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Buy Green or Buy Less? –
Comparing the influence of green marketing and green demarketing appeals on
consumers' brand attitude formation process

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Abstract

In response to the current consumerist lifestyle and its detrimental impact on the environment, some brands have started to engage in green demarketing – actively discouraging demand for their products in the interest of environmental sustainability. Given its somewhat unconventional approach and the growing skepticism towards green claims made in advertising, it is important to understand how consumers might perceive a brand using an appeal that calls for consumption reduction. Building on attribution theory and comparing it to more common green marketing strategies, this study seeks out to examine the impact of green demarketing on brand attitude and proposes that potential differences in brand evaluation can be explained by consumers' motive inferences about the underlying reasons firms promote their environmental commitment. Moreover, it is expected that skeptical consumers' inherent tendency to be suspicious of marketers' motives negatively affects the process of motive formation and thereby the subsequent brand evaluation. The results of parallel and moderated mediation analysis indicated more favorable attitudes towards the brand using a green demarketing appeal and that the effect was fully mediated by consumers heightened perception of intrinsic motives. Additionally, consumer skepticism moderated the stated indirect effect, albeit contrary to what was expected. Other than attenuating the effect, the positive relationship became stronger with growing levels of skepticism. These results suggest that consumers' skepticism is shaped by their experiences with green marketing, making it less likely to infer extrinsic motives behind the green demarketing advertisement and thus rewarding brands using such an appeal. The current findings accentuate the potential of communicating the consumption reduction aspect, as it is not only perceived as more genuinely motivated but seemingly circumvents the prevalent consumer skepticism towards green claims made in advertising.

Keywords: *Green Demarketing, Green Marketing, Attribution Theory, Motive Inferences, Consumer Skepticism, Anti - Consumption, Environmental Sustainability*

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1. Introduction

Rising CO₂ emissions, global warming, and the persistent discourse about climate change highlight the necessity for individuals, institutions, and firms to act in an environmentally responsible manner (Frick, Gossen, Santarius, & Geiger, 2021). Companies have long recognized the need to conduct business in a sustainable way, resulting in a surge of green marketing activities aiming to promote the purchase of environmentally friendly products (White, Habib, & Hardisty, 2019). Despite this promotional focus on sustainability is laudable, solely shifting consumption to sustainably sourced products may not be a sufficient path in the light of today's environmental challenges (García-de-Frutos, Ortega-Egea, & Martínez-del-Río, 2018; Howard-Grenville, Buckle, Hoskins, & George, 2014). Arguably, more effective solutions to environmental degradation in most industrialized nations lie in changing the dominant lifestyle and consumption patterns, specifically in consuming less overall (García-de-Frutos et al., 2018; Jackson, 2005; Peattie & Peattie, 2009). Despite the aspect to reduce consumption is often considered to be a more effective but less popular way for an individual or a company to lower their ecological footprint (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016), brands have started to incorporate marketing strategies encouraging consumers to avoid unnecessary consumption. For instance, in 2011 the outdoor fashion brand Patagonia advertised one of their products using the claim “Don’t buy this jacket” to address the issue of consumerism and prompt customers to think twice before they buy (Patagonia, 2011). More recently, Levi’s launched the campaign “Buy better, wear longer”, similarly reminding consumers to be more intentional about their consumption choices (Levi's, 2021). Albeit not as direct as Patagonia’s appeal, both strategies follow the same goal, namely urging customers to refrain from unneeded consumption.

In this context, marketing research has coined the term green demarketing, illustrating the use of a commercial strategy of for-profit organizations and companies through discouraging consumption (Armstrong Soule & Reich, 2015; Hesse & Rünz, 2022). More specifically, green demarketing refers to a brand strategy that encourages reduced consumption at the category level through an environmental appeal (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). Research states that given its general focus on environmental protection, albeit through a different direction than green marketing, it is possible that consumers perceive green demarketing appeals in a similar manner to their more traditional green counterparts (Hwang, Lee, Diddi, & Karpova, 2016; Reich & Armstrong Soule,

2016). However, such a strategy is somewhat counterintuitive because it apparently is a for-profit organization indirectly asking to make less profit. Thus, consumers' interpretations and subsequent judgements about brands' underlying motives for using such an appeal might diverge from those who promote the purchase of green products (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016).

In this regard, research suggests that one way of exploring consumer responses to these claims is through attribution theory, generally positing that when brands communicate their social and environmental responsibility, consumers try to understand the underlying reasons behind their communicative efforts (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). More specifically, consumers either ascribe intrinsic motives to a firm's support of an environmental cause, believing that it is designed to benefit the cause itself out of genuine concern, or extrinsic motives, interpreting it as a way to serve the firm's own interest and as a possible attempt to take opportunistic advantage of sustainable development trends (Parguel, Benoît-Moreau, & Larceneux, 2011). Findings from prior research reveal that the perception of a firm's genuine motives leads to a more favorable evaluation of the brand (Parguel et al., 2011), whereas the perception that a company engages in responsible behavior out of self-interest has the contrary effect (Ginder, Kwon, & Byun, 2021). However, consumers not only tend to question the motives behind brands' environmental efforts based on the situational context anymore but have seemingly developed a negative disposition towards green claims in general (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Mohr, Eroglu, & Ellen, 1998). As many companies claim to care about the environment but fail to demonstrate it through their actions, and consumers becoming more aware of companies' persuasive tactics (Nyilasy, Gangadharbatla, & Paladino, 2014), there has been a significant decrease in trust across all institutions, ushering in an era of consumer skepticism (Helm, Moulard, & Richins, 2015).

