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**"How Do I Carry All This Now?": Understanding Consumer Resistance to Sustainability Interventions**

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## “How Do I Carry All This Now?”: Understanding Consumer Resistance to Sustainability Interventions

### Abstract

Given the increasingly grave environmental crisis, governments and organizations frequently initiate sustainability interventions to encourage sustainable behavior in individual consumers. However, prevalent behavioral approaches to sustainability interventions often have the unintended consequence of generating consumer resistance and undermining their effectiveness. With a practice-theoretical perspective, the authors investigate what generates consumer resistance and how it can be reduced, using consumer responses to a nationwide ban on plastic bags in Chile in 2019. The findings show that consumer resistance to sustainability interventions emerges not primarily because consumers are unwilling to change their individual behavior, as commonly assumed by existing literature. Instead, consumer resistance emerges because the individual behaviors being targeted are embedded in dynamic social practices. When sustainability interventions aim to change individual behaviors, rather than social practices, they place excessive responsibility on consumers, unsettle their practice-related emotionality, and destabilize the multiple practices that interconnect to shape consumers' lives, ultimately leading to resistance. The authors propose a theory of consumer resistance in social practice change that explains why consumer resistance to sustainability interventions emerges, including how it distracts, discourages, and delays the required social practice change. They also offer recommendations for policymakers and social marketers in designing and managing sustainability initiatives that trigger less consumer resistance and therefore foster sustainable consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** sustainability intervention, sustainable consumer behavior, social change, practice theory, consumer resistance

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The battle is not just being fought over the fate of a familiar modern convenience but over, for one side, our last vestiges of freedom and, for the other, the future of planet Earth. And fluttering above this battlefield like the tattered banner of a besieged army, amid a haze of misinformation, counter-arguments, and money, money, money, you'll find a single, flimsy, humble plastic bag.

—Sternbergh (2015)

One of the most important questions today for governments, marketers, and policymakers is how to foster sustainable consumer behavior. However, efforts to encourage sustainable consumer behavior with interventions such as water restrictions (Phipps and Ozanne 2017) and fees to use disposable coffee cups (Poortinga and Whitaker 2018), often meet various forms of consumer resistance (Gleim and Lawson 2014; Scheurenbrand et al. 2018). Understanding why consumer resistance emerges is critical because it undermines the effectiveness of sustainability interventions (Little, Lee, and Nair 2019), with significant implications for companies, consumers, and policymakers.

Although highly diverse and varied in scope, prevalent approaches to sustainability interventions often center on changing individual consumer behaviors (Kemper and Ballantine 2019). Early on, these approaches focused on the diffusion and adoption of planned social changes to convince individual consumers to alter their behavior (e.g., Kotler and Zaltman 1971). More recently, research in marketing and behavioral science that investigates behavioral, attitudinal, psychological, and social barriers to or drivers of behavioral change has informed policy to encourage individual consumers to act more sustainably (Karmarkar and Bollinger 2015; Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala 2014; White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019; White and Simpson 2013). Yet, as White, Habib, and Hardisty (2019, p. 34) note, sustainability interventions need to be embraced by large groups of people, such that they differ “from traditional consumer behaviors in which the outcome is realized if the individual engages in the action alone.” In this sense, individual resistance to behavioral change might arise due to habit (Verplanken and Roy 2016), but sustainability

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3 interventions also provoke resistance when consumers reject “what is perceived as a power, a  
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5 pressure, an influence, or any attempt to act upon one’s conduct” (Roux and Izberk-Bilgin  
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7 2018, p. 295).

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10 Our purpose in this article is to investigate consumer resistance in a sustainability  
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12 context, defined as *the refusal to accept or support a sustainability intervention*. With this  
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14 frame, we ask: What gives rise to consumer resistance to sustainability interventions? And  
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16 how can consumer resistance be reduced? We approach these questions from a practice-  
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18 theoretical perspective (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012), which proposes that consumer  
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20 behavior is not primarily determined by the individual, but by the social practices through  
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22 which they conduct their daily lives (e.g., eating, cooking, shopping, driving). By conceiving  
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24 of individual consumer behaviors as embedded in dynamic social practices, we can better  
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26 understand how and why sustainability interventions are likely to face consumer resistance,  
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28 and ultimately fail.

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33 We conducted a comprehensive, real-time study of a nationwide ban on plastic bags  
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35 that occurred in Chile in 2019. The ban was met with a high level of consumer resistance,  
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37 evidenced by public manifestations of consumer resentment and extensive media coverage of  
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39 consumers’ refusal to accept the intervention. It constitutes a compelling case for  
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41 investigating our research questions. Our findings show that consumer resistance to  
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43 sustainability interventions emerges because the individual behaviors being targeted are not  
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45 separate from, but embedded in, social practices. When interventions aim for individual  
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47 behavioral change rather than social practice change, three major challenges emerge: (1)  
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49 battles about who is responsible for making practices more sustainable; (2) unsettling  
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51 emotionality brought about by the changing practice; and (3) the (un)linking of other  
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53 practices in the change. These challenges generate consumer resistance that interferes with  
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social practice change, which significantly undermines the effectiveness of the sustainability intervention.

We develop a theory of consumer resistance in social practice change that explains how the aforementioned challenges give rise to consumer resistance to sustainability interventions and how this resistance can be reduced. Based on our theory, we prescribe recommendations for policymakers and social marketers on how to design practice-based sustainability interventions to reduce resistance from the outset, and how to monitor and adjust these interventions to manage consumer resistance that may emerge later.

### **Behavioral Approaches to Sustainability Interventions**

Marketing literature pertaining to sustainable consumer behavior converges in its focus on how individual consumers should change their behaviors to be more sustainable (Kemper and Ballantine 2019). Early social marketing studies provided the foundations for this approach by conceptualizing sustainability as a *planned social change* process (e.g., Kotler and Zaltman 1971). More recently, the behavioral literature has profiled the behaviors of green consumers, informing the design of marketing interventions to encourage the adoption of relevant actions (Lin and Chang 2012; Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala 2014), such as choosing sustainably sourced products, conserving resources, and seeking more sustainable product disposal modes (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019).

Research has provided evidence that consumers will engage in more sustainable behaviors in response to specific messages (Olsen, Slotegraaf, and Chandukala 2014; Winterich, Nenkov, and Gonzales 2019), normative appeals (White and Simpson 2013), and priming (Karmarkar and Bollinger 2015). White, Habib, and Hardisty's (2019) SHIFT framework identified five psychological factors—social influence, habit formation, individual self-accounts, feelings and cognition, and tangibility—that can be leveraged in interventions

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3 to promote sustainable behaviors. However, researchers also note the potential for obstacles,  
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5 such as conflicts between sustainable behaviors and private goals (Kronrod, Grinstein, and  
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7 Wathieu 2012), as well as skepticism, lack of support, or perceptions of unfairness  
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10 (Bolderdijk et al. 2017).

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12 While increasing our understanding of sustainable consumer behavior, these  
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14 approaches have tended to adopt an “individualistic understanding of both action and change”  
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16 (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012, p. 142) that neglects the complex systems in which  
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18 environmental issues are embedded (Little, Lee, and Nair 2019). Furthermore, many  
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20 sustainability interventions make individual consumers responsible for societal issues such as  
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22 climate change and poverty (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017; Evans 2011; Giesler and Veresiu  
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24 2014; Luchs, Phipps, and Hill 2015; Shamir 2008; Shove 2010). This approach, known as  
25  
26 *responsibilization*, is based on neoliberal ideology and involves government partnership with  
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28 corporations to “encourage all citizens to become active and responsible consumer subjects  
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30 ... obliged to help solve pressing social issues through their everyday consumption choices”  
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32 (Veresiu and Giesler 2018, p. 255). Responsibilization assumes that individual consumers  
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34 want to act responsibly and make moral choices to support an intervention’s intended goals  
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36 (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2017). However, consumers often resist such responsibilization  
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38 (Eckhardt and Dobscha 2019; Soneryd and Ugglå 2015), particularly when they experience  
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40 physical, psychological, and/or philosophical discomfort in response to such allocations of  
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42 responsibility. Therefore, effective sustainability interventions may require a shift away from  
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44 responsibilizing individual consumers and toward shaping the social elements and systems of  
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46 daily life, as implied by a practice-theoretical perspective (Spurling et al. 2013).  
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**A Practice-Theoretical Perspective on the Dynamics of Social Practice Change**

Although there are several different theoretical approaches within the practice perspective (e.g., Nicolini 2012; Sandberg and Tsoukas 2015; Schatzki, Cetina, and von Savigny 2001; Thomas and Epp 2019), they all recognize that people, animals, materials, equipment, activities, norms, rules, values, and understandings are not independent but interacting units that constitute social practices and their performance (Reckwitz 2002; Sandberg and Dall’Alba 2009; Schatzki 1996). Social practices comprise “temporally evolving, open-ended sets of doings and sayings linked by practical understandings, rules, teleoaffective structure, and general understanding” (Schatzki 2002, p. 87). Continuous engagement in social practices, such as eating, cooking, shopping, driving, and reading, largely determines people’s way of life and who they are (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2015). From this perspective, “behaviors are largely individuals’ performances of social practices” (Spurling et al. 2013, p. 4). To apply such a perspective to sustainable consumer behavior, we build on Shove, Pantzar, and Watson’s (2012) theory of the dynamics of social practice, which features five key premises.

First, social practices and their performance entail three broad groups of *interacting elements*: materials (e.g., equipment, tools, ingredients, bodies), competences (e.g., specific know-how, skills, shared practical understandings), and meanings (e.g., identities, symbols, norms, aspirations, and ideas). Social practices depend on the interactions of these defining elements and thus cannot “be reduced to any one of these single elements” (Reckwitz 2002, p. 250). Only when the elements are linked together, consistently and over time, do social practices come into existence and endure. Therefore, cooking, driving, shopping, and other social practices are not fixed. Instead, these practices are dynamic as they are produced and reproduced through their performance over time (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). As an illustration, the social practice of communicating with mobile phones comprises materials

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(e.g., phones, bodies, touchable screen), competences (e.g., typing, dialing, taking turns to speak, knowing proper times to call), and meanings (e.g., social closeness, convenience) that are linked every time someone makes a call.

Second, social practices are continuously carried out by multiple actors. Consumers, retailers, and other market actors are therefore social practice *carriers* (Reckwitz 2002). As carriers, they produce, reproduce, and transform social practices by continuously linking elements in their performances of them (Blue et al. 2014, p. 38). Carriers are directed to perform the doings and sayings of a given practice in specific ways, as prescribed by the practice's goals, meanings, and materials (Schatzki 2002). For example, mobile phone users reproduce the practice of mobile communication, and the practice influences how users communicate with friends, family, and colleagues (e.g., via texting or video calling).

Third, social practices also evolve and change through the *making* and *breaking* of links among their defining elements (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Links are made and broken as a result of the introduction of new elements or the removal of existing ones. Such alterations require carriers to reconfigure the elements – that is, to develop and establish new links between them – for the practice to stabilize and endure. It is through this process of *reconfiguring* the links between modified elements across carriers that social practices evolve over time. For example, the introduction of mobile phones (new material element) changed the social practice of communicating. Mobile phones altered not only the material elements of the communication practice but also all its interacting elements, such as consumers' competences for handling mobile phones and the shared understanding of how and when communication should be performed.

Fourth, rather than existing in isolation, social practices are linked to other practices, forming *nexuses* of interacting practices (Hui, Schatzki, and Shove 2016) that together make up social life (Reckwitz 2002). Changes to some elements of a particular social practice



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3 therefore may require a reconfiguration of both its interacting elements and other, linked  
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5 social practices. In the mobile phone example, the introduction of the new material element  
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7 changed purchasing, repairing, emailing, and family practices (e.g., family video calls), each  
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9 of which demanded new tools, skills, and know-how to perform.  
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12 Fifth, social practices have an inherent *emotional* dimension (Schatzki 2019), “tied to  
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14 the embodied and tacit aspects of everyday living” (Molander and Hartmann 2018, p. 372).  
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16 This dimension provides practice carriers with a template for the acceptable beliefs, states,  
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18 and feelings that they should express as part of the practice (Schatzki 2001). Returning to our  
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20 prior example, replacing landline phones with mobile devices altered the emotionality  
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22 associated with different communication practices. Many users now regard voice calls  
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24 negatively, as anxiety-inducing or intrusive, but text messages evoke more positive emotions  
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26 related to efficiency or self-control.  
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30 These five tenets of practice theory highlight how practices can guide social life and  
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32 consumption (Warde 2005) and form the basis of our inquiry into consumer resistance to  
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34 sustainability interventions in several key ways. First, this perspective considers the  
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36 complexity associated with changing a ubiquitous social practice like shopping, which is  
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38 linked to and intertwined with many other practices. Second, in this perspective, social  
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40 practices constantly change and evolve, but their histories never disappear entirely (Shove,  
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42 Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Carriers might draw on these histories and may adapt or fail to  
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44 reconfigure practices when elements in a practice are misaligned (Phipps and Ozanne 2017;  
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46 Thomas and Epp 2019). Third, this perspective allows us to consider resistance as an activity  
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48 that interferes with social practice change that is required by interventions. While individual  
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50 in nature, such resistance can aggregate to cause even greater levels of disruption to the  
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52 reconfiguration of the targeted practice (Welch and Yates 2018). Finally, although Shove,  
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54 Pantzar, and Watson (2012) highlight that practices can change, the specific processes by  
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which carriers reconfigure links and thereby change social practices remain unclear. Our findings will extend this perspective to address this gap.

