Going Green, Going Feminine: How Green Appeal Influences Products Targeting Consumers of Different Genders

Yunhui Huang, Nanjing University, China
Echo Wan, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

Consumers associate green (vs. non-green) products more with femininity, consider people consuming green (vs. non-green) products as more feminine, and believe that a feminine (vs. masculine) friend would favor a green gift more. Moreover, consumers with well-developed/impoverished product knowledge evaluate female/male products with (vs. without) green add-ons more favorably.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1019004/volumes/v43/NA-43

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Green products are usually viewed as highly ethical and humanitarian (Kinney, Taylor, and Ahmed 1974). Moreover, being ethical and humanitarian is seen as facilitating consumers’ communal goals (Mazar and Zhong 2010). Communal goals, which involve a concern for the care, welfare, and nurturing of other people (Bakan 1966), fit the people schema towards female (Bem 1981). Bridging the research on green consumption and the literature on gender schema, the current research proposes that people associate green products with femininity.

Study 1 adopted the Implicit Association Test, a latency-based word classification task (Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998), and demonstrated that it was easier for participants to associate the green product (vs. non-green product) with a female name than a male name. In details, participants performed the task in the block where “the female name matches the green product; the male name matches the non-green product” significantly faster ($M = 900.45$ ms) than the block where “the male name matches the green product; the female name matches the non-green product” ($M = 992.60$ ms, $t(34) = 3.51$, $p = .001$ using log-transformed data).

Study 2 demonstrated individuals judge a consumer involving green purchase as more feminine, but not more masculinity. In detail, adopting the Chinese version of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem 1981), Customer X was rated as more feminine when X was described as making green purchases ($M = 4.91$) than when X was described as purchasing non-green products ($M = 4.38$, $F(1,9) = 9.11$, $p = .004$). However, participants did not differ in their ratings of the masculinity of X ($M_{green} = 4.48$ vs. $M_{non-green} = 4.39$, $F < 1$).

Study 3 showed individuals were more likely to choose green over non-green products for a feminine (vs. masculine) friend. In detail, more participants chose the less luxurious green backpack when purchasing it for a friend with traits associated with the feminine identity (48.20%) than for a friend with traits associated with the masculine identity (19.70%), $\chi^2 = 7.822$, $p = .005$.

Moreover, we suggest this association would influence consumer preference for products designed for males versus females. Consumers can infer the product’s characteristics from the characteristics of its consumers (McShane, Bradlow, and Berger 2012). Hence, consumers can transfer the gender schema to female/male products. Thus, we expect that green promotions or green add-ons are congruent/incongruent with consumers’ schema about female/male products.

Congruity might improve evaluations of the target product because it creates processing fluency which would be misattributed to the product (Lee and Labroo 2004). However, Spence and Brucks (1997) suggest that experts/novices are more likely to use top-down/bottom-up strategies in information processing. As such, consumers with high-level product knowledge are more likely to favor female products with (vs. without) green add-ons because it brings congruity.

On the other hand, empirical evidence shows that moderate incongruity (e.g., spicy cakes) can lead to more positive product evaluation than congruity (e.g., high-calorie cakes) because resolving the incongruity is rewarding and thus increases consumers’ positive product evaluation (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). And consumers with limited knowledge about the product category are more likely to notice the schema-inconsistent information and to expend cognitive efforts necessary to reconcile the incongruity (Peracchio and Tybout 1996). Thus we expect that consumers with low-level, but not high-level, product knowledge would favor male products with (vs. without) green add-ons.

Study 4 examines how a green add-on will influence consumers’ attitudes toward female and male products. Results suggested high-knowledge, but not low-knowledge, participants evaluated green female body lotions more favorably ($M_{green} = 6.94$ vs. $M_{non-green} = 5.93$, $t(164) = 2.26$, $p < .03$). Low-knowledge, but not high-knowledge, participants evaluated green male body lotions more favorably ($M_{green} = 6.65$ vs. $M_{non-green} = 6.08$, $t(164) = 1.32$, $p = .19$).

Study 5 confirmed the robustness of Study 4 using real products in a different product category: real female and male vitamin products from a real brand. High-knowledge, but not low-knowledge, participants evaluated green female vitamin more favorably ($M_{green} = 7.57$ vs. $M_{non-green} = 6.71$, $t(225) = 2.66$, $p < .01$); low-knowledge, but not high-knowledge, participants evaluated the green male vitamin more favorably ($M_{green} = 7.15$ vs. $M_{non-green} = 6.35$, $t(225) = 2.66$, $p < .05$).

Our research reveals consumers associate green consumption with femininity. We discover new conditions under which green claims help to improve product evaluation. That is, the congruity between green appeal and product schema and consumers’ product knowledge interact to affect product evaluation. Moreover, while previous research mainly treats congruity as opposite to incongruity, we suggest that congruity and incongruity could also be independent.

REFERENCE


