The Importance of Color Appropriateness in Today’s Marketing; Contingent Role of Persuasive Knowledge

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Abstract

To signal sustainability and well-being of the society, marketers usually use green color in their ads. There is no huge data available on how green marketing can be perceived by consumers. This particular research study focuses on using different colors in marketing can represent environmental friendly products/services. Persuasive knowledge model explains that how consumers develop and utilize persuasive knowledge to better address persuasive efforts. This model also explains that how consumer perceive different colors used by different brands in their advertisements which creates a distinct image in the minds of the customers regarding that particular brand and it’s advertisements. The sample size consists of the students studying at universities of twin cities of Pakistan. Selecting university level students are more relevant because they are most concerned about the environment and usually involved with environmental friendly practices. Convenient sampling technique has been utilized in order to collect the data. Empirical studies have contributed two major contributions to the study of color and its appropriate use in the ecological or environmental advertising. First, the studies show that the green color is associated with the environmental friendliness and unlike green the grey is associated with the environmental unfriendliness and it is incongruent with environmental messaging. Secondly, the studies have also shown that consumer knowledge about persuasion methods and techniques can merge the color effects. Psychological as well as marketing research show that visual and semantic aspects interact to influence advertising effectiveness. The findings of the study suggest that using green colors can bring better response in terms of consumer purchase intentions. However, brands must create awareness regarding different colors and their use in advertisements.

Keywords: Green Marketing, Grey Marketing, Ad Attitude, Color Appropriateness, Persuasive knowledge, Environmental Sustainability
Introduction

Marketing Communications relies on the color schemes to shape the behavior of the consumers (Singh, 2006). For example, the famous retailer known for their environment friendly outlook, Starbucks and Whole Food Market, reflect this approach by using the green coloring their logos which indicates a business with publically required business approach (Yoon & Oh, 2016). On the same footing, businesses has adopted the green logo to reverse the damage done to its business and goodwill. A couple of fundamental questions arise here, does the application of green color in the advertisement to enhance and reflect the environment friendliness actually enhances the effectiveness of the advertising? Does the green strategy work even if it is perceived with suspicion by some segment of the society? On the other hand, does the use of grey color, which symbolizes the destruction of the environment, damages the brand image and by extension the marketing strategy? The use of color based marketing strategies depends upon the consumer skepticism and perception? How does the color mixed with words shape the consumer behavior under the auspicious of sustainable marketing strategies? Unpredictably, empirically no evidences are available regarding these research questions. The objective of this particular research is to address the shortcoming by trying to study and answer these questions.

A great majority of the advertising campaigns rely on the pictorial elements to increase the brand perception (Parguel, Benoit-Moreau, & Russell, 2015). In order to trigger the environmental inferences the advertisers extensively use the green color which is perceived as the symbol of the environmental friendly practices. However, the green can also be used to lead the consumers adrift with respect to the greenwashing practices (Schmuck, Matthes, & Naderer, 2018). As a result, in order to counter the misuse of the said green color to induce the ecological sympathies the US Trademark and Patent office has recognized procedures so to avoid the misuse of green color in trademarks by the companies whose business are actually harming the environment (Collen, 2012).

Theoretically speaking the contemporary research proposes that the use of appropriate colors can make the marketing persuasive, however, the inappropriate colors themes can result otherwise and create resistance instead (Seo & Scammon, 2017). Therefore, model of persuasion knowledge, cautions that if the receivers of the message are unambiguously responsive that these businesses are consuming colors with an intention to gain advantage and manipulate them, the persuasive intent may backfire and lead to unintended results (Friestad & Wright, 1994). For example, green color might be found persuasive in ecological advertising, but it is not so when the consumers are aware that green is being used to bias their responses.

