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The determinants of consumer perceptions of greenwashing

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Summary

Numerous companies today engage in greenwashing, which tends to create confusion for consumers and to result in negative consumer responses. These negative effects are particularly worrisome for companies making genuine corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. How can these companies communicate effectively about their CSR activities in a marketplace where a profusion of CSR claims, well-founded or not, are made? This research addresses this question by investigating how consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing emerge.

Through two experimental studies in which participants are exposed to product advertisements, this research examines the influence of the presence of a third-party label in the ad, the positioning of the brand with respect to CSR, the type of appeal (rational versus emotional) used in the ad, and the utilitarian/hedonic feature of the product category considered.

The results indicate that consumers use different cues to assess ad credibility and the presence of greenwashing in an ad. Furthermore, the positioning of the company with respect to CSR and the type of appeal used appear to play key roles in determining consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing, whereas the use of third-party labels has no main significant effect on consumers’ greenwashing perceptions, and can even lead to negative consumer responses.

This research contributes to CSR communication research and offers companies some guidance to avoid the negative consequences of being perceived as a “greenwasher” when communicating about their CSR activities.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, greenwashing, consumer perceptions, credibility.

JEL Classification: M31.
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Originality/value – This research contributes to CSR communication research and offers companies some guidance to avoid the negative consequences of being perceived as a “greenwasher” when communicating about their CSR activities.

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1. Introduction

Companies over the world spend billions of dollars today on corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Smith, 2012), defined broadly as companies’ status and activities with regards to their perceived obligations toward society (Brown and Dacin, 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001). A key motivator of such efforts is consumer demand. A recent global survey of 10,000 consumers in 10 countries (Cone Communications and Echo Research, 2011) notably reports that 81% of consumers want companies to be more socially responsible. As a result, companies increasingly communicate about their CSR activities to promote their brands and to differentiate themselves on the marketplace. Green marketing has notably become highly popular (Murphy et al., 2010). As Gillespie (2008, p. 79) states it, “it seems we cannot turn a corner without being lambasted by the ‘eco’ credentials of yet another product or service scrabbling to portray itself as another small step to saving the planet”.

However, numerous companies today engage in greenwashing (Furlow, 2009; TerraChoice, 2010). Greenwashing has been defined as a company’s communication operations that mislead consumers regarding its environmental practices or the environmental benefits of its products or services (Parguel et al., 2011). CorpWatch, a non-profit research group that seeks to expose multinational corporations’ malfeasance, further defines greenwashing as “the phenomenon of socially and environmentally destructive corporations attempting to preserve and expand their markets by posing as friends of the environment and leaders in the struggle to eradicate poverty” (2010). While differences may exist between current definitions of greenwashing, the common ground of these definitions rests on the idea that a company disseminates false or incomplete information to appear socially and environmentally responsible, more than it actually is.

Greenwashing examples abound in the car industry. For instance, the brand Mazda was recently accused of greenwashing for its advertisement featuring the characters of Universal Pictures’s film The Lorax, which promotes the Mazda CX-5 that “received the only certified truffala tree seal of approval” with its “revolutionary skyactiv technology” (Gillespie, 2012; Griner, 2012). But greenwashing is also common in other product categories. According to the findings of TerraChoice’s studies (2009; 2010), greenwashing is particularly frequent in advertisements for household cleaning products, toys and baby products, consumer electronics, and cosmetics.

Greenwashing practices tend to create confusion for consumers and are generally associated with lower consumer trust in the environmental performance of the promoted products (Chen and Chang, 2012; Furlow, 2009). These negative effects are particularly worrisome for companies making genuine CSR efforts. How can these companies communicate effectively about their CSR activities in a marketplace where a profusion of CSR claims, well-founded or not, are made? To answer this question, improving our understanding of consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing is critical. While some research endeavors attempt to identify the drivers of companies’ greenwashing activities (Delmas and Burbano, 2011) or investigate consumer responses to companies’
greenwashing behaviors (e.g., Chen and Chan, 2012; Parguel et al., 2011), existing literature provides little information about the way consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing emerge in the first place. Yet, companies need to have a clear picture of the factors that affect consumers’ own perceptions of greenwashing if they want to avoid the negative consequences of being perceived as a “greenwasher” when communicating about their CSR activities.

The current research seeks to address this issue. Specifically, through two experiments in which participants are exposed to product advertisements, this research investigates how consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing and attitudes toward the brand vary depending on the presence of a third-party label in the ad, the positioning of the brand with regards to CSR, the type of appeal (rational versus emotional) used in the ad, and the utilitarian/hedonic feature of the product category considered.

2. Theoretical Framework

In promoting an eco-friendly or socially responsible image, companies generally hope to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors (Banerjee et al., 1995; Carlson et al., 1993; Chen and Chang, 2012). Previous research suggests that consumers tend to respond positively to CSR communications in general (e.g. Brown and Dacin, 1997; Sen and Bhattacharya, 2001; Sen et al., 2006) and to green communications in particular (e.g., Rios et al., 2006; Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius (1995)’s study for instance demonstrates that green appeals are more persuasive than non-green appeals when promoting a green product to consumers with little knowledge or interest in environmental issues. At the same time, however, CSR communication also has the potential to trigger consumer skepticism (Crane, 2000; Laroche et al., 2001; Mohr et al., 1998; Mohr et al., 2001; Pomering and Johnson, 2009). Since the perceived credibility of information underlies consumers’ confidence in a company’s claims (Erdem and Swait, 1998), finding ways to enhance the credibility of their CSR communications in order to alleviate consumer skepticism therefore is key for companies (Parguel et al., 2011; Du et al., 2010; Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004; Ottman et al., 2006). In this perspective, several factors that could increase the credibility of CSR communications have been put forward in the literature.

Enhancing the credibility of CSR communications

As consumers often don’t have the expertise or ability to verify CSR claims, message endorsement and/or seals of approval by expert third parties that ascertain the believability of the product claims made may enhance the credibility of CSR messages (Carpenter and Larceneux, 2008; Ottman et al., 2006). The current proliferation of third-party and company self-declared labels may however cause confusion in consumers’ mind (D’Souza, 2004). Furthermore, consumers often have difficulties understanding
what labels are intended to communicate, and according to Thøgersen (2002), uncertainty about the meaning of a label is often accompanied by mistrust. For these reasons, labels remain controversial communication tools (Ottman et al., 2006). Nevertheless, existing literature suggests that the perceived believability of an advertisement that bears a seal of approval is generally higher than that of an advertisement without any seals (Beltramini and Stafford, 1993; Miyazaki and Krishnamurti, 2002). Labels may indeed act as signals (Kirmani and Rao, 2000) and, according to Carpenter and Larceneux (2008), the capacity of a label to generate positive associations largely depends on its perceived credibility, which in turn depends on the credibility of its source.

