

Research on the Mechanism of Eco-Films on the Audience's Green Consumption Concept from the Perspective of Consumers

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Abstract

This study, from a consumer perspective, aims to explore how eco-films influence audiences' green consumption values. This qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews with audiences of different ages, collecting primary data. The data were coded after collection and systematically analyzed based on the coding to construct a theoretical model. The results indicate that eco-films primarily influence audiences' emotions and memories through film elements such as plot design, scene construction, and character design, ultimately impacting their green consumption values. Based on these findings, this study offers several suggestions for the creation of eco-films, such as avoiding over-exaggeration of suffering and integrating them with genres such as comedies. Currently, research on the correlation between eco-films and green consumption values is limited. This study not only fills the theoretical gap in cross-disciplinary research on eco-films and green consumption values but also provides practical advice for the film industry.

Keywords: Eco-film; Green consumption value; Film industry; Film research

1. Introduction

Consumption constitutes a fundamental human activity for survival and development, reflecting material and spiritual needs. Furthermore, consumption generates demand while stimulating and directing industrial production. With the increasingly serious ecological problems such as global warming, resource depletion, and biodiversity reduction, how to protect the ecological environment has become one of the important issues that the whole society needs to face together. Public environmental consciousness and green consumption practices constitute pivotal determinants for achieving sustainable development goals and realizing human-nature symbiosis. Consumer adoption of green consumption values catalyzes demand-driven ecological transition across industries. The film industry, as one of the industries, is also currently facing the requirements of the era of green transformation.

As a product of the film industry, eco-films possess distinctive efficacy in cultivating environmental consciousness and green consumption norms. This genre materializes abstract environmental tenets through visual discourse, thereby reshaping audience consumption ethics while fulfilling edutainment functions. The interaction between eco-films and audiences can also promote the green transformation of the film industry.

Audiences represent the primary consumer base for cinematic products. From the perspective of consumers, studying how ecological films affect the audience's green consumption concepts can clarify what will influence the audience and what the audience values. This will be of great help to the film industry in continuing to produce movies that the audience likes.

The concept of eco-film was first proposed by McDonald in 2004. He summarized the three main characteristics of this type of film: long takes and a significantly slowed pace and time; beautiful images and the integration of pristine nature and industrial technology; and a prolonged gaze and attention span. However, McDonald considered eco-film to include only experimental films and independent documentaries, excluding mainstream commercial films. This definition has been criticized by some scholars as too narrow^[1]. As eco-film research has deepened, most scholars have expanded the definition of "eco-film" to include commercial films and animated films. David Ingram argues that in Hollywood films, environmental considerations are primarily expressed in theoretical concepts such as ecofeminism and land ethics^[2]. Since then, eco-film theory has continued to develop, yielding numerous research findings. Chinese scholars Wang Ping and Liu Jun analyzed the aesthetic construction of Chinese eco-film in the digital age, arguing that inherent beauty and technological enhancement should be emphasized^[3]. Ouyang Pei-ni has also examined the evolution of thought and

ecological aesthetics within eco-film[4]. In summary, current research on eco-film focuses primarily on conceptual definition, aesthetic analysis, and production analysis.

The concept of green consumption was proposed by British scholars Elkington and Hailes in their book "Green Consumer Guide." They believe that the products used in green consumption must not harm the life and health of the consumer. Alan Dunning proposed that as individuals, consumers have distinct independence and need to exercise restraint on their own consumption behavior^[5]. Adila Rustam suggested that environmental awareness enhances consumers' ecological awareness and has a certain promoting effect on green consumption behavior^[6]. Chinese scholar Xu Junchang elaborated on the content of green consumption in a concrete way, clarifying its broad scope^[7]. Beyond conceptual definition, research on the value of green consumption has largely focused on nurturing pathways. Chinese scholars Li Tieying and Ma Xin proposed that appropriate methods should be used to guide the value of green consumption and promote improvements in the social consumption environment^[8].