The aim of this work is to empirically test the use of the green color schemes for the sake of marketing persuasion with a focus on the environmental protection. The studies discussed here compare the effects of the eco-friendly green, eco-unfriendly grey and eco-neutral blue to show that the consumers associate the green, grey and blue color with the environmental friendly, environmental unfriendly and environmental neutral perceptions respectively. The findings suggest that with the increased awareness among the consumer and an increased suspicion over
the extensive use of the green color by the companies is actually eroding the already established perception of the green color of being environmental friendly.

**Literature Review**

Many advertising strategies include visual clues to improve effectiveness of the brand (Parguel, Benoit-Moreau, & Russell, 2015). White is the most common visual signal used in white advertising to generate unconscious environmental assumptions. But the whitewashing methods, on the other hand, might be utilized to deceive customers (Schmuck, Matthes, & Naderer, 2018). As a result, the United States Patent and Trademark Office adopted restrictions to ban corporations who affect the environment from using the term "white" in their trademarks (Collen, 2012).

This study suggests that when colors are suitable for the content, marketing can be effective, but that improper color themes can generate rejection (Seo & Scammon, 2017). As a result, the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) warns that persuading purpose may backfire if message consumers are expressly aware that corporations are using color inappropriately to control people. For instance, the white color may be compelling in environmental advertising, but not if customers know that white is being utilized to influence their perceptions.

The major purpose of this paper is to empirically examine the rarely studied but widely used strategy of utilizing white to increase environmental influence. To begin, the studies presented here comparison of environment friendly white, environment unfriendly black friday, and environmentally neutral blue to show that white is associated with environmental friendliness, while black Friday is associated with environmental damage, and blue is associated with moderate opinions. The findings also show that when people are aware of influence tactics, they investigate more closely, causing white to lose its beneficial impact and black friday to lose its negative impact.

Two scientific investigations make two major key additions to the research of color suitability in environmental advertising. First, the research shows that the color white is related with eco - friendliness and is successful in communicating environmental messages, Black friday, on the other hand, is connected with environmental rudeness and is incompatible with environmental messaging. Second, the research reveals that color impacts are combined with consumer understanding of persuasive strategies. The use of psychology and market analysis is being used to demonstrate how perceptual and verbal factors interact to determine the success of marketing.

**Green Color in Advertising**

Academic research regarding use of colors in advertisings suggested that colors have two co-existing yet distinct meanings that can influence and change the insights and referential significance (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2010). This is intrinsic in nature while being context independent. The same is driven by the hedonic biological aspect of the human perception. The
meaning of embedded is inherent, and driven by physiological or basis for social biological factors. For instance red color has a high impedance that stimulates and stimulates excitement (Labrecque, Patrick, & Milne, 2013). Red color for instance, having a long wavelength, enhances inspiration and triggers stimulation (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2010). According to aesthetic theorists’ colors have two unique interpretations that can influence perceptions, embedded and reflective (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2010). The meaning of embedded is inherent, and driven by physiological or basis for social biological factors. For instance red color has a high impedance that stimulates and stimulates excitement (Labrecque, Patrick, & Milne, 2013).

More related to the current research is the referential meaning, which originates from psychological network of the mainly semantic association and real-world concepts, recognized by means of contact to the photographic stimuli. Most of the referential meanings and stimuli are learned and often dependent upon the contextual cues which have varied degrees of informational exposure. In the day to day life, individuals build learned systems of color connotations and associations as they come across color pairings with meaningful messages, concepts, objects and experiences (Labrecque et al., 2013). For example, the day to day experience causes individuals to associate different colors with different objects of daily use such as associating yellow with lemons, green with vegetables and fruits and red with danger and sign of alarm. Similarly, for lemon scents mostly yellow packaging is used while a green can be depicted as associated with the fruits and vegetables or even flowers.

Most of the marketing communication schemes rely on the green color to project environmental friendliness. Green advertising, a term coined by the marketers, indicates the promotion of the marketing products which are often associated with ecological or environmentally friendly exposures (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2009). In other words, the green marketing campaigns suggest that these products are eco-friendly.