A second important factor is the positioning of the company – or the part of the company’s identity and value proposition that is actively communicated to the target audience (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000) – with regards to CSR (Ginsberg and Bloom, 2004). Companies indeed may vary in the extent to which they rely on their CSR activities to position themselves, relative to their competitors, in the minds of consumers (Du et al., 2007), and previous research suggests that “a company’s CSR positioning is likely to amplify the effectiveness of CSR communication because, given that the company has taken the relatively uncommon and perhaps risky stance of positioning itself on CSR rather than superficially engaging in such activities, stakeholders are likely not only to pay more attention to its CSR message, but also to believe in the authenticity of its CSR endeavors” (Du et al., 2010, p. 15). Literature on green branding supports this view. Hartmann et al.’s (2005) study demonstrates that a green positioning has an overall positive effect on consumers’ brand attitudes and the results of Phau and Ong’s (2007) research show that green claims made by brands positioned as “green” are perceived as more credible and lead to more favorable consumer responses than when the same claims are made by brands with a neutral environmental image.

Finally, while the type of appeal has been largely overlooked in CSR communication research, selecting the appropriate appeal is crucial for communication effectiveness (Holmes and Crocker, 1987; Stafford, 2005) and represents another factor that could potentially enhance the credibility of CSR communications. According to prior literature, an appeal, or persuasive statement, can be directed either toward logic (i.e., rational appeal) or toward emotion (i.e., emotional appeal) (Holmes and Crocker, 1987; Mortimer, 2008). Rational appeals are defined as the presentation of factual information in a straightforward way, characterized by objectivity and relying on arguments about product attributes, demonstration, or testimonials to convey one or more reasons for which the consumer should acquire the advertised product or service (Stafford and Day, 1995). In contrast, emotional appeals rely on the emotional, experiential aspect of consumption and seek to elicit an immediate feeling such as a feeling of joy, fear, guilt, or laughter to get consumers “to do things they should or stop doing things they shouldn’t” (Kotler and Armstrong; 1994, p. 468). With regards to CSR communication, it has been argued that for CSR claims to be persuasive and credible, they ought to be as specific and meaningful as possible (Davis, 1993; Ottman et al., 2006). A recent survey also reveals that consumers tend to favor fact-based CSR communications (Schmeltz,
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2012). In this light, rational, argument-based appeals appear more appropriate for CSR messages than emotional ones. However, previous research further suggests that the type of appeal should match the product type for maximum effectiveness and that a rational appeal is more effective for utilitarian products whereas an emotional approach is more appropriate for hedonic or experiential products (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). It is therefore likely that the ability of a rational appeal to enhance the credibility of CSR messages vary with the type of product involved. While a rational appeal likely enhances the credibility of CSR messages that involve utilitarian products, this effect may not hold true in the case of CSR messages involving hedonic products, for which an emotional appeal may be more suitable.

Consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing

While these three factors may be effective in enhancing the credibility of CSR messages, whether they might also be effective in lowering consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing remains unexplored. Existing research endeavors focusing on consumers’ responses to greenwashing practices tend to define greenwashing as a voluntary act of a company, independent of consumers’ perceptions of it. For example, Benoit-Moreau et al. (2009) consider that affixing a self-declared eco-label in an ad constitutes a greenwashing practice and investigate how the presence (versus absence) of such label in a product advertisement affects consumers’ perceptions of the company and of the advertised product. The results of their study show that the presence of a self-declared label has a significant positive impact on the perceived quality of the product and on the perceived green image of the product and of the company. These results suggest that while the presence of a self-declared eco-label corresponds to one of TerraChoice’s (2010) “sins of greenwashing” and represents a greenwashing practice in theory (Parguel et al., 2009), consumers for their part do not seem to perceive the presence of a self-declared eco-label as an attempt of the company to mislead them (i.e., they do not perceive it as a greenwashing cue). In other words, existing literature provides little information about the factors that influence consumers’ own perceptions of greenwashing and whether and how the factors that affect the perceived credibility of CSR messages also influence greenwashing perceptions.

Nonetheless, as greenwashing entails the idea that a company misleads consumers about its socially responsible character and/or the properties of its advertised product, we might expect that those factors that enhance the perceived credibility of a CSR communication can also lower consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing – even though the relationship that exist between perceived credibility and perceived greenwashing has never been empirically tested. In addition, previous research suggests that when consumers perceive an advertisement as credible, they are more likely to hold positive attitudes toward the brand (Cotte et al., 2005; MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). Along those lines, we might expect that those factors that enhance the perceived credibility of CSR communication and lower perceptions of greenwashing will exert a positive influence on consumers’
attitudes toward the brand and purchase intentions. Thus, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: The presence (versus absence) of a credible, third-party label in a CSR advertisement leads to (a) higher consumer perceptions of ad credibility, (b) lower consumer perceptions of greenwashing, (c) higher consumer attitudes toward the brand, and (d) higher purchase intentions.

H2: A CSR advertisement will lead to (a) higher consumer perceptions of ad credibility, (b) lower consumer perceptions of greenwashing, (c) higher consumer attitudes toward the brand, and (d) higher purchase intentions when the brand is positioned on CSR than when the brand has a neutral positioning with respect to CSR.

H3: A rational appeal (respectively an emotional appeal) will lead to (a) higher consumer perceptions of ad credibility, (b) lower consumer perceptions of greenwashing, (c) higher consumer attitudes toward the brand, and (d) higher purchase intentions than an emotional appeal (respectively a rational appeal) when the advertised product is utilitarian (respectively hedonic).

