

**GOING GREEN OR GREENWASHING?  
PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL BRAND  
INCONGRUENCE IN GREEN ADVERTISING**

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## ABSTRACT

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Title of thesis Going green or greenwashing? Perceived environmental incongruence in green advertising	
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<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>The current environmental situation has turned green values into a megatrend, also in the field of marketing. Traditionally, research on green marketing has focused on ecological (green) products and services. However, lately focus has increasingly turned to non-green industries, for example oil companies, and actors in these industries have been urged to take responsibility. Although research on green marketing has been vast, research on green marketing by non-green companies has been limited. The slim research has been unanimous: green advertising by non-green companies is seen as greenwashing and thus should be avoided. But what if these companies can no longer stay silent due to societal pressure? How can non-green companies execute green advertising without being perceived as greenwashing? Finding the answer to this question is the objective of this research.</p> <p>Theory is approached from two different perspectives. First theory chapter will look into the characteristics of green advertising and consumer's environmental concern. Second theory chapter explores brand congruence theories. Traditionally advertising has aimed at brand-ad congruence, but recent research suggests that incongruence may be beneficial to the brand, as long as it is resolvable. This leads to the suggested theoretical framework. Framework suggests if the environmental values and brand are incongruent, some characteristics (of advertising, audience, brand) lead to incongruence resolution, whereupon the advertisement is not perceived as greenwashing. If resolution is not achieved, the advertisement will be perceived as greenwashing. The framework was tested using semi-structured interviews with both consumers with high level of environmental concern as well as those with a low level of environmental concern.</p> <p>The findings confirm the theoretical framework. Contradicting previous research, findings suggest that green advertising by non-green companies should not be seen as downright forbidden. Consumers do not see the issue as "black and white" but are rather eager to hear statements from actors in the non-green industries. However, it is crucial that the consumer can understand that connection between the company brand and green advertising, ergo that the incongruence is resolvable. Companies can aid consumers to achieve this resolution by providing specific, understandable and reliable information on their concrete green actions. Moreover, companies should carefully consider the style in their advertising and target their advertising based on the audiences' level of environmental concern. The most important factor, however, is to stay true to the green values. The only certain way to avoid being perceived as greenwashing, is to avoid greenwashing.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Green marketing, green advertising, greenwashing, brand congruence, consumer environmental concern	
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## TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p><b>Tiivistelmä</b></p> <p>Tämän hetkinen maailmantilanne on tehnyt vihreistä arvoista megatrendin, myös markkinoinnin saralla. Perinteisesti vihreä markkinointi ja sen tutkiminen on keskittynyt ekologisiin (vihreisiin) tuotteisiin ja palveluihin. Viime aikoina huomio ovat enenevässä määrin keskittynyt epäekologisiin aloihin, kuten öljytuotantoon, ja näiden alojen toimijoilta on vaadittu vastuuta ekologisiin kysymyksiin. Vaikka vihreän mainonnan tutkimus on laajaa, epäekologisten toimijoiden vihreää mainontaa on tutkittu vain vähän. Vähäinen tutkimus on ollut yksimielistä: vihreä mainonta epäekologisilta toimijoilta nähdään viherpesuna ja sitä tulisi välttää. Mutta entä nyt kun nämä toimijat eivät enää yhteiskunnan paineessa voi vaieta? Miten epäekologisilla aloilla toimivien yritysten tulisi toteuttaa vihreää mainontaa vaikuttamatta viherpesulta? Sen selvittäminen on tämän tutkimuksen tavoite.</p> <p>Teoriaa lähestytään kahdelta näkökulmalta. Ensinnäkin otetaan huomioon vihreän mainonnan sekä vihreän kuluttajuuden erityispiirteet. Toiseksi lähestytään brändin yhtenevyyden teorioita. Perinteisesti mainonnassa on pyritty brändin yhtenevyyteen, mutta viimeaikainen tutkimus osoittaa, että ristiriita saattaa hyödyntää brändiä, kunhan epäyhtenevyyteen löydetään ratkaisu. Tämä johtaa esitettyyn teoreettiseen viitekehukseen, joka ehdottaa, että mikäli yrityksen brändi ja vihreät arvot ovat epäyhteneviä, tietyt piirteet (mainonnan, yleisön, brändin) johtavat joko epäyhtenevyyden ratkaisuun, jolloin mainosta ei pidetä viherpesuna. Jos ratkaisua ei saavuteta, mainos tulkitaan viherpesuksi. Viitekehystä testattiin puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla vihreiden ja ei-vihreiden kuluttajien kanssa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tulokset vahvistavat viitekehysten toimivuuden. Vastoin aiempaa tutkimusta, epäekologisten yritysten vihreä mainonta ei ole ehdoton ei. Kuluttajat eivät suhtaudu asiaan mustavalkoisesti, vaan haluavat kannanottoja myös epäekologiselta puolelta. Tärkeää kuitenkin on, että kuluttaja pystyy ymmärtämään yhteyden yrityksen brändin ja vihreän mainonnan välillä, eli saavuttaa ratkaisun. Tässä yritys voi avustaa kuluttajaa tarjoamalla tarkkaa, helposti ymmärrettävää ja luotettavaa tietoa konkreettisista vihreistä toimistaan. Lisäksi yrityksen tulee harkita tarkkaan mainonnan tyylivalintoja ja kohdentaa mainontaa yleisön ympäristöhuolen perusteella. Tärkeintä kuitenkin on pysyä aitona esittämiensä arvojen takana. Ainoa varma keino välttää viherpesun mielikuva on välttää viherpesua.</p>	
Asiasanat vihreä markkinointi, vihreä mainonta, viherpesu, brändi yhtenevyys, kuluttajan ympäristöhuoli	
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background

This research focuses environmental marketing efforts of non-green companies and their effect on customer brand attitudes.

Green advertising has become a crucial form of marketing and advertising during the past 40 years (Davis 1993; Banerjee 1995, Gulas & Iyer 1995).

Moreover, recent events, most notably the 2018 IPCC Climate report (International Panel on Climate Change 2018), have highlighted the urgency of environmental matters. Global discussion, including the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement (United Nations, 2015), have called for significant environmental improvements from corporations. This is especially true for companies acting in industries that are traditionally considered not to be environmentally friendly. It could be stated that these “non-green industries” are industries in which the core business causes harm to the environment. For example, the use of fossil energy sources accounts for 75% of all CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions worldwide (CO<sub>2</sub>-raportti). The airline industry accounts for about 10% of greenhouse emissions in Finland (Yle 2019). Statistics like this have called for further actions towards sustainable business practices from the actors in these industries.

Corporate values evolve over time in response to public and social pressure (Delmas & Toffel 2014). Thus, environmentally sustainable business decisions and environmentally conscious brand is crucial for corporations looking to keep their competitive edge (Babiak 2011). This puts companies acting in the non-friendly sector in a difficult position: how should they conduct this brand change towards these environmentally sustainable values, when the core of their business is in conflict with the same values (Arbouw, Ballantine & Ozanne 2019)?

Indeed, previous research has shown that green advertising by a non-green company can actually severely hurt the brand (Yoon, Gürhan-Canli & Schwarz 2006; Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla & Paladino 2014). This research has also conducted that marketing focusing on corporate social responsibility

provided by a non-green company is easily seen as non-genuine effort to act according to green values, but rather benefit strategically from the sustainable brand. This behavior is commonly called “green-washing” and it has a high risk of hurting the corporate brand.

In marketing theories, brand incongruence means that brand image and promoted values do not match. This is based on schematic theories suggesting that people (or in the case of marketing, consumers) have a set of schemas in their minds which help them process information and create their own image of reality (Taylor & Crocker 1981; Mandler 1982). When an attribute contradicts this schema, an incongruence is created. These incongruences may be resolved in which case they might even be beneficial for the brand (Dahlén, Lange, Sjödin & Törn 2005) or they may be unresolvable in which case they lead to confusion and frustration (Sjödin & Törn 2006).

Green marketing has been broadly researched in the past, but mostly in the context of green products and brands. When it comes to non-green industries, the research has been very limited. This may be due to the fact that non-green industries have steered away green marketing to avoid the risks of incongruent brand-ad schema. Theoretically, the concern is valid and indeed, many such advertisements in the past few years have backfired tremendously causing serious damage to companies in e.g. automobiles, oil and airline industries (Medium 2016; Financial Times 2019; Forbes 2019; Washington Post 2019).

As with every form of advertising, not all green advertisements by non-green companies are created equal and some succeed better than others. Green marketing has some unique qualities, including the fact that it’s traditionally been seen as attractive to a certain audience, namely the green consumers, or consumers with a high environmental concern (Laroche, Bergeron & Barbaro-Forleo 2001; Vermeir & Verbeke 2006) Some studies have provided to this, although the results have been controversial: some studies find that green consumers are more skeptical of green advertisement (e.g. Shrum 1995) and some studies find that, depending on the characteristics of the advertisement, green consumers have a more positive reaction to such advertisement (e.g. Matthes & Wonneberger 2014). Nonetheless, this type of research has yet to be conducted when the brand in question is incongruent with environmental causes.

Beyond the advertisement audience, other aspects affect the reception of green marketing as well. According to extensive literature review by Kangun, Carlson and Grove (1991), Carlson, Grove and Kangun (1993) and Leonidou, Leonidou, Palihawadana & Hultman (2011) these aspects include the validity, type, emphasis and specificity of the green advertisement. Moreover, a distinction between emotional appeals and rational appeals is apparent in green advertising as green advertising often relies strongly on either one of these appeals. Therefore, these elements are concluded in the context of our research in the next chapter, research objectives and research questions.

## 1.2. Research objectives and research questions

The objective of this research is to discover how a company acting in a non-green industry can execute green advertising without being seen as greenwashing and therefore harmful to brand. There are three questions presented in order to reach this objective. These questions and the objective are summarized below in Figure 1.



FIGURE 1: Research objective and research questions

In pursuing answers to these questions, this research can provide considerable benefits to companies looking to sustain their brand in today's eco-conscious business environment. This is especially crucial for companies working in non-green industries so that they may keep their competitive edge despite the bad reputation of their industry.

## 1.3. Research structure

The research consists of six chapters. After chapter one, introduction, existing theories will be discussed in further detail. As the research relates to two very different theoretical topics, these topics will be divided into two separate chapters. In chapter two, green marketing and green advertising theories will be discussed. Also, theoretic approach to greenwashing as well as consumer

environmental concern (green consumerism) are introduced in this chapter. Chapter three focuses on theories of incongruence. This chapter also introduces the suggested terms of environmental brand incongruence as well as the suggested theoretical framework of this research. Chapter three discusses the methodology and method of analysis. Chapter four presents the results of research in detail, separating results according to the theories presented. Finally, chapter five concludes the research by presenting a discussion of the results as well as theoretical and managerial implications derived from data. Evaluation of the study and suggestions for future research are also discussed. Summary of the research structure can be found below in Figure 2.

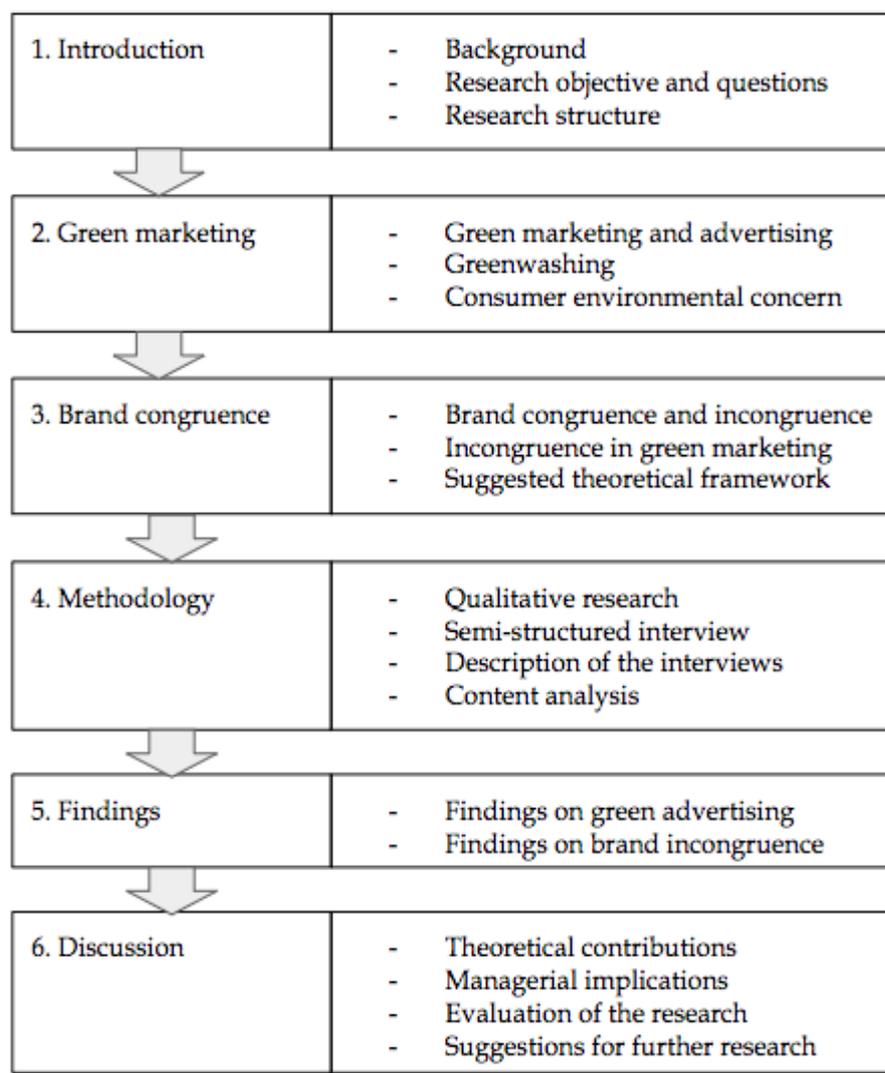


FIGURE 2: Research structure

## 2. GREEN MARKETING AND GREENWASHING

### 2.1. Green marketing

Green marketing has been broadly researched and implemented in practice. A multitude of definitions have emerged over the past 40 years since Henion first defined green marketing as *“concerned with all marketing activities that have served to help cause environmental problems and that may serve to provide a remedy for environmental problems”* (Henion 1976). Over the years with increasing popularity and concern for environmental issues, green marketing has evolved from being a mere tool of marketing into an integrated strategy for all functions (Dangelico & Vocalelli 2017). There are multiple terms following the principle of environmentally sustainable marketing, such as *“Sustainable Marketing”*, *“Eco-Marketing”* and *“Environmental Marketing”*. The differences between these terms are barely noticeable (Dangelico & Vocalelli 2017), so in this research, the terms are used interchangeably.