Research not only within the broader context of corporate social responsibility but also within green marketing has predominantly focused on situational skepticism, which refers to a consumer state induced by situational factors (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Whereas situational skepticism is important to capture consumers' negative attitudes towards marketers' persuasive attempts, it does not account for the negative predispositions consumers increasingly hold within them (Ham & Kim, 2020). In this regard, dispositional skepticism reflects a rather stable and generalizable marketplace disbelief (Forehand & Grier, 2003). Skeptical consumers not only tend to directly evaluate brands communicating a certain cause negatively (Ham & Kim, 2020), but have an ongoing tendency to be suspicious of marketers' motives. They believe that companies' social and

environmental involvement is inherently motivated by their profit interest rather than by social or environmental well-being (Bae, 2018; Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014). Thus, consumer skepticism might hurt all companies equally, even those genuinely trying to act in a responsible manner. Despite consumers' growing suspicion towards companies communicating their sustainable efforts, little research has been done on how consumer skepticism might influence the formation of motive inferences. So far, only one article has incorporated consumer skepticism in the context of green demarketing as defined in this study, treating it as a situational reaction rather than a negative predisposition (Zhang, Shao, Jeong, & Jang, 2021). Exploring the role of dispositional skepticism in the context of green marketing and green demarketing would not only bridge a gap in the demarketing literature but uncover if companies are equally affected when promoting either the consumption of green products or the refrainment from consumption overall.

Albeit the topic of green demarketing has received growing attention within the scientific community, literature examining its influence on consumer responses has delivered mixed results. Whereas recent research has found that green demarketing might be favored over a more common green marketing strategy in some instances (Da Vilasanti Luz, Mantovani, & Nepomuceno, 2020; Frick et al., 2021), earlier research revealed the contrary, accentuating that consumers might perceive a green demarketing appeal as somewhat confusing or contradictory (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). Overall, research findings on the topic imply the importance of examining the underlying processes through which consumers ultimately make their judgements about a brand using such an appeal. Moreover, despite the growing skepticism arising with the profusion of green claims made in advertising, research on green demarketing has yet to investigate its role on the process of making motive inferences. In employing attribution theory and a dispositional measure of consumer skepticism, this study seeks out to broaden the understanding of consumer responses towards green demarketing and bridge the stated gap in the literature. Specifically, with comparing it to more common green marketing strategies, it is aimed to investigate the effect of green demarketing on brand attitude through consumers' motive inferences and further explore the influence of skepticism on the process of motive formation and the subsequent brand evaluation:

RQ: How do consumers' attitudes towards a brand using either a green demarketing or a green marketing appeal differ, and how can motive inferences explain these differences? To what extent does consumer skepticism influence this process?

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Green Marketing

Consumer increasingly demand that companies operate in a socially and environmentally responsible manner, beyond their primary economic interests and legal requirements (Hartmann, Apaolaza, D'Souza, Barrutia, & Echebarria, 2017). The integration of such social and environmental concerns in a firm's business operations and the managerial obligation of taking actions to improve not only the welfare of the society, but also act in the interest of an organization can be defined as corporate social responsibility (Öberseder, Schlegelmilch, & Gruber, 2011; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

The adequate communication of CSR is a critical factor for a company's success (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010; Hartmann et al., 2017). Companies employ a variety of channels to communicate messages related to their social and environmental performance (Hartmann et al., 2017), but mainly draw on marketing techniques when focusing on the consumer as the focal receiver of such communicative efforts (Crane & Glozer, 2016). The aspect of environmental sustainability is currently one of the most important subdomains of CSR, reflecting the need for firms to reduce their environmental impact in response to issues such as global warming, scarcity of resources and societal consumption behaviors detrimental to the natural environment (Hartmann et al., 2017; Öberseder et al., 2011; Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In a communicative context, further accentuating the need to establish a certain consciousness for the topic, Kotler (2011) implores marketing academics and practitioners to recognize the environmental imperative, being a call for drastic change in business practices to aim for sustainability (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). Many forms exist through which brands and corporations choose to address this imperative. Spanning both sustainable practices, identifiable as acts of corporate social responsibility and its communication, green marketing and its distinct promotional channels are one of the most common and visible marketing activities (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Groening, Sarkis, & Zhu, 2018; Hartmann et al., 2017).

A contemporary definition of green marketing based on an extensive literature review on the topic is provided by Groening et al. (2018) whose approach contains the basic elements of marketing combined with the goal of reducing environmental impact. They define green marketing as a

concept consisting of actions directed to all consumers, incorporating a broad range of marketing activities designed to demonstrate a firm's goal of minimizing the environmental impact of its products and services (Groening et al., 2018). Focusing on the promotional aspect within the green marketing mix, the topic of green advertising has gained prominence in the marketing literature (Amatulli, Angelis, Peluso, Soscia, & Guido, 2019). A contemporary definition is offered by Matthes (2019) who interprets green or environmental advertising as the attempt to influence consumers cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors by promoting environmentally friendly features in the production, distribution, or recycling of products and services. This influence is predominantly undertaken using environmental or green claims as a statement regarding the impact of said features (do Paço & Reis, 2012; Scammon & Mayer, 1995).