The consumers also view the green brands as the brands with the products which are liked with the “environmental protection commitment and concerns” (Chen, 2010, p. 312). To convey environmental protection message, marketing communications frequently use white color patterns. White advertising refers to marketing campaigns that promote environmentally sustainable products and services (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáez, 2009). White brand images are often associated with "sustainability awareness" according to customers (Chen, 2010, p. 312). Furthermore, when considering recycled materials, organic materials, and performance of products, they clearly identify the color white with environmentally friendly (Taufique, Polonsky, Vocino, & Siwar, 2019). Consumers who are ecologically concerned, buy sustainable items, and advocate worker protection practices are referred as "white" (Brochado, Teiga, & Oliveira-Brochado, 2017). "White energy" symbolizes ecologically responsive foundations of energy (Sunstein & Reisch, 2013). On the other hand, traditional environmentally harmful sources of energy are referred to as "black Friday energy." Black Friday color is connected with industry and conflict, as well as charcoal, concrete, and cement, though to a lesser extent (Zuffi, 2012).
Because of its referential associations the marketing communications uses green color as it will activate eco-friendly practices, goods, and consumers (Yoon, Choi, & Song, 2011). Particularly, when clients come across an advertisement for an unaware trademark, they try to infer the brand options and make interpretations regarding the omitted or unnoticed choices based on their previous knowledge. Generalizations of these kinds, in fact, affect their subsequent judgements about the uncommon, unrelated attributes of the products being advertised. For example, the consumer when encounter a new brand make their observation a developing understanding regarding the products’ packaging scheme colors. The advertisements that used green color combinations are more likely to perceived eco-friendly and follow ethical practices regarding environmental safety (Sundar & Kellaris, 2017).

**Color Appropriateness**

In those environmental advertising which use green color invokes more favorable and attitudinal behavioral outcomes. The use of white in environmental advertising should result in more favorable attitudes and behaviors (Hypothesis 1) because customers are expected to practice suitable colors for marketing (Grossman & Wisenblit, 1999). Shade inclination is only a matter of personal choice, but color compatibility refers to how well colors are seen to go with certain reasons and market segments, moreover, inappropriate colors and messaging can lead to ads rejection or misinterpretation by customers (Hanss, Böhm, & Pfister, 2012).

In the context of customer selection, perceived color acceptability for different products previously studied, and according to expert’s color must be compatible with a variety of emotional characteristics between market segments and settings (Aurangzeb, Asif, & Amin, 2021; Marques da Rosa, Spence, & Miletto-Tonetto, 2019). For instance, red and yellow, convey images of power and passion and are ideal for marketing luxury and sports vehicles. Red may also be used to promote chocolates, clubs, and fragrances. Blue is more suited to frost-prevention products, power equipment, and automobile tires. Automobile advertisements should use silver and black, whereas coffee ads should use yellow and black; for fragrance, use silver and white; for detergent, use yellow and white (Bottomley & Doyle, 2006).

Similarly, red is also a color of choice to advertise chocolates and other food items which have a high nutritional value. Frost-protection agents mostly use blue colors, as they are perceived to be a few less pollutants than the other carbon pollutants such as oil etc. Similarly, various combinations are suitable for advertising various products. Due to the significant association of white with environmental concerns, customers are likely to think of white instead of black friday when emphasizing eco-friendliness. As a result, in Hypothesis 1 the white-over-black friday impact predicted is likely to be mediated by color acceptability.

**H1:** Color appropriateness has significant positive relationship with consumer purchase intentions

**Contingent Impact of Persuasion Knowledge**
The model of Persuasive knowledge recognizes that individuals and customers acquire knowledge from their choices and practices which they make in their day to day life and these encounters have various persuasive messages. Once a consumer has the encounter and has the persuasion knowledge can “recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate and remember the attempts made by the marketers by means of their campaigns”. Customer possessing persuasive knowledge “recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate and remember persuasion attempts”; subsequently, they can “select and execute coping tactics believed to be effective and appropriate”.