## Methods

### *Research Context: Disrupted Shopping Practice in Chile*

Plastic bags are a common target of sustainability interventions (Jakovcevic et al. 2014). Although they have become a symbol of an ecological crisis (Hawkins 2009), plastic bags reached this status due to their mundane and widespread acceptance; consumers use them in their shopping practices without much thought (Sternbergh 2015). As an essential material element of the shopping practice, the bags also shape other practices, such as carrying, transporting, advertising, disposing of, and selling products (Hagberg 2016).

By July 2018, 127 countries had adopted restrictions on plastic bags, with laws that targeted their manufacture, retail distribution, use, and trade (United Nations 2018). Notably, the plastic bag had begun to transform, from an innocuous container to a matter of social concern (Hawkins 2009). Chile was the first South American country to ban the use of plastic bags nationally. Chilean policymakers argued the ban was simpler than other interventions that would require participation by stakeholders other than consumers (e.g., waste generators, producers' recycling efforts).<sup>1</sup> Thus, they began regulating the use of plastic bags in coastal areas in 2013, even as they initiated discussions of a nationwide ban. The law, approved in August 2018, applied throughout the country without exceptions (Cristi et al. 2020). It required retailers to stop offering plastic bags to customers (MMA 2018), in two stages. During the first 6-month adaptation period, retailers could provide two plastic bags per customer, and then the total ban was initiated in February 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> The history of the legislation is available in the Details about Regulatory Documents in Web Appendix A.

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It may be tempting to assume that the implementation of the second-stage total ban signals the success of the intervention, but our findings indicate this was not the case. As in many countries,<sup>2</sup> the ban prompted resistance in Chile (Coleman 2018) and some consumers struggled to accept, adjust to, and support it. Some even questioned its purpose, refusing to comply and challenging supporters (Masquelier 2017), as detailed in extensive media coverage. A later bill aimed at a partial reversion of the ban, arguably to restore consumer “dignity,” by forcing retailers to provide at least one plastic bag per customer (CNN 2019).

## ***Data Collection and Analysis***

We collected archival, social media, interview, and ethnographic data related to the Chilean ban, starting in 2013 and lasting until four months after the implementation of the ban (i.e., June 2019). Table 1 summarizes these sources. To start the data analysis, we undertook a descriptive exploration of the entire data set. The Spanish-speaking members of the author team identified prominent themes in the verbatim data (e.g., emotional reactions, relevant actors, meanings), which were discussed with the entire author team. Through this analysis and discussion, we gained an initial understanding of the shopping practice from consumers’ and other carriers’ perspectives, and we determined that the analysis would focus on consumer resistance. Next, we developed etic codes, in accordance with analytical procedures commonly adopted in practice-based research in marketing (e.g., Epp, Schau, and Price 2014; Phipps and Ozanne 2017; Thomas and Epp 2019). This coding stage focused on the processes of *reconfiguring* the shopping practice to build understandings of how consumers respond to sustainability interventions.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, a New York State ban on plastic bags similarly faced strong resistance from angry consumers and unhappy retailers (Sheehan, Sullivan, and Fitz-Gibbon 2020).

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**Table 1.** Overview of Data Set

Data Source	Description	Purpose
News media	162 news articles on “bolsas plásticas” [plastic bags] from all sources in Chile starting in Oct. 2017. We read all articles returned in a Factiva search (n = 462) to determine whether they provided information about the ban. All articles with the keyword bolsas plásticas [plastic bags] in their title or lead paragraphs were included in the sample. Additional details are available in Web Appendix B.	Provide contextual background and identify key carriers
Regulatory documents	36 publicly available Chilean policy and legislation documents related to the ban, starting with the initial discussion of the law in 2013.	Identify temporal spans and governmental perspectives
Sustainability reports	9 publicly available sustainability reports from the three main supermarket chains (A, B, C) in Chile from 2015 to 2018. Together, these supermarkets account for 93% of the market in Chile.	Provide insights into retailer practices, and how they prepared for the intervention
Twitter posts	Tweets, comments, and retweets that used #ByePlasticBags (n = 5765) or #Bringyourownbag (n = 4969). We identified the users who engaged most with these hashtags, and mapped their conversation networks.	Understand consumer reactions to government and retailer actions
Facebook posts	6 posts and 949 comments from the official Facebook pages of the three main supermarket chains in Chile after October 2017.	Understand retailer portrayals of their images and consumer reactions
Interviews with checkout assistants	31 semi-structured, in-depth, audio-recorded interviews with retail checkout assistants, working at different locations in Santiago. Before the ban, virtually every checkout in Chilean supermarkets had checkout assistants to help with packing and carrying bags to vehicles.	Identify supermarket policies, and customer reactions after the intervention
Consumer interviews	23 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with consumers and observations of related materials and spaces in their households, including 111 photographs and 7 video clips.	Identify changes in shopping practices after the intervention
Ethnographic incursions	62 ethnographic incursions by undergraduate business students in households or shopping locations. Students received detailed instructions about what to observe. Their reports include introspective notes and reflections about the practice, informal interviews with family members (n = 52), photographs (n = 167), and video clips (n = 6).	Identify changes in shopping practices after the intervention

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Similar to the procedures adopted by Bradford and Boyd (2020), we supplemented the initial practice-theoretical codes with emic terms (e.g., proud, angry, hard, unfair, commercial interests) to reflect how consumers responded to changes in the shopping practice. Each Spanish-speaking author coded different types of data and discussed the coding to triangulate the findings among researchers and data sources (Atkinson and Delamont 2005). It became apparent during this round of analysis that consumers had expressed concerns about responsibility and manifested emotional responses to the sustainability intervention. This prominence of responsabilization and emotionality led us to focus on capturing these aspects. We then aggregated the emergent codes to develop meaningful themes that explain what gives rise to consumer resistance to sustainability interventions. In this iterative process, we moved between prior literature and our data, examining how existing concepts might explain or be challenged by the data (Spiggle 1994). In the final stage of analysis, we examined selected excerpts (i.e., those simultaneously coded as particular reconfiguration processes and challenges) to identify how resistance interferes with practice change. This process continued until a set of theoretical concepts emerged that captured and explained the phenomenon as it emerged from our data set, and allowed us to develop a theory of consumer resistance in social practice change. Throughout the process, we considered other types of consumer responses to the sustainability intervention (e.g., support, acceptance) and the roles of other actors (e.g., retailers) in reconfiguring the shopping practice. However, to keep the focus on consumer resistance to sustainability interventions, we do not integrate those aspects in our theory except when directly relevant (e.g., if consumers demand retailers take responsibility). We provide evidence from the various sources to illustrate our coding in Web Appendix C.

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## Findings

We have suggested that consumer resistance to sustainability interventions arises because consumers are required to alter the social practice implicated by the intervention. Our findings, which we discuss in detail in the two sections that follow, offer insights into that process. First, social practice change occurs through three recursive reconfiguration processes: sensemaking, accommodating, and stabilizing. Second, consumers encounter three challenges in reconfiguring the practice: responsabilization battles, unsettling emotionality, and the (un)linking of other practices. Each of these challenges disrupts the change process by creating different forms of consumer resistance that interfere with the reconfiguration processes – distracting sensemaking, discouraging accommodation, and delaying stabilization – which significantly undermines the effectiveness of the sustainability intervention.

Our findings are summarized in Table 2 and further elaborated below. We begin by describing the three practice reconfiguration processes and follow this by documenting the three challenges to their effective unfolding, including how these challenges distract, discourage, and delay the social change process. We finish by offering a formal statement of this emergent theory that describes these insights in a more generalizable form.

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**Table 2.** Understanding Consumer Resistance to Sustainability Interventions

<p><b>Reconfiguration processes</b></p>	<p><b>Sensemaking</b> <i>Consumers seek to understand and develop new meanings for the (reconfiguring) shopping practice.</i></p>	<p><b>Accommodating</b> <i>Consumers develop new competences for using and handling the new materials (and meanings) involved in performing the shopping practice without disposable plastic bags.</i></p>	<p><b>Stabilizing</b> <i>Consumers embody (at times with resignation) the changed practice, with more or less difficulty or speed.</i></p>
<p><b>Reconfiguration challenges</b></p>	<p><b>Consumer resistance</b></p>		
<p><b>Responsibilization battles</b> <i>Carriers clash over who is responsible for reconfiguring the shopping practice.</i></p>	<p><u>Sensemaking is distracted</u> as consumers divert sensemaking efforts towards responsabilization rather than focusing on the reconfiguring shopping practice.</p>	<p><u>Accommodation is discouraged</u> as consumers question the motives and responsibility of each actor who introduces a new material involved in performing the practice.</p>	<p><u>Stabilization is delayed</u> as consumers hesitate to commit to the reconfiguring practice without seeing commitment from other actors with whom they wish to share responsibilities.</p>
<p><b>Unsettling emotionality</b> <i>Carriers no longer feel completely attuned or “at home” with the shopping practice, which was previously familiar to them. This leads to unsettling emotions, including anxiety and fear.</i></p>	<p><b>Consumer resistance</b></p>	<p><u>Sensemaking is distracted</u> as consumers may find it difficult to understand their unsettling emotions.</p>	<p><u>Stabilization is delayed</u> as consumers may not want to stabilize the reconfiguring practice until they feel emotionally settled in it.</p>
<p><b>Un/linking other practices</b> <i>Carriers forge new or break existing connections between the shopping practice and other practices.</i></p>	<p><u>Sensemaking is distracted</u> as consumer efforts are extended to other practices by making and breaking links between them.</p>	<p><u>Accommodation is discouraged</u> as consumers direct attention to the linked and unlinked practices, reducing their ability to accommodate elements within the reconfiguring practice.</p>	<p><u>Stabilization is delayed</u> as consumers try to embody changes to un/linked practices in addition to embodying changes to the reconfiguring practice.</p>



### ***Three Social Practice Reconfiguration Processes***

Our interviews and ethnographic incursions provide multiple similar descriptions of this shopping practice, which emphasize its mundane, routinized, and stable nature prior to the ban. Consumers easily reproduced the existing shopping practice without much effort, as described by one interviewee: “I normally check what’s in the kitchen, a quick look to see what we need ... and as I know the store layout by heart, I walk the aisles the same way, I go early when there’s no one, I take one of my sons, I put things inside the cart ... and only in plastic bags. The house was filled with plastic bags.”<sup>1</sup> Consumers took the availability of plastic bags for granted and counted on them to support other practices, such as waste disposal: “Before [the ban] I didn’t bring anything to carry my purchases. In fact, if I needed five bags in a purchase, I grabbed five more for the garbage.”<sup>2</sup>

When the ban challenged this shopping practice, we observed consumers seeking to change the practice through three reconfiguration processes. We present them separately for theorization but note that real-world reconfiguration processes are ongoing and recursive.

