

The effect of Shape on Perceived Trust on Environmental and Social Sustainability Labels

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The effect of Shape on Perceived Trust on Environmental and Social Sustainability Labels

Abstract

This research examines how the shape of sustainability labels circular versus angular influences consumer trust and subsequent evaluations across environmental and social sustainability claims. Drawing on shape symbolism literature, we propose that angular shapes, associated with competence and precision, enhance trust in environmental labels, whereas circular shapes, associated with warmth and social connection, enhance trust in social labels. Across six studies, including four controlled experiments and two multi-label surveys, we tested these predictions using diverse product contexts and real-world eco-labels. Results consistently show that angular shapes increase perceived trust and willingness to buy environmentally labeled products, while circular shapes increase trust and willingness to buy socially labeled products. Perceived trust reliably mediated these relationships, and shape $\times$ claim type interactions emerged across all studies. These findings advance sustainability communication and visual design research by identifying label shape as a key driver of trust formation, offering actionable guidance for brands, certification bodies, and policymakers seeking to improve sustainable consumption. Keywords: Sustainability labels, Label shape, Shape symbolism

Track: Consumer Behaviour