While these hypotheses separately investigate the effects of the factors discussed, these factors are usually combined in advertisements and might therefore have multiplicative effects on consumers’ greenwashing perceptions and brand attitudes. More specifically, the hypothesized effects of the label and of the type of appeal used in the ad might be reinforced when the communication is made by a company positioned on CSR. Accordingly, we formulate the following additional hypotheses:

H4: The presence (versus absence) of a credible, third-party label will have a stronger effect on consumers’ (a) perceptions of ad credibility, (b) perceptions of greenwashing, (c) attitudes toward the brand, and (d) purchase intentions when the brand is positioned on CSR than when the brand has a neutral positioning with respect to CSR.

H5: The type of appeal used in the ad will have a stronger effect on consumers’ (a) perceptions of ad credibility, (b) perceptions of greenwashing, (c) attitudes toward the brand, and (d) purchase intentions when the brand is positioned on CSR than when the brand has a neutral positioning with respect to CSR.

These hypotheses will be tested in two studies focusing on two product categories: products from the banking sector (i.e., an utilitarian product category, Stafford et al., 2002) in Study 1 and cosmetics (i.e., a hedonic product category, Zaichkowsky, 1987) in Study 2.
3. STUDY 1: Products from the banking sector

METHODOLOGY

Design, Stimuli, and Procedure

To test our hypotheses, we employed a 2 (Neutral positioning versus CSR positioning) x 2 (third-party label versus no label) x 2 (rational versus emotional appeal) factorial between-subjects experimental design. We developed eight stimuli/scenarios to represent the combinations of each of the three factors. The final eight stimuli/scenarios are in Appendix 1.

We use two real companies from the banking sector pretested as being positioned differently with respect to CSR: Triodos (CSR positioning) and Belfius (neutral positioning). In a first task, respondents read about the mission of one of the two companies. Then they received an ad for a solidarity saving account offered by the bank. Depending on the experimental condition, the ad appeal either was more emotional or more rational. As suggested by Stafford and Day (1995, p. 62), “the emotional ads were designed to generate positive emotions and create warm feelings; they included subjective, evaluative properties. The rational ads were more direct, containing factual information presented in a straightforward manner; they were characterized by objectivity and designed to be thinking ads”. In addition, the ad either mentioned or did not mention a third-party label. This label was fictitious but referred to the self-regulatory body of the advertising industry and the most well-known consumer association of the country. In a second task, respondents completed several items that measured the variables under investigation.

Pretest of Manipulation

We ran a pretest of the manipulation with 40 respondents who were randomly assigned to one of two scenarios (i.e., emotional/label/Triodos versus rational/label/Belfius). Respondents then were asked to rate, on seven-point Likert scales anchored at 1 = “totally disagree” and 7 = “totally agree”, the type of ad appeal (13 items), the CSR positioning of the bank (5 items), the credibility of the label (7 items), as well as the ad realism (3 items) (see Table 1). We also pre-tested a first set of 6 items to measure consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing on seven-point Likert scales anchored at 1 = “totally disagree” and 7 = “totally agree”. The pretest ended with demographic questions (age, gender, occupation).

Results showed that both ads were perceived as realistic (rational/Belfius condition: 5.27 versus emotional/Triodos condition: 4.91), with no significant difference in terms of realism between the two condition (p=0.320). As expected, the manipulation of the CSR positioning (α=.931) was successful: the bank Triodos was rated higher than Belfius on that measure (p =.0001; 5.23 versus 3.55). Also, the mean for label credibility (α=.866)
was significantly higher than 4 on a seven-point scale (p=.0001; MeanLabelcred= 4.72) and 87.5% of the sample agree with the item “I think that this label comes from an independent third-party”. A factor analysis of the items used to measure the type of ad appeals revealed two dimensions (6 items about the emotional appeal, α=.906; 5 items about the rational appeal, α=.816 [1]). As expected, the emotional appeal was rated higher in the emotional condition than in the rational condition (p=.026; 4.19 versus 3.30); but the rational appeal evaluation was not significantly different across conditions (p=0.205). Consequently, some changes have been made to reinforce the rational appeal in the rational ad for the main experimentation. Finally, we conducted a factor analysis of the 6 items that measured perceived greenwashing. The screen plot and eigenvalue criteria indicated one factor that explains 63.13% of the variance in the data (α=.881).

**Measures**

The measures for the different constructs came from previous literature when applicable but were modified to fit the purpose of our research. The complete list of items appears in Table 1. We measured perceived greenwashing with 6 items on seven-point Likert scales (1 = “totally disagree,” 7 = “totally agree”). Ad credibility (4 items) and attitude toward the brand (4 items) were rated on semantic differential (seven-point) scales. Purchase intentions were measured with 3 items on a seven-point Likert scale. In addition, we included measures for our three manipulation checks variables (CSR positioning, 5 items; type of ad appeal, 13 items; label credibility, 6 items). At the end of the questionnaire, we added demographic questions, as well as questions pertaining to the manipulations.
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**Table 1: Measures for study 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept Measured</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived greenwashing</td>
<td>– This ad plays on words to communicate a societal contribution that does not match reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– This ad is trying to imply that the product is good for society based on a limited number of arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– This ad hides elements going against the societal contribution of the product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– This ad exaggerates the positive societal contribution of the product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– This ad is trying to deceive consumers about the societal practices of the company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– This ad gives misleading information about the product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad credibility (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989; Goldberg and Hartwick, 1990)</td>
<td>This ad is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– unbelievable - believable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– deceptive - honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– misleading - sincere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– unlikely – likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward the brand (Homer, 1995)</td>
<td>In general, my feelings toward the brand are…:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– bad – good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– unfavorable - favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– unpleasant - pleasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– negative - positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase intentions (Yi, 1990)</td>
<td>To what extent would you decide to use this saving account?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– unlikely - likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– improbable - probable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– impossible-Possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Manipulation checks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSR positioning  (adapted from Wagner et al., 2009 ; Chen, 2010)</th>
<th>This company:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- is a socially responsible company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- is concerned to improve the well-being of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- tries to respect solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- is concerned with solidarity for others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- is not only interested in profits but also in the societal contributions of its products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ad appeal  (adapted from Drolet et al., 2007; Puto and Wells, 1984; Holbrook and Batra, 1987 ; Liu and Stout, 1987)</th>
<th>This ad is directed at making me feel something about the brand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I have perceived the emotions that this ad was trying to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This ad has a strong emotional character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This made me focus on my feelings about the brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- It’s hard to put into words, but this ad leaves me with a good feeling about using this brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This ad presents information in an emotional way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This ad presents information in a subjective way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The information contained in this ad is interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I have easily perceived the logical character of the arguments in this ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This ad is well documented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I learned something from this ad that I didn’t know before about this brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This ad was very uninformative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- This ad presents the information factually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sample

For the main study, participants were recruited from the general population, using snowball sampling. A graduate master’s student at a large European university e-mailed members of her social networks and asked them to participate and send invitations to participate to members of their own networks. All participants were to visit the survey website to complete the study and were randomly assigned to one of the 8 experimental conditions. Of the 238 participants who completed the study, 63% were women; 48.7% were aged between 18-25 and 39.7% between 26-50 years old.

