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Effect of Sustainable Luxury Message Framing on Brand Evaluations

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Abstract

The current study examined the causal relations among sustainable luxury campaigns' message framing types (negative vs. positive), sustainable brand image and perceived consumer effectiveness. The study tested the moderation of perceived brand luxury about the message framing types, sustainable brand image, and perceived consumer effectiveness. An online survey adopting luxury product is conducted with a total of 194 Korean consumers, testing the hypotheses. In the results, the message framing type is found to significantly affect perceived consumer effectiveness but not sustainable brand image. Perceived brand luxury significantly negatively moderates the relationship between the message framing type and perceived consumer effectiveness but not between the type and sustainable brand image. The results supported the positive influence of perceived consumer effectiveness on sustainable brand image. The moderation of perceived brand luxury was confirmed only for the relationship between the message framing type and perceived consumer effectiveness. The results empirically confirm that the message frame of luxury marketing could positively affect consumers' attitude formation, such as perceived consumer effectiveness, which is consistent with previous studies' research results. The results document that luxury brands using a negative message frame type had a more significant effect on perceived consumer effectiveness than the positive frame type. The findings contribute to the literature of new media-based sustainable marketing of luxury products as to how it affects consumers' brand evaluation and purchase intention, focusing on the causal relationships among the message-framing type of sustainable luxury marketing, sustainable brand image, and perceived consumer effectiveness. Given the increasing pursuit of sustainability in the luxury industry, the results contribute to deriving implications for sustainable marketing of efficient luxury brands.

1. Introduction

Sustainability refers to management activities striving for the sustainable development of society over immediate positives to benefit the current generation and future generations. Industry seeks mutual growth and harmony among economic, environmental, societal, and cultural factors [1]. The luxury industry, which emits the second-largest amount of greenhouse gases among global industries and has been criticized for being the

main culprit of environmental pollution, is no exception. Despite the high interest from consumers and businesses, the actual production and consumption of sustainable luxury goods could be much higher. In current marketplaces, where companies' and consumers' interest in sustainable luxury is significantly increasing, the low rate of sustainable products leading to actual purchases is problematic and demands future research [2,3]. This study explored how new media-based sustainable marketing of luxury products affects consumers' brand evaluation and purchase intention. More specifically, it addresses the causal relationships among the message-framing type of sustainable luxury marketing, sustainable brand image, and perceived consumer effectiveness: The primary theoretical basis lies in the framing theory and consumer effectiveness theory [4,5]. Given the increasing pursuit of sustainability in the luxury industry, the results contribute to deriving implications for sustainable marketing of efficient luxury brands [6].

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sustainable Luxury Message Framing

For the past decade, sustainable marketing has become crucial to luxury. The message-framing type of sustainable luxury marketing should affect consumer evaluation of the luxury brand. The primary rationale derives from the Prospect Theory of psychology [7]. Tversky and Kahneman showed the framing effect in formulating a decision-making problem involving risk as a communication technique for advertising messages [4]. People tend to process messages in terms of subjective positives and negatives in various situations, in which they make risk-averse decisions in the domain of positives and seek risk in the domain of negatives claimed. In addition, they argued that the behavioral model of decision-makers could be measured or predicted, suggesting three psychological values through the model of the value function and the weight function [4].

Message framing - as a marketing technique used to shape consumer perception and construct meaning in advertising messages- is a growing field in consumer psychology of judgment and decision-making. Previous studies have shown that positive and negative message framing is an effective advertising model in that presenting or exposing information can significantly impact consumer judgment and decision-making process and that this is based on different attention levels and subsequent understanding of the message [8,9]. As a theoretical basis of the argument, the prospect theory claims that the effects of message framing depend on the types of framing [10]. The negative frame stimulates negative emotions, such as avoidance behavior (fear and guilt). In contrast, the positive frame stimulates more positive emotions in people, such as joy and satisfaction. In a recent study by Patel, Thomas, and Bhatt, the type of message framing influenced the purchase intention of marketing communication [11]. There was no difference according to the type of product category, and the results document that exact message framing, regardless of the product category, led to higher purchase intention. The most frequently used message framing in communicating environmental sustainability focuses on shaping the recipient's perception of the consequences of actions in terms of benefits, i.e., positives or negatives. In the positive and negative frame, the message focuses on the positive or negative aspects of a decision problem. Indeed, the extant literature has addressed various aspects of positive and negative framing's effect on promoting sustainable behavior [12].

