



THE DOUBLE FACE OF GREEN FASHION ADVERTISING.

Predicting positive attitude toward social media brand ads and electronic word-of-mouth: the influence of message appeal and the moderating role of environmental concern.

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ANR: 134100

Master's Thesis

Communication and Information Sciences

Specialization Business Communication and Digital Media

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January 2018

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Jos Bartels for his constant and excellent supervision during the Thesis's writing process. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Katalin Bálint for her kind support as second reader of my Thesis. On a personal note, I would like to thank my family and my friends, especially Júlia, Christina, Dimitra and Patrick, who always greatly supported me during my studies. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Mister Spex's Management and the Onsite team for constantly endorsing me about my decision of pursuing the Master.

Abstract

The increasing concern about the environmental footprint of apparel production led to a growing presence of green fashion brands in the global market. Nonetheless, little is known about how to advertise green apparel, especially in relation to its complex essence. Therefore, the first aim of this study was to gain a better understanding about the relationship between the employment of rational and emotional appeals in green fashion persuasive messages and attitude toward ads on social media. A further goal of the current thesis was to contribute to the developing research on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and investigate whether a favorable involvement with green apparel brand posts on social media can predict positive eWOM. Additionally, the moderating effect of environmental concern was explored on the relationship between message appeal and consumers' attitude toward the ad. The current study employed a between-subject experimental design with three message appeal conditions (rational, emotional and combined appeal). The analysis of 177 responses showed that there is no difference between the usage of rational and emotional message appeals in green fashion social media advertisements when predicting consumers' attitude toward them. In addition, environmental concern did not influence the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward green fashion ads. Moreover, the present research demonstrated that a positive attitude toward brand posts supports eWOM. Interestingly, further factors, namely social identification and skepticism toward advertising showed an important role in predicting positive eWOM. The findings provide managerial implications for employing green marketing strategies on social media.

Keywords: green fashion, message appeal, eWOM, social media, environmental concern

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1. Introduction

The fundamental role of clothes in people's life (Niinimäki, 2010; O'Cass, 2000) has shaped the progressive growth of the global fashion industry (Lu, 2017). The high-speed demand and supply of affordable apparel has turned the clothing manufacturing process into a crucial issue in terms of environmental damage (Claudio, 2007). The production of fabrics, such as polyester and cotton, has a concerning environmental footprint (Claudio, 2007), as well as landfilling, the most common practice to dispose of textile waste (Domina & Koch, 1997; Ng, Chow & Choi, 2015). As a consequence of the growing awareness of harms inflicted to the environment by the apparel industry, new phenomena, such as the "Slow Fashion" movement have risen (Pookulangara & Shepard, 2013). In addition, the presence of eco-fashion labels in the global market has become progressively relevant (Kim & Hall, 2015). The challenge of green fashion brands is to communicate to consumers clear messages about the superiority of their products in terms of quality and environmental protection. By employing an efficient communication, green fashion companies may acquire an important role in the market for a tangible and positive change in the context of clothes' production and consumption.

In order to develop a fruitful communication with consumers, green fashion brands can utilize social media established marketing potential (Hajli, 2014; Vinerean, Cetina, Dumitrescu & Tichindelean, 2013; Yan, 2010). Companies have the opportunity to employ different message appeals on social platforms when communicating information about products via, for instance, brand posts containing visual and/or textual elements (De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012; Lee & Hong, 2016; Kujur & Singh, 2017). A message appeal can address rational or emotional elaboration (Holmes & Crocker, 1987). Specifically, a rational appeal relates to the disclosure of details about manufacturing processes and product quality, addressing consumers' utilitarian

decisions (Panda, Panda & Mishra, 2013). An emotional appeal, on the other hand, utilizes elements that evoke emotions for reaching consumers' responses (Panda et al., 2013).

Analyzing the efficacy of different types of message appeals on consumers' positive attitude toward advertisements is especially relevant when the product marketed is complex, such as green apparel. More specifically, clothes are usually perceived as symbolic items by consumers and the shared meaning on apparel does not necessarily require detailed information when advertising clothing items (Lorek & Lucas, 2003; Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi, 2012). In addition, the majority of fashion ads generally relies on hedonic and emotional images, omitting utilitarian advantages (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). However, environmentally sustainable features increase green apparel's complexity compared to standard clothes, due to the higher information processing required in relation to its ecological properties (Moisander, 2007). Green fashion assumes in this way a double face, relating both to emotions and rational elaboration.

Enhancing consumers' attitude toward brand posts on social networks is one of the ways for increasing online engagement and participation, thus motivating users to like, share or comment brand posts (De Vries et al., 2012; Lee & Hong, 2016; Kujur & Singh, 2017). Sharing, liking and commenting a brand post on social platforms is part of electronic word-of-mouth (Lee & Hong, 2016; Liu, Li, Ji, North & Yang, 2017). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is the online exchange of information between consumers about a product or a service (Hennig-Thurau, Walsh & Walsh, 2003). Nonetheless, little is known about the relationship between positive attitude toward social media brand posts and engagement in eWOM in the green context.

Finally, environmental concern constitutes an important element for predicting consumers' behavior and intentions in green advertising. Previous research observed a positive

influence of consumers' environmental concern on the relationship between rational or emotional benefits conveyed via green advertisements and attitude toward the product (Hartmann & Apaolaza Ibáñez, 2008), as well as between personal or environmental advantages and purchase intentions (Grimmer & Woolley, 2012).

Taking the above-mentioned aspects into consideration, the aim of the current thesis is to investigate the influence of message appeals on attitude toward green fashion brands' posts on social media. The findings could help to gain further knowledge about the complex essence of eco-friendly apparel advertising. Additionally, another research intention is to examine the relationship between attitude toward social media brand posts and eWOM in the green context. Finally, it will be tested whether consumers' environmental concern moderates the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward green fashion brands' posts. Therefore, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ1: To what extent do message appeals influence consumers' attitude toward green apparel brands' posts on social media?

RQ2: To what extent does consumers' attitude toward green apparel brands' social media posts influence eWOM?

RQ3: What is the role of environmental concern in the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward green apparel brands' posts on social media?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Message appeals in advertising

Utilizing the right message appeal in advertising is a crucial aspect for brands in order to promote their products. Appeal relates to persuasive expression and can address the rational or the emotional sphere (Holmes & Crocker, 1987). More specifically, rational appeal refers to logic aspects of the persuasive process, where elements in favor of the product purchase are conveyed. This kind of appeal is strongly related to utilitarian consumers' decisions during the information processing (Holmes & Crocker, 1987). In particular, elements such as product quality, value and performance will be transmitted via the message in order to enhance consumers' attitude (Panda et al., 2013). Persuasive messages with an emotional appeal embody varied feelings (e.g. love, joy, happiness, fear, nostalgia, pride) which will provoke specific behaviors (Holmes & Crocker, 1987). Previous studies on the influence of message appeal on consumers' attitude observed that rational appeal resulted in higher advertising efficacy than emotional appeal, especially due to the provision of more information (Aaker & Norris, 1982; Golden & Johnson, 1983; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2009).

One important aspect to take into consideration when analyzing message appeals is their connection with the product advertised. A congruence between appeal and product should be present in order to increase the efficiency of the message (Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Specifically concerning the fashion context, brands usually rely on emotional and narrative images for promoting their products (Lorek & Lucas, 2003; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010). Moreover, apparel ads generally omit text and details, showing mostly visuals that can evoke feelings in the viewers. Therefore, utilitarian advantages of the product are not conveyed and the main element taken into consideration in fashion advertising is the employment of aesthetic values (Phillips &

McQuarrie, 2010). Additionally, clothes are usually perceived as symbolic items and individuals are assumed to have a common knowledge of apparel's essence (Yan et al., 2012). Consequently, the shared meaning regarding clothes among consumers does not necessarily require greater disclosure of details regarding the product advertised.

Concerning green advertising, previous research found that an emotional appeal positively influences consumers' purchase decisions and behaviors, due to the satisfaction of emotional needs (Finger, 1994; Smith, Haugtvedt & Petty 1994). Nonetheless, other studies claim that rational appeal is more suitable for green advertising (Hines, Hungerford & Tomera, 1987; Stone, Barnes, Montgomery, 1995), especially because of the conveyance of detailed information about green products' complexity (Moisander, 2007). More precisely, recognizing the environmental impact of choosing eco-friendly goods generally entails deep knowledge about ecological issues. Additionally, provided information about sustainability is often unclear, especially in green products' environmental claims (Moisander, 2007). In light of this, conveying factual arguments about the item's features in the green context may support consumers' cognitive elaboration.