In conclusion, while there is considerable research on both eco-films and green consumption separately, there is relatively little research combining the two. The mechanisms by which eco-films influence audiences' green consumption values remain unclear. This study aims to explore the mechanisms by which eco-films influence audiences' green consumption values and construct a theoretical model to fill the current research gap on the interplay between eco-films and green consumption.

2. Method

This study is a qualitative study, which mainly adopts the research method of semi-structured interviews to obtain the data required for the research, and organizes and analyzes the relevant data through the three-level coding method to derive a theoretical model.

2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the principal methodological approach. An interview outline was formulated after conceptual clarification of eco-films, green consumption and green consumption values. The interview outline incorporated multidimensional constructs— affective states, ideological frameworks, and behavioral patterns—to examine participants' transformation post-eco-film exposure. Participants were primarily asked whether eco-films had altered or deepened their environmental beliefs or thoughts, and why these beliefs emerged. The interviews will be used solely for this academic research, and the personal information of the participants was kept strictly confidential. Varied responses were obtained contingent upon individual contextual factors. Data collection is completed and interviews conclude when a sufficient number of respondents had reached a critical mass, with high similarity in their responses.

2.2 Theoretical basis

Narrative communication theory was used as theoretical foundation in this research. Initially conceptualized within psychological discourse (Green & Brock, 2000), this paradigm has been extensively operationalized across communication studies, film theory, and advertising research. Narrative communication theory describes a psychological state in which individuals, through reading or engaging with narrative texts, are simultaneously drawn into the story's world through cognition, emotion, and imagination, thereby influencing their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors^[9].

2.3 Data Analysis Methods

A three-level coding procedure was implemented for data organization and analysis. Interview recordings underwent verbatim transcription with resultant textual data systematically prepared for coding. Through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, a theoretical model was derived.

3. Result and Dissuasion

3.1 Open Coding

Seven interviewees were each interviewed for 40-60 minutes. Data reached a certain degree of saturation after the fifth interviewee and reached full saturation after the seventh interviewee was interviewed. After the transcripts were organized, open coding was performed based on the research questions of this study, as shown in the Table 1 below.

Table 1. Open Coding.

Initial category	Initial concept	Original content (interview original words)
Plot changes	Characters Far From Home	The country's construction and development (demolished), they have no choice but to leave their hometown
Mood changes (negative)	Depressed and heavy emotions	The movie is quite depressing and heavy, with a gray tone overall.
Past experience	Been there before	I have been to the Three Gorges and seen the movie, and I am very interested.
Empathetic Character	Deep understanding of the role	I feel that the local people are great people because they have made contributions.
The feeling brought by the scene	Demolition scenes bring shock	A demolition scene, a building, which was actually someone else's home, collapsed with a bang.
The feeling brought by the scene	Long shots show dirty environments	There was a little boy washing his hair with muddy river water. The scene lasted about a minute. It was very peaceful, but I could feel the struggle.
Scene content	River and garbage scene	The river water is very turbid, and there is garbage and construction waste from some abandoned houses
Mood changes (negative)	Large emotional fluctuations	I cried at the end, and I felt depressed.
Empathetic Character	Feeling sad for the character	I am very sad about Xiao Ma Ge's death, because he lost his life just for 50 yuan.
Plot Development	The character begins an expedition	The protagonist went to Shanxi to dig coal with the demolition workers. They all took their luggage and set off for Shanxi. It felt very uncomfortable.
Implementation	Mention of	We have made a lot of efforts in this regard, such as

