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Volume 12 Number 30 June 2023

Using Plant Benefit Information to Engage Customers

This e-GRO Alert provides insights gained from research on U.S. consumer responses to plant benefit information in retail garden center promotions.

Plants provide many benefits to people and the planet. The benefits can be categorized into broad categories, including environmental, emotional, mental, physiological, and social benefits (Hall & Knuth, 2019a, b, c). Many of these benefits are inherently part of interacting with the plants or their presence in the environment (Figure 1). Consequently, consumers may be aware of the benefits, but are blind to them when deciding on the plants they are purchasing and incorporating into their homes and landscapes.



Figure 1. Peace Lily With “Clean Air Plant” Benefit Information.

Photo source: A. Rihn

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Recently, I have been collaborating with Drs. Melinda Knuth (NCSU), Bridget Behe (MSU), and Charlie Hall (TAMU) on projects funded by the Horticulture Research Institute (HRI) and Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI) to address how plant benefit messages can be incorporated into garden center retail marketing communications to engage customers and encourage plant purchasing behavior. Results are from several surveys of U.S. consumers conducted in 2021 and 2022. Three key insights and implications are discussed in the following pages.

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Key Insights & Implications:**1. Generational differences exist when considering the best plant benefit messaging to resonate with customers.**

Millennials' (born between 1981 - 1996) likelihood of buying plants increases if plants display social, physiological, or emotional/mental health benefit information when compared to consumers born prior to 1965 (Table 1).

Gen Z (born after 1996) are more likely to buy plants displaying emotional/mental health benefit information, followed by physiological benefit information. Social benefit information did not influence this group.

Gen X (born between 1965 - 1980) were more likely to buy plants displaying emotional/mental health benefit information, followed by social benefit information. Physiological benefit information did not influence their behavior.

Garden centers can use this information to leverage specific benefit information to engage and resonate with their customers. Point-of-sale materials or newsletters can contain content informing customers about the different benefits of plants. Across the age cohorts, emotional/mental health messaging had a positive impact on likelihood to buy, meaning this information is beneficial regardless of the age of the customer. Conversely, if there is a specific age group that is the primary (or targeted) clientele, greater customer engagement could occur when the messaging aligns with the age cohort of interest. For example, if Millennials are the target, sharing information about social, physical and emotional/mental health benefits of plants could attract this group and enhance their plant purchasing behavior.

Table 1. Impact of Plant Benefit Information on U.S. Customers' Likelihood to Buy Different Plants, by Generation. (n=497)

Age Group	Social Benefit Message	Physical Benefit Message	Emotional / Mental-health Benefit Message
Gen Z	No	Yes	Yes
Millennials	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gen X	No	No	Yes
Baby Boomers	<i>Comparison group</i>		

Note: "Yes" indicates a positive, significant impact on likelihood to buy. "No" indicates no impact on likelihood to buy.

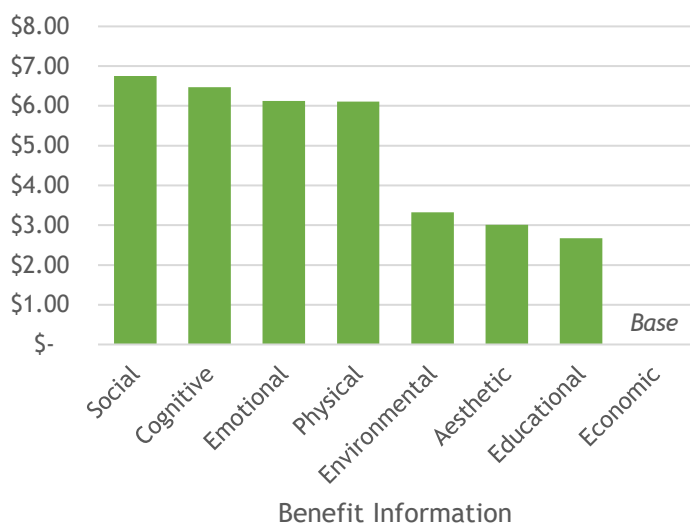


Figure 2. Premiums that U.S. Consumers Are Willing to Pay For Plants With Different Benefit Information, Relative to Economic Benefit Information. (n=435)

Source: Rihn et al.

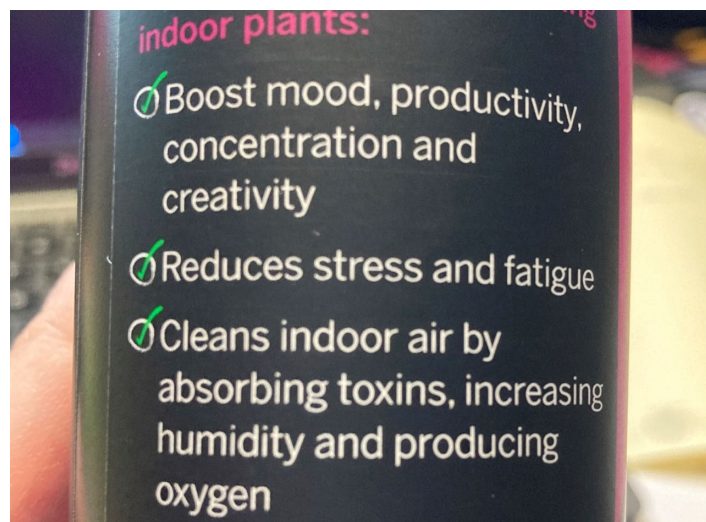


Figure 3. Label on Houseplant Fertilizer Emphasizing the Benefits of Indoor Plants.

Photo credit: A. Rihn

2. Consumers' value for plants varies by the benefit information provided.

The type of benefit information provided to the consumer results in different values they are willing to pay for the plants (Figure 2). Although all of the benefit messages generated premiums, the social and cognitive benefits generate the highest premiums relative to the economic benefits of plants. Emotional and physical benefits also generate premiums relative to economic benefit information. Garden centers can incorporate information about these benefits into their marketing mixes and point-of-sale promotions to generate additional value for customers (Figure 3).

3. Customer demographics influence the impact of plant benefit information on ornamental plant purchases.

Plant spending (in general), education level, and household income increase participants' purchasing behavior for plants with benefit information. Age negatively impacts purchasing behavior, meaning older consumers are less influenced by plant benefit information than younger customers. Assess who is already coming into the garden center and who lives in nearby neighborhoods and may come in. Target benefit information specifically to these groups of people to help them engage with the plants, generate value, and encourage purchasing behavior.

Plants are amazing and provide a plethora of benefits to humans and the environment. Customers often forget about these benefits. Reminding customers about the benefits of plants within the retail environment can aid them in making informed decisions and encourage them to buy plants that align with their needs.

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