While definitions follow a similar pattern, definitions still differ in terms of emphasis. One key difference in emphasis is whether the definition highlights green marketing's impact on the environment or the company's competitive advantage. Indeed, recent research shows that environmentally conscious brands also do better in terms of sales and company performance across most product and service categories (Nielsen 2018). A few definitions that emphasize this difference are listed below in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Definitions of green marketing

Emphasis on environmental impact	Emphasis on company performance
“Green Marketing has been used to describe marketing activities which attempt to reduce the negative social and environmental impacts of existing products and production systems, and which promote less damaging products and services” (Peattie & Peattie 2009)	“The process for formulating and implementing entrepreneurial and environmentally beneficial marketing activities with the goal of creating revenue by providing exchanges that satisfy a firm's economic and social performance objectives.” (Menon & Menon1997)
“Green Marketing” refers to holistic marketing concept wherein the production, marketing consumption and disposal of products and services happen in a manner that is less detrimental to the environment with growing awareness about the implications of global warming, nonbiodegradable solid waste, harmful impact of pollutants etc.” (Misha & Sharma 2012)	“Strategies to promote products by employing environmental claims either about the attributes or about the systems, policies and processes of the firms that manufacture or sell them” (Prakash 2002)
“All marketing activities that have served to help cause environmental problems and that may serve to provide a remedy for environmental problems” (Henion 1976)	

While the emphasis varies, most modern companies recognize the importance of both environmental responsibility as well as business competence, defining green marketing as profitable marketing actions that take into deep consideration the issues related to sustainability and the environment (Peattie 2001; Grant 2010; Simao & Lisboa 2017).

## 2.2. Green advertising

As seen above, green marketing is a vast subject touching on a multitude of attributes of the entire product and company lifecycle. Indeed, modern green marketing (so called “Third Age of Green Marketing) requires marketers to meet all environmental costs of production and consumption, calling for holistic view of green thinking spreading across management process, not merely limiting to promotion (Peattie 2001). That being said, green advertising is an important particle of green marketing, as communication to customer is crucial

and lack of such makes green marketing useless, to some extent. Banerjee et al. (1995) has defined green advertising as advertising that fills any one or more of the following categories

- Explicitly or implicitly addresses the relationship between a product/service and the biophysical environment.
- Promotes a green lifestyle with or without highlighting a product/service
- Presents a corporate image of environmental responsibility.

With this definition, green advertising varies from presenting an environmentally friendly product to highlighting the “green” elements of an entire brand (Hartman 2009). The exact environmental cause of a green advertisement seems to be related to whichever environmental cause is the most pressing at the moment, for example in the 1990’s the exact claims seemed to be related to the ozone layer (Carlson et al. 1993) and in the end of 2010’s, advertising is mostly focused on CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions.

### 2.3. Aspects of green advertising

Some research has been conducted on the exact elements and their effectiveness in green advertising. In their research, Leonidou et al. (2011) studied 473 international environmental advertisements and conducted the following message aspects of such advertisement. The following division also follows the logics presented by Kangun et al. (1991) and Carlson et al. (1993).

- Claim type → Product-oriented, Process-oriented, Image-oriented, environmental fact based
- Claim specificity → Specific, Vague
- Claim emphasis → Strong, Weak
- Claim validity → Acceptable, Ambiguous, Omission, False/Lie

Carlson et al.’s (1993) definitions of claim type are as follows: Product-orientation focuses on the environmentally friendly attributes that the product possesses (for example, low product emissions, product durability, low energy consumption, and product recycling (Leonidou et al. 2011)). Process-oriented claims deal with an organization’s internal technology, production technique and/or disposal methods that yield environmental benefits (Carlson et al. 1993) (for example, low toxic emissions, low energy use, and non-polluting production processes (Leonidou et al. 2011)). Image-orientation associates the organization with an environmental cause or activity for which there is broad-based public support (for example, stating that the organization is committed to preserving the forests (Carlson et al. 1993)). Environmental fact-based claims involve an independent statement that is ostensibly factual in nature from an organization

about the environment at large, or its condition, such as "The world's rain forests are being destroyed at the rate of two acres per second." (Carlson et al. 1993). Carlson et al. also noted, that an advertisement can be a combination of aforementioned claims. Leonidou et al. found in their study (2011) that the product-oriented claim type was by far the most utilized at the time of the research.

Claim specificity refers to how clear the mediated message is and how much detailed information is accompanied. An example could be a company claiming to protect the environment (a vague claim) compared with a company claiming to have reduced their delivery-related carbon emissions by 20% in order to protect the environment (a specific claim). Studies have found that especially in the context of green advertisements, consumers require specific and clear information. The lack of such information can easily lead to green products not being purchased or perceived greenwashing (Newell, Goldsmith & Banzhaf 1998; Testa, Iraldo, Vaccari & Ferrari 2015; Rademaker, Royne & Wahlund 2015). Despite these suggestions, information asymmetry (a large amount of vague information with little specific information or arguments) has traditionally been typical of green products and marketing efforts (D'souza, Taghian, Lamb, Peretitako 2007). The popularity of specific claims has increased considerably in the last 20 years (Leonidou et al. 2011). However, it should be noted that while consumers require their information to be specific, completely raw information is easily beyond the general public's comprehension and therefore useless or confusing (Furlow 2010; Delmas & Burbano 2011; Parguel & Benoit-Moreau & Russell 2015).

Claim emphasis refers to how strong of a role the environmental claim takes within the advertisement. A strong emphasis is taken on when the advertisement highlights environmental benefits as the main objective. A weak emphasis is when an advertisement deals with environmental benefits, but merely as one of the many attributes. (Leonidou et al. 2011)

Claim validity refers how truthful the claim is. Acceptable claims have false claims nor omissions (Leonidou et al.2011). Ambiguous claims are too broad to have a clear meaning (Kangun et al.1991), therefore an advertisement with a very vague specificity is mostly also ambiguous in validity. Omissive advertisements omit information that would be needed for fact verification (Leonidou et al.2011). Unfortunately, there are also green advertising that can be considered as outright lying. This claim aspect is the most difficult one to evaluate as judging the validity of an advertisement required a level of expertise (Kangun et al. 1991).

While the aspects presented by Leonidou et al. (2011) are one of the few comprehensive looks into the aspects of green advertising, other aspects have been studied separately as well. For example, studies have shown that difference in appeal has an impact on consumer advertisement attitude. For example, studies have been conducted on environmental vs. financial appeal (Schuhwerk & Kefkoff-Hagius 1995), emotional vs. informational appeal (Kärnä, Juslin, Ahonen & Hansen 2001) and gain vs. loss aspect (Chang, Zhang & Xie 2015). In the following chapters, these variables will be discussed in further detail.

In terms of emotional and informational appeal, Kotler (2013) explained the difference quite well. He stated that "emotional appeals attempt to stir up either

positive or negative emotions that can motivate purchase. --. Advocates of emotional appeal claim that they attract more attention and create more belief in the sponsor and the brand. The idea is that consumers often feel before they think, and the persuasion is emotional in nature" (p. 426). Informational (or rational) appeal, on the other hand, was described as "relating to audience's self-interest. They show that the product will produce the desired effect. Examples are messages showing the product's quality, economy, value or performance" (p. 426). In the context of green advertising, Kärnä et al. (2001) described green emotional appeals as harmony with nature, pleasure with environmental consciousness. Aside from the positive emotions, studies have found stirring up negative emotions, such as guilt, especially effective when it comes to green advertising (Banerjee et al. 1995; Jiménez & Yang 2008). Rational environmental appeal is the description of technical environmental performance (Kärnä et al. 2001), such as information of a certain company's green efforts and environmental efforts. Generally speaking, while studies show that consumers require specific information in their advertising, studies have also shown that emotional appeal is better in green marketing compared to rational or functional appeal (Matthes, Wonneberger and Schmuck 2014). Lee (2008) found that an emotional appeal was one of the four key elements for successful green advertising when targeting a younger audience. Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, Dermody & Urbye (2014) also found that emotional evaluations were more effective in driving pro-environmental purchase behavior, rather than rational ones. Content analysis of green advertisement thus far has been twofold, with Banerjee et al. (1995) finding that a large majority of advertisement relies on emotional appeal and Leonidou et al. (2011) finding the exact opposite. These studies also had differences in terms of time and format, thus they cannot be interchangeably compared. Rather, it can be concluded that both the emotional and rational appeal appear to be utilized for green advertising (Kärnä et al. 2001).

Aside from emotional/rational appeal, other aspects of green advertising have been studied to a great extent. Fowler and Close (2012) studied to scope of green advertising (macro, meso and micro), finding that messages encouraging small goals and actions rather than macro-level goals (e.g. everyday recycling and "saving the planet") are preferred by consumers as they perceive macro goals to be beyond their abilities. Schuhwerk and Kefkoff-Hagius (1995) studied the environmental/financial appeal, meaning the focus on making an environmental change and the possibility for saving money, respectively. Interestingly, they found that for consumers with a higher involvement with green issues (more on this on chapter 2.5 consumer environmental concern), there was no significant difference in appeals, whereas those less involved with green issues reacted more positively to the environmental appeals instead of the financial. White, Macdonnell and Dahl (2011) and Chang (2015) studied the difference in gain/loss appeals, finding that both were useful when used with appropriate contractual setting.

As seen on this chapter, green advertising and its aspects have been studied vastly in different contexts. This research will focus on the most broadly utilized aspects, as presented by Leoniou (2011).

## 2.4. Greenwashing

However, as with any marketing strategy, green advertising isn't a self-evident road to great success. One pitfall, as mentioned in the introduction, is the high danger of seeming "greenwash". Thus far, definitions of greenwashing's have been broad and vague (Lyon & Maxwell 2011). One definition of greenwash, as defined by Kärnä et al. (2001, 69) is "environmental advertising without environmental substance". The core of greenwash lies within the asymmetry of definition presented in the first chapter: the company tries to benefit from the positive impact on company performance without actually taking into consideration the environmental actions. Theoretically, greenwashing can be seen as emerging from the attribution theory.

Attribution theory emerges from conventional psychology. It was first discovered by Austrian psychologist Fritz Heider and further studied by e.g. Harold Kelley (Kelley 1971). It has later been broadly studied in the field of marketing (e.g. Settle & Golden 1974) as its assumptions are quite well applicable to consumer behavior. As attribution psychologists state "an individual will attribute observable events to their underlying causes on the basis of covariation of cause and effect. An event will be attributed to a cause that is present when the event is observed and absent when the event is not observed" (Heider 1958; Kelley 1971), meaning that people tend to give causal explanations when confronted with other's behavior in social environments. Expanding attribution theory to consumer behavior has shown that consumers create similar explanations when confronted with the behavior of companies as they would with the behavior of peer humans (Settle & Golden 1974; Weiner 2000). In green marketing literature, attribution theory has been studied in the context of cause-related marketing (Ellen, Webb & Mohr 2000; Dean 2003; Sjovald & Talk 2004), but only limitedly in the exact context of green advertising (Nyilasy et al. 2014).

In the context of green advertising, greenwashing can emerge in marketing claims that are either false (Delmas & Burbano 2011) or deceptive in their vagueness or selective disclosure of facts (Lyon & Maxwell 2011). A common form of greenwashing is to exaggerate the importance and volume of minor green initiatives (Chen, Lin & Chang 2014; Kim 2015). Greenwashing can also be subconscious cues that make consumers believe in the greenness of a brand without outright claiming so, such as nature imagery (Parguel et al. 2015). These forms of greenwash are well summarized in the five-item measurement of greenwashing, suggested by Chen, Lin and Chang (2014). These five items are as follows:

1. This product misleads with words in its environmental features
2. This product misleads with visuals or graphics in its environmental features
3. This product possesses a green claim that is vague or seemingly unprovable

4. This product overstates or exaggerates how its green functionality actually is
5. This product leaves out or masks important information, making the green claim sound better than it is

Greenwashing, or perceived greenwashing by consumers, has been shown to affect negatively on brand attitude (Newell et al. 1998; Nyilasy et al. 2014), credibility (Newell et al. 1998; Furlow 2010) and purchase intention (Nyilasy et al. 2014). One case of discovered greenwashing makes the audience suspicious of the brand's further green actions, even if they are sincere (Furlow 2010). Beyond the brand itself, greenwashing by other brands has been shown to raise skepticism towards any sincere green actions taken by other brands (Lyon & Maxwell 2011; Chen & Chang 2013).

Consumers perception is essential when it comes to greenwashing. It is important to note that greenwashing is only harmful to the brand if it is perceived as such. Greenwash, if undetected by the audience, has shown not to harm the brand. Similar results have been found vice versa: sincere green actions harm the brand if they are perceived as greenwashing.

The risk of perceived greenwashing can be so significant and the consequences of such perception so severe that a brand might choose not to communicate their green actions at all (Zmuba & Parekh 2008). This is contradictory with the fact that modern consumers expect increasing volume of ethical communication from brands (Delmas & Toffel 2014). Companies in the non-environmentally friendly sector are put into an especially difficult position, as greenwashing is more common in the industries (Delmas & Burbano 2011) and the bad reputation of others reflects on them (Lyon & Maxwell 2011; Chen & Chang 2013). Furthermore, as Delmas and Burbano (2011) stated, the level of greenness of an industry doesn't define whether a company is completely "green" or "non-green", but rather the actual acts of the company. Thus, the key question of this research emerges: how should a brand communicate their green actions without the risk of perceived greenwashing?

Not extensive research has been conducted to guide brands in how they should communicate their green advertising. Theoretical contributions of past research have, at core, been that brands should not participate in false environmental claims and they should fulfill their green undertakings (Furlow 2010; Nyilasy et al. 2014). This is rather self-evident in the light of traditional reputation research, which suggest that brands should "do as they say" (Klein & Leffler 1981). The only specific aspect of green advertising that has been studied is the specificity of environmental claims, as stated above. Carlson et al. (1993) found that the less environmentally sound claims a company can make, the more vague their environmental advertisements are, which leads to higher consumer confusion and a greater risk of perceived greenwashing. Multiple other studies found similar evidence (e.g. Ottman 2011 p. 139-143, Chang 2011, Bickart & Ruth 2012, Mo 2018). Ergo, in order to avoid being seen as greenwashing, a company should provide specific and solid evidence of their eco-friendly actions. At the same time, Carlson et al. also found that a too specific or technical environmental claim may be beyond a common consumer's grasp of understanding and the

message will be lost. This was also backed by other research (Furlow 2010; Delmas & Burbano 2011; Parguel et al. 2015). Therefore, no conclusive results have been found. Other aspects of the actual green advertising and their impact on whether the ad is perceived as greenwashing have yet to be researched.

## 2.5. Consumer environmental concern

Studies have shown that the level of consumers environmental concern effects the way that they welcome and react to green advertising. At core, consumer environmental concern is a question of issue involvement. Celsi and Olson(1988) discussed involvement as a personal relevance, “to the extent that consumers perceive it to be self-related or in some way instrumental in achieving their personal goals or values”. Indeed, in the context of environmental concern, the concept of “values” is highly relevant to involvement.

In the field of green marketing, consumer environmental concern is one of the earliest and most vastly studied topics. Research on the subject began from the early 1970's (Kilborne & Beckmann 1998; McDonagh & Prothero 2014). While research has been vast, terminology is not yet been strictly defined. The topic is referred to with many different terms in the multidisciplinary field, including green, ecological, ethical, responsible, pro environmental and sustainable consumer research (Kumar & Polonsky 2017). These terms are more or less synonyms and, in this study, the topic is from now on referred to as “consumer environmental concern”, indicating that consumers with a high level of environmental concern are “green consumers” and consumers with a low level of environmental concern are “non-green consumers”.

