

Bridging the Gap between Green Self-perception and Intentional Behaviors: Mediating Role of Ad-brand Congruency

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Introduction

The increasing attention towards sustainability issues in the fashion industry promotes fashion brands to emphasize their ethical brand identity (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). Many fashion brands advertise their sustainable practices to convince consumers of their cooperative social responsibility (CSR) efforts (Janssen, Vanhamme, Lindgreen, & Lefebvre, 2014). Although prior research has focused on green advertising appeal, effective green marketing communications are regularly unclear and confusing due to mixed results (Chang, 2011; Green & Peloza, 2014). Therefore, encouraging consumers through effective green marketing communications could be important in leading consumers to share and purchase fashion products from ethical brands. This study draws on social identity and congruity theories to examine the effect of green self-perception on intentional behaviors. Further, this study tests the role of ad-brand congruency in bridging between green self-perception (i.e., perceived consumer effectiveness) and intentional behaviors (i.e., share and purchase intentions).

Theoretical Background

Social identity theory postulates that an individual identity is constructed through symbolic interactions between self and society (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). Individuals perceive themselves in a way to present their roles in a society. Therefore, the way people look at themselves (i.e., self-perception) consequently influences the way they behave in the social context. With regard to green buying, prior research indicates that self-identity and self-perception lead to ethical purchasing behaviors (Connolly, 2008; Khare & Pandey, 2017; Niinimäki, 2010; Sparks, 2000; Stets and Biga, 2003). Khare and Pandey (2017) explained that when individuals perceive themselves as green-minded consumers, they are more favorable in purchasing ethical products. Perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) refers to a personal belief that individual actions can benefit the big picture of sustainable practices in society (Kinnear, Taylor, & Ahmed, 1974). Previous study explains that consumer effectiveness is a self-defining trait relevant in predicting ethical consumption (Lee, Jackson, Miller-Spillman, & Ferrell, 2015). Consequently, when consumers perceive effectiveness in ethical consumption, their personal beliefs (i.e., PCE) is likely to project their future behaviors.

The congruity theory explains that individuals prefer consistency in their minds. They use previous experience or knowledge (so called schema) to seek harmony in the information process (Mandler, 1982). Schema refers to “representations of experience that guide action, perception, and thought” that are stored within our memory (Mandler, 1982. p.3). Congruity

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theory explains that people think in a way congruent with pre-perceived schemata. In the context of advertising brands' social responsibility, researchers revealed that ad-brand information has an important role in enhancing the effectiveness of the advertisement (Speed & Thompson, 2000). When individuals receive new information or messages related to a brand (i.e., about new event or object), interaction between the pre-perceived brand knowledge and the information is triggered. It was found that ad-brand congruency (AC) enhanced intentional behaviors (i.e., word of mouth intention and purchase intention) related to the advertisement content. However, its mediating role remains unclear in bridging the gap between green self-perception and intentional behaviors for consumers who watched the advertisement. Filling the addressed gap, this study posits the mediating role of AC between green self-perception and intentional behaviors (i.e., share intention, purchase intention). Thus, we hypothesize the following relationships:

- H1*: PCE in green buying will lead consumers to AC in the CSR advertisement.
- H2*: PCE in green buying will increase (a) purchase intention and (b) share intention of the brand presented in the CSR advertisement.
- H3*: AC in the CSR advertisement will increase (a) purchase intention and (b) share intention of the brand presented in the CSR advertisement.
- H4*: AC will mediate the relationship between PCE and intentional behaviors; (a) purchase intention and (b) share intention.

Methods

A total of 612 college students attending a large university in the US was used for the data analysis (480 females and 126 males; median age = 21 years old). An online survey using a self-administered questionnaire collected data. In the beginning of the survey, participants viewed the CSR advertisement about sustainable practices in the social media context. Next, participants were asked to answer questions adopted from the literature (Lee et al., 2015; So & Bolloju, 2005; Speed & Thompson, 2000; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). To test the four hypotheses, this study employed structural equation modeling using AMOS. The mediating role of AC was tested through Boot strapping method.

Results

Two models for confirmatory factor analysis (CFI = .96, GFI = .94, RMSEA = .06, CMIN/DF = 3.36, $\chi^2 = 328.76$, $df = 98$, $p = 0.00$) and path analysis (CFI = .96, GFI = .94, RMSEA = .06, CMIN/DF = 3.36, $\chi^2 = 328.76$, $df = 98$, $p = 0.00$) fit the data well. With regard to path results, PCE had a positive effect on AC (*H1*; $\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) and purchase intention (*H2-a*; $\beta = .22$, $p < .001$) while PCE did not have an effect on share intention (*H2-b*; $\beta = .08$, $p = .07$). Also, AC had a positive effect on purchase intention (*H3-b*; $\beta = .27$, $p < .001$) and share intention (*H3-a*; $\beta = .40$, $p < .001$). In addition, through the AC, PCE had an in-direct effect on purchase intention (*H4-a*; $\beta = .07$, $p < .01$, 95% CI: .04 ~ .11) and share intention (*H4-b*; $\beta = .10$, $p < .01$, 95% CI: .05 ~ .14).

Discussions & Implications

The results provide support for the effect of green self-perception on AC and intentional behaviors. Findings revealed that the direct effect of AC was stronger than the direct effect of green self-perception on intentional behaviors. The mediating role of AC was statistically significant in the relationship. These findings suggest that, even though self-defining traits as green consumers do not directly relate to sharing behaviors of the advertisement in social media, AC is bridging the gap between self-perception in green buying and sharing behaviors. This study expands the research of green consumption by discussing the effects of green self-perception and AC on intentional behaviors. The results provide strong support for the importance of matching the CSR advertising appeals and the brand image in the social media context where green-minded consumers encounter advertisements stimulating green consumption. In conclusion, this study suggests that fashion brands' CSR advertisement would be more effective in increasing consumer involvement in social media marketing when brand marketers promote socially responsible practices in line with their current brand image.

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