*Sensemaking.* As evidenced in our dataset, carriers initially attempt to make sense of the changes to their shopping practice, as required by the intervention. The plastic bag ban implies the loss of a material element of the shopping practice and many other practices. Many consumers started to consider substitute materials, as well as new competences they would need to continue performing their shopping practice, such as asking “How do I carry all this now?”<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 1a). Consumers sought to understand and develop new meanings for the shopping practice too. That is, the governmental campaign assigned negative meanings to plastic bags, portraying them as damaging to natural landscapes and animal life (see Figure 1b). This conflicted with the more conventional meanings in Chilean society, which regarded plastic bags as convenient, affordable, and widely used (Cristi et al. 2020). The campaign did not extend the negative meanings to other, related materials, though, so



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consumers had to find a way to resolve the contradiction, in that “in the meantime, everything continues to be wrapped in plastic ... food ... toilet paper ... shampoo ... etc., etc., etc.”<sup>4</sup>

Online and in supermarkets, consumers discussed the scope, purpose, and point of the ban to make sense of it. As noted by the checkout assistants, who pack bags for customers at the register, in the weeks following the implementation of the ban, “half [of the shoppers] think ‘this is great for the planet’ and half [of them] say ‘this is a great business for the supermarket’ that now sells bags rather than giving them away”<sup>5</sup> (see Figure 1c). These informants highlighted the difference between “the typical people who say ‘this change is useless’”<sup>6</sup> and others saying “this is a really good policy.”<sup>7</sup>



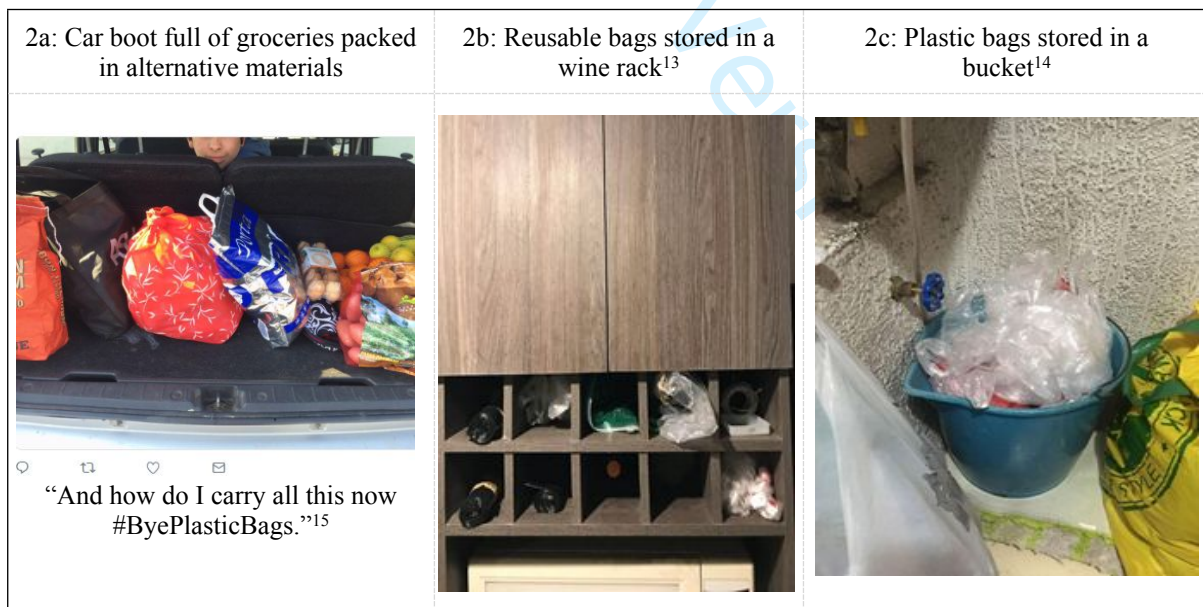
**Figure 1.** Illustrative Social Media Posts

*Accommodating the change.* We found that, after some initial sensemaking of the ban, carriers started to work to accommodate changes to the practice, discuss the intervention and its impact, and develop new competences for using and handling the new materials and meanings involved in performing the shopping practice without plastic bags. Retailers’ and governmental communications focused on a single new competence: “Bring your own bag.”<sup>11</sup> However, we found evidence that consumers had additional competences associated with shopping with disposable plastic bags, such as quickly placing products on the checkout belt,

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sorting products for a swift checkout, knowing how much to tip checkout assistants, and distributing loaded plastic bags in both hands to carry and transfer them easily into their cars (see Figure 2a). These competences were challenged significantly when bags were limited (to two per customer) and eventually banned. Consumers also had to develop new skills for unloading purchases at home (e.g., using hard plastic boxes) and to design home storage options for their reusable bags (e.g., dedicated drawer in the kitchen; see Figure 2b and 2c). A local magazine offered tips for developing new competences, such as “when making your shopping list, get in the habit of always writing down ‘reusable bags’ as the first thing.”<sup>12</sup>

Cashiers also had to develop new competences for packing groceries into different types of materials (e.g., reusable bags, boxes, carts), and learn how to time their service provision accordingly as some packing processes might take more time. The consumer interactions with these actors were also altered (e.g., when and how to provide the cashiers with the materials; if and how to pack the materials into a trolley) and thus new relational competences from consumers were required.



**Figure 2.** Illustrative Social Media Posts and Photographs

Further, the law did not propose substitute material elements, and we found that consumers began experimenting with different substitutes for plastic bags (see Figure 3a).

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Media and social media actors also offered ideas: “#ByePlasticBags: The law that seeks to reduce the use of bags has already started ... What do you think of this measure? What idea do you propose to replace the bags?”<sup>16</sup> During the partial ban period, social marketing campaigns invited consumers to bring their own bags to stores but did not provide suggestions for the type of bags. No clear path existed for reconfiguration of the shopping practice. Retailers also proposed diverse alternative materials (see Figure 3b); some supermarkets offered recyclable bags for sale, but because they contained 15% plastic, these were quickly denounced by Greenpeace as misleading.<sup>17</sup> Other supermarkets offered cardboard boxes, fabric bags, reusable plastic bags, and paper bags, though some provided no alternatives. In searching for substitute materials and to develop competences, consumers accommodated the reconfigured shopping practice as carriers, by attempting to become skillful shoppers once again: “I know I must carry a [reusable] bag in my backpack no matter what, because if I eventually want to buy something I need to know where to carry it.”<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 3.** Illustrative Social Media Posts

*Stabilizing the practice.* As our analysis indicates, at some point carriers start to embody (at times with resignation) changes to the shopping practice, with more or less difficulty or speed. The practice stabilizes as it becomes once again familiar and routinized.

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At the time we concluded data collection, some consumers settled on a set of interconnected elements that would allow them to perform the reconfigured shopping practice skillfully, describing how they might “keep reusable bags in the car. When I get home and unload them, they go back to the car immediately”<sup>22</sup> or noting “I haven’t seen anyone else doing this ... here we use garbage bags, those black ones that I purchase once a week. I purchase these bags, put my groceries in them, and when I take them out, I use the bags for the garbage.”<sup>23</sup> By regularly enacting these performances, consumers support the stabilization of the reconfigured practice. From a practice-theoretical perspective, we would expect that, as more consumers enter this stabilizing phase, their performances may converge into a new social version of the practice, which then starts being reproduced as such.

However, some consumers do not engage in stabilization immediately. We find evidence of consumers purchasing reusable bags on multiple shopping trips and accumulating them at home, or else “stealing” the disposable bags the supermarket provides for fruit and vegetables and repurposing them to carry purchases home (see Figure 3c). They continue to try to make sense of the intervention and develop sustainable meanings for the shopping practice, but they also still experience contradictions and misalignments in their performance, which impede the stabilization of the shopping practice.

### ***Challenges and Consumer Resistance to Practice Reconfiguration***

The ban on plastic bags forced carriers to reconfigure the shopping practice, and we found that this generated three challenges: responsabilization battles, unsettling emotionality, and the (un)linking of other practices. These challenges made practice change more difficult for consumers, leading to resistance. The sections that follow describe each challenge and the ways in which it distracted, discouraged, and delayed the change process, leading to a recursive state of reconfiguration instead of stabilization.



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*Responsibilization battles.* Responsibilization battles emerged when carriers clash over who is responsible for reconfiguring the shopping practice. In these battles, consumers who refused responsibilization challenged those who did not (“Are you an idiot or do you actually believe they removed the bags for the planet? To cut costs for companies, nothing else #ByePlasticBags”<sup>24</sup>) and vice versa (“I hope all those who are AGAINST the plastic bag ban choke on one! #ByePlasticBags”<sup>25</sup>). Retailers and government agencies were also pressed to take some share of the responsibility for the reconfiguration task (“Now retailers and supermarkets must give away eco bags. Not everything is revenue and profit. Do your share!!! #ByePlasticBags”<sup>26</sup>). These responsibilization battles unfolded on social media, in the press, and in retail spaces.

The battles evidenced the discomfort consumers felt due to responsibilization (Eckhardt and Dobscha 2019), throughout their practice reconfiguration processes. We found that consumers experienced physical discomfort from carrying fewer, larger, heavier bags (“I have to lift the bags and they are super heavy ... because they are so large, I tend to load them too much and the truth is, I start feeling my back”<sup>27</sup>); psychological discomfort due to social scrutiny of their performance of the shopping practice (“When I ask them: ‘Did you bring a bag?’, they get upset, they resent it a bit”<sup>28</sup>); financial discomfort as they incurred costs to replace the plastic bags they used to get for free (“always f...-ing up the poorest and most vulnerable in our country, now paper bags are sold for \$1000, \$2000 and \$3000 [Chilean] pesos”<sup>29</sup>); and moral discomfort, when they identified hypocrisy in corporations or government actors that profited from the change (“Supermarket B prospers and the consumer does not benefit at all. Customers now have to buy your bags and advertise your brand for free”<sup>30</sup>).

To resolve their discomfort and navigate the challenge of responsibilization battles, consumers resisted the plastic bag ban in various ways. This resistance is evidenced in some

1  
2  
3 consumers' attempts to spread the responsibility (“@SupermarketA, @StoreA  
4  
5 @DepartmentStore @StoreB and many more should give us bags and not sell them”<sup>31</sup>) or  
6  
7 diffuse responsabilization claims (“No one forces you to buy a reusable bag from  
8  
9 supermarkets, there are many people who have their small business selling bags, or you can  
10  
11 make your own bag, carry a backpack, even carry your purchases in your hands when you  
12  
13 don't have much stuff”<sup>32</sup>). Other consumers engaged in boycotts and retaliatory actions  
14  
15 against both supermarkets and the government: “I also enjoy going to [supermarket A] with a  
16  
17 [supermarket B] bag and going to [supermarket B] with a [supermarket A] bag, because I feel  
18  
19 like supermarkets are benefiting from this law so this is my way of protesting against this. If I  
20  
21 am forced to buy the bag, then I get to choose which one to use where.”<sup>33</sup>  
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27 These responsabilization-provoked sources of resistance interfered with practice  
28  
29 reconfiguration (see Table 2, responsabilization battles/consumer resistance). It distracts  
30  
31 consumers' sensemaking away from the shopping practice and toward other actors' intentions  
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33 and behaviors, as exemplified in debates about government mandates involving  
34  
35 supermarkets: “I don't understand why people are celebrating so much the stupidity and loss  
36  
37 of freedom of #ByePlasticBags ... Why weren't the supermarkets mandated to change the  
38  
39 [disposable plastic] bags for biodegradable and compostable ones?”<sup>34</sup>  
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41

42  
43 Such resistance also discourages accommodation when consumers witness non  
44  
45 supportive actions by other carriers whose motives and agenda they question. For example,  
46  
47 consumers who tried to replace the banned bags with reusable bags or cardboard boxes often  
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49 believed that supermarkets should support them: “Customers must be informed correctly. I  
50  
51 bought a full trolley and when I got to the cashier I got the news that I cannot get bags, they  
52  
53 did not have bags available to buy and the cashier tells me that the local manager said that  
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55 giving cardboard boxes was inappropriate. They must provide solutions to the customers, put  
56  
57 signs up warning them of the change.”<sup>35</sup> Finally, consumers hesitate and delay in committing  
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to reconfiguring the practice without perceiving sufficient commitment from other carriers with whom they wish to share responsibilities, thereby delaying the stabilization of the practice: “In part, the regulation of plastic bags is justified due to the contamination derived from them, but I believe that the ban does not solve the problem and unnecessarily burdens the customer with something that the shops should be responsible for.”<sup>36</sup>

*Unsettling emotionality.* The ban also disrupted the affective structure of the shopping practice; consumers as carriers no longer felt completely attuned or “at home” with their previously familiar practice. During reconfiguration processes, the shopping practice gets infused with an unsettling mix of negative and positive emotionality. Some consumers experienced anxiety and fear: “good heavens, what are we going to do?”<sup>37</sup> and others grappled with the notion that “though I like nature and all this, the first week when I went to the supermarket and there were no bags, it was, ... ‘good God, the bags are over!’ and I even got a bit angry like ‘Why are there no bags?’”<sup>38</sup> For other carriers who still lack competence and therefore fail to perform the practice skillfully, reconfiguring the practice creates frustration and shame: “#ByePlasticBags I can’t get used to this shit! 🤔🤔.”<sup>39</sup> As consumers reflect on their performance of the shopping practice, additional emotions emerge. Erratic or flawed performance (e.g., “people forget to bring bags or bring fewer than they need”<sup>40</sup>) prevents the changing practice from becoming “second nature,” and it adds guilt and anger to its emotionality. The dynamic links between the modified elements (materials, competences, meanings) of the shopping practice (and other practices) further unsettle its emotionality (see Figure 4a). Consumers may feel conflicted about performing well in one practice but not others:

I have mixed feelings ... too bad this will go on record ... up to the very last minute [prior to the ban] I still asked for plastic bags. Now I imagine the little fish that’s

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1  
2  
3 eating the plastic and I am committed, but my alternative is still to purchase a plastic  
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5 bag for the garbage.<sup>41</sup>  
6

7  
8 Yet the reconfiguration processes also offer numerous possibilities for performing the  
9  
10 practice in ways that may be more effective or beneficial to carriers. Therefore, consumers  
11  
12 could adopt more sustainable materials, become more competent, or derive more meaning  
13  
14 from the practice. Such possibilities charge the shopping practice with positive emotions,  
15  
16 such as hope, excitement, and pride (“You have to be calm and take it with humor, and that is  
17  
18 all!!! We look cute carrying Cloth Bags!!! Hahaha #lookinglikegrandma !”<sup>42</sup>)  
19  
20  
21

22 As the reconfiguration processes continue, and consumers start shopping without  
23  
24 disposable plastic bags, other emotions surface and become part of the unsettling  
25  
26 emotionality. Pride characterizes carriers who feel accomplished or creative in performing the  
27  
28 practice (see Figure 4b) because they have identified new materials to replace disposable  
29  
30 plastic bags: “When you are offered a plastic bag at the farmers’ market, but you open your  
31  
32 backpack and say ‘just in here please’ #GoodbyeByePlasticBags” [accompanied by an image  
33  
34 of Arnold Schwarzenegger looking at the horizon surrounded by animals and nature]<sup>43</sup>. This  
35  
36 sense of pride also gets reinforced by social marketing campaigns, such as one proclaiming:  
37  
38 “Chile is the 1st country in Latin America to say #ByePlasticBags in commerce!”<sup>44</sup>  
39  
40  
41 Reconfiguration processes can also prompt nostalgia: “When I was little and we shopped,  
42  
43 they would wrap things in newspaper, there wasn’t a plastic bag for sugar, it was paper.”<sup>45</sup>  
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**Figure 4.** Illustrative Social Media Posts

This mix of emotions that we identify emerges during reconfiguration processes and, as suggested in prior research, becomes characteristic of the practice, providing consumers with a new (albeit changing) template for the beliefs and emotions they *should* express as part of that practice (Schatzki 2001). We found that each performance of the shopping practice adds to the emotionality of the practice, making it more volatile, complex, and tense.