Environmentally conscious consumers have long been of interest to companies and early research sought to discover the demographic, physiographic and personality characteristics of environmentally conscious consumers as a customer segment (Kilborne & Beckmann 1998; McDonagh & Prothero 2014). Later research has expanded to reshaping consumer behavior towards a more sustainable direction, although this direction of research is still quite new and less emphasized (Kumar & Polonsky 2017). As well as terminology, the exact definition of consumer environmental concern also varies based on the research focus. Some define it as green consumption habits and philosophies, investigating green actions as the core of green consumerism (Laroche et al. Forleo 2001). A larger body of research defines green consumerism as an attitude and a set of values rather than action (Chang et al. 2015). This opposition of environmental concern in attitude and behavior has been an important topic of research. The majority of research has concluded that high level of environmental concern in consumer attitude does not predict a high level of environmental concern in consumer behavior (Carrigan & Attala 2001; De Pelsmacker, Driesen & Rayp 2005; Vermeir & Verbeke 2006; Moser

2015; Newton, Tsarenko, Ferraro & Sands 2015). The research that defines a high level of environmental concern as a direct indicator of green behavior is rather outdated, e.g. Laurent & Kapferer (1985). Some of the more recent research suggests that environmentally concerned customers are more likely to buy eco-friendly products but unwilling to pay more for such purchase (None & Kumar 2011; Moser 2015). In this research, the level of environmental concern is also seen as an attitude and value, rather than a set of actions (Chang et al. 2015). Due to the large body and variety in subjects in the green consumerism research, this chapter will further focus on the subject of this research, which is green marketing.

Some research has been conducted on environmental concerns relation to green advertising, e.g. how environmentally concerned consumers perceive green marketing and advertising. A positive reaction to environmentally friendly products is a core characteristic of a consumer with a high environmental concern (Laroche et al. 2001; Vermeir & Verbeke 2006), but that does not mean that a consumer with a high environmental concern would react positively to all green marketing. In fact, the idea of “skeptical green consumer” has emerged from the green consumerism research (Shrum, Mccarty & Lowrey 1995; Zinkhan & Carlson 1995; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez 2009; Do Paco & Reis 2012). Originally introduced by Shrum et al. (1995), a skeptical green consumer is a consumer with a high environmental concern who is especially careful in evaluating the content of green marketing, leading to a higher level of skepticism. This result was consistent with Shrum et al.’s finding that consumers with a high level of environmental concern preferred their advertisements to be informative. However, Matthes & Wonneberger (2014) questioned this, finding that green consumers actually put more trust into green advertisement, given that the claims in the advertisement are sound. Matthes and Wonneberger argued that what has been referred to as skepticism towards green advertisement is actually just a higher level elaboration and processing of the advertisement. Additionally, he found that the level of rationality and detailed information raised the extent to which green consumers rated the advertisement as trust-worthy.

Interestingly, research has found that while environmentally concerned consumers may expect more information from green advertising, they are not better at detecting false claims or greenwashing than consumers with a lower level of environmental concern (Newell et al. 1998; Schmuck, Matthes, Naderer 2018)

### 3. ENVIRONMENTAL BRAND INCONGRUENCE

Brand congruence refers to “matching” of the brand (Misra & Beatty 1990) The definition of congruence has yet to be universally established as some disagreement exists (Sjödín & Törn 2006) and also due to the fact that the concept of congruence is also commonly referred to as fit (Ellen, Webb & Mohr 2006), compatibility (Torelli, Monga & Kaikati 2012) or coherence (Kocher, Czellar & Usunier 2006). In this research, the term congruence is used to refer to these terms interchangeably.

The theory of brand congruence is often thought to have been based on schema-based theories embarking from the field of social psychology. These theories indicate that cognitive structures, referred to as schemas, “constitute expectations concerning the structure of information encountered”, as stated by Taylor and Crocker (1981). Their research suggests that these schemas act in twofold ways: firstly, lending structure to experience, affecting how we perceive different stimuli and secondly, helping us retrieve information from memory. Contrary to Festinger’s (1957) widely accepted cognitive dissonance theory, Taylor and Crocker suggest that attitude-consistent information is not retrieved or acknowledged more easily than attitude-inconsistent information. In fact, their studies found that in terms of memory retrieval, information that was very incongruent was as functional as very congruent information. This result has been discussed as bipolar schematic effect and it has been widely studied and utilized in the field of marketing research. (Taylor & Crocker 1981).

Mandler is often seen as a pioneer in schematic theory research. In his often quoted research on congruence and schematic theory, Mandler (1982) argued that while congruent information is often pleasing, it is not memorable, as it does not require cognitive effort (somewhat along the lines of other research on incongruent information, e.g. Taylor & Crocker 1981). Mandler also takes into account extremely incongruent information, referred to as attitude-inconsistent information in the bipolar schematic effect of Taylor and Crocker (1981). Extreme incongruence can be met with failure to assimilate or be accommodated by the existing schema. Therefore, extreme incongruence, while memorable, leads to frustration and is ultimately unpleasing. Ergo, his research

suggests that the information is best delivered moderately incongruent. This way it requires enough cognitive elaboration to be memorable, while not causing frustration. Fiske (1982) presents contrary conclusions, finding that affective responses are generated from schematic match. It can be stated that, while science agrees on the function of schemas, it has yet to be agreed upon whether information consistent or inconsistent with existing schema is more memorable and/or met with a more positive response.

In the field of marketing, brand congruence has been studied extensively. Some examples of contexts in research include celebrity endorser (Misra & Beatty 1990; Albert, Ambroise & Valette-Florence 2017; Um 2019), product placement (Russell 2002; Ferguson & Burkhalter 2014; Sloan, Aiken & Mikkelsen 2018) and self-image of the consumer (Sirgy, Johar, Samli, Clairborne 1991; Kressmann et al. 2006). Results of these studies have agreed that congruence is a key factor in successful advertising. Brand congruence has been found to be directly have a positive effect on brand attitude (Russell 2002), brand memory retrieval (Russell 2002) as well as brand loyalty (Amine 1998; Kressmann et al. 2006; Han 2008). Traditionally, companies have aimed for congruence in their marketing efforts.

However, not all research agrees. A growing number of research has been conducted in favor of intentional incongruence in marketing, especially advertising (Alden, Mukherjee & Hoyer 2002; Dahlén et al. 2005; Dahlén, Rosengren, Törn & Öhman 2008). Incongruent advertising is surprising because it conflicts with the consumers' existing schematic perception of the brand (Meyers-Levy 1998). Incongruent advertisements utilize the incongruence as an element of humor for example a candy company Haribo commercial in which formally dressed businesspeople talk with the voice of children (Adweek 2014). Incongruent advertisements often also utilize the consumers' expectations of the product category or advertisement placement, e.g. placing a car advertisement in a beauty magazine (Dahlén et al. 2008). Interestingly, research has shown that incongruent advertising can enhance ad attitude (Lee 2000) brand attitude (Lee 2000; Alden et al. 2002; Dahlén et al. 2005, 2008) and brand recall (Houston, Childers & Heckler 1987; Dahlén et al. 2008). Note that these are the same attributes that other research found to be enhanced by brand congruence.

While these results may seem contradicting, studies have found reasons why some brands may benefit from incongruence while another receives the same benefits from congruence. For example, Dahlén et al. (2005, 2008) found that the maturity, establishment and familiarity of the brands contributed to how much they benefited from brand incongruence in advertising (Dahlén et al. 2005, 2008; Delgado-Ballester, Navarro & Sicilia 2012). Familiar brands are often not looking to increase awareness or liking, but rather interest (Machleit, Chris & Thomas 1993), hence an interesting and surprising incongruence would be beneficial to their brand attitude. Interestingly, they also found that while incongruent advertising has a positive effect on brand attitude, it has a negative effect on ad attitude (Dahlén et al. 2005). The same was found on ad recall and brand recall, with incongruent messages having a negative effect on ad recall, but a positive one on brand recall in the context of familiar brands. In the

context of unfamiliar brands, study found that the incongruence hurt the brand recall (Lange & Dahlén 2003; Delgado-Ballester et al. 2012). The research also found that ad credibility suffered from incongruence. It could be speculated that the familiarity of the brand facilitates the segregation of the brand attitude and the initial ad attitude. Also, nonexisting brand schema require support from ad elements in order to be remembered. This is why brand recall suffers when the brand in question is unfamiliar (Lange & Dahlén 2003). Contrary, Houston et al. (1987) found that in terms of brand recall, brands in the introductory phase benefit the most from incongruence. An important distinction is that Dahlén et al. studied ad-brand incongruence, whereas Houston et al. studied incongruence of elements (copy and picture) within the same advertisement.

Furthermore, studies have found that incongruence has a negative effect on ad credibility (Sjödín & Törn 2006; Dahlén et al. 2005). Therefore, Sjödín & Törn (2006) suggest that incongruence can be harmful for informational brands. Rather, his managerial implications recommend it for brands that aim to be transformational. Dahlén et al. (2005) concurs these implications, stating that incongruence's harmful effect on credibility makes incongruence preferable for low-involvement brands.

Below is a figure 3 that summarizes the differences and similarities of ad-brand congruence and incongruence and their outcomes pending on variables based on previous research.

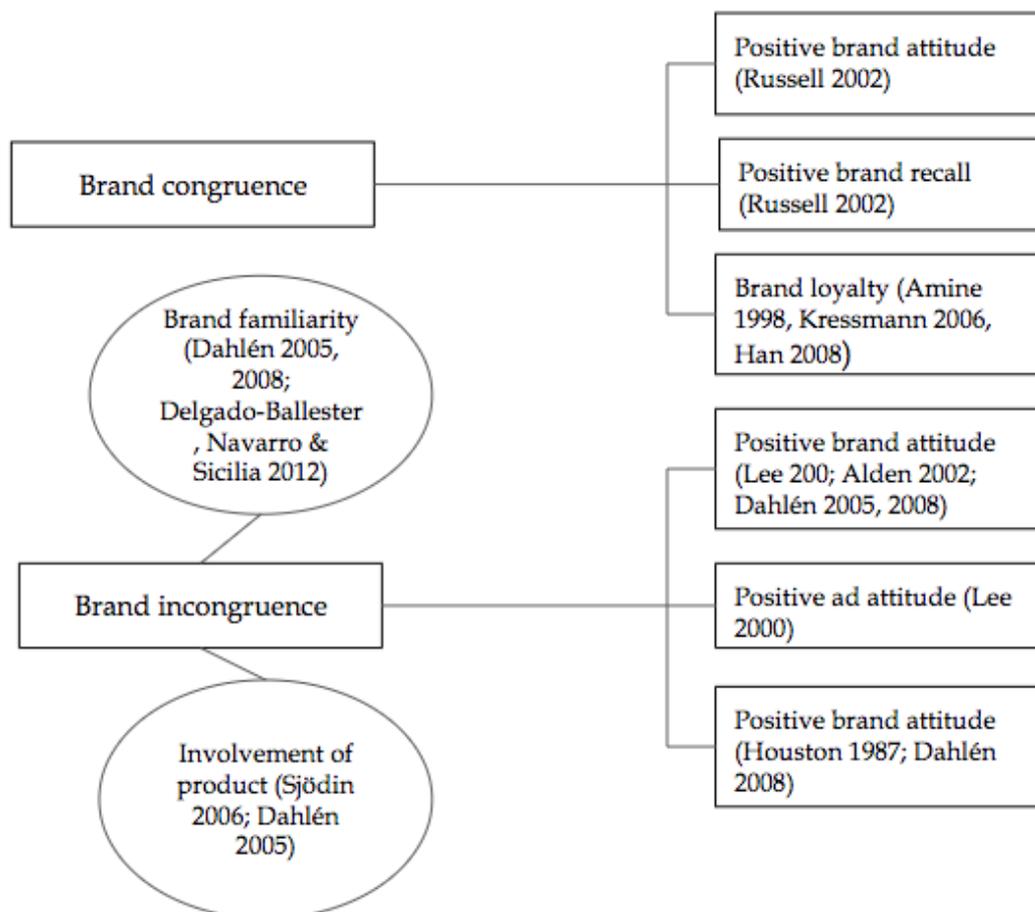


FIGURE 3: Outcomes of brand-ad congruence and incongruence based on previous research

### 3.1. Brand congruence in green advertising

Not much research has been conducted in brand congruence in the context of green advertising. However, some research has been done in the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which can be considered to be a hypernym of green marketing and advertising.

A study by Ellen et al. (2006) explored a fit between a brand and their CSR cause. They found that consumers perceived the intentions of the brand less egoistic (the preferable outcome) when the fit was high (e.g. a gas station providing free transportation for the elderly) compared to when it was low (e.g. gas station protecting the wildlife). Torelli, Monga & Kaikati (2012) added to these findings, stating that a mismatch between CSR cause and a brand led to a less favorable evaluation of the brand. Later research found similar results,

contributing with their own findings. For example, functional congruence has a direct influence on brand CSR perception, whereas image congruence influences CSR perception through the mediating effect of altruistic intentions and credibility (Bigné, Currás-Pérez & Aldás-Manzano 2012; Elving 2013) and de Jong & Meer (2017). Nan and Heo (2007) also found that CSR brand-ad congruence is especially important if the customer is high in brand consciousness. Unlike in the general brand-ad fit congruence research, no research to date has found that incongruent brand-CSR fit would be beneficial to a brand in any circumstances. Therefore, it can be concluded that brand congruence is an especially important factor in the context of CSR.

A large number of research introduced above discuss CSR in terms of charitable work. While this can also be included in green marketing, green marketing is not limited to it. Nonetheless, as both CSR and green marketing are value-related actions and sensitive in nature, it can be speculated that similar rules apply to “general” green marketing as to charitable work: the importance of brand match is crucial for the success of perceived brand attitude and skepticism towards the green actions.

As stated in the introduction of this research, corporate values must evolve over time in response to social and pressure and without recognizing these values, corporations may lose an important competitive edge (Babiak 2011; Delmas & Toffel 2014). This means that if social pressures outweigh the cautiousness of traditional marketing strategies, then companies may have no choice but to conduct green marketing, despite not being congruent as a brand with the green cause.

However, these companies are not doomed to fail. As Ellen et al. (2006) found, brands participating in CSR are not merely seen as egoistic or sincere in their motives based on the congruence. Rather, these attributes are seen as a continuum. Ellen et al. (2006) differentiated four types of motives: egoistic, strategic, stakeholder driven and value driven. Furthermore, Lafferty (2007) also divided fits into highly or moderately incongruent and found that affective response to that partnership might make the partnership effective, despite moderate or even high incongruence (such as a multinational distillery donating to MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving)). Elving (2013) also found that corporate CSR actions were perceived as more trustworthy if the company had a good reputation, despite the fit being incongruent.

Reflecting these findings to the basic assumptions of thematic theory (Taylor & Crocker 1981; Mandler 1982) the resolvable incongruence and unresolvable incongruence (Sjödín & Törn 2006) can be discussed. When discussing brand congruence theories in general, resolvable congruences are the beneficial ones, creating a sense of “puzzle” and “surprise” to the consumer, whereas the unresolvable congruences lead to frustration and negative brand attitude (Sjödín & Törn 2006). As Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989 (39-54) found “The positive evaluative effects of incongruity only follow if the incongruity is resolvable “. This was later agreed upon by Törn and Dahlén (2007, 234-239), who stated that “brand-incongruent ads improve ad attitudes, but only if consumers are able to resolve the incongruity inherent in the ads”. It is suggested that in order to avoid unresolvable incongruence, a brand should

avoid extreme incongruence (Meyers-Levy & Tybout 1989) and/or help the consumer in congruence resolution (Törn & Dahlén 2007). This help can be, for example, additional information that aids the consumer in incongruence resolution (Bridges, Keller & Sood 2000, Törn & Dahlén 2007)

In the light of current research, it would be incorrect to say that CSR-brand incongruence would create positive sense of puzzle and surprise. However, the principle of resolution could be applicable to CSR incongruence, speculating that Ellen et al.'s (2006) continuum is comparable to the possibility of congruence resolution. Following the same logic, Lafferty's (2007) affective response could be parallel to resolution, as well as Elving's (2013) effect of good brand reputation. The nature of unresolved brand incongruence (confusion, frustration, perceived insincerity) are similar to the topic discussed in chapter 2.4 greenwashing. Ergo, according to the principles of brand incongruence theories, it could be stated that green advertising by non-green companies is incongruent, but only if the incongruence is unresolvable, does it become perceived greenwashing.

