

Consumer response to green advertising

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Project Description:

Human activities have increased carbon dioxide emissions, driving up temperatures, causing numerous adverse effects on climate and environment such as extreme weather and melting polar ice. Scientists constantly advise against practices that negatively affect the environment, emphasising the need for more pro-environmental behaviours to ensure the well-being of present and future generations. 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. 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). 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) defined green advertising as 'the promotional messages that may appeal to the needs and desires of environmentally concerned consumers'. Banerjee et al. (1995, p. 22) further defined green advertising as any advertising that 'explicitly or implicitly addresses the relationship between a product/service and the biophysical environment; promotes a green lifestyle with or without highlighting a product/service; and/or presents a corporate image of environmental responsibility'. Furthermore, green or sustainable products refer to goods and services that allow for economic development while conserving for future generations. A green product is one that has less environmental impact and is more eco-friendly. 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. Various scholars investigated the effects of different appeals in advertising on customer attitudes and behaviours. However, a recurrent theme in green advertising research has been what advertising appeal enhances the effectiveness of the ad. For example, Brown (2009) points out that emotional responses generated by advertisements help in transferring customer emotions to the brand and create brand awareness and perception, as well as generating engagement and memorability. Emotional appeals may influence customers' reactions to ads, intensify their attention, and affect their brand attitudes (Mattila, 1999). However, 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, student may focus on exploring how any of the structural components such as textual information, colour, music, visuals, and spokesperson can make advertisements more appealing to target audience on a deeper, psychological level in the context of social marketing. 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.

Therefore, 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. This will address the methodological gap, i.e. the almost exclusively positivist approach adopted by the existing research.

About the supervisors:

Dr Morteza Abolhasani'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.

Professor Gordon Liu (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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