Customers with persuasive skills can extract important data from persuasion efforts, but they are distrustful behavioral intentions (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Salesperson praise can be convincing, but it is less effective for consumers who have learned about persuasion and believe that praise is mercenary. In a two-step process, convincing knowledge can trigger distrust and rejection (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000): In phase one customer gets an initially positive reaction. In phase two once persuasive knowledge is triggered the positive reaction is shifted plunging (Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988).

Persuasion abilities can be used on a long-term or short-term basis. Persuasion information is consistently, organically available to extremely skeptical persons. Situational indicators will trigger persuasive information that is now available to others. For instance, Persuasion knowledge was triggered in a shopping situation by showing the sequence of a salesman's deceptive purpose. Clients have engaged persuasive knowledge, when the salesman charmed the customers, before they made a purchase; however, this was not the case when the compliments came after the purchasing (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). As a result, the current study claims that persuasive expertise is a requirement for the white-over-black Friday impact. That is, customers are more willing to evaluate ecological promotion based on their understanding of persuasive tactics (Friestad & Wright, 1994). White's beneficial benefits might backfire if easily available persuasive information is used. Following the two-stage method that has been suggested, White is typically processed as a positive external indication by people who lack persuasive expertise, and they generate favorable advertisement attitudes and behavioral intentions as a result. People with persuasive skills, on the other hand, will be more hesitant and critical (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). They will modify their reactions negatively after they understand that a marketer purposefully and ineffectively employed white to generate favorable responses (Meyers-Levy & Peracchio, 1995). In the other way, a black friday-themed advertisement will elicit a similar corrective procedure: People will modify their replies upward when they perceive that black friday has generated unfair bias.

For people with skeptical nature, convincing information is always available, naturally available. For some, situational indicators will temporarily create convincing information. For instance, persuasive information was recommended by changing the seller’s deceptive intent time: customers use persuasive information when the seller captures them before buying (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). Similarly, present investigation claims that the pleading information is a borderline situation for the green color influence. Consumers may evaluate ecological advertising
based on their information of persuasive strategies. Precisely, easily accessible discovery information can create positive green effects to get back. Following the proposed two-stage process, people who do not have persuasive experience will usually consider the green as a good borderline view and will create advertising attitudes and ethical objectives. However, people who have gained persuasive knowledge will have doubts (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Once they see that the market is using green intentionally but unfairly to make optimistic reactions, consumers are more likely to regulate their reactions downwards. The gray ad will evoke the same correction process on the opposite side. On the other hand, the ads which have grey combination will be perceived less eco-friendly and imbalanced to the environmental practices.

H2: Persuasive knowledge is more likely to moderate the relationship between color appropriateness and consumer purchase intentions

Methodology

The population of this research study are the students studying at university level in Pakistan. For sample size researcher has selected students from twin cities Islamabad/Rawalpindi as the students belongs to these cities have broader knowledge of green products/services and their impact on environmental cleanliness. These university level students are more relevant because they are most concerned about the environment and usually involved with environmental friendly practices. Questionnaires were adopted from previously published articles. Minor changes were made in the questions to make it more understandable for the participants with regard to local context. Due to ongoing pandemic situation google-forms based questionnaire was developed. Although, there were many complexities faced during collection of the data due to the outbreak of Covid-19. However, the consistent follow-ups have helped the researchers to collect 305 filled questionnaires from targeted sample.

Results & Analysis

Encouraging response was received from the targeted sample size, total of 305 questionnaires were used further investigation. The demographic details of the respondents are they mostly belong to the age bracket of 20-25 years. Education wise most of them are enrolled in either bachelor’s degree or master’s degree program. For analysis purpose, SPSS version 21 was used. Normality of data the data is examined through skewness and Kurtosis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for data analysis.

Pearson Correlation

Pearson correlation is used to examine the strength and direction between two variables. This test was examined through SPSS version. Results reveal that all study variables has strong and positive association between them. It is suggested in the literate that correlation value ranges from .1 to .3 is considered as weak association, while .3 to .5 are considered as moderate association, and .5 to
.7 values are considered as strong association between variables (Asif, Khan, & Pasha, 2019; Bryman, 2012). The details of correlation values are given below in table 1.

