Social dynamics in behavioral tipping

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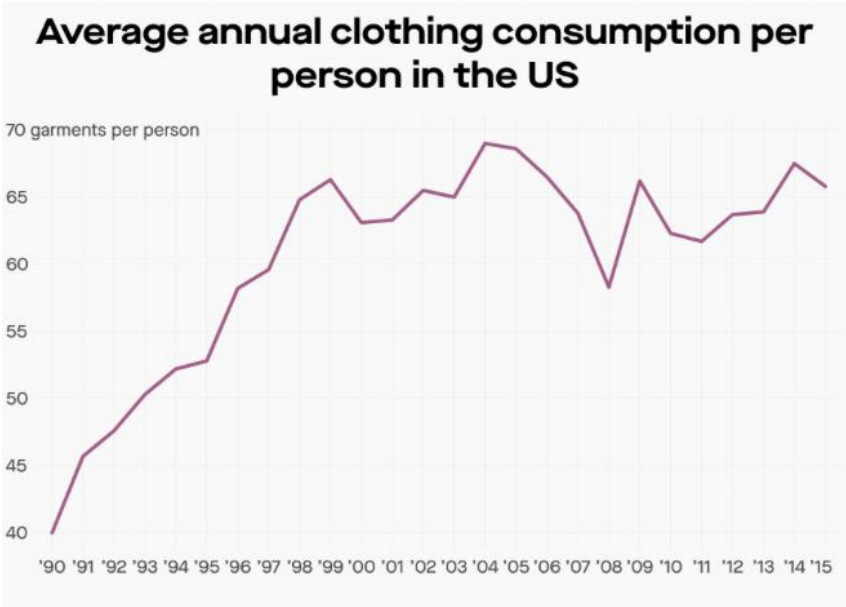


Chile's desert dumping ground for fast fashion leftovers

Chile's Atacama, the driest desert in the world, is increasingly suffering from pollution caused by fast fashion.



Used clothes discarded in the Atacama Desert, in Alto Hospicio, Iquique, Chile. [Martin Bernetti/AFP]



Article | Published: 24 July 2023

Recycling bias and reduction neglect

Michaela J. Barnett ✉, Patrick I. Hancock, Leidy E. Klotz & Shahzeen Z. Attari

Nature Sustainability **6**, 1418–1425 (2023) | Cite this article

2482 Accesses | **16** Citations | **244** Altmetric | Metrics

PERSPECTIVE

https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-020-16941-y OPEN

Scientists' warning on affluence

Thomas Wiedmann [1✉], Manfred Lenzen [2], Lorenz T. Keyßer [3] & Julia K. Steinberger [4]

For over half a century, worldwide growth in affluence has continuously increased resource use and pollutant emissions far more rapidly than these have been reduced through better technology. The affluent citizens of the world are responsible for most environmental impacts and are central to any future prospect of retreating to safer environmental conditions. We summarise the evidence and present possible solution approaches. Any transition towards sustainability can only be effective if far-reaching lifestyle changes complement technological advancements. However, existing societies, economies and cultures incite consumption expansion and the structural imperative for growth in competitive market economies inhibits necessary societal change.



"We don't have a climate crisis, but a **behavioral** crisis"

We need to reverse materially-intensive social norms

(Merz et al, 2023)

Entrenched social norms can change



1960's: early protest by Antillean and Suriname minority

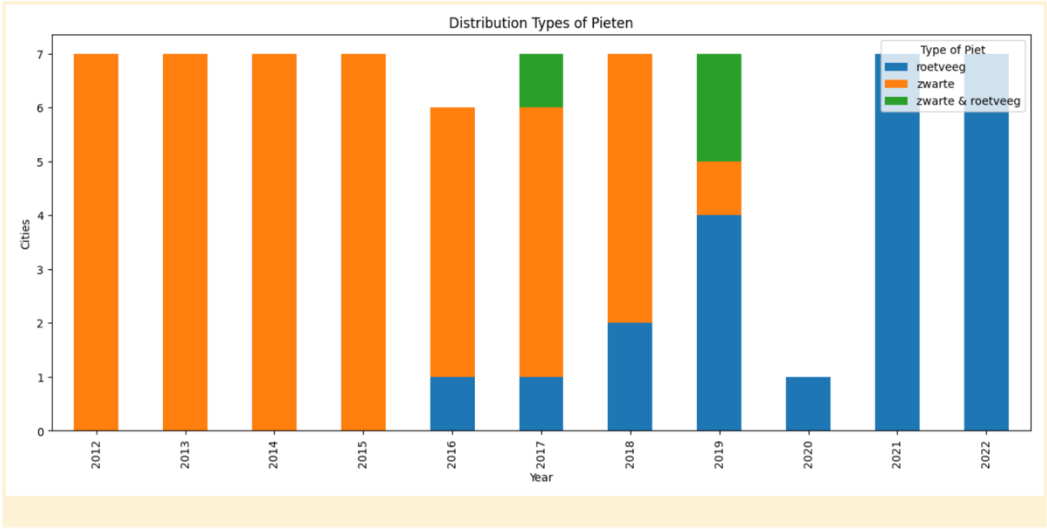


Figure 3 - Distribution of types of Piet in multiple Dutch cities over the years.