In response to the challenge of unsettling emotionality, we found that consumers resisted the sustainability intervention by complaining that “to carry products in their hands is degrading”<sup>49</sup> or claiming a “loss of dignity,”<sup>50</sup> as well as engaging in more extreme acts such as “kicking checkout points, screaming at the cashiers, causing scandals, so the supermarket security guards have to be called”<sup>51</sup>. The resistance generated by the challenge of unsettling emotionality interferes with the ongoing practice configuration (see Table 2, unsettling emotionality/consumer resistance). It distracts sensemaking by diminishing consumers’ cognitive capacity or ability to notice and make sense of important cues: “There is a feeling of disgust for having the responsibility of bringing our own bags. This increases our costs,

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2  
3 and I don't see the benefits"<sup>52</sup>. Resistance also discourages the accommodation of the  
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5 reconfiguring practice as consumers hesitate to handle new materials or develop new  
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7 competences when they struggle with their emotions: "I am already getting used to having to  
8  
9 carry the bag but if I sometimes forget the bag, I have to buy a bag again. If I don't buy it and  
10  
11 if there are a few things, I have to carry them in my hands and that's embarrassing ...  
12  
13 walking around with things in sight."<sup>53</sup> Moreover, as consumers resist in response to the  
14  
15 challenge of unsettling emotionality, they tend to avoid repeating performances that have  
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17 prompted anxiety or fear, and this delays stabilization of the practice: "Our family's initial  
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19 reaction was very positive, as we understood the purpose. However, as soon as this ban  
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21 started revealing the difficulties of this buying process, our view started changing and we  
22  
23 now feel upset and uncomfortable, and seriously question the initiative ... Isn't there an  
24  
25 easier way?"<sup>54</sup>

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27  
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31 *(Un)linking of other practices.* The challenge of (un)linking other practices emerges  
32  
33 because as the materials, competences, and meanings of the shopping practice undergo  
34  
35 reconfiguration, they also forge new or break existing connections between the shopping  
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37 practice and other practices. For example, the ban disrupted domestic disposal of garbage  
38  
39 because free disposable plastic bags, which represent a key material for both practices, were  
40  
41 no longer available: "I used the supermarket bags to dispose of trash, now I need to buy trash  
42  
43 bags because I still need to throw the trash out ... Does anybody do this differently?"<sup>55</sup>

44  
45  
46  
47 As the meaning of plastic bags evolved, we found that connotations of contamination  
48  
49 and waste also began to extend to other retailing practices, such as product packaging  
50  
51 ("wrapping eggplants in plastic film"<sup>56</sup> – see also Figure 4c), selling reusable bags wrapped  
52  
53 in plastic, "requiring that [consumers] use plastic bags to weigh fruit and bread,"<sup>57</sup> and waste  
54  
55 management efforts: "They could work on responsible waste management now, the  
56  
57 producing companies MUST take care of the waste that remains when consuming their  
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products. #wasteisadesignproblem @[sustainability ONG] knows about that.”<sup>58</sup> Once they face disruption to such links, consumers manifest resistance:

A gentleman once told me: “This is absurd! Two percent of the country’s pollution is plastic bags in the water. The rest is pure plastic that they continue selling. So what is the point? You get it? ... Do you see how ridiculous this is? They are attacking 2% instead of attacking 30% through prohibiting other plastics, reducing that, or increasing these other things. This is more of a populist measure than anything else.” I got to hear plenty of opinions from people [laughs].<sup>59</sup>

Moreover, consumers identified misalignments between the governmental discourse about the ban and government actions in other industries, such as “Everything is fine with the plastic bags ... What about the coal mine in Patagonia?”<sup>60</sup> or “#ByePlasticBags but [President] shrinks National Parks for private exploitation, persists with + hydroelectric plants, mining, destruction of native forests with pine and eucalyptus plantations, there is no recycling, what we consume comes in plastic and is disposable, retail uses electricity for lights all day.”<sup>61</sup> Upon acknowledging the complexity of interrelated practices, consumers resisted an intervention they perceived as “absurd” and “ridiculous.”

We found evidence that, as consumers resist in response to the challenge of (un)linking other practices, their resistance interferes with practice reconfiguration (see Table 2, (un)linking other practices/consumer resistance). It distracts sensemaking by requiring consumers to make sense of not just the focal shopping practice but also the broader nexuses with other practices and their elements (i.e., materials, competences, and meanings): “I don’t understand how they can talk about #ByePlasticBags while still allowing tires. It must be because the bags contaminate ‘in your face’ while tire wear is invisible because their microparticles disappear in the air we breathe. #terriblelegislation.”<sup>62</sup> Similarly, such

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consumer resistance discourages consumers from accommodating elements within the shopping practice, as they would need to accommodate elements in linked and unlinked practices at the same time: “I went to the supermarket, good thing they eliminated plastic bags, I bought this [paper bag], but everything I am carrying inside it is in plastic packaging. What has changed from this? #ByePlasticBags #GoodBusiness.”<sup>63</sup> Finally, consumers resistance delays the stabilization of the reconfiguring practice because consumers are forced to embody changes to un/linked practices in addition to embodying changes to the reconfiguring practice: “Today they didn’t give me plastic bags at the supermarket, 10 fewer bags on the planet, but what I can’t wrap my head around is that I had to purchase 10 of those black garbage bags for the bathroom and kitchen waste bins (I had never, ever purchased bags for this before). Something is not right!!! @EnvironmentMinistry Chile #ByePlasticBags.”<sup>64</sup>

## *Towards a Theory of Consumer Resistance in Social Practice Change*

In this section, we build upon our findings to propose a theory of consumer resistance in social practice change. We now present this theory, illustrated in Figure 5, in broad terms to demonstrate its generalizability.

Practice theories, such as ours, conceive of individual behaviors as embedded in social practices. As such, we start from where consumers continuously and skillfully perform an existing practice by repeatedly linking its elements in a similar manner (see Figure 5, Existing Practice). However, when interventions (imposed or otherwise) occur that modify the basic elements of a practice, consumers must reconfigure the links across the modified elements to enable the social practice to develop and endure.

They do so through three recursive reconfiguration processes (see Figure 5, Reconfiguration Processes): sensemaking, accommodating, and stabilizing. Consumers work to make sense of the modified elements, to understand what the change means for the social

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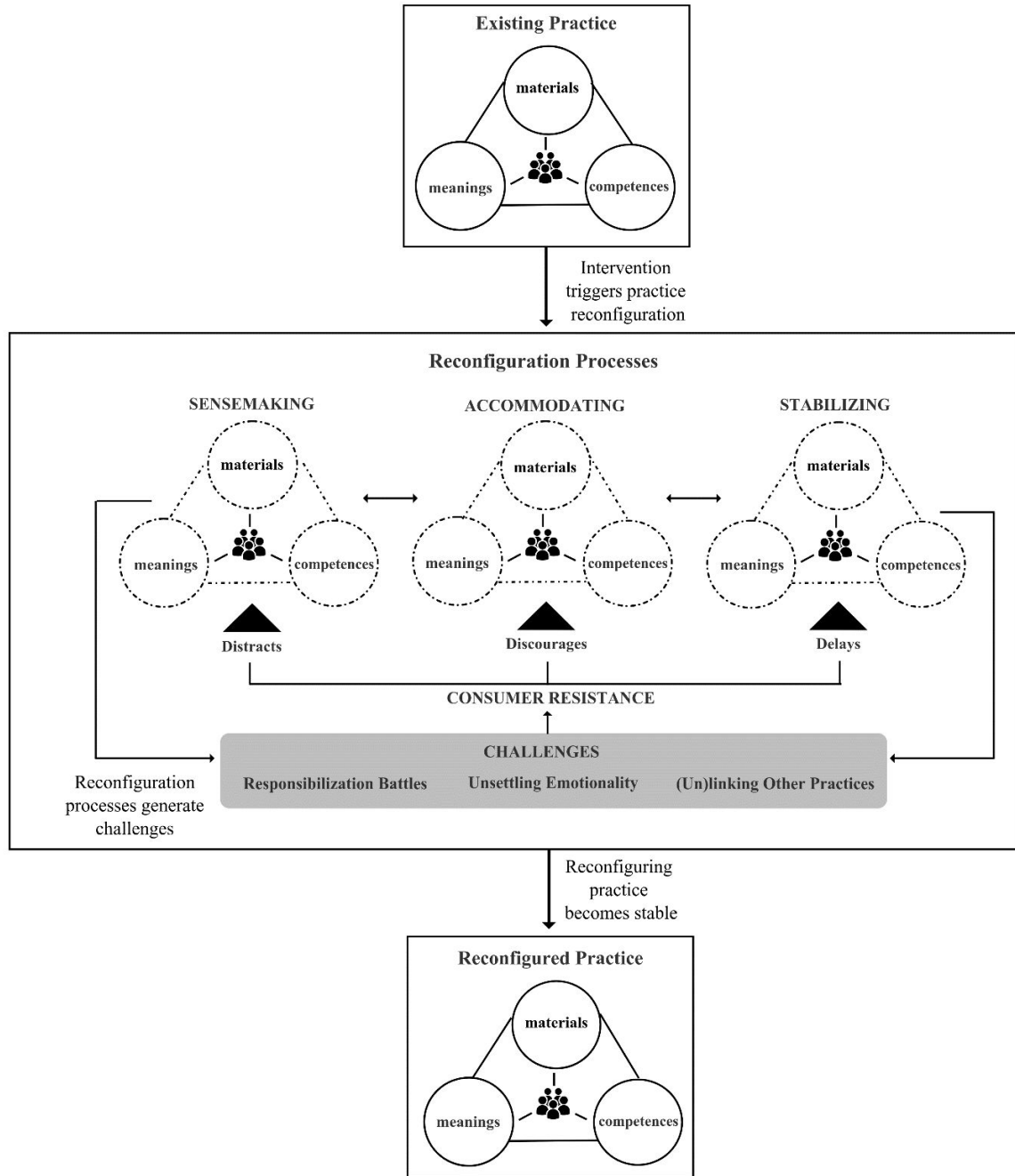
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3 practice in question and their continued performance of it (*what do we do now?*). They must  
4  
5 accommodate the modified elements while performing the changing social practice (*how do*  
6  
7 *we do it now?*). Finally, consumers need to stabilize the changed practice by embodying the  
8  
9 newly developed links between the modified elements in their performances (*this is how we*  
10  
11 *will keep doing it from now on*). During reconfiguration, the links across the practice  
12  
13 elements are provisional (dotted lines in Figure 5, Reconfiguration Processes), as consumers  
14  
15 are not yet consistently engaging with the same elements in performing the changing practice.  
16  
17

18  
19 Three major challenges emerge in social practice change: responsabilization battles,  
20  
21 unsettling emotionality, and the (un)linking of other practices. These challenges generate  
22  
23 consumer resistance that disrupts practice reconfiguration. Considering the nature of these  
24  
25 reconfiguration processes, we identify how the dispersed, yet aggregate consumer resistance  
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27 interferes with each of them in a particular way. Sensemaking, which requires focused  
28  
29 attention, emotional stability, and a manageable cognitive load (Maitlis and Christianson  
30  
31 2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas 2015), is distracted by consumer resistance. Accommodating,  
32  
33 which, as evidenced in our findings, involves experimentation, trial and error, requiring that  
34  
35 consumers engage in risk-taking to incorporate new materials into the changing practice, is  
36  
37 discouraged by consumer resistance. Finally, stabilizing, which requires that consumers  
38  
39 comfortably and consistently perform a new version of the practice (Thomas and Epp 2019;  
40  
41 Phipps and Ozanne 2017), is delayed by consumer resistance. It is worth noting that, as  
42  
43 reconfiguration processes are recursive, the ways in which consumer resistance disrupts them  
44  
45 may overlap.  
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50  
51 In this way, consumer resistance keeps the practice in a recursive state of  
52  
53 reconfiguration, interfering with the desired change. Finally, when the reconfiguring practice  
54  
55 becomes stable, the practice in question is reconfigured (see Figure 5, Reconfigured  
56  
57 Practice): consumers skillfully perform it again, by continuously linking its modified  
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elements in a similar manner. Taken together, our theory explains what gives rise to consumer resistance to interventions and how this resistance can be reduced. It suggests that consumer resistance to interventions and how this resistance can be reduced. It suggests that effective interventions require social practice change.



