Green Apparel Advertising: Does It Need to Move toward a Product-led Approach?

So Young Song and Youn-Kyung Kim,
University of Tennessee, USA

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Advertising plays a major role in raising public awareness about sustainability issues, socially responsible brand image, and driving consumers' needs for green apparel products. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of green ads has declined markedly across a variety of advertising channels because consumers are becoming increasingly skeptical about ad credibility. Using Banerjee et al.'s (1995) green advertising criteria as a framework, this study examines how *Green Apparel Advertising Potency (GAAP)* can be achieved. Possibilities emerge from empirical analyses of four main attributes from various ad types: *environment*, *product*, *lifestyle*, and *humanism*. Environment attribute includes a1) *environmental benefit* and a2) *nature harmony*. Product attribute includes b1) *apparel quality*, b2) *apparel uniqueness*, and b3) *well-being benefit*. Lifestyle attribute includes c1) *lifestyle compatibility*, c2) *meaningfulness*, and c3) *self-discovery*. Finally, humanism attribute includes d1) *ethicality*, d2) *humanitarian benefit*, d3) *compassionate love*, and d4) *connection to others*. We address the following research questions: RQ1. What are important attributes of green apparel ads that increase ads' ability to influence *purchase intent*, *word-of-mouth*, and *persuasiveness*?; and RQ2. Which combination of variables would best predict green apparel advertising's potency? We propose a consumer response framework for GAAP to outline essential elements of effective green advertising. These elements are analyzed to develop a decision tree predictive model that determines optimum combinations of attributes.

Methods and Results

To identify green ads attributes, keywords-in-context (KWIC) content analysis was conducted by using green advertising articles published in the four leading marketing journals (time frame: from 1996 to 2016): Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, International Journal of Advertising, and Journal of Marketing. Twelve pertinent variables (a1. environmental benefit to d4. connection to others) were categorized under the four attributes corresponding to the high-potency of green apparel ads (Banerjee et al., 1995). After selecting these variables, the scale items for all variables were constructed from existing studies. Using eight different types of green apparel ads, a pilot test (n = 202) was administrated by undergraduate students in a consumer behavior course. Based on the results from the pilot test, the eight ads and the scale items were refined. During main data collection, a total of 586 usable responses were collected from consumer panelists. Single-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) validated the measurement model for the thirteen constructs: CFI = 0.91 to 1.00; and RMSEA = 0.000 to 0.094. Using R statistical software, we created a decision tree model (training dataset, n = 410) and identified five important variables by rank and their optimum combinations that lead to

GAAP: *apparel quality*, *lifestyle compatibility*, *apparel uniqueness*, *compassionate love*, and *nature harmony*. The largest segment (n = 162, 40%), categorized as a high GAAP group, was explained by *apparel quality* ($\geq$ 5.6) with the strongest predictive power (prob = .94). Further, low levels of apparel quality and *lifestyle compatibility* accurately predicted a low GAAP group (n = 106, 26%, prob = .99). Next, we assessed the model's performance against the validation dataset (n = 88, AUC of 0.96) and testing dataset (n = 88, AUC of 0.88), and validated the model's accuracy and precision. Finally, the structural equation modeling (SEM) cross-validated the relationships depicted in our decision tree model: χ^2 (214) = 1478.69, *p* < .001; CFI = .980; and RMSEA = .077.

Discussion and Implication

The findings indicate that the functional product attribute of apparel quality is the primary factor that can elevate GAAP. The purchase intent, word-of-mouth, and persuasiveness of ads are most likely to be controlled by this strong differentiating product attribute. Moving sustainable marketing effort toward a more product-led approach would be effective, particularly in the apparel product category. Reflecting consumer demands for green products that have grown in the past 20 years, this study presents an extensive framework of GAAP that facilitates emergent consumers' expectation in green apparel ads in the 21st century. Future research can explore stakeholder-driven attributes of green apparel ads toward consumers, advertisers, employees, and regulators such as source credibility, brand likability, affective attitude toward a company, pursuing operational competence and cost effectiveness through environmental initiatives.
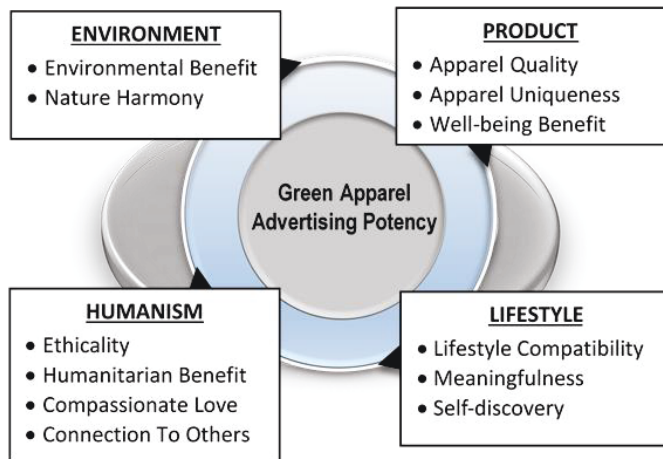

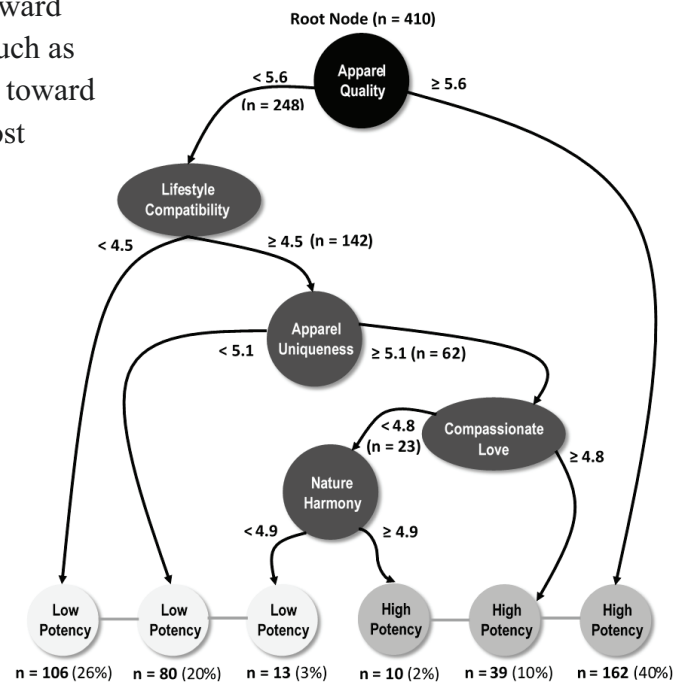**Figure 1.** Framework for Green Apparel Ad Potency

Figure 2. Green apparel ad decision tree model

References

Banerjee, S., Gulas, C. S., & Iyer, E. (1995). Shades of green: a multidimensional analysis of environmental advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 24(2), 21-31.