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CAN SUSTAINABILITY & MARKETING CO-EXIST? AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION OF CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS AND BRAND CHALLENGES WITH SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES

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An abstract of a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Business 2021.

Abstract

CAN SUSTAINABILITY & MARKETING CO-EXIST? AN EMPIRICAL EXPLORATION OF CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS AND BRAND CHALLENGES WITH SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES

By Karen Anne Wallach

This dissertation aims to produce insights around consumer perceptions of corporate social responsibility and sustainability initiatives and their resulting impact on brands and firms. Additionally, this dissertation seeks to promote an understanding of corporate social responsibility and sustainability across various stakeholders, as examined from its early days as philanthropy to its current state as a central feature of firm strategy. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to this dissertation. Chapter 2 traces the evolution of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in America. It follows the role of CSR as an element of employee/employer relations to its multi-faceted role today with consumers, society, and firm stakeholders. Chapters 3 and 4 form an empirical investigation into various factors of CSR/sustainability initiatives that impact consumer awareness and support. Chapter 3 seeks to establish a negative bias that consumers hold against sustainability initiatives related to brand size. This research explores the construct of authenticity and its role with perceived profit orientation specific to sustainability and brand size. Chapter 4 investigates the importance of communicated motive with brands and sustainability efforts. This work examines the impact of skepticism and transparency as critical tenets of consumer support of sustainability-centric products. Overall, the goal of this dissertation is to add novel insights to the academic literature and propose actionable recommendations for marketers, with the hope that products that better serve society and our planet will flourish. These results provide evidence to understand better overall consumer sentiments that help overcome challenges that brands may encounter with sustainability efforts.

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DEDICATION

To my family

I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful, loving, and supportive family. Your ongoing encouragement to accomplish my dreams has been an inspiration throughout this journey. First and foremost, to my husband, Gregory, without your love, patience, and steadfast support, the completion of this work would not have been possible. You always lifted me up and are the love of my life. To my mom, Carole, I hope that you know how thankful I am for everything you have shown me in life and for helping me become the woman I am today. I remember my middle school years of you in graduate school, showing me that anything is possible. To my children, Jocelyn and Emelia, I hope this demonstrates that dreams can become a reality when you work hard and set your mind to it. Reach for the stars!

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

"Looking at the magnitude of change in the business world, it is not overreaching to suggest that an historic social transformation of capitalism is underway."

Firms of Endearment
Raj Sisodia, Jag Sheth and David Wolfe

"Businesses must view people not as resources but as sources. A resource is like a lump of coal; you use it and it's gone. A source is like the sun—virtually inexhaustible and continually generating energy, light, and warmth. There is no more powerful source of creative energy in the world than a turned-on, empowered human being."

Conscious Capitalism
John E. Mackey

Overview

This dissertation is focused on three main ideas. First, consumers expect CSR & sustainability to be integral to the products they buy and the brands they support. Second, CSR & sustainability should be approached by brands as initiatives that can both help profits and the planet. Third, successful CSR & sustainability efforts should benefit both the consumer and the brand, while also lessening the harmful impact industrial production has brought to our planet. As a result, brands must construct sustainability initiatives with meaningful commitments and transparent communications. Thus, CSR and sustainability efforts should be driven not just by ideological thinking that corporations can be a positive force for social change but more by the multi-faceted success that businesses and society can reap from their CSR endeavors (Du et al. 2013). As Chandler says, "CSR is not an option; it is what businesses do" (Chandler, 2019, p.219). Indeed, today's strategic CSR/sustainability efforts are a management philosophy where all business decisions have economic, social, moral, and ethical dimensions. As such, a positive link between CSR and consumer patronage spurs companies to devote greater energies and resources to CSR initiatives (Mittal, 2008), shifting the debate about CSR from "whether" to "how" (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2004).

Against this backdrop, firms are reactive to the growing importance that consumers and society have placed on environmentally sustainable business practices and products (Banerjee et al. 2003, Grinstein and Nisan 2009, Olsen et al. 2014). In 2017, 85% of S&P 500 companies disclosed their environmental, social, and governance information, while in 2013, only 20% did (G&A Institute 2018). Fortune Global 500 firms spend an astounding $20 billion a year on initiatives related to corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and environmentally friendly innovation (Meier and Cassar 2018). As social and environmental sustainability has evolved to a mainstream concern for consumers, firms have incorporated such issues into their boardroom agendas (Haanaes et al. 2011, Trudel and Cotte 2009).

With the paradigm shift in environmentally sustainable business practices and products, the "green consumer" is no longer a niche market. Being "green" or environmentally sustainable has evolved from a buzzword or trend into today's business reality. In 2018, $128.5 billion was spent on sustainable consumer products making up an impressive 22% of total store sales. Furthermore, while conventional food and beverage sales were down -0.3% in 2017 (vs. 2016), sustainable goods increased +7.2% (vs. 2016). This growth of products with a sustainability focus is happening across categories. In 2018, sustainable coffee grew 11% more than the total of its respective category, sustainable chocolate 2% more, and sustainable bath products 13% more (Nielsen 2018). Consumers have indeed gravitated towards products that include sustainability in their practices, which has many brands exploring initiatives in this arena.

As more companies have focused on sustainability, there has been a wave of beneficial and harmful outcomes. Examples of beneficial outcomes include the adoption of fair-trade practices for the procurement of raw materials (i.e., Starbucks Coffee), the use of renewable energy in the manufacturing of the products (i.e., Sun Chip's & Frito-Lay), or the reduction of carbon emissions in distribution (i.e., Coca-Cola) (Rodriguez 2012). However, harmful outcomes often surround the abuse of sustainability claims as either misleading or overtly untrue. Both the popular press and academic literature are filled with evidence of company wrongdoing with misleading or dishonest claims regarding sustainability and green products. Consumers have watched as companies try to tout environmentalism while behaving in ways contradictory to their efforts. For example, Starbucks publicized a new straw-less lid in response to calls for banning plastic straws, but then reports showed that the new lid contained more plastic than the old straw and lid combined (Britschgi 2018).

In this environment of heightened consciousness about who is doing it well and who is doing it right, this dissertation seeks to provide insights to help brands that are ethically and purposefully initiating sustainability efforts. The deliberate use of experiments across the empirical research in chapters 3 and 4 is to test this paradigm as a direct cause and effect relationship. While empirical models are useful for showing correlation, experiments allow the representation of direct testing with more specific research issues. Given the nuances of information, scenarios are a good way to further isolate the cause and effect of this type of bias with sustainability initiatives.

While some of the studies that follow include fictitious brands, some include real-world brands to further confirm the explored phenomenon. Research of this type requires extensive pretesting to identify real brands that conform to the experimental manipulations (Broniarczyk and Alba 1994). For each selected category in the studies, two methods were used to minimize the impact of extraneous variables: (1) Sales were obtained using published reports on Statistica. For the “large size brand,” the #1 seller in the category was selected based on the top-selling volume in dollar sales in the United States. (2) Pretests asked consumers to recall the market leader in the category for the “large size brand.” In all experiments reported, the results from Statistica and consumer pretests matched. (3) For selecting the “small-sized brand” brand, the remaining 5-10 brands in the category were selected based on sales. Pretests were then conducted to identify a small-sized brand with the same pre-existing purchase intent as the large-sized brand. This was done to help control for purchase preferences and biases before the scenarios provided in each experiment.

Chapter 2 – Evolution of CSR

CSR has evolved from a discretionary activity of the businessmen in the 1950s to a strategic requirement of today’s firm. Notably, the perceived purpose of a corporation has also evolved over time. Scholars see the future of CSR as a continued priority, particularly around stakeholder engagement, prevalence and power of ethically sensitive consumers, and increased importance of CSR in the continuum of the global supply chain (Carroll 2015).

In previous decades, corporate social responsibility for a brand or company could be solved in the Marketing area with strategic alliances. For example, in the 1990s, partnerships with such non-profits as MADD had a significant bottom-line impact by allowing the brand to position itself as a good corporate citizen by enhancing brand loyalty with consumers (Kingsriter 1999). However, alliances have become ubiquitous and may provide temporary sentiments of goodwill but do not fix the important issues of a brand living up to today’s consumer expectations. Moreover, real impact can only be found in practices and products that lessen negative externalities, utilize materials that minimize our denegation of the planet, and develop technologies to produce environmentally friendly products at the mass scale needed.

Chapter 3 – Consumer Perceptions

The growth of sustainability is widespread across categories and industries with more than $1 trillion in opportunities for brands that can effectively launch sustainable products ("Unilever Growth," 2019). However, much of the growth in sustainability has been focused on smaller brands. According to a recent study by Boston Consulting Group, $22 billion in sales was transferred from large to small brands from 2011-2016 (Bokkerink et al. 2017). While there may be more than one reason for the decline, one commonality across many small brands is the sustainability mindset. Importantly, this shift has created a crisis for many large brands trying to remain successful, as consumers focus on environmental concerns, sustainability, and social agendas (McRonskey et al. 2019).

As such, in chapter 3, I focus on the impact of brand size on consumer perceptions of sustainable initiatives. Across seven studies, including a field experiment on Facebook, I demonstrate a negative bias that exists with consumer perceptions of brand size and sustainability related to authenticity perceptions. I show that this bias is tied to the inherent conflict of sustainability which is focused on "taking less" (i.e., less energy, chemicals, materials), and the prevailing measure of success in business which is focused on "making more" (i.e., more profit, production). With this paradox, the challenge of a brand becomes further amplified as the brand is perceived as bigger and more profit-centric. This central finding of this work is the need to overcome the negative associations with large size and sustainability that equate to inauthentic in consumers' minds. Thus, such brands can increase their commitment level or build credible partnerships to help remove the negative stereotypes consumers may hold against them.

This has implications for both brand success and societal benefit. Some may suggest that a danger with the current landscape is that big brands may be deterred from making improvements in the first place, with unfortunate results for society (Lyon and Montgomery 2015). Recognizing large brands as engines of progress and prosperity can help in ways small brands cannot. Recent empirical evidence reports that "on virtually every meaningful indicator, including wages, productivity, environmental protection, exporting, innovation, employment diversity and tax compliance, large firms as a group significantly outperform small firms." (Atkinson and Lind 2018, p.63). Thus, when big firms and big brands transform, big change can happen.

Chapter 4 – Marketing Communications

In the last decade, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) published a revision to its Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims ("Green Guides") in reaction to the perceived "misleading claims" around environmental marketing claims (U.S. FTC 2012, Lyon and Montgomery 2015). However, despite government and corporate efforts to minimize the use of ambiguous language with environmental messages in marketing, skepticism continues to grow among consumers. More than two-thirds of corporate executives think corporate social responsibility is a genuine commitment for companies, yet only one-third of the general public believes so (Nielsen 2016). Indeed, the consensus that skepticism persists can be rectified by marketers that avoid the "noise" around typical sustainability messaging (Apte and Sheth 2016).

Thus, it is the responsibility of brands or firms to emerge with transparent, relevant communications regarding all aspects of their sustainability efforts.

With this in mind, in chapter 4, I explore perceptions of brand motive towards sustainability initiatives with marketing communications. While consumer perception has been widely recognized as crucial in the customer decision-making process, the majority of the literature explores motive as dichotomous, viewed as either intrinsic or extrinsic. Additionally, I focus on the specific motives of sustainability efforts as particularly important because of its perception with consumers as potentially cause-beneficial and cause-exploitative. Across six experiments, including a field study on Facebook, results provide converging evidence for the benefits of a dual motive with sustainability communications. With a dual motive, a brand can highlight how an effort can benefit both planet & business with a "doing well by doing good" approach. Despite research examining this approach in management, scant research has examined its role in marketing communications with consumers.

Importantly, consumers today understand the need for profit maximization and become skeptical when brand messaging focuses only on the firm's own benevolence. The main findings of this research establish that lowering skepticism can be accomplished by communicating both the brand's benefits and society's benefits of the sustainability initiative. This helps reduce concerns that a firm has an ulterior motive with its sustainability efforts and leads to heightened consumer support.

This has implications for the literature and society at large. Recently, researchers have stated that "there seems to be a lack of understanding of the underlying mechanisms linking CSR with outcomes" (Aguinis and Glavas 2012, p. 953), with only 7% of CSR articles focusing on mediation effects (Habel et al. 2016). Thus, this work evaluates consumer perceptions around a brand's motive to become sustainable and change its processes – and how transparent communications can positively impact consumer decision making. Notably, this is particularly important as many of the fastest-growing brands have a growing emphasis on product processes (Whelan and Randi Kronthal-Sacco 2019). Similar to chapter 3, these results show the importance of positive consumer perceptions for the brand to succeed with its sustainability initiatives. Without consumer support, many brands may be deterred from making improvements in the first place, with unfortunate results for society (Lyon and Montgomery 2015).

Chapter 2

THE EVOLUTION OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN AMERICA

3.1 Overview

While corporate social responsibility has gained traction with practitioners and academics during the last 25 years, the idea that corporations have a responsibility to society is not new. The origins of the corporate form can be traced to ancient Romans, where the state recognized various groups under a separate identity. These entities were often built with a social aspect or purpose, such as orphanages, hospitals, and homes for the poor or aged orphanages. Interestingly, the term "corporation" is derived from Latin and means "body of the people" (Chaffee 2017). This belief system was extended to Anglo-American law during the Middle Ages, where the corporate form governed various institutions. Modern corporate law grew out of English rule, from its use in parliament and the Crown, whereby power was granted to groups in the form of corporations (Reuven 2005). Rather than creating a corporate entity for commerce, they were typically used for charity or religious associations. However, as governments expanded overseas and developed newly conquered lands, corporations were helpful as entities to oversee trading and development (Chaffee 2017).

When the United States began, corporate law began through its roots with the English governmental system. During this time, the role of the corporation was still primarily seen as a function of serving society with social functions or creating roads and bridges. However, in the 1830s, the U.S. government created statutes to separate for-profit and non-profit corporations (Hansmann 1981). This was monumental for the evolution of the role of the corporation, as the first delineation between profit and non-profit. With this designation, groups started to consider the role of profit-making within the corporate form.

Corporations grew, as did their power during the American Industrial Revolution. During this period in the 1800s, society began a new era of human experience where increased productivity created a much higher standard of living than had ever been known. However, the advancement of commerce also saw degradation for its impact on the community. Indeed, as new prospects for growth helped many with economic gains, so did such growth hurt the social welfare. This contrast of progress and exploitation inspired efforts to understand the nature of dealings between business and social relations (Heald 1970). For example, during the American Industrial Revolution, business progress led many men to see riches previously unknown in the private sector. However, this also led to harsher aspects of life for many who were not treated fairly under distressing worker conditions.

This view of poverty in American began the emergence of social responsibility for corporations. The earliest examples stem from 2 primary schools of thought: (1) community conditions and economic interests are interwoven such that healthy, stable employees are more productive; (2) ties to the humanitarianism of the Enlightenment and the precepts of Christianity, such that businessmen have mutual ties or obligations to assist their fellow human race (Carroll 2008). While it is difficult to differentiate even today, social responsibility was initially conceived based on the combination of business reasons (i.e., making workers more productive) and social aid (i.e., helping others in the name of religion or society).

Business leaders soon perceived the conditions for improvement as necessary, by both the inhumanity of what they witnessed and realizing that healthy workers were needed for continued prosperity. This mixture of practical and benevolent motives initiated social responsibility for businessmen. Moreover, the rise of bigger operations and larger-scale enterprises stimulated the demand for stable workers (Carroll 2008). This started to gain momentum in the late 1800s as increasing factory growth led to the business need for stable workers. Businessmen had to compete for quality labor and started to offer supplementary services to their employees in the form of schools, libraries, and housing. Social responsibility became a selling point to keep workers. Thus, initial efforts in this domain can be seen as employee retention and aid to the community (Bennett 2019). One of the earliest examples was the YMCA movement in America, originally created in London (Latapi et al. 2019). The YMCA aimed to support Christian values through employee rest, recreation, and prayer meetings (Heald 1970). Many large cities in America instituted local YMCA charters primarily supported by wealthy businessmen for the growing working class. In most instances, the local company or factory owned the local YMCA for its workers. This further connected the idea of social responsibility as a benevolent charity and practical business (Heald 1970).

The most iconic example of combining social responsibility and worker benefits is Ford's implementation of the Five-Dollar Day. In January 1914, Henry Ford announced that Ford would double its worker's wages to five dollars a day (more than double the average autoworker's wage at the time), and there would be a shorter workday (from nine to eight hours) (Omnex 2010). This was met with extreme controversy, with The Wall Street Journal even calling Ford's actions an "economic crime" (Snow 2013). However, much popular press also considered such action an extraordinary goodwill gesture. The mythology around this story is that Henry Ford wanted to pay his workers enough to afford the products they were making. However, the actual reasoning was to reduce worker attrition since labor turnover was high and costly. Moreover, as a result of the plan, employee turnover diminished, Ford increased productivity, and many of the general public regarded the Ford brand with genuine altruism and trust (Snow 2013).

While the growth of industry led to social responsibility in the form of programs directly related to the business (i.e., worker conditions, wages), prosperity for the elite industry leaders led to philanthropic ventures not tied to the company itself. Andrew Carnegie wrote one of the most famous documents in the history of social responsibility. His book, "The Gospel of Wealth," highlighted the conviction that wealthy people were morally obligated to give their money back to society (Carnegie 1889). After making his fortune in the steel industry and retiring in the early 1900s as the richest man in the world, Andrew Carnegie made giving money his new occupation. This popularized the idea of philanthropy and the concept that successful business leaders should consider themselves trustees for the community's interests. This gave prestige to a more formalized form of business philanthropy. Wealthy businessmen were now starting to use their means beyond their own companies and provide other institutions (Carroll 2008). This also grew the concept of businessmen helping the world beyond their own and looking towards the general welfare. For example, in the 1880s, R.H. Macy Company of New York, led by Mr. Macy, contributed funds to orphan asylums. Macy's other efforts reflected a sense of relationship with the community beyond the retailer (Heald 1970). John D. Rockefeller also followed suit to donate more than half a billion dollars and create many arts and education systems. Thus, a new upper class of businessmen arose, seeing themselves as patrons to the working-class citizen. Much of their philanthropy went towards the harmful byproducts of an industrial age. As such, society saw prosperity for the companies' leaders alongside the rise of poverty, slums, labor unrest, and social problems (Carroll 1981).

After the Great Depression and the post-Depression period that followed, books started to gain popularity about the concern of the businessmen (that is the nomenclature of the literature during this time) around social responsibility. Importantly, academia started to embrace the social performance of corporations. The literature started to focus on types of corporate responsibility and expectations (Latapi 2019). Additionally, companies started to have social obligations and an internal debate around their responsibility in society (Heald 1970). For example, the Johnson & Johnson Corporation is seen as one of the earliest adopters of corporate philanthropy as part of its ethos rather than individual philanthropic efforts. J&J's founder established its corporate credo in 1943, stating that the needs of those they serve are put first, as embedded in its core brand philosophy.

In the early 1950s, scholars started to define corporate concerns in the literature, and the modern definitional construct of Corporate Social Responsibility became clear. Specifically, a prominent book, *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, gained pervasive recognition and a new era of corporate social responsibility began (Bowen 1953). Bowen's book focused on the belief that the largest businesses of the time were vital centers of power. He advocated for business ethics and responsiveness to societal stakeholders. As such, Bowen is credited with coining the phrase "corporate social responsibility" and is seen by many scholars as the Father of CSR (Carroll 1999). Bowen also set forth a definition of corporate social responsibility: "the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). Many scholars see this period as the introduction of corporate social responsibility into the minds of businessmen at their core. Such scholars started writing numerous articles about social responsibility that were widely shared regarding the importance of a philanthropic mindset (Latapi et al. 2019).

The growing interest in CSR during the 1960s was influenced by increased awareness in society and social movements (Lapati 2019). During this time, the general public started to take a more active stance on population growth, pollution, and resource depletion (Du Pisani 2006). Books such as *The Population Bomb* by Ehrlich (1968) and *The Silent Spring* by Carson (1962) started gaining traction regarding the limits of economic growth. Moreover, these books impressed the masses with the concept that society and corporations negatively impacted the environment (Waterhouse 2017). Additionally, during this period, political activism arose over negative perceptions of the "establishment." For example, one of the most notorious instances of public unrest was with the Dow Chemical Company that came under tremendous scrutiny due to its involvement with napalm in the Vietnam War (Waterhouse 2017).

With public instances such as Dow gaining attention, scholars approached CSR as a response to the challenges of an imperfect yet modernizing society. An influential scholar of the time, Kevin Davis, explained that the important social, economic and political changes represented a pressure for businessmen to re-examine their role in society and their social responsibility. Davis argued that businessmen have an implied requirement to respect economic and human values. He is seen as one of the first to directly link social responsibility with economic returns for the firm (Davis 1960, Latapi et al. 2019). Davis established the "Iron Law of Responsibility" around the concept that the "social responsibilities of businessmen need to be commensurate with their social power" (Davis 1960, p.71), which influenced both scholars and businessmen. Additionally, a series of scholars such as Frederick (1960), McGruire (1963), and

Walton (1967) started to propose requirements and theories for the role of economic and social thinking.

