

## Consumer response to green marketing

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### **Project Description:**

Academics and practitioners are paying increasing attention to the environmental problems and the measures to be adopted to minimise the effects on societies. Green marketing has been growing rapidly, as customers are becoming more conscious of their surroundings and how their consumption habits and practices have affected the environment. The increasing environmental concerns of customers has resulted in the growth of a market for green products, as well as an exponential growth in green advertising in the past two decades (Futerra 2008; Atkinson and Kim 2015). Advertising plays an important role in enhancing public awareness about the environmental concerns, positively affecting the images of socially responsible brands, and ultimately affecting consumers' choices of green products. Recent advertising research particularly stressed on the importance of developing the appropriate blend of communication and messaging techniques in instigating positive evaluations of green products and brands by consumers (Sheehan 2013; Bailey et al. 2016).

Zinkhan and Carlson (1995, p. 1) define green advertising as 'the promotional messages that may appeal to the needs and desires of environmentally concerned consumers'. Furthermore, green or sustainable products refer to goods and services that allow for economic development while conserving for future generations. Extant literature explored the effects of various subjective variables such as consumer orientation, personality and guilt level, involvement, and CSR skepticism. However, there is a need to explore the efficacy of the structural components of advertisements upon consumer response. The association of a green brand with appropriate qualities and images through using powerful elements in advertisements may lead to more positive brand attitude, perceived brand image, and increased purchase intents.

Although the use of green claims in advertising represents billions of dollars a year in spending, the efficacy of green appeals and the effectiveness of the ad elements in reinforcing these appeals as a communication strategy remains uncertain. Green advertisements utilise different appeals, including functional appeals, emotional appeals, or a combination of both, to persuade customers to purchase products that are less harmful to the environment (Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibanez 2009; Matthes et al. 2014). Various scholars investigated the effects of different appeals in advertising on customer attitudes and behaviours. A recurrent theme in green advertising research has been advertising appeal (Mattila, 1999; Brown, 2009), although

the existing literature still lacks a consistent view of the roles of various positive and negative appeals in change and formation of customer attitude and persuasion.

In this programme of research, the student may want to focus on exploring how any of the structural components such as textual information, colour, music, visuals, and spokesperson may enhance the effectiveness of green advertisements, influencing target audiences on a deeper, psychological level. Indeed, except for a few studies (Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Haguis, 1995; Manrai et al., 1997; Chan, 2000; Tucker et al., 2012), minimal attention has been given to investigating how the design of the green claim itself influences the processing of the advertising message and its effectiveness. However, green advertising is just one of the factors which are instrumental in promoting green consumers to purchase green products. Research on green marketing identifies other factors such as awareness of green issues, increased level of information availability, increased concern for the environment, and increase in popularity of green products as some of the factors that are influential in promoting green consumption. Alternatively, the research could focus on the application of various relevant theories and concepts in explaining how consumers' actions can be predicted by their attitudes. Consumers' attitudes play a significant role in forming an intention to act in a certain behavior, and thus, exploring the ways in which attitudes guide consumers' green purchase behavior is of great importance.

Therefore, potential research questions to be explored in this programme of research may be:

- to examine various factors influencing the effectiveness of the structural elements of green advertisements
- to explore the challenges associated with promoting green consumption
- to investigate the application of relevant theories in explaining consumers' attitudes towards green products

We welcome applications for PhD research in the area of green advertising and we are interested in hearing from potential PhD students who have an interest in social marketing. The research may follow a mixed methods approach, involving the collection of quantitative and qualitative data.

#### **About the supervisors:**

This PhD research would build on a relevant study on the effects of music in green advertising, carried out at the Open University by Dr Morteza Abolhasani and Professor Gordon Liu (accepted by the European Journal of Marketing on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022). [Morteza's](#) research interests include consumer behavior, consumer psychology and sensory marketing. These areas of research are directly relevant to the focus of the current project and lies at the intersection of exploring the effects of various structural characteristics of green advertisements on customers' cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses. [Gordon's](#) (one of) research interest is on the combination of corporate social responsibility and marketing strategy, with a particular focus on how a firm should incorporate and communicate environmental

sustainability in ways that will enhance the firm's reputation. Green advertising/marketing (strategy) is central to this line of work.

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