Therefore, it can be concluded that even if the fit between the company and their environmental efforts may be incongruent, there are attributes that can make this incongruence less harmful for the brand attitude (or, in the words on Mandler (1982), turn the incongruence into resolvable incongruence). Due to the fact that the research presented above is done in the context of charitable partnership, which is a very different form of CSR than green advertising, this research suggests that there are green advertising specific attributes that could contribute to whether the incongruence is resolvable or not. As the subject has not been extensively studied in this context, any hypothesis attributes will not be presented, but rather try to discover which elements result in resolved brand congruence (acceptable green marketing by a brand in a non-green industry) and which lead to unresolved brand congruence (greenwashing).

### **3.2. Theoretical framework**

Finally, based on the theories discussed in the previous chapters, the suggested theoretical framework for this research is presented.

The suggested framework is based on the brand-ad incongruence theories (Russell 2002; Dahlén et al. 2005; Sjödin & Törn 2006) which in turn based on thematic theories (Taylor & Crocker 1981; Fiske 1982; Mandler 1982) in the context of green advertising. This research proposes to call this particular incongruence "environmental brand-ad incongruence" as the reason for the incongruence lies in the conflicting ethical values of environmental marketing and non-green brands.

As the issue has not yet been approached in this context, no certain hypotheses could be made concerning what attributes may contribute to the resolution of the incongruence. However, it can be speculated that aspects of the green advertising (Leonidou et al. 2011), aspects of the brand as well as the audience's level of environmental concern could contribute to the resolution. A

descriptive form of method is used in order to stay open to other variables and themes that may emerge from data (more on this on the chapter 4 Methodology).

Aside from the attributes that may affect the resolution of brand incongruence, the suggested theoretical framework includes the element of how ad attitude affects the brand attitude and vice versa. Previous research has been inconsistent on this issue and discovering this relation is one of the objectives of this research. Theoretical framework for this research is presented below in figure 4.

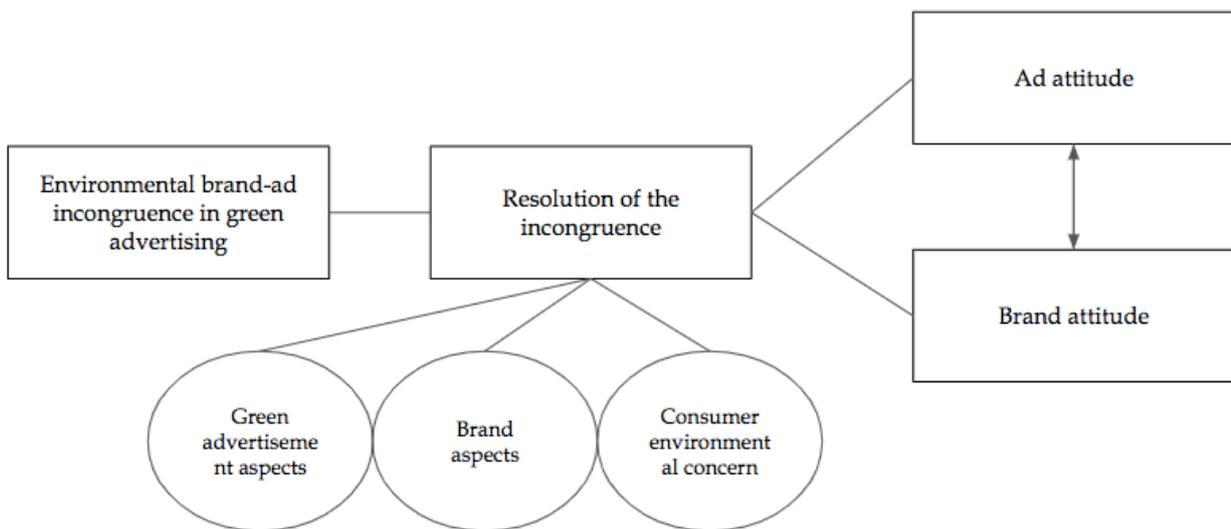


FIGURE 4: Suggested theoretical framework for the research

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter discussed the methodology used in this research. First the premises and characteristics of qualitative research are discussed. Second, semi-structured interviews, which was the method chosen for data collection, is discussed. Third, these interviews are described in further detail. Finally, the analysis methodology will be discussed.

### 4.1. Qualitative research

This research is conducted as a qualitative research. Qualitative research has some typical attributes that define its nature. Firstly, while quantitative research aims for generalisation, predictability and causal explanations, qualitative research aims for contextuality, interpretation and understanding the perspectives of respondents (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 22). It attempts to represent real life and includes the idea that reality is diverse and open for interpretation (Hirsjärvi et al 1997, 152). Qualitative research aims to explore this reality as experienced by the respondents (Adams, Raeside & Khan 2014, 6).

Traditionally qualitative research has been seen as based on inductive reasoning. As defined by Hair, Celsi, Money, Samouel & Page (2015) “inductive reasoning is a type of thinking that involves identifying patterns in a data set to reach conclusions and build theories. The opposite, analytical approach, referred to as deductive reasoning starts with theory and hypotheses before collection or analysis of data. Thus, qualitative research emphasizes the development, while quantitative research focuses on testing theories”. While some disagreement has surfaced on this strict separation (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 25), inductive reasoning is far often found in qualitative research (or abductive reasoning, which can be seen as a cross between inductive and deductive reasoning, in which the researcher has some theoretical ideas that do not qualify as qualitative hypotheses (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 136).

Aside from business research, qualitative research is often utilized in sociology, psychology, education theory and anthropology (Adams, Raeside & Khan 2014, 6)) which makes it ideal for the purposes of this study as the theories are partly related to these fields of study, especially sociology and psychology. Further, qualitative research method was appropriate for the purposes of this research as no exact hypotheses was presented but rather aim is to understand the reality of green advertising, environmental brand incongruence and perceived greenwashing. Our objective is to find and discover realities rather than verify existing claims (Hirsjärvi et al 2008 152)

## **4.2. Semi-structured interview**

The method chosen for this research is semi-structured interview. Interviews are most likely the most common method used in qualitative research, although they can also be utilized in quantitative research. The tradition of interviews has moved from the simplified question-format towards a more conversational direction. This conversational direction, especially true for open and semi-structured interviews, highlights the inherent interactive nature of interviews: the interviewer and the interviewee both influence each other. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 86)

Interviews as a research method has multiple advantages. It allows the interviewee to be active and create meanings themselves as a subject. It is an especially useful method when the studied topic is relatively unknown and the answers are to be positioned in a larger context. Interviews also allow the interviewer to clarify and deepen the answers when it is known beforehand that the answers may be complex. For these reasons interviews were a natural choice as a method for the purposes of this research. There are also some inherent disadvantages to interviews as a method, but these disadvantages will be further discussed in chapter "Evaluation of the research" (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 35)

Semi-structured interview (also known as focused interview) is a form of interview in which the topic of discussion, theme, is known. However, it lacks the strict form and order of questions, which are characteristic to structured interviews. The information gained from semi-structured interviews are also deeper in nature compared to that gained from structured interviews. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1988, 36-38).

## **4.3. Description of the interviews**

The interviewees represented people of similar ages (20-30) and two different groups: consumers with high environmental concern and consumers with low environmental concern. A requirement for the participants was that they identified strongly with either of these groups. Potential interviewees who were uncertain of their environmental concern were eliminated. This requirement was

chosen in order to discover the effect of environmental concern on green advertising perception. The level of environmental concern was based on the self-perception of the interviewees, rather than their behavior, as previous research has shown that these two elements are often in conflict with each other. Self-perception was chosen for this research, as this research deals with attitudes rather than action. Participants were gathered from the extended circle of acquaintances of the researcher, which was appropriate for the somewhat intimate topic, as the familiarity provides a sense of security. List of the interviewee attributes as well as the anonymous code used throughout the research can be found below on table 2.

The number of interviewees was limited to twelve due to reaching a point of saturation, the point at which no new, relevant information was gained from conducting more interviews (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 62). Saturation is difficult to define, as the core principle of qualitative research is that each response is unique (Hirsjärvi et al 1997, 171). Hence, it is based on the judgement of the researcher. In this research, saturation was found according to the suggestions of Eskola and Suoranta (1998, 62-64): the underlying theory and research questions were kept in mind to find answers to relevant questions and if the data were to be cut in half, it would nevertheless follow a similar pattern.

Interviews were conducted in an environment that was agreed upon with the interviewer and the interviewee, either a public or a private setting. All interviews were done face-to-face. The duration of the interviews varied from 26 minutes to one hour and 10 minutes. All in all the interviews lasted for around eight hours. The environmental concern of the participants was verified prior to the interview. Furthermore, the theme of the interviews was revealed to the interviewees prior to the interviews and they were advised that they wouldn't need to seek any additional information relating to the theme before participating in the interview. Interviewees were shown green advertisements and they were discussed in further detail according to the interview question (Appendix 1). As it is characteristic to semi-structured interviews none of the interviews followed the questionnaire precisely.

TABLE 2 Codes of the interviewees and their levels of environmental concern, age, gender and lengths of the interviews

Code	Level of environmental concern	Age	Gender	Length of the interview in minutes
LEC-M1	Low	23	Male	34:44
LEC-M2	Low	26	Male	39:16
LEC-M3	Low	29	Male	54:08
HEC-M1	High	25	Male	38:21
HEC-M2	High	24	Male	39:38

HEC-M3	High	27	Male	70:34
LEC-F1	Low	26	Female	47:40
LEC-F2	Low	23	Female	26:46
LEC-F3	Low	26	Female	38:56
HEC-F1	High	29	Female	36:59
HEC-F2	High	27	Female	27:39
HEC-F3	High	27	Female	44:30

The four advertisements chosen for this research were produced by St1 Oy and Neste Oyj, which will from now on be referred to as Company 1 and Company 2, respectively. These companies are the two largest petrol companies in Finland. Both of them also act internationally. They are competing companies, although company number two has a larger market share. During the interviews, all the interviewees were asked if they are familiar with both of the companies and they were so.

Advertisements are all audio-visual, environmental commercials, ranging in length from 20 seconds to one minute. They were chosen based on their aspect characteristics, as defined by Leonidou et al. (2011). All the aspects were specified prior to interviews, excluding the validity of the environmental claim, as it was beyond the expertise of this research. In the interviews, this was addressed rather as perceived validity. This and the rest of the aspects can be found below on Table 3. Names were chosen for these advertisements, to help clarify the style of the advertisement. First advertisement shows a man describing his fueling habits and use of eco-friendly accessory part in his car in a very practical manner, hence the advertisement will be referred to as the “practical advertisement”. Advertisement two shows everyday people doing small acts of eco-friendliness and the voice over encourages people to act green in their everyday life, hence the advertisement will be referred to as the “mundane advertisement”. Advertisement three is the most emotional one of all advertisements, showing children expressing their concern for their future. This advertisement will be referred to as the “emotional advertisement”. Advertisement four shows a car engine and the technical function of a green petrol in action, hence the advertisement will be referred to as the “technical advertisement”. Still photos of these advertisements can be found on Appendix 2. Table 3 presents a summary of the advertisements utilized for this research.

TABLE 2 Description of the advertisements used in the study

	Advertisement1 "The practical advertisement"	Advertisement2 "The mundane advertisement"	Advertisement3 "The emotional advertisement"	Advertisement4 "The technical advertisement"
Company	Company1	Company1	Company2	Company2
Validity	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear	Unclear
Type	Product-oriented	Image/Process-oriented	Image/Process-oriented	Product-oriented
Emphasis	Weak	Strong	Strong	Weak
Specificity	Specific	Vague	Vague	Specific
Appeal	Rational	Emotional	Emotional	Rational

#### 4.4. Content analysis

The interviews were transcribed in Finnish and the full transcribed text was 99 pages in length. This text was used for analysis. The method of analysis for this research was content analysis. Content analysis is the most used form of qualitative research analysis. It is often seen as based on the framework by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three steps: data reduction, data display and drawing conclusions (Hair et al. 2015, 301-310) After collecting data (conducting interviews) the data was transcribed and reduced using thematic analysis. The transcription was divided into themes emerging from the data as well as basing on the theory. This creates a connection between the data and the theoretical framework (Eskola & Suoranta 1988, 180). The data display phase involved of gathering the findings of each theme to discover which statements and patterns emerged often and which ones were unique, according to the rules of thematic analysis (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008, 173). Finally, it is possible to draw conclusions from the data and mirror the findings back to the underlying theory to discover how the results supported the original assumptions. This is also the point in which it is attempted to answer the research questions (Hair et al. 2015, 308).

## 5. FINDINGS

In this chapter findings which emerged from the interviews are discussed. The chapter is divided into two sections (green advertising and perceived environmental brand incongruence and perceived greenwashing), following the chapters presented in the theoretical framework. First, the findings relating each aspect of green advertising (validity, type, emphasis, specificity and appeal) are discussed in further detail. Second, the findings relating to perceived environmental brand incongruence and greenwashing are discussed. The chapter begins by discussing the fuel industry's environmental incongruence and finish with findings from relating specifically to our research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the results (Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9)

The interviews were conducted in Finnish; hence the quotations have been translated into English. The translations have been attempted to be as exact as possible, limiting some language-specific expressions. Yet, the meaning of translations remains original.

### 5.1. Green advertising

The first chapter of findings discusses the findings divided into themes based on the aspects of environmental advertising as presented by Leonidou et al. (2011). These aspects are validity (how valid the environmental claim is perceived, acceptable/ambiguous/omission/false), type (what exactly is advertised, product/process/image/environmental fact oriented), emphasis (how strongly environmental values are emphasized, strong/weak) and specificity (how specific is the information that the claim is argued with, specific/vague). Additional themes also emerged from the interviews, which are discussed as the appeal (rational/emotional) and other aspects in the following sub-chapters.

### 5.1.1. Validity

When discussing the validity of the environmental claims, all participants found the claims suspicious, despite the participants level of environmental concern.

The level of perceived validity seemed to be clearly related to the amount of detailed information presented. When discussing the mundane and the emotional advertisements, the participants were far more suspicious. On the scale measuring the validity of an environmental claim (Acceptable, Ambiguous, Omission, False/Lie, presented in the chapter 2.2.1), the participants considered the validity of these claims to be either omissive or false and specified that this impression was due to the lack of details and concrete information.

Of course it makes the claim seem unreliable, anyone could just say “hey we’re environmentalist” and then you don’t know the actual facts about the company or their real actions. (LEC-F2)

In the (practical advertisement) a lot more background was offered and the claim was better argued whereas in the (the mundane advertisement) the claims were rather just presented as facts without any details so that made the (practical advertisement) seem much more credible than (the mundane advertisement). (HEC-M1)

In the practical and the technical advertisements, in which more details were presents, the environmental claims were considered to be more valid. Yet, these claims were also considered merely ambiguous. The reason for the ambiguity was that the participants believed that the claims were, while not false, presented in a subjective manner, advantageous to the advertising company. Participants said that they don’t believe that the claims consider all the facts or “the big picture”. Some participants also expressed that they couldn’t consider the numeral facts valid, as they did not know what figures actually meant and had nothing to compare them to.