2012-2022: appearance of Zwarte Piet in 7 Dutch cities (source: Youtube videos)



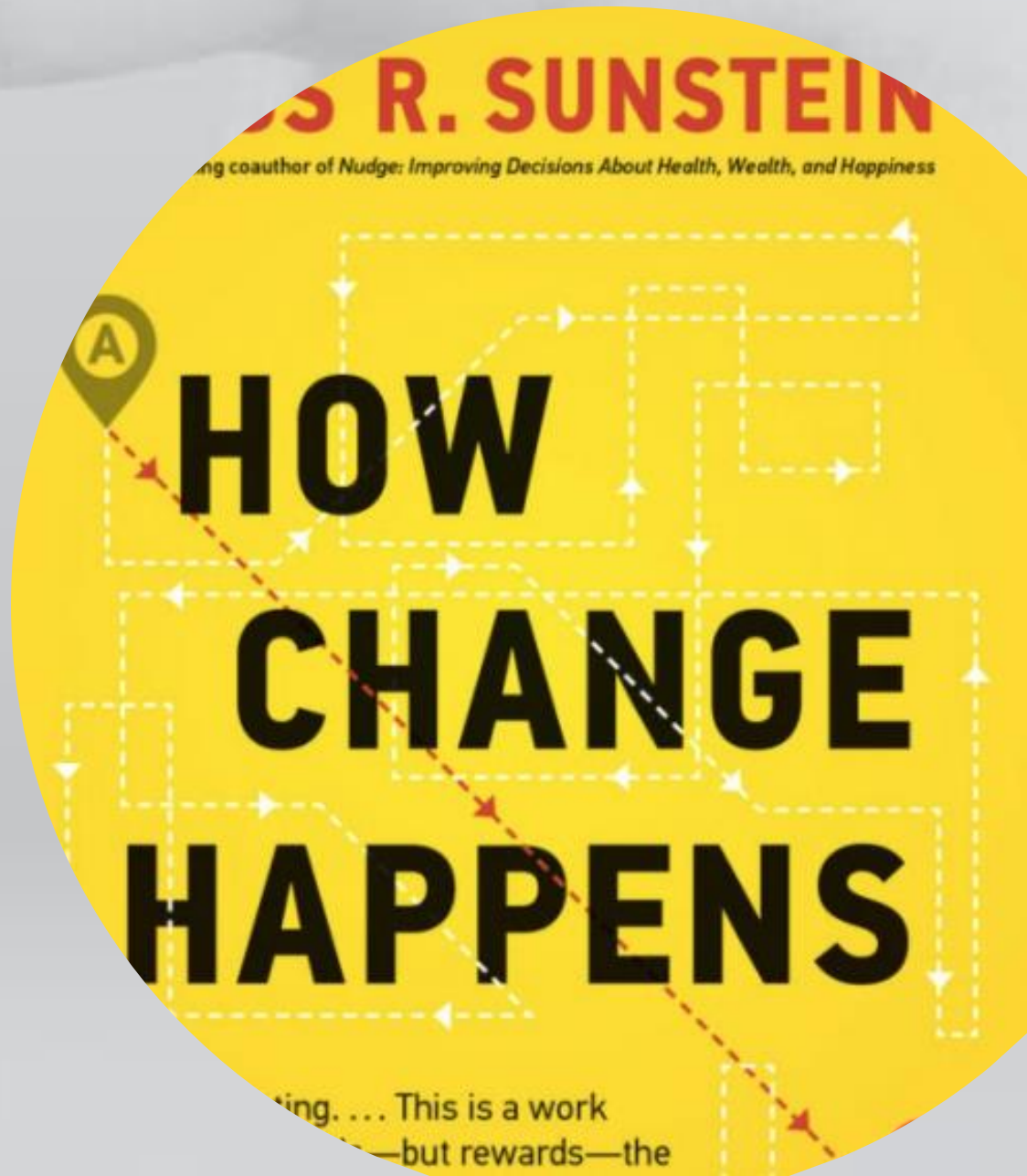
Sinterklaas wordt dit jaar bij de landelijke intocht vergezeld door alleen maar roetveegpieten. Dat meldt de NTR, die verantwoordelijk is voor de tv-registratie. © ANP

Alleen roetveegpieten bij landelijke intocht Sinterklaas in Apeldoorn

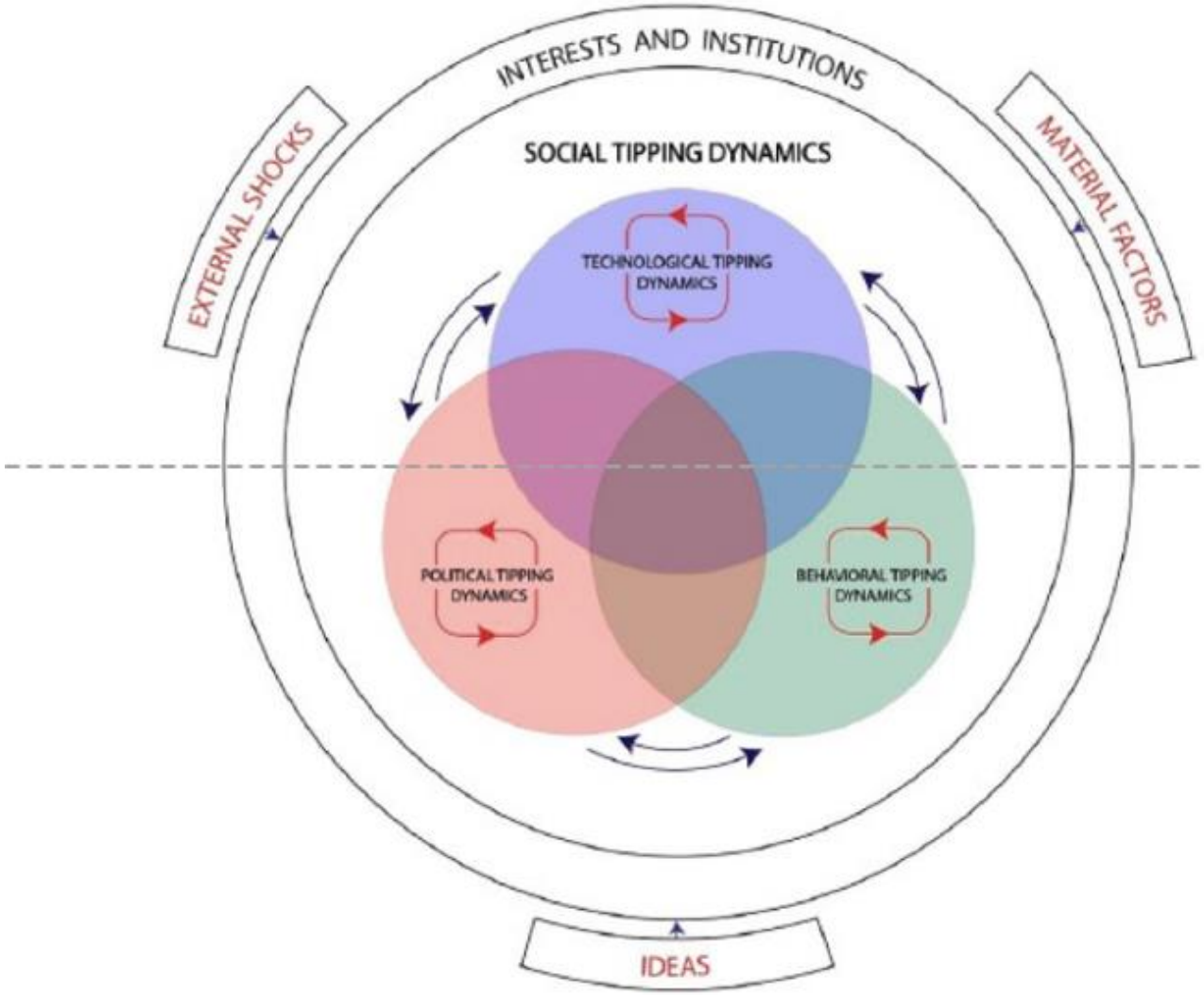
2019: national tipping point?