### RESULTS

**Measurement Checks**

We conducted a factor analysis of the 6 items measuring perceived greenwashing. The screen plot and eigenvalue criteria indicated one factor that explains 56.56% of the variance in the data ($\alpha=.846$). We aggregated the items by taking their mean. A similar
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Analysis for our different dependent variables showed that the expected items loaded on the expected factors: ad credibility (α=.876), attitude toward the brand (α=.968), and purchase intentions (α=.946). Finally, we ran factor analyses on the control and manipulation check variables: emotional appeal (6 items, α=.902), rational appeal (6 items, α=.873); CSR positioning (α=.959) and label credibility (α=.874).

Manipulation Check

As expected, respondents rated Triodos bank as more socially responsible than Belfius (p=.0001; 4.86 versus 3.25). Also, the mean for label credibility was marginally significantly higher than 4 on a seven-point scale (p=.064; MeanLabelcred= 4.22) and the emotional appeal was rated higher in the emotional condition than in the rational condition (p=.004; 3.42 versus 2.91). However, as in the pretest, the rational appeal was not significantly different across conditions (p=.153). Consequently, our conditions only differ in terms of the degree of emotional appeal (low versus high emotional appeal), but not on rational appeal.

Test of hypotheses

First, we computed the correlation between perceived greenwashing and ad credibility and found that this correlation is negative and significant at the 0.01 level, but relatively moderate (-0.479). Measuring perceived credibility and perceived greenwashing thus do not seem to be redundant, consumers apparently using other cues than company’s attempt to manipulate them (perceived greenwashing) as indicator of ad credibility.

To test our hypotheses, we then ran a 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA for ad credibility, perceived greenwashing, attitudes toward the brand and purchase intentions with CSR positioning, degree of emotional appeal and label presence as the between-subject factors. The CSR positioning has a main positive effect on ad credibility (p=.002; MeanCSR=4.07; MeanNOCSR=3.53) and a main negative effect on the perceived greenwashing (p=.0001; MeanCSR=4.03; MeanNOCSR =4.64), which leads to the validation of H2a and H2b. Moreover, quite surprisingly, the use of a more emotional appeal has a main positive effect on ad credibility (p=.012; MeanEmo=4.03; MeanLess emo=3.58) and a main negative effect on perceived greenwashing (p=.0001; MeanEmo=4.12; MeanLess emo=4.55), leading to the rejection of H3a and H3b.

In addition, the use of a more emotional appeal and the CSR positioning had an interactive effect on ad credibility (p=.031), as depicted in Figure 1. Planned contrasts indicate quite counter-intuitively that for an utilitarian product (i.e., saving account), using a more emotional appeal increases ad credibility, but only for companies already considered as CSR-oriented (MeanLess emo=3.66; MeanEmo=4.49; p=.001). For companies with a neutral positioning with respect to CSR, we observed no significant difference in consumers’ perceptions about ad credibility in the emotional appeal versus the less emotional appeal conditions (MeanLess emo=3.50; MeanEmo=3.56; p=.798).
Finally, as expected by H4b, the presence of the label and the CSR positioning had an interactive effect on perceived greenwashing ($p = .043$), as depicted in Figure 2. Planned contrasts indicate that mentioning a third-party label marginally reduces perceived greenwashing, but only for companies already considered as CSR-oriented (MeanNolabel=4.19; MeanLabel=3.87; $p=.096$). For companies with a neutral positioning in terms of CSR, we observed no significant difference in consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing with or without the inclusion of a third-party label (MeanNolabel=4.53; MeanLabel=4.79; $p=.228$).

**Figure 1:** Interactive effect of CSR positioning and the degree of emotional appeal on consumers’ perceptions of ad credibility in Study 1 (banking)

![Interactive effect of CSR positioning and the degree of emotional appeal on consumers’ perceptions of ad credibility in Study 1 (banking)](image1)

**Figure 2:** Interactive effect of CSR positioning and the presence of a label on perceived greenwashing in Study 1 (banking)

![Interactive effect of CSR positioning and the presence of a label on perceived greenwashing in Study 1 (banking)](image2)
With respect to consumers’ attitudes toward the brand, they are positively influenced by the CSR positioning \((p=.0001; \text{MeanCSR}=4.48; \text{MeanNO CSR}=3.57)\) as expected in H2c as well as by the use of a more emotional appeal – contrary to H3c \((p=.011; \text{MeanEmo}=4.26; \text{MeanLess emo}=3.79)\). Furthermore, the interaction between CSR positioning and the presence of a label is significant \((p=.020)\), as depicted in Figure 3. Planned contrasts indicate that mentioning a third-party label reduces consumers’ attitudes toward brands having a more neutral positioning \((\text{MeanNolabel}=3.85; \text{MeanLabel}=3.29; p=.032)\) and does not significantly increase brand attitudes for CSR-oriented companies \((\text{MeanNolabel}=4.33; \text{MeanLabel}=4.63; p=.250)\).

With respect to purchase intentions, consumers are positively influenced by the CSR positioning \((p=.0001; \text{MeanCSR}=3.82; \text{MeanNO CSR}=2.77)\) as expected in H2d, and there is a significant interaction between CSR positioning and the use of a more emotional appeal on purchase intentions \((p=.031)\), as depicted in Figure 4. Figure 4 illustrates and planned contrasts confirm that using an emotional appeal positively influences purchase intentions for CSR-oriented companies only (for CSR-oriented companies: MeanLess_emo=3.43; MeanEmo=4.22; p=.009; for companies with a neutral positioning: MeanLess_emo =2.83; MeanEmo=2.71; p=.671).