Based on this, the environmental claims, even when argued with facts, were considered ambiguous at best, if not omissive. Participants with a higher level of environmental concern were more likely to consider the environmental claims to be false than merely ambiguous. Some of them also stated that even if they considered the claims to appear somewhat valid, they would not believe any environmental claims presented by a fuel company. Majority of participants with a higher level of environmental concern stated they wanted to do more research using independent sources themselves to validate the environmental claims presented. Participants with a lower level of environmental concern expressed no interest in doing so.

Up to a certain point I would consider this to be credible, I’m sure they have done some sort of comparison between options, but I’m still hesitant to believe this, I’m not swallowing it all line, hook and sinker. I believe their green option is somehow better than the traditional option, but it’s hard to tell how much. All numbers can be presented in such different manner. (LEC-F3)

Numbers always add up to the credibility but you never know if they are real or if proper research has been done and how big of a scope has been used or if they've just done a tiny little survey which gave them nice number values to present. (LEC-F2)

The environmental claim was more believable in (the practical advertisement) than (the mundane advertisement) cause it was more concrete, but I still don't believe anything that this company claims. (HEC-F3)

Yeah I think the claim was the same (in the mundane and the emotional advertisements) but maybe a bit more credible in (the mundane advertisement) but no this didn't make me believe them at all. (HEC-F2)

The reason for the skepticism was twofold. First, the participants stated that they believed that the fuel companies are attempting to maximize their cash flow and due to this, are willing to claim anything in their marketing efforts, even if it is not true. Second, the participants believed the environmentalist trend to be so vast that the fuel companies have no choice but to participate and offer claims supporting this trend in their marketing efforts.

Participants with a higher level of environmental concern were more likely to base their skepticism on corporate greed whereas participants with a lower level of environmental concern were more likely to do so based on the environmental trend currently dominating the market. While these reasonings seem similar, they suggest a key difference between participants based on their level of environmental concern.

### 5.1.2. Type

All participants were able to identify the type of the advertisement (product-oriented, process-oriented, image-oriented, environmental fact based). Generally the product-oriented advertisements (the practical and the technical advertisements) were considered to be more credible, easier to understand and altogether better than image-oriented. Product-oriented advertisements were also seen as less of greenwashing than image-oriented, as it was more credible to state that a single product is more green than that an entire fuel company is such.

For me, (the practical advertisement) worked better than (the mundane advertisement) cause it told me what product I can use and what I can do differently and how I can concretely act if I want to pay more attention to environmental issues, whereas the other one (the mundane advertisement) merely tried to paint an image of the company. (LEC-M3)

I think the (practical advertisement) worked better in the sense that it didn't claim that the whole organization would be green, just that this one product is, compared to (the mundane advertisement) which seemed to claim that (company1) is generally a green choice, when actually the generally green choice is not to support a fuel company at all. (HEC-M1)

The type of the mundane and the emotional advertisements was unclear, as they could both be considered either image-oriented or process-oriented. The process-

orientation in the mundane advertisement was the imagery of (presumably) bio-energy manufacturing plant with a plant worker wearing brand-specific work attire. In the emotional advertisement, the advertisement named some of the company employees, most of which carried an environmentally concerned job title, such as sustainability manager. One of the objectives was to see if these process descriptions were notable enough for the participants to consider these advertisements to be process-oriented.

None of the participants considered these advertisements to be primarily process-oriented. In fact, only three people even mentioned that the commercials had something to do with the company's processes. All of these mentions related to the emotional advertisement and the process-related elements of the mundane advertisement seemed to go completely unnoticed. One of the participants (LEC-F3) even explicitly said that she would have wanted to imagery from the companies plants, seemingly not noticing that it was exactly the case in the mundane advertisement.

Mentioning the job titles didn't seem like a genuine way to tie this ad's message to the (company2's) processes. It seemed a bit superimposed and over the top. (LEC-F1)

There was the brand in the focus, but also the processes when you looked at the parents of the kids and they were managers of different departments at (company2). So I guess they sort of wanted to say that caring about the environment is something that penetrates the entire company. (HEC-M1)

Generally, the mundane advertisement and the emotional advertisement were seen purely as image-oriented and this had a lowering effect on the entire credibility of the advertisement. Participants with a lower level of environmental concern also stated that image-based green advertisements make it difficult to differentiate one brand from another as they are all similar.

Of course they were advertising (company1) and how responsible they are as a company. This didn't really raise any feeling in me because it could have just as easily been (company2)'s advertisement or really any company. They all have to do these kind of advertisements nowadays. (LEC-M1)

### **5.1.3. Emphasis**

All participants noticed the environmental emphasis of the advertisements. They stated that the environmental emphasis was noticeable from the spoken and text statements the advertisements as well as the environmental imagery (green and blue water and forestry elements) in the advertisements.

None of the participants described the environmental emphasis of the advertisements to have been too strong or weak in any of the advertisements. Generally, the emphasis was not seen as very strong in any of the advertisements, even in the advertisements categorized as "strongly emphasized" (the mundane and the emotional advertisements). Rather, they were seen as either a brand or product advertisement that utilized environmental elements to some extent. Some of the participants with a higher level of environmental concern also stated

that they didn't consider the environmental emphasis to be strong due to the fact that it was environmental claims made by fuel company in order to sell fuel, which is rather commentary on the validity of the claims and environmental brand incongruence than emphasis.

I wouldn't say that the environment was emphasized, rather it acted as an element in the background. Now that I think about what they said in the ad they did discuss the revolution of clean energy a lot and who are the people implementing it. But no, I don't think it was emphasized. (LEC-M3)

I guess the purpose was to have an environmental emphasis, but I don't think they succeeded cause they still told me to put fuel in my car. (HEC-F3)

Despite all participants stating that they didn't feel that the emphasis was strong in any of the advertisements, the participants with a lower level of environmental concern appeared to have a far more positive response to the advertisements with a weaker emphasis. They also argued their preference with elements relating to emphasis. They stated that they prefer advertisements in which some other benefit of a product (lower price, easier usage etc.) is highlighted and the environmental benefits downplayed as a less important benefit. This was the tactic used especially in the mundane advertisement and the technical advertisement, which generally seemed to have the most positive appeal on the participants with a lower level of environmental concern. This was especially true for participants who owned or regularly drove a car, hence the practical benefits for a car-owner were more appealing to them.

Participants with a lower level of environmental concern also stated that they sometimes feel annoyed or "fed up" when they see environmental advertising in which the emphasis is very strong. This also seemed to be their generalisation of environmental advertising. However, as stated before, they did not feel that the advertisements presented to them in this study were strongly emphasizing environment and they did not report feelings of annoyance concerning this.

Maybe they were trying to influence or in a sneaky way trying to get people to care about the environment, maybe people just think that they save money and their cars engine lasts for longer or the product is noticeably cheaper and then the planet is saved as a by-product and people don't understand that they've just been influenced by green advertising. (-) Of course you should think planet first like at the moment the earth will probably burn out with global warming if we keep going like this so maybe people need to be tricked into action. A lot of people are completely fed up with hearing about this topic all the time so if they try to get their message across this way then maybe people will be more likely to buy. (LEC-M2)

This (practical advertisement) was more like like "this is how it is", like they weren't trying to shove anything down my throat, but this is the situation we're at. I like that style, like the environment is just one of the benefits. I don't know which works better, maybe the other one (the emotional advertisement) made me think about the whole thing but this one (the technical advertisement) was something that I'd like to see later as well. (LEC-F1)

#### 5.1.4. Specificity

All participants said that they preferred advertisements that offered specific information on the environmental benefits (the mundane and the technical advertisement) compared to those that were vague. They also recognized this distinction and referred to it throughout the interviews, also when discussing other aspects of the advertisements. They found that a higher level of specificity contributed to the credibility of the brand as well as the memorability of the advertisement. In fact, five participants stated that they couldn't remember what was said in the mundane advertisement (a vague advertisement) and requested to see it again before discussing it in further detail. Furthermore, three more participants stated that they would not remember this advertisement if they were to be asked about it after the interview. All participants explained that their difficulty to remember the details of the interview was due to the vagueness of it.

I kind of missed what they said (in the mundane advertisement), they say that they want to do this and that they want to do that but they don't tell you exactly what they're planning on doing so it just seems very vague, like what exactly makes you green. (LEC-F2)

However, most participants also stated that information that is too specific is difficult to comprehend. When asked whether they understood the information they were offered, the majority of participants admitted that they did not understand it thoroughly or they understood due to being educated on the manner beforehand. Many participants that owned a car stated that they understood how engines work, which allowed them to understand the specific details and speculated that their understanding is above average. On the other hand, many participants with a higher level of environmental concern stated that their interest in environmental themes has led them to be educated on the topic and allows them to understand the details of environmental effects better than average. Vice versa, participants that did not own a car admitted that they did not quite understand the technical functions and participants with a lower level of environmental concern admitted to not quite understanding the environmental facts. One participant with a higher level of environmental concern also stated that she it is important to share specific environmental information, even if it is difficult to understand, for the sake that it directs general conversation to the right direction.

I think this appealed more to people that know more about engines or cars, so most likely men like me that know how to keep car parts clean and what it means that the car remains usable for longer and how that saves money and also the nature so that allowed the appeal to be much more specific. (LEC-M2)

If there would have been some comparable number it would have been useful, now it's more like this one figure that's kind of left hanging in the air. You would have to be pretty involved with this (car)industry to know how much there are emissions in regular gasoline so you can see why this is better. I know I'm definitely not. (LEC-F3)

I do consider myself to be more educated in environmental issues compared to the general public, so I think I'm more equipped to understand green advertisements. (HEC-M3)

Even though the practical advertisement and number four were both labelled as specific, the specific information they offered was presented very differently. In the mundane advertisement, the amount of decreased co2-emissions was presented in a percentage-format (compared to regular fuel). In the technical advertisement, the amount was presented in kilograms. Most participants stated that they preferred the percentage-format as it was easier to understand. They also said that any figure that allows them to compare the numbers is useful. Many also said that specific, numeral information that showed the company's improvement concerning the environmental issues was positive and increased the credibility of the advertisement.

I guess I understood the environmental facts quite poorly. I can't really compare these figures to anything and I don't believe people generally can either. Some people take this very seriously and some don't cause the number is so abstract. I mean 2,3 kilograms sounds like quite a lot, like a big bag of flour, but that's more of a visualization. I guess this is a good thing, but how much of a good thing, that's hard to tell. (LEC-M3)

Many participants also brought up the challenges of the advertisement-format, speculating that people have difficulty focusing on advertisements long enough to actually comprehend complicated factual information. Some participants even mentioned that the point of advertisements is not to give consumers information, but rather inspire them to find additional information independently. Participants with a higher level of environmental concern were more likely to say that they will or would do independent research on the topic later on. Participants with a lower level of environmental concern expressed no such interest, stating that the topic did not interest them enough or was not relevant to their needs.

On the other hand, if the information forces the ad to be too long then people won't be able to focus on the facts. Perhaps if people are interested, they can go online and find out more themselves. I could do that too, but I already know quite a bit about the environmental projects that (company1) is involved in. (HEC-M2)

Concrete information helps you relate yourself to the topic and understand the details, so in that sense yeah there should be more specific information, but I personally didn't need it. I guess I'm not the kind of consumer that needs everything to be pre-cooked for me, I like to find out more myself. (HEC-F1)

#### **5.1.5. Rational/emotional appeal**

Participants had a far more positive reaction to the advertisements with a stronger rational appeal. Many of them stated that while the emotional advertisements were more pleasing to look at and that they appreciated the audio-visual features of them, they still preferred the rational ones. Four

participants (both with a lower level of environmental concern and with higher) also expresses that they typically prefer emotional advertising, but when it comes to environmental topics, they want marketing efforts to be rational and emotional environmental advertisements even have a rebarbative effect on them.

There were multiple reasons for the participants preference of the rational advertisement. The most often stated one was that the emotionality made the environmental message not seem credible and they felt that the emotionality was often done in an “over the top” manner.

The emotionality in green advertisement easily goes overboard if they don't offer any strong arguments to back up their case. It just over to top and not very reliable.  
(HEC-M1)

An important distinction was that the emotional advertisements had a very different tone. The mundane advertisement appealed to feelings of hopefulness and community, using phrases like “us” (referring to company1 and the potential customer) and showing “everyday people” doing small acts of greenness (riding a bicycle, recycling etc.). The emotional advertisement appealed to feelings of guilt, showing children expressing concern for their own future and nature-related sceneries that the children were afraid would vanish. The mundane advertisement had a message that the world is on the right track (“a revolution is happening”) while the emotional advertisement had a message that things have to change if we want to keep the world for our children (“I want to grow up on a better planet, not a worse one. Please.”)

Participants reported some feelings of (false) hopefulness after viewing the mundane advertisement, especially the participants with a lower environmental concern. However, generally they stated that the advertisement did not evoke any feelings in them and they could not focus on the details. As stated in chapter 6.2.4., many participants requested to see the advertisement again as they forgot what happened.

It made me feel somewhat hopeful the way they were speaking collectively, like the change starts with individuals that realize that the need for energy isn't going to decrease so the message was that this concerns me and good for me for doing good things, like a false sense of hope and pride. (LEC-M3)

I think they're a little pathetic, the “yay let's save the world” propaganda videos. They're just big bulk commercials that everyone else is doing too, like I won't remember which company did this one. (LEC-F3)

Contrary, the emotional aspects in the emotional advertisement were met with great passions, albeit not completely in a positive sense. All participants reported that they felt they were being guilt into environmental behavior and four participants reported feelings of guilt or anxiety concerning environmental issues (three participants with lower environmental concern and one with higher). Three participants stated that they approved the usage of guilt in environmental advertising, as the issue is important and they speculated that real action will only happen alongside strong feelings. However, all participants, including the

three that reported usually approving of guilt in environmental manners, stated that advertisements number three made them feel somewhat uneasy. The reason for this was twofold: first, people said that the strong use of emotions with little informational content made the company and environmental statements seem unreliable and invalid. They said that the strong use of emotions made the advertisement seem over the top. Second, they said that a fuel company preaching environmental values and “pointing the finger” at others seems hypocritical, as the fuel industry is at the core of the problem. The use of guilt as an emotional aspect in the advertisement raised the issue of potential greenwashing, especially amongst the participants with a higher environmental concern.

I found that this was just done in a completely bad taste, especially in this context when they do stuff with kids talking and appealing to your feelings. I’m not saying that you shouldn’t use forceful means to get your point across in commercials, I think that’s completely OK but it just has to be done with pure intentions, like it’s in a context where they actually mean what they’re saying. In this one it wasn’t and that’s why I thought that it was done in such a bad taste. If it wouldn’t have been (company2)’s commercial and (company2) wouldn’t have been mentioned it could have just as easily been a commercial for an environmentalist organization. And that’s why I found it dishonest. (HEC-M3)

As a specific emotional tool, the use of children as a narrator stimulated a lot of conversation. Many participants stated that they understood the use of children in an environmental message to highlight responsibility and concern for the future and two participants (both female, one with a higher level of environmental concern and one with lower) said that they found the children endearing. However, all participants said that they had an issue with using children, either seeing it as unethical, unreliable (as they speculated that the children were too young to fully understand what they were saying) or “obvious”. A few participants also remembered seeing this tactic used quite often in environmental advertising and stated that they always found it to be distasteful.

