

College Students' Responses to Prosocial Marketing Claims on Apparel Hang Tags

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In recent years, it has become increasingly common for apparel companies to include prosocial marketing claims on product hang tags. Such claims have addressed environmentally-sound production practices, fair labor/fair trade initiatives, and/or monetary contributions to charitable causes. However, research provides only limited understanding of the benefits to consumers and/or apparel companies derived from including prosocial marketing claims on apparel hang tags. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore consumers' responses to prosocial marketing claims placed on apparel hang tags. Specifically, this study examined the impact of varied prosocial claims upon college students' evaluations of hang tags used to promote university-branded apparel (t-shirts) as well as their attitudes and patronage intentions toward the apparel. This study focused upon college students' patronage intentions because these consumers tends to respond positively to prosocial marketing claims and to be knowledgeable about socially responsible (SR) business behaviors (Alloy Media + Marketing, 2007; Kozar & Connell, 2010). For this study, the prosocial marketing claims presented on the apparel hang tags conveyed information about one of three social issues that are important to college students—the environment, fair labor, or cancer (Alloy Media + Marketing, 2007). Thus, of interest was whether these distinct prosocial claims would resonate differently with college students.

This study was guided by the theory of reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), which has been applied in prior studies exploring consumers' intentions toward apparel businesses that use prosocial marketing claims. In the present study, the classic reasoned action model (attitude and subjective norm) was used to predict consumers' purchase intentions toward university-branded apparel. Additionally, an extended version of the classic model was developed to examine variables external to the theory that may influence consumers' purchase intentions toward university-branded apparel. The variables added to the model included gender, apparel expenditures, clothing involvement, and past SR apparel purchasing behaviors.

An intercept survey approach, with an experimental design component, was used to administer a written questionnaire to 292 college students (46.6% male and 53.4% female, mean age 20.8). The experimental design component required participants to examine a university-branded t-shirt and to read the information provided on the product hang tag (one of three prosocial marketing claims: environment, fair labor, or cancer) attached to the t-shirt.

Twenty-two percent of the participants in this study read apparel hang tags very frequently, 38% read them frequently, 30% read them infrequently, and 10% never read them. The three types of information most frequently sought when reading apparel hang tags were brand name ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.96$), care instructions ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.89$), and fiber content ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 2.02$). Female students were more likely than were male students to read the information printed on hang tags when shopping for apparel ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.61$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 4.25$, $t_{(287)} = -2.94$, $p \leq .01$). Female students reported a greater likelihood than did male students to look for information about fiber content ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.23$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 3.97$, $t_{(287)} = -3.13$, $p \leq .01$) and

care instructions ($M_{\text{male}} = 3.17$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 4.38$, $t_{(287)} = -5.70$, $p \leq .001$). Students perceived hang tags to be valuable ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.38$), although results revealed that perceived value differed by gender ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.77$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 5.10$, $t_{(284)} = -2.06$, $p \leq .05$). Further, female students found the information on apparel hang tags to be more trustworthy ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.68$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 5.05$, $t_{(285)} = -2.08$, $p \leq .05$), more believable ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.74$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 5.21$, $t_{(286)} = -2.68$, $p \leq .01$), and more accurate ($M_{\text{male}} = 4.76$ vs. $M_{\text{female}} = 5.11$, $t_{(286)} = -1.99$, $p \leq .05$) than did male students.

Findings from the experimental manipulation revealed that participants who viewed hang tags with prosocial marketing claims evaluated the hang tags more positively than did participants who viewed hang tags with no prosocial marketing claims ($M_{\text{prosocial claim s}} = 4.79$ vs. $M_{\text{control}} = 3.39$, $t = -9.24$, $p \leq .001$). Separate analyses of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the content of prosocial marketing claims did not influence college students' evaluations of apparel hang tags nor did it influence their evaluations of the university-branded t-shirts.

Multiple regression revealed that apparel expenditures ($\beta = 0.14$, $t_{(6, 240)} = 2.42$, $p \leq .05$), clothing involvement ($\beta = 0.22$, $t_{(6, 240)} = 3.45$, $p \leq .001$), past SR apparel purchasing behaviors ($\beta = 0.13$, $t_{(6, 240)} = 2.22$, $p \leq .05$), evaluations of hang tags ($\beta = 0.13$, $t_{(6, 240)} = 2.27$, $p \leq .05$), and evaluations of t-shirts ($\beta = 0.31$, $t_{(6, 240)} = 5.31$, $p \leq .001$) positively predicted the amount of money that students were willing to pay for the university-branded t-shirt. Simple regression indicated that evaluation of apparel hang tags positively predicted students' attitudes toward the university-branded t-shirts ($\beta = 0.49$, $t_{(6, 240)} = 9.35$, $p \leq .001$). The results of the regression conducted to test the classic TRA model ($R^2 = 0.21$, $F_{(2, 215)} = 28.03$, $p \leq .001$) indicated that both attitude ($\beta = 0.20$, $t_{(2, 215)} = 3.25$, $p \leq .001$) and subjective norm ($\beta = 0.36$, $t_{(2, 215)} = 5.72$, $p \leq .001$) positively predicted college students' intentions to purchase university-branded apparel. The results of the regression conducted to test an extended TRA model also were significant ($R^2 = 0.40$, $F_{(6, 198)} = 20.90$, $p \leq .001$). In this model, subjective norm ($\beta = 0.27$, $t_{(6, 198)} = 4.11$, $p \leq .001$), clothing involvement ($\beta = 0.11$, $t_{(6, 198)} = 2.00$, $p \leq .05$), past SR apparel purchasing behaviors ($\beta = 0.18$, $t_{(6, 198)} = 2.83$, $p \leq .01$), evaluation of apparel hang tags ($\beta = 0.15$, $t_{(6, 198)} = 2.46$, $p \leq .05$), and evaluation of t-shirt ($\beta = 0.33$, $t_{(6, 198)} = 5.50$, $p \leq .001$) positively predicted college students' intentions to purchase university-branded apparel. An F ratio indicated that the utility of the extended model was greater than that of the classic model in explaining the variance in college students' purchase intentions ($F_{(4, 285)} = 22.56$, $p \leq .001$).

Findings indicate that college students' evaluations of hang tags featuring prosocial messages may influence the amount that they are willing to pay for a university-branded t-shirt and their likelihood to purchase university-branded apparel. As such, apparel companies engaged in socially responsible business practices may wish to develop hang tags that address both desired product attributes as well as company engagement in prosocial initiatives.

Alloy Media + Marketing. (2007). College students putting their money where their cause is.

Available at http://www.alloymarketing.com/investor_relations/news_releases/doc/070906_alloy_2.doc.

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