



ARE GREEN PRODUCTS THE NEXT STATUS BRAND?

*Exploring the Associations Between Sustainability Attributes,
Brand Image and Consumer Response*

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Abstract

Title of the dissertation: *“Are Green Products the Next Status Brand? Exploring the Associations Between Sustainability Attributes, Brand Image and Consumer Response”*

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Sustainability is becoming more and more relevant. Climate change and global warming are not anymore perceived as a problem to be dealt with only in the future but instead, a challenge of the present days. Therefore, both consumers and brands are more concerned than ever before about the environmental consequences of their actions and strive to reduce them by implementing green practices into their day-to-day life. The growing interest in eco-friendly products has raised companies' green marketing on social media. However, little is known about the impact of these sustainable strategies on brands' status and consumers' engagement in social networks. Consequently, the present dissertation aims to assess whether or not green content increases consumers' engagement with a brand and, therefore, the status of the brand on Instagram, as a function of industry. Results indicate that when analyzing the industries individually, users engage more with ecological posts on Instagram. It can be affirmed that sustainable posts work better in most industries, except in the technological one. For this reason, brands that belong to these industries should profit from an investment in sustainable communication on Instagram as the adoption of eco-friendly marketing strategies may improve their image and reputation with customers.

Keywords: Green Marketing, Sustainability, Status Brand, Greenwashing, Consumer Engagement, Instagram.

Sumário

Título da dissertação: “*Are Green Products the Next Status Brand? Exploring the Associations Between Sustainability Attributes, Brand Image and Consumer Response*”

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A sustentabilidade está a tornar-se cada vez mais relevante. As alterações climáticas e o aquecimento global já não são vistos como um problema a resolver apenas no futuro, mas sim como um desafio dos dias de hoje. Assim sendo, tanto os consumidores como as marcas estão mais preocupados do que nunca com as consequências ambientais das suas ações e esforçam-se por reduzi-las, através da implementação de práticas sustentáveis no seu dia-a-dia. O crescente interesse em produtos ecológicos levou a um aumento do marketing ecológico das empresas nas redes sociais. No entanto, pouco se sabe sobre o impacto dessas estratégias sustentáveis no status das marcas e no engagement dos consumidores nas redes sociais. Consequentemente, a presente dissertação visa avaliar se o conteúdo ecológico aumenta ou não o envolvimento dos consumidores com uma marca e, portanto, o status da marca no Instagram, em função da indústria. Os resultados indicam que, ao analisar as indústrias individualmente, os utilizadores interagem mais com publicações ecológicas no Instagram. Pode-se afirmar que os posts sustentáveis funcionam melhor na maioria das indústrias, sendo a exceção a indústria tecnológica. Por esta razão, as marcas que pertencem a estas indústrias devem investir em comunicação sustentável no Instagram, pois a adoção de estratégias de marketing eco-friendly pode melhorar sua imagem e reputação junto dos clientes.

Palavras-chave: Marketing Verde, Sustentabilidade, Status Brand, Greenwashing, Consumer Engagement, Instagram.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION8

 1.1 Background and Problem Statement.....8

 1.2 Aim and Scope9

 1.3 Research Methods.....10

 1.4 Relevance10

 1.5 Dissertation Outline10

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK12

 2.1 The boom of Green Marketing.....12

 Eco-labeling.....13

 Eco-Branding.....14

 Greenwashing15

 2.2 Green Products and Green Consumers16

 2.3 Status Brands.....17

 2.4 Social Media and Green Marketing18

 2.5 Conclusions and Research Hypotheses.....19

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY20

 3.1 Research Approach20

 3.2 Primary Data.....20

 Description of variables under study20

 3.3 Procedure and Data Collection.....22

 3.4 Data Analysis.....22

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION23

 4.1 Descriptive Analysis.....23

 4.2 The role of green vs. non-green posts on consumer engagement.....24

 4.3 Discussion25

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS28

 5.1 Conclusions and Industry Recommendations.....28

 5.2 Limitations and Future Research30

6. REFERENCES.....32

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. A Typology of Firms based on Environmental Performance and Communication..... 16
Figure 2. Research Model – Moderator Effect..... 21

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Differences between engagement with green and non-green posts across different industries
..... 24

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

Nowadays, people are more connected than ever before to brands on social networks. Brands are powerful tools to drive social change, they have become deeply involved in consumers' daily lives influencing the decisions they make. Through them, consumers can create value, personal identity, and a sense of individuality (O'Cass & Frost, 2002).

*“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is –
it is what consumers tell each other it is”*

Scott Cook, co-founder, Intuit

In a period dominated by social networks communication, this is the current business philosophy (A Grubor, Djokic, & Milovanov, 2017); where customers are not passive, but instead, clients demanding authenticity, sustainability, and transparency when making purchase decisions. They have experienced remarkable changes as a group in recent years, such as the passage from an almost compulsive consumption to a much more intentional one, supporting the saying that less is more (Pasamon, 2012).

Increasingly, sustainability begins to matter in the broader world. In a world where everyone has all the information at their fingertips about the environmental impact of a growing population, it is not surprising that people are aware of the fact that their buying behavior has a direct effect on several ecological problems (M. Laroche et al., 2001). In an attempt to alleviate these effects, consumers try to be more responsible towards the environment, support sustainable brands and are more open to less harmful products; When making purchase decisions, customers rely on how brands impact their lives and how these brands can contribute to the world (Fromm, 2017). This ecological behavior is currently a market trend that affects the attractiveness of the brand. Therefore, brands must take the initiative by making their products greener; They do not need to be perfect, but authentic and honest about their impacts (Iannuzzi, 2017).

On the other hand, it is also important to highlight that people buy eco-friendly products and it is not always because they love the environment (Keeney, 2013) but because sustainable consumption is a status' indicator and is not necessarily related to environmental concerns (Polo, 2015). By buying green and sustainable products, people make a statement and want to benefit from the social status obtained when purchasing a product that is environmentally friendly. Being eco-friendly can improve people's reputation because being green shows that you care about and are responsible for the environment, consumers gain recognition among others because they are perceived to be altruistic

(Smith & Brower, 2012). Furthermore, even if people do not bother about global warming, they do care about what other people think of them, and nobody wants to be the one who is environmentally feckless (Vaughan, 2010). Therefore, people might buy sustainable products conspicuously to reflect higher social status. However, it is important to emphasize that eco-friendly products tend to be more expensive than conventional ones. Consequently, these green brands are already targeting these conspicuous consumers.

