Chapter 2

Valuing Sustainability: How National Culture Influences Attributions Towards Green Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Consumers’ low awareness and negative attributions remain critical impediments to companies’ attempts to reap the potential benefits of CSR. Addressing the gap of how and under which conditions what type of attributions arise and the role of stakeholder factors in CSR communication strategies, the aim of this chapter is to assess to what extent national culture influences the attributions that arise towards green advertising. Preceded by a pre-test, a survey was conducted in Colombia, The Netherlands and USA. With a total of 248 responses, a multiple regression analysis was performed to analyze the data. Results show main effects of national culture on the attribution of negative motives. Specifically, the cultural dimensions power distance and uncertainty avoidance have a negative effect on negative attributions. On the other hand, results indicated that positive attributions are not influenced by national culture. The research stresses the relevance of national culture as a stakeholder-factor, influencing the effectiveness of green advertising.

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INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is playing a key role in today’s business world and society. More companies than ever before are engaging in initiatives such as philanthropy and cause-related marketing. One of the dimensions of CSR is environmental commitment comprising, among others, the development of environmentally friendly products, management of hazardous waste and recycling (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2001). In the last decades, especially environmental concern has increased considerably as there is increasing concern about the misuse and scarcity of natural resources and its consequences for future generations. As such, governments, activists and the media work towards encouraging and forcing companies to account for the social and environmental impacts of their actions and consumers worry about more than just the purchase and the consumption processes (Zinkhan & Carlson, 1995).

By engaging in CSR, companies may generate positive consumer attitudes and behaviors, such as favorable stakeholder attribution and behavior, better brand image, better stakeholder relationships and enhanced stakeholder advocacy behavior (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010). Driven by these benefits, the public concern and the increased demand towards green products, CSR has entered the realm of marketing and corporate strategy (Cronin, Smith, Gleim, Ramirez, & Martinez, 2011; Gao, 2009; Porter & Kramer, 2006). As consumer awareness is necessary to obtain the benefits, companies are also increasingly communicating their engagements (Cronin et al., 2011; Do Paço & Reis, 2013; Gao, 2009). Green advertising is one of the most commonly employed channels for the communication of environmental efforts (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla & Paladino, 2014).

With this increase in green marketing, there has also been an increase in greenwashing. Companies are pretending to care and advertise incomplete or false information to improve their image (Parguel, Benoît-Moreau, & Larceneux, 2011). Due to low awareness and the increase of greenwashing, consumers have difficulty in distinguishing between, or even naming, socially responsible and irresponsible companies. They express a desire to know more about what companies do and how they behave, but often react in a skeptical manner when these advertise their sustainability efforts (Nyilasy et al., 2014; cf. Globescan, 2012).

Even though green advertising has increased in the last two decades (Campbell, 2015), marketers generally lack the adequate tools for evaluating its effectiveness, nor do they have sufficient tools for determining consumers’ environmental attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Haytko & Matulich, 2008; Do Paço & Reis, 2013; Peattie, 2001). Not communicating the green efforts effectively and consumers’ low awareness are impediments for companies to benefit from the favorable attitudes and behaviors (Du et al., 2010).
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