

Should you *should* others: Sustainable marketing's impact on brand perception and green sportswear consumption

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Introduction

The sportswear industry possess a history of unsustainable business practices. One of the most visible issues relates to fast fashion and the industry's contribution to waste creation. Interestingly, as knowledge regarding sustainable consumption has grown, consumers have begun to alter their purchasing criteria, adding sustainability as a variable driving purchase decisions.

In response to changing consumer behavior, sportswear firms have begun to communicate a commitment to sustainability through *green product introduction*. For example, in 2015 adidas partnered with non-profit Parley for the Oceans to create the Parley X adidas Ultra Boost, a performance running shoe made from recycled ocean plastic.

For these new sportswear product types to maximally succeed—an outcome beneficial for company, consumer, and the environment—marketers must apply *sustainable marketing best practices*. This research provides a first approach at uncovering and constructing these best practices for the sportswear context.

Methods

This research utilized an experimental consumer perception survey with twelve unique stimulus advertisements to capture real consumer insights. The twelve stimulus advertisements varied across two dimensions: *brand and claim*. The four brands included in this study were Nike, adidas, Reebok, and Puma. Each brand possessed three claim type variations: Utilitarian, Sustainable Assertive, and Sustainable Gentle. Respondents (N=626) were randomly assigned one stimulus advertisement and then asked a series of questions related to perceived product quality, willingness to buy (W2B), willingness to recommended (W2R), perceived price, brand perception, and perceived genuiness.

adidas Sustainable Assertive*



adidas Utilitarian



* Sustainable Gentle claim type simply replaces "should" with "can."

Results

Multivariate and Univariate analysis of variance revealed a set of interesting and statistically significant relationships.

- 1 Significant differences in mean perceived product quality existed across claim type groups. More specifically, sustainable claims negatively impacted average perceptions of product quality.
- 2 Between brand groups, respondents recorded significant differences in mean perceived price.
- 3 Significant differences in mean willingness to recommend existed between claim type groups. Sustainable Assertive claims exhibited the largest negative impact on willingness to recommend.
- 4 Lastly, significant differences existed across stimulus advertisement type for the linear combination of all dependent variables. This finding suggests the complexity inherent to green sportswear introduction.

Conclusion

The findings of this research suggest that utilitarian claims represent the safest claim type option when marketing sustainable sportswear. Consumers do not generally receive assertive sustainable claims well, and sustainable claims must be applied with a strategic understanding of consumers.