Some studies claim that people are willing to pay higher prices for environmentally friendly products or services compared to conventional ones, for example, a report by Nielsen noted that 73% of millennials are willing to pay more for a green product (Fromm, 2017). Green and sustainable brands are more likely to attract the attention of high-status customers, not only because of their high prices but because they are unique products since most of them are ethical, sustainable or even handmade. By association, these brands become, of course, high-status themselves.

1.2 Aim and Scope

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold: To explore the extent to which “eco-friendly” brands position themselves as status givers for consumers in social media, and whether consumers react positively to that. In order to investigate the link between sustainability of products and digital and social media marketing communities, I focused on whether advertisement of ecological products act as motivators for engaging with brands on Social Media.

To achieve this aim, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1. *Do new green products posts increase customers' engagement with a brand on Instagram?*

RQ2. *Does the engagement to sustainable posts change according to the industry?*

This dissertation strives to assess whether or not green content increases the status of a brand and how it may vary within different industries. Instagram is the third most used social media platform (Statista, 2018), however it is the most used among millennials (Pew Research Center, 2018). This generation guides the trends of the global market, interacts only with brands that are transparent, and is willing to pay more for a product that is sustainable (Fromm, 2017). Furthermore, 75% of Instagram users take action after visiting a post (Kemp, 2018), Instagram is already the main social network for several influential brands, and 90% of social media users try to reach out to companies on social media (Bedgood, 2016). Hence the reason why Instagram was the chosen platform for this study.

1.3 Research Methods

To get a better understanding and with the purpose of answering the research questions above mentioned, a quantitative research approach was pursued. Specifically, primary quantitative data from a set of green and non-green publications on Instagram were collected manually and statistically analyzed. All posts and campaigns were mainly from brands from different industries that promoted new sustainable products. Taking into consideration the goal of this study *consumer engagement* was established as the dependent variable, and it is measured by the number of likes, views, and comments placed on each Instagram post.

1.4 Relevance

Being eco-friendly implies a positive impact on brands' positioning and sales, and it is important to highlight that sustainability does not have to be a sacrifice of profits (Iannuzzi, 2017). Thus, a better understanding of how "eco-friendly" brands position themselves as status-holders in social media should have a positive impact on brands' image and its relationship with consumers. Accordingly, this dissertation should provide marketing and brand managers with a clearer idea of which industries will benefit the most from promoting sustainability on social networks and which are the key factors that have the greatest impact on the way people perceive eco-brands on Instagram. It should also help marketers develop effective content strategies on social media that can lead to an increase in brand image and loyalty and, ultimately, more sales and revenues.

It is important to emphasize that the consequences of being ecological in social networks on brands' status have not yet been investigated to a large extent. Hence, from an academic perspective, this dissertation contributes to future research in this field. On the other hand, this thesis contributes to existing studies on the consumer's attitude toward environmentally friendly products through the analysis of the impact of green products' publications on Instagram, and how viewers react to it.

1.5 Dissertation Outline

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the present dissertation and explains the importance and motivations behind the chosen topic. Chapter 2 aims to explore what is meant by Green Marketing and its strategies, with emphasis on the role of Eco-labeling and Eco-branding, along with Greenwashing; as well as to review existing literature on issues related to Green Products and Consumers, and Status Brands on social media, with the hope of understanding what is essential when adopting green strategies. Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach adopted in this study to test the hypotheses and to answer the research questions proposed. This chapter also details the data collection methods and the data analysis tools used in this study. Chapter 4 reports and discusses the

main results obtained from the statistical analysis, where it can be found that new eco-friendly products only improve the status of brands in specific industries. Finally, chapter 5 draws the main conclusions of this dissertation and its potential limitations and presents some recommendations for future research that relate to this theme.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This Chapter is dedicated to present the current state of the art on ecology, such as green marketing, green consumers, green products and brands, and status brands. Conclusions are drawn in order to develop the hypotheses regarding the relevant connection types further analyzed.

2.1 The boom of Green Marketing

More than 30 years ago, the green marketing movement began to emerge. In those days, in the late 80s and early 90s, it was supposed to be a trend that would soon vanish. However, this was not the case, as customers were becoming more socially conscious and began buying “green” products (Smith & Brower, 2012). The effects of climate change also did its job on raising awareness for the importance of going green. Since its inception, green marketing has gone through three different stages: the first was the ecological phase, where the activities were pointed at resisting the growing environmental problems and offer solutions for these problems. The environmental stage was the second, where the focus was the establishment of cleaner technologies. Last but not least, the sustainable phase, which still predominates (Ribeiro, 2017); It has arrived at the end of the 90s and has involved a wide range of activities, such as modification of products and packaging as well as changes in processes of production and advertising (Polonsky, 1994).

Nowadays, green marketing, also known as environmental marketing or ecological marketing, is a fundamental element of marketing research. Green marketing is a favorable option for companies to promote their products and at the same time contribute to the environment. The American Marketing Association defines *Green Marketing* as “the development and marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe” (American Marketing Association, 2018).

Several marketing concepts, such as social marketing or relationship marketing, have evolved leading to the concept of *green marketing* that has helped brands adopt sustainability strategies (Aguilera, 2013). It is not an easy term to define since many definitions are interrelated and differ from each other. Unluckily, most people believe that green marketing applies only to the promotion of products with environmental attributes (Preeti, Lecturer, & Singh, 2010). However, green marketing is a broader concept, which can be implemented in consumer and industrial goods, and even services (Polonsky, 1994). According to Donald Fuller (Sustainable Marketing: Managerial-Ecological Issues, 1999) green marketing is based on the process of planning, implementing and managing the development, pricing, promotion and distribution of products in a manner that satisfies the criteria of meeting customer needs, achieving organizational goals, and linking these processes to the ecosystem. Following this definition, green marketing is a complicated subject that addresses many

concepts within an organization, from operations management to Corporate Social Responsibility (Ventura, 2016).

