

Prof. Angelique van Niekerk

Department of Afrikaans and Dutch, French and German, Faculty of the Humanities, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Email: vnieka@ufs.ac.za (corresponding author)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8233-2441>

Dr Marthinus Conradie

Department of English, Faculty of the Humanities, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

Email: conradiems@ufs.ac.za

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2929-8616>

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THE 'CURRENCY' OF CULTIVATING A GREEN BRAND: REPRESENTATION PRACTICES FOR GREEN BRANDING AND GREEN WASHING IN PRINT MAGAZINE ADVERTISING IN SOUTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT

Consumer brands are prioritising pro-environmental reputations in response to growing consumer concern. So-called green consumers are being targeted with buzzwords including sustainability, biodegradability, recycling and upcycling. Print advertising in South African media reflects this trend. This study mobilises a discursive taxonomy to examine particular dimensions of such advertising. The study interprets the findings thus extrapolated by suggesting a distinction between two types of green advertising: green branding and green washing in South African print media.

Keywords: green advertising; green branding; value assumptions; claim types; representation strategies; humanistic approach vs. environmental approach; marketing communication; brand communication

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Increasing public anxiety over environmental degradation has stimulated demand for pro-environmental/green products. Unsurprisingly, advertising campaigns have responded. However, scholars are questioning the veracity of the claims driving the persuasive strategies of these campaigns, warning that concepts including “sustainable”, “biodegradable”, “recycling” and “upcycling” have become floating signifiers (Yoon & Kim 20016: 49; cf. Nyilasy *et al.* 2014; Chang 2012; Anyangwe 2014; Montage & Mukherjee 2010; Carlson *et al.* 1996). Consumers risk being misled, especially given their limited capacity to independently verify advertising claims.

Similar challenges confront South African consumers. The only advertising guidelines stem from the 2008 Consumer

Protection Act, which vaguely mandates that, “Consumers must be provided with the facts needed to make informed choices and ensure their protection against dishonest or misleading advertising and labelling” (Consumer Protection Act 2008). Consequently, unless South African consumers explicitly demand supporting information, advertisers can avoid supplying strong corroborating evidence for green claims or even peddle falsehoods. Consumers are less likely to demand supporting information from advertisers and brand owners if they remain insensitive to distinctions between green advertising and green washing (clarified subsequently).

Subjecting advertising strategies to discourse analysis can advance conscientisation. One method of furthering such work proceeds from discursively analysing lexical and visual strategies. Putatively pro-green lexical and visual cues deserve scrutiny for its manipulative potential, as advertisers and brand owners vie for the construction and maintenance of a green brand.

This study qualitatively extends Yoon and Kim’s (2016: 51) quantitative research on the impact advertising discourses exercise on consumers’ knowledge about environmentalism threats. This study’s extension reads Yoon and Kim’s (2016) distinction between ecocentrism and anthropocentrism in relation to core value assumptions that underpin this study’s sample of green advertising (Fairclough 2003: 91). Within the conceptual parameters of the Health Belief Model, ecocentrism advocates environmentalism based on the notion that ecosystems are imbued with an intrinsic value, independent of human beings. By contrast, anthropocentrism treats ecosystems predominantly in relation to human welfare.

Premised on these conceptualisations, this study’s discourse analysis differentiates brands that:

- 1) promote products/services for specific, environmentally-friendly attributes that are empirically falsifiable (green branding);
- 2) promote products/services via lexical and visual representations without substantive or falsifiable information about pro-environmental attributes or brand activates (green washing); lexical representations in this category include words such as “natural”, while visual representations include images such as leaves, soil, and dew drops;
- 3) promote products/services while simultaneously endorsing pro-environmental organisations without detailing the attributes of their own products/services (worthy cause branding). This category oversteps the scope of this article, given the priority to differentiate the above-mentioned categories.

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

Research into the impact advertising exercises on public knowledge about environmental threats problematises the ambiguous claims that characterised advertisers’ efforts to create environmentally-friendly brands (Carlson *et al.* 1996). In response, consumer scepticism about green claims in general has increased enough to potentially nullify the competitive edge of organisations that have invested significantly

in pro-environmental technologies and business practices. Three consequences of this public scepticism rationalise this study.

First, as the public's concern over environmental degradation continues to grow, copywriters remain motivated to identify green claims that are optimally convincing. Second, academics in psychology, sociology, communication studies, applied linguistics, and cultural studies have responded by analysing the persuasive strategies thus developed by advertisers to secure a green brand image. This body of academic work informs the current study (Yoon & Kim 2016; Polonsky 2011; Bator & Cialdini 2000). Third, while public scepticism about green claims has grown, consumers are not affected equally. Instead, variables including media literacy and general knowledge about environmentalism moderate the effects of scepticism (Montage & Mukherjee 2010; Chang 2012).

Carlson *et al.* (1996) investigated these complexities by categorising advertising claims in terms of its key ideological objectives: 1) to signal credibility; 2) to show solidarity with consumers' concerns; and 3) to extol a brand's values. They distinguish between product, process and image claims. Product claims clarify the positive or harmful environmental impact of a product, while process claims detail the impact of production and distribution processes. Image claims announce a brand's support for pro-environmental organisations and projects, without elucidating the characteristics of its own products or processes.

This study employs this taxonomy, in conjunction with more recent applications by Montage and Mukherjee (2010), in order to ascertain:

- 1) how the implied marketing message of each advertisement depends on product, process and/or image claims; and
- 2) how consumer positions are constructed through value assumptions (Fairclough 2003: 91).

The last objective enables the authors to link Carlson *et al.*'s (1996) taxonomy with Fairclough's (2003) value assumptions, and drives this article's distinctions between greenwashing and green branding.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

As the descriptor "green" has been deployed in a nebulous fashion, this article narrows its conceptualisation specifically to anxieties over environmental degradation. "Green" is used to designate government, public, corporate and private policies, programmes and initiatives (including commercial and marketing initiatives) formulated to prevent further environmental damage and/or to reverse existing destruction (Anyangwe 2014). The emphasis centres on green advertising, which is conceptualised in relation to three closely related concepts: corporate social responsibility (CSR), green worthy cause advertising and greenwashing.