Literature on green claims is subsequently quite broad in their assessment of the topic, highlighting both positive and negative effects of its use in the context of consumer responses. On a positive note, early research found advertisements containing green claims to be more effective in eliciting favorable brand attitudes and purchase intentions than ones without said claims (Mobley, Painter, Untch, & Rao Unnava, 1995; Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). More recently, these positive responses could also be detected through the lens of argument-based processes, referring to the persuasiveness of communicating functional attributes, such as environmentally friendly production, distribution, or recycling facts (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibañez, 2009; Matthes, 2019). Similarly, ecolabels have been found to positively influence consumers attitude towards print and television advertisements (Purohit, 2012) and subsequently purchase intentions (Purohit, 2012; Spack, Board, Crighton, Kostka, & Ivory, 2012). Albeit different to claims made in green advertising, ecolabels are arguably processed in a similar vein to the arguments in environmental claims (Matthes, 2019).

But exposure to green advertisements and green claims may influence the attitudes and behavioral intentions of consumers not only in positive ways (Matthes, 2019). With the rise of claims and messages containing environmental messages a major topic within the intersection of green advertising and CSR has emerged. This profusion of green claims creates difficulties for consumers attempting to distinguish between truly virtuous firms and the ones taking opportunistic advantage of the sustainability trend (Parguel et al., 2011). In this regard the term greenwashing denotes intentionally misleading or deceiving consumers with false claims about a firms' environmental practices and impact (Matthes, 2019). Consumers are becoming increasingly discerning and

skeptical of corporations in general, as many companies claim to care about the environment but fail to demonstrate it through their actions and performance (Nyilasy et al., 2014). Perceptions of greenwashing or deliberately misleading strategies have shown to negatively influence consumers attitudes towards a company (Nyilasy et al., 2014; Peattie & Peattie, 2009). Besides these direct effects influencing consumers' evaluations of a brand, greenwashing has proven to elicit an array of negative emotions and perceptions, which in turn negatively affect consumer behavior and brand evaluation. In this regard, greenwashing seems to elicit skepticism (Leonidou & Skarmas, 2017), which in turn engenders risk perceptions (Chen & Chang, 2013; Lin, Lobo, & Leckie, 2017), leads to negative advertising and product attitudes (Schmuck, Matthes, & Naderer, 2018) and further negatively influences purchase intentions (Leonidou & Skarmas, 2017). The effects of perceived greenwashing are demonstrating to have great significance in marketing research. Not only is the perception of making false claims, either through a direct or indirect reaction, detrimental to a company's image in the eyes of the consumer, but it is also exemplary for disingenuous green communication, which might further constitute ethical harms (Davis, 1992) and can arguably hurt all corporations in the long run (Nyilasy et al., 2014). Parguel et al. (2011) even argue that in conditions of greenwashing, the communication of sustainable corporate practices may be questionable, even for truly environmental companies.

Overall, consumer perceptions of such environmental appeals, primarily persuading consumers to purchase green products, are diverse. These perceptions, brand attitudes, and subsequent behavioral intentions are seemingly influenced by an array of factors (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). This highlights the need for ongoing research as populations and cultures shift ideas, values, and relationships with brands (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014). The vast body of research has concentrated on traditional green appeals, touting the environmental friendliness of production processes or materials. Despite this promotional focus on environmental sustainability is laudable, the common thread is still that marketing seeks to encourage an increase in consumption, or at least a shift in consumer decision making in favor of the product or brand being marketed (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). However, a shift in the focus on consumption reduction is arguably more impactful from an environmental footprint standpoint (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). In this regard, social marketing inherits considerable potential to contribute to consumption reduction, as it uses marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to adapt a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole (Kotler, Roberto, & Lee, 2002;

Peattie & Peattie, 2009). Its stand on societal benefits clearly places it into the context of CSR, whereas its focus on behavioral change goes further than the outlined predominant utilizations of CSR communication. In the context of encouraging behavioral change in the light of societal issues, demarketing is a related concept, which generally augments the notion of social marketing and seeks to specifically discourage the consumption of products or goods for the sake of individuals and the society (Kotler & Levy, 1971). Ascending from both of the two overarching research streams, green demarketing embodies the promotional focus on consumption reduction to influence consumer responses for the sake of the environment (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016).

2.2 Green Demarketing

Generally, marketing strategies are focused on creating demand for a product or service (Armstrong Soule & Reich, 2015). Against this idea there are situations in which an opposite approach involving demand suppression is a sensible marketing management strategy. In this line the term demarketing refers to such strategies, originally coined by Kotler and Levy (1971). It originated from the problems caused by prolonged demand creation through common marketing techniques and the oversight of situations where the problem is to reduce demand or cope with the inability to meet it (Chaudhry, Cesareo, & Pastore, 2019). Their initial framework of corporate demarketing included three different types, namely general, selective and ostensible demarketing (Chaudhry et al., 2019; Kotler & Levy, 1971).

