

**“Green Intentions: An Exploratory Study on Advertising
and the Environmental Movement”**

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Over the past few decades, environmentalism has become an issue of much public interest. Beginning in the 1980s and continuing today, public opinion polls have been inquiring about citizens’ opinions on environmental issues. Recently, the Pew Research Center has indicated that sixty percent of Americans self-identify as environmentalists (“Americans spending more,” 2010) that percentage is up significantly from two decades prior.

In addition to general public interest, environmentalism has become an important factor in business today. Numerous companies over the past two decades have incorporated “green” appeals into their advertising messages. From SunChips’ “solar powered chip,” fashion brand Diesel’s “Global Warming Ready” campaign, to 7Up, Mentos, Starbucks, Adidas, Clorox, Hagens, BP and just about every automobile maker and hotel chain, corporations have incorporated some sort of environmental policy or marketing appeal. In a longitudinal study of green appeals in advertising, Easterling, Kenworthy and Nemzoff found an upward trend of green advertising in the 1970s, with stabilization in the

1980s, followed by another upward swing in the 1990s (1996). Today, the green trend continues.

Over the years, many consumers have realized that their consumption habits have an impact on our environment, and marketers alike have turned their attention toward what is referred to today as “green marketing.” Green marketing is well established in both the business world and the academy. Marketers see green advertising claims (e.g. eco-friendly or recyclable) as one of several ways to entice buyers, while scholars view the area as one that is ripe for continued inquiry. Many such scholars have approached the phenomenon seeking a better understanding of what green marketing actually is (Banerjee et al, 1995, Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez, 2009, and Kilbourne, 1995), how green marketing works (Kotler 2011, and Meister et al. 2006, Chen 2010), as well as if and how consumers respond to green advertising and marketing claims (Montoro-Rios et al. 2008, Mostafa 2007, Chan 2001).

This study examines what potential effect the use of green appeals in advertising has on the young adult consumer, and provides a framework for better understanding the power of green appeals on young adults in regards to their intentions toward consumption of eco-friendly products and the environmental movement in general.

Fifteen in-depth interviews with young adults inform the research while analysis and interpretation of the interviews lead to the conclusion that perceived success and/or failure of eco-friendly acts plays a major role in green purchase behaviour.

Those interviewees who have a positive attitude toward the success of their actions or those who believe that environmental issues are real and that they, as individuals, can make a difference, tend to make an honest effort to be good stewards of environmentalism. Those who have a negative attitude toward success or rather an attitude leaning toward failure, and who question the environmental movement in general, tend to feel that their individual efforts are probably not worth it, and they may not even try to act or consume in an eco-friendly manner.

Many of the young adults interviewed disclosed that they have a lack of information and/or education on the reality of environmental issues. They have doubts about the environmental movement, sustainability and energy conservation in general. Interviewees repeated time and again in their interviews that research and education are the key to recognizing and understanding the sustainability issues in our world; although interviewees' acts of researching environmental issues and educating themselves on the topic appeared to be quite limited.

According to this study, young adults appear uncommitted to environmentalism as a whole due to their lack of knowledge and/or proof of the need for sustainability, however, interviewees did not appear inspired to seek the necessary knowledge to become informed.

The findings of this study also indicate that respondents are not only uninformed about the green movement, but are thus confused, and in turn, are even more confused

about the authenticity of eco-friendly product advertising as well as its ability to sell products.

Implications of this study are that marketers and advertisers should seek to inform consumers of sustainability issues and reassure them of how their products and services could work to solve sustainability issues in our world. In addition, consumers should educate themselves on sustainability issues and the environmental movement so that they can make informed decisions about the products and services that they choose to purchase.

This study hopes to further an understanding of consumer attitudes and intentions in regards to green marketing and advertising appeals. It reveals that in the subjects under study, attitudes toward success and/or failure play a major role in young adult consumer willingness and intention to try eco-friendly products and/or practices. This study opens the door for scholars, professionals and consumers to ask more than just what do marketers get out of using environmental claims, but hopefully creates a desire to uncover additional information about the intentions of consumers in regards to green purchase behaviour, as well as the implications of green marketing on consumers, society and ultimately the environmental movement itself.

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