During this time, most academic literature reflected the social milieu of the liberal 1960s around social responsibility. Meanwhile, practitioners did not seem to follow the same thinking and were still predominantly engaged in philanthropy (Carroll 2008). Concurrently, the anti-establishment sentiment across America continued to grow. This reached a significant milestone in 1969 when a major oil spill occurred off California's coast. This oil spill incensed many and led to increased protests, rallies, and even the first Earth Day (Latapi et al. 2019). Earth Day was a significant milestone in that 20 million people across America joined together, and the protests were primarily focused on anti-corporate sentiment and its misdoings (i.e., oil spills, polluting factories, and power plants) (Earth Day 2018). This milestone against corporations was also marked with creating the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as part of the U.S. government (Earth Day 2018). In addition to the EPA, the 1970s also gained momentum with the development of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Each of these organizations included agendas concerning the accountabilities of businesses (Carroll 2015).

Additionally, in the 1970s, the Committee for Economic Development (CED) produced the influential, *Social Responsibilities of Business Corporations* (CED 1971). The CED announced that: "business functions by public consent and its basic purpose is to serve constructively the needs of society—to the satisfaction of society" (CED, p. 11). The CED suggested that the social contract between business and society was shifting in substantial ways (Latapi et al. 2019). In contrast to the newly formed government initiatives, this period saw was one of the most well-known theories embodied in Nobel economist Milton Friedman's work, developing what is universally known as the Friedman doctrine. Friedman thought that CSR was a "fundamentally subversive doctrine" where "there is one and only one social responsibility of business - to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud" (Friedman 1970). Friedman was part of a small movement that saw an implicit understanding of corporations' true purpose was to make money for their shareholders. This created the idea of Shareholder Theory, defining the role of corporations in a free capitalist system as limited to the pursuit of economic benefits. More specifically, Friedman believed CSR activities were an inappropriate use of a company's resources, resulting in unjustifiable spending for the general social interest. By the end of Friedman's career, his views had reshaped many beliefs of modern capitalism (Ip and Whitehouse 2006).

While Friedman and his followers professed limits to company responsibility, another group of researchers calling themselves 'The Club of Rome,' which included scientists, economists, and business leaders from 25 different countries, published the influential *The Limits to Growth* in 1972 (The Club of Rome 2018). Their study led by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) questioned the sustainability of continued growth, its ecological imprint, and the downfalls resulting from the business as usual attitude. Specifically, the book focused on challenges with resource depletion, pollution and pointed out the need for responsible business practices (The Club of Rome 2018). Scholars suggest that this inspired the creation of companies that proactively addressed the social issues of the time, such as the Body Shop (1976) and Ben & Jerry's (1978) (Latapi et al. 2019). Additionally, a critical definition of Corporate Social Responsibility aligned within the academic community. This definition put forth by Carroll stated: "The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time" (Carroll 1979, p. 500). Moreover, terms such as corporate social performance, corporate social responsiveness, and stakeholder theory started to appear in the 1980s literature (Carroll 2008).

While the 1960s and 1970s may have progressed institutions around corporate social responsibility, by contrast, the 1980s had changing political systems that lessened pressure on policies towards corporations. While the 1980s government focused on reducing regulations to help further economic goals, scholars shifted their attention to business ethics and the operationalization of CSR (Pillay 2015, Wankel 2008). This period also included the Chernobyl nuclear disaster (1986), the creation of the European Commission Environment Directorate-General (1981), and the United Nations' adoption of the Montreal Protocol (1987). Scholars started to focus more on the environmental concerns of the community with corporations in the spotlight. Thus, while the global events of the 1980s do not relate directly to CSR, they did reflect a growing awareness towards environmental protection and sustainable development (Carroll 2008). Notably, the publication of the report *Our Common Future* presented by the Brundtland Commission provided a clear definition of sustainable development (1987), defined as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, p.24). Brundtland's definition is the most cited definition of sustainability in the literature.

With technological improvements and a growing number of global corporations, the 1990s saw the creation of international agencies and agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol (1997), the Rio Declaration (1992), and the European Environmental Agency (1992). Notably, such international efforts represented a concerted effort to set higher standards with regard to climate-related issues (Du Pisani 2006). With increased multi-national corporations came conflicting pressures and expectations from home and host countries. This led to companies banding together under initiatives such as the Business for Social Responsibility (2018) and CSR Europe (1996). The creation of such communities focused on the shared view of a force for positive change and strong institutionalization of CSR regulations (Latapi et al. 2019).

During this time, academic scholars started to focus more on the sometimes-conflicting demands of business obligations to the shareholders with their duties to a broader set of stakeholders. This led to the highly cited "pyramid of CSR," which represented the duties of companies around economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (Carroll 1991). Scholarly work also linked financial evidence to support CSR initiatives, thereby creating strategic plans for CSR objectives (Burke and Logsdon 1996). However, not all initiatives proved equal as scholars defined ways to look at CSR under different company and social conditions. Burke and Logsdon identified vital concepts that standardized successful CSR implementation such as centrality (closeness or fit), specificity (linking benefits to the firm), proactivity (action before mass acceptance), voluntarism (discretionary decision making), and visibility (relevance to stakeholders) (Burke and Logsdon 1996). Indeed, such theories addressed programming that could translate to value creation in some form for the firm.

The idea of benevolence with firm value initiated another critical contribution to the literature, conceived by Elkington, as the well-known "Triple Bottom Line (TBL)." TBL is a sustainability framework to equalize the company's social, environmental, and economic impact, which became popular in the late 1990s and has remained prominent in the CSR literature (Elkington 1998). Both practitioners and academics deliberate the nuances of how corporations need to have environmentally and socially responsible behavior that positively balances with economic goals (Latapi et al. 2019). As CSR evolved, so did the extensions of the concept. Alternative subjects such as stakeholder theory (Donaldson and Preston 1995, Freeman 1994), corporate social performance (Swanson 1995), and corporate citizenship (Carroll 1998) started appearing in the literature around new themes to evolve CSR further. While most were consistent with the original ideas of a corporation's social responsibilities to society, methods to operationalize them expanded. Moreover, the broader concept of companies becoming "good corporate citizens" was further standardized by the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) (Latapi et al. 2019).

Notable scholars in the literature such as Smith (2001) and Lantos (2001) further defined CSR's role within society. These views emphasized a broader set of stakeholders and obligations beyond just legal requirements and more focused on maximizing the beneficial impact of the firm on society (Smith 2001). Lantos further built on Smith's work and included a strategic view of the concept, concluding that: "CSR entails the obligation stemming from the implicit 'social contract' between business and society for firms to be responsive to society's long-run needs and wants, optimizing the positive effects and minimizing the negative effects of its actions on society" (Lantos 2001, p. 9). Such limits, however, should be understood only if they result in financial returns for the firm (Lantos 2001). Conversely, scholars also emphasized the firm's value beyond just its responsibilities to itself. As such, stakeholder theory broadened towards a responsibility towards suppliers, consumers, employees, stockholders, and the local community (Freeman 2001). This evolved view of CSR reinforced the belief that corporations are responsible to a broader set of stakeholders than previously examined. Moreover, concepts of CSR became motivated by a developing social and strategic context. As such, companies have to evolve to the new roles society deems relevant with an overall model of "strategic CSR" (Werther and Chandler 2005).

Another milestone in the evolution of CSR was the concept of "shared value" in terms of benefits for society while improving the firm's competitiveness (Porter and Kramer 2006). This outlined CSR as a "holistic business framework rather than a limited goal-oriented perspective" (Latapi et al. 2019, p.11). Heslin and Ochoa's seven principles further conceptualized this: cultivate the needed talent, protect labor welfare, develop new markets, reduce the environmental footprint, profit from byproducts, involve customers, and green the supply chain (Heslin and Ochoa 2008). Such principles further reinforced the evolving view of CSR around the belief that companies can improve their business opportunities while providing benefits to the social context in which they operate. Shared value was further advanced by Porter and Kramer as a necessary step in the evolution of business - to enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously advancing its economic and social progress (Porter and Kramer 2011). This perspective of shared value is often cited as the third generation of CSR, an evolution seen as the acknowledgment by corporations that they should assume their new roles and responsibilities towards society (Trapp 2012). Scholars of this time reflect on a reorientation of efforts towards creating shared value instead of profit maximization. As such, the integration of CSR in the literature highlights the imperative of strategic orientation, where a company's planning process includes a more profound understanding that CSR should be tied to core operations.

Moreover, this belief includes responsiveness to all stakeholders where firms aim to optimize the value created (Chandler 2016, Chandler and Werther 2013). In a 2015 meta-analysis, research by Carroll concluded that the concepts of stakeholder engagement and management, corporate citizenship, business ethics, corporate sustainability, and the creation of shared value are all interrelated, overlapping, and central to the socially responsible business movement (Carroll 2015). Moreover, the expansion of terms and strategies has contributed to the substantial growth of CSR topics in the literature (Chandler 2016). Recent scholars have focused on the different types of CSR implementation and its impact on specific areas of performance. However, the concept of shared value has remained at the forefront of the literature (Latapi et al. 2019).

3.2 A Modern Outlook of CSR

CSR has evolved from a discretionary activity of the businessmen in the 1950s to be understood as a decision-making process in the 1980s and seen as a strategic requirement in the early 2000s. Notably, the perceived purpose of a corporation has also evolved from being limited to the generation of economic profits in the 1950s to the growing mindset of the 2010's that the corporation should have a purpose to generate shared value (Latapi et al. 2019). Scholars see the future of CSR as a continued priority, particularly around stakeholder engagement, prevalence and power of ethically sensitive consumers, and increased importance of CSR in the continuum of the global supply chain (Carroll 2015). The future continuation of CSR will also need to consider the latest technological advances, such as Artificial Intelligence. With new business frameworks, corporations will have to balance embracing tools with the combined notions of sustainability, shared value, and the belief that companies can redefine their purpose to do what is best for the world.

Many suggest that shared value can be further eclipsed by the broadening sense of responsibility companies and executives hold to society. As such, there is a vanguard of companies broadening their purpose to act as agents for the larger good (Sisodia, Sheth, and

Wolfe 2014). These philosophies start at the top with enlightened executives changing the culture of the firm. As such, the executives and the companies become champions of a new "humanistic vision of capitalism's role" that transcends the narrow perspectives of profit (Sisodia, Sheth and Wolfe 2014, p.23). As these companies build themselves around a vision to make the world a better place, their successes become architectures for a company's possibility of having a higher purpose to serve. From Whole Foods to Patagonia to the SAS Institute, companies profess the logic and superiority of enlightened business management with putting overall societal well-being at the forefront (Sisodia, Sheth, and Wolfe 2014).

To follow this perspective, on August 19, 2019, almost 200 of the world's top CEOs, including Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Apple's Tim Cook, and Procter & Gamble's David Taylor, put out a worldwide statement committed to a redefined American economic model of business. Included in this statement was a modernized definition of the purpose of the corporation, which included a promise to "protect the environment by embracing sustainable practices across our businesses" (Business Roundtable 2019). After its release, the popular press quickly tried to make sense of this change from such large corporations, which seemed like a disconnect from decades-long corporate ideals. While many applauded the effort and held a sense of optimism, most appeared critical, suggesting companies were pandering to consumer sentiment about their lack of genuine concern for social and environmental challenges. Much of the public saw that notably absent from the statement was any indication of ways to measure accountability, leaving the American consumer to trust its veracity. "They are responding to something in the zeitgeist," said Nancy Koehn, a historian at Harvard Business School. "They perceive that business as usual is no longer acceptable. It is an open question whether any of these companies will change the way they do business" (Koehn 2019).

Big business is currently receiving much attention from academics, the popular press, and even politicians. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren have suggested big businesses perpetuate economic mobility problems and environmental harm. Lawmakers are considering going after Facebook and Amazon for dominance in the technology area. Thus, while larger global issues have impacted the consumer mindset about the institution of corporate America, brands themselves have been disappointing consumers. One of America's most beloved brand icons, Johnson & Johnson, may have started its infamous 1943 credo putting patients and nurses first, but in 2019, a judge fined J&J $572 million due to its contributions to the opioid epidemic (Hoffman 2019). From the emissions scandals of Volkswagen to the oil spill disasters of B.P. and Exxon to the lawsuits against Walmart and Nestle for acts of environmental irresponsibility, it seems that companies and brands once held in high esteem have been making news headlines due to a lack of ethics and little concern about the health of the planet.

For many years following the Friedman doctrine, there has been an implicit understanding that the purpose of corporations is to make money for shareholders. This philosophy had been the center of business practices in most capitalist societies for decades. However, with the changing landscape of broadened awareness of societal and environmental concerns, pressure has been mounting for companies to take a larger role in leading change. Both corporations and society are seeing an evolving solution, similar to its roots, where “the business of business is more than business” (Sheth 2020, p.261). Thus, in our increasingly global world and competitive marketplace, a firm must find the win-win between its own internal needs and that of the outside world. This is in contrast to the original, simplified edicts of the Friedman doctrine. Moreover, as the expectations around corporations further expands, all levels of stakeholders continue to explore how social responsibility can be further integrated as part of the corporate purpose.

At the center of the evolved definition of a corporation is not only business's role in supporting a re-identified purpose but the consumer's willingness to embrace both the mindset and products that come with it. A significant part of this change coming to fruition will involve creating products and services that consider natural resources, sustainable materials, and renewable energy practices. Such decisions around what products to make or how product consumption can be encouraged are at the core of marketing (Rodriguez 2012). In addition, previous research has shown how the realm of marketing includes what resources to use and how to use them to develop products and services (Fuller 1999).

In previous decades, corporate social responsibility for a brand or company could be solved in the Marketing area with strategic alliances. For example, in the 1990s, partnerships with such non-profits as MADD had a significant bottom-line impact by allowing the brand to position itself as a good corporate citizen by enhancing brand loyalty with consumers (Kingsriter 1999). However, alliances have become ubiquitous and may provide temporary sentiments of goodwill but do not fix the important issues of a brand living up to today's consumer expectations. For instance, the Susan G. Komen Foundation to raise funds for Breast Cancer now has over 2000 corporate sponsors and over 125 annual Races for the Cure. While such efforts are laudable in helping causes, they are highly replicable by the competition and provide little differentiation. Indeed, they have become so prevalent that the consumer's memory may often be short-lived with such brand efforts. For today's conscious consumer, a brand must live the values that it espouses rather than outsourcing them by association. Moreover, real impact can only be found in practices and products that lessen negative externalities, utilize materials that minimize our denegation of the planet, and develop technologies to produce environmentally friendly products at the mass scale needed. Consumers, scholars, politicians, and the media have identified a need for change, and corporations should follow the evolution of change needed with social responsibility.

Chapter 3

WHEN BIG IS BAD: THE ROLE OF BRAND SIZE AND AUTHENTICITY IN CONSUMER SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

4.1 Introduction

With 65% of sales coming from brands using sustainability marketing, branding efforts featuring sustainability are ubiquitous (Nielsen 2018). Indeed, the biggest beverage company, Coca-Cola, launched its sustainability program 'World Without Waste' around the plastic crisis emphasizing recycling, plant-based materials, and marketing communications ("Coca-Cola WWW" 2017). The biggest retail brand, Amazon, introduced its Climate Pledge program, including the Climate Pledge friendly label, efforts around carbon reduction, and electric delivery vehicles ("Amazon Sustainability" 2015). The biggest shoe brand, Nike, launched an environmentally friendly shoe called Considered, designed with sustainable materials and winning several design awards ("Nike Considered" 2009).

However, while 50% of growth in the last five years has come from sustainability-marketed products (IRI 2018), consumers are more receptive to some efforts over others. For Coca-Cola, in a recent study of almost 35,000 Americans, only 10% think Coca-Cola is doing enough with the environment (Bandoim 2020). For Amazon, there have been protests on five continents, and 34 countries have banned together with the 'Make Amazon Pay' campaign focused on climate change and worker rights (Reuters 2020). For Nike, within 12 months of its launch, Considered was discontinued due to low sales (Jana 2009). Interestingly, all three of these very different brands have encountered challenges with their sustainability efforts, but they all share one major commonality – their large size.

I propose that these anecdotal examples are emblematic of a consumer bias against big brands and sustainability. As such, big brands may be successful in their respective categories but face formidable challenges with consumers as they launch sustainability efforts. Moreover, I propose that this challenge is rooted in pre-existing beliefs that consumers hold against the authenticity of big brand efforts in the sustainability domain. Research has shown that a central feature of authenticity is a perceived motive that not just about money and profits (Gilmore and Pine 2007). Thus, I infer that Nike Considered was not authentic because Nike's largess of profitability was not congruent with the more socially involved motivations expected of sustainability. Notably, many big brands may face similar challenges as they try to introduce sustainable products. This is increasingly relevant, as authenticity plays an essential role in consumer decision-making and is prominent in consumers' minds. Indeed, 90% of consumers say authenticity matters when deciding what brands to support (DeGruttola 2019). However, while authenticity is one of the most prevalent buzzwords for managers and academics (Becker et al. 2019, Morhart et al. 2015), there is scant empirical research on authenticity and sustainability.

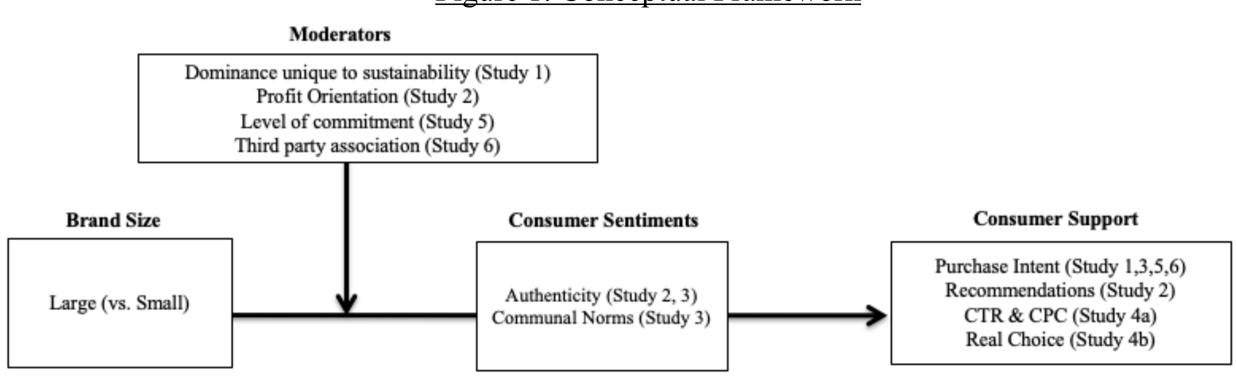
Against this backdrop, I argue that these challenges are due to the consumer association of large brands with profit centricity, which is perceived as inauthentic. As such, large brands make profit motive more salient, resulting in sustainability efforts seen as low in authenticity. While consumers often recognize the need for profitability with business, they also see profit-seeking as in conflict with beneficial outcomes for society (Baron et al. 2006, Bhattacharjee et al. 2017). This creates a paradox around sustainable business based on the rationale that profit-seeking as a motive is regarded as "fundamentally incompatible with social good" (Bhattacharjee et al. 2017, p.2). This is rooted in a perceived incongruence between profitability, which big brands represent, and societal good, which sustainability is focused on. Thus, a conflict emerges from the prevailing measure of success in business around "making more" (i.e., more profit, production) against the core of sustainability which is focused on "taking less" (i.e., less energy, chemicals, materials). Importantly, I propose that the paradox between profitability and sustainability is further amplified as the brand is perceived as bigger, negatively impacting both authenticity and purchase intent.

My research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, while previous research has explored authenticity, this is the first to investigate the role of brand size with authenticity perceptions around sustainability. Indeed, previous literature has demonstrated that it is critical to appear authentic with corporate social responsibility (Alhouti et al. 2016). As such, I extend prior work by exploring how consumer support of sustainability initiatives varies as a function of brand size governed by beliefs about profit motive, resulting in assessments of authenticity. More specifically, when the brand size is large, the profit motive is more salient, hurting authenticity. Second, previous research has explored the importance of relationship norms between consumers and brands, but it has not explored the unique norms connected with sustainability. I explore the novel concept that sustainability initiatives trigger relationship norms similar to the communal norms associated with social missions (i.e., charitable causes). Previous research has shown that for a social cause or social mission, an indication of profit-seeking is interpreted negatively by the consumer (Lee et al. 2017). I propose that this creates a violation of norms as the largeness of the brand makes profit more salient, while the sustainability aspect makes communal norms more salient. Third, I provide managerially relevant boundary conditions that moderate the impact of brand size on sustainability. I aim to show the existing bias and provide solutions for how a big brand can effectively navigate its sustainability efforts. Thus, this work exposes how this deficit can be attenuated in two ways: (1) a big brand can adopt sustainability efforts that show a major commitment towards sustainability that supersedes the current marketplace norms, or (2) a big brand can create sustainability initiatives with third-party certification, thus providing external credibility to its efforts and "borrowing" the equity already associated with eco-friendly, third party certifications. Finally, this research incorporates an interdisciplinary viewpoint (i.e., marketing, economics, management, psychology) to expose the dynamic views of branding, sustainability, and profits. By establishing this effect and exploring its mechanisms, this work addresses the fact that no previous study has systematically compared how relationship norms impact sustainability (vs. non-sustainability) minded efforts, and no previous research has considered the effect of brand size on authenticity evaluations of sustainability claims and purchase intent. Moreover, in identifying the negative bias of consumers towards big brands introducing sustainable products, these findings underscore the importance of managing the authenticity deficit associated with brand size.