2.2 Perceived Consumer Effectiveness

Perceived consumer effectiveness refers to the belief that individual efforts can be essential in solving a problem and making a difference [13]. It has been attracting attention as a factor influencing an individual's will to act beyond simple interest in an issue. Consumers are more ethical when they feel that the consequences

of their consumption behavior can make a difference [14]. Kinnear et al. first conceptualized and measured perceived consumer effectiveness as the subject's belief that individual efforts alone can contribute to solving environmental problems [15,16]. Past research has indicated that perceived consumer effectiveness can be a positive and decisive motivating factor necessary for social and environmental well-being behavior [17]. In specific, previous studies on sustainable consumption behavior associate perceived consumer effectiveness with environmental problems and other structures, such as knowledge of environmental problems and perceived personal importance [15,16,17].

2.3 Sustainable Brand Image

Message framing of sustainable luxury campaigns likely affects perceived consumer effectiveness and sustainable brand image. Previous studies on luxury products using recycled materials have shown that consumers can negatively evaluate sustainable efforts [18]. As such, consumer responses to sustainability depend on brand types and perceptions of luxury brands; thus, a favorable attitude toward a luxury brand does not necessarily motivate sustainable behavior [19]. In previous studies, sustainability has been more consistent with non-luxury brands because the image of luxury brands is inconsistent with eco-friendliness [16]. Focusing more on the context of sustainable consumption, Amatulli et al. documented that negatively (vs. positively) framed messages are more effective than positively framed ones in prompting consumers to engage in pro-environmental behaviors [20]. Consumers' self-perception of one's effectiveness towards worlds from sustainable luxury campaigns will increase the brand's perception of sustainability. The previous studies of sustainable consumption have documented that perceived brand effectiveness positively impacts the behavioral intention and actual behavior of consumers positively. Based on the literature, the negative framing of sustainable luxury campaigns is expected to have a more substantial positive influence on positive brand evaluations. Thus, the following are hypothesized:

H₁. The type of message framing of sustainable luxury campaigns affects perceived consumer effectiveness.

H₂. The type of message framing of sustainable luxury campaigns will affect sustainable brand image.

2.4 Perceived Brand Luxury

Perceived brand luxury refers to the individual perception and evaluation of the luxury product group [21]. In reflecting the socio-psychological meaning of luxury, the concept is multi-faceted and characterized by a mixture of positive and negative brand associations [22]. The positive luxury perceptions include unrivaled craftsmanship, the brand's heritage, superior quality, aesthetics, rarity, and prestige; on the other hand, the negative luxury perceptions are about discrimination, harmful exclusivity self-directed positive, elitism, differentiation, excessiveness, waste of resources, display of secular snobbery, and conspicuousness are also a significant axis of luxury perceptions [23]. Subjective luxury perception likely affects consumers' psychological responses towards sustainable luxury campaigns. In more recent studies, the type of message framing was found to influence purchase intention, and there was no difference according to the type of product category [24]. The results indicate that exact message framing, regardless of the product, generated higher purchase intention. The luxury category and the green concession category are in a cognitive conflict situation, and this lowers the effect of advertisements perceived by consumers and weakens the influence of the connected message framing—the higher the perceived luxury, the lower the consumer perceived effectiveness [25,26,27]. In total, the following hypotheses are established:

H₃. Perceived brand luxury will moderate the relationship between the message framing type of

sustainable luxury campaign and perceived consumer effectiveness.

H₄. Perceived brand luxury will moderate the relationship between the message framing type of sustainable luxury campaign and sustainable brand image.