It just seemed a bit too obvious to use the children but I get that kids are the future so I see why they did it like that but they just seemed too young to understand this and it just seemed too clear that they were trying to appeal to my feelings so it took some of the credibility away. It was just all a bit too much. (LEC-F1)

#### **5.1.6. Other aspects**

Another issue that contributed quite a lot to the perceived greenness was domesticity. Participants with a lower level of environmental concern stated that they considered Finnish fuel companies to be more environmentally sound and they reacted positively to company number one’s brand slogan (“Finnish energy company”), expressing that the domesticity gave them a sense of sustainability.

This motion was also acknowledged by participants with a higher level of environmental concern, but from a different perspective. They considered the overemphasizing of domesticity to be a way of luring people into buying

products that are not necessarily green despite being domestic. Some of the implied overemphasizing of domesticity being a means for greenwashing.

I guess I see (company1) as more eco-friendly than eco-terrorists but I think that idea is based on them being Finnish. (LEC-M3)

They're trying to mix being domestic with being ecological and people are buying into it. Like being Finnish would be the same as being green in everything, like fueling Finnish fuel would be better, or somehow cleaner when it's Finnish. But I mean, it's fuel. No nationality is going to change that. (HEC-F3)

Both groups, participants with a higher and lower level of environmental concern, felt that it was very important for them to identify themselves with the narrator of the advertisement. In the green advertisements presented in this study, many participants with a lower level of environmental concern achieved that identification, while participants with a higher level of environmental concern did not.

In the practical advertisement, participants identified with the narrator's wish to be more considerate to the environment, despite doing environmentally not friendly acts (driving the car). Participants stated that this narrative of encouraging little acts instead of being perfectly environmentally conscious appealed to them. They also identified with the narrator's needs: saving money and easy convenience. Identification was not gender limited, as female participants also expressed feelings of identification, despite the narrator being male. A few participants also expressed that since green issues do not interest them generally, they need strong identification to pay attention to an advertisement. For this reason, the technical advertisement, in which there were no human characters, did not evoke feelings of identification and therefore no interest.

Contrary, participants with a higher level of environmental concern did not identify with the narrator in the practical advertisement. Some even expressed feelings of annoyance to how obviously the narrative character was made to feel relatable. However, they did speculate this to be a convenient tactic for attracting consumers with lower environmental concern. They stated that for them to identify with a narrator of green advertisement, they need to be more "in connection with nature," "suburban" and "stricter with environmental conduct". While some participants with a lower level of environmental concern also did not identify with the narrator in the first advertisement (due to not driving a car), they did not express as strong feeling about this disconnect as participants with a lower environmental concern, who often felt that this advertisement was not directed to them at all.

The first (advertisement) had a stronger emotional appeal to me, like there's this guy who also drives quite a lot and he's not like trying to guilt you for it, but rather like he also drives a lot like you so maybe you should consider this product cause it also works for him. (LEC-M2)

It made me feel like your "Average Joe" can do it and anyone can and it's not very difficult. It seemed like (the advertised product) is easy to get and set up and they

said it's like upgrading to today, so that gave me a modern feeling like if you're just a regular person but you can get one of these and you're not so old-fashioned, you can be trendsetter. (LEC-F1)

The target audience (for other green advertisements participants has seen by company2) is very different, like a person living in the city center who doesn't drive a car, like an obviously different brand image. That's the kind of green advertisement (by company2) I've seen on social media and I can relate to more easily. (HEC-F3)

(In the mundane advertisement) they were filming children and elderly people touching greenery so I guess it felt closer, like there was more to grab onto, compared to (practical advertisement) in which there was this manly man who drove thousands of kilometers from south to north, like there wasn't much for me to identify with, but I feel like more people can identify with the other one, like they have done and want to do that in the future, play around in a clean environment and stuff. At least for me, that's how it seems. (HEC-M2)

## 5.2. Environmental brand incongruence and perceived greenwashing

### 5.2.1. The petrol industry in general

When discussing the petrol industry in general, the participants were very aware of the industry's environmental impact. Many of them brought up current innovations that aim for more environmentally sound results (biofuels, ethanol based fuels). They said that the majority of their information of these new, green innovations was based on general news or the fuels company's own communication. These green innovations were seen as a positive development, regardless of the participants environmental concern.

Somehow I'd like to believe that the industry is going to a more bio-based direction and hopefully those solutions would be as effective as the solutions we are using now, I think I've read a lot of news that indicate that the industry would have a greener future (LEC-F3)

I think that the industry is in an interesting state at the moment now that there's a big hype going on around the electric and hydrogen cars so it's interesting how the traditional fuel industry will respond to this. For example, I know that (company2) has invested a lot in biodiesel and they're coming out with a new airplane-gasoline which is completely bio-friendly (HEC-M1)

In general, the participants with a higher level of environmental concern stated that they are skeptical towards the fuel industry. They described that industry as "outdated" and "environmentally non-friendly", despite being aware of the green innovations. The green participants were very aware of the industry and were able to differentiate between fuel resellers (such as our companies) and

actual oil producers, which were considered to have a more negative effect on the environment. They were also able to differentiate between companies that they considered to be more environmentally sound and ones that are less so, despite working in the same industry. They shared information on the fuel companies' exact actions, which they had gained from news outlets.

Participants with a higher level of environmental concern described the industry in higher detail and with a higher level of skepticism, but most of them still expressed feelings of hopefulness and trust that the industry is moving in a more environmentally sound direction, as stated above. Only two participants (HEC-F2 and HEC-F3) stated that they didn't trust the industry's change towards a greener direction and considered the environmental efforts to be too small to make an actual difference.

Finnish fuel suppliers, or what would you call them, I see them as positive per se, if you don't consider the (company2)'s palm oil plantations. But generally speaking, they invest quite a lot in renewable resources and try to lessen the fossil-based ones and create new ones. This can't be said for all the foreign players. (HEC-M2)

I wouldn't speak of the industry's eco-friendliness in general, not in a positive nor a negative manner. It really depends on which company we are talking about and what factual information I have on their actions. (HEC-F1)

I know there are quite a few green inventions, but they don't really affect my perception of the industry. They are too marginal, the alternative solutions. (HEC-F3)

Some of the participants with a lower level for environmental concern were also able to differentiate between companies that they considered to be more environmentally sound and the ones less so. Participants with a lower level of environmental concern were less confident in their segregation and offered less detailed information than the participants with higher a level of environmental concern. However, the information they provided was not more or less accurate than that provided by the participants with a higher level of environmental concern. Rather, there was a difference in the level of confidence they had in their own knowledge.

Yes, I guess (the fuel industry's eco-friendliness) sparks some thoughts, to some extent at least. There has been news that some companies in some parts of the world have taken care of this worse and some better, some are focusing on biofuels. I guess it depends on the company, sure no one can downright cut out the emissions but the amount of them probably varies quite a bit. (LEC-M3)

The segregation between these "green" and "non-green" fuel companies was based on two-fold sources: news outlet information and general brand information and marketing efforts.

When comparing the two fuel companies used in this study, Company number 2 was generally considered to be more environmentally sound. The reason for this was in their branding and marketing efforts. All of the participants

stated that they have seen a larger volume of advertising from company number 2, especially green advertisements. When comparing the perceived eco-friendliness of company number 1 and company number 2 (prior to showing the participants the green advertisements and discussing the issue in greater detail), the key element seemed to be the amount of marketing efforts the participants had come across. This was true for both participants with a higher and lower levels of environmental concern, although consumers with a lower level of environmental concern were generally more upfront about the commercial nature of their information sources.

Additionally, company number 2 has used green and blue colors in their branding, whereas company number 1 has used yellow and red. This seemed to have a major effect on the participants' perception of the company's greenness. The branding even as successful that one of the participants confused an environmental brand slogan used by company 1 to be that of company 2's ("Company number 1, biofuel company").

From what I've heard, if I can compare the company1 and company2, company2 immediately comes across as greener than company1. Maybe it's the color of the advertisements or something, but if the options are company2 and company1, then I think company2 has far more produced eco-friendly solutions, but this is just the mental image I have based on their advertising. (LEC-F1)

I think I am basing my assumption (that company1 is not very eco-friendly) on advertising, for example company2 has advertised a lot based on green themes and been very visible and I've seen no advertising by company1 so if you compare these two the assumption would be that company2 does nothing. (HEC-F3)

As a brand image if I had to think about what the eco-friendliest fuel company would be, then it definitely wouldn't be company1. Maybe it would be company2, they have branded themselves as a biofuel company. I guess my idea of (Company 2's eco-friendliness) comes from their brand slogan, wasn't it something like "the biofuel company" or something along those lines. (LEC-M1)

There was only one participant who considered company number 1 to be more environmentally friendly than company number 2 (HEC-M2). Interestingly, these assumptions were not based on marketing efforts by either company. Furthermore, they were not based on news concerning environmental efforts by company number 1 but rather news concerning environmental failures by company number 2. Another participant (LEC-F3) also approached this failure, but nonetheless stated that she considered company number 2 to be more green, due to the large amount of green advertising she has seen.

I know that company2 has done some pretty questionable activities in the past, like using lots of palm oil in their diesel and stuff like that, so because of that I have a below average image of company2's eco-friendliness based on what I've read in the news. I have a feeling that they have profiled themselves as the big responsible company in Finland that does a lot for the environmental but then there's more to the story than that. (HEC-M2)

I would consider company1 to be the bad guys greenness-wise compared to company2 that actually tries, although I read that company2 uses a horrible amount of palm oil which isn't so good, but this is just the image that I have. -- I think company2 is a big, international company and I feel like they do a lot in the environmental sense but on the other hand maybe they have just succeeded in their marketing because as I said, I read that they use a lot of palm oil which is horrible. But yeah I've seen a lot of their green advertisements so I consider them to be the good guys. (LEC-F3)

Despite the difference in the level of skepticism and confidence in knowledge, both participants with a higher and lower levels of environmental concern conducted the fuel industry to be needed in the modern world and its environmental issues unfortunate, yet unavoidable. Participants with a higher level of environmental concern emphasized the industry's development towards a greener future while acknowledging that the fuel industry is still largely based on fossil fuels and therefore profoundly not environmentally friendly. Participants with a lower level of environmental concern emphasized the industry's status and importance in its current form.

The fuel industry is essential in today's day and age. I don't perceive it as negative, because it's still needed and driving a car won't be outlawed anytime soon so it will still be needed in years to come. (LEC-M1)

They (actors in the fuel industry) have a chance to make a change from within the industry by shifting towards genuinely greener alternatives and encouraging all car manufacturers to develop eco-friendlier car. That has already happened to some extent, but I just think that fuel companies are right in the very core because they have the power to, well I'm not sure how much they can afford to make big changes, financially speaking. But anyway, they have to power to get stuck in the current state of things or to make a difference. (HEC-M3)

### **5.2.2. Environmental brand incongruence and perceived greenwashing**

After seeing the advertisements and discussing them in further detail, all of the participants acknowledged that there is a notable discrepancy in a fuel company advertising with green values. Participants, both with a higher and lower environmental concern, talked about these advertisements bringing up a false sense of greenness, justifying non-green behavior and that the only actually green way is to not consume fuel at all. They also speculated there to be an imbalance between how much a fuel company discusses their green innovations and how much is actually done. This is an issue that clearly provoked a considerable amount of thoughts and feelings as the participants discussed this issue at length.

Interestingly, despite fully acknowledging the issue and being able to describe it in further detail, the participants were not likely to judge the companies in question for promoting with green values. In fact, only one participant (HEC-F2) expressed that she fully judges the companies for using green values in their advertising, speculating that they're merely taking advantage of the potential market possibilities.

This made me feel very conflicted, (--), it just seems that the marketing team has decided to make this kind of campaign, I wish I could believe that they want to do a lot for the environment, but I just feel quite skeptical. I think it's not so much in the research and development that they're wondering how they can make their fuels eco-friendlier but more in the marketing department how they can make more money. So, all in all these commercials made me feel a little uncomfortable. I've thought a lot about this issue before too. (HEC-F2)

A far more common narrative was that the participant understood the ethical issue with a fuel company promoting their own product with green values and found it ethically questionable. However, they did not strictly condemn the companies for this behavior. One reason which came forth was that the participants understood that green values are a world-wide trend, also in the fuel industry, and all companies are obligated to participate if they want to remain competitive.

Another reason, which was mostly expressed by participants with a lower level of environmental concern, was that they trusted the advertised products to be environmentally sound and said that they should be advertised for the sake of exposure. Participants with a higher level of environmental concern were more likely to express some skepticism toward the actual environmental benefits of the products.

Third reason, which was mostly expressed by participants with a higher level of environmental concern was that they understood that fuel companies receive most of their cash flow from the sale of fossil fuels, but as long as these funds are used for innovation of greener solution, they had no problem with such behavior. Participants with lower environmental concern did not express thoughts on funds from fossil fuel sales funding environmental projects.

Everyone does it (advertise themselves with green values) so of course there will be pressure to act in the same manner as everyone else, if you don't then you will quickly be seen as the bad guys who aren't interested. I can't say I judge them cause this is a pretty fundamental part of today, for the rules of capitalism and you have to act accordingly if you want to succeed. (LEC-M3)

I don't see it as disturbing. If they have cool new innovations like that then they should come forth with them, otherwise they'll be swallowed up by the competition. I get the ethical issue, but it doesn't really bother me. (LEC-F1)

Obviously there is a conflict, the business where the big bucks are coming from at the moment is from selling fossil fuels but if that's a way to finance other projects in the future that could potentially replace these fossil businesses with renewable options, so if that will happen, which I think is very likely, well in that case I think it's completely fine (to advertise themselves with green values). It's not like they have another choice either. (HEC-M2)

However, there were differences in how the participants perceived the ethical issues. Some of them said that they saw the ethical issue as grave in both companies and all advertisements they were shown. Nonetheless, most participants had a preference: they judged one of the companies more forcefully for unethical advertisement than the other. Their preference wearied (similarly

as seen on chapter 6.4.1) but there were some common causes for their preferences.

One reason for what lessened the burden of environmental brand incongruence was the background knowledge the participants had beforehand. As seen above (in chapter 6.4.1) this was also one of the reasons why participants deemed one fuel company greener than the other. Therefore, one could assume that if the participant deemed a company green, they would not judge the company based on the environmental brand incongruence. While background information gained from independent, non-commercial sources was a relevant factor, it was not a straight-forward indicator.

All, except for one, participants perceived company number two as greener than company number one prior to seeing the advertisements in this study. This seems to have an effect on how the advertisements changed the viewer's perception of the company. When the participant's perception of the company was green to begin with (mostly the case with company two), the advertisements had a weaker effect on the company's green image. None of the participants stated that the advertisements made them perceive company number two as greener than they had prior to seeing the advertisements. Most participants said that their image of company two as a green fuel company remained the same.

Four participants even said that the strong emotional and the guilt elements used in the emotional advertisement made company two seem hypocritical and lacking in credibility and this weakened their perception of the company's image as a green company. As participants LEC-F3 stated, company number two has put a lot of branding efforts into seeming green, so the bar is set high for them and their green actions are followed more critically than potentially company number one. She also went on to say that after seeing the advertisement, she would choose company number one over company number two, even if she preferred company number two before seeing the advertisements. Participant HEC-M3 also said that based on the emotional advertisement he will avoid using company number two's services in the future. Before seeing the advertisement, all of the participants quoted below deemed company number two as greener than company number one.