(Zella, Bolderdijk, et al working paper)

"What is needed is some kind of movement, initiated by people who say they disapprove of the norm, and succeeding when some kind of tipping point is reached, **by which time it is socially costless, and maybe even beneficial**, and maybe even mandatory, to say: Me Too"



The Social Tipping Dynamics and Their Interlinkages





Stadelmann-Steffen et al (2021)

Social tipping: from the field to the lab

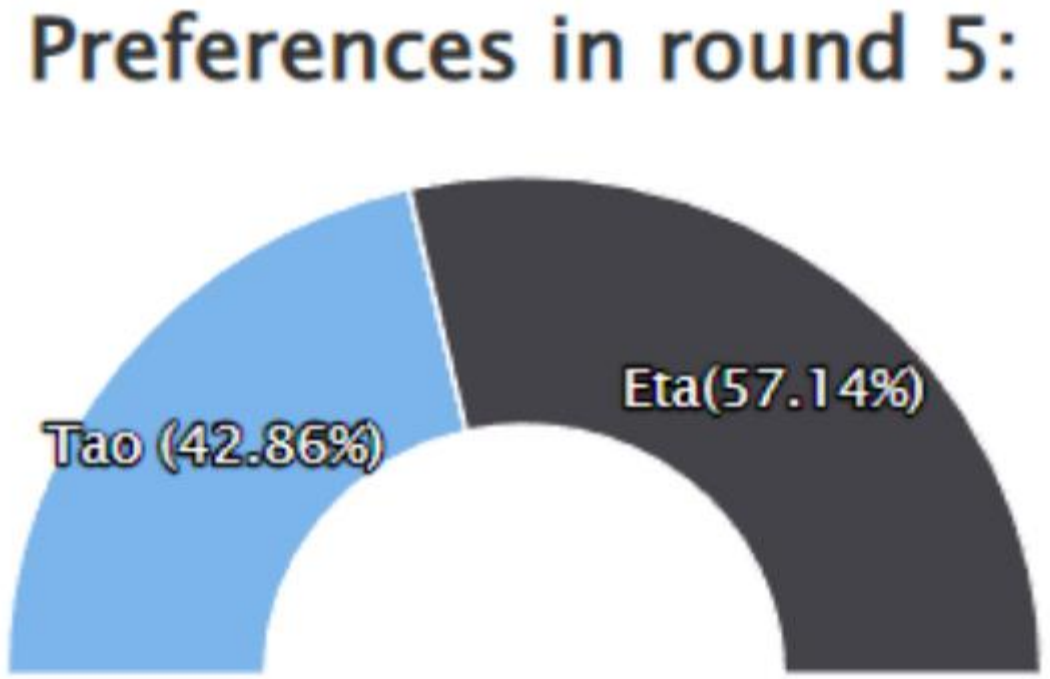


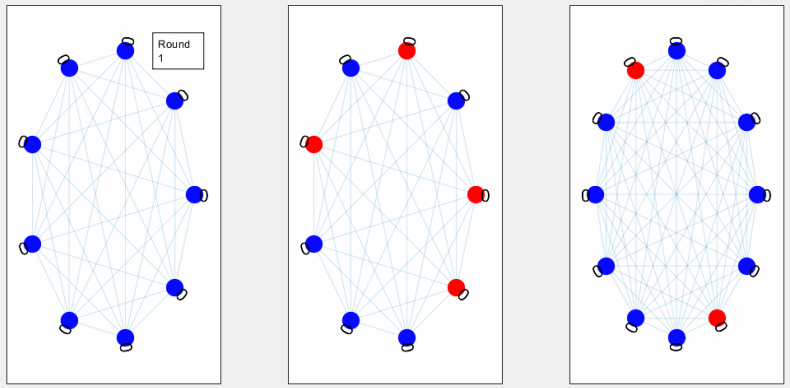


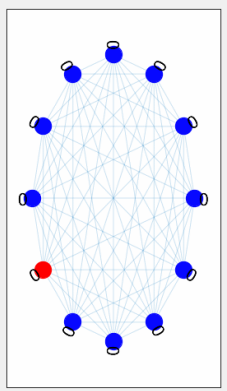
Social convention game

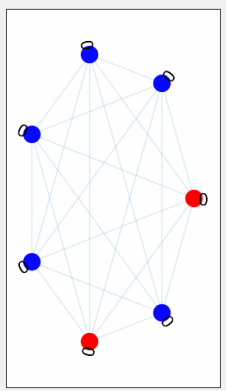
Fig. 3: In-game choice page

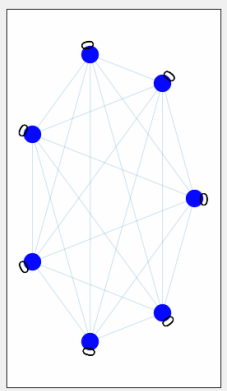


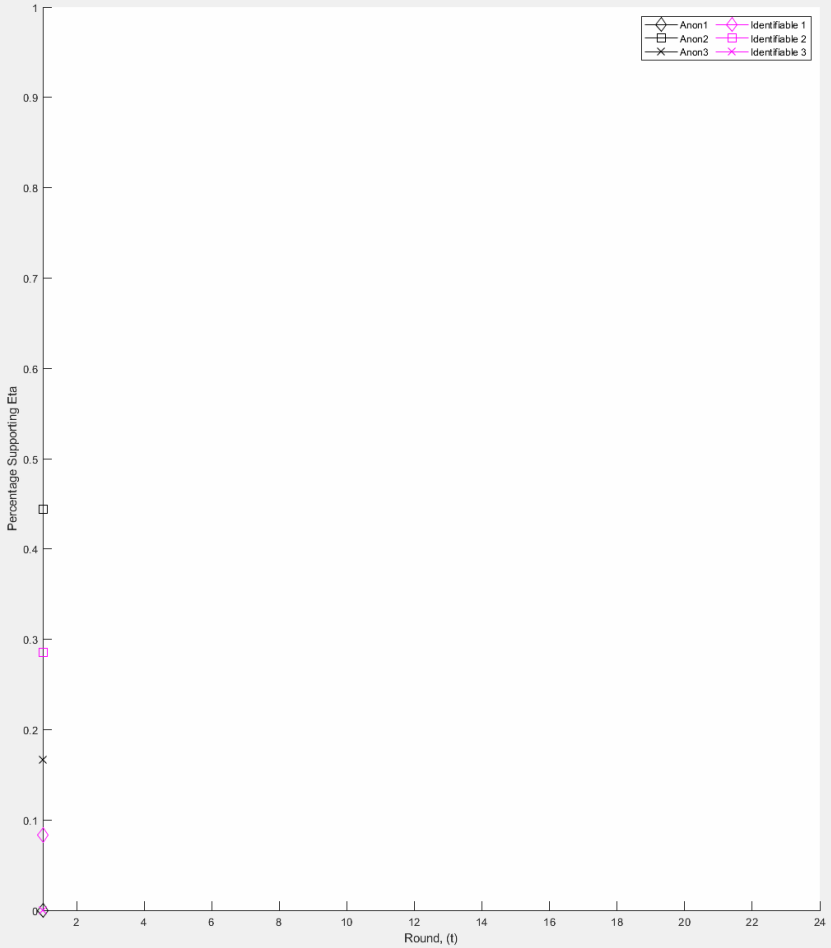



Round
1

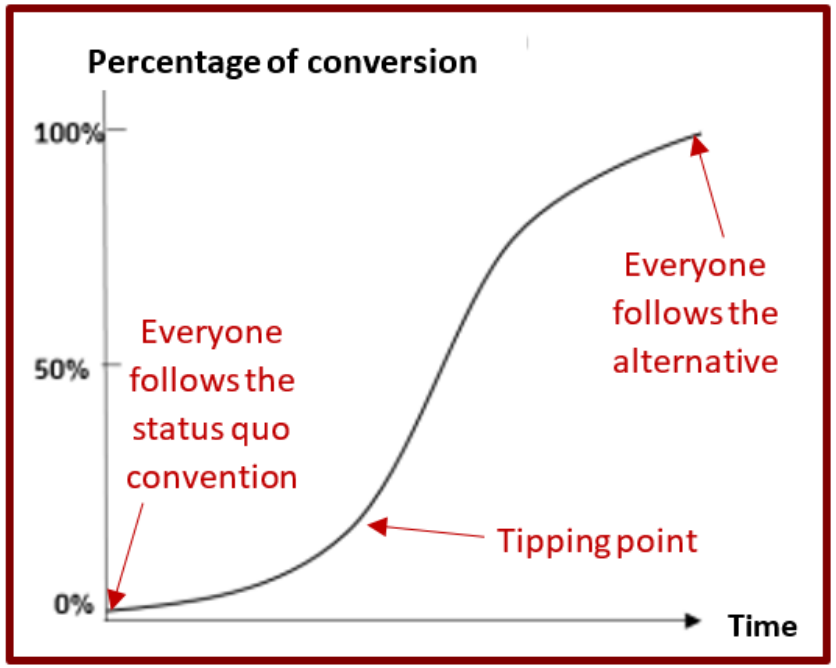







Anon1
Anon2
Anon3
Identifiable 1
Identifiable 2
Identifiable 3
Percentage Supporting Eta
Round, (t)
0
0.1
0.2
0.3
0.4
0.5
0.6
0.7
0.8
0.9
1
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
18
20
22
24

- Behavioral tipping after critical mass is reached
  - Delay
  - Inertia *before* explosive change
- Segments:
  - Early adopters vs. laggards



nature COMMUNICATIONS

ARTICLE

https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-021-25953-1 OPEN

Check for updates

Collective patterns of social diffusion are shaped by individual inertia and trend-seeking

Mengbin Ye[1,2✉], Lorenzo Zino[2], Žan Mlakar[3], Jan Willem Bolderdijk[3], Hans Risselada[3], Bob M. Fennis[3] & Ming Cao[2✉]

Why aren’t we seeing behavioral tipping yet?