Sustainable marketing aims to demonstrate to customers the value of preserving the environment in the context of product waste and create the natural need to be environmentally responsible (Moravcikova, Krizanova, Kliestikova, & Rypakova, 2017). Nevertheless, consumers are still doubtful of some brands' communications related to environmental issues. The main reason for this skepticism toward green marketing is that sometimes can be hard to see or verify the benefits of sustainable consumption, and due to false marketing claims regarding their environmental performance (Smith & Brower, 2012). Companies that use green marketing must ensure that their actions do not fool customers (Polonsky, 1994); Customers do not expect brands to be perfect, but real (Iannuzzi, 2017).

Green Marketing is a means with which brands convey not only their concern for the environment but also their long-term goals, which is to reach and guarantee sustainable growth. The chance to accomplish its objectives is the main reason for companies to implement green marketing, along with other driving forces, such as the moral obligation of a company, social pressure, the potential to improve incomes and create a positive image (Ribeiro, 2017). On the other hand, the adoption of eco-friendly marketing strategies may or may not increase a firm's financial performance, but it may improve its image and reputation with customers (Smith & Brower, 2012).

Furthermore, the eco-friendly marketing strategy must fulfill two characteristics: Offer a product that competently meets the needs of consumers with minimal negative repercussions on the environment and, together with this, to create a perception in the minds of consumers to highlight the quality of the product and the compromise of the company with the environment (Ribeiro, 2017). These green strategies can yield valuable benefits for both individuals and organizations, along with the environment's protection. Eco-marketing strategies are a means for companies to manage the differentiation of products and are of great significance in the change of consumer behavior towards products and services that respect the environment (Polo, 2015).

Eco-labeling

Among the eco-friendly marketing tools, it can be found the promotion of eco-labels. The eco-labeling on products is an efficient way of transmitting to the consumer the green benefits and attributes of the product and its benefits for society and the planet (Preeti et al., 2010). Eco-labels promote goods with reduced environmental repercussions and strive to provide customers with better data about their environmental impact (Aguilera, 2013). Eco-labeling aims to help customers making

a more informed decision during the shopping experience; the point of eco-labels lies in their direct influence on consumers' choices to buy green products. The principal goal of eco-labeling is to project a green image, promote green consumerism, and diminish the environmental information gap.

It has been suggested that eco-labels effectively raise sustainability's awareness: several studies showed that when customers learn about eco-labels, they respond more positively to the purchase of sustainable products (Cherian & Jacob, 2012; Aguilera, 2013). However, some authors affirm that although eco-labels can be useful, their efficiency to improve eco-friendly products' sales is inconclusive (Smith & Brower, 2012). Hence, consumers' knowledge of eco-labeling does not necessarily lead to their eco-friendly purchasing decisions (Cherian & Jacob, 2012).

Eco-Branding

Branding strategies are crucial to increase positive attitudes toward brands, and they became one of the most important marketing tools, attempting to get product differentiation meeting the emotional and functional needs of the consumer (Aguilera, 2013). Brands are perceived by consumers as an added value, a unique experience, and a promise fulfilled. Through them, customers can communicate their concerns, beliefs, preferences and overall personality (Aleksandar Grubor & Milovanov, 2017).

According to Hartmann *et al.* (2005) positioning a brand as a *green* implies a continuous communication and differentiation of the brand of its competitors through its ecological attributes. Brands can be positioned by functional attributes and by emotional benefits. Green positioning based on functional characteristics gives information about products' green attributes and should be based on the relevant environmental benefits of the product compared to conventional products. On the other hand, green positioning can also be based on three different types of emotional values (Hartmann *et al.*, 2005): A feeling of well-being (acting altruistically), benefits of self-expression (conspicuous consumption), and benefits related to nature (love toward nature).

Eco-branding is a branding approach focused on improving the ecological attributes of products (Aguilera, 2013). Green brands can be defined as those that behave in an eco-friendly way, being fully committed to the preservation of nature (Ribeiro, 2017). Grubor & Milovanov (2017) highlight that green brands are “ecological” (minimize the negative impact on the environment), “fair” (avoid the promotion of unsustainable practices), and “economic” (promote economic development). According to these authors, the brands differ as a function of their degree of "greenness", therefore, three categories can be differentiated: 1) green as core value, 2) green integrated in core values, and 3) green values as the guarantee.

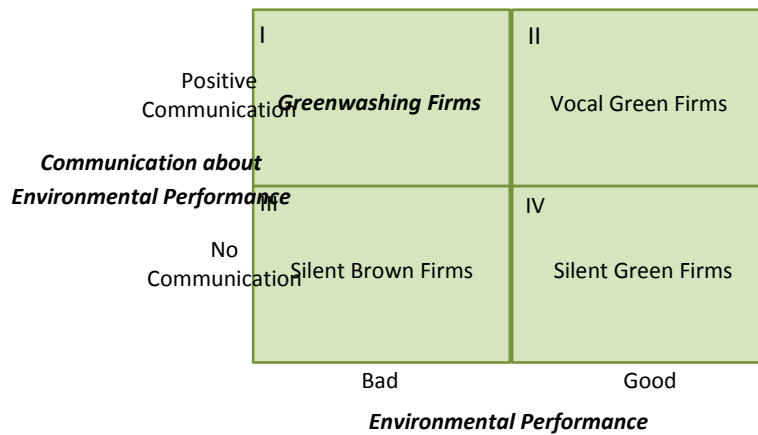
The role of sustainable branding is increasingly important and is reflected in several benefits that are incorporated into this concept. However, eco-branding has a great challenge, which is to deal with the breach between the performance of companies and the thought of the customer. There are two types of gaps, positive and negative; the first refers to a higher sustainable yield than the perception that consumers have of those practices and vice versa in the negative one. Green branding is more than an eco-labeling, a convincing and reliable communication is essential for the process (Aleksandar Grubor & Milovanov, 2017).