(Company2) has made themselves seem ecological with their advertisement so if it turns out they do something questionable, including cheesy and hypocritical advertisements like (the emotional advertisement), compared to if (company1) does the same thing, it just feels worse when (company2) does it. It makes me feel betrayed. (--) If their prices are about the same, I would choose (company1) cause this ad (the emotional advertisement) just annoyed me so much. (LEC-F3)

After these advertisements and especially (the emotional advertisement) I kind of got fed up with (company2), like in the future if I have to fuel a car I will avoid (company2)'s stations. I can't be sure of their concrete actions and I can't tell which company is better in that sense and I don't know if there's some questionable actions that (company1) is doing cause there just isn't that much information on them. My judgement is very image-based rather than information, but it's just that (company2) is using full-on, textbook greenwashing tactics so that makes me avoid them. (HEC-M3)

Before seeing these ads I said that they're about equal in my eyes, in terms of greenness, maybe (company2) seems a little greener, but after seeing these advertisements and without knowing anything about their real actions but just like image-wise, (company2) drops way below in my books. (HEC-F2)

Contrary, the advertisement by company number one, which appeared to have weaker green image, benefited more from the green advertisements. Six participants, both with lower and higher environmental concern, stated that their image of company number two as a green company became stronger after seeing their advertisements.

Yeah, these advertisements definitely made me think of (company1) as greener than I did before. (LEC-F1)

Well yes in a way these advertisements made me see (company1) greener than I did before, as I didn't know that they had these green products in their selection before. (HEC-M1)

Five out of twelve participants deemed the advertisements as greenwashing. Two of these participants were ones with lower environmental concern and three with higher environmental concern.

While both groups agreed on the greenwashing, their reasonings were different. Participants with a lower level of environmental concern said that they felt that the lack of information and elements of guilt resulted in the feeling of greenwashing, therefore this reaction was especially true in company number two's advertisements. Participants with a higher level of environmental concern stated that the general nature of fuel industry was the reason behind perceived greenwashing. Ergo, any environmental advertising a fuel company would participate in would be deemed as greenwashing. While they said that perceived greenwashing was highlighted in company number two's advertisements, they also deemed company number one's advertisements as greenwashing.

This (third) advertisement, in which they were saying that (company2) works for these issues and they tried to create this image of (company2) as a responsible company, I'm not sure if they were trying to create credibility. I'm not sure what it was, but it was certainly greenwashing. (LEC-M3)

Yeah, the kids and the guilting were pretty much "greenwashing starter pack". They should have gotten rid of the kids, the overtone was so annoying that I'm not really open to any information in this even if there would have been any. (LEC-F3)

I would call that greenwashing, cause this is a pretty marginal product in their otherwise eco-catastrophic product portfolio. (HEC-M3)

### 5.3. Summary of the findings

Finally, summaries of the findings are presented. The figures below represent the key findings in these interviews.

Figures number 5 and 6 present the findings from chapter 5.1. These figures presents elements that lead to a positive response in environmental brand-ad incongruence in green marketing and elements that lead to a negative response, respectively. Moreover, elements that contribute to and elements that prevent environmental brand incongruence resolution are presented in figures 7 and 8, relating to the findings of chapter 5.2.

Further theoretical contributions and managerial implications of these findings are discussed in chapter 6.

Looking back to the suggested theoretical framework, it can be seen that the aspects that emerged from the interviews were very much in line with the suggested elements. The suggested elements were green advertisement elements, brand elements and consumer environmental concern. First, green advertisement elements were so significantly presented that they contribute for half of the figured findings (figures 5 and 6). Brand elements and consumer environmental elements were also significant, as they can be found in all of the figured findings (figures 5, 6, 7 and 8). The relation of ad attitude and brand attitude is briefly touched upon in the figures, but further discussed in chapter 6. Also, further examination of the validity of the suggested theoretical framework is discussed in chapter 6.

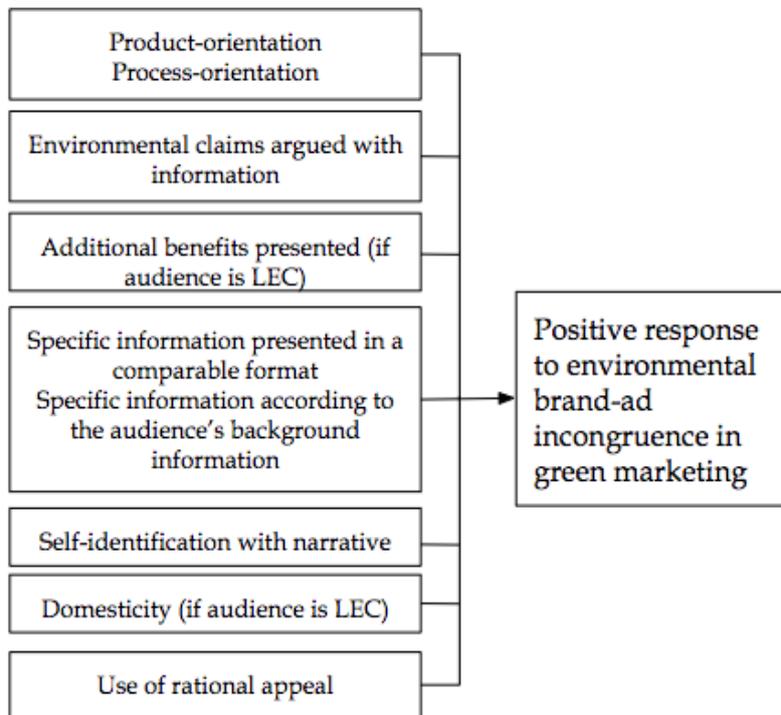


FIGURE 5: Aspects resulting in a positive response to environmental brand-ad incongruence in green marketing

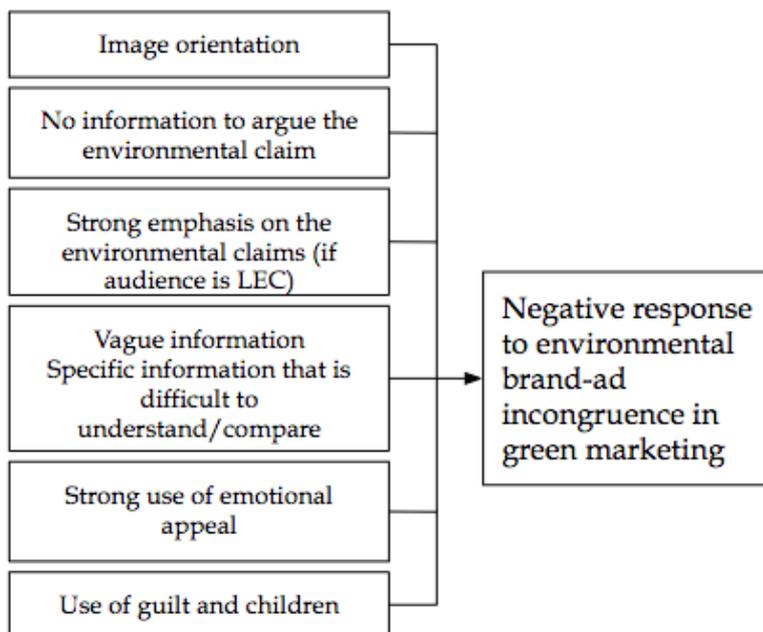


FIGURE 6: Aspects resulting in a negative response to environmental brand-ad incongruence in green marketing

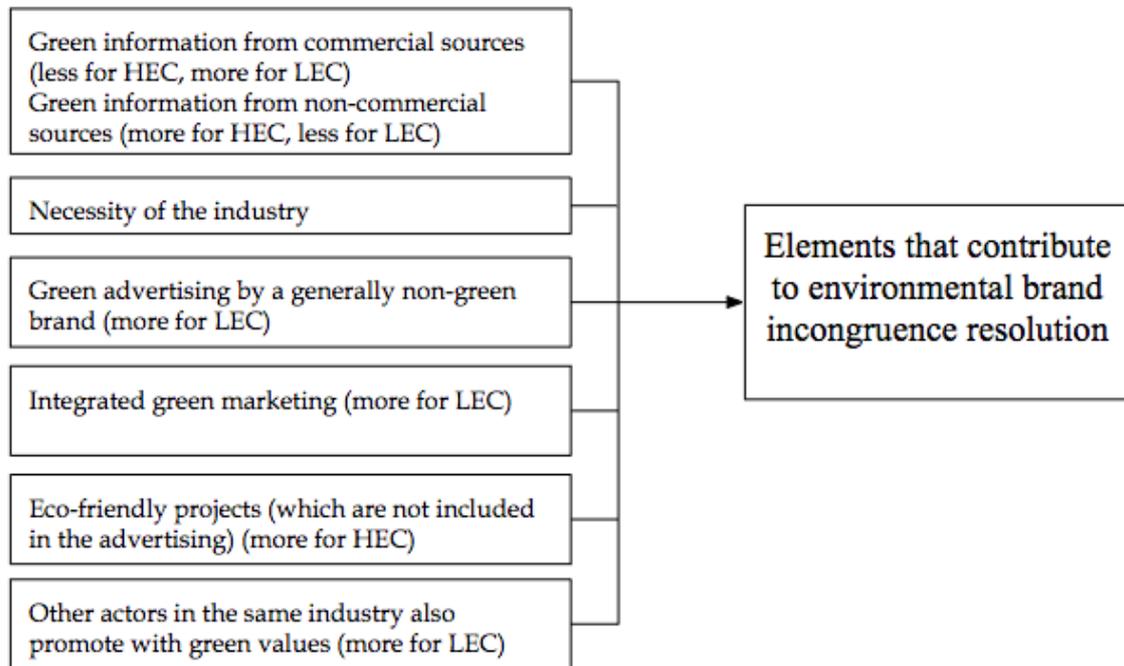


FIGURE 7: Elements that contribute to environmental brand incongruence resolution

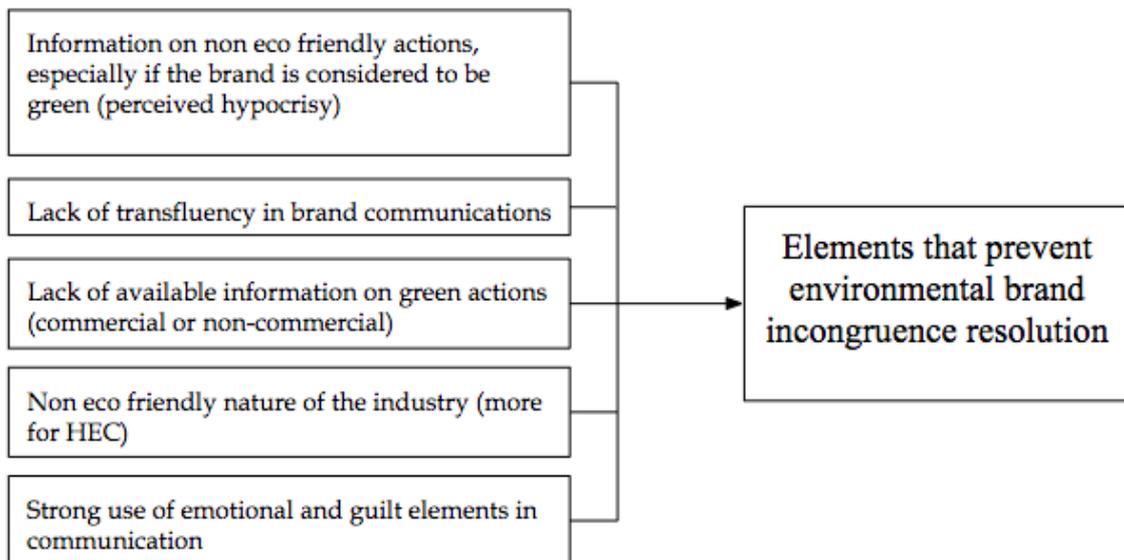


FIGURE 8: Elements that prevent environmental brand incongruence resolution

## 6. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings, offers theoretical contributions and managerial implications. Limitations of the research and suggestions for future research are also presented.

### 6.1. Theoretical contributions

The first contribution of this research is that it discusses the aspects of green advertising (as presented by Leonidou et al. (2011) and Carlson et al. (1993)) and expands to their effects on perceived greenwashing. Second, contributions to brand incongruence theories are discussed. Third and finally, the suggested theoretical framework is revisited in the light of findings.

The findings expanded to consumer perceived validity of environmental claims presented in green advertisements. The findings suggest that environmental claims presented in an advertising format were not perceived valid in any case. The reactions could be explained with the assumptions of attribution theory (Heider 1958, Kelley 1971), as participants speculated advertisers to have motives for false claims. The perceived validity ranged from dismissive to false, depending on the audience and the other aspects of the advertisement. Participants with a higher level of environmental concern were more likely to perceive the claims as false, which supports the theory of skeptical green consumer (Shrum et al. 1995; Zinkhan & Carlson 1995; Hartmann Apaolaza-Ibanez 2009; Do Paco & Reis 2012). One of the most significant aspects affecting the perceived validity was the specificity of advertisement. Specificity and findings relating to it will be discussed further later in this chapter. Also, while this finding might appear concerning, it may not have as severe

consequences to the credibility of the brand or brand attitude. This will also be discussed further.

Past research on the type of the advertisement has been limited. The findings of this research contribute to this gap in research. Findings suggest that green advertisements that are product or process oriented were considered to be more credible and sincere in their environmental claims when the advertising company acts in a non-green industry. However, both consumers with a higher and lower level of environmental concern had difficulties in finding process orientation in advertisements and were more likely to consider these advertisements image based. Image oriented advertisements were more likely to be considered greenwashing. Mirroring to Leonideou's (2011) findings, product-oriented are the most utilized form of advertising and also the most positively perceived green advertising.

As well as the type of advertisement, the environmental emphasis of marketing and its regard to perceived greenwashing has not been studied. The findings of this research suggest that emphasis does not have an effect on perceived greenwashing. However, it does affect the general attitude towards the advertisement, depending on the audience. This will be further discussed in managerial implications.

The aspect of green advertising that has to date been the most studied is specificity. Based on the findings of this research, it is also the one that draws the most attention in consumers, as it was the most discussed aspect in the interviews. The findings of this research support the findings of previous research. An advertisement that provides specific information is considered to be more credible and less likely to be deemed as greenwashing (Newell et al. 1998; Testa et al 2015; Rademaker et al. 2015). However, as found by Furlow (2010) Delmas and Burbano (2011) and Parguel, Benoit-Moreau and Russell (2015), this research also confirms that specific information should be presented in a way that is understandable to the target audience. While this research did not find evidence that information that is difficult to comprehend would lead to higher level of perceived greenwashing, it did find that understanding the environmental claims led to perceived sincerity of said claims. This research supported the majority of previous research on green advertising specificity, except for the findings of Schmuck et al. (2018) that stated that exclusively false information lead to perception of greenwashing, but vague information did not. This research found the opposite, as few of the participants accused the environmental claims in the advertisements to be downright false, but rather deceptive in their vagueness, which lead to a lower level of perceived validity.

