

Multimodal Copywriting Strategies through CaaS and DCO in Sustainability Advertising.

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Abstract

Multimodal copywriting enhances sustainability communication in digital advertising, a growing priority for both consumers and brands. While previous research has often considered text and imagery separately, little is known about how these elements work together to reinforce sustainability narratives by integrating three case studies, namely Uniqlo's RE.UNIQLO STUDIO, Watsons' #LessPlasticJuly, and the DHL Coldplay sustainability partnership, alongside six semi-structured interviews with senior advertising and marketing practitioners. Marsh and White's taxonomy of text-image relationship guides the analysis of how multimodal strategies are deployed in these campaigns. Findings emphasise the value of content that is educational, engaging, and credible, alongside dynamic, data-driven approaches that enable real-time personalisation of advertising. Collectively, these strategies enhance message resonance, trust, and consumer engagement. The study contributes to communication and advertising scholars by extending multimodal analysis to sustainability contexts and offers practical guidance for marketers, educators, and students on designing campaigns where text and visuals operate in synergy to shape meaning, build authenticity, and inspire behavioural change.

Keywords: *Multimodal Copywriting, Digital Advertising, Sustainability Communication, Digital Marketing, Content as a Service (CaaS), Dynamic Creative Optimisation (DCO).*

1. Introduction

Sustainability communication has become an ever more essential aspect of digital advertising. As environmental, economic, and social concerns gain global attention, brands are predominantly under pressure to perform and demonstrate authentic and responsible practices (Braga et al., 2024; Bulmer et al., 2024). Digital media platforms further accelerated this transition by exposing consumers to a continuous stream of advertising whilst simultaneously providing them more opportunity to interrogate brand values (Alzub, 2023). Consequently, sustainability-oriented campaigns must be strategically and critically executed to positively shape consumers' perceptions and cultivate trust (Nazish et al., 2024).

In this fast-paced advancement of digital media, consumers are constantly engaging with a massive number of digital ads across various platforms (Alzub, 2023). The proliferation of digital advertisements now poses a significant challenge for marketers, who must navigate through this clutter to deliver meaningful messages that resonate with their audience. Furthermore, consumers are becoming increasingly selective in their engagement with advertisements, often disregarding content they perceive as intrusive or irrelevant (Fan et al., 2024). This behavioural shift in consumer engagement has pushed the advertising industry to rethink its approaches to producing ad content. Consequently, it has prompted the industry

to place a growing emphasis on multimodal communication and integration of visual and textual elements to enhance persuasive messaging and audience engagement (Alifah & Hidayat, 2024). A study by Li et al. (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of a multimodal approach, demonstrating that digital ads with interactive visuals and text significantly outperform traditional formats in driving user engagement. Therefore, an effective digital advertising should incorporate a multimodal copywriting strategy, where text and imagery interact cohesively to construct layered meanings, thereby enhancing persuasive communication and optimising audience engagement (Ren et al., 2024).

While previous scholars have studied sustainability messages and examined the respective roles of text and visuals in isolation, comparatively limited attention has been afforded to how copywriting and visual elements converge to produce integrated meanings (Wang et al., 2022; Zou et al., 2023). This underexplored field of copywriting presents a significant research gap for how text and visuals interact together, which is key to shaping effective sustainability campaigns in today's crowded digital landscape (Li et al., 2022). The objective of the current study is to:

- (i) Explore how multimodal copywriting improves the effectiveness of digital advertising.
- (ii) Explore how combining text and visuals engages users and conveys brand messages.
- (iii) Identify the best practices for creating engaging multimodal content focused on user interaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Role of Copywriting in Digital Advertising

Copywriting pertains to the textual material of advertisements, rich in persuasive language and sales-focused messages (Jesslyn & Agustiningih, 2021). The role of copywriting as a fundamental element of advertising cannot be understated. When executed effectively, copywriting can produce effective sales messages, influence consumer behaviour, as well as propagate new ideas, opinions, and societal messages (Kartsivadze, 2022). In digital advertising, effective copywriting communicates product features and enhances user experience, crucially increasing the likelihood of user engagement and purchase (Zou et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022).