Conventional wisdom



Going Green to Be Seen: Status, Reputation, and Conspicuous Conservation

Vladas Griskevicius
University of Minnesota

Joshua M. Tybur
University of New Mexico

Bram Van den Bergh
Rotterdam School of Management

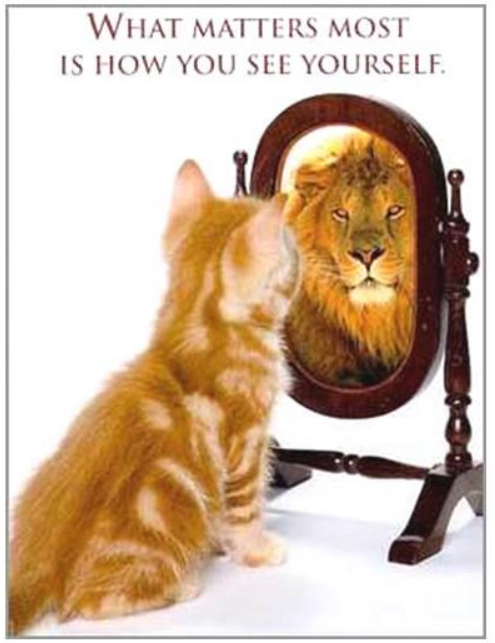
Why do people purchase proenvironmental "green" products? We argue that buying such products can be construed as altruistic, since green products often cost more and are of lower quality than their conventional counterparts, but green goods benefit the environment for everyone. Because biologists have observed that altruism might function as a "costly signal" associated with status, we examined in 3 experiments how status motives influenced desire for green products. Activating status motives led people to choose green products over more luxurious nongreen products. Supporting the notion that altruism signals one's willingness and ability to incur costs for others' benefit, status motives increased desire for green products when shopping in public (but not private) and when green products cost more (but not less) than nongreen products. Findings suggest that status competition can be used to promote proenvironmental behavior.

Keywords: altruism, environmental conservation, costly signaling, status competition, consumer behavior

However…

“By taking a moral stance, rebels imply it is wrong for anyone else to act differently”

(Benoit Monin)




OPTIONS!
SPROUTED FOODS
A SMALLER CARBON
FOOTPRINT
BUT A LITTLE
OR BUT A LOT
IT'S UP TO YOU
IT'S A GREAT
VALUE!
OPTIONS!
HOW TO BUY
BULK
1 TAKE A
BAG
2 FILL IT
3 USE A TWIST TIE
TO CLOSE
YOUR BAG
4 MAR

