

Measuring Trust on Green Advertising Claims: An Exploratory Study on Higher Institution Student towards Malaysian Green Advertisements

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Abstract. Green advertising now has become a buzz word in Malaysia where demands on green products have increased drastically. Most of the marketers now are concentrating on developing green products to fulfill the needs of green consumers. A part of that, green advertising play an important role in persuading consumers with green claims such as Eco friendly, save energy, biodegradable and many more that will attract consumers' attention to green products. One of the important elements of persuasion is trust, where consumers' trust on certain brands and claims is vital for advertisers. Therefore, the objective of this study is to measure trust on green advertising claims were 110 UiTM's students were participating in this exploratory study. The main reason choosing students was because they are the future consumers that will be part of the market segmentation.

Keywords: Green Advertising, Creative Execution, Trust, Acceptance.

1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years, public support for environmental protection has waxed and waned. Despite the variation in concern, the green movement is arguably one of the most important social movements in recent history (Banerjee *et al.*, 1995). Global issues related to environmental issues have raised global concern among society especially for marketers. At the same time, mass media play an important role in disseminating green information to the public in creating awareness among public towards the importance of green for our future generation. The ways in which the environment and issues relating explicitly to the environment have been represented in the media have been continuously evolving ever since the environmental movement came into being. It is likely that every individual who reads this can recall a particularly high profile media event that centered on human induced environmental disasters, frequently involving transnational corporations. The environment has been the focus of some of the most memorable media spectacles of the last 25 years. Taking this history into account, it is now worth acknowledging how this relationship will continue into the next 25 years for it is certainly not wholly inappropriate to note that the last decade has witnessed some significant changes in how the environment is represented and by whom (Cox, 2008). Hence, the concern on environmental issues in Malaysia has changed the public perception on the importance of green. It has become a new scenario in Malaysia and most of Malaysian companies have started to participate in green activities as part of their social responsibility.

The incidence of green advertising has increased in many developed countries, and consumers worldwide have been exposed to a vast array of environmental ad claims. Such terms as *degradable*, *recycled*, and *ozone* friendly has become commonplace in marketing targeted at both household and industry. While environmental (green) advertising typically focuses on a single or limited number of environmental product attributes or organizational practices, problems have been uncovered (Carlson, *et.al* 1996). Advertising is a persuasion effort by advertisers to persuade consumers to buy products and services. Therefore many claims will be made by advertisers to promote, publicize, inform and persuade the potential buyers to buy or consume the products that have been advertised. Undeniably, marketers have discovered a trend and are attempting to exploit it (Banerjee, *et.al* 1995). Trust is important to the study of advertising

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because there is a consistent tendency for consumers to distrust advertising (Calfee and Ringold 1994 cited in Soh et.al 2007). Usually, consumers will put their trust on certain advertising claims based on their rational process towards the advertising claims that they see. The research found that trust in advertising is an important research in advertising and marketing. Such findings encourage marketers to explore ways in which they can build and enhance trusting relationships with customers, including fostering consumer trust through trust advertising appeals (Fuan Li and Miniard 2006).

2. Problem Statement

Advertising has been criticized as encouraging materialism, giving false claims, very deceptive and manipulative. But in promoting green products, some advertisers may use different strategies to gain trust of the consumers. Gaining trust is important criteria for advertisers to create a positive relationship with the consumers where green claims are not a thing that can be compromised by both parties. Over the years, studies have been conducted by various scholars on the impact of green advertising towards public awareness, attitudes, opinions and psychological effects. These studies have provided an in-depth finding in understanding the role of green advertising to marketers and customers (Suhaimie, *et.al* 2011). As far as advertising is concerned, the number of green printed advertisements had increased drastically (Ottman, 1993; Banerje *et.al.*, 1995). The earliest “green advertising” campaigns, for instance, exemplified a blatant effort by some advertisers to cash in on consumers’ desire for a cleaner environment. Some promoted nebulous product qualities, such as “environmental friendliness,” that actually had no basis in fact (Arens, et.al 2009). Over the past 20 years, research in green advertising has increased drastically, it has become an important research topic in advertising. Some scholars in green advertising research have made a move in studying the impact of green advertising either at the consumer levels or industry levels. Research on environmental claims (Carlos, Grove and Kangun 1993; Chan, Leung Wong 2006), environmental appeals in advertisements (Banerjee, et.al 1995), green advertising and public perception (Cox 2008) and green advertising themes and effects (Carlson *et.al* 1995) have raised interest among scholar especially in the advertising field. Unfortunately, research on green advertising in Malaysia is still small and not many research can be found in Malaysia on the topic. At the industry levels, interest in green advertising has sparked their business opportunities in producing more green products and services.