However, the essence of copywriting extends beyond mere text creation. It is the strategic reproduction of ideas or content into new, impactful text, images or audio-visual forms that align with the brand's objectives (Harmoko & Hermawan, 2023). As a vital component of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), copywriting fulfils distinct communicative functions within a campaign (Karapenchev, 2020). The potential of copywriting, however, immensely flourishes in its integration with other elements. For example, Jesslyn and Agustiningih (2021) regard the interaction between copywriting and design to be essential and inseparable; visuals capture attention, while text delivers context.

The potency of this approach is described as multimodal copywriting, which involves the strategic usage of text, images, videos, and sound to create impactful ads (Povoroznyuk, 2022). In the digital landscape, these elements reinforce messages and boost user engagement. Zou et al. (2023) stress that understanding these interactions is key to developing effective strategies in a crowded market. Therefore, copywriting should not be trivialised as just a textual component of a campaign but instead be recognised as the basis for the success of its communication through alignment with broader marketing objectives (Kartsivadze, 2022).

2.2. Understanding Sustainability Messaging

Sustainability messaging has evolved into a key focus in marketing, particularly in fostering brand loyalty and consumer trust. Its integration into modern communication strategies is pivotal to establishing authentic and trustworthy brand image. This is achieved through the conveyance of credible messages,

while simultaneously balancing the brand's economic objectives with ecological and societal obligations (Braga et al., 2024; Bulmer et al., 2024).

Multiple studies (e.g. Salmones et al., 2024; Kapoor et al., 2021; Hurst & Stern, 2020; Tanford et al., 2020; Noor et al., 2023; Florence et al., 2022; Nazish et al., 2024) also demonstrated the positive effect sustainability messaging has on consumer purchasing behaviour, namely accompanied by common devices such as framing and emotional appeals. Studies have also revealed that consumer responses to sustainability-themed marketing are twofold. Emotion-induced affective responses are consequently more evident, while persuasion is increased through sensory-targeted message appeals and eco-friendly source brands (Salmones et al., 2024; Kapoor et al., 2021).

Specific consumer attitudes have also been observed from the framing of sustainability messages. Sustainability messaging that resonates with conservative audiences are highly effective and could even be equally appealing to both conservative and liberal consumers when supplemented with conservative sources (Hurst & Stern, 2020). Additionally, Tanford et al. (2020) found that sustainability advertisements that are positively framed can significantly influence purchase intention, word-of-mouth communication, and a higher willingness to pay a premium. As such, the success of a brand's sustainability messaging is highly dependent on their alignment with consumer personal values, the emotional responses consumer evokes, and consumer's perceived credibility of the brand's sustainability efforts (Florence et al., 2022).

2.3. Consumer Behaviour and Sustainability

Consumer behaviour is a significant factor in promoting sustainability. The emotional affinity they have towards environmental values ultimately influence green consumer behaviour brand attitudes that are shaped by sustainability messaging (Taufique, 2022; Nabivi, 2025).

Consumers generally perceive sustainability marketing content as more relevant than conventional non-green advertisements, suggesting greater potential for surface-level engagement (Nazish et al., 2024). Furthermore, Salnikova et al. (2022) found that consumers possessing a strong global identity are more inclined to engage with sustainability initiatives when the messaging aligns with their identity, specifically when promotion frames are coupled with spatial and temporal frames. Additionally, Septianto and Lee (2020) discovered the dependence of sustainability message effectiveness on the emotional response they evoke, with different images and message combination resulting in varying levels of consumer engagement. This aligns with Kao and Du's (2020) findings about how self-reference and strong argumentation in advertisement yield the best results, especially when positive moral and social emotions are combined.

As with communication, sustainability messaging requires a great level of transparency and greater effort to constantly maintain integrity to forge brand authenticity. This, in turn, cultivates positive attitudes, trust, and behavioural intentions (Yang & Battochio, 2021). Oppositely, in the case of misleading claims or ambiguous messaging, sustainability marketing efforts would break down, causing lasting distrust, scepticism, and diminished motivation (Shelty & Nayak, 2024; Wu & Long, 2024). Higgins et al. (2020) cautioned that messaging that lacks clarity and accuracy can potentially lead to consumer suspicion, thus underscoring the need for a continuous commitment to transparency in sustainability communications.