Table – 1 Pearson correlation (N-305)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>PK</th>
<th>PI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td></td>
<td>.149**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PK</td>
<td>.149**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.152**</td>
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<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>.267**</td>
<td>.152**</td>
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Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is used to check the impact of predictor variables on variable of interest. In this particular research study color appropriateness is taken as independent variable whereas purchase intention is taken as dependent variable. The model summary of regression analysis shows that value of adjusted R square is .075, it explains that color appropriateness can bring 8% change in consumer purchase intentions.

Table 2: Model Summary Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Square</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>.281a</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.84631</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Predictors: (Constant), CA

Table 3: Beta Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>1.823</td>
<td>.267</td>
<td>6.823</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>4.263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK (Moderator)</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>3.243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. Dependent Variable: PI
The beta value for color appropriateness is .195 whereas the (Sig. < .05), which shows that using green colors can bring 20% better response in terms of consumer purchase intentions. When the moderating variable persuasive knowledge is added in the interaction, the impact of independent variable decreases which show buffering moderation effect is present in the model.

Discussion

The focus of this research is to identify the impact of color appropriateness on purchase intentions of the consumers. Findings confirms that green color marketing is more likely to positively perceive by the consumers. Whereas, the grey color are perceived as negatively associated with the advertisements. Therefore, the first hypothesis is supported by the research findings. Secondly, the contingent impact of persuasive knowledge between color appropriateness and consumer purchase intentions is also signified. The more persuasive knowledge consumers possess, the more they will be concerned about the use of different colors in the ads.

The contribution of study is to initiate understanding how colors show an important role in publicity. The hypotheses are inclined with the findings of the study (Choi, Yoon, Kim, and Kim, 2019), predicts that approval is most operational when publicity mechanisms including the speaker and advertisement ideas are aligned with the theme. As a result, when consumers semantically and visually process the word green and color green respectively, the color conforms to the message and evokes mental cohesion. The literature of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Kareklas, Muheling, & King, 2019) suggests that the intersection among the essential course and the persuasive course (color themes) might bring a convincing collaboration. In addition to this function by exhibiting that the color clues alongside the main ad idea can improve your inclusive expressiveness.

In addition to this, persuasive information documents and provide new information for advertising and attitude researchers on how persuasive awareness shakes the interaction between graphic and semantic perception and specifies how persuasive information can change the existence and magnitude of green results. Similarly, an experiment that uses a modified version of Stroop's work (1935) to produce a conflict between colors and their meanings, including printing different colors, establish that graphic-semantic collisions increase reasoning heaps, postponement material processing, and influence successive product judgment (Oh, Yoon, & Vargas, 2019).

The results add understanding of how colors show a dynamic part in the efficacy of advertising. The findings support the hypothesis (Choi, Yoon, Kim, & Kim, 2019), According to this theory, recommendations are more powerful when marketing components like spokespersons and advertisement messaging are conceptually similar. As a result, the color white aligns with the message and creates psychological coherence when customers visually perceive the color white and conceptually understand the word white. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model literature, there can be harmony in convincing, if the center pathway (explicit statements in the advertisement) and the outer route (color patterns) are compatible. We build on this study by
demonstrating how color signals outside of the primary advertisement message might improve overall credibility.

We contribute to the literature on persuasion and provide novel insights for advertising and psychological experts regarding how persuasion information influences the interaction dynamics among visual and cognitive views, and how persuasion knowledge can modify the existence and degree of white color impacts. Similarly, a test employing a customized version of the Stroop (1935) assignment to generate a conflict between concept and color, such as the researchers discovered that writing the keyword blue in a red color raises cognitive burdens, delays information processing, and impacts future brand judgments (Oh, Yoon, & Vargas, 2019).