Green advertising

Banerjee *et al.* (1995: 22) conceptualise green advertising as any form of commercial communication that makes explicit or implicit statements about the impact of a product/service/organisation on the biophysical environment (cf. Nyilasy *et al.* 2014; Montage & Mukherjee 2010). Using this conceptualisation, the set of South African print advertisements was divided into two categories. Green branding designates green advertising for commercial brands, and it is distinguished from green washing on the grounds explicated in the next section. First, however, it is noted that green branding has become increasingly pivotal for fostering what Nyilasy *et al.* (2014: 694) call corporate social responsibility (CSR).

From a brand management perspective, CSR's commercial value increases under specific conditions. In South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, the most notable condition is the continued growth of green consumers, and pressure from governmental bodies and non-governmental organisations (Nyilasy *et al.* 2014; Montage & Mukherjee 2010). Combining Carlson *et al.*'s (1996) taxonomy with Fairclough's (2003) discourse analysis sharpens our ability to trace brand managers' methods for securing a green image, and to differentiate green washing from green branding in print advertising.

Green washing

One vein of the research into green advertising problematises ambiguous claims about the attributes of a product/service.

Obscure claims exploit the ideological currency of a pro-environmental brand image and constitute greenwashing (Montage & Mukherjee 2010). In the analysis, this article unpacks the strategic combination of images and lexical items to produce obscure claims. The use of lexical items are traced, including "natural" and "organic", alongside ambiguous visual allusions to nature (including leaves, vines, seeds and earthen colours) as forms of greenwashing. These lexical and visual cues eschew explicit information about the green characteristics of the product or its production processes. Instead, the cues resonate with what Song and Kim (2018: 4) term "a sense of harmonious living that connects nature, quality of life and well-being", based on the proposition that, "consumers tend to be more susceptible to nature imagery" when they make purchase options (at least for low involvement products).

To unpack visual cues, the article relies on Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2002: 343) exposition of the social and cultural significations of colour along the lines of "differentiation, saturation, purity, modulation, value and hue". Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002: 344) treat colour as productive of "unspoken assumptions", derived from broad cultural conventions, which accounts for the way earthen colours, and shades of brown, green and blue could become evocative of "harmonious living" between individuals and nature, as is evident in the advertisements collected from South African print media (Song & Kim 2018: 4). Although this study does not embark on a comprehensive investigation of colour, it nevertheless draws from Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2002) proposition that colour represents a semiotic resource, rather than

an arbitrary dimension of visual communication. The semiotic utility of colour is cast in sharp relief when analysed in terms of its combination with other semiotic modes such as typography, product design and document design (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2002: 351).

Green branding

A second branch of research on green advertising classifies the green claims of advertising campaigns in terms of product, process and image claims (Carlson *et al.* 1996; Montage & Mukherjee 2010; Nyilasy *et al.* 2014). Building on these claim types, Song and Kim's (2018: 3-6) quantitative research suggests that consumers consider product and process claims more compelling than image claims. They account for this preference by suggesting that product and process claims depend on a human-centric approach to marketing, which attempts to balance consumer needs with environmental protection (Song & Kim 2018: 2). Image claims are less effective owing to the relative ambiguity of their content and concomitant inability to balance "consumers' product needs" with pro-environmental objectives (*ibid.*). However, the reduced effectiveness of image claims may not hold for low involvement products.

(Green) worthy cause advertising

The Boards of the International Social Marketing Association, European Social Marketing Association, and Australian Association of Social Marketing concur on the following conceptualisation:

Social marketing seeks to develop and integrate marketing concepts with other approaches to influence behaviours that benefit individuals and communities for the greater social good. [It] is guided by ethical principles [and] seeks to integrate research, best practice, theory, audience and partnership insight, to inform the delivery of competition sensitive and segmented social change programmes that are effective, efficient, equitable and sustainable (ISMA n.d.)

While this article acknowledges the value of research on social marketing discourse, the deployment of Carlson *et al.*'s (1996) taxonomy and Fairclough (2003) is less suited to its nuances, especially as social marketing is not driven by the same commercial exigencies as green branding.

CLAIM ORIENTATION

Product claims explicate the characteristics of the product/service itself and its impact on the biophysical environment, such as low CO₂ emissions or biodegradability. Process claims expound the "technology, production methods or disposal methods" involved in creating a product/service (Montage & Mukherjee 2010: 434). Examples include claims about the sustainability of water and energy consumption. Image claims are orientated towards associating the advertised brand with a particular environmental issue, project or activist group. Associations can be pursued explicitly by announcing sponsorship for an organisation. Recondite claims can also be made by encouraging pro-environmental behaviours without stipulating the brand's own commitments (Carlson *et al.* 1996). Song and Kim (2018) and Montage and Mukherjee's

(2010) empirical studies on consumer reactions suggest that image claims are more susceptible to scepticism, compared to product or process claims. Both studies explain this distinction by appealing to a human-centric model of green advertising. Because image claims offer little or no direct information about the brand's own contributions to environmental issues, they are more vulnerable to mistrust (Song & Kim 2018: 3). As the analysis demonstrates, this study treats such cases as instances of green washing, while conceptualising product and process claims as green branding, given their propensity for specific and empirically falsifiable information about a brand's contribution to environmental care (Montage & Mukherjee 2010).

A final observation on these distinctions between product, process and image claims regard the nature of the advertised product/service. Song and Kim (2018) and Montage and Mukherjee (2010) report that consumers scrutinised green claims more closely for high-involvement products, because they are more expensive, bought infrequently, and expected to last longer. Higher prices motivate consumers to process advertisements by means of what the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty *et al.* 1983) terms the central route. This route stimulates attention to falsifiable claims and comparison with competing brands. Consequently, green claims for high-involvement products are pondered more critically and image claims are dismissed. Conversely, low-involvement products are processed along a peripheral route. In such cases, less cognitive energy is devoted to assessing the veracity of potentially misleading claims. Product and process claims are thus most influential for high-involvement products (Song & Kim 2018; Montage & Mukherjee 2010).

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Data set

The sample comprises 100 print advertisements from general circulation South African magazines published between 2008 and 2017. The dataset is relatively small taking into account that one of the three categories (advertising for non-profit organisations) is almost absent from above the line marketing, owing to the financial constraints endured by welfare organisations. Consequently, the investigation focuses on typical instances of green branding and green washing. Four examples of green washing and four examples of green branding from South African general circulation print magazines comprise the centrepieces of the analysis, inasmuch as they illustrate wider trends.

Graduate students majoring in communication science completed an initial stage of data collection as part of their coursework, designed to conscientise the participants about distinctions between green branding and green washing. Following thorough engagement with the above-mentioned theorists, the graduates in question were instructed to collect two recent examples (no older than 12 months) of green advertising, featuring product, process and/or image claims. Collective discussions and presentations were convened, where graduates defended their selection.