**Figure 5.** Consumer Resistance in Social Practice Change as Required by Interventions



## Discussion

### *Theoretical Implications*

Our theory of consumer resistance in social practice change has two main research implications. First, we advance marketing literature on sustainable consumer behavior by shifting the focus from individual consumer behavior to social practice change. Second, we advance theories of social practice change in marketing and social sciences more broadly by closely examining the role of consumer resistance in social practice change, and emphasizing the previously overlooked roles of responsabilization and emotionality. We detail these implications below.

*Shifting from individual perspectives on sustainable consumer behavior to social practice change.* Consumers often resist behavioral-focused interventions, particularly when they are made responsible for social issues (e.g., Eckhardt and Dobscha 2019), thereby undermining the effectiveness of the intervention. Our theory offers an explanation for this important problem. Extending prior research (e.g., Blue et al. 2014; Scheurenbrand et al. 2018), we show how sustainability interventions disrupt social practices, and explain that consumer resistance emerges because the individual behaviors being targeted are embedded in disrupted social practices. Specifically, we explain that, when interventions aim to change individual behaviors rather than social practices, they place excessive responsibility on consumers, unsettle their practice-related emotionality, and destabilize the multiple practices that interconnect to shape consumers' lives, ultimately leading to resistance. This theory offers marketing scholars a conceptual framework for better examining, understanding, and explaining consumer resistance to sustainability interventions and how this resistance can be reduced.

*Connecting consumer resistance, responsabilization, and emotionality to theories of social practice change.* Our proposed theory also contributes to theories of social practice

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change in marketing and social sciences more generally. Whereas Shove, Pantzar, and Watson's (2012) highly influential theory shows convincingly that social practices change when links among their elements (i.e., materials, competences, meanings) are made or broken, their theory does not fully articulate what processes and challenges are actually involved in social practice change, and what gives rise to consumer resistance in social practice change. Our theory does. Accordingly, it advances existing social practice theories in three important ways. First, it shows that social practice change takes place through three recursive reconfiguration processes by which carriers reconnect the links among modified elements for a practice to endure. Second, it identifies three major challenges arising in the reconfiguration processes. Third, it shows how these challenges generate consumer resistance, which disrupts the reconfiguration processes required by sustainability interventions and, thus, undermines the effectiveness of the intervention.

In addition to articulating the practice reconfiguration processes, our theory extends current understandings of social practice change in two ways: responsabilization and emotionality. First, we explain why consumers resist responsabilization and provide evidence of how they do so, in the context of a social practice change. Our analysis shows that consumers resist responsabilization not only when they find it difficult to reconfigure their habituated social practices, but also when they feel they are the primary carriers being tasked with the change. Thus, our findings extend Eckhardt and Dobscha's (2019) work by identifying other forms of discomfort that consumers experience in response to such allocations of responsibility. Moreover, by introducing *responsibilization battles* we identify the consequences of discomfort that go beyond the individual. The notion of responsabilization battles in social practice change is important as these battles are likely to become more frequent as consumers increasingly find themselves tasked with complex practice reconfigurations. Furthermore, when these battles occur publicly, such as through



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social media, they may amplify consumer resistance and outrage about sustainability interventions, potentially working through social contagion (Plé and Demangeot 2020) to disrupt other social practices.

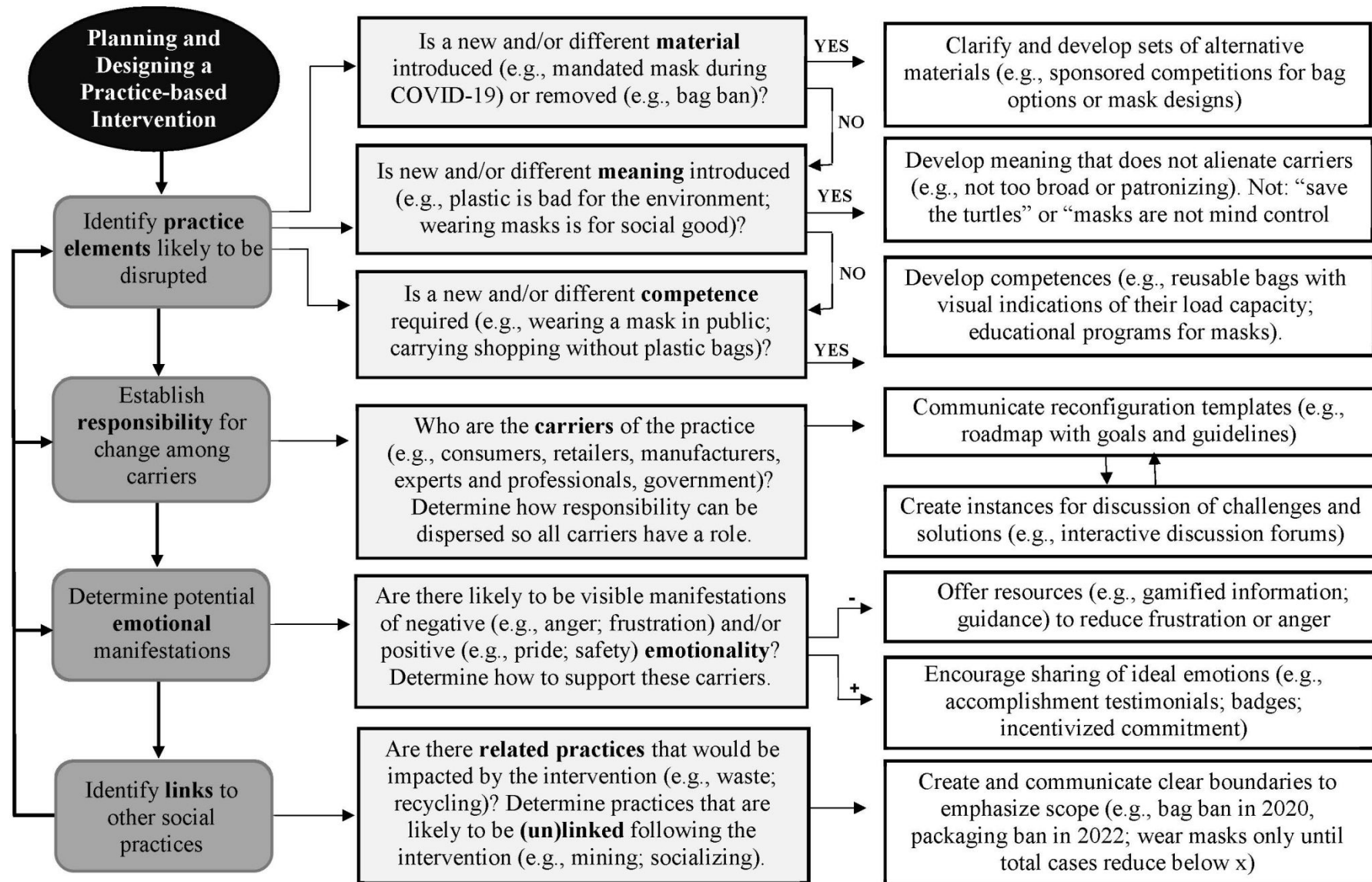
Second, we emphasize the role of emotionality in social practice change. We show that during reconfiguration, multiple, often conflicting emotions get linked to practices as consumers perform them, which affect these performances. This notion adds to a practice-theoretical understanding of practice reconfiguration, particularly when sparked by an imposed, abrupt modification of an element rather than an organic evolution of a practice or an introduction of a new technology. Thus, our findings extend Phipps and Ozanne's (2017) description of ontological insecurity. We challenge the assumption that consumers simply accept responsibility assigned to them by government interventions. We find that consumer resistance is a disruptive force that pushes against consumers' desire to acclimatize to a new normal (Phipps and Ozanne 2017), and can infuse reconfiguring practices with demoralizing emotions. Although emotionality is often a 'blind spot' in social practice theory (Molander and Hartmann 2018), examining its role offers a way to connect cultural and material explanations of social phenomena (Bassi, Parkins, and Caine 2019; Reckwitz 2012). By identifying the unsettling emotionality of social practice change, we help clarify the conflicts that often surround sustainability interventions (Sternbergh 2015). These go beyond individual reactions to routine disruptions or behavioral change, and this insight adds to current knowledge about the role of collective emotions in sustainable consumer behavior (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019).

## ***Managerial Implications***

If individual consumer behavior is determined by social practices beyond individual motivations or attitudes, then putting a sustainability intervention into effect is just a first step. Reconfiguring the practice should be the primary goal, which can lead to the broader

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1  
2  
3 end goal of fostering sustainable consumer behavior. Our emergent theory offers a  
4  
5 framework for designing and managing practice-based sustainability interventions, which  
6  
7 makes it possible to explore methods to reduce consumer resistance that go beyond individual  
8  
9 behavioral approaches. Our recommendations focus on two key aspects: how to (1) design  
10  
11 practice-based sustainability interventions to reduce resistance at the outset, and (2) monitor  
12  
13 and adjust these interventions to manage consumer resistance that may emerge later. Using  
14  
15 the plastic bag bans as an example, we offer a first set of recommendations for considerations  
16  
17 that should be addressed *prior* to implementing the intervention, then a second set involving  
18  
19 ways to monitor and adjust ongoing processes *during* practice reconfiguration. We outline the  
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21 sets of recommendations in Figure 6 and Figure 7.  
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**Figure 6.** Decision Flowchart: Planning and Designing Practice-Based Interventions

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*Planning and designing practice-based interventions.* First, when designing sustainability interventions, policymakers should identify the potential practice elements (i.e., materials, competences, and meanings) that will be disrupted and require reconfiguration. They can then introduce substitute elements that reflect the sustainability goal of the intervention, demonstrate how the new elements work, and provide advice regarding their use and assessment. To replace disposable plastic bags, policymakers could present alternative forms of reusable bags, describing both their usage and their (positive) impact on the environment. Likewise, policymakers should identify the competences that consumers need to perform the changed practice, such as packing different types and sizes of reusable bags, choosing the right bags, or deciding where to store them. We advise policymakers to obtain consumers' perceptions of and reactions to the new practice before announcing the intervention; they can then include those insights in their planning and communication. Rather than relying exclusively on opinion polls, which often show strong support for interventions (see <http://chaobolsasplasticas.cl/en/>), deeper consumer insights should be gained through focus groups and ethnographic work (see Cayla and Arnould 2013), to capture consumer experiences of the reconfiguration processes.