Our conclusions are similar to those of others in that congruency between optical and cognitive input improves judgments regarding marketing messaging. Graphic judgments are used by customers to assess the quality of items (Kim, Gravier, Yoon, & Oh, 2019), or nutritional marketing claims (Gomez, 2013), business in sports (Henderson, Mazodier, & Sundar, 2019), and designs for packaging (Herbes, Beuthner, & Ramme, 2020). Our findings imply that easily available persuasion knowledge may enable consumers to recognize and correct color-induced biases.

Strong downward adjustments may harm businesses, but our findings did not show that persuasive expertise usually reduces the value of white while increasing the value of black friday in environmental marketing. Persuasion knowledge, on the other hand, in certain circumstances has been proven to overcorrect instead of properly alter original judgments (e.g., Meyers-Levy & Peracchio, 1995). If overcorrection happens, the customer moves downward too sharply, which, unfortunately, may harm the brand's environmental reputation. Thus, future study should look into whether overcorrections exist, especially when people are aware that colors may be skewing their views.

Consistent with these findings, our research shows that the interaction between visual and semantic stimulants improves judgment through advertising messages. Users use visual heuristics to judge product quality (Kim, Gravier, Yoon, and Oh, 2019) or food-related advertising claims (Gomez, 2013), sports sponsorship (Henderson, Mazodier, and Sundar, 2019), and packaging projects (Marques da Rosa et al., 2019). Our discoveries suggest that easily accessible information can allow consumers to identify and adjust color-induced preconceptions.

Extreme redress can hurt brands, but our data has failed to show that persuasive information is constantly reducing the significance of green or improving the importance of gray in eco-friendly publicity. Conversely, in some cases, persuasive information has been exposed to be more flexible than precisely correcting early results. If overuse repairs actually occur, the consumer adjusts downward too strongly, this can surprisingly damage the organic image of the product. Therefore, future research should investigate whether over-adjustment occurs especially when consumers realize that colors are likely to undermine their ideas.
Research Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations of this current study which enable other researchers to work on this particular topic. For instance, in this particular research study researchers only focused on the color appropriateness rather the comparison between green, grey, blue and red colors. The study suggested the use of appropriate colors would increase the purchase intentions of the consumers. However, comparison and impact of colors like black color if used by different business would be considered as related for the environment. Secondly, we haven’t examined the factor “color blindness”. The National Eye Institute (NIE) suggested that about 8% of the people are unable to differentiate between red and green colors (National Eye Institute, 2019). These factors related to consumers’ perception regarding color blindness can be included for future research.

When analysts consider color impacts, they ought to deliberate both epitomized and referential implications (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2010), however, it is considered only referential implications. Additionally, the perceptions of saturation, hue, and value influence color (Labrecque & Milne, 2013), but we centered on hue only, whereas controlling for color value and saturation. Future research might investigate how saturation and value components may be utilized to advance ecological influences. Researchers dispute that the definitions of color and organization depend on background and ethos (Kareklas et al., 2019). For example, green means good in Brazil (Madden, Hewett, & Roth, 2000). Research regarding contextual and culture would be interesting to explore. Another limitation is that did not test for color vision impairment, despite the fact that the National Eye Institute (NIE) reports that around 8% of the males and 0.5 % of the females have difficulty differentiating between red and white (National Eye Institute, 2019). Participants in future studies should be screened for color vision impairments.

When studying color impacts, investigators should examine both personified and referential connotations (Meyers-Levy & Zhu, 2010), however, we just examined referential interpretations. Furthermore, color, intensity, and value all have an impact on color perception (Labrecque & Milne, 2013), however, researchers concentrated only on color, while keeping color saturation and intensity under control. Future study might look at how intensity and relevance elements can be employed to boost environmental persuasion. We argue that color interpretations and connections are influenced by circumstance and society (Kareklas et al., 2019). For instance, In Brazil, white denotes beauty (Madden, Hewett, & Roth, 2000). It would be useful to investigate additional cultural variables that could change the environmental interpretations of white.

References


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