3. Literature Review

Chan, Leung and Wong (2006) examined how different types of environment claims may affect the communication effectiveness of environmental advertising, and how two important moderating variables, perceived eco-friendly image of the originating country and consumer involvement, may influence the claim type. They studied the responses of 1,200 adult Chinese subjects in Shanghai, China, to mock advertisements containing environmental claims using a 2 x 3 factorial design. In the design, perceived eco-friendliness of the advertiser’s originating country (PE), and environmental claim type (ECT) was treated as the independent variables or factors, and communication effectiveness was the independent variable. Of the 1,200 subjects, 600 were randomly assigned for investigating the high-involvement service of a hotel, and 600 for the low-involvement service of fast food. The research found that environmental claims enhance the communication effectiveness relationship of advertisements for both high-involvement and low-involvement.

According to Cox (2008) in his study on relationship to sustain communication between British Petroleum (BP) green advertising and public perception, he aims to identify the differences between a recent green advert promoting BP and earlier non-green advertisement by the same company, and secondly an experiment to test public perception in relation to these two adverts. This research adopted two methods, content analysis and experiment in collecting data. In the early phase of the data collection, content analysis was used on approach of two BP green television adverts. The main focus was to select the most important clear units of the ads aspect. For instance language, visual content, timing and editing techniques to gather an adequate amount of empirical data to illustrate the different representations of the environment between BP

advert from 1998 and from the ‘beyond petroleum’ campaign of 2000. The second phase of data collection, a focus group experiment of 12 A-level students was used as sample to gather data of the audience reception of the advertisement in question, using star diagram questionnaires and a group discussion.

4. Research objective

The main objective of this paper is to study Malaysians’ perception towards green advertising in Malaysia. Therefore three specific objectives were developed:

- To identify the level of attitude among students towards green advertising claims in Malaysia.
- To identify the level of trust among students towards green advertising claims in Malaysia.
- To identify the level of acceptance among students towards green advertising claims in Malaysia.

5. Methodology and Conceptual Framework

This study used survey method in order to meet the objectives set earlier. This method is often used by social science researchers to study the impact of media content on a public or audience. Considering the connection between advertising and persuasion, researchers in mass communication have shown their interest studying the effects of advertising. The focus of these researchers has been either on the process involved whenever advertising media effects occur or on the differences in effects produced by the media context in which the advertisement embedded (Bryant & Thompson, 2002).

A set of questionnaire has been constructed and tested before it was disseminated to the respondents. The questionnaire contained 14 questions and including the demographics. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the 5-points of items of the scale.

6. The Sample and Sampling

This study was conducted in April 2012 and 110 students from The Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, UiTM, Shah Alam were selected to participate in this study. Purposive sampling was used in this study. It is the most common non-probability sampling method used by researcher by using his or her knowledge to select few selected items to be sampled. According to Sheehan (2004), advertisers will pay more to reach younger people than to reach older people. Therefore, the second largest target consumers in the market will be young people. The main purpose of selecting university students is because they are the future consumers and market force are focusing on this group because they will shape the future consumer behavior. Therefore, their decision making is vital for advertisers and marketers to fulfill the demands of the future young consumers.