2.4. Psychology of Persuasion in Advertising

The psychology of persuasion is among the fundamental aspects of advertising that influences how consumers perceive and subsequently respond to its messages. The persuasive power of a message is closely linked to how authentic and credible it appears to the consumer, such as easily-verifiable claims of sustainability that would supplement more ethical purchasing decisions (Ginder & Byun, 2022).

The comprehensive taxonomy of persuasion techniques provided by Braca and Dondio (2023) highlights the technical role of language styles, cognitive biases, and emotional engagement in persuasive communication. Similarly, Hamby and Jones (2022) detailed the relevance of storylines, made vivid through elements of narrative advertisements and relatable characters in enhancing audience engagement and persuasiveness. A narrative approach to green messaging, as Kim et al. (2022) observed, is more persuasive compared to a factual approach, as interweaving specific facts still enhances message credibility.

Furthermore, emotion-based themes in advertising also help to foster brand engagement, as Kemp et al. (2020) found. This engagement could further develop into active advocacy when the organisational status of the communicator aligns with the audience's reliance on facts. Building upon the tremendous effectiveness of emotion, Balaskas et al. (2023) suggests the leveraging of emotive languages in sustainability messages to evoke resonant emotional responses, though denouncing the effectiveness of fear appeal messages. Kapoor et al. (2023) noted that concrete message appeals are more potent in increasing purchase intent if they simultaneously heighten consumer perceptions of message authenticity and product sustainability. This corroborates Neto et al.'s (2020) research, which examined a positive relationship between message-consistent environmental certifications (green seals) in sustainable products advertising and adoptions of sustainable consumption practices.

2.5. Digital Platforms and Sustainability Messages

Digital platforms such as social media are crucial in disseminating sustainability messages and influencing consumer behaviour, especially social media. Over the last few years, social media campaigns of various brands have successfully capitalised on emerging sustainability trends (Nabivi, 2021). Kong et al. (2021) identified ideal conditions for effective sustainability communication on social media: messages from non-luxury brands in cultures with high sustainability awareness and need. This indicates the effectiveness of digital sustainability messaging as highly context-dependent.

The enhanced audience engagement of sustainability messages on social media was observed to have also promoted sustainable behavioural changes (Nabivi, 2025). When fashioned into engaging and entertaining forms of content, these sustainability messages have the capacity to profoundly impact consumer attitudes and behaviours towards green products (Gupta & Syed, 2022).

Moreover, Zafar et al. (2021) outlined the role of social media usage in cultivating environmental responsibility within its users, which in turn shaped sustainable purchasing attitudes. But the level of trust users possess towards social media platforms and its perceived environmental effectiveness were found to significantly moderate this relationship. Therefore, to maximise their impact on consumer behaviour, digital platforms must first foster trust and demonstrate environmental effectiveness. Sun and Wang (2020) discovered the effect social media marketing has on product knowledge, which subsequently influences consumer purchase intention. Similarly, Nekmahmud et al. (2022) discovered that social media marketing also has a positive and significant correlation with the purchase intent of green products on social media. Chi's (2021) findings expand upon these synthesised connections by suggesting that social media significantly impacts green consumption intention through motivation, and environmental concerns enhance this relationship. However, it is important to note that the inevitable scepticism surrounding social media communication negatively affects green purchase intent via the moderation of perceived information utility. Therefore, effective promotions of green products on social media requires brand authenticity and consumer-oriented sustainable advertising (Luo et al., 2020).

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study, built upon Marsh and White's (2003) taxonomy, provides a structured approach to integrating visual (e.g., images, videos) and textual (e.g., copy, hashtags) elements in multimodal digital advertising. As emphasised by Karapenchev (2020), a multimodal approach that

incorporates different modes of communication is crucial to elevating user engagement and message effectiveness.

Thus, the framework (Figure 1) categorises visual-text relationships into three distinct levels, establishing the best practices for effective content creation. These levels reflect the varying degrees to which visuals contribute to the interpretation of meaning when combined with text, and the extent of their impact towards multimodal copywriting impact in digital advertising.