Findings of this research also suggest while appeal is not considered to be a relevant aspect of green advertisement by Carlson et al. (1993) and Leonidou et al. (2011), it should be. Aside from specificity, the segregation of emotional and rational appeal sparked the most conversation. Emotional advertisements were deemed as greenwashing far more likely than rational advertisements, amongst both consumers with a higher and a lower environmental concern. Even if consumers reported generally enjoying emotional advertisements, they stated that they wanted factual information when it came to environmental issues. Lack factual information made the participants speculate that such information was

not available due to environmental claims not being sound, hence the higher likelihood of greenwashing. This finding contradicts those of Lee (2008), Matthes et al (2014) and Koenig-Lewis et al. (2014). Moreover, while previous research has found guilt to be a useful method (Banerjee et al. 1995; Jiménez & Yang 2008), the findings of this research find the opposite. When the brand in question is environmentally incongruent, the use of guilt appeal is not a beneficial tactic. Pointing the finger makes the brand seem hypocritical and results in a negative response from the audience, whether it is one with a higher or a lower environmental concern.

Generally, previous research on green advertising and perceived greenwashing merely states that environmental claims should be sincere in order to prevent perception of greenwashing (Furlow 2010; Nyilasy et al. 2014). This research expands to this, finding that aside from the sincerity of the claim, green advertising aspects significantly affect the level of perceived greenwashing in green advertising.

Moving on from green advertising specific aspects, this research also contributed to previous research on brand congruence. The term “environmental brand-ad incongruence” was introduced in the suggested framework, suggesting that a brand may advertise themselves with environmental values despite being profoundly non-green, due to its industry or other brand elements. Findings of this research confirm the existence of such phenomenon, as participants were able to recognize and describe it with their own words. This finding expands the understanding of brand congruence research.

First of all, in line with findings of Törn and Dahlén (2007) and Bridges et al. (2000), a key element in reaching incongruence resolution is additional information provided on the brand. The findings, however, discovered a distinction between consumers with a higher environmental concern and a lower environmental concern. Those with a lower level of environmental concern benefited more from information that was gained through commercial sources (such as advertising) than those with a higher level of environmental concern. They also perceived brands that utilized integrated branding tactics (brand colors etc.) as greener than those that did not, as the brand cues are also a form of information. Those with a higher level of environmental concern stated that they judge the “green-ness” of a company based on independent news they have come across. That being said, consumers with a higher level of environmental concern later on also quoted information from commercial sources, partly without acknowledging it. The findings of this study are also in line with those of Törn and Dahlén (2007) and Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989) as they suggested that an incongruence that is not extreme is easier to resolve. This is indicated by the findings that suggested that environmental brand incongruence is more easily resolved if other companies in the industry also promote themselves with green values. This was especially true for consumers with a lower level of environmental concern. Other findings on what contributes to environmental brand incongruence resolution, such as environmental projects, also boil down to information that the consumer is getting that aids them in the resolution. Despite the source of the information (the preference of which depended on the consumer’s environmental concern), it can be stated that additional information

is key in environmental incongruence resolution. Reciprocally, lack of information was key element which prevented brand incongruence resolution, in line with findings of Törn and Dahlén (2007) and Bridges et al. (2000).

It was interesting to discover through interviews that one of the companies had a far stronger green brand than the other. This led to interesting findings concerning the brand aspects effect on brand incongruence resolution. First, a brand with a weaker green image benefited more from green advertising, as it provided new information concerning their green actions (again, in line with findings of Törn & Dahlén (2007), Bridges et al. (2000) and Meyers-Levy & Tybout (1989)). A brand that is predominantly seen as “green” does not benefit as strongly from green advertising, even though the green advertising is congruent with their brand. This could be explained with brand-ad incongruence theories, stating that incongruent brand ads lead to better ad attitude (Lee 2000). This positive ad attitude also translated into a positive brand attitude: new green information provided by a predominantly non-green brand in pleasing green advertising resulted in a greener brand attitude. Moreover, the brand that was predominantly perceived as green suffered more from the weaknesses in their advertising. The use of guilt and lack of valid information resulted in a negative ad attitude which in turn resulted in a weakened brand attitude and purchase intention, as the brand was perceived as hypocritical.

Moreover, the brand that was previously perceived as green had to live up to a higher standard in their advertising. The audience, both levels of environmental concern, expected a great deal from the brand. They were disappointed in the lack of information and the displeasing overtone of the advertisements. They did not expect such high standard from the brand that was perceived as less green, ergo they were less judgmental of their green marketing actions. Therefore, this confirms the final segment of the suggested theoretical framework: in the case of environmental brand incongruence, ad attitude affects the brand attitude and vice versa.

## **6.2. Managerial implications**

This research offers multiple managerial implications for marketing strategies of green advertisements by environmentally incongruent brand. These implications are significant as they have yet to be thoroughly researched.

First implication relates to whether companies in non-green industries show participate in green advertising. Previous research has stated that these companies should steer away from such strategies due to the risk of perceived greenwashing (Nyilasy et al. 2014). This research suggests that in today’s marketing environment, in which green values is a megatrend and companies are expected to take responsibility, this might be the wrong tactic. Green marketing has become a mainstream marketing strategy not exclusive to niche green products and audience. Green actions and communication are not only

approved but expected also from companies acting in the non-green industries. A company acting in such industry and not communicating any green initiatives in their marketing efforts is assumed to be completely passive in the issue. Having said that, greenwashing is still perceived by consumers in these advertisements. Consumers, both those with a high and a low environmental concern are conscious and critical of the environmental claims in marketing. Yet, this perceived greenwashing may not be as severely damaging to the brand as previously thought. Consumers are aware of the increasing amount of green advertising, which makes them less condemning of the possible greenwashing. Conscious consumers understand that in today's competitive environment, most of the companies have to participate in green marketing and they appreciate the involvement in what they perceive as the entire society's responsibility. A certain level of greenwashing is approved, as long as the incongruence is resolvable. The findings of this research suggest that taking a risk of perceived greenwashing might be safer than staying silent.

However, as Hartman et al (2005) found, while choosing a green brand strategy is generally beneficial to the brand, "there is still controversy in which kind of green persuasion strategy would be the most effective". Especially green advertising by a non-green brand has to be done very carefully and strategically, keeping in mind the audience, aspects of the advertisement as well as the aspects of the brand itself. This research suggests that universally, green advertisement by a non-green company should provide specific information on the brands genuine green efforts. The information presented should be easy to understand and compare, clearly indicating the progress that the brand has done. Focus should be on a single product line or processes, rather than the image, in order to avoid perceived hypocrisy. The tone of the advertisement should be foremost informative to maintain credibility and memorability. If emotional appeals are included, they should be subtle and absolutely avoid guilt or blame elements. Green marketing should not be limited to advertisement, but rather integrated green branding.

Aside from these universal aspects, green advertising should be targeted based on the audience's environmental concern. Consumers with a high level of environmental concern were more likely to do independent research on the environmental actions of brands and they appreciated information from independent sources. This audience could benefit from a higher level of transparency, for example directions to independent studies included in the advertisement. Generally, this audience appeared more skeptical towards the commercial nature of green advertisements. Brands could benefit from raising awareness of their green actions, wide spread of relevant news and content from non-commercial sources rather than targeting traditional advertisements to consumers with a high environmental concern. On the other hand, consumers with a low level of environmental concern were more likely to react positively to weak environmental emphasis and stronger emphasis on alternative benefits (e.g. price, convenience etc.). This contradicts the findings of Schuhwerk and Kefkoff-Hagius (1995). They also found domesticity to enforce to green brand. Consumers with a lower level of environmental concern also reacted positively to a narrative that guided them how to act more green, whereas consumers with

a higher environmental concern wanted to do such research themselves. Considering this, it is very important for a brand to understand how their audience perceived themselves and how they can reach targeted audience.

Consumers with a higher level of environmental concern were predominantly more skeptical towards environmental advertising, as previous research suggests. In their case, unresolved environmental brand-ad incongruence was more harmful for the brand attitude and even resolvable environmental brand-ad incongruence was harmful. This was due to the non-green nature of the industry and there was not much that the appeal of the advertisement could do to change this. Therefore, this research suggest that companies in a non-green industry should be careful in targeting consumers with a high environmental concern and perhaps consider not making a great effort in pursuing these consumers as customers. This managerial suggestion is, frankly, self-evident as these consumers would not be very lucrative customers to their business due to their purchase habits.

While consumers are aware of the increasing green advertising, they are also aware of the increasing risk of greenwashing. Consumers, also those with a lower level of environmental concern, are conscious and somewhat skeptical of the environmental information presented. They know where to find more information and the higher their environmental concern, the more likely they are to do independent research. Companies could benefit from gaining environmental certificates and labels, as well as spreading the positive news and other independent content that covers their environmental actions. However, they must be careful: the more a company brands itself as green, the more harshly they are condemned for their non-green actions and disability to raise to the green standard. Therefore, this research supports the self-evident, but significant findings of previous research: in order to prevent perceived greenwashing, brands should be sincere, truthful and trans fluent in their green marketing. So, in summary, in order to avoid perceived greenwashing, brands should avoid actual greenwashing.

### **6.3.Evaluation of the research**

According to Adams et al. (2014, 245) there are three criteria for testing and evaluating the variables and ensuring the quality of data, research design methods and overall accuracy of study results. These are reliability and validity.

Reliability refers to the consistency of the data. That is to say that the results would remain the same any time that a similar research would be conducted. Reliability can be seen as repeatability as well as internal consistency of the data. A way to test this repeatability is the test-retest method. In this method, the same question is asserted again in the interview, only in a different format. If the answer remains the same, data is repeatable. In this research, the method of research was semi-structured interviews in which it is quite easy to circle back to the same topic in order to see if answer vary. They did not and participants remained consistent in their opinions, therefore it can

be conducted that the data was somewhat repeatable. Secondly, internal consistency can be measured with so called split half method, in which, if the data was split in half, the results would remain the same. There were some isolated results, which would possibly not appear if the data were to be split in half. For this reason, these results are mentioned in chapter 5 Findings, but they are not returned to in the theoretical attributions nor managerial implications. However, the nature of qualitative research and semi-structured interviews is always subjective, so it cannot be said with absolute certainty that the results would remain the same if they were gained at a different time. Compared to quantitative research, some level of uncertainty when it comes to reliability is accepted. (Adams et al. 2014, 245-247)

Validity is the strength of conclusions, measuring if the researched answered to the question it was asking. It can be divided into internal validity (is there causality?) and external validity (can the results be generalized to other settings?). Validity is seen as more important than reliability, because if the results are not valid, there is no reason for them to be reliable. Adams et al. (2014). To enhance causality, the research structure was based on previous research. Interviewees were also able to auto-reflect their own answers, explaining which variables lead to which attitudes. In terms of external validity, as stated in the discussion on reliability, as with any consumer-research, interviewees are individuals and many personality, culture etc. traits effect their answers. The amount of interviewees was appropriate for this research, as saturation was achieved, but the interviewees represented a certain age (20-30) and Finnish nationality. There is no guarantee that the results of this research would be generalizable to other demographics. (Adams et al. 2014, 247-252)

#### **6.4.Future research suggestions**

This research was one of the first ones to look into brand incongruence resolution in an environmental setting. For this reason, it was necessary to be broad and open to themes that may emerge from interviews. However, it is not self-evident that the variables presented in this research (advertising aspects, brand elements and consumer environmental concern) are the only ones affecting environmental brand incongruence resolution. Thus, more research on a wider scope is required to understand this phenomenon thoroughly.

The term “environmental brand-ad incongruence” has not been introduced before and in this research, it is only discussed in the context of oil companies. Are the results generalizable to other industries? Do other psychographics of the consumers, beyond their level of environmental concern, effect their perception of environmental brand-ad incongruence? Is environmental brand-ad incongruence seen similarly as other ethical brand-ad incongruences? These are all interesting topics for future research.



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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Introductory questions**

Gender, age, level of environmental concern in consumption

#### **Before seeing the advertisements:**

What is your opinion of company1/company2? What is their industry? What do you think of this industry? What do you think of the environmental position of this industry? Do you think company1/company2 is a green company?

#### **After seeing the advertisements:**

What did you think of the advertisement? What happened in this advertisement? What was the claim of this advertisement? Did you think the claim was credible?

*(Type)* What was the exact object that was advertised?

*(Emphasis: Weak/Strong)* Did you see environmentalist elements in the advertisement? Did you consider this to be a green advertisement?

*(Specificity: Vague)* Would you have wanted more detailed information? What kind of information would you want to see?

*(Specificity: Specific)* Did you understand the information? Do you feel like you have benefited from the information?

*(Appeal: Rational/Emotional)* What emotions did the advertisement awaken? What did you think of the overtone of the advertisement?

*(Environmental brand incongruence)* Do you detect a conflict with this company advertising with green values? Do you find this conflict problematic?

What is your opinion of company1/company2 after seeing these advertisements? Did these advertisements change your opinion of their level of green-ness?

## APPENDIX

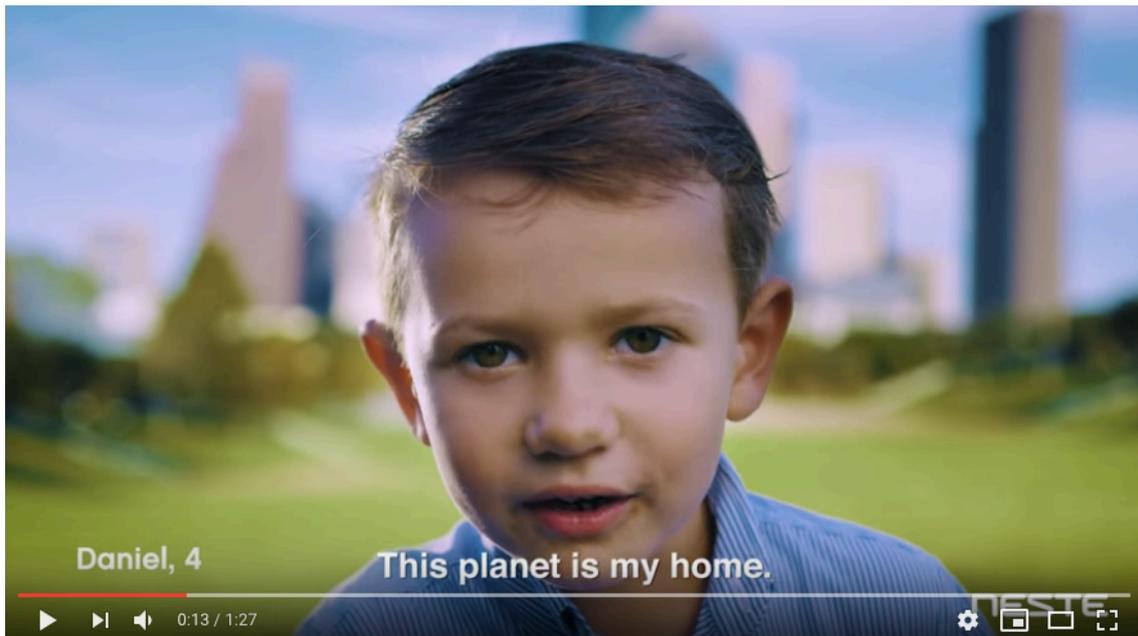
### APPENDIX 2 - STILLS OF THE ADVERTISEMENTS



Advertisement 1 "The practical advertisement"



Advertisement 2 "The mundane advertisement"



Advertisement 3 "The emotional advertisement"



Advertisement 4 "The technical advertisement"