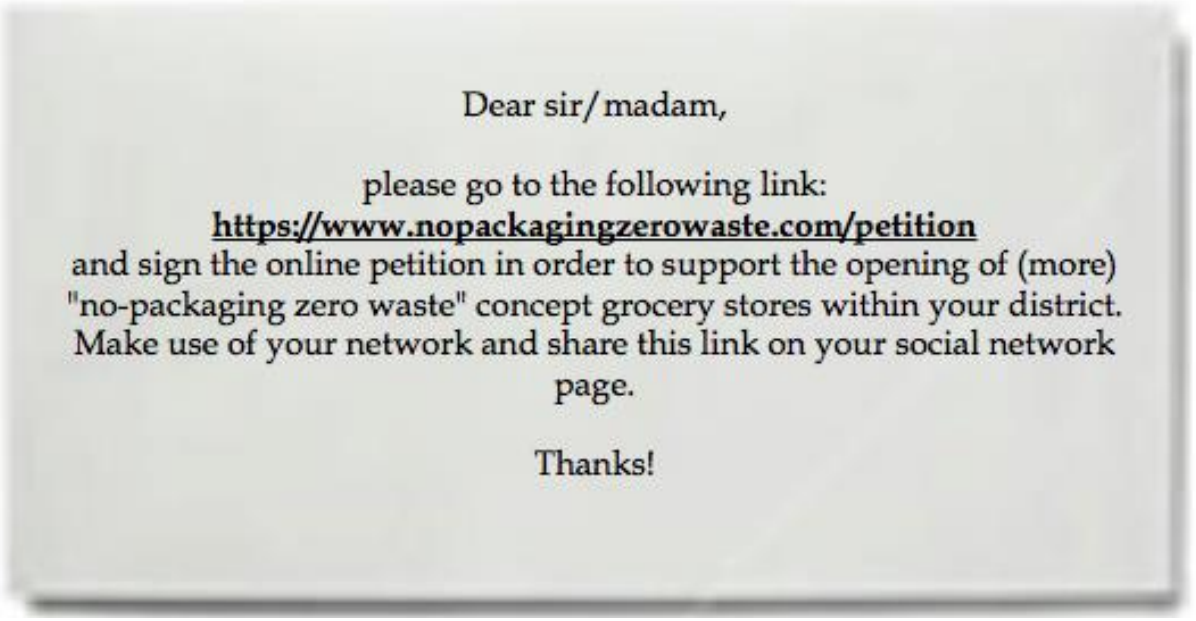
Morally motivated rebel



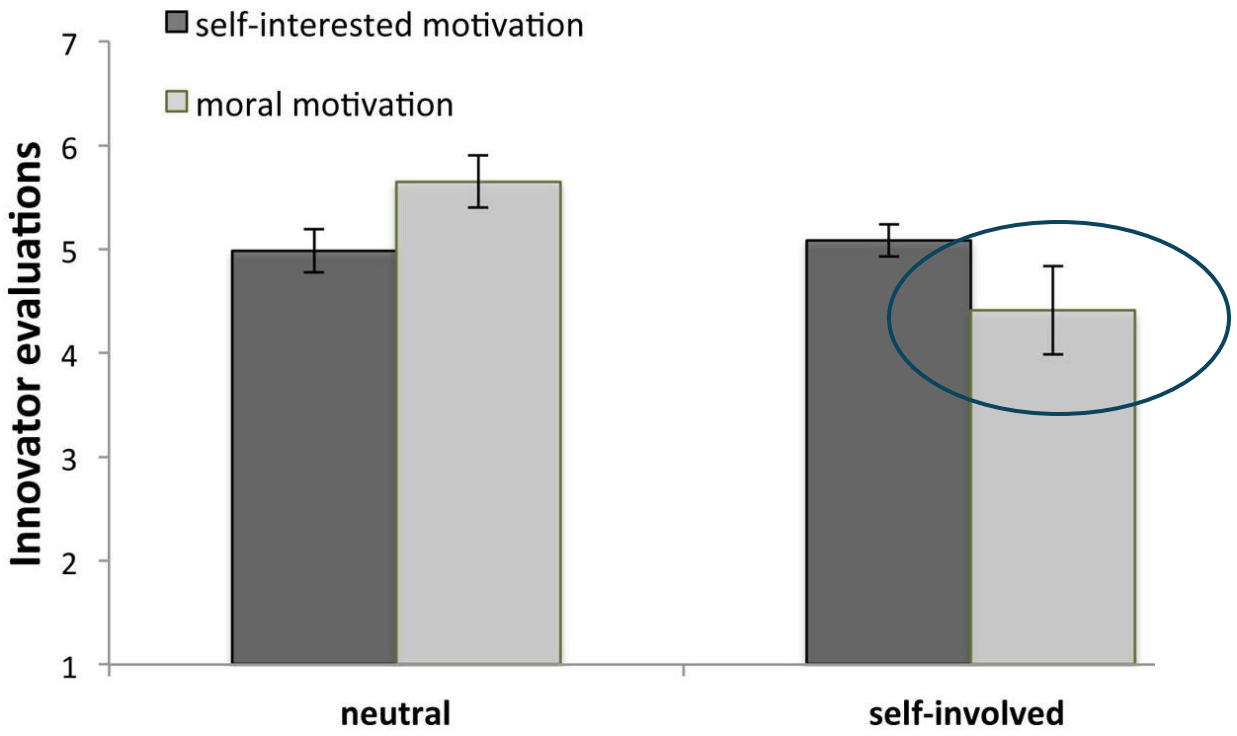
Self-interested rebel



And what if you refused to sign the petition?

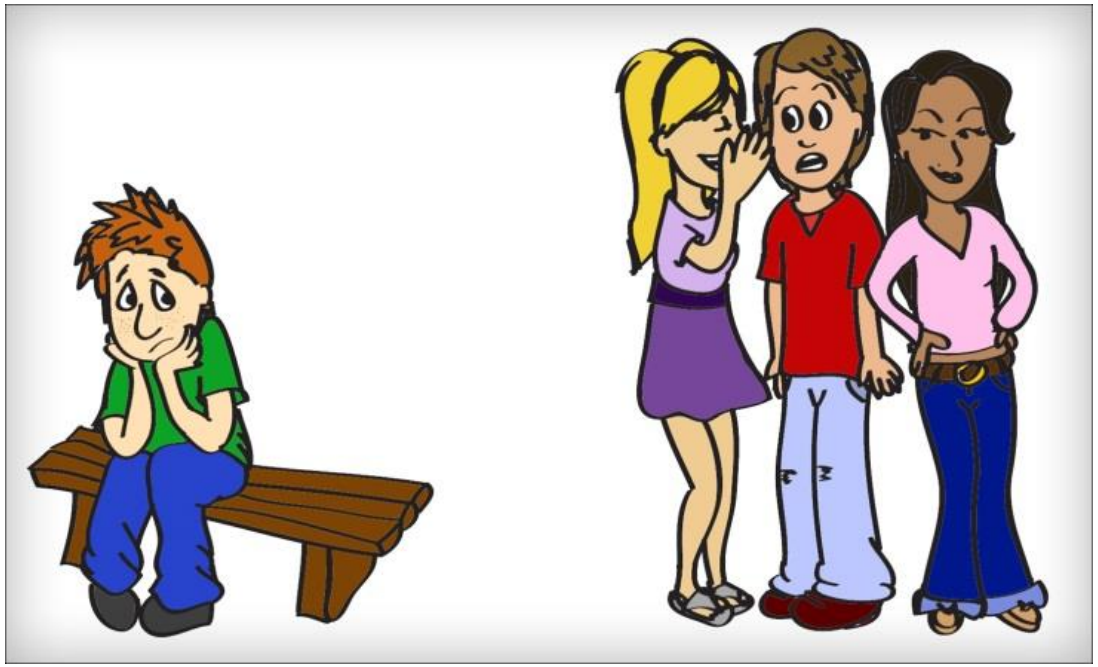


Moral do-gooder derogation



(Bolderdijk, Brouwer & Cornelissen, 2018)

The do-gooder’s dilemma





Do the morally right thing. Sign this petition!



There should be *more vegetarian and vegan alternatives in the assortment of supermarkets*.

Recent studies found that vegetarians have a much lower environmental impact than meat-eaters. Plant-based diets require less energy, land and water in their