The approach of general demarketing refers to a situation in which sellers face excess demand for one or more of their products, which requires them to either temporarily or permanently discourage consumers (Chaudhry et al., 2019). The reasons to engage in general demarketing range from temporary product shortages, the combat of overly popular product segments, or contrarily, the elimination of certain products due to low profitability and stagnant sales (Chaudhry et al., 2019; Kotler & Levy, 1971). Similarly, selective demarketing aims to limit demand among a segment of consumers identified as unprofitable or undesirable by the company, offering a strategic option to manage these segments who are likely to be a poor fit with the company's offering (Chaudhry et al., 2019). Contrarily, the idea of ostensible demarketing centers around devising perceived product shortages to attract additional consumers (Kotler & Levy, 1971). Thus, even though not specifically discouraging consumers, this form of demarketing employs an image of scarcity to promote its product (Chaudhry et al., 2019).

Augmenting the category of general demarketing with two subcategories, arguing the original specification of general demarketing only took on a microenvironmental perspective into the discussion, Chaudhry et al. (2019) introduced preventive and protective demarketing. In this regard, preventive demarketing aims at creating ways to reduce the consumption, or the promotion of limited consumption, of potentially health-hazardous products like alcohol, tobacco, or sugar in order to prevent diseases linked to their overconsumption. The other subcategory they conceptualized was protective demarketing, which can be seen as ways to limit excess consumption or waste of a scarce natural resource, such as water or oil, to somewhat safeguard limited supply of the product for future consumption (Chaudhry et al., 2019).

Given the original framework by Kotler and Levy (1971) the underlying motivations to utilize demarketing strategies were not primarily used to address sustainability as a potential reason for demand suppression. Albeit the augmentation made by Chaudhry et al. (2019) incorporated sustainability aspects within their protective general demarketing dimension, their intent was to broaden the scope to a macro level, predominantly including actors that aim to suppress demand on a household level through public policy interventions. Recent research has aimed to encompass said sustainability dimension and to extend the demarketing framework with a strategy designed to build a sustainable brand image through demand suppression from a consumer perspective. In this regard Armstrong Soule and Reich (2015) coined the term green demarketing and define it as a brand's strategic attempt to reduce consumption at a category level for the sake of environmental protection. With green demarketing seeking to persuade consumers to engage in a good cause such as environmental protection through refrainment from consumption, but still aiming at a positive effect on an organizational level, the concept of green demarketing can be interpreted as an act of corporate social responsibility (Armstrong Soule & Reich, 2015).

Focusing on the consumer as the focal recipient of such a strategy, Armstrong Soule and Reich (2015) firstly investigated the influence of a green demarketing appeal on consumer responses through the mediating role of motive inferences based on the brands perceived reputation. Their results have shown that consumer ascribe more genuine motives behind the brands actions when it was manipulated having a higher environmental reputation, which in turn positively influenced attitudes towards the product and the brand. Reich and Armstrong Soule (2016) further explored that a green demarketing advertisement underperforms in comparison to one with a green appeal in a commercial setting but evokes more positive motivational inferences and thus higher values

for brand attitude in an institutional setting. They argue that in a commercial context the act of advertising a specific product is inherently perceived as an effort by the brand to encourage consumption, whereas in an institutional context consumption it is not implicitly encouraged and thus not evokes confusion in the consumer subsequently resulting in more positive reactions. Following a similar comparison, Da Vilasanti Luz et al. (2020) investigated the differing effect of green demarketing and green environmental appeals on consumers' brand attitudes and willingness to buy. More specifically, they investigated the roles of brand positioning and ad believability in this process. Their results indicate that consumers believe more in demarketing appeals when matching a luxury brand position, whereas a green appeal was more believable when employed in a mass-market position. In turn, believability increased both brand attitude and willingness to buy for the respective appeal type based on its positioning.

With comparing a green marketing and traditional advertising appeal, Hwang et al. (2016) found support for their hypothesized negative relationship of a demarketing advertisement on consumers attitudes toward purchasing the product and subsequently purchase intention, opposed to a positive relationship of a traditional, pro-consumption advertisement on said outcome variables. They again demonstrated motivational inferences to be strong predictors on these consumer responses. As they manipulated their advertisements using the brand Patagonia, they argue that, given the brands high environmental reputation, green demarketing is capable of influencing consumers' purchase intentions to an extent, where it is convincing enough to persuade people of its message to buy less. More recently and offering contrary results, Frick et al. (2021) explored the concept of green demarketing as a form of sufficiency promotion in the context of social media. They found a positive influence of the sufficiency promoting advertisement compared to a neutral and consumption-promoting advertisement on sufficiency behavior and attitudes towards the sender, mediated by lower aspirations to acquire new goods.