Taking the aforementioned aspects into consideration, green apparel results as being a complex product, showing a double face. More specifically, on one hand, clothes are perceived as symbolic products, due to fashion's familiar characteristics and shared meaning among individuals. On the other hand, the sustainable properties of green apparel require a higher cognitive elaboration, making green clothes more complex products. It seems compelling to investigate which kind of message appeal may influence consumers' positive responses toward green apparel advertisements, especially in relation to the growing impact of eco-friendly fashion brands in the global market and within public opinion.

2.2. Green fashion marketing and social media

Green marketing has progressively become influential in different manufacturing contexts (Leonidou, Leonidou, Palihawadana & Hultman, 2011). More specifically, green marketing depicts the advertising of sustainable products (Zinkhan & Carlson, 1995). In recent times, besides traditional media (e.g. print media), green companies have increasingly utilized social media for their marketing campaigns (Minton et al., 2012; Tillinghast, 2010). Social media are Web 2.0 applications which enable individuals to create and share content. At the same time, social media users are able to interact with each other instantly (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The effectiveness of social media as marketing channels and as tools for engaging with consumers has been assessed by a large amount of studies (Hajli, 2014; Vinerean, et al., 2013; Yan, 2010).

In addition, social networks result as being an efficient marketing medium, due to the fact that consumers' interests and lifestyle shared on social platforms become an important source for companies to create ad-hoc advertising strategies (Kahle & Valette-Florence, 2012). This is especially important in order to target environmentally concerned consumers for promoting sustainable products. As a matter of fact, being involved in environmental issues was seen as one of the main triggers for engaging in green behaviors and for purchasing eco-friendly goods (Connell, 2010). Moreover, social media were observed as being more credible communication channels than traditional media, due to their interactive and networking features (Hung, Li & Tse, 2011). This fact is specifically relevant when employing green marketing, because many consumers show skepticism in relation to eco-friendly advertising claims (do Paço & Reis, 2012; Mohr, Eroğlu & Ellen, 1998).

In the general context of fashion, social media are the ideal place to communicate about apparel, due to fashion's intrinsic characteristic of spreading via networks (Easley & Kleinberg,

2010). Fashion trends are continually shared and shaped by consumers and this exchange of information influences which trends will be adopted (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). Taking the above-mentioned aspects into consideration, social media can represent an effective tool to promote eco-friendly apparel products and increase consumers' engagement toward green fashion brands. Concerning marketing strategies, social platforms offer companies the chance to create appealing advertising campaigns by publishing posts which can include pictures and textual captions (De Vries, et al., 2012). The posts' content elements can influence positively or negatively the attitude of users toward the advertisement, and in consequence their response toward the brand and the products (Wang, 2006).

2.3. Attitude toward the advertisement

The attitude that consumers develop toward advertisements results as an important factor for predicting advertising efficacy (Aaker & Stayman, 1990). The literature review of Muehling and McCann (1993) gives a significant insight into the extensive research conducted on this topic in order to find determinants of consumers' positive response toward ads. Attitude toward the advertisement is defined as a disposition to react in a positive or negative manner to an advertising message in a specific exposure event (Lutz, 1985). Furthermore, Wang (2006) argued that the creation of positive attitude is strongly influenced by contextual relevance, which is constituted by factors related to the ad content. Therefore, advertisement's content features, such as visual and verbal components, affect consumers' attitude toward the ad and toward the brand (Mitchell, 1986).

In the sphere of social media, advertisements take the shape of posts including pictures, text and other elements (Kujur & Singh, 2017). The favorable response to brand posts is seen as influencing consumers' online engagement and participation with the brand (De Vries et al.,

2012; Lee & Hong, 2016; Kujur & Singh, 2017). Nonetheless, often users react negatively toward what they perceive as excessive advertising on social media. Consequently, it is of crucial importance to achieve consumer acceptance (e.g. positive attitude toward the ad) for a successful advertising strategy (Taylor, Lewin & Strutton, 2011).

Regarding green marketing social media communication, little is known about which advertisement properties can lead to a more favorable response to brands' posts. Additionally, the complexity of how to promote green fashion products previously mentioned requires further research on which type of message appeal is more suitable for increasing positive attitude toward eco-fashion ads on social networks. Rational and emotional appeals will be examined in the current study in relation to green fashion brands' social media posts to test consumers' attitude toward the ad.

2.4. Message appeals for predicting attitude toward the ad

Yan et al. (2012) investigated the role of message explicitness on attitude toward eco-fashion brands' print advertisements. Message explicitness in relation to persuasive messages defines the communication of the comprehensive perspective that the message wants to convey (O'Keefe, 1997). O'Keefe (1998) observed that explicit information can increase the message's persuasive effect. More specifically, explicit messages may be perceived as more credible and informative than implicit information (O'Keefe, 1998). Explicit information conveyed in a product ad can be related to the use of more detailed information about product qualities and processes communicated through a rational appeal. Message explicitness was hypothesized as leading to more favorable attitude in the study of Yan et al. (2012), both toward brand and ad, because of the complex nature of green apparel and of eco-friendly marketing claims (Moisander, 2007). Consequently, detailed information about materials and processes utilized for

producing green apparel communicated via a rational appeal can lead to a higher consumers' understanding, thus to a more positive attitude toward the ad than an emotional appeal.

For the current research, rational appeal is predicted to lead to a more positive attitude toward the green fashion ad due to the necessity of details regarding the product's ecological properties besides the already high hedonic value of apparel. Furthermore, in the context of social media, brand posts can be perceived as means to forward information and consumers are likely to expect more details about a product via brand posts (Chen, Kim & Lin, 2015; De Vries et al. 2012). For this reason, users may rely more on cognitive elaboration when they process information in brand posts. Moreover, Lee and Hong (2016) observed a strong effect of informativeness in service companies' ads on attitude toward empathy expression, which is strictly related to attitude toward ads in the context of social media. The authors found that utilitarian values communicated through brand posts on social media can enhance users' positive attitude. Therefore:

H1: Rational appeal will lead to a better consumers' attitude toward social media green apparel brands' posts than emotional appeal.

Additionally, previous research found that combining emotional and rational appeals in green products ads leads to a higher level of positive attitude toward the ad and the brand than showing only one of the appeals (Hartmann et al., 2005; Matthes et al., 2014). Therefore, the current study aims to test whether the combination of rational and emotional appeals can be relevant for green fashion brand posts on social media as well. More specifically, it will be investigated whether taking into consideration the emotional sphere regarding fashion and environment, as well as the rational approach in relation to sustainable properties of the product may lead to a greater consumers' positive attitude. Consequently, it is hypothesized that:

H2: The combination of rational and emotional appeal will lead to more positive consumers' attitude toward social media green apparel brands' posts than when only one of the message appeals is present.

2.5. Electronic word-of-mouth

In the last years, a vast amount of studies investigated electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) revealing its increasing importance in relation to positive consumers' attitude toward brands and purchase intentions in the online marketing sphere (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2003; Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009). EWOM defines the online exchange of information between consumers about a product or a service (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003).

Previous literature recognized different motives for engaging in traditional word-of-mouth (Dichter, 1966; Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1993; Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2003; Sundaram, Mitra & Webster, 1998). In the social platforms context, consumers may feel motivated to engage in eWOM about a brand or a product in consequence of their positive attitude toward brands' social media ads (Liu et al., 2017). Users can show their favorable response through comments and social plug-ins, such as the "like" and "share" buttons. These elements constitute new forms of eWOM, because they enable users to evaluate products and brands (Liu et al., 2017). When users show a positive attitude toward a post by liking or commenting it, they make a public statement about their evaluation. This aspect is related to eWOM performance (Liu et al., 2017). Furthermore, individuals can be notified in their newsfeeds when someone among their contacts likes or shares a post and this increases the awareness of that post within the social media community (Lee & Hong, 2016).

In light of this, it appears compelling to understand which elements may enhance favorable consumers' responses toward social media brand posts for motivating users to like

and/or share them. Berger and Milkman (2012) examined which characteristics define when the content will be shared in the general context. According to the authors, besides external predictors of attention, social media posts' content characteristics, such as the presence of useful information, are indicators of eWOM. Moreover, Lee and Hong (2016) observed that social media users with a positive attitude toward an advertising post are more likely to express empathy toward the ad and consequently like and share it.

Taking the points above-mentioned into account, the intent of this study is to shed light on the relationship between attitude toward social media brand posts and positive eWOM in the context of green clothing products. Therefore, the relation between positive attitude toward green apparel posts and positive eWOM on social media will be tested predicting that:

H3: Consumers with more positive attitude toward green apparel brands' social media posts will be more likely to engage in positive eWOM than consumers with less positive attitude toward the posts.