In short, among green marketing tools, both *eco-labeling* and *eco-branding*, can be easily found. Also, companies use both in order to obtain product differentiation, to be perceived as environmentally responsible and to meet customers' expectations. These tools are essential when adopting eco-friendly marketing, because they allow brands to project a sustainable image and to promote green consumerism. On the other hand, there are several challenges that companies must overcome when putting into practice green strategies, such as avoid *greenwashing*, to avoid jeopardizing the positive image that the brand wants to convey (Ribeiro, 2017).

Greenwashing

Greenwashing can be defined as follows: The act of misleading consumers regarding a company's environmental practices or the benefits of a product or service (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013). Meaning, it is the inconsistency between a company's message regarding the environment and its actual practice, a false philanthropy.

Firms use green marketing to manipulate consumers' perceptions, convincing them that the company and its products are sustainable. A simple explanation is that the expression of environmental concerns can be a competitive advantage for many companies. Therefore, some brands promote themselves as eco-friendly, even though they have a low environmental performance. These are called the *greenwashing* organizations (Ventura, 2016). On the other hand, according to Delmas and Burbano (2011), it is also possible to find three other types of organizations, based on two environmental dimensions: environmental performance, and communication on environmental performance. First, *vocal green* companies, combine good environmental performance with positive communication about their environmental performance. Second, companies that do not communicate their good environmental performance are the *silent green* organizations. The last category, or the *silent brown* firms, concerns those that have a low environmental performance but avoid communicating it.



Source: (Delmas & Burbano, 2011)

FIGURE 1. A Typology of Firms based on Environmental Performance and Communication.

This typology is a simplification of reality. In practice, the environmental performance of a company is more complicated than being good or bad, since it often involves many different aspects that are not acknowledged in Figure 1 (De Jong, Harkink, & Barth, 2018).

Although all the typologies have their pros and cons, greenwashing carries another level of concern, the degree of uncertainty. Consumers get suspicious and feel insecure and ambivalent towards companies high in their environmental-friendly claims. Due to the lack of consistency between the green message of a company and what it truly does, customers tend to be prudent when assessing its ecological communication. In general, they can detect fake attempts to protect the environment and refuse brands that communicate their environmental concerns in an insecure, inaccurate or incomplete manner (Ventura, 2016). Consequently, customers mistrust both the brand and its green products.

2.2 Green Products and Green Consumers

In recent years, clients have become more involved in areas of social and moral interest. Consumers' purchasing decisions reveal not just price and quality preferences, but also social and ethical values, as evidenced by the extraordinary growth in the global market for eco-friendly products. Organizations have tried to reply to the increasing consumers' environmental concern with the introduction of a variety of environmentally friendly products, ranging from energy-efficient appliances to compostable diapers (Preeti et al., 2010).

All products can have a minimum negative impact on the environment, so it is not a simple task to define one hundred percent eco-friendly products. Although green products still have an effect on the environment, but it is considerably reduced compared to products manufactured in a conventional process (Preeti et al., 2010). Green products are generally described as those with low environmental

damage or, more precisely, as products that their manufacturing, transportation and communication processes employ concrete materials and techniques to decrease their environmental impact (Ventura, 2016). Environmental-friendly activities can range from products that are built in an eco-friendly way to lifestyle changes that are meant to benefit the environment. Green products are generally durable, non-toxic, made from recycled materials or minimally packed (Ribeiro, 2017). Even though customers are more conscious about green products, those who consider necessary to seek and purchase such products still remain a niche market – “the green consumers” (Preeti et al., 2010).

The green consumers are those consumers who care about the environmental consequences of their actions and attempt to decrease them through high levels of sustainable consumption. On the other hand, it is also important to emphasize that the fact that a consumer is concerned about ecological problems does not mean that he or she will buy green products. Although customers are increasingly concerned with the environment, they do not translate their concerns into green products’ purchases. As a matter of fact, "action-value gap" is the name of this difference between the client's intention and the client's action (Ventura, 2016).

Customers do care about the environment but are not always willing to pay a higher price just because it is an eco-friendly product (Ribeiro, 2017); It must deliver some additional value to justify the payment. Therefore, green consumers are only willing to pay more for green products, if these products can meet their needs and if the quality of the products is equivalent to that of other competitors.

2.3 Status Brands

Brands are deeply involved in consumers’ daily lives and the decisions they make. Through them, consumers can create value, personal identity, and a sense of individuality. Brands generate value for clients through possible benefits of recognition of significant people, produces positive feelings, support self-expression, along with the sensation of having personal “good taste” in choosing the brand (O’Cass & Frost, 2002).

The concept of status consumption is where customers are motivated by the need for status in their lives and long for status symbols. Brands that improve the status can be used to an end, as to impress others through its symbolism. Status brands have higher perceived quality, luxury or prestige attributed to them and their consumption (O’Cass & Frost, 2002). The average customer knows status brands. It is not necessary to be particularly familiar with the status brand or product to recognize it when the customer sees it. Status brands are in a category labeled *exclusive*. Exclusivity is one of the main signs to set the status of a brand and is mainly due to its price. These brands tend to be more

expensive and, for this reason, some consumers who would like to buy them are excluded (O’Cass & Frost, 2002).

Dion and Borraz (2017) highlight that brands are not just status pointers, but also make consumers adopt a position in the social hierarchy. While some statuses communicate explicitly through visible codes, such as brand logos, others communicate implicitly through subtle signs, such as iconic design or specific materials. The same perception is true for green products, once green brands are easily associated to a consumers’ high reputation. Some studies reveal socially oriented motives as a dominant impulse behind eco-friendly shopping. People buy ecological products instead of self-serving products due to status reasons. When purchasing a sustainable product that demands a bit of sacrifice, people are showing willingness to incur costs to aid the environment and community; Therefore this act of altruism can raise their social status (Smith & Brower, 2012).

2.4 Social Media and Green Marketing

In the past few years, we have seen a gigantic shift on the replacement of conventional marketing. Marketing strategies entail social networks and online communities where users play a central role on their experience sharing and reviews, contributing with an electronic word of mouth (WOM) to the online reputation of companies (Aguilera, 2013).