Importantly, understanding this phenomenon is crucial, as the paradigm shift towards environmental sustainability in business indicates the "green consumer" is no longer a niche market. Indeed, as consumers increasingly seek sustainably focused products, environmental sustainability has evolved from a trend into today's business reality. In 2018, $128.5 billion was spent on sustainable consumer products making up an impressive 22% of total store sales (Nielsen 2018). Sustainable products are also a key source of revenue growth: 50% of CPG growth from 2013 to 2018 came from sustainability marketed products, 90% of categories saw sustainability marketed products outperform the overall product category, and sustainable products grew five times faster than conventional products in the last five years (IRI 2018, Whelan and Kronthal-Sacco 2019). However, much of the growth in sustainability has been focused on smaller brands, with $22 billion in sales transferred from large to small brands from 2001-2016 (Daneshkhu 2018). This does not signal a promising future for big brands. While large brands currently control the majority of market share, their growth rates have not kept up with the impressive growth of small brands. Moreover, as social and environmental sustainability has become a mainstream concern for consumers, firms have incorporated such issues into their boardroom agendas and innovation pipelines (Haanaes et al. 2011, Trudel and Cotte 2009).

The chapter is organized as follows: In the next section, I define the role of brand size and its link to sustainability initiatives. This is followed by an understanding of relationship norms, perceptions of profit motive, and authenticity as critical tenants of consumer decision-making on sustainability-centric products. I then describe seven experiments that directly test the hypotheses. These experiments show that consumers respond less favorably to the sustainability initiatives of large (vs. small) brands across multiple categories. Additionally, these experiments explore the distinctive relationship norms linked to sustainability, as well as the impact of profit orientation and authenticity perceptions on consumer support of sustainability-centric initiatives. Ultimately, I show the negative impact of large (vs. small) brands in this domain, resulting in lower consumer support with sustainability efforts. Importantly, I identify two boundary conditions to help ameliorate the authenticity deficit and conclude with a discussion of results, implications for marketing and public policy, and future directions. To summarize, see the conceptual framework below:

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



4.2 BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The Role of Brand Size

For sustainability efforts, I theorize that a large (vs. small) brand will encounter a negative bias linked to its size and associated traits, hurting consumer support. In this research, brand size is operationalized under the construct of brand dominance, which is defined as the brand with the largest market share or the observed leader in market share vs. other competitors in a category (Shamsie 2003). Thus, the "dominant brand" or large brand in a category has been previously explored in the literature under the construct of brand dominance. As such, there are many reasons to believe the dominant brand would obtain success in introducing a new sustainable product. Given its strength in the market and impressive sales from consumers, one would assume that a new product by a dominant brand would continue its existing success. Overall, the literature has mixed results with consumer perceptions around the concept of brand dominance. Studies have shown that consumers generally hold positive beliefs and attitudes towards brands they perceive as big or dominant in a category (Carpenter and Nakamoto 1989, Kamins et al. 2003). This work explores a positive view around consumers and brand dominance for brand extensions (Herr et al. 1996), consumers infer quality with brand dominance (Hellofs and Jacobson 1999), and consumers experience lower risk perceptions and psychological benefits with dominant brands (Kamins et al. 2003). As such, brand dominance can minimize failure, enable brands to more successfully enter new categories, and dictate what attributes other brands must have in the category (Carpenter and Nakamoto 1990). Empirical evidence has shown positive correlations between brand dominance in a category and perceptions of fit, brand attribute, and brand quality (Barwise and Ehrenberg 1985, Castleberry and Ehrenberg 1990). In examining how consumers perceive brand dominance, previous work by Herr et al. shows the positive impact of being the dominant brand in the category with higher purchase intent, affect for the brand, market success, and stronger positioning (Herr et al. 1996).

In contrast, while research focusing on brand size has revealed the positive aspects of dominance, research displaying the opposite has also been shown. This has been studied in comparative advertising where cognitive factors drive an opposing effort such that a small brand will be considered more positively when compared to a large brand (Kalra and Goodstein 1998, Paharia et al. 2014, Pechmann and Stewart 1990). Additionally, an underdog phenomenon with consumers shows that a small brand may receive consumer support when it includes a brand biography of determination or external disadvantage (Paharia et al. 2011). This supports a consumer's own view of self as an underdog when brands are compared and a desire to support the small or "underdog" brand (Paharia et al. 2011, Paharia et al. 2014).

Overall, the negative aspects of brand dominance have been exposed mainly in comparative situations where a competitive threat is made salient, or there is a reference to relative brand size in the category. However, the majority of the literature is generally positive in the research of consumer perceptions and brand dominance. Moreover, this work proposes a negative view of brand dominance regardless of the competitive landscape, and more importantly, specific to the category of sustainability products and services. Thus, the negative lens of brand dominance is only relative to sustainability efforts. To put it more formally:

> *Hypothesis 1:* The negative relationship of large (vs. small) brands and consumer support is unique for sustainability-focused initiatives (vs. non-sustainability-focused initiatives).

Sustainability and Relationship Norms

As more brands implement sustainability efforts, understanding its meaning is essential. The most commonly used definition of sustainability is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs," which is from the Brundtland Report released by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987, p.24). More generally, sustainability is seen as initiatives around the nature of the product (i.e., recyclability) and the process by which it was produced (i.e., materials or resources used to make the product) (Gielsens et al. 2018). However, there are at least 41 different definitions of sustainability in the literature that I was able to locate. Such language around sustainability is regularly used interchangeably with terms such as green, ecological, eco-friendly, and environmental. Notably, sustainability is often seen as under the umbrella concept of corporate social responsibility, a broader concept that describes "a firm or brand's commitment to maximize economic, societal and environmental well-being through business practices, policies, and resources" (Du et al. 2011, p.1528). Such research has focused on brand alliances, corporate philanthropy, cause-related marketing, and ethical consumption practices, while sustainability features inputs of social, environmental, and economic considerations in product creation (Gielsens et al. 2018). Notably, while sustainability may be part of corporate social responsibility, it is essential to highlight that sustainability is typically more focused on product creation.

Sustainability research within marketing has primarily focused on individual motivations to consume (Peattie 2010, Steg and Vlek 2009), decision-making and consumption contexts (Auger et al. 2008, Henderson and Arora 2010), and product selection among sustainability considerations (Luchs et al. 2010). However, while brands are increasingly leveraging their current brand equity to introduce initiatives with a sustainable or green focus, there is sparse empirical research specifically focused on the unique aspects of sustainability-focused branding. Limited work in this area has explored the positive benefits of a younger target audience with fashion brands and sustainability (Hill and Hyun-Hwa 2015), the development of the sustainability halo with eco-performance brands (Olsen et al. 2014), and the benefits of brands introducing an eco-efficient version of their existing product (Lopes and Veiga 2019). Importantly, all work in this area has highlighted the importance of further academic research needed on this topic, and more specifically, recent calls emphasize exploring the association between *specific types* of CSR (i.e., sustainability) and their outcomes (Homburg et al. 2013, Mishra and Mohi 2016, Olsen et al. 2014).

Although there is work focused on the positive aspects of brands adopting sustainability, I focus on the unexplored challenges around the perceptions of the profitability they may evoke. My research posits that previous work showing incompatibility of profit and societal good can be extended to sustainability initiatives. More specifically, there exist stereotypes that predispose consumers to be suspicious of profit-seeking firms, such that adopting better practices to impact society more positively is not expected to be profitable (Bhattacharjee et al. 2017, Campbell 2007, Friestad and Wright, 1994). Consumer generalizations characterize this perception that profit and societal good conflict because business is conducted in a zero-sum world (Aaker et al. 2010). While a large body of research documents how profit motives can overall help a society (Margolis et al. 2007, Orlitzky et al. 2003, Aguilera et al. 2007), it is crucial to explore further consumer's perceptions of a profit motive relative to the unique characteristics of sustainability products.

On the one hand, consumers accept the quid pro quo exchange associated with purchasing products and firm profitability (Aggarwal 2004, Clark and Mills 2011). In the context of the traditional norms around exchange relationships, consumers receive a desired product or service and acknowledge the benefits to the firm retaining a profit (Kahneman et al. 1986). Such relationship norms (e.g., communal and exchange norms) have been reviewed at length in the literature, and their relevance has been extended to consumer contexts (Aggarwal 2004, Bolton and Mattila 2015, Clark and Mills 1979, Goodwin 1996, Johnson and Grimm 2010, Wan, Hui, and Wyer 2011). However, when the initiative follows a social mission, a profit motive is negatively perceived by the consumer. In past research, the expected motive of any socially based mission (i.e., firm with a charity donation or welfare-oriented behavior) is a caring concern for the cause (Aggarwal 2004, Clark and Mills 2011, Lee et al. 2017, McGraw, Schwartz, and Tetlock 2012, McGraw and Tetlock 2005). As such, if consumers perceive profit motivation with activities having a social purpose, it is likely to be rejected and fail (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006, Ellen, Webb, and Mohr 2006, Torelli et al. 2012). I theorize that consumers may perceive profit orientation at the brand level in conflict with the social aspect of sustainability. Specifically, I posit that sustainability initiatives related to brands trigger communal norms (rather than exchange norms). This leads consumers to expect that sustainability will behave following communal norms (that they are motivated by care and concern) rather than exchange norms (that they are motivated by profit). This disconnect then becomes further amplified as the sustainability initiated is associated with large brands.

> *Hypothesis 2:* Sustainability initiatives of large (vs. small) brands will be perceived as following less (vs. more) communal norms. However, there will be no significant difference between the perceived communal norms of non-sustainability initiatives, regardless of brand size.

Research has shown that the consumer response to firm efforts may depend on the buyer-seller relationship's norms (Bolton and Mattila 2015). As such, exchange norms are associated with the more traditional exchange of products between a consumer and a brand, while communal norms may be better suited to consumers engaged in volunteering and charity donations (Aggarwal 2004, Goodwin 1996, Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown 2001, Johnson and Grimm 2010, Small and Simonsohn 2008). Thus, communal norms place greater emphasis on responsiveness to society's needs, while the motives of exchange norms are perceived as more self-serving. Likewise, past research suggests that efforts are more effective when they "match" the norms of the relationship (Barone et al. 2007). As such, big brands further activate exchange norms, which violate the communal norms associated with social causes and sustainability. Moreover, my research theorizes a critical mismatch between the perceived profit centricity of big brands and the social purpose around sustainability efforts.

The Challenges of Authenticity & Profit-centricity

When consumers evaluate sustainability initiatives, I theorize that the traits associated with "being big" as the dominant brand may increase perceived profit centricity, predisposing consumers to question authenticity. Researchers have investigated a myriad of antecedents for a brand to proclaim itself as authentic, identifying more than 25 qualities that can contribute to or reflect authenticity (Spiggle et al. 2012). Such efforts on authenticity have studied traits such as sincere (Beverland 2006), moral (Leigh et al. 2006), symbolic (Culler 2981), and iconic (Grayson and Martinec 2004). For sustainability efforts, my work focuses on the perceived motive of the brand as a critical consideration towards an authenticity evaluation. Previous literature has demonstrated that critical to achieving authenticity with corporate social responsibility is linked to a commitment motivated beyond profits (Alhouti et al. 2016). This is tied to a perceived conflict between business profit and societal good, such that profit-seeking firms are perceived as harmful to society (Bhattacharjee et al. 2017). Moreover, given the perceived success that a dominant brand may represent, this conflict of profit and society may be further amplified. Thus, financial success is tied to a profit motive, which diverges from the more sincere motive required for authenticity. This is rooted in a perceived incongruence between profitability, which strong dominant brands represent, and societal good, which sustainability is focused on. As such, an authenticity deficit arises out of the paradox between sustainability (i.e., taking and making less) and the idea of successful business.

Notably, while a brand may be perceived as generally authentic, it may not be authentic in all areas. This is an important nuance to authenticity, as its context-dependency and changeable judgment may differ by the criteria or situation (Arnould and Price 2000, Leigh et al. 2006, Rose and Wood 2005). For example, Beverland and Farrelly studied context-dependency when examining the consumer authenticity perceptions of McDonald's (2010). McDonald's is viewed as authentic for a consistent consumption experience in the context of a food experience. However, when considering healthy food offerings, McDonald's can be considered inauthentic when selling salads or healthy options. In this scenario, consumers may compartmentalize authenticity based on the different contexts. Thus, the same brand may be authentic in one context yet inauthentic in another (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). Notably, the authenticity of the brand is relative to the circumstance or context the consumer is considering. My paper extends this *context dependency* to evaluating authenticity with brands in the context of sustainability. When existing brands introduce sustainability-focused products, this is a type of extension for the brand. Brand extension research shows that the fit between the parent brand and extension category is a key determinant of success (Aaker and Keller 1990). Such associations of fit have focused on similarity and relevance, such that the consumer associations between the brand and the new extension (i.e., shared features, attributes, benefits) positively impact extension success (Bousch and Loken 1991, Spiggle et al. 2012). Examples of fit can be related to common features, substitutability, or complementarity (Basil and Herr 2006). As such, when there is a high similarity or relevance between the original and the extension categories, there is high brand fit for the brand extension. However, the nuances of authenticity are more complex than the properties and associations inherent with brand fit. Authenticity is a more multilayered concept that can be impacted by both internal consistency (i.e., true to the original brand meaning or essence) and motive (i.e., sincere vs. profit-focused opportunism) (Gilmore and Pine 2007, Spiggle et al. 2012). As consumers increasingly seek authenticity, understanding such nuances has become critical for brands (Arnould and Price 2000, Beverland 2005). Thus, I argue that the size of a brand works against its ability to appear authentic with regard to sustainability and leads to an authenticity deficit. This is based on the perceived conflict of profit and societal good, which are critical components of authenticity with sustainable initiatives. Thus, authenticity lessens as brand size and largess perceptions negatively impact consumer support of the sustainability initiative. To put it more formally:

> *Hypothesis 3:* Authenticity will mediate purchase intent such that large (vs. small) brands will be seen as less authentic, leading to lower purchase intent.

Overcoming the Big as Bad Bias

For sustainability efforts, marketers of dominant brands might logically ask how they can overcome these negative barriers between large brand size and authenticity. I propose two different approaches to remedy this bias: (1) use third-party certification, (2) initiate efforts that fit the scale of the brand. With both of these approaches, the dominant brand is able to attenuate the challenges of the authenticity deficit.

The first moderator explored to alleviate the challenges of authenticity with dominant brands is to utilize third-party certification. Consistent with previous work, a third-party association is a formidable method to heighten credibility and legitimacy, inducing more favorable consumer responses (Grankvist et al. 2004, Parguel et al. 2011, Swaen and Van Hamme 2004). Third-party certification serves as an important information cue that enhances the consumer's perceived authenticity of the sustainability effort (Darnall et al. 2018). Research shows that private businesses are often seen as having self-serving motives that may turn away eco-minded consumers. However, these motives can be attenuated by labels that are third-party certified (Darnall et al. 2018). Thus, previous studies have shown third-party or external sources serve as a verification process that increases positive consumer evaluations of sustainability efforts (Gosselt et al. 2019).

The authenticity deficit suggested in this paper is relative to the perceived motive of the brand when it is the dominant brand in the category. Previous research has shown that the credibility gap of different environmental efforts can be narrowed through the use of independent third-party assurance (Dando and Swift 2003). Thus, the ability of third-party certification to attenuate the perceived self-serving motive shown in previous research will be extended in this work to attenuate the perceived lack of authenticity. Specifically, the authenticity of the effort will be heightened for the brand when the third-party certification is part of its sustainability initiatives. To put it more formally:

> *Hypothesis 4a*: Large (vs. small) brands may overcome the authenticity challenges associated with their dominance through efforts with third-party certification (compared to no certification).
>
> *Hypothesis 4b*: Authenticity will mediate the impact of large (vs. small) brands for the impact of third-party certification on purchase intent.

The second moderator explored to attenuate the authenticity deficit is level of commitment. This approach evokes a higher level of commitment beyond the current industry standard. Support for this assertion comes from findings of previous research. Indeed, research has shown that magnitude of a monetary commitment could be seen as an indicator of authenticity with philanthropic efforts (Alhouti et al. 2016). Given that the magnitude of monetary commitment indicates authenticity with philanthropy events, it should follow that a greater sustainability commitment would indicate authenticity with sustainability efforts. Importantly, simple framing of efforts and green language claims cannot be perceived positively when the sustainability effort is not seen as sufficient by the consumer. Second, from the theoretical perspective of persuasion knowledge theory, consumers evaluate an act's impact by assessing the work needed to solve the problem (Friestad and Wright 1994). This ties to research showing that corporate social responsibility causes should be reasonably correlated with the size of the company (Alhouti et al. 2016). This reasoning could imply that the size of the sustainability initiative must be congruent with the size of the brand to be considered impactful. For example, if a large brand is doing what seems like a small project around sustainability, the consumer will likely not support this lack of a credible commitment. This may be seen as an inadequate attempt to appear authentic. As such, a major commitment that signals that the brand is dedicated to sustainability will likely be better perceived by the consumer. Accordingly:

> *Hypothesis 5a*: Large (vs. small) brands may overcome the authenticity challenges associated with their dominance with efforts that have a major commitment (compared to a standard commitment).

> *Hypothesis 5b*:Authenticity will mediate the impact of large (vs. small) brands for the impact of a major commitment on purchase intent.

Previous studies report that when consumers infer an act is motivated by business performance or financial gain, it is likely to be seen an inauthentic (Alhouti et al. 2016). Thus, brand authenticity may emerge when the sustainability effort is perceived as beyond profit-centricity and public relations appearances. With a plethora of watchdog organizations, the ease of information gathering on the Internet, and the consciousness of the consumer, false attempts to appear sustainable will likely be apprehended (Lynn and Montgomery 2013). Thus, to demonstrate a genuine undertaking and signal a motive beyond profits, dominant brands must initiate efforts that go beyond the greenwashing label frequently used by the consumer. My research shows that both a third-party certification or an effort showing major commitment can alleviate the challenges. However, this this implies that dominant brands cannot introduce one sustainable product extension and expect consumers to believe they are authentic. The sustainability efforts of dominant brands must be done strategically and impactfully. Importantly, dominant brands often control the majority of distribution, sales and budgets. As such, it is conceivable that successful implementation of sustainability practices can truly help the environment and create positive change. This change is needed not only for brands to be successful, but also for sustainability and environmentalism in general to be more impactful in improving environmental standards.

4.3 OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

To test these hypotheses, this chapter reports seven experiments that investigated consumer reactions to sustainability initiatives of brands. These experiments tested the idea that consumers respond less favorably to sustainability initiatives of large (vs. small) brands. Experiment 1 showed that the challenge of big brands was unique for sustainability efforts, rather than all types of efforts. Using a fictitious coffee brand, Experiment 1 showed that big brands had lower purchase intent than small brands when the initiative was sustainability focused. However, this effect did not occur when the initiative was not centered on sustainability. Experiment 2 tested the theory that the perceived profit motive around authenticity moderated consumer support. To test this, Experiment 2 isolated the impact of profit by investigating a for-profit vs. non-profit sustainability initiative. This study showed that when the orientation was for-profit, the big (vs. small) brand had lower authenticity and consumer support, compared to the small brand. However, when the orientation was non-profit, it was reversed with the large brand performing better. Experiment 3 further investigated authenticity of large (vs. small) brands in sustainable (vs. non-sustainable) initiatives and the impact of changing relationship norms. Results showed moderated mediation, such that when the brand is large (vs. small), there is a lower perception of authenticity with sustainability, while there is no significant difference in authenticity perceptions when the brand is non-sustainable, regardless of size. Importantly, eco products are perceived as more communal, with small eco-products having a significantly higher communal expectation. Experiment 4a tested the theory that sustainability initiatives of a large (vs. small) brand results in lower consumer interest using a real field experiment on Facebook. With a dependent variable as CTR, the Facebook advertisement that highlighted the company as a "large company" compared to a "small company" had less interest from the consumer. Experiment 4b verified the hypothesis using a real-choice experiment in a lottery scenario. Both studies showed that the large (vs. small) brand resulted in lower purchase intent using real-world conditions. Experiments 5 and 6 established boundary conditions to show that the sustainability initiatives of large brands will not always result in lower consumer support. Experiment 5 used a fictitious scenario of a beverage company and investigated the role of third-party certification. Experiment 6 used a fictious scenario of a restaurant and investigated the level of commitment.