Figure 3: Interactive effect of CSR positioning and the presence of a label on consumers’ attitudes toward the brand in Study 1 (banking)
4. STUDY 2: Cosmetics

Study 1 highlights that the positioning of the company with respect to CSR plays an important role in determining consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing and that the type of appeal leads to counter-intuitive findings. The results of Study 1 also suggest that the use of a third-party label as a means to increase the credibility of CSR communication can have adverse effects on brand attitudes for companies with a neutral CSR positioning and does not bring any advantage, in terms of brand attitudes, to CSR-oriented companies. For these reasons, Study 2 does not focus any longer on the effect of the label but investigates further the effects of the positioning of the company and of the type of appeal used by looking at their influence in the context of a hedonic product category.

METHODOLOGY

Design, Stimuli, and Procedure

We employed a 2 (Neutral positioning versus CSR positioning) x 2 (rational versus emotional appeal) factorial between-subjects experimental design. We developed four stimuli/scenarios to represent the combinations of the two factors. The final four stimuli/scenarios are in Appendix 2. We use two real companies from the cosmetics sector pretested as being positioned differently with respect to CSR: Yves Rocher (CSR positioning) and L’Oreal (neutral positioning). In a first task, respondents received an ad for beauty cream made of organic and natural ingredients offered by the company. Depending on the experimental condition, the ad appeal either was more emotional or
more rational. In a second task, respondents completed several items that measured the variables under investigation.

Pretest of Manipulation

We ran a pretest of the manipulation with 90 respondents. In a first task, respondents were asked to look at an ad for a Garnier’s beauty cream, using either a more emotional appeal or a more rational appeal. Respondents then were asked to rate on seven-point scales the type of ad appeal (14 items) and the ad realism (4 items). In a second task, we show them a brand logo (among the following ones: The Body Shop, L’Oréal, Yves Rocher and Biotherm). When they declared knowing the brand, respondents were asked to rate it on the basis of the following constructs measured on seven-point Likert scales: brand attitudes (4 items, Homer, 1995); brand trust (5 items, adapted from Gurviez and Korchia, 2002); CSR positioning (6 items, adapted from Wagner et al., 2009 and Chen, 2010) and perceived ecological orientation (3 items, adapted from Swaen and Chumpitaz, 2008). They did it twice (for two brands among the four potential brands). The questionnaire also included some demographic questions (age, gender, occupation).

A factor analysis of the items used to measure the type of ad appeals revealed two dimensions (6 items about the emotional appeal, \( \alpha = .847 \); 6 items about the rational appeal, \( \alpha = .853 \) [2]). As expected, the rational appeal was rated marginally higher in the rational condition versus the emotional condition (\( p = .083 \); 3.92 versus 3.44); but the emotional appeal was not significantly different across conditions (\( p = 0.350 \)). Moreover, both (emotional and rational) ads were perceived as relatively realistic (4.60 and 4.96 respectively), with no significant difference in ad realism between the two conditions (\( p = 0.181 \)). Consequently, some changes have been made to reinforce the emotional appeal in the emotional ad for the main experimentation.

Regarding the brands selection, the CSR positioning (\( \alpha = .937 \)) and the ecological orientation (\( \alpha = .916 \)) are perceived as significantly lower for L’Oréal (MeanCSR=3.03; MeanEco=2.94) compared to the three other brands (\( p s < .0001 \)); and no significant difference appears among the three other brands. L’Oréal was thus considered as the neutral brand with respect to CSR in the main experimentation. In addition, we compared consumers’ brand attitudes and brand trust to choose the CSR-oriented brand that is the least different from L’Oréal, to avoid confounding effects with our manipulation of CSR positioning. Consumers’ attitudes and trust for Yves Rocher were not significantly different from the consumers’ attitudes and trust for L’Oréal (\( p = .255 \) and \( p = .445 \) respectively), contrary to the Body Shop and Biotherm that were both better perceived in terms of consumers’ attitudes and trust compared to L’Oréal. Yves Rocher was thus considered as the CSR positioned brand to be used in our main experimentation.
Measures

The complete list of items appears in Table 2. We measured the perceived greenwashing with 6 items on seven-point Likert scales (1 = “totally disagree,” 7 = “totally agree”). Ad credibility (5 items) and attitude toward the brand (4 items) were rated on semantic differential (seven-point) scales. Purchase intentions were measured with 6 items on a seven-point Likert scale. At the end of the questionnaire, we added demographic questions, as well as questions pertaining to the manipulations.

Table 2: Measures for study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept Measured</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Perceived greenwashing            | - This ad plays on words to communicate a societal contribution that does not match reality  
|                                   | - This ad is trying to imply that the product is good for society based on a limited number of arguments  
|                                   | - This ad hides elements going against the societal contribution of the product  
|                                   | - This ad exaggerates the positive societal contribution of the product  
|                                   | - This ad is trying to deceive consumers about the societal practices of the company  
|                                   | - This ad gives misleading information about the product  |
| Ad credibility (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989; Goldberg and Hartwick, 1990) | This ad is:  
|                                   | - unconvincing – convincing  
|                                   | - unbiased – biased  
|                                   | - unbelievable - believable  
|                                   | - deceptive - honest  
|                                   | - misleading – sincere  |
| Attitude toward the brand (Homer, 1995) | In general, my feelings toward the brand are…:  
|                                   | - bad – good  
|                                   | - unfavorable - favorable  
|                                   | - unpleasant - pleasant  
|                                   | - negative – positive  |
| Purchase intentions (adapted from Zeithaml et al., 1996) | To what extent would you decide to adopt the following behaviors with respect to this cosmetic cream?  
|                                   | - Buying this cream in the future  
|                                   | - Recommending this cream to friends and relatives  
|                                   | - Saying positive things about this cream  
|                                   | - Encouraging my friends and relatives to buy this cream  
|                                   | - Considering this brand as my first choice when I need to buy a cream  
|                                   | - Looking for more information about this cream  |
Manipulation checks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ad appeal</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have perceived the emotions that this ad was trying to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This ad presents information in an emotional way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The information contained in this ad is interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have perceived easily the logical character of the arguments in this ad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This ad makes me learn something that I did not know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This ad was really informative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSR positioning</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This company:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is a socially responsible company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is concerned to improve the well-being of society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>follows high ethical standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tries to respect the natural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is concerned with respect for the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is not only interested in profits but also in the environmental impact of its products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample

For the main study, participants were recruited from student and the general population, using the same procedure as in Study 1, and were randomly assigned to one of the 4 experimental conditions. Of the 212 participants who completed the study, 82.5% were women; 77.7% were aged between 18-25 and 18.9% between 26-50 years old.