Action	environmental protection actions	planting trees.
Deepening Faith	Connect her own actions	I think ordinary people should travel in a low-carbon way and do their best to do what they can. I am more engaged when watching movies, I can easily empathize with others, and my thoughts are influenced by the characters.
Emotional resonance	Immersive viewing	I thought about how I usually travel by public transportation, subway, etc., and I will always stick to it.
Implementation Action	Think of her own actions	Also, I will always use biodegradable straws when drinking milk tea in the future, and not other non-biodegradable plastic products.
Implementation Action	Think of her own actions	The images of mountain gods and mythical beasts in the movie are very shocking, and they are quite different from what we know before. They are very ferocious.
Image Design	The role brings shock	You would think that this is a villain who wants to invade and attack humans, but in the end you find that the situation is very complicated. The moment he died, the forest withered, and finally it affected humans.
Plot Development	Multiple plot twists	Humans and wild boars fought, and the human villagers also suffered heavy casualties. Several rows of people lay on the ground, covered with straw mats, and both sides suffered losses.
The feeling brought by the scene	The corpse scene was shocking	
Memory Recall	Link to own memory	This town mines ore and smelts steel. My hometown

		used to have industries such as coal mining and steelmaking. I remembered that the environment here was very bad, the air was very bad, and people's lives were not good, so I decided to really protect the ecology.
Plot Development	Stories that spark thought	The movie also mentioned that there was a conflict between humans and nature. Although both sides suffered losses, humans were the ones who suffered more in the end.
Deepening of Faith	Movies deepen the impression	Through film and television works, I will deepen my impression of the concept of green consumption, which is equivalent to reminding me
The feeling brought by the scene	The picture brings shock	The Earth has become a garbage planet, and even garbage can be used to build buildings.
The feeling brought by the scene	The screen conflict is obvious	They found the last green plant on the garbage planet. The surrounding area was dirty, and the green color was in sharp contrast.
Active reflection	The picture brings thinking	Mainly because I see so much garbage, I worry whether it will become like that in the future.
Plot Development	The plot is shocking	In the end, all humans stood up to protect the last plant. The whole process was so inspiring that it really shocked me.
Active reflection	The plot brings thinking	I feel like I have a little confidence in environmental protection. That is to say, what humans have done is not irreversible. In fact, there are many people working hard.
Deepening of Faith	Movies deepen faith	I feel like we have been taught to protect the

		environment and consume green since we were young. After watching this movie, I feel it is even more necessary to do so.
Active reflection	The plot raises doubts	When I see things like this that destroy the ecological balance in movies, I wonder if it will really become like this in a few years?
Active reflection	The plot brings thinking	After watching the movie, I feel that a good ecological environment has always been our responsibility, otherwise the earth will become worse and worse.
Deepening of Faith	Movies deepen faith	I was indeed influenced after watching it. The main thing is that we rarely use disposable items in our daily lives. We really need green consumption.

3.2 Axial coding

After the open coding work was completed, the coding content was sorted out and the axis coding was started. A total of 7 main categories were coded, as shown in the following Table 2.

Table 2. Axial Coding.

Main Category	Sub-category	Relationship connotation
Plot Impact	Plot changes	The narrative development brings about inner fluctuations
	Plot Development	
Scene Construction	The feeling brought by the scene	The scene creates a variety of impacts
	Scene content	
	Empathetic	
Character Design	Character	Character design evokes emotional changes
	Image Design	
emotional response	Mood changes	Audience emotions are affected by many factors
	Emotional resonance	

Link Memories	Memory Recall	The movie plot makes the audience think
Reflecting on the past	Active reflection	The film shows the consequences and makes the audience reflect
	Deepening of Faith	Multiple factors influence green consumption concepts
Deepen ideas	Implementation	
Action		

3.3 Selective Coding and Theoretical Model

Following axial coding, all coding content was summarized and the logical relationships sorted, yielding a theoretical model of the mechanism by which ecological films impact audiences' green consumption values (hereinafter referred to as the model), as shown in the Figure 1 below.

