Abstract

Intention and motivation factors to invest in sustainable investments: The case of German private investors

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The increasing relevance of sustainable investments in financial markets is closely linked to the growing integration of ESG criteria and rising environmental and social awareness among private investors. Although sustainable finance has received increasing attention in academic research and financial practice, prior studies have largely focused on institutional investors or general market-level developments. Comparatively less attention has been paid to the motivational and psychological factors influencing private investors' sustainable investment decisions, particularly in the German context.

The aim of this dissertation is to identify the factors influencing German private investors' motivation and intention to invest in sustainable investments. More specifically, the study examines the effects of attitude toward sustainable investments, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control on sustainable investment intention. In addition, it examines ecological value orientations, measured by the New Ecological Paradigm, and their indirect effect on sustainable investment intention through attitude, while also analyzing motivation factors such as social influence, wealth gain, sustainability consciousness, emotional attachment, and identity-related motives.

The empirical part of the dissertation is based on a quantitative survey of 221 private investors in Germany. The research model is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and incorporates the New Ecological Paradigm scale. Structural equation modeling was applied to analyze the relationships between the constructs. The findings show that attitude toward sustainable investments is the most influential determinant of sustainable investment intention. Ecological value orientations influence investment intention primarily indirectly through attitude. Perceived behavioral control shows a statistically significant but weaker relationship with investment intention and should be interpreted with caution due to measurement-related limitations. Subjective norms do not have a significant effect on sustainable investment intention.

The analysis of motivation factors indicates that expected high long-term financial returns represent the most important motivator for considering sustainable investments. Incentives and self-fulfillment also play relevant roles, whereas social pressure, negative emotions, and the desire for social recognition are among the least important motivators. These findings suggest that sustainable investing among German private investors is primarily a self-driven and value-aligned decision, shaped by positive attitudes, personal values, and rational financial expectations rather than by external social pressure.

This dissertation contributes to the literature on behavioral finance and sustainable investment research by extending the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior to private financial investment decisions and by integrating ecological value orientations into a model explaining sustainable investment intention. The findings also provide practical implications for financial advisors, financial institutions, and policymakers by highlighting the importance of transparent communication, investor education, and incentive mechanisms to support private investor participation in sustainable investments.

Keywords: sustainable investments, private investors, Theory of Planned Behavior, New Ecological Paradigm, investment intention, motivation factors, behavioral finance, Germany