3. Method

3.1 Study Design

The hypothesized relationships among the variables were tested with an online survey. The survey employed stimuli that contained product photos and information on a leather bag. For the stimuli, a luxury brand set-up was hypothesized with an advertisement image promoting the brand's sustainable brand philosophy. The leather bag shown in the stimuli had been chosen from pretests. The advertisement's type of message framing (positive vs. negative) was also developed based on the relevant literature and revised through the pretests; as a result, two distinct stimuli for two differing types of message framing (positive vs. negative) were set. The fictitious brand and product information appearing in the ad had been made based on the multiple brand stories of extant luxury brands and were set identically across the two conditions except for the type of message framing.

To determine if message framing was effectively manipulated, the type of message framing was modified based on the questions in Meyerowitz and Chaiken [28]. An independent sample t-test was conducted to analyze the results of the confirmation response to the advertisement manipulation of the preliminary survey used in this study. As a result of the analysis, the negative group (n=30, M=2.73, S.D.=.33, t=44.772, p. <.001) and the positive group (n=30, M=3.00, S.D.=.33, p<.001) message framing method was all statistically significant, confirming a successful manipulation. The result of the independent sample t-test using Levene's test of equal variances indicates the level of perceived brand luxury across the negative ($n_{negative}$ =118, $M_{negative}$ = 3.680, $SD_{negative}$ = .608) and positive condition ($n_{positive}$=127, $M_{positive}$ = 3.795, $SD_{positive}$ = .652) was statistically insignificant (F = .181, t = -1.419, p = .671). The respondents to the primary survey were randomly exposed to one of the two stimuli and guided to respond to the questions. The perceived sustainability of brands was used by taking questions from previous studies and adjusting them for this study's context [29]. Perceived consumer effectiveness is measured by adjusting the questions extracted from prior studies [15,30]. The measurement items were modified and designed to fit this study's goals. For each questionnaire item, a nominal scale and a 5-point Likert scale were used (1 = not at all/disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Frequency, reliability, factor, mean value, and t-test analyses were performed using SPSS 25.0 to verify this study's hypothesis. The frequency analysis was used to identify the general characteristics of the sample; internal consistency verification (Cronbach's α), exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis were used to verify the reliability and validity of each measurement variable. An independent t-test was used to check manipulation between the two stimuli according to message framing types. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using Amos 25.0. A structural equation modeling (SEM) was applied to test the causal relationship between perceived consumer effectiveness and sustainable brand image.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Preliminary Analysis

Participants' profile. A total of 194 Korean consumers in their 20s to 50s answered to an online questionnaire. A preliminary survey was conducted to verify the reliability of the stimuli and questionnaire and increase the study's accuracy. The preliminary survey was conducted over three days; 36 questionnaires were distributed, and 30 copies were used as preliminary survey data, excluding insincere responses. The items used in the preliminary survey above were refined and used in the actual survey. In this survey, 194 questionnaires were collected and finally analyzed. By gender, there were slightly more females, with 81 (41.8%) males and 113 females (58.2%). By age, 39 people were in their 20s (20.1%), 70 people were in their 30s (36.1%), and 85 people were in their 40s (43.8%). Regarding educational background, 120 people (61.9%) attended or graduated from college.

In this study, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and Cronbach's α value were obtained to verify the validity and reliability of the measurement tool. In exploratory factor analysis, principal component analysis with the Varimax rotation method was used for factor extraction; we adopted the principal component analysis to minimize information negative and generate as few factors as possible [31]. The selection criteria for factors and items were a commonality of 0.50 or more, an eigenvalue of 1.0 or more, and a factor loading of 0.50 or more. The identity matrix of the correlation matrix between measurement items for factor analysis was tested using Bartlett's sphericity test [31]. The eigenvalue of each factor was one or more, the explained total variance was 76.846%, and all factor loadings were 0.5 or more. In addition, the KMO value was 0.886, showing an acceptable level (Table 1). As a result of exploratory factor analysis, four factors were extracted for the twelve items, including perceived consumer effectiveness, sustainable brand image, and perceived brand luxury, showing a total explanatory power of 77.902%. Table 1 presents the factor loading and eigenvalue. In addition, the Maximum Likelihood Estimates were implemented through the Amos program for four latent variables with the same items to check the construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis. The analysis results included RMSEA = 0.058, NFI = 0.967, RFI = 0.946, IFI = 0.985, CFI = 0.985, GFI = 0.954, AGFI = 0.911, CMIN = 73.319, DF = 40, p < 0.001, With PCMIN/DF = 1.833. Thus, the model fit was suitable, and the convergence validity was high, with all average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.5 [32]. As a result, it was confirmed that conceptual and construct validities were appropriate. All Cronbach's alpha values were more than 0.7, indicating that the reliability of all questions is appropriate. In total, the factors had appropriateness and validity. Additionally, as a result of reliability analysis, Cronbach's α value showed a desirable level of reliability, with sustainable brand image at 0.867, perceived consumer effectiveness at 0.828, and perceived brand luxury at 0.807 [33].