Social networks increased the efficacy in which companies communicate and strengthen their brand identity, encouraging consumers' interactions with the brand. With the growing popularity of the Internet and social networks applications, consumers readily share their shopping experiences. However, this greater visibility of the consumer experience can have positive and negative effects on a brand, for instance, the amount and persistence of WOM could, indeed, damage the image of a brand, which can influence customers’ trust and loyalty (So, Wu, Xiong, & King, 2018).

On the other hand, social networks have facilitated the observation of the behavior of many companies since these behaviors are a reflection of what they are doing in real life. Thus, social media pose a powerful way of promoting sustainability, and it has become a challenge for a growing number of companies, which are currently using social media to give advice, to mention difficulties and admit faults when adopting eco-friendly behaviors. Social networks support companies' green marketing strategies and help them share their current practices to make them more transparent. There is a remarkable involvement of companies with ecological strategies in social media, which aim is to promote sustainability, engage with people and influence them to reduce their environmental impacts. Through social networks, companies can penetrate consumers' beliefs and behaviors and encourage them towards greener lifestyles. The main goal of adopting green strategies on social media is to

increase people's awareness of the environment and, allow individuals to find environmental news, companies' sustainable practices, and even force companies to improve their habits (Aguilera, 2013).

2.5 Conclusions and Research Hypotheses

The findings of this literature review are briefly summarized.

Green Marketing is in vogue in today's business world. Consumers worry more than ever about how products are manufactured, and their expectations, demands, and standards are rising; Thus, brands have no choice but to contemplate and embrace green practices, they are expected to alleviate the harm to the environment and to adopt sustainable practices (Lai, Cheng, & Tang, 2010). Moreover, organizations have understood that creating an eco-friendly image would distinguish them from their competitors (Sinha & Chaudhuri, 2014). This sustainable marketing can be defined as the marketing of products that are supposed to be safe for the environment and, among its tools, it can be found *eco-labeling* and *eco-branding*, both used by companies to obtain product differentiation, be perceived as environmentally responsible and meet customers' expectations. On the other hand, when it comes to putting into practice green strategies, there are several challenges that companies must overcome, such as avoid *greenwashing*, which is the incoherence between a company's message regarding the environment and its actual practice.

However, little is known yet about the impact of sustainable marketing on Instagram and how users react to it. The goal of this study is to assess whether or not green content increases the status of a brand and how it may vary across different industries. Consequently, to evaluate this, two hypotheses were formulated:

H₁: *Brands' green posts on Instagram have higher engagement than non-green posts.*

H₂: *Consumers' engagement to green posts changes according to the industry.*

These hypotheses were the main object of study of the research that followed. Gaining a better understanding about the use of social networks to promote sustainability and the impact of green content on Instagram will help increase audience interactions with a brand and, therefore, raise brand's engagement, which translates into an increase in the brand's status.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Here, I will present the methodological approach adopted in this study to test the hypotheses introduced in Chapter 2 and to answer to the research questions proposed in Chapter 1. Therefore, the research approach, sampling process, data collection methods, and the data analysis tools used in this study are described here.

3.1 Research Approach

According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), three main types of research proposals can be distinguished: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. An exploratory approach attempts to identify and describe a new and intricate problem that has not been previously studied. Secondly, descriptive analysis explains in detail an existing and known phenomenon. Finally, explanatory research is carried out when it is necessary to determine the causal relationships among variables, and sufficient theory is available on the existent problem.

This dissertation carried out a descriptive approach to determine whether the launch of new green products increases the engagement of customers with a brand on Instagram. Additionally, a quantitative approach was used to obtain more accurate conclusions about the relation between green products' content and likes, comments, and views. The quantitative data was collected manually directly from the brands' social media platforms. Instagram data was analyzed to examine the reach and the user engagement of green posts.

3.2 Primary Data

Primary data was manually collected through a set of green and non-green publication posts on Instagram and statistically analyzed, with the goal of answer if the new green products generate a greater engagement to a brand and if this changes according to the sector within the industry.

Description of variables under study

At first glance, the proposed framework is quite simple, since it just considers the relation between the independent variable "*content type*" (green vs. non-green) and the dependent variable "*consumer engagement*", as a function of a moderator variable, the "*industry type*". The insertion of the moderator variable is especially relevant since customers reactions to the communications related to the brand may change depending on the industry.

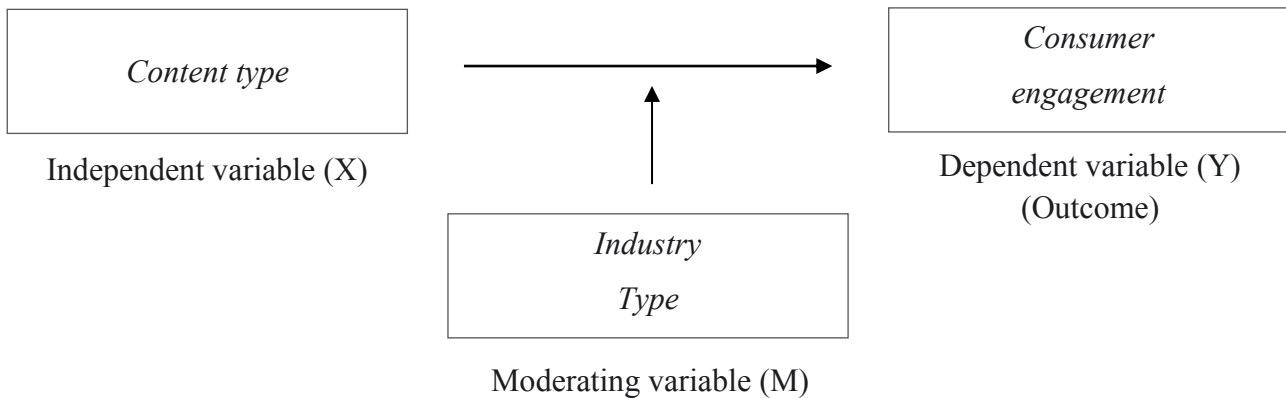


FIGURE 2. Research Model – Moderator Effect.