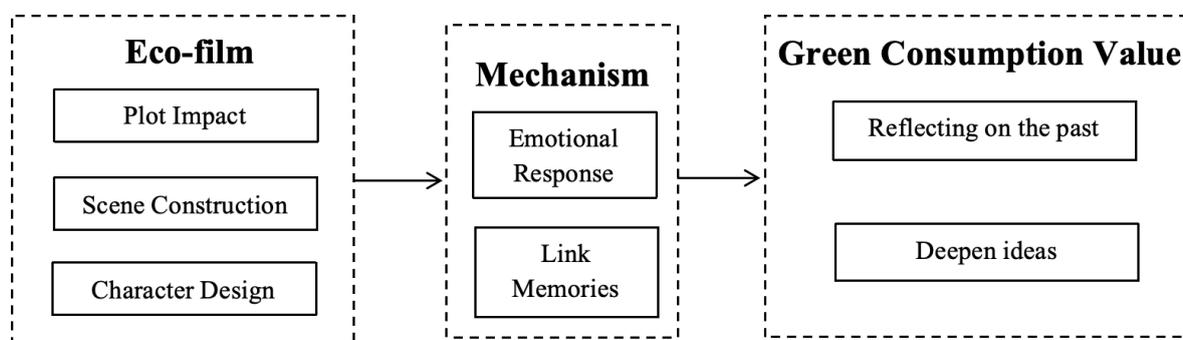


Figure 1. Model.

3.4 Research Findings

Analysis of coded interview data revealed that eco-films primarily modulate audience affect and mnemonic processes through three cinematic mechanisms: narrative architecture incorporating peripeteia and unexpected developments; diegetic construction employing impactful audiovisual semiotics; characterological design encompassing physiognomic, dialogic, and behavioral dimensions. These mechanisms collectively facilitate audience internalization of ecological paradigms, thereby reconstructing green consumption valuation frameworks, catalyzing behavioral retrospection and reinforcing conceptual internalization.

The study found that eco-films primarily influence audiences by appealing to their psychology and emotions. Furthermore, the majority of respondents indicated that the emotional impact of watching a film influences subsequent behavior, such as attracting attention to green products or deciding to watch an eco-film again. Based on these findings and the resulting model, the following conclusions can be drawn.

First, eco-films should pay close attention to their visual composition and plot development during the creative process, using multiple twists and unexpected plot developments to engage the audience and evoke emotional fluctuations, thereby effectively promoting the value of green consumption. Second, eco-films should avoid extensively portraying suffering and overly depressing expressions. During interviews, the majority of respondents expressed confusion about the future of environmental protection after experiencing depression and pain, but hope for the future rekindled when experiencing a more relaxed mood. Some also expressed a desire to see lighter genres like animation and comedy incorporate

environmental concepts. Eco-films can also explore integrating with different film genres during the creative process to convey positive emotions and values.

3.5 Limitation Analysis

This study is qualitative and subjective. However, the data were collected and analyzed after reaching saturation in semi-structured interviews, which makes them credible. This study focuses solely on how eco-films influence audiences' green consumption perspectives and does not systematically analyze the extent of their impact.

4. Conclusion

This study, from a consumer perspective, examines how eco-films influence audiences' green consumption values. The study found that eco-films influence audiences' emotions and memories through plot, characters, and settings, ultimately influencing their green consumption values and promoting green consumption behaviors. After coding the content of semi-structured interviews, the study developed a theoretical model for the mechanism by which eco-films influence audiences' green consumption values, addressing a gap in eco-film research.

Furthermore, based on the interviews and theoretical models, the study provides corresponding suggestions for filmmaking. For instance, given the profound role of emotional engagement in audience reception, filmmakers ought to strategically integrate affective dimensions into narrative and characterization. More specifically, based on the emotional responses and influence pathways of the model derived from this study, filmmakers can try to incorporate comedic and heartwarming elements into their films to enhance positive emotions and ultimately help audiences accept the concepts conveyed by the film, such as green consumption. This research aids the film industry in producing eco-films with greater efficacy, ultimately fostering deeper ecological awareness among viewers and contributing to the advancement of ecological civilization and harmonious human-nature relations.

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