In the analysis that follows, the authors exemplify the application of Montage and Mukherjee (2010) and Fairclough (2003) by means of seven exemplars that illustrate this study's distinction between green washing and green branding. The analysis attends specifically to claim types (product, process and/or image) and value assumptions.

Discourse as representation

This section contextualises the framework by explicating Fairclough's (2003) use of the concepts social structures, practices and events, before explaining what a relational approach to discourse analysis entails. Finally, the connections between discursive representation and value assumptions are unpacked as a means of investigating the shared beliefs on which advertising messages depend. Theoretically, these shared beliefs are akin to the "unspoken assumptions" that drive interpretations of colour in Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2002: 344) semiotic research.

Social structures, practices and events

Fairclough's (2003) research proceeds from the observation that discourses both reflect existing social norms and power relations, while concurrently carrying the potential to perpetuate or challenge these in a dialectical relationship.

This study adopted Fairclough's (2003) approach to texts by viewing them as components of social events. That is, texts only gain meaning in a negotiated and co-constructed process between communicators and receivers. This perspective organises the interest in the strategic use of claim types in green advertising. Analytically, this broad approach is narrowed by relying on Fairclough's (2003) proposition that two causal factors influence the production and interpretation of texts: social structures and social actors.

Social structures signify broad/abstract entities, which delimit sets of possibilities. Social events are constrained by these sets of possibilities. Advertising texts (as social events) are constrained by their economic/commercial purposes and cultural contexts. Consequently, the ultimate success of advertising is measured by an increase in net profits.

However, the constraining influence that social structures exert on social events filter through intermediate entities, which Fairclough (2003: 35-37) calls social practices. Advertising texts are therefore structured by prevailing social practices, and this is applied to green advertising as expounded below.

Genres, discourses and styles

Fairclough (2003: 26-27) distinguishes three linguistic social practices that mediate the influence of social structures on texts: genres, discourses and styles. All three dimensions are dialectically interconnected and thus identifiable through a relational analysis.

First, genres involve particular ways of acting. For this article, advertising constitutes a genre, since commercial communication constitutes a form of social action aimed

at specific objectives (Fairclough 2003: 67). The typical objectives and associated textual characteristics of a genre like advertising mediate the influence that social structures exert on texts. Consumers, for example, know that advertising promotes one brand over competitors, which influences their attempts to interpret advertising texts. Linguistically speaking, genres are often realised in the organisational features of a text such as the patterned combination of brand logos, images, headlines, subtexts and contact information. The analysis below maps the combination of these features to make green claims.

Second, Fairclough (2003) uses the concept discourse to designate patterned ways of representing elements of the social world. Discourse analysis is concerned with identifying which elements have been singled out for representation, and the ideologically productive ways in which elements are related to each other. Significantly, these relations are not pre-determined by the language in question, but instead are contingent and context-dependent (Fairclough 2003: 129-130). The discourse of green advertising can involve elements such as ecological disasters and individual consumers' responsibility, and can relate these to each other in ways that promote the environmental image of a particular brand. Discourse analysts can trace these relations in the linguistic patterns of a text such as the distribution of product, process and image claims. In order to investigate these representations in more detail, the concept value assumptions is employed.

Finally, styles, in Fairclough's (2003) perspective, treats language as a resource for self-identification. Brands can employ a range of discursive strategies in an advertising campaign to construct a pro-environmental image (or style) through carefully selected representations of ecological concerns and the brand's own contribution to alleviating these problems, as well as the behaviours that consumers are called on to exhibit.

Value assumptions

Pivotal to this study is Fairclough's (2003: 55) contention that no form of communication is conceivable without a degree of common ground, with the corollary that, by virtue of their relative social power, brands can manipulate the nature and content of this common ground. This can be accomplished by articulating ideologically-loaded representations as if their truth value is axiomatic (*ibid.*), allowing advertising to play a primary role in shaping popular beliefs and priorities

Value assumptions offer a lens for examining taken-for-granted discursive representations in advertising (Fairclough 2003: 55). All advertising strategies hinge on collecting extensive information regarding the target audience's background knowledge, shared beliefs, attitudes and norms. Marketing professionals are charged with applying this information to draw the audience's attention, to engage them in the process of assigning meaning to an advertisement, and to commit specific claims to memory. Fairclough refers to this process as the construction of consumer positions, which in turn includes the construction of value assumptions. To clarify Fairclough's (2003) observation, Conradie and Van Niekerk (2015) offer an illustration of how the construction of consumer positions and value assumptions work.

Conradie and Van Niekerk (2015: 135) focus on code-switching in advertising and illustrate how the close association between the French language and feminine eroticism can be used to construct the consumer position that French haute couture is especially desirable. The implied marketing message, therefore, depends on consumers' ability to notice, understand and accept (implicitly) a value assumption about the desirability of French haute couture, and its status as symbolic of feminine eroticism. Similarly, the consumer positions in this sample depend on value assumptions that are considered likely to motivate subsequent decisions and behaviour (at least from the copywriters' perspectives).

Value assumptions are meant to encourage consumers to act on their presumed or perceived environmental, humanitarian, product commitment by supporting brands with a strong pro-environmental image (Song & Kim 2018: 6). Since the use of value assumptions forms part of copywriters' standard practices, one of the primary concerns in this analysis is to examine the presumably shared values that underpin the green claims in the sample. These shared values are also referred to as hyper norms underpinning the value assumptions in advertising communication in a specific time frame. This study focuses on the assumptions related to green product claims, process claims and image claims.

Analytic template

Informed by the above-mentioned combination of product, process and image claims, value assumptions from Fairclough (2003), as well as the work of Song and Kim (2018), Yoon and Kim (2016) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002), the analysis of this study is presented on three levels:

- A) claim type;
- B) value assumptions; and
- C) the implied marketing message.

To demonstrate the dominant trends in the dataset, a qualitative analysis of typical exemplars are offered within the category.

