



STUDIES IN THE RESEARCH PROFILE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
DOCTORAL THESIS NO. 5

Psychological consequences of moral labelling in the built environment

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Abstract

Climate change is strongly linked to human behavior and technologies, and many of the barriers to sustainable behavior are rather psychological than technological. More sustainable technologies and food products have been introduced to combat climate change, most often labeled with morally load-ed labels such as “organic” or “environmentally friendly”. The purpose of this thesis was, first, to gain knowledge into the psychological consequences of the introduction of eco-friendly technologies in the built environment, specifically how labeling these products “eco-friendly” influences percep-tion and performance; secondly, to identify underlying psychological mech-anisms and limits of this eco-label effect. Study 1 showed that participants generally prefer the taste of consumables labeled eco-friendly compared to conventional labeled alternatives, but the study also found that the label-effect is limited to certain products and certain judgmental dimensions. Results in this study also showed that people believe that eco-labeled prod-ucts have positive effects on mental abilities. In Study 2 and 3, the focus was to study the effects of eco-labeling in the built environment on perfor-mance in cognitively demanding tasks, such as color discrimination and proofreading. At this point, the eco-label effect had been shown across a wide range of products like food, water, and office technologies, and been generalized to a wide range of judgmental dimensions and behaviors (i.e. taste, nutrition health benefits, comfortableness, and mental performance). In Study 4, results showed that eco-labeling can have effects also on behav-ior that arguably have very little to do with the labeling itself, by showing that social perception of photographed persons can also depend on the label-ing of desktop lamps. A consistent finding across the studies was also that individual differences in environmental concern modulated the magnitude of the effect. The magnitude was larger in people with higher concern for the environment.

Keywords: Eco-label effect, performance, perception, judgment, moral labels, social judgement, lamp, label