4.2 Framing Type of Message to Consumer Effectiveness and Brand Sustainability (H1–H2)

Hypothesis 1 posited that a sustainable marketing campaign's message framing type (positive vs. negative) should affect perceived brand effectiveness. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to check the hypothesis where the type of message framing was coded as a dummy variable (positive frame = 0, negative frame = 1). The results indicate that the brand's message frame positively affected the brand effectiveness (β = -0.496, t = -8.655, p = 0.001). That is, the campaign message's negative (vs. positive) framing causes consumers to be more significantly affected by the perceived consumer effectiveness. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Table 1 reports a hierarchical regression analysis with perceived consumer effectiveness as the dependent variable, message framing type as the independent variable, and perceived brand luxury as the

control variable.

Table 1. Results of regression analysis (DV: perceived consumer effectiveness)

	IV	B	S.E.	β	t-value	p-value	F-value (p-value)	R² (adj. R²)
1	**Gender**	**-.064**	**.082**	**-.051**	**-.787**	**.432**	2.725 (.030)	.043 (.027)
	Age	**.004**	**.004**	**.059**	**.898**	**.370**		
	Education	**-.066**	**.049**	**-.092**	**-1.342**	**.181**		
	Income	**.080**	**.030**	**.180**	**2.678**	**.008**		
2	Gender	-.067	.081	-.053	-.828	.409	3.710 (.003)	.072 (.053)
	Age	.004	.004	.066	1.024	.307		
	Education	-.070	.049	-.097	-1.434	.153		
	Income	.082	.029	.186	2.793	.006		
	Message Framing (A)	**.211**	**.078**	**.169**	**2.713**	**.007**		
3	Gender	-.101	.071	-.080	-1.421	.157	16.532 (.000)	.294 (.276)
	Age	-.000	.004	.000	-.005	.996		
	Education	-.038	.043	-.053	-.883	.378		
	Income	.027	.026	.062	1.033	.303		
	Message Framing (A)	.145	.068	.116	2.118	.035		
	Brand Luxury (B)	**.489**	**.057**	**.496**	**8.655**	**.000**		
4	Gender	-.093	.070	-.073	-1.316	.189	14.891 (.000)	.305 (.285)
	Age	.001	.004	.009	.151	.880		
	Education	-.038	.042	-.053	-.892	.373		
	Income	.029	.026	.066	1.102	.272		
	Message Framing (A)	.940	.411	.755	2.288	.023		
	Brand Luxury (B)	.604	.081	.612	7.437	.000		
	A×B	**-.213**	**.108**	**-.668**	**-1.963**	**.051**		

Hypothesis 2 posited that the luxury brand's message framing of a sustainable marketing campaign could affect sustainable brand luxury. A hierarchical regression analysis was performed using the message framing type (positive vs. negative) as an independent dummy variable and sustainable brand image as the dependent variable. The results indicate that the type of message framing did not affect the sustainable brand image (β = -0.072, t = -1.159, p = 0.248). According to the verified results, Hypothesis 2 was rejected. Table 2 shows the results of a hierarchical regression analysis with message framing type as the independent variable, sustainable brand image as the dependent variable, and perceived brand luxury as the control variable.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis (DV: sustainable brand image)