Independent Variables

Content type was entered as a factor, or as an independent variable, and is an important category when it comes to understanding why some publications have greater customers engagement than others. The variable *content type* refers to whether the selected posts are green or non-green; To be considered green, the chosen publication must have a sustainable product or message about sustainability in it.

Furthermore, three categorical independent variables can be found in the study, *media type*, *product*, and *industry*. The *media type* corresponds a dichotomous variable, assessing whether the post is an image or a video, and the product variable is also dichotomous, and it refers to whether it is a campaign or a product post; while the *industry* variable relates to the activity to which the brand studied belongs, and five different subtypes of industries (Apparel: n = 22, Technology: n = 14, Food: n = 21, Cars: n = 17, Cosmetics: n = 15) were identified.

Dependent Variable

This dissertation aims to answer the research question regarding eco-friendly content engagement, but first, it is necessary to define the metrics to measure the performance.

Thus, the consumer engagement variable was comprised of the total number of two of the following indicators: 1) likes, 2) comments or 3) views. For each post, individuals can express whether or not they liked it (indicator 1). If the post is a picture, there is the possibility to comment it (indicator 2). If the post is a video, there is the possibility to watch it (indicator 3). Depending of the type of post, I combined the available indicators (either indicators 1 and 2 or indicators 1 and 3), after transforming their original values to a ranked index. Thus, consumer engagement was comprised of the average of the available indicators, for both green and non-green posts.

3.3 Procedure and Data Collection

Certain conditions must be met in order to have reliable research, such as that the selected brands should be present in the Portuguese market and be from different industries. In addition, these brands must have a green campaign ongoing on Instagram. In order to reduce posts' selection bias, the posts included in this dissertation had to be the brand's last sustainable *campaign* or *product* post. Additionally, for the non-green post selection, considered the baseline comparison, it was selected the immediately previous post that advertised non-green products or campaigns.

Following, data from several posts were collected manually and compiled into an SPSS data set. A total of 89 observations were collected from Instagram. For each brand considered, both green and non-green posts were collected. Then, different brands' industries were identified and categorized (e.g., Apparel, Technology, Food, Cars, and Cosmetics); and the publication is classified into whether it is a video or an image and whether it is a campaign or a product post. Finally, all the indicators (likes, comments and/or views) were collected for both green and non-green posts.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered was compiled into an SPSS data set, and a repeated measures ANOVA was the statistical technique used to analyze the data and test the hypothesis formulated in Chapter 2. In this type of analysis, a variable is measured several times to determine the effect of a treatment (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) which is the principal purpose of this dissertation: to investigate the link between green posts, industry and consumers' engagement with a brand.

Taking into account the design, the content type was a within-subjects factor (green vs. non-green), industry was a between-subjects factor (Apparel, Technology, Food, Cars, and Cosmetics) and consumer engagement was the dependent variable.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following chapter reports and discusses the main results obtained from the statistical analysis to determine if new green products increase customers' engagement with a brand on Instagram and if this engagement varies according to the industry.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

First, for a more in-depth and detailed study, a descriptive analysis was carried out. This analysis was performed with the raw values and not with the ranked ones in order to obtain an outcome closer to reality. The purpose of this analysis was to examine the commitment to these green versus non-green posts in the different industries. Through paired sample *t*-tests, it was showed that the means between green and non-green posts were significantly different for most industries. The results of the *t*-test, including means, *t*- and *p*-values are presented below in Table 1.

The descriptive analysis exhibits the data for consumers' engagement with green and non-green posts in diverse industries. As stated before, there are a total of 89 observations, with the Apparel industry having the highest number of observations ($n = 22$). Results showed that, when analyzing the industries individually, it can be concluded that green engagement is higher than non-green engagement in most industries, except in the technological one. The apparel industry ($M = 65297.07$, $SD = 87184.88$) is the one with the highest engagement to sustainable posts, which was expected, as Instagram is the main social media channel for fashion brands, and people tend to be more involved with apparel brands on this social network. The green engagement of this industry is more than twenty times greater than that of the technology industry ($M = 2831.89$, $SD = 2062.67$). This engagement was expected to be lower in this category since consumers value more other factors than sustainability when it comes to technology products, such as performance, functionality or design. The next industry with the greatest green engagement is the cars industry ($M = 27561.59$, $SD = 37515.80$). The cars industry is followed by the cosmetics industry, the food industry and, lastly, the technology industry. On the other hand, when it comes to non-green posts, the food industry reflects the lowest engagement ($M = 2390.70$, $SD = 4256.23$), while the apparel industry remains the one with the greatest involvement ($M = 35624.02$, $SD = 54371.18$).

TABLE 1. Differences between engagement with green and non-green posts across different industries.

Industry	Green Content		Non-green Content	<i>t</i> -test (<i>p</i> -value)
<i>Apparel</i>	65297.07	>	35624.02	2.43 (.024)
<i>Technology</i>	2831.89	<	4116.93	-1.76 (.102)
<i>Food</i>	6515.86	>	2390.70	2.48 (.022)
<i>Cars</i>	27561.59	>	19732.44	2.95 (.009)
<i>Cosmetics</i>	10126.03	>	5546.03	3.44 (.004)

On the other hand, as indicated above, a repeated measures ANOVA model was carried out to test the hypotheses and understand how the type of industry could influence the level of engagement. This model involves a mixed design of a between-subjects factor (industry type) and a within-subjects factor (content type). The dependent variable was engagement with the post.