Overall, the research on green demarketing suggests its influential role with regards to consumer responses, not only when compared to traditional but also green advertisements, with differing outcomes. Moreover, when comparing a green demarketing appeal to another appeal type, its effects on consumer responses are seemingly influenced by an array of factors, such as brand positioning (Da Vilasanti Luz et al., 2020) aspiration levels (Frick et al., 2021) the overall credibility of the brand as a sender of such an appeal (Hwang et al., 2016; Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016) and the believability of the message itself (Da Vilasanti Luz et al., 2020). Whereas

these findings imply the important role of explanatory mechanisms in further understanding how a green demarketing appeal is received, especially when comparing it to a green marketing appeal, the results do not paint a clear picture on which of the two appeals is favored from a consumer perspective (Da Vilasanti Luz et al., 2020; Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). Instead, in order to investigate immediate consumer responses, drawing on the differences in phrasing a message with the same goal has been found to be effective in the context of environmental advertising (Kim, Ko, & Kim, 2018; Schwarz, 2012). In this regard, green demarketing focuses on the aspect of lowering consumption overall, whereas green marketing aims to contribute to environmental sustainability by offering products that are less harmful towards the environment (Groening et al., 2018; Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). Given that both appeals communicate the same objective of lowering environmental impact but accentuate different aspects to achieve it, this difference in communicating the same goal can be interpreted as a form of message framing (Kim et al., 2018; Olsen, Slotegraaf, & Chandukala, 2014). This approach of drawing on the differences in communicating a message now offers a suitable pathway to explain direct consumer responses (Kim et al., 2018; Schwarz, 2012), especially in the context of evaluating the brand as the sender of such a message (Olsen et al., 2014).

2.3 Message Framing and Consumer Responses

In general, message framing is a technique in which objectively equivalent information is described in different ways to elicit distinct responses and choices from an audience by emphasizing a specific goal (Segev, Fernandes, & Hong, 2016). More specifically, in the pursuit of a singular goal, a positive frame stresses a potential gain or benefit, whereas a negative frame emphasizes the prevention of a potentially negative consequence or loss (Levin, Schneider, & Gaeth, 1998; Olsen et al., 2014). Recipients seemingly react in a different way to the objectively same information depending on whether said messages are framed to highlight benefits or losses (Chang, Zhang, & Xie, 2015). Previous research has shown that the type of frame influences a recipient's attention towards the message and the subsequent comprehensions prior to making their judgements (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 2004). This makes it an effective persuasive tactic not only to motivate an individual to behave in a certain manner (Chang et al., 2015) but also to alter an individual's purchase intentions and attitudes towards the message's sender (Olsen et al., 2014).

Research on message framing generally indicates that a positive frame tends to be less effective than a negative frame at influencing attitudes and behavior (Banks et al., 1995; Olsen et al., 2014; Schneider et al., 2001; Wilson, Wallston, & King, 1990). Social marketing research suggests that negative frames are more persuasive when communicating health-related behaviors (Amatulli et al., 2019; Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 2004). For instance, in the context of breast self-examination, messages highlighting its benefits are less persuasive than messages stressing the risks associated with not engaging in breast self-examination (Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987). Similar results in favor of negative framed messages have been found for topics such as mammography screenings (Banks et al., 1995), HIV prevention (Marchand & Filiatrault, 2002) and the adoption of safe sex practices (Block & Keller, 1995). Widening the scope towards a consumer context, credit card customers, for example, are found to be less receptive to a message accentuating the gains when using this card than the ones that stress the potential losses one might be confronted with when not using a credit card (Ganzach & Karsahi, 1995).

These results indicate that a higher-level goal, such as health or personal finance, associated with a message offers reduced effectiveness for positively framed messages over negatively framed messages in affecting a person's attitude and inducing the desired behavior (Olsen et al., 2014). Focusing on the dimension, or rather the goal of environmental sustainability, positively framed claims emphasize the possession of something beneficial to the environment, whereas claims framed in a negative way accentuate the removal of something harmful to the environment (Olsen et al., 2014). Findings from studies focusing on green communication augment the notion that negatively framed messages are more effective not only in promoting pro-environmental behaviors (Chang et al., 2015; White, Macdonnell, & Dahl, 2011), but moreover influencing consumer responses and subsequently behavioral intentions (Amatulli et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2015; Ku, Kuo, Wu, & Wu, 2012). Olsen et al. (2014) showed that highlighting the absence of environmentally harmful attributes as negative frames to be more effective in changing consumer brand attitudes than frames emphasizing the presence of such attributes.

The theoretical concept of message framing, especially in the context of environmental sustainability, offers an approach to differentiate green marketing and green demarketing in terms of how each of them strives for the same goal by promoting different ways to achieve them. Generally, green marketing aims at promoting products that contribute to the goal of environmental sustainability, achieved through the act of buying products that are less detrimental to the

environment than non-green products (Groening et al., 2018). This focus on a potential gain by pursuing a certain action in a general context (Chang et al., 2015) and the possession of something beneficial to the environment in the context of sustainability (Olsen et al., 2014) identifies green marketing as a positive message frame. Green demarketing on the other hand, promoting the same goal of environmental sustainability, emphasizes consumption reduction to achieve it (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). Despite green demarketing also focuses on a certain action (Chang et al., 2015) it is contrary to the possession aspect of the green marketing approach, classifying it as a form of negative framing (Olsen et al., 2014). Kim et al. (2018) support this notion, identifying green demarketing as a negative frame, ascending from green advertising and calling consumers to prevent a potential threat.