production process, and therefore offer a more sustainable alternative. A plant-based diet is animal-friendly. According to various studies, vegetarian alternatives help to reduce a number of societal problems, including:

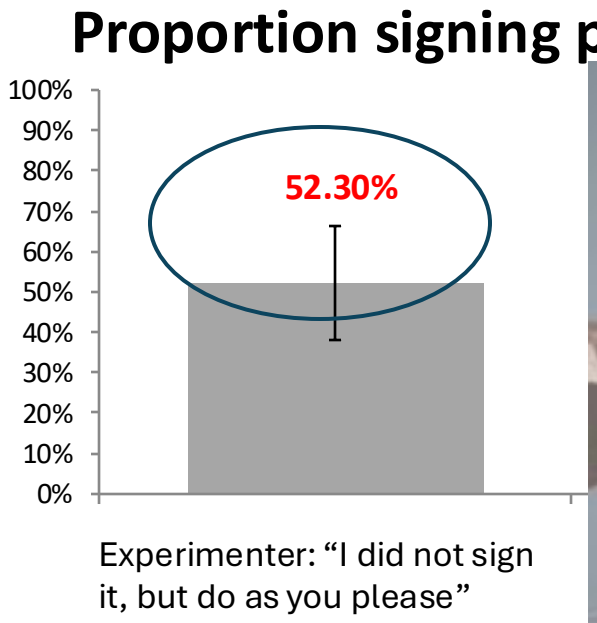
- animal suffering
- air and water pollution
- erosion of soil
- waste of energy

The aim of this petition is to give the Association of the Supermarket Sector in the Netherlands (CBL) a strong signal that many consumers would welcome more vegetarian and thus environmentally friendly food alternatives. Help us reach 2000 signatures before the 1st of June 2016.