2.6. The moderating role of environmental concern

A vast amount of studies about green marketing and consumption took environmental concern into consideration as one of the main motives for eco-friendly purchases and behaviors (Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2010; Mainieri, Barnett, Valdero, Unipan & Oskamp, 1997; Minton & Rose, 1997). Environmental concern is an individual's personal involvement in environmental issues (Antonides & Van Raaij, 1998). In the case of green advertising, environmentally concerned viewers of eco-friendly products' ads will have a higher degree of involvement with the products than not environmentally concerned consumers.

Personal involvement constitutes one of the elements that triggers specific attitudes toward persuasive messages (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). According to the Elaboration

Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983), highly involved consumers will be eager to process information and elaborate a response toward the message, than less involved individuals. Additionally, a rational appeal conveying details about the object depicted in the advertisement will influence consumers more than when viewing an emotional appeal. On the contrary, low involved consumers will rely more on feelings to generate their attitude toward the message. Consequently, environmentally involved individuals will elaborate the green brand message and will be more likely to create a favorable attitude toward the ad and the product shown (Grimmer & Woolley, 2012; Matthes et al., 2014).

Grimmer and Woolley (2012) found that environmental involvement moderates the relationship between personal and environmental advantages conveyed via ads and purchase intentions. Additionally, Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2008) measured the moderating impact of environmental concern on the relationship between different kind of benefits and product/brand attitude. The findings showed that environmental concern has a strong effect, especially on the relation between green utilitarian benefits and attitude toward the brand and product. Nonetheless, less is known about the effect of different message appeals in combination with the moderating impact of consumers' environmental concern on responses toward ads.

Considering the abovementioned studies, environmental concern may moderate the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward a green fashion brand post on social media. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H4: Environmental concern intensifies the positive relationship between message appeal and attitude toward green apparel brands' posts on social media.

The conceptual model of the current study is presented in Figure 1, offering a clear visualization of the hypotheses previously proposed.

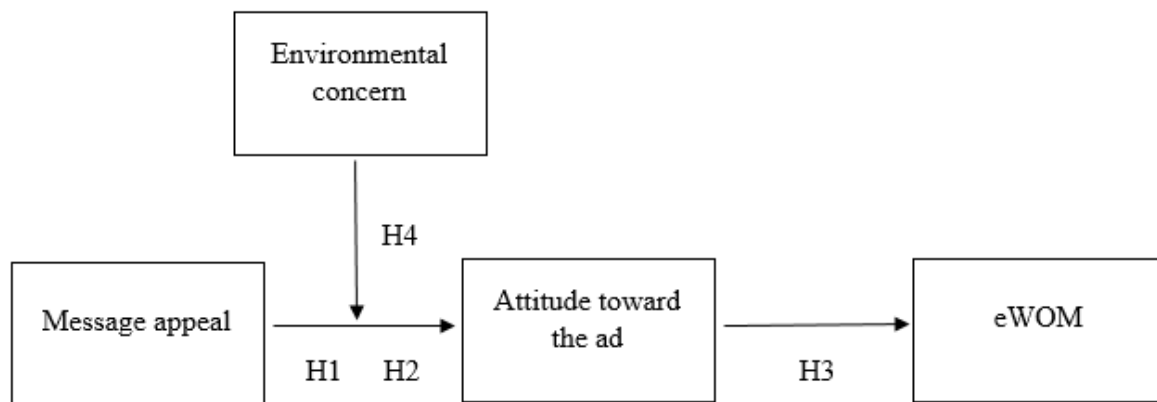


Figure 1. Conceptual model

3. Method

3.1. Research design

In order to test the hypotheses of this study, a between-subject experimental design was employed. The independent variable, namely message appeal, was manipulated creating three conditions: a brand post with an emotional message appeal, a brand post with a rational message appeal and a brand post combining a rational and emotional message appeal.

3.2. Procedure

The experiment was conducted via an online survey developed with the software Qualtrics. Individuals were invited to participate in the experiment via social networks and on Tilburg University Campus. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. Before starting the survey, participants were informed about the anonymity of their contribution to the experiment.

In addition, participants were made aware that they were going to see a Facebook brand post of a clothing brand, Praesent. The post showed both image, textual elements and a short caption. After viewing the brand post, respondents were requested to answer to statements for checking the manipulation and for measuring attitude toward the ad, eWOM and environmental concern. In addition, some control variables were measured to rule out possible confounding effects. Finally, information about participants' demographic background (gender, age, nationality, education level and profession) was asked.

3.3. Sample

Snowball and convenience sampling was utilized for recruiting participants for the experiment. In total, 213 participants took part to the experiment. In order to rule out any possible problematic effect on the final results, 36 responses were not taken into consideration for the analysis, due to the fact that participants did not recognize the right post or did not know what they saw. In consequence, a total of 177 (68% female) participants' responses were analyzed. Respondents were divided equally over the three conditions ($N = 59$ per condition). Out of the 177 participants, 117 were students (Age: $M = 25.94$, $SD = 4.70$). Moreover, 32.3% were Dutch, 16.4% Italian, 11.8% German and 39.5% other nationalities.

3.4. Materials

In order to eliminate any confounding effect of previous knowledge about brands or products, a fictitious green apparel brand was utilized, Praesent. The brand name was created in order to avoid any identification with existing brands. A specific social network, Facebook, was utilized because of its main role in the marketing context among other social media platforms (Schultz, 2016).

Message appeal was manipulated by presenting a brand post following Facebook layout features. The post presented a picture, textual elements and a short caption for each condition, specifically with emotional appeal, with rational appeal and with rational and emotional appeal together. Based on the stimuli features utilized in the study of Matthes et al. (2014), the rational appeal post was created showing product, for the current study a t-shirt, brand name, a slogan and four ecological advantages. The ecological information was based on real green apparel brands' sustainable claims and utilized arguments supporting sustainable product attributes and manufacturing processes (Karna, Juslin, Ahonen & Hansen, 2001). A neutral background was used for the rational appeal condition. Additionally, the post caption focused on product advantages and manufacturing processes.

In order to employ an emotional appeal, a natural scene with mountains and a lake was added to the product image. According to previous studies, a picture depicting a pleasant natural scenery can evoke positive emotions (Hartmann et al., 2005; Matthes et al., 2014). Moreover, a caption describing a sense of enthusiasm in protecting the environment was included in the post in order to connect to the emotional sphere (Karna, et al., 2001). Details about ecological advantages of the product were not mentioned in this condition. Finally, a post combining product and natural scene was created to generate the material for the last condition (emotional and rational appeal). Additionally, details employed in the rational appeal and a caption with both informative and emotional elements were used in this condition. The stimuli material can be found in Appendix A.

3.5. Pre-test of manipulation

In order to verify whether the stimuli were understood by the participants, a pre-test was conducted. A total of 42 participants took part in the pre-test. Participants were shown randomly

one of the three brand posts manipulated with the different message appeals. Six responses were not taken into consideration for the statistical analyses, due to the fact that respondents did not recognize the right post for their condition. Therefore, 36 responses were analyzed. Out of 36 participants, 75% were female and 47% were students (Age: $M = 25.11$, $SD = 2.15$). Moreover, 36% were Brazilian, 28% Italian and 36% other nationalities. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which each brand post related to emotions and feelings or to facts and advantages on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “Totally disagree” to 7 = “Totally agree”). The items utilized in the pretest were: “This brand post relates to emotions and feelings” and “This brand post relates to facts and advantages”. In addition, an open question was present to record what mostly influenced participants in their answers. Moreover, respondents were asked to indicate whether they viewed the brand post with emotional appeal, with rational appeal or the combined brand post (see Appendix B). Finally, demographic information was requested (gender, age, nationality and profession). The pre-test method was based and adapted on the pre-testing procedure of Rosselli, Skelly and Mackie (1995). The authors asked participants to rate on a semantic scale whether statements about animal research were related to facts/information or to emotions and feelings.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to check whether there was a significant difference in each condition between the two items used. The data for each condition was not normally distributed, therefore the analysis was bootstrapped. The results show that in the rational condition there was a significant difference between the rational ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.22$) and the emotional item ($M = 4$, $SD = 1.52$), $M_{dif} = -1.64$, $t(13) = -4.25$, $p = .008$ 95% CI (-2.43, -1.00). Therefore, participants in the rational condition viewed the post as more relating to facts than to emotions. Moreover, in the emotional condition there was no significant difference

between the rational ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.42$) and the emotional statement ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.44$), $Mdif = 0.73$, $t(10) = 1.62$, $p = .167$ 95% CI (-0.09, 1.55). The findings suggest that respondents in the emotional condition recognized the ad as evoking similarly emotions and facts, even though they rated the brand post as slightly more related to feelings. Furthermore, also in the combined condition there was no significant difference between the rational ($M = 6.64$, $SD = .505$) and the emotional item ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.68$), $Mdif = -0.91$, $t(10) = -1.72$, $p = .363$ 95% CI (-2.00, -0.18). Specifically, participants in this group recognized the brand post as communicating both emotions and facts. The findings of the paired-samples t-test are summarized in Table 1.

Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was performed. The overall ANOVA was significant, showing differences between conditions, both for the item relating to emotions and feelings ($F(2, 35) = 4.61$, $p = .017$) and the one regarding facts and advantages ($F(2, 35) = 7.89$, $p = .002$). Respondents in the rational appeal condition agreed more regarding the fact that the brand post was related to facts and advantages ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.22$) than evoking emotions and feelings ($M = 4$, $SD = 1.52$). Regarding participants in the emotional appeal condition, they showed to recognize the post as relating more to emotions ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 1.44$) than to rational facts ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.42$). Respondents in the combined appeal condition scored higher by connecting the brand post to facts and advantages ($M = 6.64$, $SD = 0.51$) than to emotions ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.68$).

In relation to the open question asking what influenced participants more in their first answer, the most frequent words for the rational condition were words such as, “text”, “advantages”, “arguments”, “structure”, “list”, “information” (“the information that was listed”). Regarding the emotional condition, respondents most frequently answered to have been influenced in their response by the image presenting mountains and lake. Moreover, the caption

appeared to convey emotions in relation to eco-friendly practices (“The text tells me the product is eco-friendly and the image makes me feel calm and comfortable”). Finally, participants in the combined condition mostly focused both on the image and on the list of advantages to give their response (“The image, the text, the information about the t-shirt”).

In conclusion, the manipulation was in general successful. However, the layout of the combined condition post was slightly changed for the main experiment, in order to present more clearly both emotional and rational appeal. More specifically, the position of the advantages’ list followed the layout of the rational condition. Furthermore, the caption of the brand post employing the rational appeal was modified in order to rule out any possible emotional influence conveyed by the text.

Table 1

Paired-samples t-test for the rational and emotional item in the three conditions (pre-test).

	Items		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	Rational Mean (SD)	Emotional Mean (SD)		
Rational condition	5.64 (1.22)	4.00 (1.52)	-4.25*	13
Emotional condition	4.73 (1.42)	5.45 (1.44)	1.62	10
Combined condition	5.73 (1.68)	6.64 (0.51)	-1.72	10

Note: * indicates $p < .05$

3.6. Manipulation checks

Manipulation checks were conducted in order to assess that the material was elaborated properly by the respondents in the main experiment. The method utilized in the pre-test was employed for the manipulation checks as well. However, the open question was not utilized for the main experiment.

3.7. Measures

3.7.1. Attitude toward the advertisement. Attitude toward the advertisement was assessed utilizing four items measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale (negative-positive; bad-good; unpleasant-pleasant; unattractive-attractive). The items were based and adapted from previous studies (Holmes & Crocker, 1987; Matthes et al., 2014). The items of this scale can be seen in Appendix C. The scale showed a high reliability ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.17$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$).

3.7.2. EWOM. EWOM was measured with five items partly based on Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia & Bell (2015). A 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Very unlikely", 7 = "Very likely") was employed. The scale used items such as, "To what extent is it likely that you will say positive things about Praesent on Facebook?" (see Appendix C). The items formed a reliable scale ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.47$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$).

3.7.3. Moderator - Environmental concern. The moderator variable, environmental concern, was measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Six items based and adapted on previous research (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibañez, 2009; Matthes et al. 2014) were employed, such as: "I am personally concerned about the environment". The scale can be found in Appendix C. Reliability was checked for this scale as well and the results showed a high reliability ($M = 5.78$, $SD = 0.80$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

3.7.4. Control variables

3.7.4.1. Social media usage. Because of the focus in this study on social media for testing the attitude toward brand ads, social media use was taken into consideration as control variable. In order to assess participants' social media use, three items employed in previous literature (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007) were adapted and measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Totally disagree" to 7 = "Totally agree"). One of the item employed is "Social media is part of my everyday life" (see Appendix C). The scale was highly reliable ($M = 5.39$, $SD = 1.30$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

3.7.4.2. Apparel involvement. Since the brand used for conducting the experiment is a clothing brand, the involvement of participants with apparel was utilized as a control variable. Four items were employed to measure this variable on a 7-point semantic scale (unimportant-important, not valuable-valuable; not involving - involving; not appealing-appealing) adapting them from previous literature (Zaichkowsky, 1994). The scale can be found in Appendix C and showed high reliability ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.14$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

3.7.4.3. Social identification. Previous research observed the role of social identification within company-consumers contexts in predicting human behavior (Aherane, Bhattacharya & Gruen, 2005). In order to rule out its possible effect in this study, social identification was taken into consideration as control variable. This variable was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Totally disagree" to 7 = "Totally agree") based on existing literature (Leach, van Zomeren, Zebel, Vliek, Pennekamp, Doosje, Ouwerkerk, & Spears, 2008). One of the item was: "I feel a bond with Praesent" (see Appendix C). The items constituted a reliable scale ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.36$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

3.7.4.4. Skepticism toward the ad. Obermiller and Spangenberg (2000) argued that ad skepticism has a strong influence among consumers on their response toward advertising. In order to control the possible effect of skepticism toward the ad in the current study, this variable was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “Totally disagree” to 7 = “Totally agree”) adapted from previous research (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Ad skepticism was assessed with items, such as: “I am skeptical toward advertisements” (see Appendix C). This scale had high reliability as well ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.12$, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$).

4. Results

4.1. Manipulation checks

In order to check whether the stimuli were understood by the participants in the main experiment, manipulation checks were conducted. A paired-samples t-test was run in order to investigate whether there was a significant difference in each group between the item relating to rational facts and the one regarding emotions. The data was not normally distributed, thus bootstrapping was performed. In the rational condition there was a significant difference between the rational ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 1.20$) and the emotional item ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.60$), $Mdif = -1.44$, $t(58) = -5.09$, $p = .001$ 95% CI (-1.93, -0.85). Additionally, there was a large effect size of $r^2 = .21$. The results show that participants in the rational condition rated the post as more relating to facts and advantages than to emotions. A significant difference between the rational ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.66$) and the emotional statement was found in the emotional condition as well ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.48$), $Mdif = 0.95$, $t(58) = 4.18$, $p = .001$ 95% CI (0.51, 1.39). The effect size was large, $r^2 = .23$. Specifically, respondents in the emotional condition recognized the ad as evoking emotions and feelings more than rational facts.

Furthermore, the paired-samples t-test showed that there was no significant difference in the combined condition between the rational ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.32$) and the emotional item ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.17$), $M_{dif} = -0.02$, $t(58) = -0.07$, $p = .945$ 95% CI (-0.46, 0.44). These findings suggest that participants in the combined condition saw the brand post as conveying both emotions and facts. A better overview of the results is visible in Table 2.

Moreover, a one-way ANOVA was performed to check differences between the three groups. The overall ANOVA was significant, showing differences between conditions, both for the item relating to emotions and feelings ($F(2, 176) = 8.44$, $p < .001$) and the one regarding facts and advantages ($F(2, 176) = 17.49$, $p < .001$). Respondents in the rational appeal condition recognized the brand post as being related more to facts and advantages ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 1.20$) than to emotions and feelings ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.60$). Regarding the emotional appeal condition, participants rated the post as relating more to emotions ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.48$) than to rational facts ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.66$). Respondents in the combined appeal condition scored similarly by connecting the brand post to facts and advantages ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.32$) and to emotions ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.17$).

Table 2

Paired-samples t-test for the rational and emotional item in the three conditions

	Items		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
	Rational Mean (SD)	Emotional Mean (SD)		
Rational condition	5.47 (1.20)	4.03 (1.60)	-5.09*	58
Emotional condition	3.98 (1.66)	4.93 (1.48)	4.18*	58
Emotional-Rational condition	5.02 (1.32)	5.00 (1.17)	-0.07	58

Note: * indicates $p < .05$

4.2. Effectiveness of message appeal on attitude toward the ad

The current study proposed that a rational appeal employed in green fashion brand posts leads to a better consumer's attitude toward the ad than the use of an emotional appeal (H1). Additionally, a combination of emotional and rational appeal was hypothesized as causing a better attitude toward the ad than only using the rational or the emotional appeal (H2).