Overall negative message frames seem to be more effective in eliciting favorable responses from consumers than positive ones when communicating a higher-order goal (Olsen et al., 2014). When a brand incorporates a negative message frame within its communication for the sake of environmental protection, consumers react with higher purchase intentions (Amatulli et al., 2019) and positive changes in brand attitude (Olsen et al., 2014). Thus, based on these results and the classification of green marketing as a positively and green demarketing as a negatively framed message, it is expected that a green demarketing appeal elicits more favorable consumers responses than a green marketing appeal. More specifically, when evaluating the brand as a sender of the respective message, it is hypothesized:

H1: A green demarketing appeal leads to more favorable attitudes towards the brand than a green marketing appeal.

Literature on green demarketing has stressed the importance of understanding these potential differences in brand evaluation. In this regard, attribution theory and the idea that consumers make motive inferences about the underlying reasons why brands communicate their environmental commitment offers a suitable approach to elucidate these differences (Hwang et al., 2016; Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016).

2.4 Attribution Theory and the Mediating Role of Motive Inferences

Fundamentally, attribution theory serves as a theoretical framework to explain the processes by which people come to understand their own behavior and that of others (Parguel et al., 2011). A starting point for contemporary research on attribution theory is Heider's (1958) depiction of people making decisions as naive psychologists, stating that individuals make common sense explanations of the world in order to understand, predict, and control events (Hewett, Shantz, Mundy, & Alfes, 2018). Said explanations are naive to that effect, that they are not scientifically conceptualized, analyzed, or tested (Heider, 1958). However, the process by which individuals arrive at explanations for events is similar to the way scientists arrive at explanations, namely in a fairly logical and analytical manner (Hewett et al., 2018). In this regard, Heider (1958) originally described attributions as the result of people's beliefs of cause and effect that follow their cognitive processes, which in turn can be interpreted as individual inferences of personality traits, and judgements of responsibility and blame (Malle, 2015). People make two basic types of attributions, namely internal and external (Lin-Hi & Blumberg, 2018). In the case of internal attributions, such as an actor's intentions, abilities and motives people focus on intrinsic motives when seeking to explain a certain behavior (Gosselt, van Rompay, & Haske, 2019; Lin-Hi & Blumberg, 2018). On the other hand, in the case of external attributions, the cause of observed behavior is ascribed to situational causes outside the actor's control causing individuals to focus on extrinsic motives and attributing behavior to external factors (Gosselt et al., 2019; Lin-Hi & Blumberg, 2018).

Broadening the scope of this theoretical approach towards the evaluation of corporate as opposed to an individual's behavior, consumer research has successfully adopted attribution theory, suggesting that consumers similarly engage in attributional processing when evaluating a company's behavior (Gosselt et al., 2019; Weiner, 2000). In the case of internal attributions, consumers believe that a company participates in CSR due to its sincere concern for the social cause, whereas in the case of external attributions, consumers might infer that the company is participating in CSR due to situational factors, such as pressure from the market it is operating in (Gosselt et al., 2019). In the context of communicating environmental responsibility, consumer reactions may thus range from inferring an attempt to take opportunistic advantage of sustainable development trends (extrinsic motives) to a sincere environmental consciousness as part of the company's DNA (intrinsic motives) (Parguel et al., 2011). In this regard, consumer perceptions are

shaped by the attributions they use to infer the motive behind the CSR activity (Green & Peloza, 2014). Research suggests that the stated dichotomy of firms engaging in CSR to either help themselves through self-oriented motivations or serve society through altruistic orientations are not opposite ends of a continuum (Gosselt et al., 2019; Green & Peloza, 2014; Leonidou & Skarmas, 2017). Ellen, Webb, and Mohr (2006) therefore conceptualized that a firm's CSR motives can be either self- or other-centered, further positing that consumers attribute multiple and more specific motives to a company's social engagement (Ginder et al., 2021; Gosselt et al., 2019).

Other-centered motives can have two dimensions, namely values-driven and stakeholder-driven (Ellen et al., 2006). Values-driven motives refer to beliefs that a company engages in CSR actions purely because of its ethical, moral and societal standards (Ellen et al., 2006) and has a genuine concern about social problems (Skarmas & Leonidou, 2013). Stakeholder-driven motives refer to beliefs that the company engages in CSR actions to satisfy the expectations of different stakeholders (Vlachos, Tsamakos, Vrechopoulos, & Avramidis, 2009). On the other hand, self-centered motives consist of egoistic and strategic attributions (Ellen et al., 2006). Egoistic attributions refer to assumptions that a company is exploiting rather than supporting the cause it is engaging with (Vlachos et al., 2009). When consumers assign opportunistic and excessive profiteering motives to CSR engagement, they perceive CSR as a deliberate attempt to mislead them into false conclusions about the company's ideology (Skarmas & Leonidou, 2013). Differently, strategic motives reflect beliefs that the company can achieve its business objectives in line with supporting the proclaimed cause (Ellen et al., 2006; Skarmas & Leonidou, 2013; Vlachos et al., 2009). Overall, with regards to these different motivational components, especially values-driven CSR motives closely align with the concept of intrinsic motivations of CSR, as they address the intrinsic pleasures of genuinely doing something good for the society (Ginder et al., 2021). On the other hand, especially egoistic, but also strategic and stakeholder-driven attributions can generally be identified as extrinsic motives, as the company engages in CSR to achieve goals due to external pressure (Ginder et al., 2021).