Second, policymakers should consider all practice carriers, beyond consumers, and distribute responsibilities among them. Consumers may perform the shopping practice, but retailers and bag manufacturers set material arrangements for shopping, the government determines the rules for the commercial activity, and social marketers promote the meaning of sustainable consumption. Rather than banning bags, which eliminates retailers' responsibility for this aspect of the shopping practice, policymakers might assign retailers the task of developing sustainable alternatives. Similarly, to prevent retailers' opportunistic attempts to profit from the intervention (e.g., by selling reusable bags for profit), which threatens to irritate consumers as they perceive these tactics as hypocritical, policymakers

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2  
3 might establish legal price limits for reusable bags or prohibit retailers from charging for a  
4  
5 bag that features their brand logo. Taking this approach could facilitate the development of  
6  
7 successful intervention policies, as it involves other actors in reconfiguration who may have  
8  
9 more agency and capacity to make meaningful progress on sustainable goals.  
10  
11

12 Third, ethnographic studies might help policymakers determine and evaluate the  
13  
14 potential emotional implications of the intervention and practice reconfiguration. For  
15  
16 retailers, the point of sale is generally where consumers experience performances laden with  
17  
18 emotions. Planning to reduce those visible manifestations of unsettling emotionality may  
19  
20 reduce their effects on consumer resistance. Social marketing campaigns and efforts at the  
21  
22 point of sale (e.g., signals that indicate the shared responsibilities of multiple carriers, advice  
23  
24 in store catalogs for accommodating the change) might reduce extreme negative  
25  
26 manifestations, such as assaults on cashiers, abandoned shopping carts, or theft of plastic  
27  
28 bags from the produce section. Consumers might also feel a sense of pride, or other positive  
29  
30 emotions, if they can accomplish the shopping practice without plastic bags, so these positive  
31  
32 emotional manifestations should be leveraged to reduce resistance, such as through the  
33  
34 gamification of compliance (Müller-Stewens et al. 2017).  
35  
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40 Fourth, policymakers and social marketing institutions should identify which practices  
41  
42 share materials, competences, or meanings with the targeted practice (e.g., garbage and waste  
43  
44 practices, goods packaging and transportation), so they can anticipate other possible sources  
45  
46 of resistance and act accordingly. Materials should be considered broadly; a sustainability  
47  
48 intervention targeting plastic bags should address links to other practices that involve plastic  
49  
50 too, as a substance and not necessarily just in the shape of disposable bags. Due to their broad  
51  
52 goals, such as “promoting sustainable consumption,” the scope of sustainability interventions  
53  
54 tends to appear virtually endless. Consequently, consumers might link any intervention to  
55  
56 other practices that they consider unsustainable (e.g., waste, mining). By establishing and  
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1  
2  
3 communicating clear boundaries around an intervention, policymakers can establish a precise  
4  
5 sequence of future interventions that can support the broader goal of sustainable consumer  
6  
7 behavior.  
8

9  
10 *Monitoring and adjusting practice-based interventions.* Following such careful  
11  
12 considerations, the intervention can be executed, but that step should not be considered an  
13  
14 end goal. Designing interventions that account for the aforementioned considerations may  
15  
16 reduce consumer resistance at the outset, but policymakers must continue monitoring the  
17  
18 reconfiguration processes to identify any emerging resistance, then make necessary  
19  
20 adjustments to manage this resistance. These adjustments should focus specifically on how  
21  
22 potential consumer resistance disrupts the reconfiguration processes (i.e., distracting  
23  
24 sensemaking, discouraging accommodation, or delaying stabilization), and aim at *refocusing*  
25  
26 *sensemaking, encouraging accommodation, and accelerating stabilization.*  
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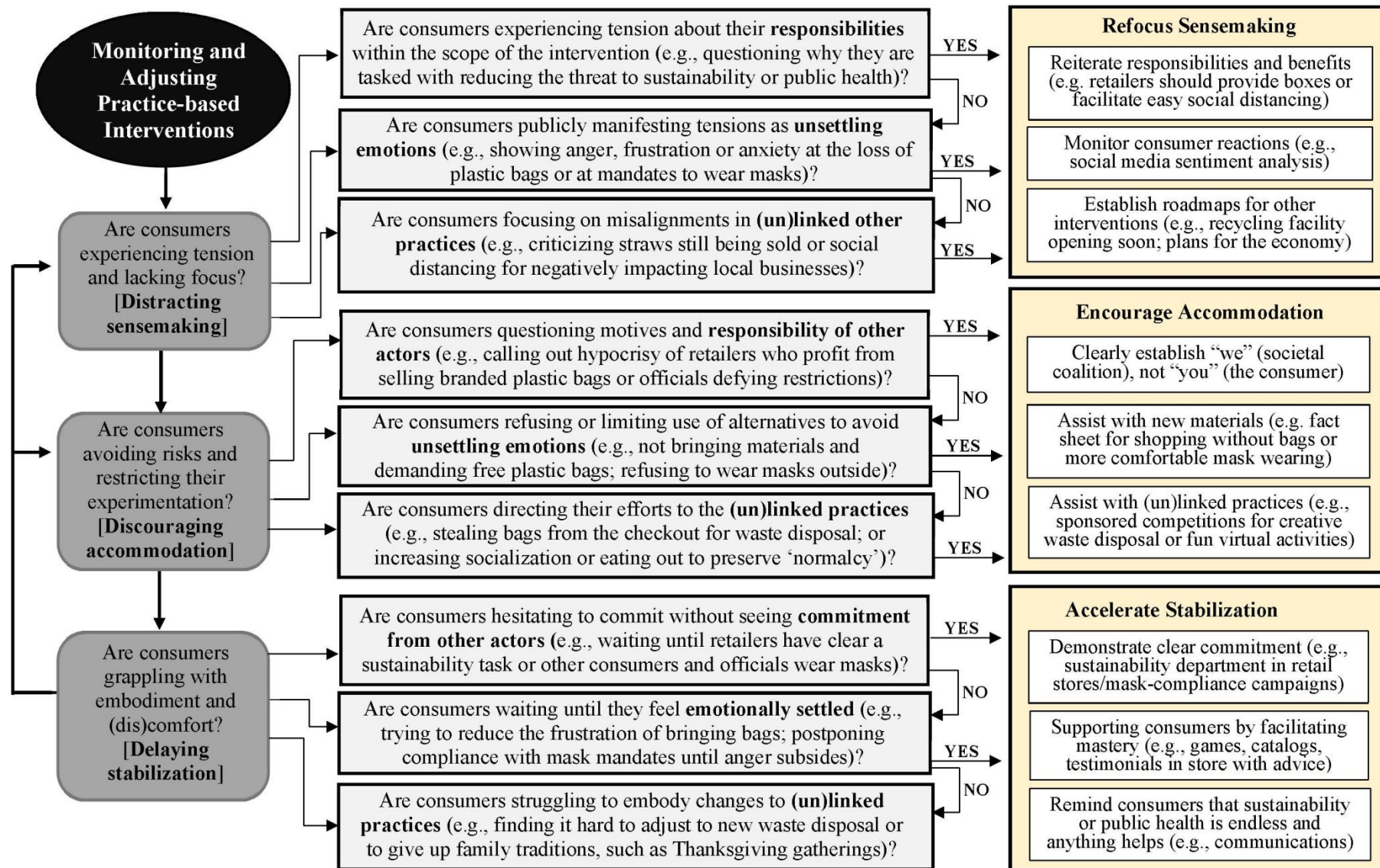


Figure 7. Decision Flowchart: Monitoring and Adjusting Practice-Based Interventions

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1  
2  
3 First, consumer resistance may manifest distracting sensemaking during the  
4  
5 reconfiguration process. This resistance will be identifiable as consumers experiencing  
6  
7 tensions and lacking focus while attempting to make sense of the intervention and the  
8  
9 required changes the intervention brings about. When consumer resistance manifests in this  
10  
11 way, intervention efforts should remove or reduce these distractions. For example,  
12  
13 communications could remind carriers of the scope of the intervention, the distribution of  
14  
15 responsibility, and the specific benefits to them. Broader benefits for the “greater good” are  
16  
17 unlikely to refocus the carriers on their sensemaking process, but descriptions of the specific  
18  
19 benefits for different carriers may be more effective. By clearly communicating and  
20  
21 reaffirming the boundaries around the intervention and its benefits, policymakers can reduce  
22  
23 distraction and refocus sensemaking (e.g., establishing a roadmap for associated  
24  
25 interventions). To ensure benefits for consumers – often the most visible and numerous  
26  
27 carriers of a practice – retailers might introduce limited-time discounts on eco-friendly  
28  
29 garbage bags for shoppers who comply with the intervention by bringing reusable bags, for  
30  
31 example. If this incentive is not financially viable, retailers could consider other ways to  
32  
33 encourage adoption (e.g., badges for early compliance). Policymakers might also build  
34  
35 financial considerations (e.g., grants, funding) into the policy, then allow retailers to  
36  
37 distribute the government-sponsored incentives to consumers.  
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44 Second, consumer resistance may manifest discouraging accommodation. This  
45  
46 resistance will be identifiable as consumers avoiding risks and restricting their  
47  
48 experimentation with new materials, competences and/or meanings. When consumer  
49  
50 resistance manifests in this way, the encouragement efforts should focus on the challenges  
51  
52 that trigger the discouragement. If consumers are struggling to develop competences due to  
53  
54 unsettling emotionality, for example, additional educational programs might be helpful. At  
55  
56 the point of sale, instruction banners might acknowledge initial forgetfulness, then offer  
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sustainable alternatives for those shoppers who left their reusable bags at home. Policymakers should observe what alternatives become visible when consumers make attempts to reconfigure the shopping practice, and use these insights to determine solutions that can be quickly and easily adopted. These alternatives that arise through reconfiguration efforts may be better suited to the market setting, even if they may differ from the options predicted in the planning phase. Hence, it is important to monitor and then leverage consumer accommodation efforts.

Third, consumer resistance may manifest delaying stabilization. This resistance will be identifiable as consumers grappling with how to comfortably embody the changes. To deal with these delays in stabilization, intervention efforts should focus on removing barriers and accelerating stabilization. Traditionally, testimonials and success stories have been recommended to foster consumer compliance to behavioral change (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019). However, we find that consumers tend to be unwilling to stabilize a reconfiguring practice until they observe commitment from other actors. Hence, we propose that effective campaigns and forums should focus on other actors, whom consumers believe have not been adequately responsabilized. Other efforts to help consumers overcome the discomfort associated with stabilizing practices should refer to both the reconfiguring practice and those that have been (un)linked. Finally, in line with our recommendation that broader sustainability goals should be emphasized throughout the process, policymakers must ensure that any promises are met and establish good alignment between current and future sustainability policy developments. Carriers will be more likely to stabilize reconfiguring practices if they know that their efforts are not moot when it comes to fostering more sustainable consumer behavior overall.

At the time an intervention is put in place and then thereafter, communications with carriers should be ongoing, describing its scope, importance, and responsibility assignments.

1  
2  
3 When responsabilization, unsettling emotionality, and the (un)linking of other practices  
4  
5 generate consumer resistance during the reconfiguration process, policymakers should  
6  
7 prioritize identifying disruptions to ensure targeted responses to resistance. In this way, the  
8  
9 process of designing and implementing interventions will remain appropriately dynamic and  
10  
11 iterative, rather than static and linear.  
12  
13

#### 14 ***Limitations and Further Research***

15  
16  
17 There are limitations in this study that can be addressed by further research. First, we  
18  
19 examine a ban on plastic bags, an intervention promoted by many governments and  
20  
21 organizations worldwide to reduce plastic pollution. Despite its spread and importance, this  
22  
23 empirical setting may differ from other contexts within the broader sustainability domain,  
24  
25 such as those outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2020).  
26  
27 Nevertheless, our emergent theory is relevant to intervention contexts that (1) result in  
28  
29 significant changes to established practices; (2) are public, such that the intervention affects  
30  
31 many consumers who might resist it; and (3) relate to changes that demand the involvement  
32  
33 of multiple actors to reconfigure the practice. Additional research might apply this theory and  
34  
35 investigate interventions that target other goals (e.g., interventions aimed at reducing  
36  
37 smoking, drinking, obesity). Second, the intervention we study entails the elimination of a  
38  
39 material (plastic bags); reconfigurations of social practices could vary in response to  
40  
41 interventions that encourage new competences (e.g., recycling) or alterations to meaning  
42  
43 (e.g., recycled drinking water). Continued research should address consumer resistance to  
44  
45 interventions that target such practice elements. This further research might also consider if  
46  
47 there are patterns to consumer resistance when a specific challenge (i.e., responsabilization  
48  
49 battles, unsettling emotionality, (un)linking of other practices) emerges, and how the  
50  
51 reconfiguration processes (i.e., sensemaking, accommodating, stabilizing) may differ under  
52  
53 different circumstances. Third, our comprehensive study mirrors the implementation of the  
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1 plastic bag ban in real-time, and we could trace the emergence of consumer resistance and  
2  
3 theorize about its impact on the process of social practice change. However, we did not assess  
4  
5 the long-term outcomes of this sustainability intervention. We hope continued research will  
6  
7 analyze consumer responses over time to gain additional insights into monitoring/adjusting  
8  
9 strategies. Fourth, the sustainability intervention we study was a mandated governmental  
10  
11 policy. Other organizations also propose sustainability interventions (e.g., Meat-free  
12  
13 Mondays), and the reconfiguration of social practices in response to marketing-led  
14  
15 interventions (e.g., packaging-free product strategies) might differ. We suggest adapting our  
16  
17 theory to such research topics, to develop insights into the roles of consumers and companies  
18  
19 in the successful implementation of such interventions. Finally, the proposed theory provides  
20  
21 a novel and comprehensive explanation for why consumers engage in resistance, and as such,  
22  
23 it proposes several additional methods for reducing consumer resistance to interventions.  
24  
25 However, facilitating more sustainable consumer behavior through sustainability  
26  
27 interventions is a complex, multilayered effort, likely to require contributions from multiple  
28  
29 perspectives to be resolved satisfactorily. Continued research should consider how the  
30  
31 proposed theory of consumer resistance in social practice change can be combined with other  
32  
33 perspectives, such as the SHIFT framework (White et al. 2019), to clarify how consumer  
34  
35 resistance to sustainability interventions can be reduced and, ultimately, to foster more  
36  
37 sustainable consumer behavior.  
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13 Interview with Consumer 23  
14 Interview with Consumer 20  
15 Twitter post by consumer, June 13, 2018  
16 Twitter post by radio station, August 6, 2018  
17 News Media article 2 (see Dataset References)  
18 Interview with Checkout Assistant 21  
19 Twitter post by consumer, May 9, 2018  
20 Twitter post by consumer, June 26, 2018  
21 Twitter post by consumer, July 8, 2018  
22 Ethnographic Incursion 32  
23 Interview with Consumer 6  
24 Twitter post by consumer, May 31, 2018  
25 Twitter post by consumer, May 9, 2018  
26 Twitter post by consumer, May 30, 2018  
27 Interview with consumer 8  
28 Interview with Checkout Assistant 25  
29 Twitter post by consumer, August 5, 2019  
30 Facebook comment by consumer in response to Supermarket B, August 4, 2018  
31 Twitter post by consumer in response to government, August 3, 2018  
32 Twitter post by a consumer in response to another consumer, August 3, 2018  
33 Ethnographic Incursion 27  
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35 Facebook comment by consumer in response to Supermarket B, August 4, 2018  
36 Ethnographic Incursion 9  
37 Interview with Consumer 11  
38 Interview with Consumer 19  
39 Twitter post by consumer, July 4, 2018  
40 Interview with Checkout Assistant 6  
41 Interview with Consumer 3  
42 Facebook post by consumer, August 4, 2018  
43 Twitter post by consumer, June 4, 2018  
44 Twitter post by government, February 10, 2019  
45 Interview with Consumer 10  
46 Twitter post by consumer, June 21, 2018  
47 Twitter post by consumer, July 29, 2018  
48 Twitter post by consumer, July 13, 2018  
49 News Media article 3 (see Dataset References)  
50 News Media article 4 (see Dataset References)  
51 Interview with Checkout Assistant 27  
52 Ethnographic Incursion 17  
53 Interview with Consumer 18  
54 Ethnographic Incursion 10  
55 Twitter post by consumer, February 3, 2019  
56 Twitter post by consumer, July 11, 2018  
57 Ethnographic Incursion 8  
58 Twitter post by consumer in response to government, February 3, 2019