Data analysis

There is a demonstrable link between value assumptions and marketing messages. Value assumptions are broader in nature, in the sense that a presumably desirable outcome might be applicable to a range of products or brands; marketing messages are more specific since they must be linked to a particular brand. Value assumptions, therefore, underpin a brand-specific marketing message, with the consequence that the success of the marketing message requires that audiences accept an underlying value assumption. Based on the less-is-more principle of advertising communication (Crook 2004), this article argues that all three categories of green advertising in the data use brand-specific iterations of a basic, concise marketing message: "As a green/environmentally conscious consumer you should support this brand (in contrast to alternative brands without commensurate environmental benefits) because it

serves your own needs/interests (defined in more specific terms by each brand and produce type) as well as that of the environment.” The difference and link between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism of Yoon and Kim (2016) is thus relevant again.

Green advertising categories

Two categories are of interest in this investigation, green branding and green washing. Typical examples representative of these two categories (A: green branding and B: green washing) will be analysed in the following section.

Green branding

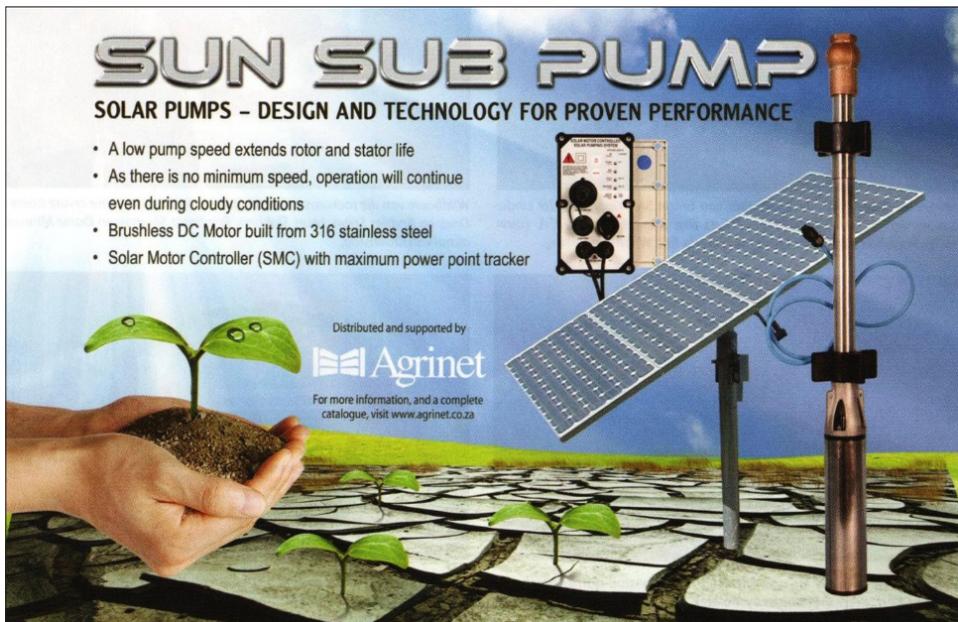


FIGURE 1: GREEN BRANDING - ENGLISH EXAMPLE

TABLE 1: GREEN BRANDING (A1)

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|--|---|
| 1. Claim type | <p>Product claim</p> <p>While the slogan (printed directly beneath the product name SUN SUB PUMP) draws a link between “design and technology” and “proven performance”, the claim orientation is most prominently communicated by the four bullet-points below this slogan. Each bullet supplies technical information about the product, and is likely to be processed since this is a high-involvement product. All four points emphasise aspects of the product rather the production process, and all points relate to the reliability of a product that is by its very nature pro-environmental inasmuch as it offers an alternative energy source to fossil fuels.</p> |
| 2. Relevant visual, lexical representations and colour use underpinning claim type and marketing message | <p>Lexical representations</p> <p>“Solar pump”; “Distributed and supported by Agrinet” (agricultural based company); and four bullet points aimed at promoting specific claims about the produce.</p> <p>Visual representations</p> <p>Young plants with dew drops and soil in the hands of a consumer support the product claim by demonstrating its effectiveness. Given that Agrinet operates as the distributor of the product, it seems plausible that the image is meant to represent the hands of a farmer or a similar professional engaged agricultural work.</p> <p>Colour</p> <p>The use of the natural green and brown colours and (sky) blue helps to frame/contextualise the message as “green” or good for the environment.</p> |
| 3. Value assumptions | <p>People from the agricultural community should be interested in environmental-friendly energy solutions they can trust for proven performance.</p> |

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|------------------------------|--|
| 4. Implied marketing message | <p>First, the advertisement depends on the audience's ability to recall background knowledge regarding solar energy, and specifically that solar energy constitutes a more sustainable alternative than fossil fuels. Information on the sustainability of solar energy is not explicitly provided in any of the lexical or visual features. Instead, it is assumed that consumers already possess this knowledge and that they will be able to retrieve it when encountering the word "solar", the image of the product, the image of solar rays in the upper right-hand corner, as well as bedewed young plants growing under these rays. Retrieving this knowledge is intended to activate the above-mentioned value assumption.</p> <p>Combining the broad knowledge that solar energy is more sustainable and desirable, with the specific claims of reliability conveyed by the bullet points, encourages consumers to extract a message that this product is both environmentally-friendly as well as dependable. The rational claims offered in bullet-form are substantiated by the endorsement of an agricultural organisation (Agrinet). That is, the fact that the product is being distributed by Agrinet further corroborates both its environmentally-friendly status as well as its dependability. Such endorsements are a regular feature of high-involvement advertisements, and provide what Crook (2004: 762) calls a "validating context".</p> <p>Summary: Green consumers should favour energy-sustainable products that are also reliable. The SUN SUB PUMP is desirable as an environmentally-friendly energy solution that can also be trusted for performance in the agricultural community.</p> |
| 5. Example | SUN SUB PUMP |
| 6. Source | <i>Veeplaas</i> , April 2013 |

Waterbesparingstegnologie om oor opgewonde te raak.

Groen
Tegnologie
aan die binnekant

Die nuwe 8 kg wasmasjien gebruik presies die regte hoeveelheid water vir elke bondel. En nie 'n druppel meer nie.



BOSCH Avantix 8
Wasmasjien

Die nuwe Avantix 8 kg. Eerste vir volhoubaarheid. Of jy nou net 'n hemp of 'n volle bondel was, ons intelligente ActiveWater™-tegnologie gebruik slegs die korrekte hoeveelheid water en kan jou genoeg bespaar om 40 baddens 'n jaar vol te tap.* Jy kan nou dus meer van die Aarde se natuurlike hulpbronne red sonder om enige veranderinge te maak. Maak elke dag 'n Bosch-dag.