A one-way ANCOVA was conducted with message appeal as independent variable, attitude as dependent variable and social identification, apparel involvement, social media usage and skepticism toward ads as covariates. There was no significant main effect of message appeal on attitude toward the ad $F(2,170) = 1.63, p = .200, h_p^2 = 0.19$. Participants in the rational appeal condition ($M = 4.95, SD = 1.25$) did not show a more positive attitude toward the green fashion apparel ad than respondents in the emotional appeal condition ($M = 5.23, SD = 1.16$). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was rejected. In addition, the combined usage of emotional and rational appeal in

the brand post ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.09$) did not predict a more positive attitude toward the ad than only when employing the emotional appeal or the rational one. Consequently, hypothesis 2 was not confirmed.

4.3. Effectiveness of attitude toward the ad on eWOM

The third hypothesis proposed was that consumers with a positive attitude toward a green apparel brand post will be more likely to engage in eWOM than consumers with a less positive attitude toward the post. In order to test this hypothesis, a regression analysis was performed with attitude as independent variable and eWOM as dependent. The analysis showed that attitude toward the ad significantly predicts a person's willingness to engage in eWOM in relation to the advertisement viewed, $b = .71$, $\beta = .56$, $t(175) = 8.97$, $p < .001$. The model explained 31.5% of the variance. The third hypothesis of the current research is confirmed. Individuals with a more positive attitude toward a green fashion brand post will be more likely to engage in eWOM about the post than individuals with a less positive attitude toward the ad.

4.4. The moderating role of environmental concern

The last hypothesis of this study took into consideration the moderating role of environmental concern on the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward the ad. H4 proposed that environmental concern moderates the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward a green apparel brand post.

For testing hypothesis 4, a moderation analysis was conducted with PROCESS (Hayes & Matthes, 2009) model 1. The analysis included message appeal as independent variable, attitude toward the ad as dependent variable and environmental concern as moderator.

The results of the PROCESS model are shown in Table 3. The general model was not significant, $R^2 = .01$, $F(3, 173) = 0.92$, $p = .434$. Neither message appeal nor environmental concern were significantly related to attitude toward the ad. Additionally, the predicted interaction effect between message appeal and environmental concern was not significant. This aspect can be observed better in Figure 2. As can be seen, message appeal did not interact with the moderator (environmental concern) at any of its levels.

Table 3

Linear Model of Predictors of Attitude toward the Ad

	<i>b</i> [BCa 95% CI]	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	5.12 [4.94, 5.30]	0.09	57.45	< .001
Message appeal (centered)	0.11 [-0.11, 0.32]	0.11	0.98	.328
Environmental concern (centered)	0.09 [-0.12, 0.30]	0.11	0.83	.408
Message appeal x Environmental concern	-0.08 [-0.32, 0.17]	0.13	-0.60	.548

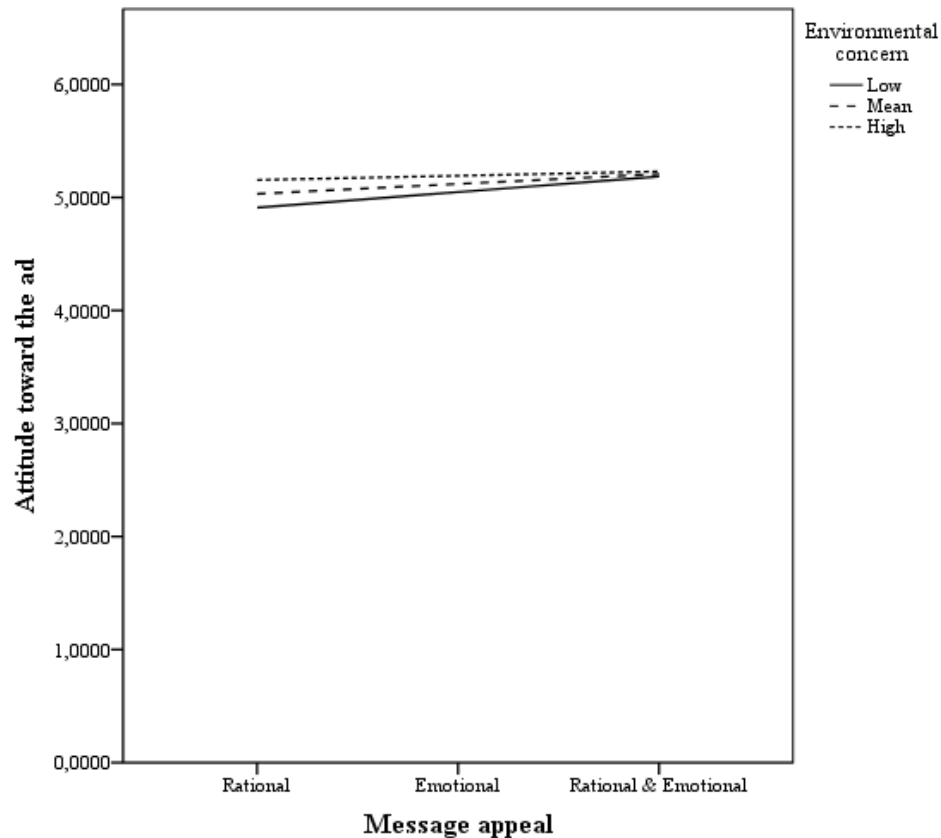


Figure 2. Conditional effect of message appeal on attitude toward the ad with environmental concern as moderator.

In conclusion, hypothesis 4 of the current study could not be confirmed. No difference was found among individuals with a higher or a lower level of environmental concern when shaping their attitude toward a green fashion brand post where a message appeal is employed.

4.5. Additional analyses

4.5.1. Effect of control variables and moderator on eWOM

A further analysis was conducted for finding possible relations between the control variables, the moderator variable and eWOM. In Table 4 the descriptive statistics of the variables above-mentioned can be observed.

Table 4

Means and standard deviations of the scales and the dependent variable, as well as their correlations.

	Mean (SD)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. EWOM	3.23 (1.47)						
2. Environmental concern	5.78 (0.80)	.07					
3. Social media usage	5.39 (1.29)	.12	-.13				
4. Apparel Involvement	5.09 (1.14)	.30*	-.06	.24**			
5. Social Identification	3.61 (1.36)	.67*	.14	.03	.30*		
6. Skepticism toward ads	4.91 (1.12)	-.34*	.20**	-.25*	-.22**	-.28*	

Note: * indicates $p < .001$. ** indicates $p < .05$

Social identification highly correlates with eWOM ($r = .67, p < .001$). This indicates that people who identify with the company are more likely to share the brand post on social media. In addition, people who appear as being skeptical toward advertisements were less likely to engage in positive eWOM ($r = -.34, p < .001$). In order to test specific relations between variables, a multiple regression was performed including the four control variables (social media usage, apparel involvement, social identification, skepticism toward ads), the moderator (environmental concern) and eWOM.

The model was significant ($R^2_{adj} = .47$, $F_{change}(5, 171) = 31.86$, $p < .001$). The significant predictors in the model were social identification ($\beta = .66$, $p < .001$) and skepticism toward advertisements ($\beta = -.19$, $p = .017$). These findings can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5

The model with five predictors of eWOM.

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>
Intercept	0.77	0.90		
Environmental concern	0.49	0.11	.026	.647
Social media usage	0.06	0.07	.049	.403
Apparel involvement	0.09	0.08	.071	.239
Social identification	0.66	0.07	.603	.000*
Skepticism toward ads	-0.19	0.08	-.147	.017**

Note: * indicates $p < .001$. ** indicates $p < .05$

In conclusion, it can be assumed that people identifying and feeling a bond with the brand presented through a brand post may be more likely to share the post with their peers on social media than people who do not identify with the company. In addition, consumers who are skeptical about advertisements may be less eager to engage in positive eWOM.

4.5.2. The mediating role of social identification

Since social identification showed to be an important element for predicting eWOM, a mediation analysis was conducted to understand better whether this variable may explain the relationship between attitude toward a brand post and eWOM. The mediation analysis was

conducted with PROCESS (Hayes & Matthes, 2009) model 4 employing attitude toward the ad as independent variable, eWOM as dependent variable and social identification as mediator.

There was a significant total effect of attitude toward the ad on engaging in eWOM ($b = 0.71$, $SE = 0.79$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals with a better attitude toward a green fashion brand post on social media are more prone to engage in eWOM. The effect did not substantially change when the mediator was added to the model, showing a direct effect of $b = 0.42$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$.