4.2 The role of green vs. non-green posts on consumer engagement

I aimed to test the hypothesis that green posts, when compared to non-green post, have a higher consumer engagement, specifically for non-technological industries. As aforementioned, a repeated-measures ANOVA, entering content type (green vs. non-green posts) as the within-subjects factor, industry type (apparel vs. technology vs. food vs. cars vs. cosmetics) as the between-subjects factor and consumer engagement as the dependent variable. Results yielded a statistically significant interaction effect of content type \times industry on consumer engagement, $F(4, 84) = 14.09, p < .001$. The main effect of content type was not statistically significant, $F < 1, p = .348$, neither was the main effect of industry, $F(4, 84) = 1.63, p = .174$. When decomposing the interaction, simple pairwise comparisons revealed that green engagement is higher than non-green engagement in most industries, except in the technological one. The cosmetics industry is the one with the highest engagement to sustainable posts, almost twice as much as the technology industry. For the industry of cosmetics, green engagement by consumers ($M = 50.95, SE = 5.49$) was higher than non-green engagement ($M = 46.63, SE = 5.76, F(1, 84) = 5.36, p = .023$). On the contrary, for the technology industry, consumers engaged more in non-green ($M = 28.00, SE = 5.68$) than in green posts ($M = 41.20, SE = 5.96, F(1, 84) = 46.80, p < .001$). The next industry with the greatest green engagement is the apparel industry, where consumers engaged more in green ($M = 45.98, SE = 4.53$) than in non-green posts ($M = 44.49, SE = 4.75, F < 1, p = .336$). For the cars industry, consumers were a little more engaged with green posts ($M = 42.84, SE = 5.15$) than with non-green ones ($M = 41.84, SE = 5.41, F < 1, p = .569$).

Lastly, in the case of the food industry, consumers commitment to green posts ($M = 35.12$, $SE = 4.64$) was higher than for non-green posts ($M = 32.40$, $SE = 4.86$, $F(1, 84) = 2.99$, $p = .087$).

In summary, both variables, Content type and Industry, individually are not significant. Nevertheless, the interaction between both variables is significant, therefore, the engagement to sustainable products varies according to the industry.

4.3 Discussion

The principal goal of this study was to determine if new green products posts had any impact on customers' engagement with a brand and if this change according to the industry. The analysis carried out endeavored to answer the two research questions and to test the respective hypotheses presented in Chapters 1-2.

Do green posts on Instagram have higher consumer engagement than non-green posts?

The findings from my dissertation showed that the type of content from posts do not, alone, generate more consumers' engagement with a brand on Instagram. Descriptive statistics showed that, on average, engagement is greater when posts are sustainable. However, this is true for almost all the industries addressed here, but not for the technological industry, where the non-green engagement is higher than the green engagement. Although I saw this tendency in the mean levels and dispersion measures, the differences between these indicators did not reach statistical significance, suggesting a failure to reject the null hypothesis. Specifically, it means that when taking only in consideration green posts on Instagram, they do not raise consumer engagement, when directly compared to non-green posts.

Do consumer engagement towards green posts changes according to the industry type?

In my dissertation, I was particularly interested in a more detailed analysis considering industry, as different types of industries represent different challenges for the environment. Not only because of the type of materials they use, but also because of the products durability. For example, a pair of jeans may be usable for a great amount of time whereas a cell phone may be outdated in one or two years. The food industry poses a different challenge, as the world deals with a food waste that is unsustainable in the long run, and that is why some supermarkets are running campaigns to reuse food by turning it, for example, into jams. In the case of the cosmetics industry, with the increase in plastic waste worldwide, several cosmetics brands are feeling the pressure to take the initiative by reducing their plastic pollution. Therefore, looking at the type of industry becomes highly relevant. Aligned with my initial predictions, these findings showed that consumers' engagement to green posts varies across industries. Specifically, posts about green products on Instagram did not, *per se*, increase

customers' engagement with a brand. Outcomes showed that users engaged in the same way with green and non-green publications. However, this engagement depended on the type of industry to which the brand belongs. The industry showed to be crucial when interpreting the importance of the type of post, *green* or *non-green*. The commitment to eco-friendly publications is higher in the apparel and cosmetics industries. On the other hand, in the technology industry, the non-green engagement was higher than the green one. Also, because customers value more other factors than sustainability when it comes to technology products, such as performance or functionality. Customers who like technology products value speed over sustainability, especially if being green means they have to give up other essential features. They are not going to change their behavior towards the environment if companies do not change first. Thus, it is up to companies to promote and initiate change, so that customers do the same. Technology industries must change. This shift is needed and timewise. Besides, it's not that they have any other choice, over time, brands have to become greener.

On the contrary, consumers are more demanding with the cosmetics industry. One possible reason could be that they are more informed than ever about animal abuse practices in this industry. This generation cares about animal welfare. For example, since 2009 it has been forbidden to carry out animal testing on any cosmetic product within the European Union and to sell it (European Chemicals Agency, 2014), although there may be some exceptions, the vast majority of cosmetic brands have been forced to become eco-friendly. Consumers are therefore more committed to cruelty-free posts from brands operating in these sectors.

Another explanation for the reduced commitment to eco-friendly posts in some industries is that, in this study, users are reacting to brands that launch new sustainable products within their offer in different industries, not to brands that are considered green. Users may perceive these brands' eco-friendly publications as a strategy of greenwashing, which causes a lower commitment with these publications than with conventional posts (Ventura, 2016). Therefore, in line with academic literature, customers are skeptical towards brands' ecological publications since sometimes it can be difficult to see or verify the benefits of sustainability (Smith & Brower, 2012). Sustainable products within the cosmetics and apparel industries could be easier to recognize or verify through subtle signs, such as specific materials, than in the technology industry.

On the other hand, on the basis of the results, it could be assumed that consumers' engagement with green posts may vary according to gender; specifically, that females engage more with eco-friendly posts than males. Without falling into a cliché, women tend to demand more cosmetic products than men (Aranda, 2018), and men are more interested in technology than women. According to Mintel

Group, a market research firm, women are more concerned about the planet than men and are more involved in issues such as ethics and sustainability (Mintel Group, 2018).

In brief, although consumers are concerned about the environment, they do not show it by committing to some industries' ecological posts on Instagram, such as the technology one. Therefore, as the engagement was a metric to measure the status of a brand, it can be concluded that new eco-friendly products only improve this status in specific industries.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The fifth and final Chapter presents the main conclusions and limitations of the dissertation, along with some recommendations for future research.