Experiment 1: Negative Perceptions Unique to Sustainability

Previous research has shown that being the dominant brand results in many positive benefits such perceptions of fit, brand attribute, and brand quality (Barwise and Ehrenberg 1985, Castleberry and Ehrenberg 1990). However, the main hypothesis of my research is that brand dominance will have the opposite effect in the area of sustainability, such that consumers will have a negative bias towards big brands. Thus, the purpose of experiment 1 is to show the negative perceptions of big brands as unique to sustainability.

In experiment 1, I introduce a 2 Product (Non-Eco, Eco) x 2 Brand Size (Large, Small) scenario. This will isolate whether this phenomenon is for all brand initiatives or for *sustainability initiatives* of large brands. I hypothesized that the negative associations of brand dominance were related to sustainability efforts but were not be related to non-sustainability focused efforts.

Method

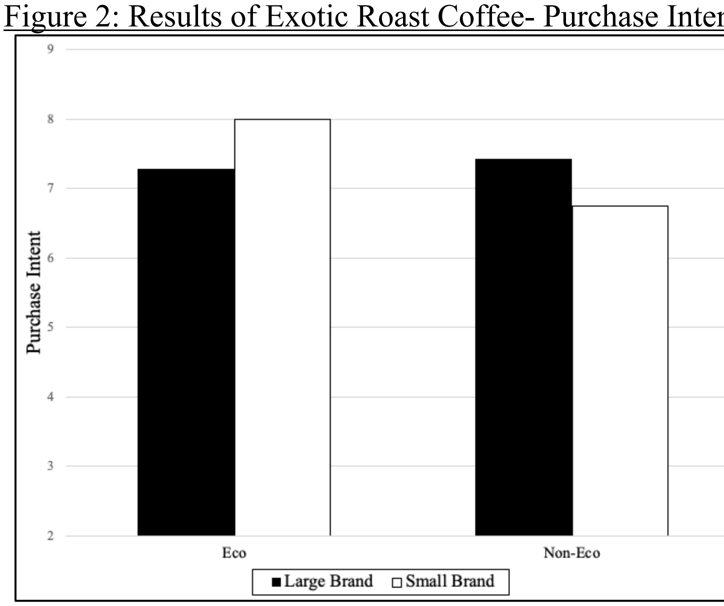
I recruited 386 participants from Prolific (ages 18-75, *Mage* = 32). I randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions in a 2 Product (Non-Eco, Eco) x 2 Brand Size (Large, Small) design. All participants evaluated a new type of coffee from a coffee producer. Across all conditions, participants were told that a coffee producer was testing plans to introduce its new 'Exotic Roast' line of coffee. Participants in the eco product conditions were told that the new line was sustainable coffee, while participants in the non-eco production conditions had no mention of sustainability included in the stimuli. For brand dominance, the coffee provider was either the largest coffee brand in the supermarket (brand size: large) or a small coffee brand in the supermarket (brand size: small) (see Appendix 1 for stimuli).

After reviewing the stimuli, participants were also asked to rate their purchase intent ("I am interested in this line of coffee more/less after hearing about Exotic Roast") on a scale of 1-11 with 1=much less and 11=much more. This was to directly test the hypothesis that the phenomenon of brand size was related to sustainability but would not be related to non-sustainability.

Results and Discussion

Purchase Intent. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between brand size (large vs. small) and product type (eco vs. non-eco) on purchase intent, F (1, 382) = 11.9, p<.00. As shown in previous literature, with the large brand (non-eco), it revealed higher purchase intent compared to the small brand (non-eco) ($M_{largenoneco}$ = 7.43 vs. $M_{smallnoneco}$ = 6.75, t(190)= 2.5, p<.01). However, as hypothesized in this research, the large brand had lower purchase intent compared to the small brand when the environmentally friendly product was introduced ($M_{largeeco}$ = 7.29 vs. $M_{smalleco}$= 7.99, t(192)= -2.4, p<.02). This confirms the hypothesis that a negative bias towards large brand is uniquely associated with sustainability initiatives. Results from this experiment are depicted below.

Figure 2: Results of Exotic Roast Coffee- Purchase Intent



Experiment 2: Profit Orientation & Authenticity

In Experiment 2, I aim to show that large (vs. small) brands have challenges with authenticity of sustainability efforts due to perceptions of profit centricity. This is tied to research suggesting that a central feature of authenticity is a perceived motive that is not just about money (Gilmore and Pine 2007). Thus, I introduce a 2 Profit orientation (non-profit, profit) x 2 Brand size (large, small) scenario to isolate the motive of profit. I hypothesize that with a non-profit orientation, there will be no significant difference in authenticity of large vs. small brands. However, with a for-profit orientation, the large brand will have significantly lower authenticity compared to the small brand, due to the amplification of profit centricity that large brands represent. Thus, the goal of Experiment 2 is to directly test profit motive as linked to authenticity and the impact of brand size.

Method

I recruited 210 participants from Prolific (ages 18-75, M*age* = 32). I randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions in a 2 Profit orientation (non-profit, profit) x 2 Brand Size (Large, Small) design. All participants evaluated a new type of toothbrush. Across all conditions, participants were informed about a new toothbrush that was being launched as completely plastic-free and better for the environment. Participants in the non-profit conditions were told that the toothbrush was from a non-profit organization, while participants in the for-profit production conditions were told it was a for-profit organization. For brand size, the toothbrush provider was either a large brand in the US (brand size: large) or a small brand in the US (brand size: small). They were also told that the name was being kept confidential for research purposes to increase realism of the scenario. Lastly, all scenarios included that the brand was created in the

US in 1978. This was to ensure there were no alternative theories around brand age related to this phenomenon (see Appendix 2 for stimuli).

After reviewing the stimuli, participants were also asked to rate their authenticity perceptions of the concept. Since seven different authenticity scales were located in the marketing literature, this experiment used a combination of scales to form the authenticity index for this paper (Spiggle et al. 2012, Becker et al. 2019). The questions for authenticity were an index of the following questions: (1) "The brand's actions are genuine." with 1=Not at all and 11=very much so. (2) "Do you think this new toothbrush launch is credible for the brand?" with 1=Very credible. 11=Not at all credible. These were reverse coded. (3) "The new product preserves what the brand stands for." with 1=Very much so and 11=Not at all. These were reverse coded. The questions were collapsed into a single measure of authenticity (α=0.76).

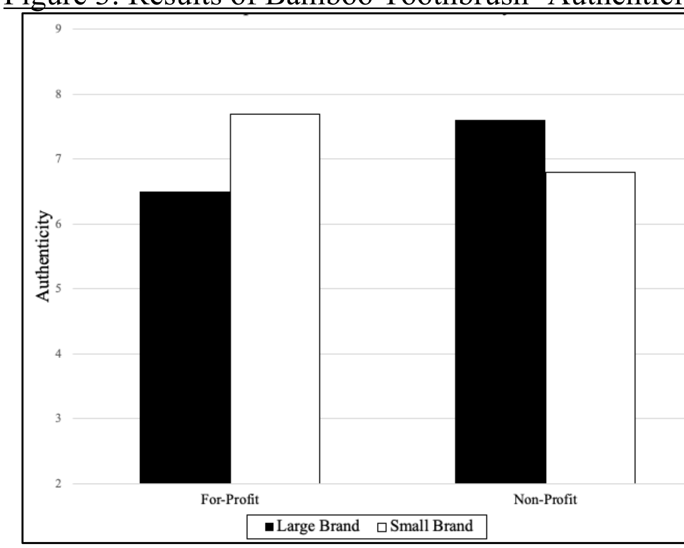
Additionally, since Experiment 1 measured consumer support with purchase intent, Experiment 2 used product recommendation as a measure for consumer support. Thus, all participants were asked to product recommendation to others (How willing would you be to recommend this to others with 11=very much and 1=not at all). All answers were reverse coded.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Check. To ensure the profit orientation was perceived as expected by participants, a one-way ANOVA found a significant effect on perceptions of profit motive. Participants with the scenario of for-profit orientation (compared to the participants in the scenario of a non-profit) rated the motive as significantly more focused on profit, F (1,210) = 51.6, $p<.00$. This served as a manipulation check and is not surprising but confirms that the perceptions of profit vs. non-profit were correctly assessed in the scenarios provided.

Authenticity. Measures of authenticity were submitted to an analogous two-way ANOVA, which revealed a significant interaction between brand size and profit orientation on authenticity, $F(3,208) = 15.0$, $p<.00$. With a for-profit orientation, participants reported lower authenticity with the large vs. small brand ($M_{largeprof} = 6.5$ vs. $M_{smallprof} = 7.7$, $t(102)=-3.1$, $p<.00$). However, when it was a non-profit, the large brand was seen as more authentic compared to the small brand ($M_{largenon}= 7.6$ vs. ($M_{smallnon} = 6.8$, $t(105)=2.3$, $p<.02$). Thus, while large brand size in a general scenario is not reviewed negatively, when the brand is featuring a product focused on sustainability, the large size brand is viewed significantly less authentic compared to the small size brand.

Figure 3: Results of Bamboo Toothbrush- Authenticity



Moderated Mediation: I conducted a moderated mediation analysis to test the predicted relationship of profit orientation (non-profit, profit) x 2 brand size (Large, Small) on consumer recommendation through the mediator of authenticity. Results showed a significant model of moderated mediation (95% CI [-1.0961 to -.3194]). More specifically, for the for-profit brand, brand size mediated authenticity, which in turn affected product recommendation (95% CI [-

.7089 to -.1361]). This had a negative effect such that when the brand size was large, this lowered authenticity and product recommendation. However, for non-profit brand, brand size mediated authenticity, which in turn affected product recommendation (95% CI [.0387 to .524)]), but in a *different direction*. As such, there was a positive effect such that when the brand size was large (vs. small), it benefited authenticity and product recommendation, while when the brand was large, it negatively impacted the brand.

In Experiment 2, when the moderator of profit orientation (for-profit vs. non-profit) was introduced, there was a significant interaction with authenticity. This highlights the ability to establish a direct impact on profit orientation and sustainability with brand size. Overall, the brand size is seen as more authentic when it is small (vs. large) for-profit, compared to more authentic when it is large (vs. small) non-profit. The results show the negative impact of large size, specific to profit orientation in the sustainability (vs. non-sustainability) domain.

Experiment 3: Relationship Norms and Authenticity

Experiment 2 isolated the impact of a profit vs. non-profit on brand size. There are two goals in Experiment 3: (1) show the phenomenon across all for-profit brands, (2) examine the hypothesis around differing relationship norms associated with sustainability. Similar to experiment 1, the stimuli include all for-profit scenarios as a 2 eco (vs. non-eco) x 2 brand size (large, small). Notably, in Experiment 3, I examine the relationship norms associated with the scenarios. This is to test the theory that a sustainability initiative will be closer to the expected communal norms associated with social missions, compared to non-sustainable initiatives. I also highlight the impact on authenticity perception. This is tied to previous work showing that an organization with a social mission is perceived as having a communal relationship. Thus, I extend this work to hypothesize that eco-friendly products will be perceived as more communal than non-eco-friendly products. This suggests that eco-friendly products will be expected to follow perceived communal norms, while non-eco friendly products will be seem as following exchange norms. Importantly, the expectation of a communal norm will be further amplified as the brand is small (vs. large).

Method

I recruited 210 participants from Prolific (ages 18-75, M*age* = 34). I randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions in a 2 product (eco vs. non-eco) x 2 brand size (large, small) design. All participants evaluated a new type of shampoo. For the eco conditions, participants were provided information about the eco-friendliness of the shampoo. While it did not match current brands, the scenario was created based on an audit of eco-friendly shampoo products currently in the marketplace. For the non-eco conditions, participants were provided information about a new shampoo, with no mention of the environment. For brand size, the shampoo was either a large brand or a small brand (see Appendix 3 for stimuli).

Similar to previous experiments, all respondents were asked to rate their perceived authenticity and purchase intent. Additionally, participants were asked to rate their perceptions in regard to the traditional communal norms from the literature. To measure perceptions around the communal norms, an index was created based on the seminal paper in this area by Aggarwal (2004). The questions were an index of the following: (1) "I think this company is doing something good" with 1=disagree and 11=agree, (2) "This company is committed to friendly practices" with 1=disagree and 11=agree, (3) This company is making a difference" with 1=disagree and 11=agree, (4) "This company is helping others" with 1=disagree and 11=agree. The questions were collapsed into a single measure of perceptions for communal norms (a=0.96). Lastly, to rule out any alternative hypotheses around product quality, participants were asked the following: "Please rate the quality level you think this product will be" with 1= very low and 9=very high.

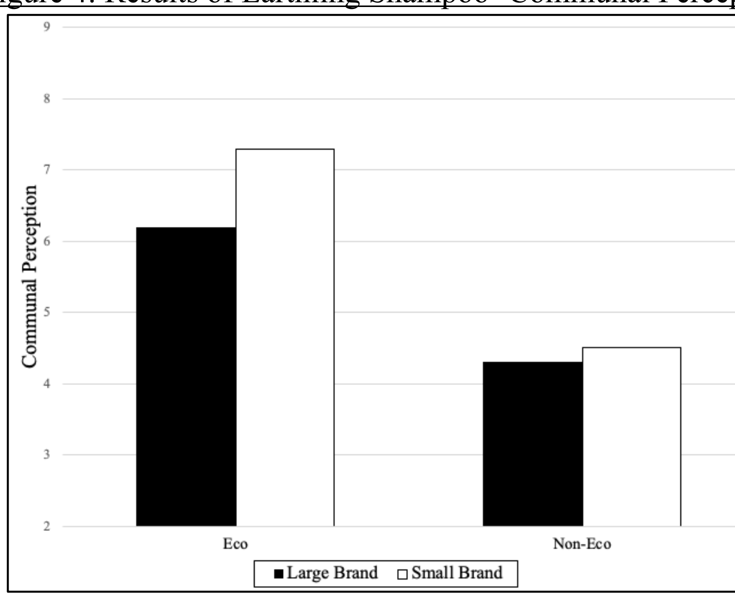
Results and Discussion

Quality. To rule out any alternative theories around product quality, I submitted an analogous two-way ANOVA with brand size (large, size) and product (eco, non-eco) on purchase intent. There was no significant interaction ($F(1,197) = 1.41$, $p<.24$). This means that there was no significant difference in perceived purchase quality among the conditions.

Authenticity. To repeat prior results from Experiment 2, measures of authenticity for Experiment 3 were submitted to an analogous two-way ANOVA, which revealed a significant interaction between brand size and product, $F(1,197) = 19.5$, $p<.00$ on perceptions of authenticity. Thus as expected, with a eco product, previous results were replicated such that participants reported lower authenticity with the large vs. small brand ($M_{largeprod}= 5.4$ vs. $M_{smallprod} = 7.3$, $t(98)=-4.6$, $p<.00$). However, when it was a non-eco product, there was no significant difference between the large and small brand ($M_{largenonprod}= 5.6$ vs. ($M_{smallnonprod} = 5.3$, $t(98)=1.1$, $p<.29$). Additionally, I conducted a moderated mediation analysis to test the predicted relationship of eco orientation (eco, non-eco) x 2 brand size (Large, Small) on purchase intent through the mediator of authenticity. Results showed a significant model of moderated mediation (95% CI [.7391 to -.0141]). More specifically, for the eco product, brand size mediated authenticity, which in turn affected product recommendation (95% CI [-.7278 to-.1393]). This had a negative effect such that when the brand size was large, this lowered authenticity and purchase intent. However, for non-eco products, brand size did not mediate authenticity through purchase intent (95% CI [-.3185 to .1586]).

Communal Focus. I ran a one-way ANOVA to show the main effect of eco orientation on communal perceptions. This follows that products with an eco focus will have significantly higher communal perceptions of the consumer compared to non-eco products. The main effect was significant, $F(1, 200) = 5.4$, $p<.02$). Additionally, I hypothesized that the communal perceptions would be amplified when the brand is small (vs. large). Thus, a two-way ANOVA found a significant interaction of perceptions of communal norms on eco (vs. non-eco) compared to large (vs. small) brand size, $F(1,200) = 4.4$, $p<.03$. As expected, with an eco product, participants reported significantly higher consumer perceptions with the small brand compared to the large brand ($M_{largeeco} = 6.2$ vs. $M_{smalleco}= 7.3$, $t(98)=-3.9$, $p<.00$). However, when it was a non-eco product, there was no significant difference between the large and small brand ($M_{largenoneco}= 4.3$ vs. ($M_{smallnoneco} = 4.5$, $t(98)=-.65$, $p<.52$). This served as evidence of the hypothesis that sustainability initiatives are seen as more communal overall, but even more significantly so when the brand size is large (vs. small).

Figure 4: Results of Earthling Shampoo- Communal Perception



The purpose of Experiment 3 was to show the differences in communal perceptions based on eco vs non-eco products. This was shown in a main effect of eco vs. non-eco products. Importantly, it was shown as significantly different between large and small brands when they are eco-focused but not when they are non-eco. Additionally, experiment 3 replicated previous results, such that authenticity mediates the impact of brand small and eco orientation on purchase intent.

Experiment 4a: Field Experiment on Facebook

Experiment 4a is a field study using Facebook's advertising platform. I test the main effect of brand size using Facebook to collect real data. I partnered with an environmentally friendly toothbrush company, named Grin. I tested two distinct advertising concepts in a real-world context to confirm the generalizability of the effect and to collect real data.

Method

The test included two distinct advertisements, a concept for the small brand condition and a concept for the large brand condition. Across both treatment conditions, the same visuals, logo, and information about the brand were provided in the ad. The only difference in the execution of the creative was the language emphasizing the brand size of the company. In the large brand condition, the headline read, "This big toothbrush company invented something that is going to make a big difference." However, in the small brand condition, the headline read, "This small toothbrush company invented something that is going to make a big difference" (see Appendix 4 for the actual stimuli).

For a pretest, I recruited 77 participants from Prolific (ages 18-64, M_{age} = 36) to verify the realism of the ads. Participants were randomly assigned to either the small or large brand condition. They were asked to evaluate their agreement with the item "This ad is realistic" with 1

= strongly disagree and 9=strongly agree. There was no statistical difference between the perceived realism of the ads (M*large* = 6.55 vs. M*small* = 6.36, F (1,75) = .31, *p*<.58).

The dependent variable was advertising click-through rates (CTRs), a function of impressions and clicks, for ads created on Facebook's advertising platform. This is similar to the industry use of A/B testing where brands pay by cost per click (CPC) and evaluate CTRs to determine advertising effectiveness (Hubbard 2016, Paharia 2020). For this experiment, the ads were set to be optimized for clicks versus impressions using CPC. This is a commonly used way to set up digital advertising (O'Neill 2010, Paharia 2020). In addition to data on clicks and impressions, I also collected data on gender and age of the participants who clicked on the ad. This was included in the empirical test to rule out any alternative explanations regarding demographics of the consumer. The time of the test was set up in advance to expire at a pre-set time to allow for equal evaluation of how both ads performed for the same period.

Results & Discussion

Click-Thru Rate. Across the two contexts, the ads generated 31,292 impressions, 418 of which were clicked on (1.3%). For Facebook advertisements, this CTR is within normal range, showing that this creative execution is similar in interest and targeting to other ads in the industry (Irvine 2017, Paharia 2014). To analyze the data, I calculated the click-through rate (CTR; total number of clicks per ad divided by the total number of impressions for the ad) and average cost-per-click (CPC; average cost to serve each ad throughout the field study) associated with both versions of the ad. Results revealed that there was a significant effect between the two ads; such that the weak dominant brand condition generated significantly higher CTRs (CTR_{small} = 1.92%; CTR_{large} = .84%; z = -8.4, p <.00) and lower CPCs (CTR_{small} = \$0.31; CPC_{large} = \$0.53; z = 3.8, p < .00; see below table). The CTRs is within normal range for the Facebook industry average of

0.35% for digital display ads (Volovich 2016). Overall, there was a statistically significant difference for both CTR ($p < .00$) and CPC rates ($p < .00$). Thus, the Facebook ad for sustainable toothbrushes performed better when it was a small brand compared to a large brand. See below for detailed results.

Table 1: Results of Grin Brand & Facebook Field Experiment

	Impressions	**Clicks**	**CTR**	**Average CPC**
Version A – Large Brand	17,073	143	0.84%	$0.53
Version B – Small Brand	14,219	275	1.92%	$0.31
Pooled	31,292	418	1.33%	$0.39

Note: Click-through rate (CTR); Cost-per-click (CPC)

Click vs. No Click. As an additional check for robustness, I conducted a binary logistic regression with Treatment (1=large, 0=small), age (5 separate dummy variables) and gender (1=male, 0=female) as the independent variables and clicks (1=click, 0=no click) as the dependent variable. I found a significant main effect of treatment ($b=-3.63$, $SE=.09$, $p<.00$). To rule out any alternative hypotheses regarding age or gender, I looked at the interaction of treatment/age, treatment/gender, treatment/age/gender. None of the interaction variables were significant. As expected, young people were more likely to click on ads overall, but there was no interaction with the treatment variable. Thus, the main effect is not driven by age or gender.

