

Hard-to-Reach Consumers Miss Core Circular Economy Concepts — Awareness Alone Isn't Enough

A resource-efficient and low-waste society is one of the long-term objectives of the European Union. While many consumers are engaging with waste prevention and recycling efforts, a significant portion, particularly the hard-to-reach (HTR) consumer group, remains disengaged.

This study explores the mental models that shape waste-related behaviors across three consumer groups (experts – EXP, easy-to-reach – ETR, and hard-to-reach – HTR) using cognitive mapping and scenario modelling to understand how each group responds to waste reduction measures.

Main findings

The study reveals significant cognitive and behavioral differences among consumer groups. EXP and ETR consumers demonstrate more integrated and causal understanding of waste reduction systems.

In contrast, the HTR group displays formal, hierarchical mental models lacking elements such as reuse, repair, and recycling, and do not even include education or information as impactful factors.

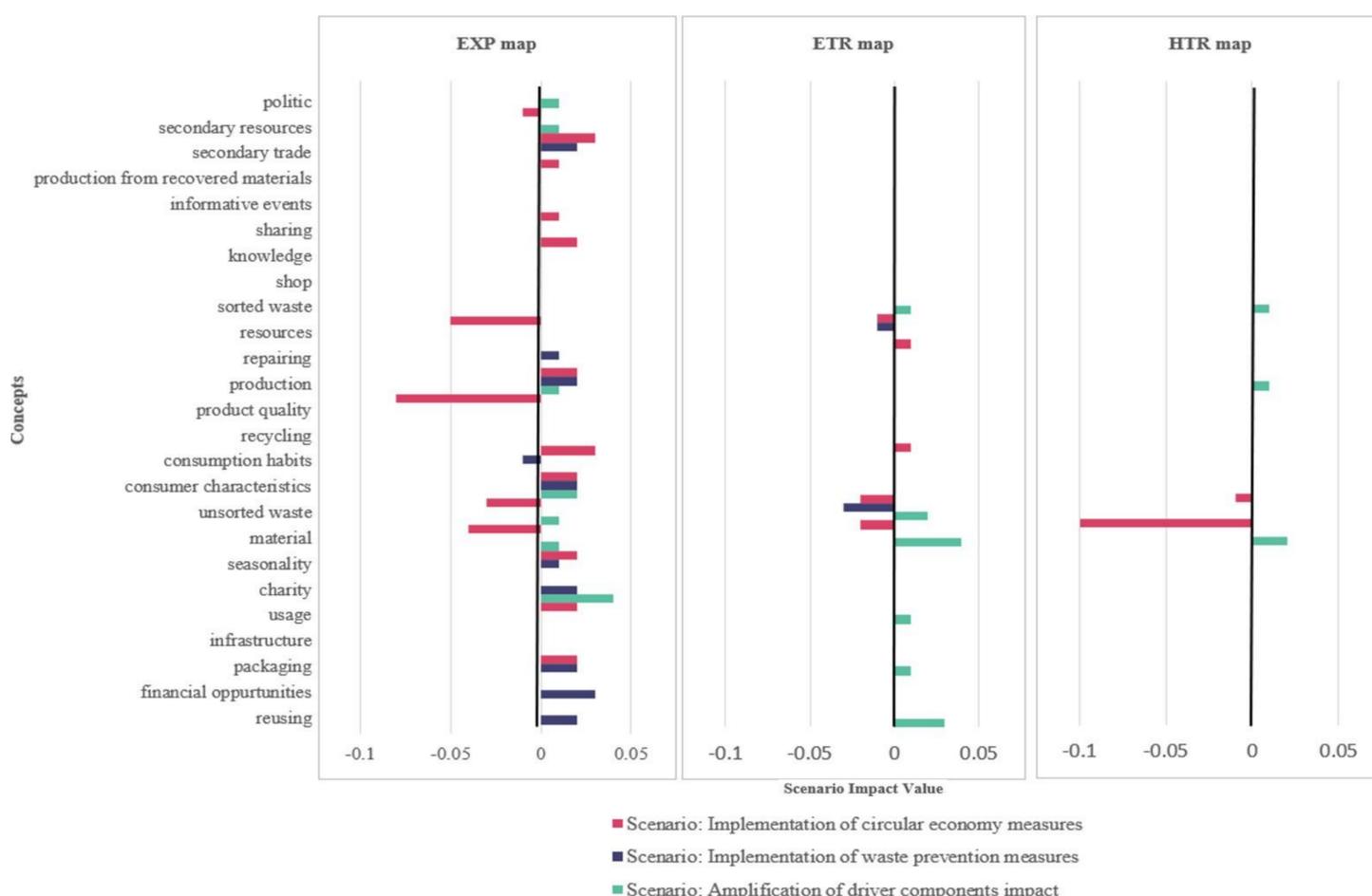
These findings underline the complexity of consumer behavior and the necessity of tailored, interdisciplinary strategies to influence different groups effectively.

Policy Implications

Scenario modelling indicates that policy measures outlined in the Latvian National Waste Management Plan (LNWMP) have a positive effect on EXP and ETR groups, encouraging their active participation in circular economy practices.

However, the same measures show minimal impact on HTR groups, highlighting a critical gap.

This suggests that traditional policy tools and information campaigns are insufficient for engaging HTR consumers, and new, targeted interventions are essential.



Relative changes in the importance of concepts in the modelled politic scenarios.