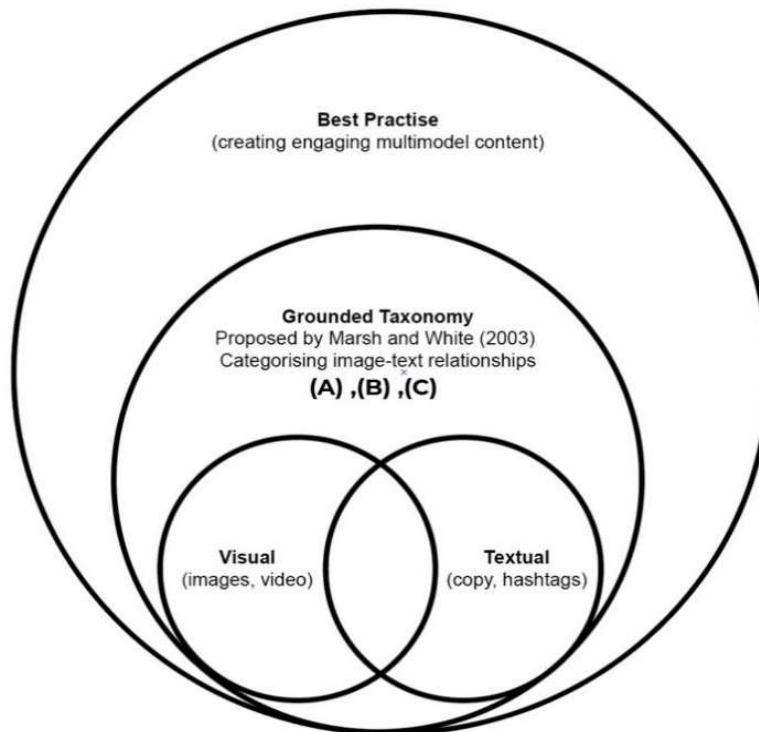


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

3. Methods

This research adopted a qualitative design, combining case study and analysis with in-depth semi-structured interviews with senior advertising practitioners. Three contemporary sustainability-focused digital advertising campaigns were selected for examination: Uniqlo's RE.UNIQLO STUDIO, Watsons' #LESSPLASTICJULY, and the DHL-Coldplay sustainability partnership. The campaigns were identified based on three criteria:

- (i) their explicit alignment with prevailing sustainability trends in marketing (Duttgupta et al., 2023);
- (ii) evidence of measurable audience engagement through social media interactions (Nekmahmud et al., 2022); and
- (iii) demonstrable influence on brand perception (Kapoor et al., 2021).

Each campaign was analysed using Marsh and White's (2003) taxonomy of text-image relationships to evaluate the extent to which multimodal strategies reinforced the communication of sustainability narratives. As part of the study's ethical considerations, campaign materials are described and critically interpreted without the reproduction of copyrighted images. All three aforementioned campaigns were conducted in recent years and chosen as appropriate case studies for exemplifying multimodal strategies of text-image integration. Additionally, these selected campaigns illustrate how different

implementations of image-text interaction across various online platforms can produce varying results in conveying sustainability messages.

To complement the case study analysis, six senior advertising practitioners (copywriters and account managers) from three distinct international advertising agencies were selected to participate in the in-depth semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the multimodal strategy executions of digital campaigns in a real-world setting and how they can shape consumer perceptions and actions. The six participants were carefully selected for their extensive experience across both traditional and digital media platforms, as well as their diverse industry expertise in the FMCG, healthcare, and nonprofit sectors. This approach ensured a robust breadth of professional insight whilst affording the depth necessary to examine how multimodal strategies are conceptualised, negotiated, and enacted within the practice of sustainability communication.

4. Results

4.1. Case Study Analysis

This section analyses three digital sustainability campaigns that strategically utilised multimodal copywriting strategies across different digital platforms to execute its sustainability initiatives. Using Marsh and White's taxonomy, the case studies revealed how the three brands leveraged different executions of image-text interactions to engage audiences with sustainability messaging that align with their communication goals. The analysis examines 20 materials per campaign: 10 pertaining to visual elements (e.g. images, videos, and graphics), while the rest addresses the textual content (e.g. headlines, captions, body text, hashtags) of social media posts, website banners, and digital ads. The case studies also investigate how visual elements adapt across different digital platforms as well as different tones and styles in the sustainability messaging strategy. Subsequently, research results showed the effect that different executions of image-text interactions have on the meaning-making process and audience engagement in sustainability messaging.