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis in real-world contexts with two distinct ads on Facebook. I found that whether I compare CTR, CPC or Click/No Click, the ad that emphasizes the sustainability brand Grin as the “small company” significantly out-performs the ad that emphasizes Grin as “a large company.”

Experiment 4b: Field Experiment in a Lottery

In Experiment 4b, I aimed to provide more evidence for the hypotheses using real behavior rather than hypothetical survey questions. Similar to previous research (Paharia 2020), this experiment uses a lottery incentive where participants are automatically entered into a lottery with the possibility of real winnings.

Method

I choose Folgers as the stimuli in this study because it is a brand that can be framed as either a large brand or a small brand, depending on the context. While the pretest showed a clear leader for many categories in terms of the #1 brand, the coffee market left more room to individual interpretation without a clear dominant brand. This is likely due to the different contexts for coffee consumption and perceptions. More specifically, Folgers is the dominant brand in the coffee market in the US for in-home coffee consumption. However, Folders is a small brand for worldwide production of general coffee consumption. To ensure all information was accurate, data was collected from Statistica and scenarios were created to frame Folgers accurately (see Appendix 5 for actual language used in the experiment). Importantly, across both frames, Folgers was highlighted as being 40 years old. Brand age was held constant to rule out any alternative hypotheses that brand age could impact sustainability perceptions.

I recruited 192 participants from Prolific (ages 18-75, M*age* = 32). I randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions: small vs large brand. After reading the background scenario on Folgers, all participants were informed of a new line of sustainable coffee. While all participants were told that they would receive the Prolific study fee, to make the study incentive compatible, they were all informed of a lottery, in which, if they were selected as the winner in a random drawing, they would receive either cash or a Folgers gift certificate. As previous research has suggested, participants frequently prefer cash over noncash rewards (Jeffrey 2009, Paharia 2020). Therefore, I offered participants the choice to win either $10 in cash or a $40 Folgers gift certificate to try the new product. Participants then indicated their choice in the event they won the lottery.

Results & Discussion

Choice of cash or gift certificate. Overall, participants were more likely to select cash (74%) compared to the gift certificate (26%). This is typical for online study panels in that cash is generally seen as more appealing than a gift certificate. However, if the incentive is strong enough, participants are more likely to select the gift certificate given its obvious superiority in terms of value ($10 vs $40). For the results of this experiment, participants in the small brand condition were more likely to select the Folgers gift card (33%) compared to those choosing the Folders gift card in the large brand condition (19%). I conducted a logistic regression model with lottery selection as the dependent variable (1=cash, -1=gift card) and brand size as the independent variable (1=large, -1=small). Results showed a significant difference such that participants with the small size condition were more likely to select the gift certificate ($F(1,192) = 4.94$, $p<.03$). This significant difference is a strong indicator that when a brand is framed as a small brand in the sustainability category it is viewed more positively by consumers than when it is framed as the large brand.

Experiment 5: The Moderating Role of Third-Party Certification

The previous experiments found support for the hypothesis that when brands implement sustainability efforts, consumers are more likely to see dominant brands (i.e. big brands) as profit focused and less authentic, resulting in lower purchase intent. However, in this experiment, I explore how the negative impact of brand size can be attenuated. To do this, I explore third-party certification.

Previous research has shown that information from the company is often perceived as being self-interested, calling into question the credibility and legitimacy of both the message and the company (Gosselt et al. 2019). However, external information creates less bias and is perceived as more credible. In line with prior studies, third-party certification can provide external certification with eco-labeling and eco efforts (Parguel et al. 2011, Swaen and Van Hamme 2004).

For this experiment, I predicted that when consumers of both small and large size brands were shown sustainability efforts that included third-party certification (vs. no certification), they would infer that the brand was authentic, and as a result, would increase purchase intent levels. Therefore, the present experiment tests for moderated mediation. Notably, the specific eco-labels used in the experiment were selected based on previous literature affirming their credibility with consumers (Castka and Corbett 2016).

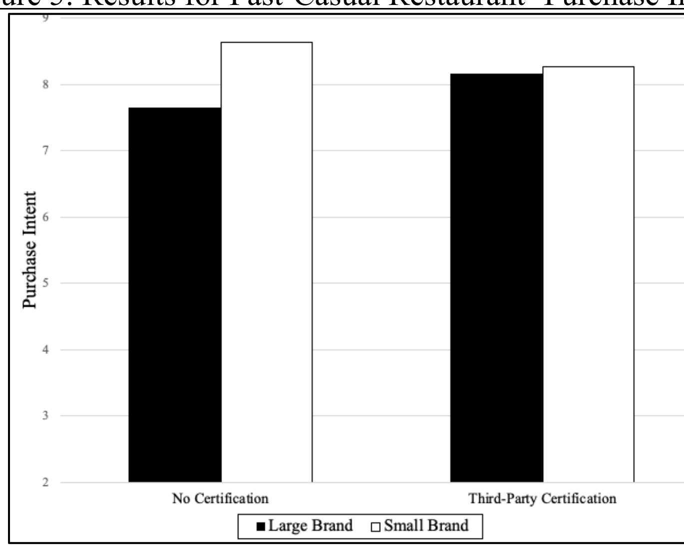
Method

I recruited 394 participants from Prolific (ages 18-75, M*age* = 34). I randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions in a 2 brand size (large, small) x 2 certification (no mention, 3rd party certification) design. All participants evaluated a fast-causal restaurant. Participants in the large brand condition were informed about an announcement from "the largest fast casual restaurant in the world", while in the small brand condition, the announcement was from "a small fast causal restaurant." For the third-party certification condition, all initiatives included a certifier for each of the three sustainability efforts (see Appendix 6 for actual language). For the no certification condition, all initiatives did not include any mention of certification. For the questionnaire, similar to previous experiments, all respondents were asked to rate their perceived authenticity and purchase intent.

Results & Discussion

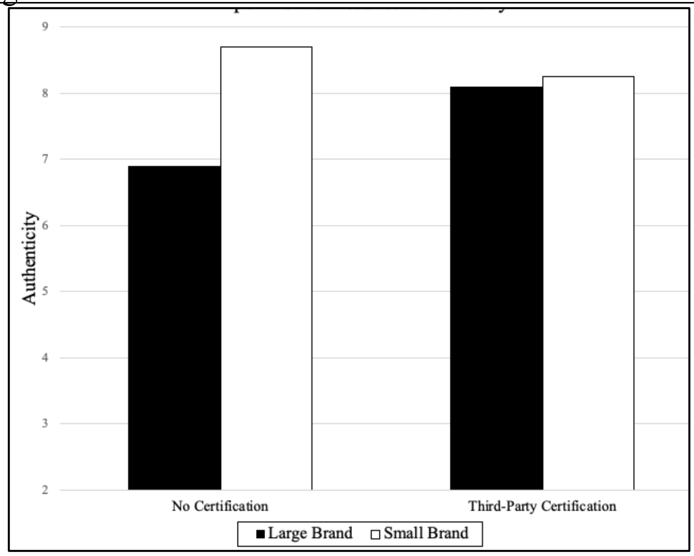
Purchase Intent. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between brand size (large vs. small) and certification (no mention, 3rd party mention) on purchase intent, F (1, 390) = 5.2, p<.02. As was observed in the previous experiments, purchase intent was lower for the large vs. small dominant brand when no mention of certification was mentioned ($M_{largestd}$ = 7.65 vs. $M_{smallstd}$ = 8.63, t(193)=-3.6, p<.00). However, when the 3rd party certification was included, there was no statistical difference between the large and small brand ($M_{largecert}$ = 8.16 vs. $M_{smallcert}$ = 8.27, t(197)=-.4, p<.69). Results from this experiment are depicted below.

Figure 5: Results for Fast-Casual Restaurant- Purchase Intent



Authenticity. Measures of authenticity were submitted to an analogous two-way ANOVA, which revealed a significant interaction between brand size and certification on authenticity, F(1,390) = 11.1, p<.00. With no mention of certification, previous results were replicated such that participants reported lower authenticity with the large vs. small brand (M_{large}= 6.9 vs. M_{small} = 8.7, t(194)=-5.5, p<.00). However, when the 3rd party certification was included, there was no statistical difference between the large vs. small brand (M*largecert* = 8.07 vs. M*smallcert*= 8.26, t(197)=-.59, *p*<.56). Results from this experiment are depicted below.

Figure 6: Results for Fast-Casual Restaurant- Authenticity



Moderated Mediation: I conducted a moderated mediation analysis to test the predicted relationship of certification (no mention vs. 3rd party mention) and brand size (small vs. large) on purchase intent through the mediator of authenticity. Results showed a significant model of moderated mediation (95% CI [-.5094 to -.1359]. More specifically, for no mention of certification, brand size mediated authenticity, which in turn affected purchase intent (95% CI [-.5041 to -.2133]). However, for 3rd party certification, brand size did not mediate authenticity, which in turn did not significantly impact purchase intent (95% CI [-.1595 to .0867]). This shows that a large brand can attenuate the negative bias with its sustainability efforts with third party certification.

Experiment 6: The Moderating Role of Commitment

The previous experiments found a boundary condition with third-party certification. However, in this experiment, I explore how the negative impact of large brand size can be attenuated within the firm itself. To do this, I explore levels of commitment. Importantly, all initiatives and efforts represented thus far have been based on current industry norms. They are the prevalent scale of efforts when brands implement sustainability projects, based on an audit of current brand websites and ESG reports.

Given this industry norm is the "standard" commitment, this experiment will explore perceptions of a "major" commitment. I suggest that large brands have to implement more comprehensive and thorough initiatives around the level of sustainability. For example, many consumers have become habituated to brands introducing new green products, to brands communicating different sustainability efforts, and to brands attempting to improve some of their packaging. This is the current "standard" level of commitment or the industry norms. For example, the current goal for Pampers is 30% less diapering materials ("P&G Environmental Sustainability," 2019.) the current sustainable shoe marketed by Nike includes 50% recycled fiber ("Nike Sustainable Footwear," 2019), and the current recycled materials in packaging for Coca-Cola is 30% ("2018 Coca-Cola Sustainability," 2019). In contrast, a major commitment could be perceived by consumers when brands make much more significant change that is seen as credible and sincere. For example, this would potentially include efforts with much higher than average recycled materials, more complex change for water sourcing, or further dedication by the *entire brand* to be truly sustainable. Therefore, I hypothesize that the difference between a "standard" and "major" commitment is a key moderator of the negative bias towards large brands. More simply, I propose that large brands have large expected levels of commitment by the consumer.

The present experiment tested this prediction directly. I predicted that when consumers of both large and small brands were shown sustainability efforts that had a major commitment (compared to the standard commitment), they would infer that the brand was authentic, and as a result, would increase purchase intent levels. Therefore, the present experiment tests for moderated mediation.

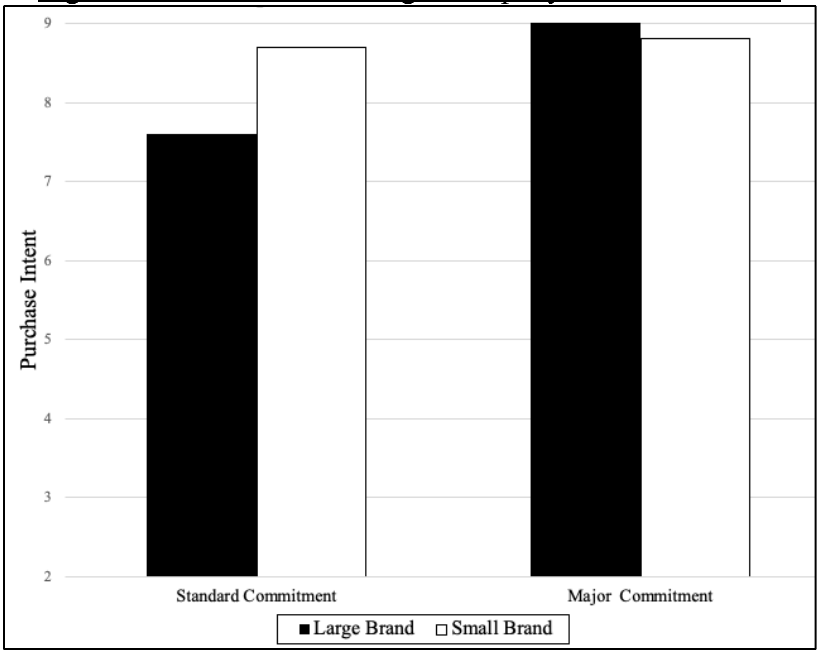
Method

I recruited 178 participants (ages 18-24, M_{age} = 20) from an undergraduate subject pool at a large southeastern university in exchange for course credit. I randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions in a 2 brand size (large vs small) x 2 commitment (standard vs. major) design. All participants evaluated a beverage company. Participants in the large brand condition were informed about an announcement from "the largest beverage company in the world", while in the small brand condition, the announcement was from "a small beverage company." For the level of commitment, the standard condition included changes of 30%, while for the major commitment condition changes were 100% (see Appendix 7 for actual language). For the questionnaire, similar to previous experiments, all respondents were asked to rate their purchase intent and perceived authenticity

Results & Discussion

Purchase Intent. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between brand size (large vs. small) and level of commitment (standard vs. major) on purchase intent, $F(1, 174) = 6.9$, $p<.01$. As was observed in the previous experiments, purchase intent was lower with standard commitment for the large vs. small brand ($M_{largegstd}$ = 7.60 vs. $M_{smallstd}$ = 8.70, $t(87)=-2.8$, $p<.01$). However, when the commitment was major, there was no statistical difference between the large vs. small brand ($M_{largemjr}$ = 9.11 vs. $M_{smallmjr}$ = 8.82, $t(87)=.84$, $p<.41$). Importantly, across all four conditions, the highest purchase intent is for the large brand undergoing a major commitment. Results from this experiment are depicted below.

Figure 7: Results for Beverage Company- Purchase Intent



Moderated Mediation: I conducted a moderated mediation analysis to test the predicted relationship of commitment level (standard vs. major) and brand size (small vs. large) on purchase intent through the mediator of authenticity. Results showed a significant model of moderated mediation (95% CI [.0110 to .3237]). More specifically, for standard commitment, brand size mediated authenticity, which in turn affected purchase intent (95% CI [-.2036 to -.0051]). However, for major commitment, brand dominance did not mediate authenticity, which in turn did not significantly impact purchase intent (95% CI [-.0154 to .1596]). This shows that for standard commitment, the presence of a large (vs. small) brand decreases purchase intent by negatively impacting authenticity. However, for major commitment, the presence of a large (vs. small) brand does not have the negativity bias, and thus, brand size does not significantly impact authenticity or purchase intent.

In Experiment 6, when the moderator of commitment (standard vs. major) was introduced, there was a significant impact on purchase intent and authenticity. This shows that a large brand can attenuate the negative bias with its sustainability efforts with an initiative that is perceived as a major commitment. Major signifies a credible commitment by the brand with sustainability. These results show that in order to achieve authenticity, large brands cannot simply do the standard commitment.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The current research identifies a distinction of brand size within sustainability efforts and the damaging implications of perceived “largeness” on purchase intent. This represents a novel mechanism to the literature and underscores the importance of authenticity around sustainability initiatives. These experiments identify reasons for the negative bias and establish suggested remedies for authenticity, and ultimately, purchase intent. Indeed, acknowledging that consumers have a different expectation of large vs. small brands is important to remedying the authenticity deficit. In previous decades, consumers may have accepted “pitches” or promises from brands stating they were making the world a better place. Today’s consumer wants real change where the brand took the effort to receive third-party certification or developed efforts that showed a sizeable commitment. Thus, consumers are asking big business to implement considerable change (Porter and Kramer 2011), and brands need to do so. This research serves as an objective review that a negativity bias does exist with large brands, but it can be attenuated with actions that remedy the authenticity deficit.

These findings establish a negative bias by the consumer towards big brands with sustainability initiatives. My findings suggest that large brands can no longer depend on their previous brand value with today’s market wanting a sustainable product. To successfully position themselves and overcome the negative associations with being big, these brands need to ensure authenticity with unparalleled actions. For example, many consumers may question brands introducing a *single* new green product, brands communicating different sustainability efforts, and brands attempting to improve *some* of their packaging. These initiatives are often side projects created by brands to appear environmentally friendly. For example, Ziploc introduced a compostable Ziploc bag after consumer complaints about its single-use plastic. However, the batch was small, and the compostable bags were nearly impossible to find in stores. It was not until social media exposed SC Johnson, the parent company of Ziploc, that it started to look into mass distribution (Northrop 2019). Unfortunately, many were not surprised. Scholars argue that many brands have half-embraced sustainability and corporate social responsibility mostly for its branding, public relations, and legal value (Ales 2009). However, such efforts are increasingly short-lived and met with consumer skepticism. I propose that working with credible third-party certifiers and devoting significant effort towards a "major commitment" will be needed to achieve authenticity with the consumer. As such, brands need to rethink their sustainability agendas at each level of development.

Overall, these results indicate that (1) big brands do have a negativity bias with consumers, (2) authenticity concerns are a real threat for these large brands, and (3) key moderators of authenticity appear to be level of commitment or third-party certification. From an applied perspective, these results may be resourceful to large brands to understand how consumers perceive them and how they can mitigate some of their perception challenges with sustainability. It also should be seen as a "wake-up call" to understanding the gains that large firms or brands can bring to society in the landscape of the current "big is bad" outlook.

Chapter 4

CAUSE BENEFICIAL OR CAUSE EXPLOITATIVE? THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DUAL MOTIVE COMMUNICATIONS ON CONSUMER SKEPTICISM OF SUSTAINABLE GOODS

5.1 Introduction

In 2018, the Patagonia brand reached a net worth of $1 billion and stated in its marketing, "we're in business to save our home planet." Relatedly, the Tom's of Maine brand communicates on its website that it wants "to create a better world and empower others to share our knowledge, talents, and profits." Even Tide, the detergent brand, launched the Tide Eco-Box by explaining its reduced impact on the environment and their own "obsession with delighting consumers." Importantly, across all of these examples, brands share that their motive includes an aspect of business in their pursuit to promote green products or sustainable practices. Indeed, these communications acknowledge and support an intention around eco-friendly goods that include helping the planet and existing as a profitable brand.

These examples are just a sampling of brands that directly reveal how their motive to do good also involves doing well for its own success. However, despite previous research examining the impact of "doing well by doing good" in management and marketing (Patterson 2000, Eichholtz et al. 2010, Bhattacharya et al. 2011, Apte and Sheth 2016), relatively little research has examined its role in communications with consumers. Given the known importance of motive to consumers, research shows that consumers care more about *why* a company is doing something than *what* the company is doing (Gilbert and Malone 1995). Additionally, with the increased consumer consciousness of non-environmentally friendly products (i.e., plastic straws), the widespread use of words like recycling and composting, and the increased availability of green alternatives suggests that consumers are truly focused on embracing sustainability. Indeed, in 2018, consumers spent $128.5 billion on sustainable products making up an impressive 22% of total store sales (Nielsen 2018).

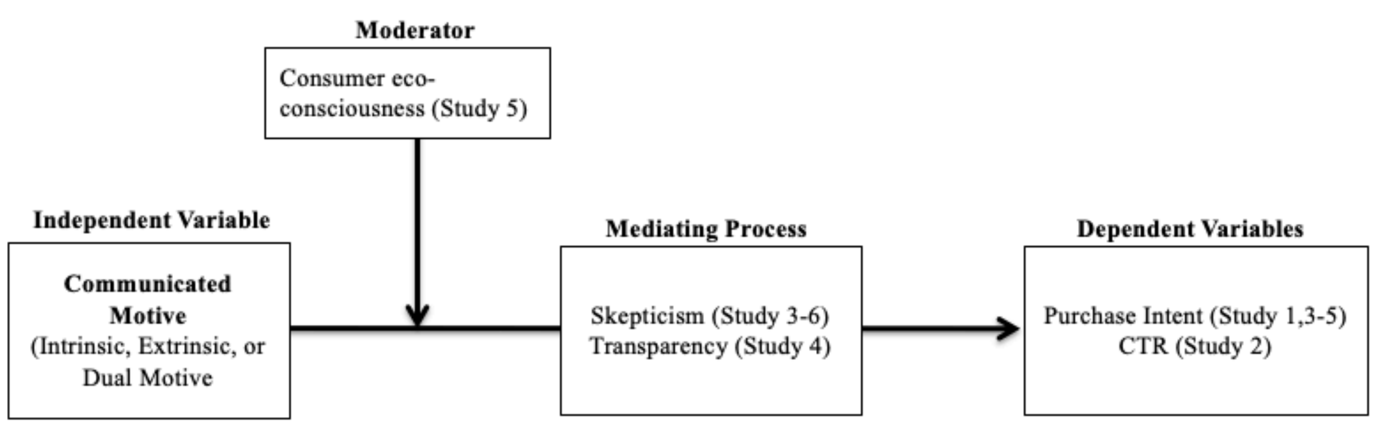
In this research, I am the first to demonstrate the positive effects of conveying an intrinsic motive (i.e., good for the environment) and extrinsic motive (i.e., good for the company) together in a brand's sustainability efforts. More specifically, such messaging includes both the brand serving and planet serving aspects of an eco-friendly initiative via open communications to the consumer. Past work on motive has shown that when brands state they are motivated because they want to help the planet or society (i.e., intrinsic motive), research suggests that skepticism or ulterior suspicions may harm their efforts (Ellen et al. 2006, Fein 1996, Forehand and Grier 2003). Alternatively, other research suggests that if a brand highlights how it is helping its own business (i.e., extrinsic motive), consumers would be skeptical of a deviation from altruism as opportunistic or exploitative (Andreasen 1996, Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill 2006, Drumwright 1996, Habel et al. 2016, Webb and Mohr 1998). However, my research investigates the effectiveness of a communicated motive that highlights the "dual motive," where both the intrinsic *and* extrinsic are communicated together to consumers. As such, the focus of this paper is on the benefit of a brand proactively utilizing a more nuanced dual motive where both altruism and self-serving motives are communicated together in marketing efforts related to sustainability practices and green goods.