The total indirect effect of attitude toward the ad on eWOM via social identification was significant, $b = 0.29$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% BCa CI [0.18, 0.42]. The completely standardized indirect effect was significant as well, $b = 0.23$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% BCa CI [0.16, 0.31]. Therefore, social identification seems to partly explain the relationship between consumers' attitude toward an ad and their possible engagement in eWOM.

5. Conclusion and discussion

The current study aimed to shed light on how to advertise green apparel. Previous research observed that communicating explicit information about green apparel features and manufacturing processes may increase the attitude of consumers toward the brand (Yan et al., 2012) and enhance the understanding of ecological details as well (Moisander, 2007). However, less is known about the influence of different types of message appeal in relation to eco-friendly clothes' marketing. Existing literature only analyzed this aspect in relation to ecological detergents (Matthes et al., 2014). No research was conducted in this direction specifically about green apparel. As a consequence, the main goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of which kind of message appeal may predict a better consumers' attitude toward social media

brand posts of green fashion brands. In addition, the study aimed to have a deeper insight into the relation between attitude toward social media brand posts and engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2003; Trusov et al., 2009). Finally, it was investigated whether the moderating role of environmental concern was recognizable on the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward green apparel ads

5.1. Summary of the findings

The findings of this study lead to several conclusions. First, the results did not confirm the fact that the employment of a rational appeal in a green apparel ad led to a better attitude than the use of an emotional appeal. More specifically, the communication of details about apparel's sustainable production and quality did not lead to a more positive attitude than when only relying on an emotional appeal (H1). In addition, the combination of rational and emotional appeals did not have a higher impact on individuals' attitude toward the green fashion brand post than when only employing one type of message appeal (H2).

Second, the findings confirmed that a more positive attitude toward an advertisement on social media led to a higher engagement in eWOM (H3). Specifically, social media users who shape a positive attitude toward a brand post are more likely to share and like it on social networks.

Third, the results did not support the hypothesis that environmental concern moderated the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward a green fashion ad (H4). Individuals viewing a green apparel persuasive message were not influenced by their interest for the environment in shaping their attitude toward the brand post.

Besides the main findings, additional analyses interestingly showed that social identification is an important element when predicting eWOM, based on attitude toward the ad.

Individuals who identify stronger with a brand are more likely to engage in positive eWOM. Additionally, social identification was observed as partly mediating the relationship between attitude toward ads and eWOM.

Finally, skepticism toward advertising is a further element to take into account in order to increase the liking and sharing of brand posts on social media. More precisely, individuals who are in general less skeptical about ads will be more likely to engage in positive eWOM.

5.2. Discussion and theoretical implications

The current study contributes theoretically to existing literature regarding consumers' responses to different types of message appeal, with a focus on green fashion advertising. In addition, the present research gives further insight into the role of various factors on consumers' engagement in eWOM about brands on social media.

Existing literature claimed the importance of giving explicit information about sustainable features and processes of the product advertised to increase understanding among consumers (Moisander, 2007) and consequently attitude toward the ad and the brand (Yan et al. 2013). However, no difference was found in the present study for respondents viewing an advertisement with an emotional or a rational appeal. In addition, the study of Matthes et al. (2010) observed a significant effect of a combined message condition, where rational and emotional appeals were utilized at the same time. Based on these findings, the second hypothesis of the current research predicted a greater influence of the combined condition over the employment of only one appeal. Nonetheless, no difference was observed between this condition and the single use of an emotional or a rational appeal.

The fact that there was no substantial difference in attitude toward ads between emotional, rational and mixed message appeals could be explained by the complex combination of apparel's

emotional characteristics and the communication of sustainable features of the product shown in the ad. Previous research argued that apparel advertising mostly relies on emotional and evocative images, because of clothes' omnipresence in people's life and shared meaning (Lorek & Lucas, 2003). Fashion is something appealing, that gives pleasure to purchasers and that does not require textual information to gain attention. Including environmental details about product features and manufacturing processes could somehow collapse with the hedonic essence of apparel (Lorek & Lucas, 2003). Participants may have been more cautious in rating their attitude toward the ad in the different conditions, because of the greater complexity of green fashion. The emotional element related to fashion and environment could lead to a similar attitude toward the ad as the perceived importance of viewing utilitarian details about the ecological properties of the product.

Previous research investigated the effects of hedonic and utilitarian benefits on consumers' attitude toward products and brands (Batra & Ahtola, 1991; Chitturi, Raghunathan & Mahajan, 2008). Utilitarian benefits are functional and practical advantages in relation to products, while hedonic benefits refer to the aesthetic and enjoyment-related aspects of an item (Chitturi et al., 2008). Individuals perceive different benefits depending on the product category they are involved with. In the context of fashion, human motivation theory (McGuire, 1974) describes apparel purchase as an activity that satisfies hedonic needs. When advertising standard clothes, this kind of benefits will be prominent, thus an emotional appeal could efficiently gain the attention of consumers and enhance their attitude toward the apparel ads. However, in the case of green fashion, details about the ecological properties of the product could satisfy utilitarian benefits as well. Due to the double face of green fashion, substantial variances in the

employment of different message appeals are not recognizable. As a consequence, emotional and rational appeal could be utilized indistinctly for advertising green apparel.

Contrary to previous research (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2008), involvement with environmental issues did not have an influence on the relationship between message appeal and participants' attitude toward the green fashion ad. In addition, environmental concern did not impact directly the attitude toward the brand post. One important factor observed in existing research when assessing the influence of consumers' environmental concern on their attitude is perceived consumer effectiveness (Tucker, Rifon, Lee & Reece, 2012). This aspect relates to the perception that a behavior can lead to tangible results and as a consequence to a more positive attitude and behavior. It can be assumed that participants did not recognize their important role in relation to environment protection when engaging with green apparel brands. Consequently, environmental concern did not have an influence on the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward the ad. In other words, individuals in front of a green apparel ad are not affected by their concern for environmental issues when forming their attitude toward it.

Additionally, previous literature investigated the gap between individuals' general interest for environmental issues and knowledge about specific advantages of sustainable consumption (Bang, Ellinger, Hadjimarcou & Traichal, 2000). Connell (2010) observed that individuals have a low knowledge about the impact of apparel production on the environment. The absence of influence of environmental concern in this study could be related as well to the fact that participants, even though with a high environmental concern, did not have enough knowledge about the positive impact that eco-friendly clothes production has on the environment. Consequently, environmental concern did not influence the relationship between persuasive green apparel message and respondents' attitude toward the ad.

Furthermore, the findings of the current research confirmed that a positive attitude toward a brand post on social media motivates consumers to engage in positive eWOM. Existing literature stated message involvement as one of the main predictors of traditional word-of-mouth (Dichter, 1966; Engel et al., 1993). Message involvement relates to the exchange of information stimulated by advertisements. Consequently, individuals with a positive attitude toward a brand post on social media will share information about it, and in this way increase awareness about the brand among their peers. The findings of the current study add further knowledge to research on eWOM in relation to green advertising. In addition, existing literature about eWOM took into consideration mostly consumers' internal motivations for participating in eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003; Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Ho and Dempsey (2010) employed interpersonal behavioral theory in their study. Based on this theory, individuals are keen to engage in interpersonal communication because they are motivated to fulfill interpersonal needs, such as inclusion, affection and control. This aspect relates to the willingness to forward content online as well. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2003) investigated engagement in eWOM identifying three types of social interaction utility, namely focus-related utility, consumption utility and approval utility. Following this stream of literature, individuals' internal motives were seen as the main trigger for engaging in eWOM. Consumers communicate about brands and products with each other mostly to satisfy inner needs. External factors, such as attitude toward an advertisement were not explored accurately in previous research.

The additional analyses demonstrated the strong role of social identification as mediator between attitude toward the ad and eWOM. More specifically, viewers identifying with the green brand were more likely to share and like it on social media. Social Identity Theory asserts that individuals identify with a group in order to enhance their self-conception (Tajfel, 1974). In an

organizational context, consumer-company identification (C-C identification) occurs when some characteristics of the brand become self-relevant for the consumer (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Existing literature found that one of the consequences of C-C identification is company promotion (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). The feeling to identify with a brand can enhance the self-concept of consumers and consequently increase their support to the company by promoting it to their peers, particularly by engaging in WOM (Taylor et al., 2011). In light of this, the impact of organizational identification on self-enhancement can explain the willingness to share brand ads on social media.

Furthermore, in line with existing literature (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 2000), skepticism toward advertising was observed in the current study as constituting an obstacle for shaping a positive attitude toward a brand post and for engaging in eWOM. When participants perceive advertisements as misleading, they will not be likely to share information about the ad with others.