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- <sup>59</sup> Interview with Checkout Assistant 19
- <sup>60</sup> Twitter post by consumer to Minister of Environment, January 29, 2019
- <sup>61</sup> Twitter post by consumer, February 4, 2019
- <sup>62</sup> Twitter post by consumer, August 3, 2018
- <sup>63</sup> Twitter post by consumer, February 23, 2019
- <sup>64</sup> Twitter post by consumer, February 5, 2019

Peer Review Version

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## “How Do I Carry All This Now?”: Understanding Consumer Resistance to Sustainability Interventions

Claudia Gonzalez-Arcos, Alison M. Joubert, Daiane Scaraboto, Rodrigo Guesalaga and  
Jörgen Sandberg

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**WEB APPENDIX A**  
Details about Regulatory Documents

Label	Date	Discussion Stage	Document Details
RD1	10.10.2013	First constitutional procedure at the Chamber of Deputies (CD)	Project submission
RD2	10.10.2013	Same as above	Project account. Sent to the Natural Resources, National Assets and Environment Commission
RD3	28.11.2013	Same as above	Account, Office of the Extreme Zones Commission, for which it requests the agreement of the Chamber, so that the project is sent only and exclusively to this Commission for its report.
RD4	22.01.2014	Same as above	First commission report (Extreme Zones)
RD5	22.01.2014	Same as above	First commission report (Extreme Zones)
RD6	28.01.2014	Same as above	First commission report account
RD7	08.04.2014	Same as above	General discussion. Approved in general. Sent to the second report of the Commission of Extreme Zones and Chilean Antarctic.
RD8	08.04.2014	Same as above	Second commission report (Extreme Zones)
RD9	15.04.2014	Same as above	Second commission report account
RD10	24.04.2014	Same as above	Particular discussion. A new report is requested.
RD11	24.04.2014	Same as above	Note No. 11.254. Forward a project, for a second report, to the Commission on Extreme Zones and Chilean Antarctic.
RD12	07.05.2014	Same as above	New second commission report (Extreme Zones)
RD13	14.05.2014	Same as above	Account new second report
RD14	05.06.2014	Same as above	Particular discussion Approved.
RD15	05.06.2014	Same as above	Law Office to the Review Chamber
RD16	11.11.2014	Second constitutional procedure at the Senate (S)	First commission report (Special Commission of Extreme Zones and Special Territories)
RD17	03.03.2015	Same as above	General discussion. Approved in general. Fixed as a deadline to submit indications on 03/23/2015
RD18	18.05.2018	Same as above	Second commission report (on Environment and National Assets)
RD19	29.05.2018	Same as above	Official Letter No. 31 to the Supreme Court (on Environment and National Assets)
RD20	29.05.2018	Same as above	Particular discussion

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Label	Date	Discussion Stage	Document Details
RD21	29.05.2018	Same as above	Official modifications to the Chamber of Origin
RD22	30.05.2018	Third constitutional process at the Chamber of Deputies	Official account with modifications of the Review Chamber
RD23	30.05.2018	Same as above	Account of Message 115-366 that withdraws and makes urgent present Immediate discussion
RD24	30.05.2018	Same as above	Single discussion Modifications approved.
RD25	30.05.2018	Same as above	Letter No. 13.971, which communicates approval of modifications
RD26	30.05.2018	Same as above	Official Account No. 13.971, which communicates approval of modifications
RD27	30.05.2018	Same as above	Letter of law to the Executive
RD28	31.05.2018	Procedure for presidential approval at the Chamber of Deputies	Official Account No. 55 of the Supreme Court (on Environment and National Assets)
RD29	21.06.2018	Same as above	Official letter. President of the Republic by which he communicates that he has resolved not to make use of the faculty conferred by the first paragraph of article 73 of the Political Constitution of the Republic with respect to the project.
RD30	21.06.2018	Same as above	Letter No. 14.032 of the Constitutional Court
RD31	12.06.2018	Same as above	Official Account No. 1816-2018 of the Constitutional Court
RD32	12.06.2018	Same as above	Letter No. 14.073. Submit project for promulgation.
RD33	21.09.2018	First constitutional process at the Chamber of Deputies	History of Law No. 21.100 National Library, Chile
RD34	09.10.2018	Second constitutional process at the Chamber of Deputies	History of Law No. 21.100 National Library, Chile
RD35	09.10.2018	Third constitutional process at the Chamber of Deputies	History of Law No. 21.100 National Library, Chile
RD36	28.09.2018	Fourth constitutional process at the Constitutional Court	History of Law No. 21.100 National Library, Chile

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**WEB APPENDIX B**  
Additional Data Information

Table WB1: News Media Data (Cited Articles Only)

Label	Author (Date)	Source	Title
NM1	Maturana, Isabel (Feb. 1, 2019)	Revista Capital	“Adiós a las bolsas plásticas: el decálogo de la WWF para no olvidar tu bolsa reutilizable.” [Bye plastic bags: the WWF’s decalogue so you don’t forget your reusable bag.]
NM2	NA (Mar. 27, 2019)	El Mostrador	“Greenpeace y nueva oferta de bolsas en supermercados: ‘Son bolsas plásticas, pero con pasamontañas.’” [Greenpeace and the new bags offered in supermarkets: ‘They are plastic bags, but in disguise.’]
NM3	Retamal Pablo (Feb. 4, 2019)	La Tercera	“Haciendo equilibrio sin bolsas plásticas.” [Balancing without plastic bags.]
NM4	NA (Apr. 4, 2019)	BioBio	“¿Una bolsa gratis en el comercio?: presentan proyecto para recuperar ‘dignidad’ del cliente” [A free bag in retail? A project is introduced to regain customer ‘dignity’.]

Table WB2: Sustainability Reports

Label	Year	Details
SRA0	2014	Supermarket Chain A, 106 pages
SRA1	2015	Supermarket Chain A, 125 pages
SRA2	2016	Supermarket Chain A, 84 pages
SRA3	2017	Supermarket Chain A, 83 pages
SRB1	2016	Brief Report promoting reusable bags. Supermarket Chain B, 2 pages
SRB2	2016	Supermarket Chain B, 123 pages
SRB2	2017	Supermarket Chain B, 78 pages
SRC1	2016	Supermarket Chain C, 343 pages (Annual Report, Sustainability Section)
SRC2	2017	Supermarket Chain C, 355 pages (Annual Report, Sustainability Section)



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Table WB3: Checkout Assistants (Interviews)

Label (CAI)	Age	Gender	Months in the Role	Supermarket Chain	Location
1	24	Female	41	B	Northeast and South of Santiago
2	21	Male	36	B	Southeast of Santiago
3	20	Female	N/A	C	North of Santiago
4	21	Female	24	B	Northeast of Santiago
5	24	Male	41	B	Southwest of Santiago
6	25	Female	60	B	North of Santiago
7	21	Female	60	B	Eastern Santiago
8	21	Female	36	B	N/A
9	23	Female	48	A	Eastern Santiago
10	25	Female	60	B	N/A
11	23	Female	30	B	Southeast of Santiago
12	26	Female	36	B	Southeast of Santiago
13	23	Female	52	B	Northeast of Santiago
14	24	Female	48	C	Santiago Downtown
15	25	Female	48	B	Southwest of Santiago
16	23	Male	48	C	Northeast of Santiago
17	23	Female	21	A	Southwest of Santiago
18	23	Female	36	A	Southwest of Santiago
19	22	Male	48	B	Eastern Santiago
20	25	Male	32	B	Santiago Downtown
21	21	Female	36	B	North of Santiago
22	25	Female	60	B	Southeast of Santiago
23	23	Male	18	A	Eastern Santiago
24	22	Male	29	A	Southwest of Santiago
25	N/A	Female	53	A	Eastern Santiago
26	24	Female	72	B	Western Santiago
27	24	Female	60	A	Southwest of Santiago
28	25	Female	53	B	Eastern Santiago

Label (CAI)	Age	Gender	Months in the Role	Supermarket Chain	Location
29	26	Female	29	C	Eastern Santiago
30	22	Male	18	B	Southeast of Santiago
31	23	Female	36	B	Eastern Santiago

Table WB4: Consumers (Interviews)

#	Age	Gender	Location in Santiago
1	46	Female	Southwest
2	65	Male	Northeast
3	27	Female	Northeast
4	42	Male	Northeast
5	62	Male	Northeast
6	52	Male	Northeast
7	71	Female	Northeast
8	48	Female	Northeast
9	73	Female	North
10	87	Female	Southeast
11	53	Female	Southwest
12	22	Male	City Center
13	42	Male	City Center
14	22	Male	Northeast
15	28	Male	Northeast
16	54	Female	Northwest
17	80	Female	Northeast
18	69	Female	Northwest
19	46	Female	Northeast
20	61	Male	City Center
21	27	Female	Northeast
22	60	Male	Southeast
23	20	Female	City Center

**WEB APPENDIX C**

## Data and Coding Tables

Table WC1: Data and Coding Table Reconfiguration Processes

**Reconfiguration Process: Sensemaking**

“Very well. Let’s help decontaminate the dying planet.” (FP, consumer in response to Supermarket A, Feb. 10, 2018)

“It is strange about plastic bags because plastic bottles will continue to exist and despite the ban [on free bags] they can be bought. Could it be that they only did it to eliminate the only free product that we had left and the companies win with this? #ByePlasticBags.” (TP, consumer, Jul. 3, 2018)

“And how do you do it when you buy groceries for the month? Does everything fit in the car? And how do you put the items in the shopping trolley when there are people waiting behind? Or do you put things like that [back in the trolley without bags] anyway? I ask out of curiosity because my family is big, I buy plenty of milk and they do not fit in my shopping trolley and I don’t have a car. Then, I don’t know how to do it with the shopping trolley.” (FP, consumer, May 11, 2018).