The focus on the motives of sustainability efforts is particularly important in marketing because of its perception with consumers as potentially cause-beneficial and cause-exploitative. Traditional social responsibility efforts in this area have focused on contexts such as charitable giving (Barone et al. 2000, Chernev and Blair 2015, Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013), social initiatives, and cause marketing (Becker-Olsen et al. 2006, Romani et al. 2016, Webb and Mohr 1998) and corporate volunteerism (Forehand and Grier 2003). However, sustainability or "green" products by brands should be explored separately from these areas because its selling proposition is often made with environmentalism in mind. Thus, the brand focuses on the creation of eco-friendly *internal* to the product's creation (i.e., less materials, renewable energy), compared to the traditional social responsibility efforts about initiatives *external* to the product's creation (i.e., donation with purchase, employee volunteerism). Through this lens, the motive is not to market the product for another cause or philanthropy but to market the product as an extension of its emphasis on the planet or environment, which is increasingly prominent with goods and services in the current marketplace.

This research makes several contributions. First, I build on previous corporate social responsibility literature by explicitly evaluating the perceived motive of a brand's efforts specific to sustainability and its influence on consumer purchase intent. Second, I show the value of a dual motive communicating both intrinsic and extrinsic benefits together that emphasize how a green effort is good for the planet and the brand, which positively impacts consumer perceptions. Third, I demonstrate the importance of transparency and skepticism as mechanisms that help further an understanding of motive evaluations in the consumer decision making process. Finally, I seek to provide an essential contribution to the CSR literature by revealing a novel examination of the mechanisms tied to motive and consumer outcomes. Recently, researchers have stated that "there seems to be a lack of understanding of the underlying mechanisms linking CSR with outcomes" (Aguinis and Glavas 2012, p. 953), with only 7% of CSR articles focusing on mediation effects (Habel et al. 2016). Thus, this study evaluates consumer perceptions of brand motives that emphasize the dual motive behind a product creation or process that involves sustainability – and its positive impact on consumer decision making. Notably, this is particularly important as many of the fastest-growing brands have a growing emphasis on product processes (Whelan and Randi Kronthal-Sacco 2019).

I organize the remainder of this chapter as follows: In the next section, I describe the roles of motive and skepticism as critical tenets of consumer decision-making on sustainability-centric products. This is followed by six experiments that directly test my hypotheses. These experiments show that consumers respond more favorably to a dual motive across multiple categories. These studies explore the heightened perception of transparency and the reduced impact of skepticism with a dual motive, which ultimately leads to higher purchase intent. Additionally, I explore a moderating factor that acts as a boundary condition around this type of motive: consumer eco-consciousness. I conclude with a discussion of results, implications for practitioners, and future directions. To summarize, see the conceptual framework below.

Figure 8: Conceptual Framework



5.2 BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

The Importance of Motive with Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility includes many aspects of involvement by a company, including corporate philanthropy, employee volunteerism, environmental responsibility, and cause-related marketing programs that focus on economic, ethical, and discretionary practices (Carroll 1979). When a brand decides to engage in CSR, the consumer perception of its motives plays an essential role in how consumers respond to it (Vlachos et al. 2009). Moreover, consumers outwardly express great interest in justifying and understanding why brands engage in CSR practices (Gilbert and Malone 1995). Importantly, understanding consumer opinions in this area is crucial because negative perceptions can significantly hurt its effectiveness and interest in the product (Rim and Song 2016).

Most of the academic literature in this area has dichotomized motives using labels such as “altruistic vs. egoistic,” “benevolence vs. self-interest,” “extrinsic vs. intrinsic,” “self-serving vs. society serving,” and “firm serving vs. public-serving” (Barone, Miyazaki, and Taylor 2000, Chernov and Blair 2015, Forehand and Grier 2003, Lichtenstein et al. 2004, Romani et al. 2016). With this bipolar view, there are two main kinds of logic: intrinsic motive, where a brand is acting out of a genuine concern for the society, or extrinsic motive, where a brand is seen as attempting to increase its profits or other business returns. The majority of the literature suggests intrinsic motives (i.e., a sincere effort to help the environment) produces a positive reaction by consumers, compared to extrinsic motives (i.e., a need to maximize profits), which result in negative or neutral reactions (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill, 2006, Chernev and Blair 2015, Du and Sen 2007, Skarmeas and Leonidoi 2013).

However, an intrinsic motive does come with undesirable consequences. Although consumers want to believe that a brand is intrinsically motivated or “truly cares” with its societal efforts, they are also suspicious of it (Fein 1996, Forehand and Grier 2003). This is tied to the view that a brand is hiding something by professing such a pure motive, leaving consumers to feel misled or even duped (Ellen et al. 2006). As such, when a brand solely communicates its altruistic sentiment towards an effort, consumers may view this as a strategy to deceive or manipulate them (Campbell 1995, Forehand 2000). This speaks to an understanding that consumers may anticipate how a business needs to serve “two masters”: their bottom lines and long-run viability, as well as the needs of society (Ellen et al. 2006).

An additional concern with a brand expressing benevolence alone is the larger consumer distrust of business. Indeed, with the escalation of recent scandals in the popular press, consumers feel distrustful toward advertising and marketing-related messages (Helm 2006, Olenski 2017). This is particularly true in corporate social responsibility, where disbelief about CSR messages, activities, and motives has been well documented in previous work (Forehand and Grier, 2003, Romani, Grappi, and Bagozzi, 2016, Yoon, Gurhan-Canli, and Schwarz, 2006). This distrust of business had led to a prevalence of skepticism towards CSR and a historical low of 4% of consumers trusting advertisers (Ipsos 2015).

The scant literature suggesting a non-dichotomized view of motive recognizes that consumers can appreciate multiple perspectives (Ellen et al. 2006, Vlachos et al. 2009). In an open-ended study by Ellen et al., when asked to explain why a company did social responsibility, three-quarters of respondents ascribed company motives to more than one reason (2006). Interestingly, consumer reactions were more positive when they had recognized mixed attributions than when they reported motives as just intrinsic or extrinsic alone. However, there is no known literature on a brand utilizing a "dual motive" (i.e., both intrinsic and extrinsic motives) in its external marketing communications. Thus, this work proposes that a dual motive will ameliorate some of the challenges that occur when brands use intrinsic motives. While an extrinsic motive used on its own may be perceived as opportunistic and rejected by consumers (Habel et al. 2016), the dual motive may alleviate some of the concerns that the brand is hiding something by providing its self-benefits. More specifically, while consumers want to know the intrinsic motive, consumers may also legitimize an extrinsic motive that benefits profits since corporate survival requires it. Thus, by acknowledging the benefits to the business and the planet, I propose that a dual motive will be better perceived and lead to a higher purchase intent by the consumer. Or more formally:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Relative to intrinsic or extrinsic motives, a brand including a dual motive in its marketing communications of its sustainability initiatives will increase purchase intent.

Motive & Consumer Skepticism

Skepticism refers to a person's tendency to doubt, distrust, question, or have negative feelings toward a company's actions (Boush, Friestad, and Rose 1994, Forehand and Grier, 2003, Webb and Mohr 1998). These actions may include the motives of marketers, specific advertising claims, and public relations efforts (Ford and Smith 1990, Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998, Webb and Mohr 1998). When consumers are skeptical, it can negatively impact their response to both the brand and the effort (Forehand and Grier 2003, Romani et al. 2016, Webb and Mohr 1998). Given the rise in unscrupulous brands engaging in false sustainability marketing and CSR, consumer skepticism is undeniably rising (Economist 2012, Leonidou and Skarmeas 2017). Research on skepticism in the CSR literature has been shown in the context of corporate social marketing (Forehand and Grier, 2003), CSR communication during crises (Vanhamme and Grobben, 2009), and CSR programs (Pirsch, Gupta, and Grau, 2007). Across these studies, results show that skepticism makes communications less believable, triggers negative consumer reactions, and hurts purchase intent of products (Leonidou and Skarmeas 2017, Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998).

Consumers can be skeptical of motives for several reasons. With an intrinsic motive, consumers may appreciate a brand trying to "do good" but then be skeptical of what its true or genuine motive may be, fearing the brand may be hiding a different agenda. With an extrinsic motive, consumers may appreciate a brand's transparency but then be skeptical of its actual commitment or sentiment towards the cause (Forehand and Grier, 2003, Leonidou and Skarmeas 2017). In both instances, the skepticism can dwarf the benefits of the overall effort and have a negative impact on the business. This is consistent with prior research on skepticism showing consumer uncertainty of motive leads to concerns of trustworthiness (Albayrak et al. 2011, Mayer and Scammon 1993). Thus, with skepticism comes a reluctance to buy the environmentally friendly product or support the initiative. Importantly, my work proposes that a dual motive may lessen consumer skepticism. As such, consumers can appreciate the brand trying to do good with its efforts while also understanding the business reason behind its commitment. Moreover, in communicating its business rationale, the brand alleviates the need for the consumer to wonder about hidden motives and doubt its efforts. Indeed, by being transparent with its pro-self and pro-planet motives, consumer skepticism may decrease and improve consumer decision-making. More specifically:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Skepticism will mediate purchase intent, such that a dual motive will lessen skepticism, leading to higher purchase intent.

> *Hypothesis 3:* Transparency will increase purchase intent indirectly through skepticism, such that a dual motive will heighten transparency, thus lowering skepticism and leading to higher purchase intent.

Consumer Differences

To further explain motive related to the purchase of eco-friendly goods, I test for a moderating condition. Given that there are many types of consumers in the marketplace, I attempt to identify situations in which the dual motive may not significantly impact purchase intent. One aspect that may mitigate the superior perceptions of a dual motive is the type of consumer, or more specifically, the eco-consciousness of the consumer. This draws on previous research on socially conscious consumers, which suggests that these consumers are less reactive to the specific advertising messaging of a brand supporting a cause due to the time and effort put into their own awareness. This research suggests that some consumers may perceive that "the end justifies the means" such that whatever marketing is done with CSR or environmentalism, the reason for helping is not a factor in their support of it (Webb and Mohr 1998). Haws et al. suggest that consumers high in green consumption values will process information about an environmentally friendly product more favorably than the general consumer (2014). Moreover, these consumers have already been "won over" on the idea of supporting sustainability and may not need a high level of persuasion (Conick 2019). Thus, I predict that consumers already high in eco-consciousness may not be as influenced or impacted by marketing communications about motive. More specifically:

> *Hypothesis 4:* Consumer eco-consciousness moderates the results hypothesized in H1, such that consumers high (vs. low) in eco-consciousness will not have significantly higher purchase intent when the motive communicated by the brand is a dual motive (vs other motive).

5.3 OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

To test these hypotheses, this chapter reports six experiments that investigated reactions to marketing communications that test different types of brand motive. These experiments investigated the idea that consumers respond more positively to a dual motive which combines intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Experiment 1A tested the theory that a product communicating a dual motive will result in higher purchase intent compared to either an intrinsic motive, an extrinsic motive, or a control condition. Experiment 1B also shows the superiority of the dual motive, but in the category of services. Additionally, Experiment 1B intentionally holds constant the amount of information to rule out any alternative hypotheses about information quantity. Experiment 2 shows the superiority of a dual motive in a real-world field experiment on Facebook using CTRs as the dependent variable. Experiment 3 introduces the mechanism of skepticism, such that consumers are less skeptical of the brand's motives with the dual motive. Experiment 3 also rules out a potential confound with brand age by using a new vs. existing brand. Results showed that the dual motive is better perceived in either condition, regardless of brand age. Moreover, results proved that skepticism mediated the difference in purchase intent and motive. Experiment 4 examined the role of transparency as an antecedent to skepticism, ultimately leading to higher purchase intent. Results showed serial mediation such that a dual motive has higher perceptions of transparency which impacts lower skepticism and higher purchase intent. Experiment 5 investigated the role of consumer eco-consciousness, such that consumers with high eco-consciousness do not exhibit the same skepticism of marketing communications for eco-goods, resulting in moderated mediation.

Experiment 1A: Dual Motive & Purchase Intent

The goal of Experiment 1A is to test the proposition that a brand using a dual motive that includes an intrinsic and an extrinsic benefit communicated together will have higher purchase intent compared any of the following individually: control motive, intrinsic motive, extrinsic motive. I use the scenario of Tide detergent launching new packaging. The only difference among the scenarios is the motive that the brand communicates for its new initiative.

Method

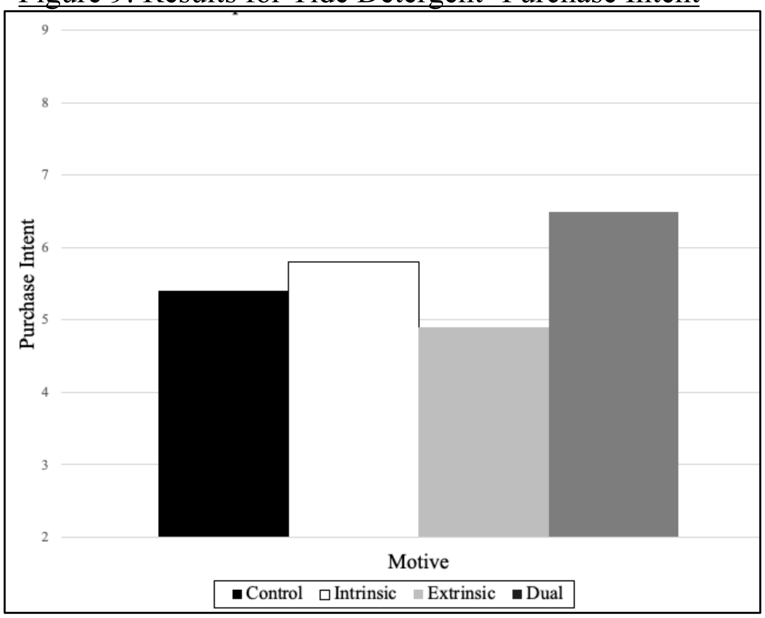
One hundred and ninety-nine participants (ages 18-23, M*age* = 20 years) were recruited from an undergraduate subject pool at a large southeastern university in exchange for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: (1) Control, (2) Intrinsic motive, (3) Extrinsic motive, (4) Dual motive (Intrinsic + Extrinsic). All participants viewed a news article about Tide detergent introducing new packaging. The article included a visual of the new design and information on the product. In the control condition, there was no mention of why the packaging was changed. In the intrinsic motive condition, participants were told that the packaging was changed to be more environmentally friendly and included relevant details of how it would help. In the extrinsic motive condition, participants were told that the packaging was changed to increase profitability with lower shipping costs. In the dual motive condition, participants were told a combination of the intrinsic and extrinsic motive conditions, where the packaging was changed to be both environmentally friendly and help lower shipping costs. See Appendix 8 for actual stimuli.

After reviewing the stimuli, respondents were asked to assess their purchase intent ("I am interested in purchasing Tide more/less after reading this" with 1=much less and 9=much more). They were then asked questions on demographics and thanked for their participation.

Results & Discussion

Purchase Intent. I predicted that consumers in the dual motive condition would have higher purchase intent than the other conditions. I conducted a one-way ANOVA with four conditions and purchase intent as the dependent measure. There was a significant effect of condition ($F(3, 199) = 23.6$, $p<.000$). Planned contrasts revealed higher purchase intent in the dual motive condition vs. control ($M_{dual} = 6.5$ vs. $M_{ctrl} = 5.4$; $t(98) = -3.3$, $p<.00$), dual vs. intrinsic motive condition ($M_{dual} =6.5$ vs. $M_{intr} = 5.8$; $t(96) = -2.2$, $p<.03$) and dual vs. extrinsic motive condition ($M_{dual} = 6.5$ vs. $M_{extr} = 4.9$; $t(97) = -4.5$, $p<.00$).

Figure 9: Results for Tide Detergent- Purchase Intent



The results of Experiment 1A demonstrate that individuals have higher purchase intent with the dual motive compared to any of the other conditions. While the same brand name, packaging and visual were shown across all conditions, the change in motive significantly impacted higher purchase intent. In this specific scenario, the focus is a product. This may then raise the question

– would this also occur with a service? Additionally, would this work with a brand less familiar in the marketplace? Experiment 1B explores these questions.

Experiment 1B: Dual Motive & Purchase Intent

In the previous study, I showed that a dual motive has higher purchase intent compared to an intrinsic, extrinsic or control condition. This was using the stimuli of Tide, a well-known product. The goal of Experiment 1B is to extend the findings of Experiment 1A but with a service provider, named Stratto, a fictitious coffee chain in Italy. This differs in that it is a service (vs. product) and it is not a familiar brand (vs. familiar brand). Additionally, Experiment 1B rules out any alternate hypotheses around information quantity around motive. This is important as the stimuli in Experiment 1A around dual motive did include both of the motives of the intrinsic and extrinsic communications. Thus, each of the scenarios in Experiment 1A will contain the *same amount* of information on the motive, holding information amount constant.

Method

I recruited two hundred thirty participants from Prolific (ages 18-65, M*age* =35). The scenario was centered around Stratto, a fictious Italian coffee chain. Across all conditions, participants were presented information on Stratto's initiative to change its existing disposable coffee cups to eliminate plastic. Each condition was told, "Stratto will use our new compostable coffee cups, serving you the same quality coffee but without the unnecessary plastic." Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: Intrinsic Motive, Extrinsic Motive, Dual Motive. As such, the intrinsic motive included 2 pieces of information on the pro-social benefits (help the environment + lessen waste in landfills). The extrinsic motive included 2 pieces of information on the pro-self-benefits for the brand (doing this for our consumers request

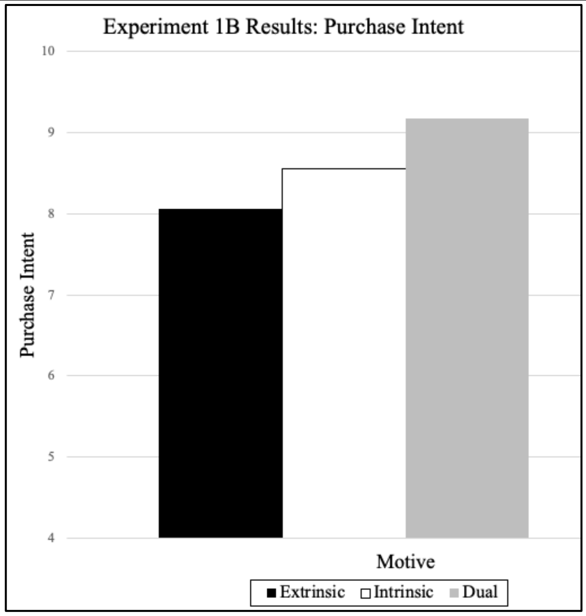
+ our financial community). The information for the dual motive was both intrinsic (help the environment) and extrinsic (doing this for our consumers request). Thus, all 3 conditions each had 2 pieces of motive information to control for information quantity. Additionally, this extends my findings of the previous experiment with a service provider. See Appendix 9 for actual stimuli.

After reviewing the stimuli, respondents were asked questions on purchase intent ("I am interested in purchasing from Stratto" with 1=strongly disagree and 11=strongly agree). They were then asked questions on demographics and thanked for their participation.

Results & Discussion

Purchase Intent. I predicted that consumers in the dual motive condition would have higher purchase intent than the other conditions. I conducted a one-way ANOVA with three conditions and purchase intent as the dependent measure. There was a significant effect of condition ($F(3, 227) = 6.61$, $p<.00$). Planned contrasts revealed higher purchase intent in the dual vs. intrinsic motive condition ($M_{dual} = 9.18$ vs. $M_{intri}= 8.55$; $t(150) = -2.28$, $p<.02$) and dual vs. extrinsic motive condition ($M_{dual} = 9.18$ vs. $M_{extr} = 8.06$; $t(152) = 3.63$, $p<.00$). This demonstrates that the dual motive has the highest purchase intent when information quantity is held constant, and in the service category.

Figure 10: Results for Stratto Coffee – Purchase Intent



While Experiment 1A showed higher purchase intent with products and Experiment 1B showed higher purchase intent with services, this may then lead the question – will this be replicated with actual behavior. While purchase intent is a well-known variable to display purchase behaviors, Experiment 2 uses a real-world field experiment on Facebook.