Subsequently, the perception of a company's motives generally leads to different attitudes and behavioral intentions. Research has found that the perception of values-driven motives directly influences consumer trust, attitudes toward the company, as well as recommendation and purchase intentions in a positive way (Ellen et al., 2006). Contrarily, research has demonstrated a direct negative effect of egoistic and stakeholder-driven motives on said consumer responses (Groza,

Pronschinske, & Walker, 2011; Vlachos et al., 2009). These findings are in line with the idea that consumers respond favorably to inherently intrinsic corporate activities (Groza et al., 2011). However, in the case of stakeholder-driven and egoistic attributions consumers respond negatively, as they perceive CSR efforts to be forced and insincere when enacted only after pressure from stakeholders (Groza et al., 2011) and interpret the misleading attempts of CSR engagements as manipulative (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Vlachos et al., 2009). The findings for strategic motives are ambiguous, with research indicating both their negative impact on patronage intentions (Vlachos et al., 2009) as well as their positive effect on purchase intentions and attitudes toward a company (Ellen et al., 2006; Groza et al., 2011). In this line the company attains goals inherent to its survival by undertaking social activities and subsequently promoting them to create a win-win-situation, which might pose a perplexing problem for consumers (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Firstly, consumers may perceive these motivations as legitimate because a company needs to be economically viable (Ellen et al., 2006) and secondly, profit motivated giving reflects a behavior that derives from economic, rather than moral reasoning (Vlachos et al., 2009). The consumer may interpret the contribution of the company to the social cause not because the act is right, but rather because doing so is “just business” and thus are likely to raise doubts about a company’s CSR initiative when they ascribe them to profit seeking reasons (Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Research employing the dichotomous approach of intrinsic and extrinsic motive inferences has found support for the direct effects these attributions have with regards to consumer responses, indicating a positive relationship between intrinsic motives and corporate brand evaluation (Parguel et al., 2011) as well a negative relationship between extrinsic motives and purchase intentions (Ginder et al., 2021).

Other than solely investigating the direct impact attributions have on consumer responses, research has stressed their mediating role in the process of brand attitude formation and the development of purchase intentions (Ellen et al., 2006; Ginder et al., 2021; Gosselt et al., 2019). In this regard, Ellen et al. (2006) found that a company’s higher fit as opposed to a lower fit with the cause it was promoting positively influenced purchase intentions, mediated by the inferences of more genuine motives, arguing that a higher fit reduces suspicion. Similarly, Groza et al. (2011) demonstrated that if consumers evaluate a CSR initiative as proactive, they will likely attribute positive motives behind this initiative and in turn enhance their attitude towards the firm and their purchase intentions. The mediating role of perceived motive inferences has also been detected within green

marketing research. In this regard, Gosselt et al. (2019) illustrated that external CSR claims about a company's environmental engagement positively influence said inferences, which in turn positively impacted consumers' brand attitudes. In the context of green demarketing research, Reich and Armstrong Soule (2016) found a strong mediating effect of motive inferences on the respondents' attitude towards the advertisement and the brand.

Overall, consumers' attributions can be identified as a route through which CSR information and engagement affects behavioral intentions and attitude formation, acting as key intervening variables in explaining said consumer responses (Ellen et al., 2006; Ginder et al., 2021; Groza et al., 2011). Consumers seemingly rely on the perceived reason behind a company's engagement, further making the process at which consumer develop causal inferences, especially in the general context of environmental marketing messages, an important component (Ellen et al., 2006; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Due to differing explanations for the process of attribution formation (Ellen et al., 2006; Ginder et al., 2021; Groza et al., 2011) and the relative novelty of green demarketing communication, there is still relatively little empirical evidence on the its relationship with consumer motive inferences when compared to green marketing appeals.

A suitable approach to derive differences in inference making based on the two appeal types is Kelley's covariation model (1973). It draws on the idea that consumers act as naïve psychologists and take into account three types of evidence for a certain behavior or event, namely consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). In the context of CSR communication and its underlying actions, consensus refers to the extent to which others adopt the same behavior, distinctiveness to which this behavior occurs only within a specific situation or is repeated by the actor in other situations, and consistency to which the behavior is repeated over time (Parguel et al., 2011; Sjovalld & Talk, 2004). When embedding both a green demarketing as well as green marketing appeal into this model, they seem to solely differ along the consensus dimension. Brands using green demarketing adopt a different behavior than their competitors, as they are not only less common, but moreover is the focus on the refrainment from consumption contrary to the persuasive buying approach of green marketing strategies. Based on the preceding three types of evidence, the consumer might then attribute the company's advertised engagement to extrinsic motives when most of its competitors engage in the same behavior at the same time (high consensus), when the company engages in only one CSR activity rather than several (low distinctiveness), or when CSR engagements are not common company practices (low consistency)

(Parguel et al., 2011). Hence, it can be argued that a green demarketing appeal seemingly does not act in consensus to other companies they are competing with, therefore causing higher intrinsic attributions. Importantly, as consumers cannot draw conclusions about the distinctiveness or consistency for the advertisement appeal they are confronted with, these dimensions can be interpreted as equal for both appeal types (Parguel et al., 2011). Following the derivation approach of Parguel et al. (2011), it is expected that when the other two dimensions, namely distinctiveness and consistency are the same across both conditions, the observation of low consensus is sufficient for consumers to attribute higher levels of social consciousness towards the company sending a demarketing appeal.