4.1.1. Uniqlo Malaysia's RE.UNIQLO STUDIO campaign

The launching of Uniqlo Malaysia's RE.UNIQLO STUDIO campaign was mobilised through Instagram stories, reels, and posts. This campaign targeted environmentally conscious Malaysian consumers by highlighting Uniqlo's circular fashion efforts, which include clothing repair, remaking, reuse, and recycling services, aimed at extending the lifespan of garments. Alongside eye-catching visuals, the campaign's messaging incorporated sustainability keywords like "repair," "remake", "longer life," and "new life" to promote fashion waste reduction. Analysis on RE.UNIQLO Studio's upcycling campaign demonstrated Marsh and White's (2003) "Beyond the Text" relationship, where visuals of refashioned clothing supplemented the expressed themes of revitalisation by providing additional dimensions of visual conveyance. These images not only illustrate their sustainability messaging but also signify the brand's credibility and authenticity, thus helping bolster their appeal to eco-conscious fashion consumers.

4.1.2. Watsons' #LessPlasticJuly campaign

Presented through a website article format, the campaign is inspired by the Australian Plastic Free July movement. This initiative educated consumers about Watsons' sustainable product alternatives while conveying sustainability messages through persuasive copywriting. Under Marsh and White's taxonomy, Watsons' #LessPlasticJuly campaign demonstrated a "Close Relation" interaction between visual and textual elements, where images of plastic-free products directly reinforced the campaign's call to action. The content's inclusive emphasis through linguistic choices (such as the collective pronoun "we") creates a tone of openness in the message and invokes a sense of shared responsibility. Combined with Watson's product visuals as well as the provided factual information on plastic reduction, this approach creates a cohesive narrative that actively engages audiences by presenting the concerns of plastic consumption while effectively positioning Watsons as a retailer supporting sustainable solutions.

4.1.3. DHL x Coldplay Partnership Campaign

A one-minute video commercial of the DHL x Coldplay partnership campaign collaboration is backgrounded by the band's ambition to reduce carbon emissions during their "Music of the Spheres" world tour. With DHL as their official logistics partner, the campaign aligns with the sustainability target of Coldplay, highlighting the brand's commitment to eco-friendly solutions and responsible sustainability. Similar to RE:UNIQLO STUDIO, the DHL x Coldplay campaign also demonstrated a "Beyond the Text" interaction. The commercial showcases DHL's multiple environmental efforts, which included their choice of using electric vehicles for transporting Coldplay's tour equipment as well as the distribution of reusable concert wristbands. These creative expressions actively provide concrete visual evidence that supports their textual sustainability claims. As such, this dynamic format illustrates the lasting commitment of both parties to eco-friendly initiatives in providing entertainment to a global audience of both music fans and sustainability-conscious consumers.

4.2. Definitions of Key Terms

Interviews with senior industry practitioners yielded valuable insights that revealed six key terminologies widely used in the industry but is underdefined academically for current approaches to sustainability in digital advertising. The following are the definitions of the key terms that have emerged from the interviews:

- (i) Emotional Hook: The usage of emotionally engaging visuals and texts that capture the audience's attention within the first few seconds of exposure, creating long lasting impressions
- (ii) Omnichannel Consistency: The practice of ensuring a consistent and seamless user experience across all media platforms to enhance the user's journey
- (iii) Dynamic Creative Optimisation (DCO): A data-driven approach that tailors advertising content in real-time for diverse audiences to enhance the messaging's relevancy and impact
- (iv) Continuous Testing and Iteration: An agile approach of continually testing with and refining ad formats, messages, and placements to optimise campaign effectiveness against various demographics
- (v) Micro-Moment Marketing: The strategic targeting of brief but intent-driven crucial moments when consumers are most ready to act
- (vi) Content as a Service (CaaS): A communication approach where brands provide educational, entertaining, and rich content that builds relationships and establishes long-term trusts with audiences

4.3 Insights From Advertising Practitioners

After analysing the aforementioned case studies on Uniqlo, Watson, and DHL's digital advertising campaigns, the present study conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 6 advertising practitioners to further contextualise how the employed multimodal strategies can benefit sustainability messaging efforts in a real-world setting. The 6 interview participants are comprised of 3 senior copywriters (designated as CW-A, CW-B, CW-C) and 3 account managers (designated as AM-A, AM-B, AM-C), ensuring balanced inputs from experts in both creative and client strategy. Building on the case study analysis, results from the interview yielded valuable insights into advertising practitioners' strategic decision-making processes regarding effective multimodal strategies to achieve success in digital sustainability advertising campaigns. Among their responses, six key factors that drives campaign effectiveness were highlighted by the interview participants.