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* Jaarlikse besparings gebaseer op 'n gemiddelde bondel van 8 kg en 22 was siklusse per jaar saam 'n gemiddelde grootte bad van 75 liter.

Model getoon: WAQ24441BY

Bosch beveel OMO AUTO Liquid-Wasmiddel aan. Dit verwyder hardnekkige vlekke, selfs in 'n KOUE WAS.



FIGURE 2: GREEN BRANDING - AFRIKAANS EXAMPLE (A2)

TABLE 2: GREEN BRANDING (A2)

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|--|---|
| 1. Claim type | <p>Product claim</p> <p>The subtext emphasises technological advances that enable more economic water use. Implicitly, it also endorses behaviour associated with the frugal use of energy, since using cold water is recommended.</p> |
| 2. Relevant visual, lexical representations and colour use underpinning claim type and marketing message | <p>Lexical representations</p> <p>“Volhoubaarheid” (sustainability); “bespaar” (save); “Aarde se natuurlike hulpbronne red” (rescuing Earth’s natural resources).</p> <p>Visual representations</p> <p>The visual representation of a dial set to cold cycle enforces the lexical message printed between the OMO container and the dial. Similarly, the “green technology inside” logo in the upper right-hand corner attempts to corroborate the pro-environmental status of this product. These logos are not awarded by a third-party; instead they are applied by the manufacturer Bosch to showcase “our most efficient models” (Bosch n.d.).</p> <p>Colour:</p> <p>The use of almost only white/pale blue (light colours) to focus on cleaning and not harmful (dirty) to the environment helps to frame/contextualise the message as “green” or good for the environment. The use of natural green (earthly green colour) in the top right corner stands out to support the value assumption of sustainability.</p> |
| 3. Value assumptions | <p>Green consumers should be interested in new technologies that are sustainable without demanding additional effort on their part.</p> |

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|------------------------------|---|
| 4. Implied marketing message | <p>The advertisement relies on the intended audience's ability to recall background knowledge regarding water scarcity and pressure on energy resources. It is assumed that consumers already possess this basic knowledge and that they will be able to retrieve it when encountering the lexical representations listed above, such as "sustainable" and "natural resources", etc., as well as the logo for green technology and the cold water knob on the Bosch machine.</p> <p>Combined with the information the subtext printed beneath the headline and below the image of the product, consumers are encouraged to reconstruct the marketing message in terms of the sustainability and technological advancement of the home appliances produced by this brand. The "green technology inside" logo at the top indexes the brand's confidence in the product.</p> <p>Summary: A green consumer should save water and energy by buying Bosch house hold appliances/ washing machine.</p> |
| 5. Example | Bosch appliances – washing machine |
| 6. Source | <i>Rooi Rose</i> , May 2013 |

WAVERLEY HILLS
ORGANIC WINES

**GO
GREEN**

NO pesticides
NO herbicides
NO fungicides
NO chemical fertilizers

With this reassurance you can relax
and savour every sip of Waverley
Hills Fine Organic Wine.

Our unique style of wine
is silky and smooth with
soft ripe tannins and robust
fynbos characteristics.

WAVERLEY
HILLS

CABERNET
SAUVIGNON
SHIRAZ
2010
PRODUCT OF SOUTH AFRICA

It won't cost the earth

100% Organically certified and produced with great
care to preserve Mother nature as God intended.

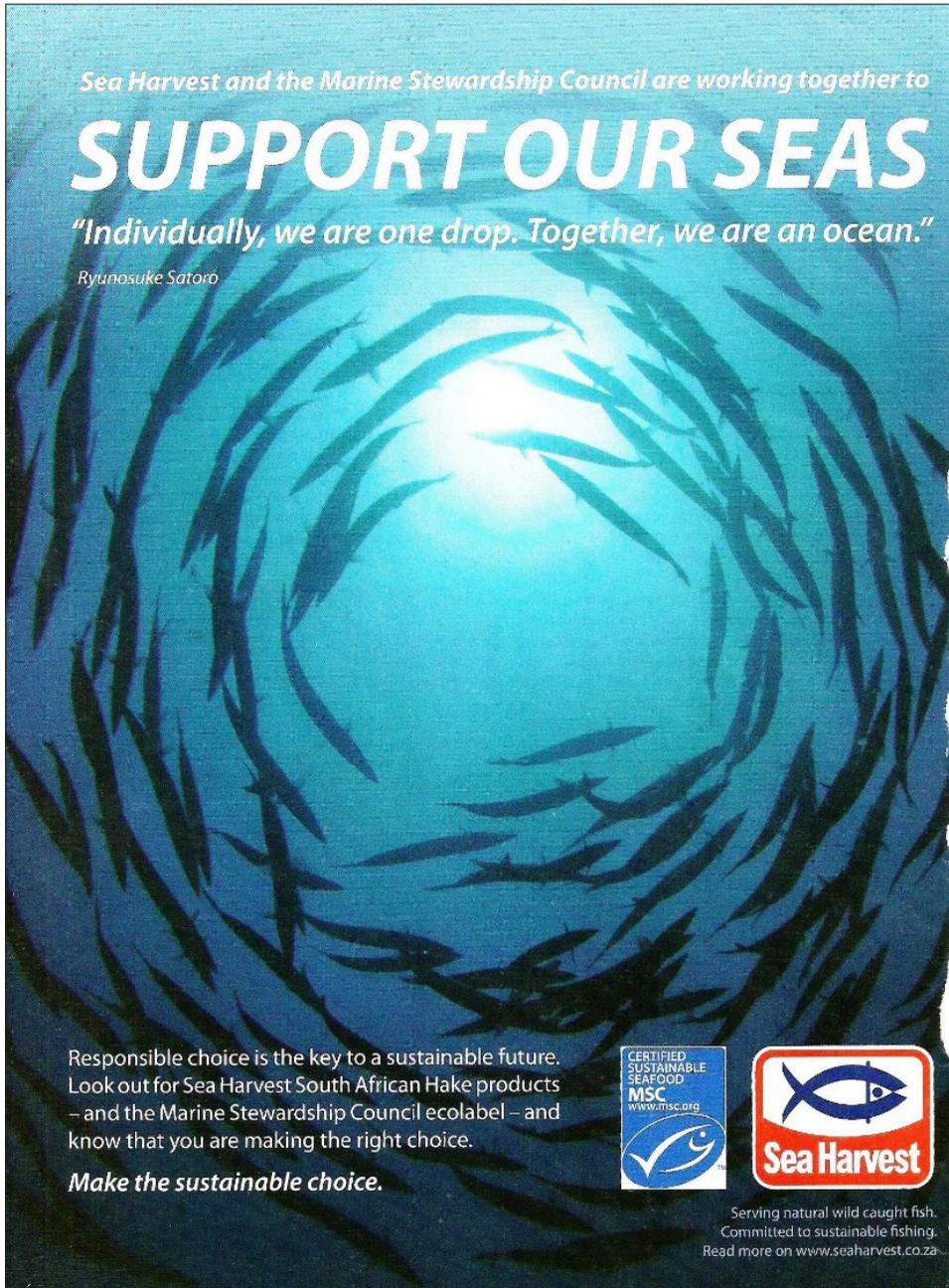
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FIGURE 3: GREEN BRANDING - ENGLISH EXAMPLE (A3)