7. Results

This part discusses the finding based on content analysis on seven green print ads that had been found in this study. The discussion based on the analytical framework introduced by Banerje *et. al* (1995) in their earlier study on green advertising. As mentioned earlier, this study is an exploratory study which tries to study green advertising in Malaysia. Descriptive analysis is used to describe the finding.

Table I: Gender of respondent

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)
Male	46	41.8
Female	64	58.2
Total	110	100

Based on the above table I, from the 110 respondents was selected, a total of 64 respondent persons or 58.2 per cent are female. The male respondents in this study are only 46 (41.8 percent). Therefore, the largest respondents in this study are female respondents.

Table II: Age of respondents

Age	Frequency		Percent	
	(f)		(%)	
21 - 24	96		87.3	
25- 27	11		10.0	
28-29	3		2.7	
Total	110		100	

Based on Table II, 96 respondents (87.3 %), in this study are aged 21-24 years. A total of 11 respondents (10%) are aged 25-27 while only 3 respondents are aged 28-29 years. Clearly, this indicates that a large group in this study are those of aged 21-24 years.

Table III: Respondents' attitude towards green advertising claims

	Frequency (f)				percentage (%)					
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Strongly agree	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
Skeptical	8	7.3	35	31.8	39	35.5	27	24.5	1	0.9
Trends	2	1.8	11	10	24	21.8	58	52.7	15	13.6
Real concept	2	1.8	35	31.8	37	33.6	29	26.4	7	6.4
To exaggerate	4	3.6	32	29.1	39	35.5	32	29.1	3	2.7

The table above describes the respondents' attitude towards green advertisements claims. From 110 respondents in this study, only 27 of them agreed that they remain skeptical on green ad's claims. About 31% felt they did not agree that they do not feel skeptical. Nearly 35 % of them were unsure that they are quite skeptical of green ad's claims. Only 7.3% strongly disagreed with green ad's claims. The respondents were then asked whether they agree green advertising as only a new trend. From this, 52% agreed that green ads is only a trend and only 1.8% disagreed with this statement. Meanwhile, 11 of them disagreed compared 15 respondents are strongly agreed. The respondents were also asked whether green ads do not describe the real concept of green. From the findings, it shows that most of them (31.8%) disagreed with this statement. Among them, 33.6% (37) respondents were unsure with the concept of green while 26.4% agreed that green ads do not tell the true concept of green to them. Respondents were asked whether some green ads are too exaggerates to them. From the findings, 29.1% (32) respondents disagreed and agreed with this statement. It clearly shows that there are no significant differences between those that agreed and disagreed with the statement. But the number of respondents who were unsure with these statements is quiet huge. It represents 35.5% of the total respondents in this study. From the finding, it shows that the level of care among respondents towards green products is quite high. Of 110 respondents, 38.2% (42) and 40% (44) strongly disagreed and disagreed that they are not concerned with green products. Only 6.4% of the respondents indicated that they do not really care about green products. However, 11.8 % are still unsure towards green products.

Table IV: Respondents' trust towards green advertising claims

	Frequency (f)				percentage (%)					
	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Not sure		Agree		Strongly agree	
	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)	(f)	(%)
Vague and ambiguous	3	2.7	16	14.5	47	42.7	40	36.4	4	3.6
Misleading and untruthful	3	2.7	35	31.8	31	28.2	38	34.5	3	2.7
Absolutely safe	7	6.4	24	21.8	24	21.8	47	42.7	8	7.3
Reliability	3	2.7	9	8.2	33	30	54	49.1	11	10
Concealed facts	1	0.9	14	12.7	54	49.1	31	28.2	10	9.7