So choose for a sustainable environment and animal welfare, and sign this petition!

Pilot test (N=22): **100%** of vegetarian/vegan participants signs

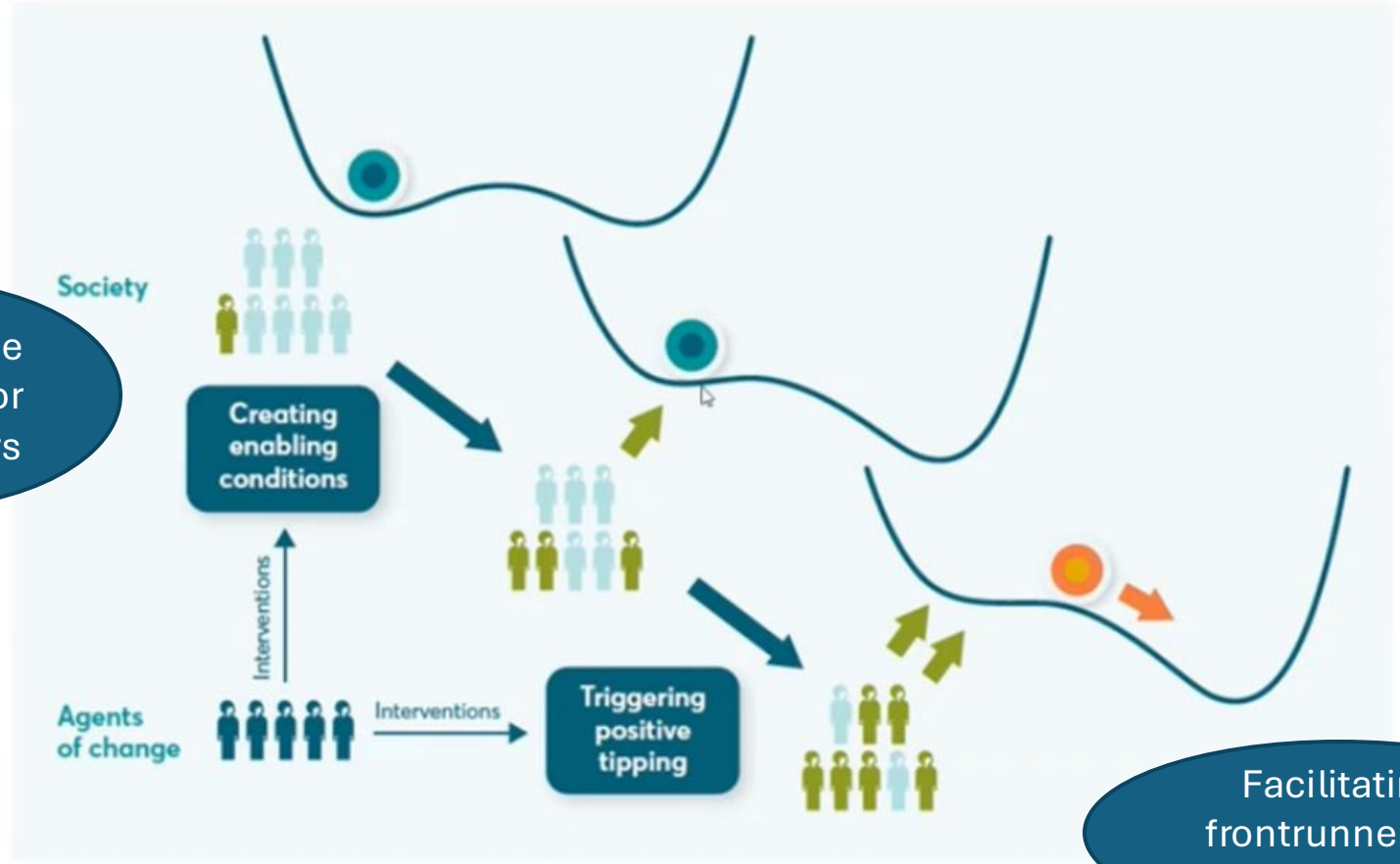
Self-silencing





(Bolderdijk & Cornelissen, *Appetite*, 2022)

