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HONORS THESIS



Green Advertising and Millennials

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the responsiveness of Millennials to green versus non-green framed automobile print ads. A 2x2 factorial design was used in which specific advertising frames were manipulated to measure ad attitudes, purchase intentions, and skepticism for a high involvement product (i.e., an automobile). Results showed that highly-environmentally-concerned participants have more positive ad attitudes and greater purchase intentions after viewing a green ad than after viewing a non-green ad. These differences were not evident however for participants who exhibited low-environmental-concern. The results also showed that participants who are more environmentally concerned are less skeptical about green ads than those who are less environmentally concerned. This study adds to the literature on persuasion by identifying individual differences that influence responsiveness to green versus non-green ads. It also provides information to assist marketing managers who are concerned with influencing millennials' purchases of environmentally friendly products. This study could be extended by exploring the differences in Millennials' ad attitudes, purchase intentions, and skepticism in response to different types of ads (e.g., banner ads, tv ads) and for a different high involvement product. The sample of Bryant University students was appropriate for this research project, but extending this work to a sample of non-student Millennials, older Millennials, and older adults could increase the generalizability of the results.

INTRODUCTION

Millennials are the second largest segment of the population following the Baby Boomers (Tanyel et al. 2013). Tanyel et al. (2013) found that this generation has a large purchasing power and that marketers should promote their products to them. In addition, Millennials are very concerned about the environment (Cohn et al., 2013; Finisterra do Paço & Reis, 2012). Millennials are likely to be better informed about the environment than other generations, and represent a significant part of the green market (Furlow and Knott, 2009).

Highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials have also been shown to have more positive ad attitudes and purchase intentions after viewing a green versus non-green ad for a low involvement product (i.e. laundry detergent) (Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). Similarly, a recent study by Loroz & Helgeson (2013) showed that Millennials respond better (i.e., have more positive attitudes) towards pro-environment ad appeals versus more general ad appeals (i.e., image/functional, extravagance/economical, sex/romance, and greed/sharing) for shampoo, a low involvement product. In addition, Matthes & Wonneberger (2014) found that highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials tend to be less skeptical toward green advertising claims than low-environmentally-concerned Millennials.

The goal of this research is to add to the literature on green advertising for Millennials. In contrast to earlier work that investigated differences in how Millennials respond to “green” (i.e., pro-environment) versus non-green ads for a low involvement product (e.g., shampoo), this research investigates these differences for a high involvement product. This research also extends Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius’ (1995) work by exploring differences in high- versus low-environmentally-concerned Millennials ad attitudes and purchase intentions after viewing a green ad for a high involvement product (i.e., an automobile). Specifically, this research investigates whether or not green automobile ads are more effective than non-green automobile ads aimed at Millennials in influencing their ad attitudes and purchase intentions. Finally, this study will also extend Matthes & Wonneberger (2014) work by exploring differences in skepticism between highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials versus low-environmentally-concerned Millennials after viewing green automobile ads.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Millennials

Morton (2002), defines individuals born between 1977 and 1994 as the Millennial Generation. However, Tanyel et al. (2013) considers Millennials as those individuals born between 1980 and 2000. The Millennials of interest for this study therefore, are young Millennials who are between 18 and 22 years of age and born between 1993 and 1997.

Millennials and Automobiles

Cars represent the most important purchase for Millennials (Morton, 2002). Durbin (2016) suggests that Millennials are starting to use their purchasing power to buy new vehicles. In 2015, US Millennials purchased more than 4 million cars and trucks, and now represent 28 percent of the new car market. Millennials' automobile purchases and adoption of green (i.e., environmentally-friendly) versus non-green vehicles are influenced by i) efficient gas mileage, ii) safety and technology, and iii) concern for the future (Cohn & Vaccaro, 2013). Cohn & Vaccaro (2013) report that environmental concern is one of the consumer values that is particularly related to Millennials' green vehicle purchases.

