

Extended Abstract | *The 1st Research Innovations in Sustainable Marketing: A Global Virtual Symposium*

The Role of Anthropomorphism in Consumers' Evaluations of Sustainable Products

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Extended Abstract: Numerous studies have investigated sustainable consumer behavior, with a focus on how consumers evaluate sustainable products and their increasing consumption. This study aims to determine whether anthropomorphizing sustainable products can aid in eliciting positive product evaluations from consumers. Anthropomorphism is the act of attributing human characteristics to nonhuman entities or events, which can pervade human judgment. Previous research has indicated that consumers tend to prefer anthropomorphized products.

Moreover, this paper examines two potential mediators to understand the underlying process of this effect. One mediator is perceived personal relevance, which is known to be linked to brand preference. The study proposes that anthropomorphism enhances the personal relevance of sustainable products, leading to a more favorable evaluation. Another mediator is package attractiveness. Earlier research has shown that anthropomorphism can increase preferences for aesthetically pleasing products. The study expects that consumers evaluate anthropomorphized sustainable products more favorably due to their appealing packaging.

This study conducted an experiment to test its predictions. We employed a single-factor between-subjects design with two conditions: anthropomor-

phism and non-anthropomorphism. The manipulation occurred in the advertisement of a fictitious brand. In the anthropomorphism condition, respondents viewed an advertisement that described the brand in the first-person narrative. In contrast, respondents in the non-anthropomorphism condition observed an advertisement that introduced the brand in the third-person narrative. Both advertisements featured a product image. After viewing the advertisement, respondents rated their evaluation of the brand, perceived personal relevance, and package attractiveness. Respondents then answered manipulation check questions regarding their perception of the brand as a person.

A manipulation check confirmed that the anthropomorphized brand was perceived as more humanized than the non-anthropomorphized brand. Consistent with our prediction, the independent samples t-test revealed that the anthropomorphized brand received a more favorable evaluation than the non-anthropomorphized brand. We then tested our predicted mediation effects using a mediation model with 5,000 bootstrap samples for each mediator. The results showed significant indirect effects of anthropomorphism on brand evaluation through perceived personal relevance and package attractiveness. A parallel mediation analysis indicated that perceived

personal relevance had a more significant impact than package attractiveness.

This study contributes to the literature on sustainable consumer behavior and anthropomorphism by providing a better understanding of the relationship between anthropomorphism and consumer responses to sustainable products, while clarifying the psychological process with personal relevance and package evaluation as mediators. The findings suggest that anthropomorphizing sustainable products is an effective marketing tool for attracting consumers. This effect results from consumers perceiving the products as more relevant to them and paying greater attention to their packaging. Therefore, companies should devise communication strategies that portray sustainable products as more humanized to improve customer perceptions.

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Conflict of interest

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