TABLE 3: GREEN BRANDING (A3)

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|--|--|
| 1. Claim type | <p>Process claim</p> <p>The headline includes the word “organic”, referring to the production process, and the claim is rendered in more particular terms by the list:</p> <p>“NO pesticides NO herbicides NO fungicides NO chemical fertilizers”.</p> <p>Besides these assurances regarding the production methods, the process claim is further manifested in the final line, “It won’t cost the earth [...] 100% Organically certified and produced with great care to preserve Mother nature as God intended.”</p> |
| 2. Relevant visual, lexical representations and colour use underpinning claim type and marketing message | <p>Lexical representations</p> <p>The following list of lexical representations from the advertisement emphasise the process claim made: “Organic”; “No pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, chemical fertilizers”; “100% organically certified and produced with great care to preserve Mother nature as God intended.”</p> <p>Visual representations</p> <p>The green colours and icons of butterflies and birds all contribute to the process claim made on lexical level.</p> <p>Colour</p> <p>The use of only shades of green (with the support of the lexical and visual representations) contextualise this brand as also “green” or good for the environment.</p> |
| 3. Value assumptions | <p>Green consumers should support products generated by an organic manufacturing process that neither harms the environment nor endangers their health.</p> |

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|------------------------------|--|
| 4. Implied marketing message | <p>The advertisement hinges on the capacity of the audience to retrieve background knowledge on the potentially harmful qualities of pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and fertilisers. Similarly, audiences must also recall that organic food production is viewed as a potentially safer alternative. The advertisement is predicated on the assumption that audiences already have access to this information, and that it will be activated upon processing the lexical representation listed above, including the call to action in the headline's verb phrase: "GO GREEN", alongside icons of birds and butterflies against a green background.</p> <p>By taking cognisance of the list of process claims, consumers are encouraged to place the brand name as being produced through organic and environmental-friendly methods.</p> <p>Summary: A green conscious consumer should prefer wine that is produced organically such as the brand Waverley Hills.</p> |
| 5. Example | Waverly Hills wine |
| 6. Source | <i>Good taste</i> , August 2012 |



Sea Harvest and the Marine Stewardship Council are working together to

SUPPORT OUR SEAS

"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean."

Ryunosuke Satoro

Responsible choice is the key to a sustainable future. Look out for Sea Harvest South African Hake products – and the Marine Stewardship Council ecolabel – and know that you are making the right choice.

Make the sustainable choice.



Serving natural wild caught fish.
Committed to sustainable fishing.
Read more on www.seaharvest.co.za

FIGURE 4: GREEN BRANDING - ENGLISH EXAMPLE (A4)

TABLE 4: GREEN BRANDING (A4)

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|--|--|
| 1. Claim type | <p>Image claim</p> <p>The call to action, conveyed in the headline's verb phrase, is printed beneath the advertised brand's expression of support for a non-profit organisation: the Marine Stewardship Council. As outlined below, this move to foster a pro-environmental image through claims of support for green organisations, is accompanied by a process claim.</p> <p>Process claim</p> <p>This claim is conveyed by a declaration beneath the Sea Harvest logo, proclaiming a commitment to serve "naturally caught fish" as a cognate of "sustainable fishing". The eco label assigned by a third party (the Marine Stewardship Council) provides a validating context that testifies to sustainable production methods, rather than the qualities of the product itself.</p> |
| 2. Relevant visual, lexical representations and colour use underpinning claim type and marketing message | <p>Lexical representations</p> <p>While expressions of support for the Marine Stewardship Council constitute an image claim, a subsequent list of lexical choices advance a process claim: "responsible choices"; "sustainable future"; "sustainable choice"; "sustainable fishing"; and "sustainable food".</p> <p>Visual representations</p> <p>The image of a school of fish and the eco label support the process claim made on a lexical level.</p> <p>Colour</p> <p>The use of the dominant natural (sea) blue colours contextualises the brand. By buying this brand, consumers also support a worthy cause (Marine Stewardship Council) to ensure sustainability of and responsibility to our natural resources.</p> |
| 3. Value assumptions | <p>Green consumers should value products generated by means of sustainable manufacturing processes.</p> |

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|------------------------------|--|
| 4. Implied marketing message | <p>The advertisement is predicated on the audience's ability to summon information on the danger of exhausting marine life, particularly the consequent threat to human food supplies. In addition, no information is provided on the actions of the Marine Stewardship Council. Possession of this knowledge is taken for granted. Consumers are expected to retrieve it upon processing items including "sustainable" and the eco label for sustainable sea food.</p> <p>Summary: A green consumer should support sustainable fishing methods, and therefore support brands such as Sea Harvest that co-operate with and are endorsed by the Marine Stewardship Council.</p> |
| 5. Example | Sea harvest fish product |
| 6. Source | <i>Good Housekeeping</i> , June 2012 |

Green washing

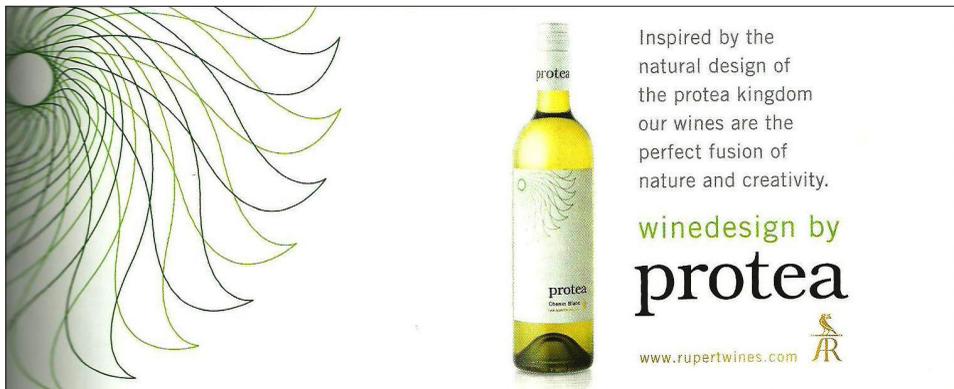


FIGURE 5: GREEN WASHING - ENGLISH EXAMPLE (B1)