Automobiles have been shown to be a high involvement product for Millennials (Parment, 2013). Parment's in depth interviews and survey measuring purchase involvement found that 55.2% of Millennials reported that their purchase involvement for automobiles is very high (28.6%) or rather high (26.6%). In addition, approximately 58.2% of Millennials said that it was either very important (18.8%) or important (39.4%) to have a relationship with an automobile salesperson. 58.9% of Millennials said that they were very sure (38.7%) or very likely (20.2%) to ask for assistance at an automobile dealership.

Millennials and Green Ads

Prior research on Millennials and green ads offers an understanding of the importance of green advertising for this generation. A study that looked at 10 different ad appeals (i.e., image, function, extravagance, economic, environmentally focused, self-focused, greed, sharing, sex, and romance) for either a car or shampoo revealed that Millennials responded

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best (i.e., report positive ad attitudes) to environmentally-focused appeals (Loroz & Helgeson, 2013).

When Millennials were asked to assess the meaning of 8 environmentally-descriptive words (i.e., biodegradable, eco-friendly, green, natural, nature-friendly, organic, recycled, sustainability), the most effective words for conveying that a product is ‘environmentally preferable’ were found to be eco-friendly (59%), recycled (58%), and green (56%) (Smith, 2014). Furthermore, when identifying effective marketing techniques to communicate the environmental friendliness of a product, 90% of Millennials regard a recycling symbol on a package as denoting that the product is environmentally friendly (Smith, 2010). Similarly, Purohit’s (2012) study on the impact of green ads and eco-friendly labeling on the behavior of consumers found that print ads significantly influenced Millennials’ buying decisions for green products.

Smith’s (2010) study on the communication of environmentally friendly products also found that advertising was one of the top two influencers of Millennials’ perception of whether or not a product is green. Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, & Paladino’s (2014) study on the effects of green advertising and the corporation’s environmental performance revealed that Millennials’ attitudes towards the company and intentions to purchase the advertised product are influenced by the type of company performance information provided. When corporate performance was poor, consumer purchase intentions were low. However, when consumers viewed a green ad, the negative effect of corporate performance on purchase intentions was reduced. That is, the presence of a green ad resulted in greater purchase intentions than reported when no green ad was present.

Furlow and Knott (2009) explored the characteristics of Millennials who are most likely to respond to environmental labels on products when making purchases. Participants were asked to answer questions concerning label usage in relation to different environmental concerns, environmental behaviors, environmental involvement, and news frequency. Furlow and Knott (2009) found that Millennials who reported that they use labels frequently are more likely to buy environmentally friendly products than Millennials who do not use labels as frequently. Furthermore, labels and recycling symbols are preferred by Millennials for communicating that a product is environmentally friendly (Smith, 2012). In summary, Millennials respond

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well to green advertising, product descriptors, and labeling. In addition, green advertising has been shown to influence Millennials brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Millennials will have more positive ad attitudes and greater purchase intentions after viewing green versus non-green automobile ads.

Millennials, Environmental Concern and Green Ads

A recent study explored the effect of green ads and environmental concern on Millennials' ad attitudes and purchase intentions for a low involvement product (i.e. laundry detergent) (Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). Two ads were designed to promote an environmentally-friendly product, ECOWASH, a vegetable-based laundry detergent that was packaged in a recycled plastic bottle. Both ads included information that indicated the product was an environmentally friendly product. They differentiated however with regard to the main focus of the ad. In one ad, words and phrases were used to create a "green" appeal: "You can save the planet while doing laundry." The other ad used words and phrases to create a cost-saving ad appeal: "You can save money while doing laundry." Participants were assigned to high- and low-environmental-concern groups based on their responses to three items that measured environmental concern. The study showed that ad attitudes and purchase intentions did not differ between the green and non-green appeals for highly-environmentally-concerned participants, whereas for consumers that are less concerned with the environment, purchase intentions and ad attitudes were greater for a green-focused environmental ad than for the cost-focused environmental ad.

This study suggests that highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials will respond equally well to ads that promote environmentally friendly products regardless of whether the focus of the ad is on saving the environment or saving the cost of the product.

