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Give it a Try! How Electric Vehicle Test Drives Influence Symbolism Perceptions and Adoption Intent

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Abstract: The symbolic meaning that individuals attribute to Electric Vehicles (EVs) strongly predicts their intent to adopt EVs. However, prior literature has been inconsistent in defining symbolic meaning. In this study, we assess two types of EV symbolic meaning and evaluate their influences on adoption intent: (1) public meaning (i.e., perceived EV expressiveness), and (2) private meaning (i.e., holding EV congruent identities). We examine these relationships across two studies, conducted in virtual and real EV test drive experiences with a combined sample size of (cumulative N = 729). Participants rated EV public and private meanings before and after the test drive, as well as their post-drive adoption intent. Both studies reveal post-drive enhancements in both private and public meanings of EVs. However, only changes in private meaning (i.e., reinforced identity) are found to be associated with EV adoption intent, while enhancements in public meaning (i.e., enhanced perception of expressiveness) are not. These results are discussed in the context of Identity-Based Motivation Theory, and limitations and implications of the findings are addressed.

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