RESULTS

Measurement Checks

We conducted a factor analysis of the 6 items that measured perceived greenwashing. The screen plot and eigenvalue criteria indicated one factor that explains 47.62% of the variance in the data (greenwashing $\alpha=.778$). We aggregated the items by taking their mean. A similar analysis for our different dependent variables showed that the expected items loaded on the expected factors: ad credibility (4 items $[3]$, $\alpha=.752$), attitude toward the ad ($\alpha=.862$), attitude toward the brand ($\alpha=.951$), and purchase intentions ($\alpha=.866$). Finally, we ran factor analyses on the control and manipulation check variables: rational appeal (4 items, $\alpha=.681$ [4]) and CSR positioning ($\alpha=.897$). For emotional appeal, the Cronbach alpha was too low (2 items, $\alpha=.582$), so we decided to check manipulation success on the basis of the items.
Manipulation Check

As expected, respondents rated Yves Rocher as more socially responsible than L’Oréal (p=.0001, 3.10 versus 2.48). The emotional appeal was rated higher in the emotional versus rational condition (p=.0001, 3.50 versus 2.59); the rational appeal was rated higher in the rational versus emotional condition (p=0.0001; 2.57 versus 2.17).

Test of hypotheses

As in Study 1, the correlation between ad credibility and perceived greenwashing is negative and significant at 0.05 level, but relatively low (-.171). To test our hypotheses, we ran a 2 x 2 ANOVA for ad credibility, perceived greenwashing, brand attitudes and purchase intentions with CSR positioning and type of emotional appeal as the between-subject factors. As in Study 1, the CSR positioning has a main positive effect on ad credibility (p=.009; MeanCSR=2.84; MeanNO CSR=2.64), which supports H2a. However, contrary to H3a, the use of a rational appeal has a main positive effect on ad credibility (p =.069; MeanEmo=2.67; MeanRat=2.81). In addition, the use of a rational appeal and the CSR positioning had an interactive effect on ad credibility (p=.069) and on perceived greenwashing (p=.018), as we depict in Figures 5 and Figure 6. Planned contrasts indicate quite counter-intuitively that for a hedonic product, using a more rational appeal increases ad credibility (MeanRat=2.98; MeanEmo=2.70; p=.013), but only for companies already considered as CSR-oriented. For companies with a neutral positioning, we observed no significant difference between rational or emotional appeal in terms of consumers’ perceptions about ad credibility (MeanRat=2.64; MeanEmo=2.64; p=.999). However, for those companies, using a more rational appeal increases perceived greenwashing (MeanRat=3.63; MeanEmo=3.35; p=.030).

As expected in H2c, consumers’ attitudes toward the brand are positively influenced by the CSR positioning (p=.076; MeanCSR=3.52; MeanNO CSR=3.30). Furthermore, the interaction between CSR positioning and the type of ad appeal is significant (p=.024), as depicted in figure 7. Planned contrasts indicate that using a more rational appeal increases brand attitudes for companies already considered as CSR-oriented (MeanRat=3.71; MeanEmo=3.33; p=.031).

With respect to purchase intentions, they are only positively influenced by the CSR positioning (p=.077; MeanCSR=2.68; MeanNO CSR=2.45). H2d is thus validated, but H3d is not supported.
Figure 5: Interactive effect of CSR positioning and the use of a rational appeal on ad credibility in Study 2 (cosmetics)

Figure 6: Interactive effect of CSR positioning and the use of a rational appeal on perceived greenwashing in Study 2 (cosmetics)

Figure 7: Interactive effect of CSR positioning and the type of ad appeal on consumers’ attitudes toward the brand in Study 2 (cosmetics)
The status of our hypotheses in light of the results of Study 1 and Study 2 is summarized in Table 3.

### Table 3: Results of hypothesis testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Study 1 Utilitarian product</th>
<th>Study 2 Hedonic product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main effect of a third-party label</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1a: Label → ad credibility (+)</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1b: Label → perceived greenwashing (-)</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1c: Label → brand attitudes (+)</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1d: Label → purchase intentions (+)</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effect of the CSR positioning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2a: CSR positioning → ad credibility (+)</td>
<td>Validated</td>
<td>Validated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b: CSR positioning → perceived greenwashing (-)</td>
<td>Validated</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2c: CSR positioning → brand attitudes (+)</td>
<td>Validated</td>
<td>Validated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2d: CSR positioning → purchase intentions (+)</td>
<td>Validated</td>
<td>Validated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effect of the type of appeal with respect to the product category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3a: Rational appeal in utilitarian product (emotional appeal in hedonic product) → ad credibility (+)</td>
<td>Not validated: Emotional appeal (+)</td>
<td>Not validated: Rational appeal (+)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3b: Rational appeal in utilitarian product (emotional appeal in hedonic product) → perceived greenwashing (-)</td>
<td>Not validated: Emotional appeal (-)</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3c: Rational appeal in utilitarian product (emotional appeal in hedonic product) → brand attitudes (+)</td>
<td>Not validated: Emotional appeal (+)</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3d: Rational appeal in utilitarian product (emotional appeal in hedonic product) → purchase intentions (+)</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
<td>Not validated (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Interaction between the CSR positioning and the label

**H4a:** Interaction between CSR positioning and the label → ad credibility (+)
- Not validated (n.s.)

**H4b:** Interaction between CSR positioning and the label → perceived greenwashing (-)
- Validated
  - Significant interaction: stronger effect when label for CSR positioned brands

**H4c:** Interaction between CSR positioning and the label → brand attitudes (+)
- Not validated
  - Significant interaction but lower effect when label for brands with neutral positioning

**H4d:** Interaction between CSR positioning and the label → purchase intentions (+)
- Not validated (n.s.)
  - Significant interaction but lower effect when label for CSR positioned brands

### Interaction between the CSR positioning and the type of appeal

**H5a:** Interaction between CSR positioning and the type of appeal → ad credibility (+)
- Not validated
  - Significant interaction but stronger effect when emotional appeal for CSR positioned brands

**H5b:** Interaction between CSR positioning and the type of appeal → perceived greenwashing (-)
- Not validated (n.s.)
  - Significant interaction but stronger effect when rational appeal for CSR positioned brands

**H5c:** Interaction between CSR positioning and the type of appeal → brand attitudes (+)
- Not validated (n.s.)
  - Significant interaction but stronger effect when rational appeal for CSR positioned brands

**H5d:** Interaction between CSR positioning and the type of appeal → purchase intentions (+)
- Not validated (n.s.)
  - Significant interaction but stronger effect when emotional appeal for CSR positioned brands

---

### 5. Discussion

Gaining a better understanding of the factors that affect consumers’ evaluations of CSR communication is increasingly important. In this context, this research has timely and relevant managerial implications and contributes to extant CSR communication research in at least two ways.