Experiment 2: Field Experiment on Facebook

The goal of Experiment 2 is to show the superior consumer perception of a dual motive in marketing communications in the context of a field study. Thus, Experiment 2 is a real-world field experiment using click-through rates as the dependent variable. I partnered with an eco-friendly toothbrush brand from Canada to test the impact of the dual motive. Additionally, to rule out any alternative explanations around visuals or creative execution, there were 2 separate campaigns that ran concurrently to show the robustness of the findings.

Method

The test included 4 distinct advertisements for Grin, a toothbrush company launching an advertisement on Facebook. Due to the low levels of purchase intent in Experiment 1A, the control and extrinsic motive conditions were removed. Therefore, all experiments moving forward will use the dual motive vs. the intrinsic motive to test stimuli since they were the highest performing in previous experiments.

To rule out any alternative hypotheses around creative execution, the experiment included 2 distinct creative looks, “Nature” and “Brushes” (see Appendix 10 for visuals). In previous research, visuals of nature were a method to integrate affect or emotions into the advertisement. Therefore, “Nature” is to rule out the impact of any emotionality of the marketing. Additionally, the “Brushes” creative execution includes imagery of toothbrushes as more functional. Importantly, I argue that changes in visuals will not impact my results. As such, I hypothesize that regardless of visuals used, the dual motive will perform better compared to an intrinsic motive. Thus, this will be a 2x2 with 2 Motive (Dual, Intrinsic) vs 2 Creative (Brushes/Functional, Nature/Affect).

The dependent variable was advertising click-through rates (CTRs), a function of impressions and clicks, for ads created on Facebook’s advertising platform. This is similar to the industry use of A/B testing where brands evaluate CTRs to determine advertising effectiveness (Hubbard 2016, Paharia 2020). For this experiment, the ads were set to be optimized for clicks versus impressions. This is a commonly used way to set up digital advertising (O’Neill 2010, Paharia 2020). The time of the test was set up in advance to expire at a pre-set time to allow for equal evaluation of how both ads performed for the same period.

Results & Discussion

Click-Thru Rate. Across the four ads, they generated a total of 27,800 impressions, 1274 of which were clicked on (CTR = 4.64%). This CTR is within normal range for digital display ads and within range for Facebook advertisements (Irvine 2017, Volovich 2016). To analyze the data, I calculated the click-through rate (total number of clicks per ad divided by the total number of impressions for the ad) associated with each version of the ad. For the "nature" campaign, results revealed that there was a significant difference between the two ads; such that the dual motive condition generated significantly higher CTRs than the intrinsic motive condition ($CTR_{dual.nature}$ = 5.08%; $CTR_{intri.nature}$ = 4.26%; z = 2.47, p<.01). For the "brushes" campaign, results similarly revealed a significant difference between the two ads; such that the dual motive condition generated significantly higher CTRs than the intrinsic motive condition ($CTR_{dual.brush}$ = 5.10%; $CTR_{intri.brush}$ = 4.14%; z = 2.52, p = .01). See Table 2 below for detailed results.

Table 2: Results of Grin Brand & Facebook Field Experiment

Advertising Execution	Impressions	Clicks	CTR
Nature - Dual Motive	7,050	358	5.08%
Nature - Intrinsic Motive	8,507	362	4.26%
Brushes - Dual Motive	4,918	251	5.10%
Brushes - Intrinsic Motive	7,325	303	4.14%
Pooled	*27,800*	*1,274*	*4.64%*

Overall, there was a statistically significant difference for CTR across both the "nature" and "brushes" creative executions for the dual vs. intrinsic motives. This indicates that using a dual motive in marketing communications can yield positive results for a brand, as those who were exposed to the dual motive were significantly more likely to click on the ad than those who were exposed to the intrinsic motive. This was true for both creative executions in the field study.

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis in real-world contexts on Facebook. I found that across multiple marketing communications, the scenario that included the dual motive significantly outperformed the ad that included the intrinsic motive. This may then lead to the question – what is the mechanism driving this affect? Thus, Experiment 3 explores the mechanism of skepticism.

Experiment 3: Mechanism of Skepticism

Previous experiments showed that a dual motive performed better across both purchase intent and CTR. The goal of Experiment 3 is to gain insight into the mechanism driving this effect. Therefore, Experiment 3 tests for the mediational impact of skepticism on purchase intent. Additionally, this experiment will rule out any alternate explanations around brand age. As such, this experiment will use a fictious brand in the shoe category, named Naria that will be positioned as either new or old. I hypothesis that dual motive will be better received, regardless of brand age. Notably, the language used in the experiment came from an online audit of multiple shoe brand websites and their current efforts in this area to ensure believability. However, none of them are real-world scenarios.

Method

I recruited two hundred forty-two participants from Prolific (ages 18-65, M*age* =30). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2x2 study with 2 motive (Dual, Intrinsic) x 2 Brand age (New, Old). All participants evaluated the launch of a new eco-friendly shoe named Naria and were shown a visual of the shoe, the logo and information about how the shoe was produced in an environmentally friendly manner. For motive, participants in the intrinsic motive condition were told that Naria truly believes in environmentalism for a healthy planet. In the dual motive condition, participants were given the same intrinsic motive, but were also told that Naria understands that being eco-friendly with its products is important to customers. Additionally, for brand age, participants in the new condition were told that Naria would be launching its new eco-shoe in the U.S. during the summer 2020. However, participants in the old condition were told that while Naria would be launching its new eco-shoe in the U.S. during the summer 2020, it had been in existence in other countries for over 50 years. For stimuli, see Appendix 11. Similar to previous experiments, I posit that the dual motive condition will be perceived more favorably, regardless of brand age.

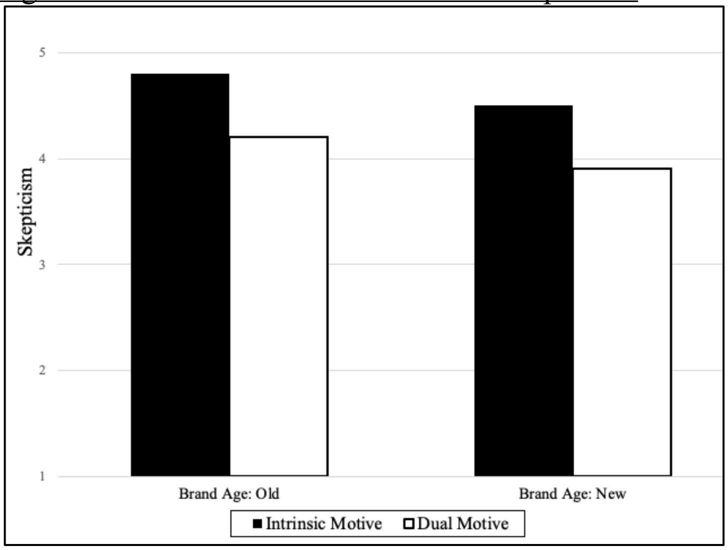
While this experiment aims to rule out any alterative hypotheses concerning brand age, the main purpose of Experiment 3 is to explore the mechanism of skepticism. After reviewing the stimuli, respondents answered questions on their perceived skepticism around the motive behind Naria's initiative. Since multiple skepticism scales were located in the marketing literature, this experiment used a combination of scales to form the skepticism index for this paper (Gaski and Etzel 1986, Mohr et al. 1998, Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998). Four items formed the skepticism index for this paper. The questions were an index of the following: (1) "I am skeptical about the reasons behind this initiative" with 1 = not at all and 9=absolutely. (2) "I believe Naria has a hidden agenda with this initiative" with 1 = not at all and 9=absolutely. (3) "I think this product has false claims" with 1 = not at all and 9=absolutely. (4) "Naria's motives are different from those they stated." with 1 = not at all and 9=absolutely. The questions were collapsed into a single measure of skepticism (α=0.875). Additionally, a confirmatory factor analysis indicated the four items loaded onto one factor and all had factor loadings greater than

.80. All four items were also significantly correlated at the .01 level. Additionally, participants were asked about purchase intent ("How likely would you be to purchase this" with 1=not at all likely and 9=very likely). Lastly, they were then asked questions on demographics and thanked for their participation.

Results & Discussion

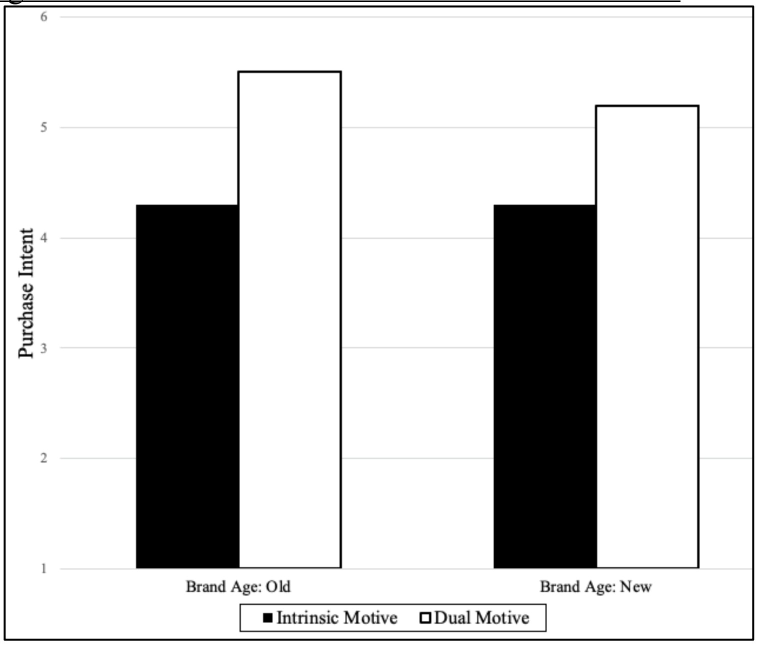
Skepticism. Overall, there was a significant effect of condition ($F(3, 238) = 5.4$, $p<.00$). Importantly, there was no significant interaction with motive and brand age on skepticism. This follows the theory that skepticism will be higher with an intrinsic motive (compared to dual motive), regardless of brand age ($F(3,238) =.001$, $p<.91$). Notably, in both conditions, there was a main effect, such that the dual motive was significantly lower than the intrinsic motive, whether the brand was old or new. Results revealed skepticism was lower in the dual motive condition ($M_{dual} = 4.1$) than in the intrinsic motive condition ($M_{intri} = 4.7$). This difference was significant ($F(1, 241) = 12.4$, $p<.00$). When the brand was old, planned contrasts revealed lower skepticism in the dual vs. intrinsic motive condition ($M_{dua.old} = 4.2$ vs. $M_{intri.old} = 4.8$; $t(119) = 2.6$, $p<.01$). Additionally, when the brand was new, planned contrasts revealed lower skepticism in the dual vs. intrinsic motive condition ($M_{dual.new} = 3.9$ vs. $M_{intri.new} = 4.5$; $t(119) = 2.4$, $p<.02$). Thus, as expected, the dual motive condition had lower skepticism than the intrinsic motive, regardless of brand age.

Figure 11: Results for Naria Sneakers- Skepticism



Purchase Intent. Overall, there was a significant effect of condition ($F(3, 238) = 5.41$, $p<.00$). Importantly, there was no significant interaction with motive and brand age on purchase intent. This follows the theory that purchase intent will be lower with an intrinsic motive (compared to dual motive), regardless of brand age ($F(3,238) = .25$, $p<.62$). Notably, in both conditions, there was a main effect, such that the dual motive had significantly higher purchase intent than the intrinsic motive, whether the brand was old or new. Results revealed purchase intent was higher in the dual motive condition ($M_{dual} = 5.3$) than in the intrinsic motive condition ($M_{intri} = 4.3$). This difference was significant ($F(1, 241) = 15.7$, $p<.00$). When the brand was old, planned contrasts revealed higher purchase intent in the dual vs. intrinsic motive condition ($M_{dual.old} = 5.5$ vs. $M_{intri.old}= 4.3$; $t(119) = -3.3$, $p<.01$). Additionally, when the brand was new, planned contrasts revealed higher purchase intent in the dual vs. intrinsic motive condition ($M_{dual.new} = 5.2$ vs. $M_{intri.new} = 4.3$; $t(119) = -2.4$, $p<.02$). Thus, as expected, the dual motive condition leads to higher purchase intent compared to the intrinsic motive condition, regardless of brand age.

Figure 12: Results for Naria Sneakers- Purchase Intent



Mediation: A mediation analysis (Hayes 2018, Model 4) with motive (dual vs. intrinsic) as the independent variable and purchase intent as the dependent variable with skepticism, as the mediator revealed that perceptions of skepticism significantly mediated this relationship (β = -.03, SE = .04, 95% CI [.0961 to .2260]). These results show that purchase intent of a dual motive compared to an intrinsic motive is mediated by lower skepticism, leading to higher purchase intent.

The results of Experiment 2 show that skepticism mediates the relationship between motive and purchase intent. This effect holds true regardless of brand age, such that the dual motive performs better than the intrinsic motive.

Experiment 4: Serial Mediation

As shown in the previous experiment, consumers showed lower skepticism and higher purchase intent when the motive is a dual motive. Additionally, results showed skepticism mediates the relationship between motive and purchase intent. The goal of experiment 4 is to further understand the antecedents that impact lower skepticism. Previous research has suggested that in order to overcome pervasive consumer skepticism, brands should systematically strive to make their business more transparent as part of their green marketing strategy (Cronin et al. 201, Marshall and Brown 2003). Thus, Experiment 4 tests for serial mediation through transparency and skepticism. I hypothesize that a dual motive will be seen as more transparent, resulting in lower skepticism and higher purchase intent.

Method

Two hundred sixteen participants (ages 18-23, M*age* = 20 years) were recruited from an undergraduate subject pool at a large southeastern university in exchange for course credit. To further expand the robustness of these findings, this experiment includes 4 conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: (1) Control, (2) Intrinsic motive, (3) Extrinsic motive, (4) Dual motive. For stimuli, see Appendix 12. All participants viewed a news article about Bold detergent introducing new packaging. All conditions included a visual of the new design and information on the product. Differing across conditions was the reason that Bold changed their packaging. In the control condition, there was no reason provided for the packaging change, just an announcement and image of it. In the intrinsic motive condition, participants were told that the packaging was changed to be more environmentally friendly. In the extrinsic motive condition, participants were told that the packaging was changed to increase profitability. In the dual motive condition that included both intrinsic and extrinsic serving motives, participants were told that Bold had changed its packaging to be more environmentally friendly and to increase profitability.

After reviewing the stimuli, respondents answered questions on their perceived skepticism and purchase intent around the motive behind the Bold's initiative. For skepticism, the questions were the same four-item skepticism scale used in previous experiments that were collapsed into a single measure of skepticism (α=0.823). For purchase intent, all respondents were asked to rate their purchase intent ("I would purchase products from Bold with 1=not at all and 9=absolutely). Additionally, all respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of transparency ("Bold is being transparent about their motives for this packaging change" with 1=not at all and 9=absolutely).

Results & Discussion

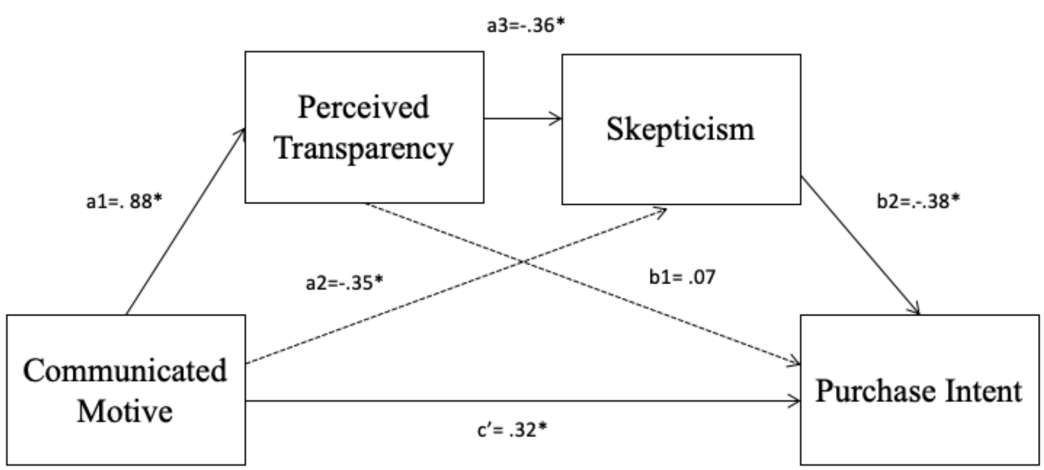
Skepticism. I predicted that consumers in the dual motive condition would have lower skepticism than the other conditions. I conducted a one-way ANOVA with four conditions and skepticism as the dependent measure. There was a significant effect of condition ($F(3, 172) = 14.2$, $p<.00$). Planned contrasts revealed lower skepticism in the dual motive condition vs. control (M_{dual}= 3.4 vs. M_{ctrl} = 5.4; $t(84) = 6.0$, $p<.00$), dual vs. intrinsic motive condition (M_{dual} =3.4 vs. M_{intri} = 4.9; $t(85) = 4.4$, $p<.00$) and dual vs. extrinsic motive condition (M_{dual} = 3.4 vs. M_{extr} = 4.5; $t(85) = 3.2$, $p<.00$).

Transparency. I predicted that consumers in the dual motive condition would have higher transparency than the other conditions. I conducted a one-way ANOVA with four conditions and transparency as the dependent measure. There was a significant effect of condition ($F(3, 172) = 33.7$, $p<.000$). Planned contrasts revealed higher transparency in the dual motive condition vs. control (M_{dual} = 8.0 vs. M_{ctrl} = 4.5; $t(84) = -9.6$, $p<.00$), dual vs. intrinsic motive condition (M_{dual} = 8.0 vs. M_{intri} = 6.4; $t(85) = -5.5$, $p<.00$) and dual vs. extrinsic motive condition (M_{dual} = 8.0 vs. M_{extr} = 7.1; $t(85) = -2.8$, $p<.01$).

Purchase Intent. I predicted that consumers in the dual motive condition would have higher purchase intent than the other conditions. I conducted a one-way ANOVA with four conditions and purchase intent as the dependent measure. There was a significant effect of condition (F3, 172) = 7.2, p<.00). Planned contrasts revealed higher purchase intent in the dual motive condition vs. control (M_{dual} = 6.3 vs. M_{ctrl} = 4.7; t(84) = -5.0, p<.00), dual vs. intrinsic motive condition (M_{dual} = 6.3 vs. M_{intri} = 5.6; t(85) = -2.3, p<.02) and dual vs. extrinsic motive condition (M_{dual} = 6.3vs. M_{extri} = 5.5; t(85) = -2.5, p<.02).

Serial Mediation: A serial mediation analysis was conducted (Hayes 2018, Model 6). As expected, I found a significant indirect effect for the mediation path through transparency and skepticism (see Figure 13 below for estimated path coefficients and results on all indirect effects). These results show that a dual motive (vs. other motives) leads to higher transparency, which in turn lowers skepticism, ultimately leading to higher purchase intent.

Figure 13: Serial Mediation Results



NOTE: Multiple-step mediation analysis with 5,000 bootstrap samples (Model 6 in PROCESS, Hayes 2018). Coefficients significantly different from zero indicated by asterisks (*p<.05).
The total indirect effect was significant (95% CI from .15 to .52)
The indirect effect through perceived transparency & skepticism was significant (95% CI from .06 to .21)
The indirect effect through perceived transparency was not significant (95% CI from -.06 to .20)
The indirect effect through skepticism was significant (95% CI from .03 to .29)

The results of Experiment 4 demonstrate that transparency is an antecedent to skepticism. More specifically, when respondents view a dual motive in marketing communications, there are higher perceptions of transparency, leading to lower skepticism. This may then raise the question – are there groups of consumers who may perceive a dual motive differently than the general consumer? I explore this question in Experiment 5.

Experiment 5: Moderating Impact of Environmental Consciousness

Previous experiments have found that consumers are less skeptical of a dual motive, leading to higher purchase intent. Experiment 4 focuses on the moderating role of eco-consciousness of the consumer and investigates how this this impacts skepticism and purchase intent. I hypothesize that for consumers high in eco-consciousness, the type of motive does not have a significant impact on their perceived skepticism or purchase intent. This is consistent with prior work in this area. Previous research on consumers high in social consciousness suggests that due to the time and effort put into their own awareness, these consumers are less reactive to the specific advertising messaging of a brand supporting a cause. This work suggests that "the end justifies the means" such that whatever marketing is done, the company's reason for helping is not a factor in their support of it (Webb and Mohr 1998).

