

Marketing Green Apparel: Do Advertisement Claims Influence Consumer Perceptions?

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Objectives With the significant growth of the green apparel market, fashion brands (e.g., Patagonia, Levi's, Eileen Fisher, Stella McCartney) are increasingly committed to promoting green apparel, using word such as "eco-friendly," "natural," or "green" in their marketing campaigns. Like other apparel items, however, previous studies indicated that aesthetic attributes are the primary motivators in purchasing green apparel (Gam, 2011; Perry & Chung, 2016). Therefore, a lack of aesthetics in marketing campaigns may leave fashion consumers uncertain about choosing green apparel. The effects of advertising claims particularly focusing on environmental messages have been widely studied (Yan, Hyllegard, & Blaesi, 2012; Kim, Lee, & Hur, 2012), yet few empirical studies investigated the effect of the aesthetic claims in the advertisements. Considering that fashion products are closely related to symbolic meaning (Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005), we posited that consumers' propensity to manage their impression on others may play a key role in their green apparel consumption. To help create a better advertisement strategy, this study was designed to answer (1) how different advertisement claims result in positive perceptions (purchase intention and willingness to pay premium) and (2) how consumers' orientation to impression management moderates the effects of each claim on these positive perceptions. To this end, we designed a between-subject experimental study with the manipulation of three different claims: pro-environmental, aesthetic and functional messages.

Hypotheses Development From an environmental protection perspective, green apparel should last a long time, minimizing or negating the use of harmful materials, resulting in less design choices and higher costs (e.g., Perry & Chung, 2016). The conflict between the simple designs for green apparel and consumers' needs for trendy styles may hinder consumer decisions with green apparel. Previous studies found the importance of aesthetic attributes in green apparel consumption and the positive relationships between consumers' fashion consciousness and purchase intention for green apparel (e.g., Gam, 2011; Perry & Chung, 2016). Considering the central characteristics of apparel items, emphasizing aesthetic appeals will be critical to elevate positive perceptions when marketing green apparel. In this vein, we expected greater consumer responses to the aesthetic ad claim than in functional and environmental ad claims.

H1: The aesthetic ad claim will create more positive (a) purchase intentions and (b) willingness to pay premium than functional and pro-environmental ad claims.

Impression management argues that when consumers expect others will evaluate their actions, they are likely to put forth positive impressions to others (Damhorst *et al.*, 2005). Previous studies found the effect of impression management in selecting green products and behaviors (e.g., Green & Pelozo, 2014). Like other apparel items, the importance of a social component has been found in the green apparel consumption (Gam, 2011). That is, consumers

who are more likely to want to make a favorable impression to others will respond more positively to the claim than consumers who have less concern for their image. Hence, we posited a moderating role of impression management.

H2. Impression management moderates the effect of advertisement claims on (a) purchase intention and (b) willingness to pay premium.

Method A total of 504 nationwide U.S. consumers over the age of 18 participated in an online survey. Photographs of folded jeans were combined with environmental ($n=171$), aesthetic ($n=169$), or functional ($n=164$) claims. Being randomly assigned to one of three conditions, participants read the definition of green apparel and answered questions related to impression management, purchase intention, and willingness to pay premium on a 7-point Likert scale. Internal reliability of the scales was supported by Cronbach's α values (.90-.98). For the impression management scale, a median split of the averaged score of items (Median = 4.8) was used to divide respondents into two groups and gender was included as a covariate.

Findings With the significant effect of manipulation, the results of MANCOVA prominently showed the main effect of the claim (Wilks' $\lambda= 0.857, p<.001$) and the interaction effect

between claims and impression management (Wilks' $\lambda= 0.895, p<.01$) after controlling for the gender effect. Post-hoc comparison tests revealed that respondents formed more purchase intention ($M_e= 5.03, M_a= 4.96, M_f= 4.41, F= 9.68, p< .01$) and willingness to

pay premium ($M_e= 4.58, M_a= 4.44, M_f= 4.21 F= 3.43, p< .05$) when the advertising claims contained environment and aesthetic information compared to functional information. However, no significant difference was found between them. Thus, H1a and H1b were partially supported. The moderating role of impression management was tested (Table 1); the high impression management group expressed a greater purchase intention ($p< .001$) and willingness to pay a premium ($p< .001$) than the low impression management group in the environmental claim. However, there were no differences between the impression management groups in the aesthetic and functional claims, thus partially supporting H2.

Conclusions The empirical results confirmed that aesthetic attributes as well as environmental aspects are important in green apparel consumption, bridging the gap in previous studies which paid less attention to the aesthetic aspects of green apparel. Moreover, the interaction effect between advertisement claims and impression management showed that the advertisement message featuring a pro-environment claim may more strongly appeal to consumers who are highly concerned with their images to others, as compared with advertisements with functional and aesthetic claims. This could be because purchasing a green apparel item that benefits others may be perceived as a behavior designed to make a favorable impression to others. The study would help marketers better develop effective advertisements for green apparel with emphasis on aesthetic attributes such as unique designs.

References will be provided upon request.

Table 1. Means: Testing an interaction effect between claim and impression management

Variables	Environment ^a		Aesthetic		Function	
	High ^b	Low	High ^b	Low	High ^b	Low
Purchase intentions	5.74	4.73	5.53	4.55	5.19	4.88
Paying premium	5.05	4.10	4.65	3.76	4.48	3.98

Note: ^a Post-hoc comparison test showed the significant mean differences at $p < .001$, ^b impression management