TABLE 5: GREEN WASHING (B1)

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|--|---|
| 1. Claim type | <p>Image claim</p> <p>The lexical representation provides no factual evidence of claims related to either the pro-environmental qualities of the product itself or the production processes. Moreover, its image claim is not corroborated by evidence of support to a pro-environmental non-profit organisation. Instead, the advertisement is designed to associate the brand and product with nature by claiming to draw inspiration from the natural world. This particular kind of image claim was therefore coded under green washing as conceptualised in earlier sections, since it neither conforms to the definition of green branding nor of worthy cause advertising.</p> |
| 2. Relevant visual, lexical representations and colour use underpinning claim type and marketing message | <p>Lexical representations</p> <p>Words like “natural”, “protea”, and “nature” are used in the absence of clear information about any environmental benefits.</p> <p>Visual representations</p> <p>Images of flowers, leaves and typical lines from nature are used.</p> <p>Colour</p> <p>The use of only white (clean) and shades of different (natural) greens portrays/represents the brand as “green” or good for the environment.</p> |
| 3. Value assumptions | <p>It is good for the image of the brand and the consumer to support creative and environmentally concerned initiatives; to at least look green as opposed to being green. Possessing the image of being green should provide a competitive advantage because it offers support for relevant value assumptions.</p> |
| 4. Implied marketing message | <p>The advertisement explicitly attempts to link the protea, South Africa’s national flower, with creativity. On this basis, the text claims to derive its inspiration from nature in order to establish a close association between the advertised brand and nature. No further elaborations are provided as to what this link might entail.</p> <p>Summary: Protea wines are inspired by nature and the creativity offered by natural design should be preferred by green consumers.</p> |

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 5. Example | <i>Protea wines</i> |
| 6. Source | <i>Good taste</i> , March 2012 |

Die wetenskap

Stratys 3 verskaf vog aan die vel se boonste en middellae, asook die dieper lae vir 'n ongeëwenaarde sysagte vel teenoor gewone alledaagse lyfrome.

Die resultaat: 'n beter, gesonder, meer bevochtigde vel.

+ suiwer natuurlike bestanddele

Daar word na hawermout verwys as 'n 'slim' vogmiddel omdat dit die droë dele bevog, terwyl dit die oliërigheid op ander plekke verminder en vog terugsit waar jou vel dit die nodigste het.

Sorg vir jou vel sedert 1870

Vir meer inligting van ons velsorgkundiges besoek [facebook.com/Vaseline](https://www.facebook.com/Vaseline)

FIGURE 6: GREEN WASHING - AFRIKAANS EXAMPLE (B2)

TABLE 6: GREEN WASHING (B2)

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|--|--|
| 1. Claim type | <p>Image claim</p> <p>The lexical representation provides no factual evidence of either a product or process claim. Additionally, the image claim is not accompanied by any statements of support for pro-environmental, non-profit organisations. Instead, the advertisement attempts to establish a close association with nature by means of lexical items including of being green for this brand, but the brand is still portrayed as being green by the use of the listed lexical and visual representations such as “suiwer” (pure), “natuurlik” (natural), and “wetenskap” (science), in conjunction with images of seeds, leaves, oatmeal, and natural colours. This type of image claim is coded as a form of green washing.</p> |
| 2. Relevant visual, lexical representations and colour use underpinning claim type and marketing message | <p>Lexical representations</p> <p>Words such as “natuurlik” (natural), “suiwer” (pure), “sorg” (take care) are used to create an association with nature.</p> <p>Visual representations</p> <p>The use of natural items from nature; images of seeds, oatmeal, flowers are employed to portray this image of a “green” brand that is not harmful to the environment</p> <p>Colour</p> <p>The use of natural, earthy brown, cream and yellow colours helps to portray the brand as “green”; thus, natural and not harmful to either the environment or the individual.</p> |
| 3. Value assumptions | <p>It is good for the image of the brand and the target audience to support creative and environmentally concerned natural brands; to at least look green (as opposed to being green).</p> |

| Category of analysis | Analysis |
|------------------------------|--|
| 4. Implied marketing message | <p>Acceptance of the association between the advertised brand and nature depends on the intended audience's ability to process icons such as seeds, oatmeal and flowers, as well as references to pure, natural ingredients ("suiwer, natuurlike bestanddele") as evidence of the healthy characteristics of the product. The advertisement is designed on the assumption that the target audience already associates words such as natural ("natuurlik") with health, and that such associations will be strengthened by visual representations from nature such as oatmeal, seeds and leaves, as well as earthly colours.</p> <p>Summary: Vaseline skincare lotion will scientifically enhance and naturally take care of your skin with ingredients from nature, as should be preferred by green conscious consumers.</p> |
| 5. Example | Vaseline skin care product |
| 6. Source | Sarie, May 2013 |

With reference to Song and Kim (2018)'s human-centric approach to green advertising, the green positioning in the above three examples does not centre on benefits to the environment or humanity, but exploits the audience's need for uniqueness and quality. The perception of "being green"/linked to the environment and the benefit of humanity is created by the listed lexical and visual signs and the use of colours from nature: "The body cream is depicted as superior to competing products based on the claim that it is a trustworthy, sustainable and natural product made from natural ingredients"; "This wine is a better option than competitors', owing to its fusion of creativity and natural design". The similarity in the value assumptions and implied marketing message between the green branding category and the green washing category makes it clear that the uninformed consumer can easily be misled in believing the "greenness/goodness" of the brand based on the ways it is portrayed (visual, lexical, colour).

(Green) worthy cause branding

This category, worthy cause branding (Figure 7), is excluded from the analysis because worthy cause branding (also worthy causes such as the brand name Paper Power focusing on good causes related to nature and conservation) that is inherently green with the consequence that the taxonomy in terms of product, process and image claims is not applicable.