5.3. Practical implications

Various managerial implications can be discussed based on the present study. First, the findings showed that a positive attitude toward a brand post on social media leads individuals to engage in eWOM. Therefore, consumers will share and like a brand post when they perceive it as positive. In light of this, brands should take care of enhancing the attitude of consumers toward their ads via appealing messages on social media. Previous research found that vivid posts, specifically media which enhance sensory experience, lead to a positive consumers' attitude and to more shares and likes on social platforms (Liu et al., 2017). In addition, vividness influences both cognition and emotions. In this way, independently from the message appeal utilized, consumers will feel motivated to share the post with their peers and consequently increase

awareness about the brand advertised in their social platform feed. This can be especially relevant for green apparel companies, in order to increase interest about their sustainable products, for both a positive impact on their performance and on the environment.

Second, social identification showed to be an important factor in relation to positive eWOM in the present study. Companies could clearly convey identity aspects, such as their uniqueness and prestige, in their advertising strategy in order to increase company-consumer identification. In this way, consumers may find relevant characteristics of the brand useful for their self-enhancement, and in consequence share information about it with other people. Additionally, ensuring social identification will lead to more enduring positive effects for organizations over time (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003).

Finally, managers may develop social media advertisements employing elements that can decrease consumers' skepticism. Therefore, ads' credibility should be conveyed in order to convince consumers and motivate them to share information about the product advertised with their peers on social media. In order to achieve this, managers could communicate factual arguments about the products and the societal impact that the consumption of green products can lead to (Du & Vieira, 2012). In this case, utilitarian benefits could be utilized. Additionally, previous research observed the important role of two-sided messages in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) context (Du & Vieira, 2012). Contrary to one-sided communication, two-sided messages present both sides of an argument (Hovland, 1954). In order to develop a two-sided communication, green fashion brands could employ two different types of motives, strategic-driven and values-driven motives (Vlachos, Tsamakos, Vrechopoulos & Avramidis, 2009). Strategic-driven motivations relate to the fact that the engagement in socially responsible activities is mostly led by the organization's business goals (e.g. increase sales) and not by a

genuine interest in such actions (Vlachos et al., 2009). On the contrary, values-driven motives describe the honest concern for a specific cause, not including the business objectives of a company (Vlachos et al., 2009). In light of this, green apparel brands could communicate both these motives to the consumers in order to increase the credibility of their messages.

5.4. Limitations and future research

Some limitations need to be acknowledged in the present study. A first limitation is that the difference between product categories elaboration in relation to their benefits was not taken into consideration for the manipulation. The stimuli employed in the present study were based on previous research which tested the effect of different message appeals on attitude toward green detergents' ads (Matthes et al., 2010). Even though the current experiment was based on validated measures, it can be assumed that advertising green apparel, which is constituted by a higher complexity in comparison to eco-friendly cleaners, may not imply differences between consumers' attitude toward ads when utilizing different message appeals as found for eco-friendly detergents. Fashion implies a symbolic meaning for consumers, and in the context of sustainable clothing a higher cognitive elaboration as well. The complexity of advertising green fashion may require in future research a different manipulation for testing message appeal on attitude toward advertisements, taking into account the possible presence of both hedonic and utilitarian benefits in this context.

Moreover, the artificial experimental setting could constitute another limitation. Participants' evaluation of the brand post via the mockup could lead to different effects than directly evaluate the brand on Facebook, where users are physically able to share and like the post. In consequence of this, future studies could use real Facebook brand pages to gain a better insight into the effects observed in the present research. As previously discussed, vividness is an

important aspect for enhancing attitude toward advertising media. In addition, the hedonic value of fashion may benefit from an increase of consumers' sensory experience. Future research in green fashion advertising could explore more deeply this aspect and test it in real social media contexts.

A further limitation is the fact that the brand used was a fictitious green apparel label. This aspect can represent a threat to external validity and the results may not be generalized to contexts where well-known brands are implied. Previous research observed the key role of consumers' prior expectations about companies on their attitude toward them (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). Additionally, recognizing a brand's established Corporate Social Responsibility positioning will lead to more favorable beliefs among consumers (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2007). Future research could test different kinds of message appeal on attitude toward ads of established green fashion brands and take previous consumers' awareness and CSR positioning into account.

Regarding eWOM, in the current study only positive eWOM was investigated. It could be worthwhile to explore the role of negative eWOM as well, specifically when consumers have bad perceptions and beliefs about a brand, in order to test whether it could lead to a greater eWOM effect, as observed in existing research (Park & Lee, 2009)

Furthermore, previous literature (Connell, 2010) observed that general knowledge about harms inflicted to environment by apparel production is limited. The fact that previous understanding about this aspect was not checked in the current study could constitute a limitation. Therefore, future studies about green fashion advertising testing environmental concern could benefit from assessing respondents' knowledge about apparel production's environmental footprint.

Finally, environmental concern as measured in the current study is a general concept that may not cover the personal interest of consumers for green fashion ads. A more positive attitude toward eco-friendly apparel ads involves a higher degree of engagement than the mere interest for environmental issues. More specifically, in general people show a high involvement with topics about environment and are willing to do something to preserve it. However, the interest for green products and possible consumption is still low (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Therefore, other studies about green apparel marketing could employ specific measures in relation to apparel ecological impact for making participants more aware of this aspect.

5.5. Conclusion

To sum up, the results of the current study showed that consumers' positive attitude toward green apparel ads does not per se depend on the type of message appeal employed. Additionally, the relationship between message appeal and attitude toward a green apparel ad is not influenced by consumers' concern for the environment. Moreover, the findings revealed that a favorable attitude toward green apparel brand posts on social media predicts positive eWOM. In addition, social identification partly explains the relationship between attitude toward ads and eWOM. Furthermore, skepticism toward advertising results as a relevant element when employing social media advertising strategies. Taking into consideration the findings of the current research, brands, especially employing green advertising on social media, should invest resources in reinforcing identification management, as well as in increasing consumers' trust toward advertisements before applying their advertising strategies.