Table IV demonstrates the level of respondents' trust towards green ad's claims. From the findings, 36.4% (40) of respondents agreed that green ad claims were vague and ambiguous and only 14.5% disagreed with this statement. Also, 42.7% of respondents were unsure whether green ads claim that they seen before were vague and ambiguous. The findings, also indicated that 34.5% of the respondents found that green ads claims were misleading and untruthful compared to 31.8% of respondents were disagreed with this statement. Only 2.7% strongly disagreed and strongly agreed with this statement. Respondents were also asked whether green ads claim is hard for them to believe that many green products ads absolutely safe from the environment. The level of trust among the respondents with this statement is quite high where 42.7% agreed with green ads claims and 49.1% of them agreed that green ads claims still can be questioned in terms of reliability. But the number of respondents in the level of not sureness with green ads claims in terms of their trust is still at the level of 20% of the total population. From the findings, 28.2% (31) agreed that many claims in green ads concealed the true facts about the products. But to compare with those that are not disagreeing, finding shows that 12.7% (14) disagreed that green ad claims concealed the true facts about green. But, the number of respondents who are unsure with this statement compromise 49.1 % of the total respondents in this study.

Table V: Respondents' acceptance towards green advertising claims

	Frequency (f)		percentage (%)							
	Strongly disagree (f) (%)	Disagree (f) (%)	Not sure (f) (%)	Agree (f) (%)	Strongly agree (f) (%)					
Offers	1	0.9	31	28.2	37	33.6	31	28.2	10	9.1
Safe for environment	-		4	3.6	8	7.3	50	45.5	48	43.6
True facts	-		4	3.6	14	12.7	45	40.9	47	42.7
Too expensive	-		20	18.2	26	23.6	38	34.5	26	23.6

Based on table V, the respondent's acceptance towards green advertising claims were measured. The number of respondents that were difficult to accept offers enclosed in green ads claims were high compared to those that can easily accept the offers in green ads claims. The total of 28.2% (31) and 9.1% (10) were agreed and strongly agreed that they are difficult to accept green ads offers. There are only 28.25 (31) and 0.9 % (1) who disagreed and strongly agreed with this statement. Most of the respondents in this study agreed that they will only buy green products if the products are safe to the environment and eco friendly. The number of respondents that agreed and disagreed are 45.5 % (50) and 43.6 % (48) and this accumulates to more than 50% from the total of respondents agreed with this statement. Respondents were asked whether they will buy green products if the green ads claims provides true facts on the benefits towards the environment. From the findings, it shows that the number of the respondents that agreed and strongly agreed with these statements is very high. 40.9% (45) and 42.7 % (47) agreed and strongly agreed compared only 3.6% (4) disagreed with this statement. There are only 12.7% of the respondents were not sure with this statement. Based on the respondents' opinion, 34.5 % (38) and 23.6 % (26) respondents who agreed and strongly agreed that green products are too expensive for them. The number of respondents that are not sure compared that those who disagreed is at the level of 23.6 % (26) and 18.2% (20) from the total of respondents. Clearly this shows that it is difficult for the respondents to accept green products due to the high price.

8. Conclusion

When it comes to a decision on using environmental claims in advertising and packaging, marketers are faced with conflicting perspectives regarding the role these factors play in consumer purchase behavior (Davis, 1994). Based on the finding, respondents are not too skeptical in accepting green ad's claims. Most of them believe that green ads are only a new marketing hype where most of the marketers focuses more on producing green products. Respondents in this study also believed that green ads claims are not too exaggerating in making the green claims on certain products. But most of them in terms of attitude believed that they are really concerned with green products and it is part of today's lifestyle. In terms of trust, most of

the respondents in this study found that green ad claims were vague and ambiguous but disagreed that green ad claims were misleading and untruthful. But at the same time, respondents still question the level of reliability of green ads claims in Malaysia and most of the claims that they found concealed the true facts about the products. Meanwhile, analysis on respondent's acceptance indicated that most of the respondents find it difficult to accept offers or deals made by marketers. But at the same time respondents are willing to buy green products if the products can ensure that they are really safe to the environment and if they found that the advertisers are delivering the true facts about the benefits to the environment. Price factor also influences the respondents' buying decision if they find that the green products are too expensive they are reluctant to buy the products. Therefore, green advertising research is a new field of research that can be explored in knowing more about this trend and its effects to the Malaysian consumers specifically.

9. References

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