In cases of the aforementioned categories, green branding (A examples) or green washing (B examples), product, process and image claims form part of an overall strategy as is identified in the analysis to enhance the pro-environmental image of the

advertising brand that is meant to benefit the environment and/or the individual without harming the environment. That is, they serve to persuade green consumers that they merit support, but the ultimate goal of these strategies is to gain a commercial edge over competitors and to strengthen profit. By contrast, pro-environmental organisations are not concerned with commercial gain, and because they are green by their very nature, recourse to persuasive tactics such as product, process or image claims are unnecessary.

In terms of value assumptions, all advertisements in this category depend on consumers' presupposed desire to address environmental concerns and therefore support worthy cause organisations and programmes that need financial support from the general public. The concise implied marketing message is similar to those of the first two categories (green branding and green washing): "As a good/green conscious consumer, you should support this (worthy cause) brand, since it coheres with your existing desire to contribute to the amelioration of environmental concerns." Financial interests are limited to the needs of the organisation and its initiatives rather than profit.

One typical example within the category (green) worthy cause advertising is merely included to illustrate the above argumentation.

65% of recycled paper is used as raw material in the manufacturing of new paper.



Recycled paper has value.

Paper can be recycled at least seven times. New wood fibre from new timber is thus required to keep the paper cycle going.

PRASA

Furthermore, recycling paper reduces pollution and litter. When paper products biodegrade in rubbish dumps and landfills, global warming gases such as methane and carbon dioxide are released. Recycling means that the carbon stored in trees, wood and paper is kept out of the atmosphere for longer.

As with the pulp and paper manufacturing industry, paper recycling also creates valuable employment and economic empowerment opportunities.

Endorsed by



Paper Power
The truth about paper



TWO SIDES
www.twosides.info

Join the conversation on Twitter @PaperPowerZa to have your say.

FIGURE 7: WORTHY CAUSE BRANDING - ENGLISH EXAMPLE (C1)

Example: Paper Power

Source: *DSTV Premium* magazine, February 2014

DISCUSSION

The expansion of green advertising is amplified by numerous developments, including increased media coverage of the dangers that environmental degradation poses to the life-sustaining capacities of the planet (Anyangwe 2014). Environmental sustainability is increasingly recognised as a collective peril to all humanity, even while distinct population groups feel the threat more immediately. The universality of the threat renders environmental concerns especially attractive to commercial brands. Potentially, it offers a poignant and widely-appealing method of demonstrating solidarity with consumers' concerns, and the scholarly literature reviewed suggests that corporate expenditure on green advertising is likely to increase sharply in the future (Chang 2012).

Van Niekerk (2008: 495-510) also identified environmental concerns as a hyper norm of contemporary advertising discourse. Like value assumptions, hyper norms denote an assumption that constitutes the common ground shared between advertisers and audiences, and which provides an implicit basis for persuasive messages. Hyper norms, however, subsume a range of more specific value assumptions, including those identified in the sample.

The value assumptions isolated in the categories for green branding and green washing evince a noteworthy convergence, and the authors suggest that South African consumers should be critically sensitised to the manipulative potential of green washing, as it exploits impulses towards environmental concern. At a representational level, green branding and green washing can resist easy distinction, as suggested in the qualitative analyses.

The results of this study confirm the currency accorded to the attainment of a pro-environmental image. Moreover, by first applying a typology of claim types before qualitatively scrutinising the interaction between claim types and value assumptions, the findings showcase how persuasive strategies operate across green washing and green branding.

Advertisements in the green branding category serve commercial brands and are, consequently, vulnerable to consumer scepticism, which they predominantly work to overcome by deploying product and process claims. Image claims, if present, are combined with product and/or process claims, suggesting that the endorsement of behaviours associated with a green lifestyle or a pro-environmental organisation are not considered sufficient as a persuasive strategy. Instead, product and process claims are relied upon to overcome scepticism, and to vivify an underlying assumption that consumers ought to express their concern over environmental degradation through financial support of the advertised brand.

Additionally, the advertisements were classified premised on vague image claims without detailed or explicit information regarding its environmental impact as instances of green washing. In the sample, such instances were confined to low-involvement products, which consumers are less likely to evaluate critically owing to the lower cost. The typical examples in this category are lexically and visually (often in terms

of colour) constructed around value assumptions that resemble those in the green branding category.

Literature on persuasive commercial communication stress that in order to signal credibility and solidarity with consumers' values, brands attempt to simultaneously reflect and manipulate the content of consumers' knowledge (Bator & Cialdini 2000; Fairclough 2003; Chang 2012). The valence that has accrued to pro-environmentalism provides a method of reflecting the values that consumers are (meant) to hold, while concurrently suggesting a means of acting on these values.



FIGURE 8: GREEN ABOVE ALL ELSE

Example: Cuticura body cream

Source: *Move* magazine, April 2017

The green washing example by Cuticura (Figure 8) cream is indicative of this value attributed to the norm of being regarded as “green” and the fact that the ingredients of the brand are made from plant extracts are helpful in positioning this brand as “green” and therefore healthy and good for you and the environment. This example will also be classified as green washing since no proof is provided. Aspects such as beauty and physical appearance are of less importance in the positioning of the brand in this advertisement. This is evident in the visual choices (leave, colour, layout) and the lexical choices (“herbal”, “restore”, “natural”, “life”, “repair”), as was also illustrated in the complete analysis of the advertisements included in this investigation.

In the words of Friedman (2008) commercial competition is increasingly optimised toward “out green[ing]” the competition. This article contributes to the understanding of what it means to be seen as a “green brand” by focusing on the relevance of knowledge of societal norms when communication practitioners and opinion makers communicate with their target audiences. This study sheds light on the signs of representation (visual clues, lexical items and colour) which copywriters/brand owners use to portray a brand as green or good for the environment. On the other hand, South African consumers should be empowered to differentiate between misleading (image) green claims and to report false advertising claims based on the Consumer Protection Act. The use of natural artefacts from the environment (visual representations) such as stones, rocks, water from the sea, rivers, leaves, bark, seeds, roots, words (lexical representations) such as “green”, “natural”, “sustainable”, “responsible”, and natural colours (greens, blue, browns) offer poor proof as to whether a brand and/or product is good for the environment, or whether it could support human welfare without harming the environment. The above-mentioned representations function as communicative codes that, given their use in a period during which cultivating a green reputation is good for business, endow their users with a form of currency to gain market share without any substantial evidence to support the value assumptions underpinning the advertisement: this brand/service is also good for the environment, or this brand/service benefits humanity without harming the environment.

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