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Appendix A

Stimuli

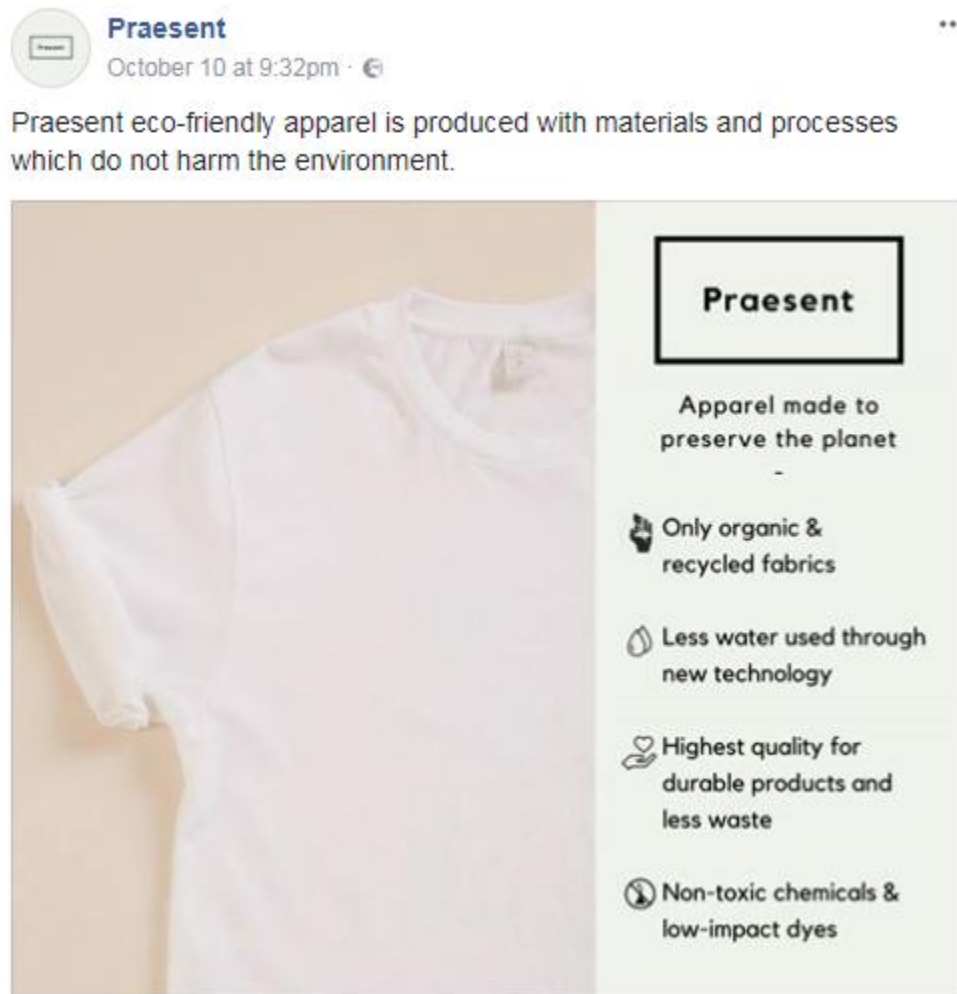


Figure A1. Brand post used in the rational appeal condition

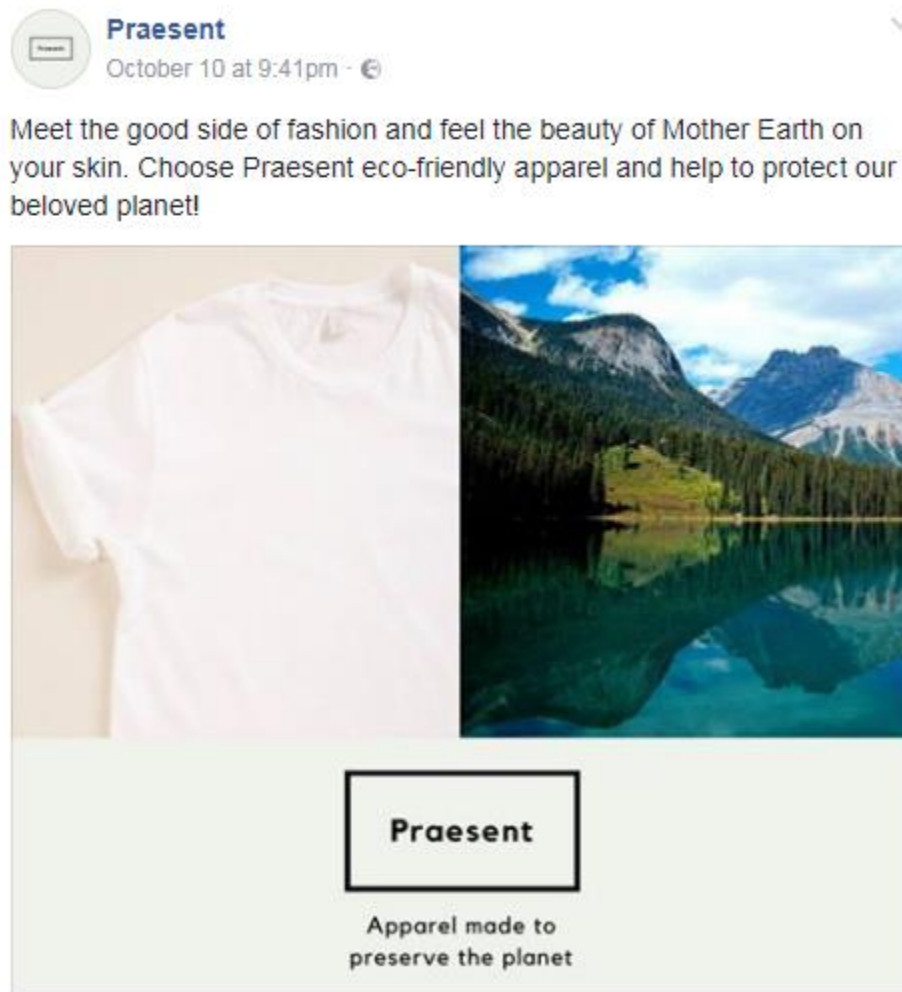


Figure A2. Brand post used in the emotional appeal condition

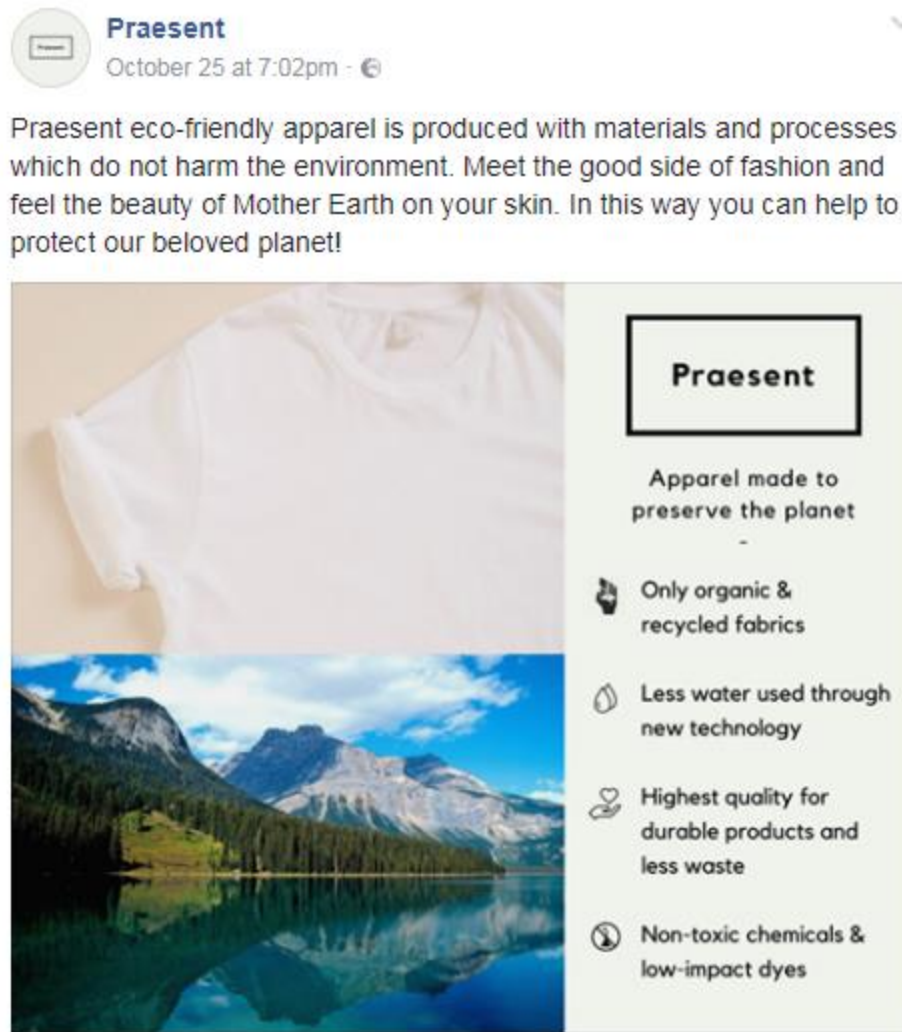


Figure A3. Brand post used in the emotional and rational appeal condition

Appendix B

Manipulation check measures

To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

- a. The brand post evokes emotions and feelings
- b. The brand post is related to facts and advantages

Open question:

What influenced you the most in your previous decision?

I just saw a t-shirt advertisement with:

- a. A list of product features
- b. A picture of a mountain and a lake
- c. A list of product features and an image of a mountain and a lake
- d. I don't know

Appendix C

Variables measures**Attitude toward the ad**

Rate the brand post you just saw on each of the following dimensions:

- a. Negative_____ Positive
- b. Bad _____ Good
- c. Unpleasant _____ Pleasant
- d. Unattractive _____ Attractive

EWOM

To what extent is it likely that you:

- a. Will like this brand post on Facebook?
- b. Will share this brand post on Facebook?
- c. Will say positive things about Praesent on Facebook?
- d. Recommend Praesent on Facebook?
- e. Would become a fan/follower of Praesent on Facebook and other social media?

Environmental Concern

Rate the following statements:

- a. I am personally concerned about the environment
- b. My actions have an impact on the environment
- c. I feel worried about the destruction of nature and extinction of wildlife

- d. Apparel industry has a negative environmental impact, such as soil and air pollution
- e. The condition of the environment affects the quality of my life
- f. I am willing to make sacrifices to protect the environment

Social media use

Rate the following statements about your relation with social media:

- a. Social media is part of my everyday life
- b. I feel I am part of a community on social media
- c. Social media are part of my daily routine

Apparel involvement

Rate how you perceive apparel on each of the following dimensions:

- a. Unimportant _ _ _ _ _ Important
- b. Not valuable _ _ _ _ _ Valuable
- c. Not involving _ _ _ _ _ Involving
- d. Not appealing _ _ _ _ _ Appealing

Social identification

Rate the following statements:

- a. I feel a bond with Praesent
- b. I feel solidarity with Praesent
- c. I feel committed to Praesent

Skepticism toward the ad

Rate the following statements:

- a. Advertisements are unreliable
- b. Advertisements are misleading
- c. I am skeptical towards advertisements