Congruence

Message tailoring, involves adapting persuasive ad messages to match recipients' characteristics and concerns. There is evidence that congruence between ad messages and the recipients characteristics and concerns leads to increased persuasion (Lynch & Schuler, 1994). For example, an ad focusing on saving money would appeal to a cost conscious recipient.

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Similarly, an ad for a high-fashion item might appeal to a person who is very concerned with dressing fashionably. Cesario, Grant, & Higgins (2004) suggest that messages that are congruent with an individual's motivational orientation are processed more fluently and evaluated more positively than non-congruent messages. Therefore, this suggests that highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials will respond better to green versus non-green ads because green ads are congruent with their concern for the environment. It is expected that these congruence effects will be especially evident for products with which Millennials are highly involved (e.g., an automobile) because these ads will be more effortlessly processed. Thus, the following relationships are hypothesized:

H2: Millennial's environmental concern will moderate the effect of an individual's responsiveness to ad messages for a high involvement product, such that when a green ad is viewed, individuals with high environmental concern will have more positive ad attitudes than when a non-green ad is viewed. These effects however, are not expected for low-environmentally-concerned Millennials.

H3: Millennial's environmental concern will moderate the effect of an individual's responsiveness to ad messages for a high involvement product, such that when a green ad is viewed, individuals with high environmental concern will have greater purchase intentions than when a non-green ad is viewed. These effects however, are not expected for low-environmentally-concerned Millennials

Skepticism

Using Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius' (1995) three item environmental concern scale, Matthes & Wonneberger (2014) found that environmentally concerned consumers were less skeptical of green ads than less environmentally concerned consumers. They suggest that the decrease in ad skepticism is due to the perceived informational utility of green ads for environmentally concerned individuals.

A recent study of Millennials at a Portuguese university however, reports results that conflict with the above study (Finisterra do Paço & Reis, 2012). Skepticism toward environmental claims on packages, labels or in ad was measured with a 4-item scale that included questions like "Most environmental claims on package labels or presented in advertising are true".

Interestingly, Finisterra do Paço & Reis (2012) reported that Millennials who are

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environmentally concerned are more skeptical toward pro-environmental claims than Millennials who are not environmentally concerned. However, Matthes & Wonneberger (2014) found that Finisterra do Paço & Reis' (2012) information was incorrectly reported. While the data reported in Finisterra do Paço & Reis' (2012) paper indicates that highly-environmentally-concerned individuals are less skeptical of green ads than low-environmentally-concerned individuals, in the discussion of results, the authors incorrectly state that high-environmentally-concerned individuals are more skeptical of green ads. Therefore, consistent with the studies mentioned above, it is expected that Millennials who are highly-environmentally-concerned will be less skeptical toward a green *automobile* ad than individuals who are less environmentally concerned. Specifically, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Millennial's environmental concern will moderate the effect of an individual's responsiveness to ad messages for a high involvement product such that high-environmentally-concerned individuals will be less skeptical towards a green ad than low-environmentally-concerned individuals.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and thirty-four undergraduate students participated in this study for partial course credit. Subjects for this study were drawn from the Marketing Department Subject Pool at Bryant University. Thirty-seven subjects who were not born in the United States and who did not speak English as their first language were eliminated from the study because the focus of this study is automobile advertising in the United States. 55.8% of the remaining participants were male, and the mean age was 19.8 years old. Data was collected in the fall semester of 2015 at Bryant University using MediaLab in the Behavioral Research Lab. Ethics approval was obtained by the Bryant University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before collecting data.

Experimental Design, Procedure, and Measures

The hypotheses were tested with a 2x2 factorial design (ad frame: green versus non-green; environmental concern: high vs. low) in which ad frame was manipulated and environmental

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concern was measured. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions: (1) *green ad*, (2) *non-green ad*. Because Millennials perceive internet advertising more negatively than traditional advertising (Tanyel et al., 2013), a print ad from a gender neutral American magazine was modified to create green and non-green ads.

Independent Variables

Green Ads

Nyilasy et al. (2014, pg. 694) defines green advertising as “any ad that meets one or more of the following criteria: (1) explicitly or implicitly addresses the relationship between a product/service and the biophysical environment, (2) promotes a green lifestyle with or without highlighting a product/service, and (3) presents a corporate image of environmental responsibility”. Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius (1995) describe “green” and “non-green” ads based on appeal. “Green” ads will have an emotional, euphoria, or management appeal. “Non-green” ads will have a financial and zeitgeist appeal. Taken Smith (2014) found that 44% of Millennials associated the term “green” with the meaning “energy conservation practiced in making of the product.” Therefore, for this study, green ads that present a corporate image of environmental responsibility using an emotional appeal with respect to energy conservation were developed. Both contained the same automobile and background. All brand labels were deleted to eliminate brand bias from the participant’s attitudes towards the ad. The green ad contained the words “Green Car of the Year” at the top, along with the words “comfortable, eco-friendly interior” with a recycling symbol in the bottom right corner. In contrast, the non-green ad contained the words “4 Door Car of the Year” with no added wording or symbols at the bottom (see Appendix A).

Environmental Concern

A modified version of the commonly used environmental measure developed by Weigel & Weigel (1978) was used to measure environmental concern (see Appendix B). This scale determines concerns related to the limits to growth, pollution, the economy, and resource conservation. Reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach $\alpha = .71$ and the ten items were

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averaged to form an index for environmental concern. Participants were assigned high- vs. low-environmental-concern based on a median split. The median was 5.

Dependent Variables

Ad Attitudes. Attitudes towards the ads were measured using four 7-point likert-scale items anchored with (1) boring, (7) interesting; (1) not at all persuasive, (7) persuasive; (1) not at all effective; (7) effective; (1) not at all appealing, (7) appealing. The questions were modified based on the frequently reported attitude scale used by Peterson, Wilson, & Brown (1992). Reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach $\alpha = .92$ so the four items were averaged to form an index for ad attitudes.

Purchase Intentions. Purchase intentions were measured with three 7-point likert-scale items anchored with 1) strongly disagree and 7) strongly agree. The items drawn from Putrevu & Lord (1994) were as follows: *It is very likely that I will buy this automobile, I will purchase this automobile next time I need an automobile, I will definitely try driving this automobile.* Reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach $\alpha = .91$ so the three items were averaged to form an index for purchase intentions.

Skepticism. Skepticism was measured with a modified version of Mohr, Eroglu, & Ellen's (1998) skepticism scale. The two 7-point likert-scale items measured the extent to which participants agree that: *Most environmental claims on package labels or in advertising are intended to mislead rather than inform consumers,* and *I do not believe most environmental claims on package labels or presented in advertising.* An analysis using Peterson's correlation coefficient indicated that there is a significant linear relationship between these two items ($r(191) = .578, p < .001$) and they were averaged to form an index of skepticism.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the ad manipulation. Participants were asked: *The ad I saw was about an environmentally friendly car,* and *The ad*

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I saw was about a green car. An analysis using Pearson's correlation coefficient indicated that there is a significant linear relationship between these two scale items ($r(191) = .538, p < .001$), and they were averaged to form an index of manipulation. Ad manipulation was tested using a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with ad frame (green/non-green) as the independent variable and manipulation as the dependent variable. The test revealed that participants in the green ad condition viewed the ads as significantly more "green" than participants in the non-green ad condition ($M_{\text{Green}} = 5.51, M_{\text{Non-Green}} = 3.48, F(1,195) = 130.56, p < .001$).

Hypotheses Tests

Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1a predicted that Millennials will have greater ad attitudes after viewing green versus non-green automobile ads. Hypothesis 1a was tested using a one-way ANOVA with ad frame (green/non-green) as the independent variable and ad attitudes as the dependent variable. The test revealed that participants have more positive ad attitudes when viewing green versus non-green automobile ads ($M_{\text{Green}} = 4.68, M_{\text{Non-Green}} = 4.24, F(1,195) = 4.80, p < .05$). Thus, Hypothesis 1a is supported.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that Millennials will have greater purchase intentions for green versus non-green automobile ads. Hypothesis 1b was tested using a one-way ANOVA with ad frame (green/non-green) as the independent variable and purchase intentions as the dependent variable. The test revealed no significant effects of the type of ad shown on participants' purchase intentions ($M_{\text{Green}} = 4.30, M_{\text{Non-Green}} = 4.06, F(1,195) = 1.46, p = \text{n.s.}$). It is noted that although the mean was higher for green ads, it was not significant enough to accept Hypothesis 1b.

Hypothesis 2. Hypothesis 2 predicted Millennials' environmental concern will moderate the effect of an individual's responsiveness to ad messages for a high involvement product, such that when a green ad is viewed, individuals with high environmental concern will have more positive ad attitudes than when a non-green ad is viewed. These effects however, are not expected for low-environmentally-concerned Millennials. The ad attitudes measure was submitted to a 2 (ad frame: green vs. non-green) X 2 (environmental concern: high vs. low) factorial ANOVA. A two-way interaction between ad frame and environmental concern was not evident ($F(1, 193) = .171, p = \text{n.s.}$).

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There was however a main effect for environmental concern. Further analysis revealed that when environmental concern is high, ad attitudes are more positive after viewing a green versus a non-green ad ($M_{\text{green}} = 4.99$, $M_{\text{non-green}} = 4.49$, $F(1,99) = 4.06$, $p < .05$). That is, highly-environmentally-concerned participants have more positive ad attitudes after viewing a green ad than after viewing a non-green ad. Similar effects however were not evident for low-environmentally-concerned individuals ($M_{\text{green}} = 4.34$, $M_{\text{non-green}} = 4.00$, $F(1,94) = 1.30$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 predicted when Millennials' environmental concern will moderate the effect of an individual's responsiveness to ad messages for a high involvement product, such that when a green ad is viewed, individuals with high environmental concern will have greater purchase intentions than when a non-green ad is viewed. These effects however, are not expected for low-environmentally-concerned Millennials. The purchase intentions measure was submitted to a 2 (ad frame: green vs. non-green) X 2 (environmental concern: high vs. low) factorial ANOVA. A two-way interaction between ad frame and environmental concern was not evident ($F(1, 193) = 2.21$, $p = \text{n.s.}$).

Further analysis however revealed that when environmental concern is high, purchase intentions are greater after viewing a green versus a non-green ad ($M_{\text{green}} = 4.69$, $M_{\text{non-green}} = 4.17$, $F(1,99) = 3.92$, $p < .05$). Highly-environmentally-concerned participants have greater purchase intentions after viewing a green ad than after viewing a non-green ad. Similar effects however were not evident for low-environmentally-concerned individuals ($M_{\text{green}} = 3.88$, $M_{\text{non-green}} = 3.95$, $F(1,94) = .05$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 4 predicted Millennial's environmental concern will moderate the effect of an individual's responsiveness to ad messages for a high involvement product such that high-environmentally-concerned individuals will be less skeptical towards a green ad than low-environmentally-concerned individuals. Analysis using one way ANOVA's revealed differences in skepticism for high- versus low-environmentally concerned participants for green ads ($M_{\text{low-environmental-concern}} = 4.02$, $M_{\text{high-environmental-concern}} = 3.48$; $F(1, 96) = 4.66$, $p < .05$)

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but not for non-green ads ($M_{\text{low-environmental-concern}} = 3.85$, $M_{\text{high-environmental-concern}} = 3.82$; $F(1, 97) = 0.32$, $p = \text{n.s.}$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

DISCUSSION

As expected, Millennials respond better to green than to non-green ads for a high involvement product. More specifically, they have more positive ad attitudes after viewing a green versus a non-green automobile ad. Although the same effect was expected for Millennial's purchase intentions, the differences were not significant. However, purchase intentions means were higher for the green than the non-green ad.

The results of this study also show that highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials respond better to green versus non-green ads. Specifically, highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials have more positive ad attitudes and greater purchase intentions after viewing a green versus non-green automobile advertisement (i.e., a high involvement product).

Interestingly, no differences in responsiveness to green vs. non-green ads was evident for low-environmentally-concerned individuals. Finally, highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials were less skeptical of the claims made in the green automobile ad than less environmentally concerned individuals.

This research both extends and confirms previous findings. It adds to the literature that has begun to explore the relationship between Millennials and green advertising. While previous work has shown that Millennials are responsive to green ads for low involvement products (e.g., shampoo), this study demonstrates that Millennials are also responsive to green ads for high involvement products (e.g., an automobile). This study also adds to literature that considers the persuasive effects of congruence between message frame and characteristics of message recipients. Results of this study show that individual differences in environmental concern may influence responsiveness to green ads. Specifically the results suggests that individuals with high environmental concern will be more persuaded by green ads than individuals with low environmental concern. Skepticism results for this study were consistent with Matthes & Wonneberger's (2014) research. The present study has shown that highly-environmentally-concerned individuals are less skeptical than low-environmentally-concerned individuals about a green ad.

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In addition to adding to literature on persuasion, this study has implications for marketers. The results suggest that marketers can use ads focused on the environment to influence highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials. Therefore, organizations concerned with selling environmentally friendly products can have confidence that their green ads will be effective for highly-environmentally-concerned Millennials. While the results show that low-environmentally-concerned individuals are not as responsive to green ads as those with high environmental concern, it is important to note that all Millennials in this study viewed green ads more positively than non-green ads.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the convenience sample of university students was appropriate for this research project, this narrow sample limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research that investigates Millennials and green advertising should include a broader sample of Millennials. For example, it is important to determine whether these results will hold for Millennials from different socio-economic groups and different education levels.

Future research could also explore the relationship between environmental concern and green advertising in a sample of older adults. Although previous research (Loroz & Helgeson, 2013) has shown that Millennials respond better to green ads than Baby Boomers, it is not known how environmental concern might influence older adults' responsiveness to green ads.

Previous research has found that Millennials' perceptions of internet advertising is more negative than traditional print advertising (Tanyel, Stuart, & Griffin, 2013). Therefore, because this research used print ads, future research could investigate the effects of Millennials' environmental concern on their persuasiveness of an environmentally-focused internet ad.

Furthermore, this study could investigate the effects of combined appeals. For example, an ad message might focus on saving costs *and* protecting the environment, or focus on convenience *and* protecting the environment. Because some ads have more than one appeal, it would be helpful to know which of the appeals is most effective for persuading environmentally concerned Millennials.

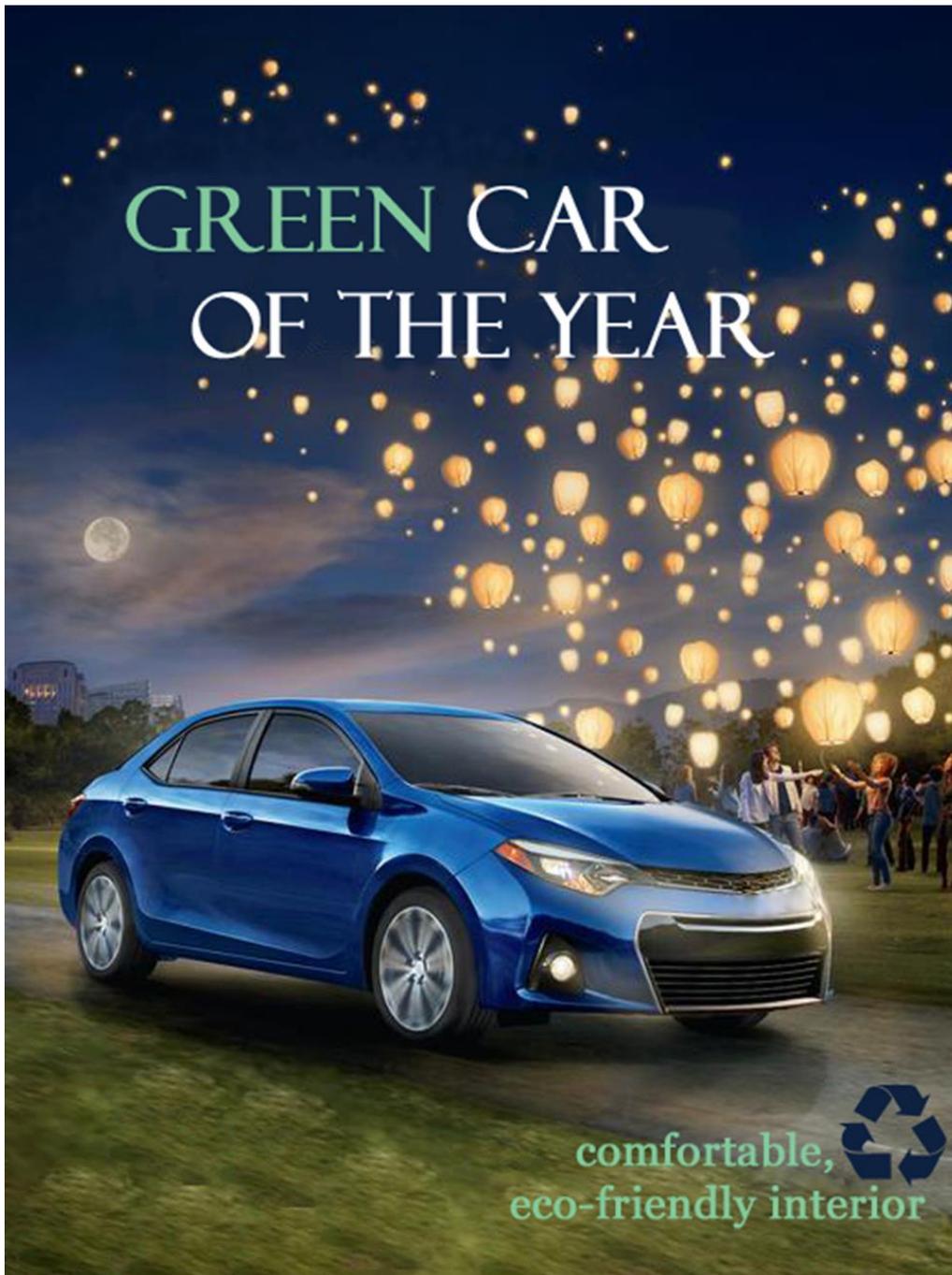
CONCLUSION

This research explored differences in high- versus low-environmentally-concerned Millennials responsiveness to green ads for a high involvement product. It replicated previous findings and added to the literature on persuasion. It offers practical guidance to marketers who are concerned with promoting green products to Millennials. Therefore, it has made an important contribution to theory and practice.

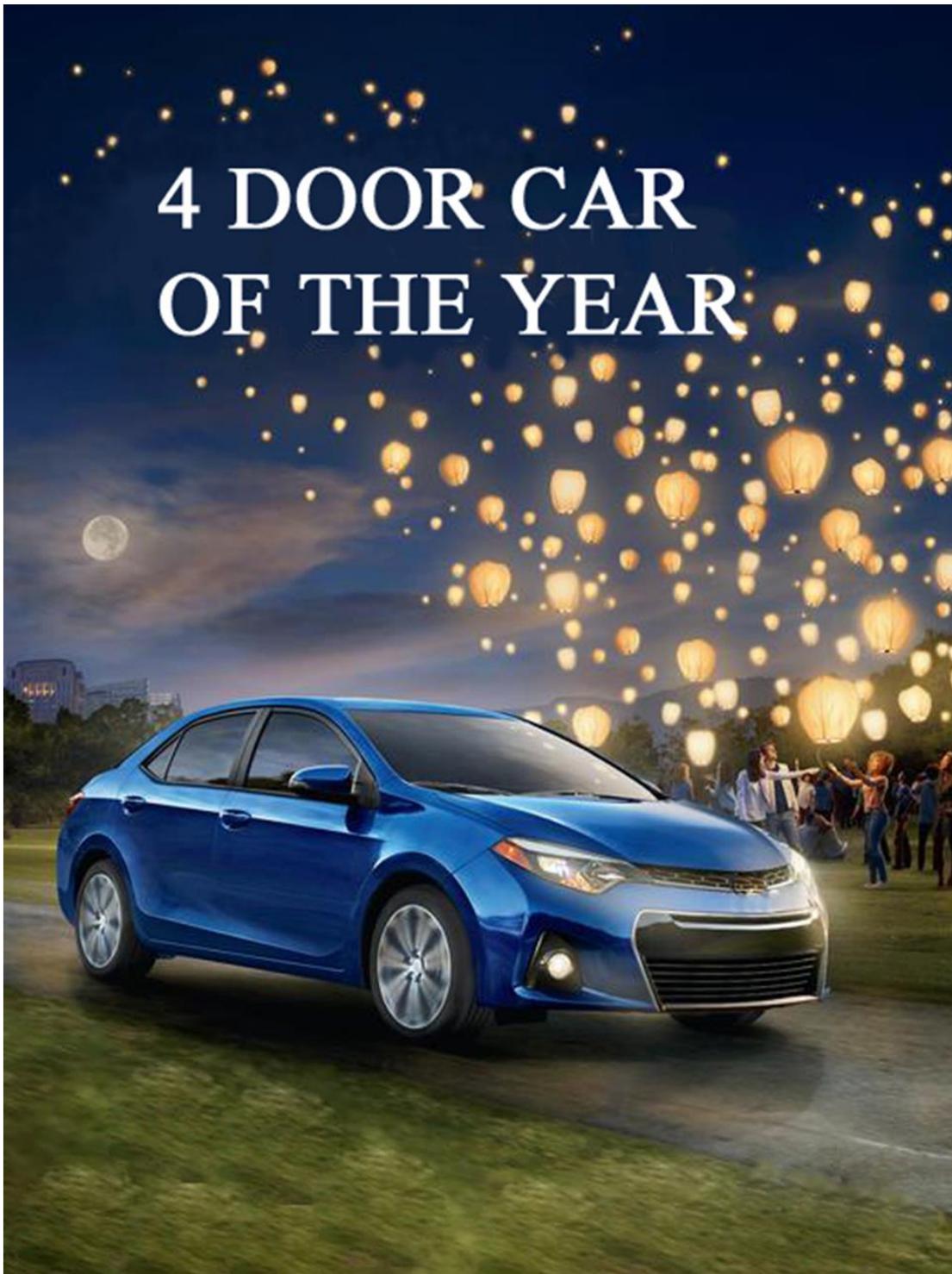
APPENDICES

Appendix A – Advertisements

Green Ad



Non-Green Ad



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Appendix B – Environmental Concern Scale

Weigel & Weigel 1978

1. I would be willing to make personal sacrifices for the sake of preserving the environment even though the immediate results may not seem significant.
2. Pollution does not personally affect my life (reverse scored).
3. The benefits of modern consumer products are more important than the pollution that results from their production and use (reverse scored).
4. Courses focusing on the conservation of natural resources should be taught in schools.
5. Although there is continual contamination of our lakes, streams, and air, nature's purifying processes soon return them to normal (reverse scored).
6. Because the government has such good inspection and control agencies, it is very unlikely that pollution due to production will become excessive (reverse scored).
7. The government should make it easy for people to report environmental damage.
8. Environmental organizations (e.g., Greenpeace) are really more interested in disrupting society than they are in saving the environment (reverse scored).
9. If asked, I would contribute time, money, or both to organizations that work to improve the quality of the environment.
10. I would be willing to spend more money on products and services that are environmentally friendly.

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