Lowering the threshold for frontrunners

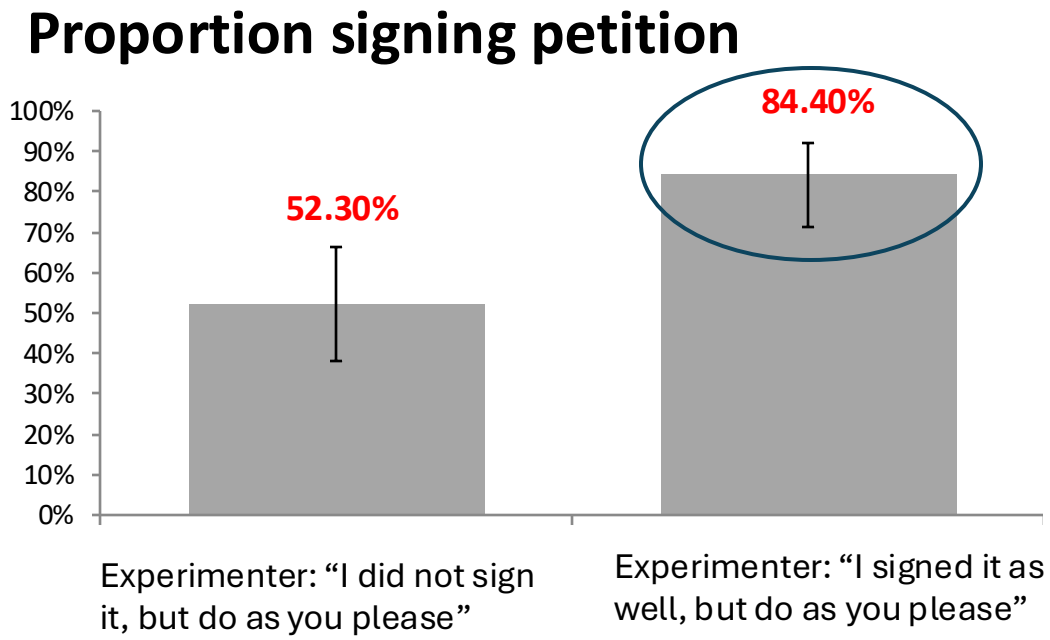


Facilitating frontrunners to 'infect' others

https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/knowledge-for-sdgs-part-6-tipping-points-threat-and-opportunity

Reducing social discomfort


“I **DID** sign it, but do as you please”
?
mple product:
Veganslices chorizo



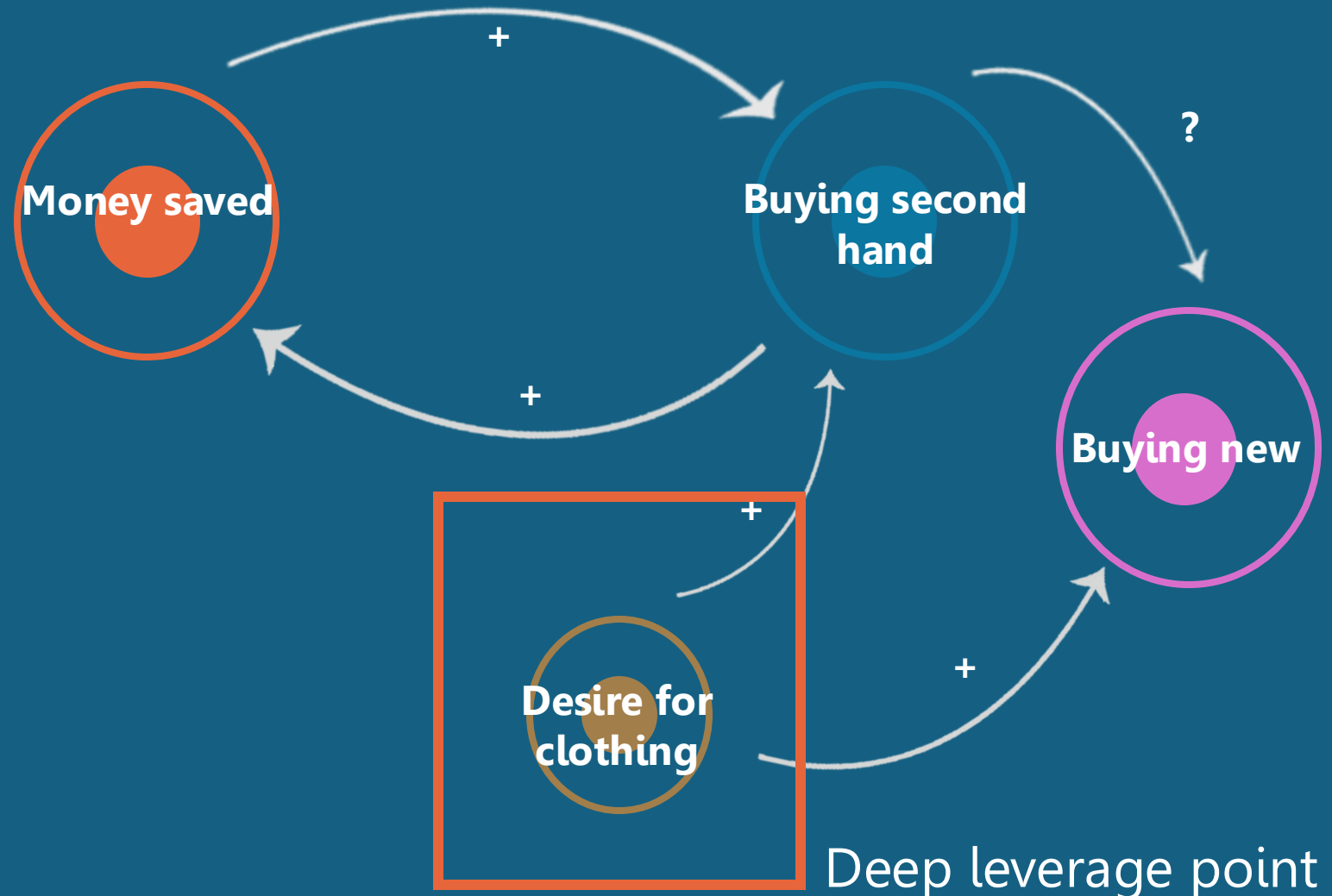
(Bolderdijk & Cornelissen, 2022)

Strengthening reinforcing feedback loops





Hoffmann et al (working paper)



Deep leverage point

(Dekhili et al, 2025; Koster, Bolderdijk et al, working paper)

Deep leverage point: changing paradigms

Een verbod op fossiele reclame: essentieel, maar niet voldoende

Rapport | 25-10-2023

Advies over de toegevoegde waarde van een eventueel verbod op fossiele reclame voor het bevorderen van klimaatvriendelijk gedrag.

↗ Een verbod op fossiele reclame: essentieel, maar niet voldoende

https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2023/10/25/een-verbod-op-fossiele-reclame