4.3.1. Emotional Hook

The importance of emotional engagement emerged strongly as the fundamental factor to a sustainability campaign's success, with participants CW-B and CW-C noting that "ads triggering emotions leave lasting impressions". Both participants stressed the importance of capturing attention within the first 3 to 4 seconds of exposure through a combination of dynamic, high-contrast visuals and minimal amounts of

text. Consequently, this image-text integration strategy could effectively allow sustainability messages to form instant, yet lasting emotional connections within audiences.

4.3.2. Omnichannel Consistency

Participant AM-B highlighted omnichannel consistency as a key consideration for campaign success. As an account manager, they emphasised the necessity of "seamless transitions between digital platforms to enhance the user journey". They mentioned that this approach has been proven effective for maintaining content consistency of the campaign across different platforms such as social media, websites, and email.

4.3.3. Dynamic Creative Optimisation

Insights from the interviews also revealed a key technical approach in the notion of Dynamic Creative Optimisation (DCO). In essence, DCO tailors messaging for diverse audiences, therefore enhancing its impact and resonance. As noted by participant AM-A, DCO "allows content to change in real-time based on user data, making the ads highly relevant and engaging". Consequently, brands that utilise DCO could potentially improve the engagement of sustainability messages and create more favourable brand perceptions.

4.3.4. Continuous Testing and Iteration

Participants CW-A and CW-B both advocated for continuous testing and iteration, emphasising the fundamental need to "adopt an agile approach by continually testing ad formats, messages, and placements to refine strategies". This approach is particularly important in digital sustainability advertising as consumer may respond differently to eco-claims and messaging across varying demographics. Therefore, fine-tuning multimodal elements by ensuring a balanced blend of textual clarity and visual impression could optimise consumer receptiveness and message engagement to enhance the effectiveness of a campaign.

4.3.5. Micro-Moment Marketing

In line with Continuous Testing and Iteration, another emerging factor revealed during the interview with participant AM-A is Micro-Moment Marketing. They described Micro-Moment Marketing as "those brief, intent-driven moments when consumers are ready to act", including instances of making a purchase, finding an answer, or discovering something new. AM-A expressed its necessity in today's fast-paced digital landscape, where users have evolved into a consumer base that expect immediate, relevant information whenever they need it.

4.3.6. Content as a Service (CaaS)

Perhaps most significantly highlighted during the interviews, participants considered Content as a Service (CaaS) as transformative for sustainability communication. When executed successfully in digital campaigns, the adoption of CaaS can position the content as an educational and engaging resource. As suggested by participants AM-B and CW-B, "brands need to act like educators or even entertainers, offering useful content that builds trust". This approach crucially turns sporadic engagements such as sustainability messaging from transactional campaigns into long-term relationships with the audience.

5. Conclusion

This study enhances understanding of how multimodal copywriting contributes to sustainability communication in digital advertising. The case studies of Uniqlo, Watsons, and DHL with Coldplay, together with insights from industry practitioners, show that text and image achieve the greatest effect when they are designed to complement and extend one another (Zou et al., 2023). Theoretically, the research extends Marsh and White's (2003) taxonomy to sustainability contexts and highlights how emotional appeal and multimodal storytelling shape consumer responses (Hamby & Jones, 2022).

Practically, the findings provide guidance for the development of campaigns that combine persuasion with credibility (Wu & Liu, 2022). Emotional engagement, consistency across platforms, and the use of data-driven optimisation emerge as key principles for connecting with audiences who prioritise sustainability (Gupta & Syed, 2022). The study illustrates the value of linking conceptual analysis with industry application, equipping emerging professionals with insights for a digital-first environment. Effective sustainability advertising rests on the deliberate orchestration of text and image. When carefully aligned, the two amplify meaning and leave impressions that both raise awareness and encourage positive behavioural change (Li et al., 2022).

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