Method

I recruited two hundred and one participants (M*age* = 31 years, 53% female) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The purpose of this study was to evaluate all four conditions in a 2 environmental consciousness (high, low) x 2 communicated motive (dual, intrinsic) experiment. For stimuli, see Appendix 13. All participants viewed an Instagram post from McDonald's about their new fiber-based fry box made from "100% recycled goods that contain no plastic and shows McDonald's commitment to the planet." This post also included information on McDonald's overall packaging commitments for the brand. While the Instagram post was a mock-up, all language around environmentalism was taken from the McDonald's Corporate website. In the intrinsic motive condition, there was information above the post stating that McDonald's feels they have a responsibility to take action to protect the environment. However, in the dual condition, in addition to the language from the intrinsic motive condition, the post also described how the packaging change would decrease packaging costs for the company and help profits.

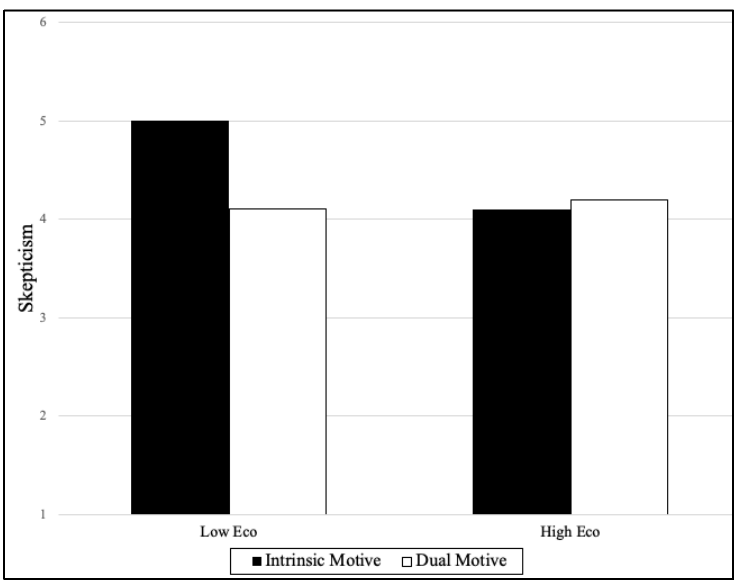
Before reviewing any stimuli, participants were asked questions on how they felt about a list of 10 current issues (i.e. healthcare reform, environmental causes, LGBTQ rights, etc.). A variety of issues were asked so participants did not focus on any one particular cause. To test the moderating effects of environmental consciousness, the specific question of focus for this study was a self-assessment of "support towards environmental causes" on a scale of 1-4 with 1=always supportive to 4=never supportive. Participants were grouped into high vs. low eco-consciousness based on their response. Consumers that answered "always support" environmental causes were put into the high eco-conscious condition (43% of respondents), while other respondents ("sometimes/rarely/never") were put into the low eco-conscious condition (57% of respondents). This was the closest possible to a median split since 57% of consumers stated either sometimes, rarely or never, all grouping into the low eco-consciousness condition.

Participants were then shown the Instagram post from McDonalds. After reviewing the stimuli, respondents answered questions on skepticism with the same four-item skepticism scale as previous Experiments. Also, all respondents were asked to assess their purchase intent ("I will buy McDonald's the next time I buy fast food" with 1=disagree and 9=agree). Additionally, in a pre-test, there was no statistical differences across conditions for levels of liking McDonalds or purchase frequency from McDonald's.

Results & Discussion

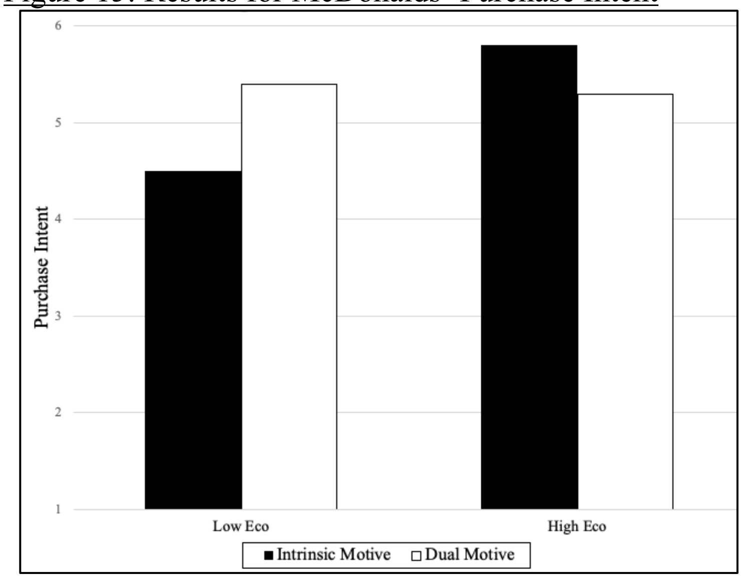
Skepticism. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between communicated motive (dual vs. intrinsic) and eco-consciousness (high vs low) on skepticism, (F (1, 201) = 5.1, p<.03). In the low eco-conscious condition, there was a significant difference between conditions (M_{dual} = 4.1 vs. M_{intri} = 5.0, t(117)= 2.0, p<.04). This replicated the results of previous experiments. However, in the high eco-conscious condition, there was no significant difference of skepticism between communicated motives (M_{dual} = 4.2 vs. M_{intri}= 4.1, t(80)= -1.3, p<.21). Results from this experiment are depicted below.

Figure 14: Results for McDonalds- Skepticism



Purchase Intent. A two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between communicated motive (dual vs. intrinsic) and eco-consciousness (high vs low) on purchase intent, (F (1, 200) = 3.7, p<.05). In the low eco-conscious condition, there was a significant difference between conditions (M*dual* = 5.4 vs. M*intri* = 4.5, t(117)= -2.2, *p*<.03). This replicated the results of previous experiments with the general consumer. However, in the high eco-consciousness condition, there was no significant difference of purchase intent between communicated motives (M*dual* = 5.3 vs. M*intri*= 5.8, t(80)= .74, *p*<.46). Results from this experiment are depicted below.

Figure 15: Results for McDonalds- Purchase Intent



Moderated Mediation Analysis: To further examine the role of skepticism, I conducted a moderated mediation analysis (Hayes 2018, Model 8) examining whether the interaction between communicated motive (dual vs. intrinsic) and eco-consciousness (high vs. low) on purchase intent was mediated by skepticism. Results showed a significant model of moderated mediation (β = -.63, SE = .18, 95% [CI = -.7091 to -.0377]). More specifically, for low eco consumers, motive mediated skepticism, which in turn affected purchase intent (β = .20, SE = .11, 95% [CI = .0052 to .4063]). However, for high eco consumers, motive did not mediate skepticism, which in turn did not significantly impact purchase intent (β = -.17, SE = .14, 95% [CI = -.4416 to .0987]). This shows that with low eco-conscious consumers, there is a significant difference in reported skepticism and purchase intent, based on whether the motive was dual or intrinsic. However, high eco-conscious consumers are not as impacted by different motive conditions. Thus, there is no significant difference between the skepticism or the purchase intent for the high eco-conscious conditions. This follows previous research in the literature suggesting high-eco conscious consumers are less reactive to marketing messaging, as they are already "won over" on the benefits of supporting sustainability (Conick 2019, Haws et al. 2014).

Overall, Experiment 5 demonstrates the moderating role of eco-consciousness of the consumer. Results show that consumers high in eco-consciousness are not as impacted by the communicated motive, resulting in no statistical differences between dual vs. intrinsic, compared to a significant difference of the low eco-conscious consumer.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The current research contributes to the literature by proposing the use of a "dual motive" in marketing communications around sustainability. In these communications, the consumer gains an understanding of both the societal good and the benefit for the firm when sustainability efforts are enacted. With this approach, the firm's transparency leaves consumers less likely to doubt the effort or wonder about hidden motives. This is crucial, as previous research has shown how consumer attributions of CSR motives have an enormous impact on consumer responses to firms (Ellen et al. 2006). Thus, when the consumer is not skeptical of the brand or firm, they are more likely to support its initiatives. As shown across this research, when consumers were informed of both the firm and planet serving motive together, they were less skeptical and reported higher purchase intent.

This research has several findings to further the understanding of consumer perception to sustainability motives. First, consumers may be skeptical of communications that try to sound purely altruistic. Indeed, consumers today understand the need for profit maximization and become skeptical when brand messaging focuses only on the firm's own benevolence. Thus, the studies establish that lowering skepticism can be accomplished by communicating both the firm's benefits and society's benefits of the sustainability initiative. This helps reduce concerns that a firm has an ulterior motive with its sustainability efforts. Moreover, my findings suggest that this method of a dual motive communications can lead to higher purchase intent.

The present research provides the author's first known investigation of a brand or firm outwardly utilizing a dual motive its in consumer communications. These results indicate that (1) communicating both society and firm serving benefits together minimizes skepticism, (2) reduced skepticism with this approach leads to higher purchase intent, (3) the results appear to be moderated by the level of eco-consciousness of the consumer.

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Appendix 1
Experiment 1: Stimuli for Exotic Roast Coffee Brand

The largest (A small) coffee brand in the supermarket is testing plans to launch its new ‘Exotic Roast’ line of coffee. This coffee brand has been the #1 producer of coffee in the United States for almost 40 years (This coffee brand is not a huge player in the coffee market, but it has been in the United States for almost 40 years).

The new 'Exotic Roast' will be a line of (sustainability made and environmentally friendly) coffee blends. It will be priced at the same price as its other coffee variants and will be offered in Original, Hazelnut and Mocha. (The ‘Exotic Roast line’ will include: * Elimination of plastic in packaging through the use of recycled aluminum and PET bottles, * 90% will be ethnically sourced, * 68% reduction in waste sent to landfills, * 57% reduction in carbon emissions, * Water neutrality).

<u>Appendix 2</u>
Experiment 2: Stimuli for Bamboo Toothbrush & Profit Focus

Many people don't realize the harm that plastic toothbrushes cause to the environment. Each year, over 4 billion toothbrushes end up polluting our ecosystem, ending up in landfills.

With this in mind, a large (small) company in the U.S. has developed a completely plastic-free toothbrush. Made with Bamboo, Nylon 4 bristles and cardboard packaging, it will cost the same as plastic toothbrushes but without the environmental harm.

While most consumers are familiar with this brand, for the purposes of this research, we have been asked to keep its brand name confidential. It has a large (small) portion of the market share in this category and was created in the U.S. in 1978. This company is a profit (not-for-profit) organization (designed to serve a social purpose rather than making a profit).

Appendix 3
Experiment 3: Stimuli for Earthling Shampoo Brand

A large (small) shampoo company in the U.S. is launching a newly created shampoo (bottle called "Earthling" to try and make a difference with bettering the environment). The new shampoo (will be made of reclaimed and recycled plastics and will not contain any virgin plastic. It will be fully decomposable and recyclable). It will cost the same as regular shampoo (but without the environmental harm). It will be available for men & women, different hair types and styles.

While some consumers may be familiar with this brand, for the purposes of this research, we have been asked to keep its brand name confidential. It does (does not) have a large portion of the market share in this category.

<u>Appendix 4</u>
Experiment 4a: Stimuli for Grin Facebook Field Study

<u>Appendix 5</u>
Experiment 4b: Stimuli for Folgers Coffee Brand

Folgers coffee has been the #1 producer (a producer) of coffee in the United States for almost 40 years. The Folgers brand is synonymous with in-home coffee (quality roasted coffee). Even with the growth of retail coffee, Folgers is still the market leader (However, with the growth of retail coffee, Folgers is a small player). With consumer preferences hitting 87% of coffee consumption happening at home (With consumer preferences increasingly happening outside the home), Folgers is more than double the sales in the market to the next largest brands (Folgers is less than half the global coffee marketplace).

However, due to its dominance as the #1 coffee supplier (due to its position as a coffee supplier) and with the increased consumer demand for environmentally friendly practices, Folgers is starting its "Grown by generations, Enjoyed by generations" program. Folgers understands the growing importance of sustainability. Thus, Folgers plan includes:

- Converting its roasting facilities to solar power
- Commitment to local farmers including free training through farmer support centers in coffee-producing countries around the world
- Elimination of plastic in packaging through the use of recycled aluminum and PET bottles
- Increase sourcing of coffee to sustainability standards by 20%

<u>Appendix 6</u>
Experiment 5: Stimuli for Fast-Casual Restaurant & Certification

A large (A small) fast food restaurant just announced an initiative to help the planet. They know the world is changing- the population is growing, cities are expanding, and temperatures are rising, stretching basic resources like water and food to their limits.

As a big brand (Although they are a small brand), they know they can truly make a big impact. Their initiatives will include changes to how they operate their business.

-By 2024, 70% of all coffee will be certified fair trade (by Fairtrade America).
-By 2024, 70% of all beef will come from a fully verified sustainable supply chain (which will be certified through our official partnership with the Rainforest Alliance).
-By 2024, 70% of all packaging will come from compostable or recycled sources (working with our global partner, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

<u>Appendix 7</u>
Experiment 6: Stimuli for Beverage Company & Commitment

As a large beverage brand (small beverage brand), we want to enact change where we can. Our sustainability initiative will include changes to how we operate business:

- Achieve 100% (35%) sustainably sourced potato, whole corn and oats by 2022
- Achieve 100% (35%) sustainably sourced cane sugar by 2022
- Replenish 100% (35%) of the water we use in manufacturing operations by 2025
- Design 100% (35%) of packaging to be recyclable, compostable, or biodegradable by 2025

Appendix 8:
Experiment 1A: Stimuli for Tide Detergent

LATEST NEWS

Tide changes packaging to be more profitable & eco-friendly

Anne Stych, Contributing Writer
Dec 28, 2018, 9:38am EST Updated: Dec 28, 2018, 7:52pm EST

Tide, a brand owned by Proctor & Gamble (NYSE:PG), has introduced new packaging that's more profitable and eco-friendly.

The new Tide box is made with 30% less water and 60% less plastic, which means less waste for the environment and less packaging for the company to produce. Also, the new Tide box will not require re-boxing or bubble wrap and will be lighter than the normal plastic bottle. It truly is a win-win for the company and the planet– the package takes up less space, which means more loads of laundry can fit on fewer delivery trucks, meaning less greenhouse emissions.

"With more and more products arriving with online orders rather than a supermarket, our packaging needs to keep innovating to minimize our footprint on the planet and help with costs," Sandy Roman, vice president of P&G's North America Fabric Care business said. The new packaging will be found at Amazon, Walmart and all digital partners starting in January 2020.

Condition details:

1. *Control, Headline: "Tide changes packaging."*
2. *Intrinsic motive, Headline: "Tide changes packaging to be more eco-friendly."*
3. *Extrinsic motive, Headline: "Tide changes packaging to be more profitable."*
4. *Dual motive – see above visual of stimuli*

Appendix 9:
Experiment 1B: Stimuli for Stratto Coffee Chain

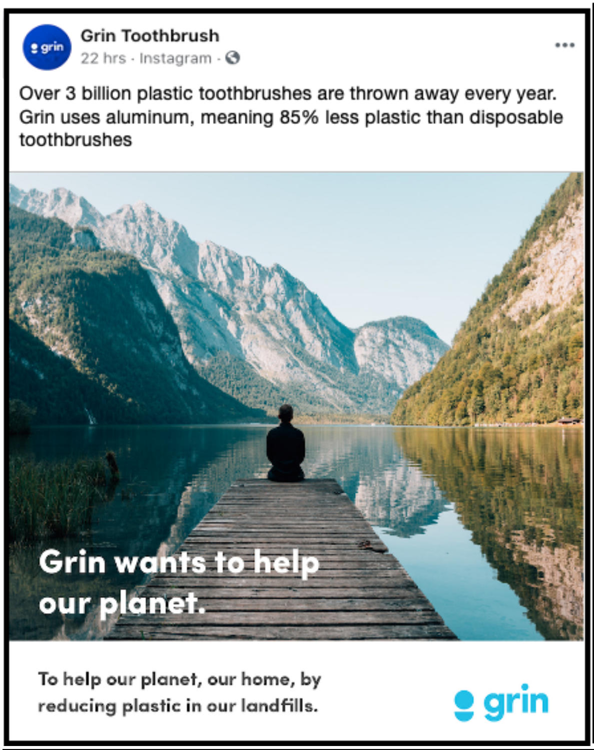
"Did you know that plastic can be found in most disposable coffee cups? Below details an effort by Stratto, a large Italian coffee chain."

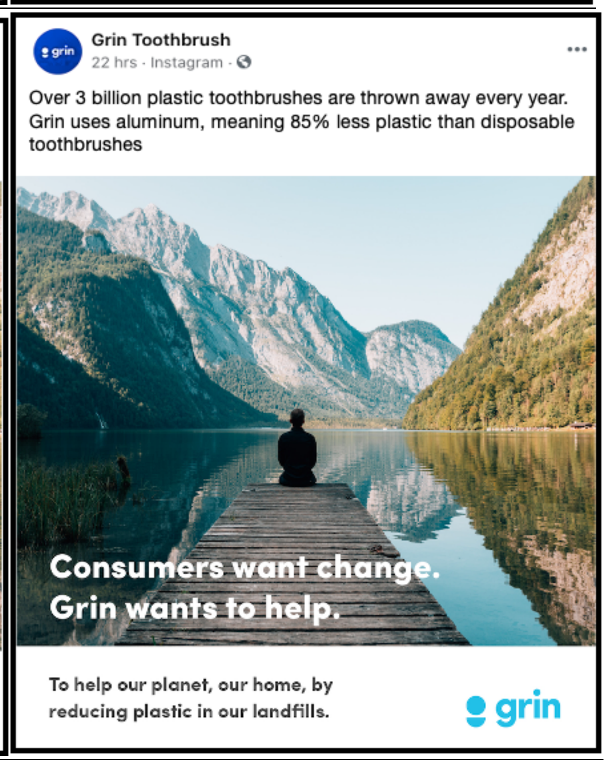
Condition 1
*Intrinsic (Intrinsic + Intrinsic): "*Stratto has decided to stop using standard disposable coffee cups because we want to help the environment and we want to lessen waste in landfills."
Condition 2
*Dual (Intrinsic + Extrinsic): "*Stratto has decided to stop using standard disposable coffee cups because we want to help the environment and our customers have requested it."
Condition 2
Extrinsic (Extrinsic + Extrinsic): "Stratto has decided to stop using standard disposable coffee cups because our customers have requested it and so has our financial community."

All: "Stratto will use our new compostable coffee cups, serving you the same quality coffee but without the unnecessary plastic. Same Stratto. Just better."

Appendix 10:

Experiment 2: Stimuli for Grin Toothbrush & Facebook Field Experiment





Appendix 11:
Experiment 3: Stimuli for Naria Sneakers Brand

Naria truly believes in environmentalism for a healthy planet *(and understands that being eco-friendly is important to its customers).*

Appendix 12:
Experiment 4: Stimuli for Bold Detergent Brand

LATEST NEWS

Bold changes packaging to help planet and profits

Anne Stych, Contributing Writer

December 5, 2019

Bold has introduced new packaging that can help the planet and profits. The new Bold box is made with 30% less water and 60% less plastic, which means less waste for the environment and less packaging for the company to produce. It truly is a win-win for the company and the planet– the package takes up less space, which means fewer delivery trucks and less greenhouse emissions. Also, the new Bold box will not require re-boxing or bubble wrap and will be lighter than the normal plastic bottle.

"With more and more products arriving with online orders rather than a supermarket, our packaging needs to keep innovating to minimize our footprint on the planet and help with costs," Sandy Roman, vice president of Bold's North America Fabric Care business said. The new packaging will be found at Amazon, Walmart and all digital partners starting in July 2020.

Condition details:

1. *Control – Headline: "Bold changes packaging." Copy: Bold has introduced new packaging. "With more and more products arriving with online orders rather than a supermarket, our packaging needs to keep innovating," Sandy Roman, vice president of Bold's North America Fabric Care business said.*
2. *Intrinsic motive – Headline: "Bold changes packaging to help the planet." Copy: To show how much it cares about helping the planet, Bold is changing its packaging to be more environmentally friendly. The new Bold box is made with 30% less water and 60% less plastic, which means less strain on the environment. Also, the new Bold box will not require re-boxing or bubble wrap and will be lighter than the normal plastic bottle. Good for the planet, the new Bold also takes up less space, which means fewer delivery trucks and less greenhouse emissions. "We care about the planet. We know this packaging change will help lessen the pressure on raw materials." Sandy Roman, vice president of Bold's North America Fabric Care business said.*
3. *Extrinsic motive – Headline: "Bold changes packaging to help profits." Copy: Bold has introduced new packaging that's more profitable for the business. The new Bold packaging box will be more compact and lighter - saving shipping and production costs for the company. The box was made specifically for partners such as Amazon, making it more compact and easier to deliver. It also includes less materials making it less costly for the company to produce. "With more and more products arriving with online orders rather than a supermarket, our packaging needs to keep costs down and make our business partners happy," Sandy Roman, vice president of Bold's North America Fabric Care business said. Some brand executives told the Journal that Bold increase profits with the packaging change.*
4. *Dual motive – see above visual of stimuli*

Note: All conditions ended with the following sentence - The new packaging will be found at Amazon, Walmart and all digital partners starting in July 2020.

Appendix 13:
Experiment 5: Stimuli for McDonald's Brand

Condition 1 – Intrinsic Motive:

Condition 2 – Dual Motive: