

Ecocentricity: How do consumers decide what makes a product 'green'?

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The greenness of a product has become increasingly important to consumers, but how do they decide how green a product is in the first place? A new study in the *Journal of Marketing* suggests that consumers believe that products with central rather than peripheral recycled features are greener (even when they are not).

"The greenness of central features, that is, the defining characteristics of the product, will lead to greater perception of the overall greenness of the product compared with the greenness of non-central product features," write authors Andrew D. Gershoff (University of Texas) and Judy K. Frels (University of Maryland). "A central attribute with an [environmental benefit](#) will imbue the entire product with greenness."

The authors focused on understanding how modifying a single feature of a product with a green benefit ([recycled materials](#), for example) influenced consumer evaluations of the overall greenness of the product. In one study, participants were given one of two different advertisements for a laptop computer. The ads stated either that the laptop's motherboard (central feature) or soundcard (non-central feature) was "made from recycled materials, and this reduces dangerous waste by 10,000 gallons per year."

People who believed that the motherboard was green rated the computer greener overall than those who believed the soundcard was green, even though both components were advertised as reducing the same amount of dangerous waste.

"Few products are 100% green," the authors conclude. "In most cases, firms must make choices about where to invest to capture the greatest green benefit and the greatest competitive advantage. This study shows that making these investments in central versus non-central features can have a significant influence on the extent to which the product is perceived as green."

More information: Andrew D. Gershoff and Judy K. Frels. "What Makes It Green? The Role of Centrality of Green Attributes in Evaluations of the Greenness of Products." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Marketing*.

Provided by American Marketing Association

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