	IV	B	S.E.	β	t-value	p-value	F-value (p-value)	R² (adj. R²)
1	**Gender**	**.008**	**.093**	**.005**	**.082**	**.934**	4.392 (.002)	.068 (.053)
	Age	**-.001**	**.005**	**-.008**	**-.125**	**.900**		

		B	SE	β	t	p	F	R²
	Education	**-.045**	**.056**	**-.055**	**-.807**	**.420**		
	Income	**.138**	**.034**	**.274**	**4.112**	**.001**		
2	Gender	.006	.093	.004	.070	.945	3.783 (.003)	.073 (.054)
	Age	.000	.005	-.005	-.076	.940		
	Education	-.047	.056	-.057	-.839	.402		
	Income	.140	.034	.276	4.148	.001		
	Message Framing (A)	**.103**	**.089**	**.072**	**1.159**	**.248**		
3	Gender	-.031	.082	-.022	-.384	.701	15.916 (.000)	.286 (.268)
	Age	-.005	.004	-.070	-.384	.223		
	Education	-.011	.049	-.013	-1.222	.827		
	Income	.078	.030	.154	-.219	.011		
	Message Framing (A)	.029	.079	.020	2.563	.714		
	Brand Luxury (B)	**.550**	**.065**	**.485**	**8.429**	**.001**		
4	Gender	-.029	.082	-.020	-.351	.726	13.646*** (.000)	.287 (.266)
	Age	-.005	.004	-.068	-1.172	.243		
	Education	-.011	.049	-.013	-.220	.826		
	Income	.079	.031	.155	2.576	.011		
	Message Framing (A)	.290	.478	.203	.607	.544		
	Brand Luxury (B)	.587	.094	.519	6.218	.001		
	A×B	**-.070**	**.126**	**-.191**	**-.554**	**.580**		

4.3 Moderation of Brand Luxury in the Effects of Message Framing Type on Perceived Consumer Effectiveness and Brand Sustainability (H3–H4)

Hypotheses 3 and 4 assumed a moderating effect of perceived brand luxury in the relationships among message framing, perceived consumer effectiveness, and sustainable brand image. Hierarchical regression analysis was performed using message framing as an independent variable and perceived consumer effectiveness as a dependent variable, analyzing the moderating effect of perceived brand luxury on the effect of message framing type on perceived consumer effectiveness (Table 1). As a result, the influence of the interaction variable of message framing and perceived brand luxury on perceived consumer effectiveness was significant at $p < 0.10$ ($\beta = -0.668$, $t = -1.963$, $p = 0.051$). Specifically, the standardized beta value was negative, and the higher the consumer perception of luxury for the brand, the lower the influence of the message framing type on perceived consumer effectiveness. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 established that perceived brand luxury moderated the influence of message framing types on perceived consumers' brands. Hierarchical regression analysis used message framing as an independent variable and sustainable brand image as a dependent variable to test the hypothesis (Table 2). The interaction effect between message framing and perceived brand luxury was insignificant on the sustainable brand image ($\beta = -0.191$, $t = -0.556$, $p = 0.580$). As a result, Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the effect of message framing types (positive vs. negative) of sustainable luxury campaigns on sustainable brand image and perceived consumer effectiveness. The results of this study

contributed to a new academic research flow in a situation where only some prior studies link luxury branding and message framing. Specifically, this study can be understood as an initial attempt in a situation where there are few empirical studies on the influence of message framing types in sustainable luxury advertising situations. As a result of this study, the hypothesis on the effect of message framing on consumer advertisement evaluation was partially confirmed. In the case of the negative (negative appeal) type of message framing than the case of the positive (positive appeal) type, the respondents' perception of their own consumer efficacy through the corresponding campaign was higher. This is consistent with the results of previous studies that found that negative message framing had a more substantial influence on consumer persuasion in eco-friendly consumption patterns. Overall, the results of this study contribute to the new media-based luxury sustainable marketing literature on how it affects consumers' brand evaluation and purchase intention by focusing on the causal relationship between the type of message framing in sustainable luxury marketing and sustainable brand image. Considering the increasing pursuit of sustainability in the luxury goods industry, these results affect the sustainable marketing of influential luxury brands.

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