First, our studies showed that even though consumers’ perceptions about ad credibility and greenwashing are negatively correlated, this correlation is relatively moderate, suggesting that consumers use different cues to assess ad credibility and the presence of greenwashing in an ad. This finding is important since it highlights that credibility and
greenwashing are not two sides of the same coin and should therefore not be treated as such in CSR research focusing on greenwashing.

Second, by highlighting the factors that influence consumers’ perceptions of greenwashing, this research provides relevant insights into the debate over CSR communication, which shifted in the past decade from “whether” to “how” companies should communicate about their CSR activities (Du et al., 2010; Tixier, 2004; Van de Ven, 2008). As suggested previously by Du et al. (2010) and Hartmann et al. (2005), CSR positioning had an overall positive effect on all dependent variables in both contexts (banking and cosmetics). The use of a third-party label in CSR communication, on the other hand, has no significant effect on consumers’ perceptions about ad credibility and greenwashing, and can even damage consumers’ brand attitudes when companies are not perceived as positioned on CSR by consumers. Our results thus align with D’Souza (2004) and Thøgersen (2002), who suggest that labels may confuse consumers. This seems to be especially true when companies making use of those labels are not considered by consumers as trustful enough with respect to CSR. Our results therefore highlight that using a third-party label is not the miracle solution for companies to improve the credibility of their CSR communication and to avoid greenwashing perceptions. Third-party labels should be used with caution, since their impact is non-significant at best or even damageable for company image, depending on the positioning of the company with respect to CSR. Finally, our research highlights the impact of ad appeal in CSR communication, which has been largely overlooked in previous CSR research. Counter-intuitively, our results suggest that using a rational appeal (emotional appeal) to communicate about CSR in a hedonic (rational) context is more efficient, but only for CSR-oriented companies. For companies with a more neutral positioning with respect to CSR, using rational or emotional appeals does not seem to make a difference. This last result partially contradicts prior recommendations (Schmeltz, 2012) to use fact-based arguments to enhance the credibility of CSR communication. Our research indeed suggests that the type of appeal that should be used to enhance ad credibility and lower greenwashing perceptions mainly depends on the product category involved and on the CSR positioning of the company.

Overall, our results are quite encouraging for companies making genuine CSR efforts, since consumers do not seem as credulous as one might believe they are. Adding a third-party label and/or using rational arguments to communicate about the socially responsible aspect of a product appear not to compensate for the CSR positioning (or lack thereof) of the company.
6. Limitations and Further Research

Although this study provides several important findings, we acknowledge some limitations that also offer potential avenues for further research. First, we used a fictitious third-party label in Study 1 that was designed in reference to two real, credible third-parties. It is however possible that this fictitious label and/or the two third-parties were not credible enough to generate positive associations (Carpenter and Larceneux, 2008). Our research should be replicated using real labels to nuance our results.

Second, we encountered difficulties, in both product categories, with the manipulation of the type of appeal and we did not find a validated scale to measure this construct. Further research should focus on developing appropriate scales for measuring emotional and rational appeals, and investigate whether the use of a mixed appeal (rational and emotional at the same time) could be a way to benefit from the advantages of both appeals.

Third, our hypotheses were tested in two product categories that were assumed to be utilitarian and hedonic on the basis of prior literature (Batra and Ahtola, 1991; Stafford et al., 2002; Zaichkowsky, 1987). However, further research should explore the effects with other types of products and test whether these products actually differ according to the hedonic/utilitarian distinction. Moreover, additional variables could be included as moderating or control variables, such as consumer involvement in the product category and consumers’ level of CSR expertise.

Fourth, our results show a strong and positive influence of the CSR positioning. However, an important question that therefore arises is how can companies build such a positioning in consumers’ mind? Which cues do consumers use to decide whether a company is more or less CSR-oriented? More research is needed to answer these questions and paint a clearer portrait of what a “good” CSR communication is in an advertising context.

7. Notes

[1] Two items being deleted because they were not well represented in the factor solution.
[2] Two items being deleted because they were not well represented in the factor solution.
[3] The item not biased – biased has been deleted because not well represented in the factor structure.
[4] This cronbach alpha is below the classic threshold level of 0.7, but is still considered as acceptable in exploratory studies (Peter, 1979).
8. Lists of items

MEASURE FOR STUDY 1

Dependent Variables

Perceived greenwashing:
- This ad plays on words to communicate a societal contribution that does not match reality
- This ad is trying to imply that the product is good for society based on a limited number of arguments
- This ad hides elements going against the societal contribution of the product
- This ad exaggerates the positive societal contribution of the product
- This ad is trying to deceive consumers about the societal practices of the company
- This ad gives misleading information about the product

Ad credibility (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989; Goldberg and Hartwick, 1990)
This ad is:
- unbelievable - believable
- deceptive - honest
- misleading - sincere
- unlikely – likely

Attitude toward the brand (Homer, 1995)
In general, my feelings toward the brand are…:
- bad – good
- unfavorable - favorable
- unpleasant - pleasant
- negative – positive

Purchase intentions (Yi, 1990)
To what extent would you decide to use this saving account?
- unlikely - likely
- improbable - probable
- impossible-Possible

Manipulation Checks

CSR positioning (adapted from Wagner et al., 2009 ; Chen, 2010)
This company:
- is a socially responsible company
- is concerned to improve the well-being of society
- tries to respect solidarity
• is concerned with solidarity for others
• is not only interested in profits but also in the societal contributions of its products