5.1 Conclusions and Industry Recommendations

Increasingly, sustainability begins to matter in the broader world. Climate change and global warming are not anymore perceived as a problem to be dealt with only in the future but instead, a challenge of the present days. Being sustainable is no longer a choice but an obligation. It is a growing and worrying issue. Therefore, both consumers and brands are more concerned than ever before about the environmental consequences of their actions and strive to reduce them by implementing green practices into their day-to-day life. On the other hand, it is also important to emphasize that people buy eco-friendly products and it is not always because they care about the environment (Keeney, 2013). As I have explained before, by buying eco-friendly products, people make a statement and want to benefit from the social status obtained when buying a product that respects the environment (Vaughan, 2010). There are numerous studies that have demonstrated these behaviors with regard to the environment and eco-friendly products (Sexton & Sexton, 2014; Polo, 2015). However, little is known about the impact of these products on brands' status and consumers' engagement in social networks. This dissertation sought to evaluate whether or not green content increases consumers' engagement with a brand and, therefore, the status of the brand on Instagram, as a function of industry. Hence, the principal purpose of this dissertation was to explore the extent to which consumers react positively to "eco-friendly" promotions and campaigns. In addition to assessing whether the eco-friendly content increases the status of a brand in Instagram, the study aimed to evaluate how it can vary across different industries. Thus, the difference between green and non-green engagement was studied, as well as the variation of this engagement depending on the type of industry. The results suggest that posts about green products on Instagram do not increase customers' engagement with a brand. Users were involved in the same way with green and non-green posts in the social network, unless the type of industry was taken into account.

Recommendations for Industry

Although the study did not provide statistically significant results regarding the factor *Green*, a relevant finding was that the type of industry affects consumers' engagement to green posts. Meaning that green products content increases costumers' engagement in some industries. Concerning the type of industry, main findings revealed that green engagement is higher than non-green engagement in most of the industries studied, while, as expected, it is not relevant in the technology industry. Driven from these findings, different industries should adopt different strategies of communicating their

green posts on Instagram. Particularly, being green is highly valued by the cosmetic and apparel industries. Users engage more with these green posts than they engage with non-green posts when it comes to make-up and clothes. The cosmetic industry has a long tradition of being eco-friendly. This may facilitate the interaction of users with these types of posts, as being green in this industry is salient as the normative behavior. For the apparel industry, it is increasing the number of brands re-using materials for their collections, and it has also become part of the fashion industry. It is highly beneficial and recommended for these industries to make such investments, as the adoption of eco-friendly marketing strategies may improve their image and reputation with customers (Smith & Brower, 2012). Users do not seem to behave similarly when it comes to technology. They actually value less the green brands, as they may not promote up-to-date digital advancements. Consequently, technology brands should increase their green marketing, while demonstrating to consumers that being sustainable does not mean a loss of other properties. On the other hand, although the car industry also deals with technology, being green is highly valued in this industry. Consumers are increasingly concerned about the enormous impact that cars have on the environment. Furthermore, this may also be due to the importance of environmental legislation for both manufacturers and consumers. Environmental performance has therefore become an important feature for consumers, which makes it easier for users to interact with such content.

In addition, as mentioned above, consumers' commitment to ecological posts may vary according to gender, since without falling into a cliché, women tend to demand more cosmetic products than men (Aranda, 2018), and men are more interested in technology than women. There is an ecological gender gap in which brands must work. According to some studies, men are not as environmentally friendly as women (Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac, & Gal, 2016; Mintel Group, 2018), so it could be assumed that women engage more with eco-friendly posts on Instagram. It is recommended that brands increase their green promotion to men, as often the lack of commitment to such posts in some industries is due to the lack of promotion properly targeted at this group.

Another explanation behind the low commitment to ecological publications may be the poor, or inexistent communication of the brands as eco-brands. When these non-eco-brands promote themselves as ecological, it may send the signal to users that their green strategies are just false attempts to protect the environment. If this is the case, then managing *Green Marketing* should include strategies with an increment of associations of ecological concerns towards the brand on Instagram, and only after that they should promote their own eco-branding. It seems crucial that companies and community managers understand how their communication can influence consumers'

engagement, and their message needs to be consistent with their actual practice to avoid falling into the *greenwashing* categorization.

In conclusion, although there is room for further research under the topic, these results contribute to existing studies on the consumer's attitude toward environmentally friendly products and indicate that green posts enhance the status of a brand on Instagram in most of the industries but the technological.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

The outcomes exhibited in this dissertation include some limitations. The following section introduces the principal limitations found in the development of the present research. Therefore, all the results should be interpreted considering such limitations.

The main limitation is the small number of observations gathered for specific industries, that do not post often green products or advertisements on Instagram, such as tech industry. This industry was the most complicated as some brands, such as Apple, might be doing sustainable practices but do not show it or talk about it. The lack of variety among brands in certain industries was an important limitation since one can learn from data of 4 or 5 companies, but not much more, and that is hard to generalize. For that reason, it was difficult to find the same number of observations within the industries studied. A total of 89 observations may not be significant. Therefore, a larger sample size would provide more robust results and meaningful conclusions.

On the other hand, an important limitation with respect to the literature review was the scarcity of information. The consequences of being green on social media platforms for a brand and the impact on their status have not yet been studied to a large extent. Therefore, from an academic perspective, this dissertation contributes to future research in this field. The combination of this quantitative analysis with a qualitative one would help to enrich the conclusions drawn.

To assess the strength of these findings, future research should examine a confound that is hard to disentangle: when it comes to consumers' commitment to sustainable posts, is it about the industry type or about the associations that people make between the industries and their green components? for example, cosmetics and non-animal testing. If this is about the association that people make between the industry and its values, then it should be easy to change that for any industry, as long as this association begins to be created.

It is also important to highlight that this study is based on a single social network, Instagram; it does not take into account other relevant social media platforms such as Facebook, where users' engagement may vary. Thus, results might not be fully generalizable to other social networks. Further

studies may compare consumers' engagement with green posts across different social media platforms. Moreover, this study does not consider other variables that could be important, such as users' age or gender, since Instagram does not offer programs to analyze users individually. The implementation of these variables would have made the study more powerful. However, the findings of this dissertation provide valuable and useful contributions to the existing knowledge on green marketing in social networks, and it will hopefully encourage other researchers to explore further this topic in the future.

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