“They have to start training supermarket packers. There are many who look scared when they are given the reusable bag, they are not used to packing if it is not everything in a different plastic bag. Today one of them got angry because she was leaving the bottles out of the reusable bag to put them in plastic bags ‘so that it would not be so heavy,’ according to her, and I had to tell her that the [reusable] bag is more resistant and that is not the first time that cargo was used and transported. She reacted badly by throwing the products I bought inside. It is essential that they teach them not to use plastic bags when packing if they really want to end the use of them, if not, it is just a pretty pose.” (TP, consumer, Feb. 24, 2019)

**Reconfiguration Process: Accommodating**

“Customers take forever [to pack purchases]. They are so clumsy! They are slow and delay the cashier.” (CAI 3)

“It happened to me that sometimes I had a bag and I wanted to buy more things but I couldn’t because they were not going to fit in my reusable bag ... so I have to plan the amount of things I have to buy [and think] this does not fit [in the bag] ... I cannot carry more things because they do not fit. Also, I need to plan ahead so when I want to buy toilet paper, I have to go with the big bag.” (CI 3)

“At first it was difficult for me to remember to take the bag to the supermarket, so I had to buy bags, so [now] I always put them in the car.” (CI 7)

“Now, I find it much more complex because I need to determine how things will fit, how I will do this, whether everything will fit or if I will need to carry it in my hands, or if I will need to spend money on another extra bag. So now the time to plan how to carry stuff is more important than before. This wasn’t really important before, now it is much more.” (CI 19)

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“At the beginning, it was super ‘shocking’ because I did not have the habit of carrying the bags and forgot them every time, at the beginning, I bought about 1,500 bags every time I had to go to the supermarket.” (CI 8)

### Reconfiguration Process: Stabilizing

“I used the plastic bags before, with the backpack that I had [...] now I use cloth bags and the backpack.” (CI 12)

“Similar to the phone, or the makeup case, we keep a small bag in the wallet. It costs nothing to do it. It is true that one does not always leave with the intention of buying something but you can still carry the bag just in case.” (TP, consumer, Feb. 3, 2019)

“We leave the bags near the entrance so we don’t forget to take them when we go shopping.” (EI, 18)

“My husband always throws everything in the car, puts everything in the bags and brings it here ... the other day my husband bought a lot of meat for a barbecue for my son’s birthday, and they were covered in blood, so I cleaned the bags and put them away.” (CI 11)

“I reacted badly at first, because I was saying, why are they going to take my garbage bags away from me and I will have to buy them? I also assumed that the bags they gave us were not so bad [for the environment]. Now I imagine the little fish that is eating the plastic. It is like yes, they are right ... but even until the last minute I asked for a bag, a plastic bag when I was restricted [to 2 bags], so I didn’t have to buy a garbage bag. But now always I carry my reusable bag, even in other smaller stores, I carry my bag.” (CI 3)

“I have the bags in the car, in the boot, because how are we going to get groceries if we do not remember to take the bags in the car, because [before] I did not have the habit of going out with bags, I forgot and bought bags and bought bags ... I arrive [home], take them out. Because if you leave them around here, then you forget.” (CI 7)

#### Data Codes:

NM = News media

RD = Regulatory documents

SR = Sustainability reports

TP = Twitter posts

FP = Facebook posts

CAI = Interviews with checkout assistants

CI = Consumer interviews

EI = Ethnographic incursions

Table WC2: Data and Coding Table Reconfiguration Challenges

**Reconfiguration Challenge: Responsibilization Battles**

“I really do not understand (and hate) those criticizing the new ban on plastic bags. We all know it will not solve the problem of plastic contamination, but it certainly helps. This is all about pretending to be anti-system, rebels, or cool. #ByePlasticBags”

“#ByePlasticBags To those who complain that the plastic bags thing is a business: yes, but the idiot is you: use totes, backpacks that you have around the house and that will help you for the rest of your life. There are totes for 2 thousand pesos that are sold on the street and that are very useful for this.” (TP, consumer, Jul. 3, 2018)

“I agree that we need to do something. We are not good for the environment. I know something about science, so I know that plastic is very damaging to the environment. For that reason, I agree with the law, but on the other hand, I feel that only the consumers are required to change. In the end, the environment will benefit, but at the moment, the big supermarkets are benefiting the most.” (EI 34)

“Good for #ByePlasticBags is a business that sells plastic bottles, plastic containers with little or no care for the environment. Would it be too much to ask that not only ordinary people will make the effort to walk with their bag, but so will large companies make an effort? Do I ask too much?” (TP, consumer, Jul. 3 2018).

“#ByePlasticBags Those complaining the most about the law are the *cuicos* [derogatory term for upper-class snobs], how much does it cost them to purchase a bag for 700 pesos and then carry it every time they go shopping?” (TP, consumer, Aug. 14, 2018)

“#ByePlasticBags W O N D E R F U L ...!!! And to those who complain about product packaging: the clear majority of these products come in ‘biodegradable’ packaging, check your pantry. I don’t see the business in a ‘REUSABLE’ bag that one can even make herself.” (TP, consumer, May 30, 2018)

**Reconfiguration Challenge: Unsettling Emotionality**

“My grandfather is really upset about the bag thing. He said ‘I am going to the supermarket and I will buy a trolley [worth of purchases] and if they don’t give me bags I will just leave everything at the cashier.’ And then I got angry because it wasn’t the cashier’s fault, but, no, the stubborn old man did that.” (CI 21)

“They took away the only shit we recycled, now we will have to buy it directly [referring to garbage bags].” (TP, consumer to government, Feb. 3, 2019)

“Finally no plastic bags for Chile. Hello biodegradable bags for everyone! Thank you very much for helping the environment and being friendly with nature.” (TP, consumer in response to government announcement, Feb. 3, 2019)

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“To take care of the environment, if you want to do this, you must assume some costs, and this is probably one of the costs ... changing habits, adapting to the need for more planning. So, I feel that in the future we will be the beneficiaries, and our children will probably have oceans that are less contaminated. And I feel that the main beneficiaries are ourselves and our families, which will have a better future.” (CI 11)

“#ByePlasticBags all of us who went shopping at supermarkets and malls and see that the conditions are inhumane, to say the least, should go protest at Plaza Italia” (TP, consumer, Aug. 3, 2018)

### Reconfiguration Challenge: (Un)linking Other Practices

“This law should also apply to farmers’ markets. They are still with their plastic bags and the worst thing is that they are small and useless to be able to reuse them.” (FP, Consumer response to government announcement, Feb. 3, 2019)

“Well, the government has just bought 500 Mercedes oil buses from Brazil, instead of choosing 100 electric ones.” (TP, consumer, Feb. 1, 2019)

“What good are the bags if on the other hand, they are destroying the south of Chile, #IslaRiesco, Lake General Carrera with mining, the decline of the park in Torres del Paine to deliver it to the Canadian miner ... Zero consideration? What will you leave for your son minister?” (TP, consumer response to government official, Jan. 29, 2019)

“#ByePlasticBags The problem has never been plastic, the problem is the education of people who throw garbage anywhere, it is also the government’s fault for not having places where one can recycle and that are all over the country, not only in [the capital city].” (TP, consumer, Jul. 3, 2018)

#### Data Codes:

NM = News media

RD = Regulatory documents

SR = Sustainability reports

TP = Twitter posts

FP = Facebook posts

CAI = Interviews with checkout assistants

CI = Consumer interviews

EI = Ethnographic incursions

Table WC3: Data and Coding Table Consumer Resistance to Sustainability Interventions

**Consumer Resistance Distracts Sensemaking**

“#ByePlasticBags pleeeeeeaseeeeee think a little bit about the planet. Look beyond this and not only: how uncomfortable it is not to have the bags, and who profits from the bags, etc etc etc. We are super contaminated and doing little about it.” (TP, Consumer, May. 9, 2018) [*Responsibilization battles*]

“What does not seem right to me, is that the system makes us responsible for the use of plastic. Look at all the food production and see that there are a lot of plastic containers, of things that are plastic, I think [the issue] is the large amount of plastic that exists in the world in production, not the bag ... The use of plastic, in general, is excessive. We are held responsible as users and consumers, when you have created this form of consumption.” (CI 15) [*Responsibilization battles*]

“@minister A shame, a stupidity, a ridiculousness your shit of prohibiting plastic bags, it is a lack of respect. #ByePlasticBags??? Wouldn't it be better #ByeMinisterName (but with respect)” (TP, consumer, Jun. 1, 2018) [*Unsettling emotionality*]

“@EnvironmentalMinistry This is bad ... The problem of saying Bye Bags is that [...] retailers today won't give you bags anymore justifying it with #ByePlasticBags and the other day I went shopping and they told me we don't give bags now and I had to bring everything in my hands!!!, they didn't even have paper bags, or wrapping paper...” (TP, consumer, Jul. 4, 2018) [*Unsettling emotionality*]

“It seems illogical to me to remove the bags from the supermarket and not to remove all the plastics with which things are wrapped. In the end, what they did was create another business for large companies, because they sell us the bags,” argued Paola Quevedo, a client of a La Reina hypermarket. And since now you cannot use the now banned ‘t-shirt bags’ for garbage removal at home, you have to buy the traditional black bags. “It is a great business for commerce,” he says. (NM3) [*(Un)linking other practices*]

“Consumer: I don't really understand ... they keep selling plastic bags on the supermarket. Interviewer: Garbage bags? Consumer: No, in addition to those, which I think we really need, they sell these ... they come 50 bags in a package, so these are the [...] clear ones that I now use in waste bins. I used to line the bins with supermarket bags because I used to have tons of the supermarket bags, but now I changed for these ones. That's why I don't understand how much of a ban this really is. (CI 8) [*(Un)linking other practices*]

**Consumer Resistance Discourages Accommodation**

“We all have that t-shirt that we no longer use. Be intelligent, use your creativity and make your own reusable bag. Let's not applaud the supermarkets, because for them this is not social responsibility, it is a business. #ByePlasticBags.” (TP, consumer, Feb. 4, 2019) [*Responsibilization battles*]

“Today, I use reusable bags, but in my case, I never have them at hand, I remember when I am on my way to the cashier, and then I take products out of my cart because I won't be able to carry them. [...] As I am against this law and that the supermarkets profit from this, I refuse to purchase more bags from the supermarkets.” (CI 4) [*Responsibilization battles*]



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“Interviewer: What is your ideal reusable bag like? Consumer: It doesn’t matter the specific design or color, because I don’t use it that much to care about that. What I would like it NOT to have is a brand on it, this is what bothers me the most.” (CI 21) [*Responsibilization battles*]

“Please, in the supermarket premises, they should highlight that it’s the law because everyone takes it out on the cashiers. You have to listen to all the insults from the clients who do not understand that it’s a law. They become aggressive with cashiers who have nothing to do with it” (FP, consumer in response to Supermarket B, Aug. 4, 2018) [*Unsettling emotionality*]

“I’m taking it home [stealing] because it’s like a kind of revenge? so it’s like: ‘the supermarket took my bag ... plastic ... So now I’m going to take the plastic bags of the vegetables’ and they tell me: ‘no ...’ and in fact, they look at me [the checkout assistant] with a panicked face some ... saying ‘please don’t ... don’t tell me to take it off, leave it there, just like you didn’t see anything ...’” (CAI 27) [*Unsettling emotionality*]

“#ByePlasticBags Eliminate plastic packaging too. What do I gain by carrying my purchases in reusable bags if the products are wrapped in plastic that contaminates just the same.” (TP, consumer, May 9, 2018) [*(Un)linking other practices*]

“#ByePlasticBags How about eliminating plastic packaging too? Would we really stand such radical change, especially if that implies an increase in the price of products because ... beyond plastic, what else is there? Glass ... and not everything can be kept in glass ... and cans rust ...” (TP, consumer, May 9, 2018) [*(Un)linking other practices*]

#### Consumer Resistance Delays Stabilization

“I would like to be more committed and I need to change. My plan is to bring a bag to the office so I can start to develop the habit of carrying a bag [...] but about the extra cost, I already have it, because I need to buy a bag, and this is enough. I would do more sacrifices if I felt that this law was working well, but this is not happening. If I saw that retailers were investing what they save from bags in planting green areas or something like that, I would obviously be more involved.” (CI 21) [*Responsibilization battles*]

“I will continue purchasing the bags they sell and I will throw them wherever I feel like. It didn’t cost them nothing to require that retailers provided recyclable bags, but no, they had to favor retailers who will increase their profit from what they are saving in bags [they used to give] and from the ones they now sell for a few coins.” (TP, consumer, Jan. 19, 2019) [*Responsibilization battles*]

“All those who claim that they will have to buy bags (I am sure that their houses are fuller of bags than they need for garbage) that is a business for the companies, etc. Why don’t you channel your anger and clean the beaches that are full of plastic bags and the animals dying thanks to their precious plastic treasure.” (FP, consumer in response to Supermarket B, Aug. 4, 2018) [*Unsettling emotionality*]

“#ByePlasticBags I tell you that here we have been with this law for like 5 years and people buy plastic bags to take the garbage out and it is so annoying to go shopping and forget the stupid fabric bag.” (TP, consumer [from coastal area], Aug. 4, 2018) [*Unsettling emotionality*]

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3 “In comparison to industrial pollution (mining, salmon farming), soil and water depletion with intensive crops (pine and others), the #ByePlasticBags  
4 looks tiny. It’s something. Well. But there is much + that could be done.” (TP, consumer response to government, Jun. 5, 2018) [(Un)linking other  
5 practices]

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7 “I would be happy with the #ByePlasticBags law if it came along with a new project to implement recycling programs on a national scale. Without this,  
8 it is only hype.” (TP, consumer, Apr. 27, 2018) [(Un)linking other practices]  
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11 **Data Codes:**

12 NM = News media

13 RD = Regulatory documents

14 SR = Sustainability reports

15 TP = Twitter posts

16 FP = Facebook posts

17 CAI = Interviews with checkout assistants

18 CI = Consumer interviews

19 EI = Ethnographic incursions  
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Peer Review Version