Type of ad appeal (adapted from Drolet et al., 2007; Puto and Wells, 1984; Holbrook and Batra, 1987)
• This ad is directed at making me feel something about the brand
• I have perceived the emotions that this ad was trying to communicate
• This ad has a strong emotional character
• This made me focus on my feelings about the brand
• It’s hard to put into words, but this ad leaves me with a good feeling about using this brand
• This ad presents information in an emotional way
• This ad presents information in a subjective way
• The information contained in this ad is interesting
• I have easily perceived the logical character of the arguments in this ad
• This ad is well documented
• I learned something from this ad that I didn’t know before about this brand
• This ad was very uninformative
• This ad presents the information factually

MEASURE FOR STUDY 2

Dependent Variables

Percieved greenwashing
• This ad plays on words to communicate a societal contribution that does not match reality
• This ad is trying to imply that the product is good for society based on a limited number of arguments
• This ad hides elements going against the societal contribution of the product
• This ad exaggerates the positive societal contribution of the product
• This ad is trying to deceive consumers about the societal practices of the company
• This ad gives misleading information about the product

Ad credibility (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989; Goldberg and Hartwick, 1990)
This ad is:
• unconvincing – convincing
• unbiased – biased
• unbelievable - believable
• deceptive - honest
• misleading – sincere
Attitude toward the brand (Homer, 1995)
In general, my feelings toward the brand are…:
- bad – good
- unfavorable - favorable
- unpleasant - pleasant
- negative – positive

Purchase intentions (adapted from Zeithaml et al., 1996)
To what extent would you decide to adopt the following behaviors with respect to this cosmetic cream?
- Buying this cream in the future
- Recommending this cream to friends and relatives
- Saying positive things about this cream
- Encouraging my friends and relatives to buy this cream
- Considering this brand as my first choice when I need to buy a cream
- Looking for more information about this cream

Manipulation checks

Type of ad appeal (adapted from Drolet et al., 2007; Puto and Wells, 1984; Holbrook and Batra, 1987)
- I have perceived the emotions that this ad was trying to communicate
- This ad presents information in an emotional way
- The information contained in this ad is interesting
- I have perceived easily the logical character of the arguments in this ad
- This ad makes me learn something that I did not know
- This ad was really informative

CSR positioning (adapted from Wagner et al., 2009; Chen, 2010)
This company:
- is a socially responsible company
- is concerned to improve the well-being of society
- follows high ethical standards
- tries to respect the natural environment
- is concerned with respect for the environment
- is not only interested in profits but also in the environmental impact of its products
Appendix A. Stimuli used in Study 1 (translated from French)

**Neutral positioning with respect to CSR - Belfius:** « Our primary mission is to serve our customers, to establish a long-term relationship with them, to help them achieve their personal and professional projects. We assist individuals in managing their finances and savings every day. And finally, we will communicate frankly on our strategy, our results and corporate governance. »

**CSR positioning - Triodos:** « Triodos is one of the first leading sustainable banks in the world. Its mission is to put the money at the service of social, environmental and cultural positive changes. Its purpose is to contribute creating a society that protects and promotes the quality of life for all its members; to enable individuals, organizations and companies to invest in projects that benefit people and the environment, and ultimately to offer their customers innovative financial products and a high quality of services. »

**Rational appeal:**

“**Solidarity Saving: Spare better, spare usefully**”

Enjoy the many benefits of the solidarity saving account offered by Belfius:
- Choose the formula you need;
- Deposit the amount of money of your choice (no minimum required);
- More you save, more your base rate increases;
- Account opening and account management for free;
- Manage your own account with ease and simplicity.

For more information visit our website: [www.triodos.be](http://www.triodos.be)

**Emotional appeal:**

“**Solidarity Savings: Spare better, spare usefully**”

Do like them, give meaning to your savings by participating in the funding of various projects of reconstruction, integration of disable people in the workplace, building of wind turbines and some more!

Find us on: [www.triodos.be](http://www.triodos.be)

**Third-party label**

“The new division of Test-Achat aims to check the consistency between companies’ actions and ad claims. For more information, visit [www.JEP.TestAchat.be](http://www.JEP.TestAchat.be)”

(JEP stands for “Jury d’éthique publicitaire” – the self-regulatory body of the advertising industry in Belgium. Test-Achat is a Belgian consumer association)
### Final stimuli

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rational</th>
<th>Neutral positioning</th>
<th>CSR positioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No label</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Neutral positioning**
- L'ÉPARGNE SOLIDAIRE...
- ÉPARGNEZ MEILLEURS ÉPARGNEZ UTILE !
- 1.50% + 0.70% la première année

**CSR positioning**
- L'ÉPARGNE SOLIDAIRE...
- ÉPARGNEZ MEILLEURS ÉPARGNEZ UTILE !
- 1.50% + 0.70% la deuxième année

---

*Notes:*
- All images and text content are placeholders and should be replaced with actual content.
- The images should be included as actual graphics in a report or presentation.
- The table format is used to organize the information clearly.
Emotional- No label

Emotion al- Label
Appendix B. Stimuli used in Study 2 (translated from French)

**CSR positioning: neutral (L’Oréal) versus CSR (Yves Rocher)**

**Rational appeal:**
*Nutriganics: Opt for the natural!*
L’Oréal offers you the most natural formulas enriched with many ingredients originating from organic farming. All in the service of an intense hydration!

**Emotional appeal:**
*Nutriganics: Opt for the natural!*
L’Oréal invites you to a journey into the heart of spring. Its new natural elixir awakens your senses in an explosion of pleasure and delight. Love your skin so that your sweetheart!

**Final stimuli**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rational</th>
<th>Neutral positioning</th>
<th>CSR positioning</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><img src="image2" alt="CSR positioning" /></td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="CSR positioning" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Emotional

**NUTRIGANICS™**

**UN CAFÉSSEMENT AU NATUREL !**

L’OCCITAN vous convie à un voyage au cœur du printemps.

Son rosière fleur sauvage ressemble au printemps,

dans un feu d’arlequin du printemps et du violet.

Peut-on dire que vous aurez que l'œil de votre cœur.

**YVES ROCHER** vous convie à un voyage au cœur du printemps.

Son rosière fleur sauvage ressemble aux vynes,

dans un feu d’arlequin du printemps et du violet.

Peut-on dire que vous aurez que l’œil de votre cœur.
References