Based on the literature on attribution theory the current study assumes a mediating effect of the motivational inferences consumers make when evaluating an appeal type. Following the dichotomous approach of consumers making intrinsic and extrinsic motives to evaluate the reasons behind a brand's communicated environmental responsibility, it is expected that these motive inferences explain the differing influence of the green demarketing and green marketing appeal on consumer's brand attitude. In more detail, drawing on the covariation model and the coherently positive impact of intrinsic, as well as the generally negative impact of perceived extrinsic motives on consumer responses, it is assumed that the reasons behind a green demarketing appeal are more likely to be perceived as intrinsically motivated, further positively influencing brand attitude. Differently, the reasons behind a green marketing appeal are more likely to be perceived as extrinsically motivated, leading to less favorable brand attitudes. Thus, the more favorable attitudes towards the brand using a green demarketing appeal compared to a green marketing appeal is due to the heightened perception of intrinsic motives, whereas the comparably negative effect of a green marketing appeal is explained by the heightened perception of extrinsic motives:

H2: The positive effect of the green demarketing appeal on brand attitude is mediated by the perception of intrinsic motive inferences. The green demarketing appeal is more likely to elicit intrinsic motive inferences (vs. green marketing), which positively influence brand attitude.

H3: The negative effect of the green marketing appeal on brand attitude is mediated by the perception of extrinsic motives. The green marketing appeal is more likely to elicit extrinsic motive inferences (vs. green demarketing), which negatively influence brand attitude.

But other than relying on motive inferences to make judgements about brands sincere environmental engagement, consumers have seemingly developed a certain suspicion towards advertising and green claims in particular (Nyilasy et al., 2014). Research has identified consumer skepticism as an influential factor that might equally hurt brands communicating their environmental commitment (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014), through either green marketing or green demarketing.

2.5 The Moderating Influence of Consumer Skepticism

According to Webb and Mohr (1998) skepticism generally occurs when an audience questions, distrusts, or has contradictory feelings about a company's societal obligations or actions, after the company has frequently been inconsistent in its behaviors and declarations. Marketing research has broadly conceptualized skepticism as consumers' distrust of marketers' actions (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Ham & Kim, 2020). More specifically, consumer skepticism can be defined as consumers' disbelief in advertising claims and their suspicion regarding advertisers' ulterior motives (Mohr et al., 1998; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Research has stressed the importance of understanding the different approaches towards skepticism as it might not only be a direct reaction towards disingenuous marketing strategies, but could undermine marketing efficiency and advertising credibility as a whole (Bae, 2018; Pollay & Mittal, 1993).

Previous literature has identified two perspectives on consumer skepticism, namely dispositional and situational skepticism (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Ham & Kim, 2020). Dispositional skepticism refers to an individual's ongoing tendency to be suspicious of marketer's motives (Forehand & Grier, 2003) with an emphasis on individual personality traits and an ongoing state of disbelief (Boush, Friestad, & Rose, 1994; Ham & Kim, 2020; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). It develops as a result of direct and indirect experiences, media exposure, and socialization, and becomes a stable and enduring personal tendency (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). For instance, older children have a better understanding of potentially exaggerated, misleading or deceptive advertising characteristics and are thus more skeptical of advertising messages than younger children (Boush et al., 1994). Differently, situational skepticism can be defined as a momentary state of distrust and suspicion of corporate motives and is seen as a consumer state induced by certain situational factors independent of personality traits (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Ham & Kim, 2020). Thus, consumer skepticism towards advertising either reflects

a stable and generalizable marketplace belief that is the result of marketplace socialization, or it arises from a temporary psychological reaction induced by a certain communication message or situation (Ham & Kim, 2020). These views on consumer skepticism already accentuate the importance of their differentiation, not only in their theoretical approaches but especially in their implementation within research.

Despite the notion of dispositional skepticism closely aligns with the general definition of skepticism, marketing literature has focused on the situational influences on consumers temporary state of skepticism. Research has found that situational skepticism can be influenced by factors such as perceptions of self-serving and thus disingenuous motives and perceptions of greenwashing (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013). Following the dispositional notion, the findings of previous research suggest that the extent of consumers' skepticism towards persuasive communication tactics is an important determinant of their set of responses to advertising (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Obermiller, Spangenberg, & MacLachlan, 2005). As consumers' dispositional skepticism is not only reflective of a general distrust towards marketers' actions but further expresses a distrust towards the informational content of advertisements, more skeptical consumers may respond more negatively to contextual information in advertisements (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Obermiller et al., 2005). In this regard, research has shown that consumer skepticism negatively influences the attitude towards the brand image and patronage intentions (Amawate & Deb, 2021), advertisement attitude (Yu, 2020) and even green consumption intentions (Cheng, Chang, & Lee, 2020).

Importantly, other than directly influencing their responses towards advertisements, consumers' dispositional skepticism would further lead them to doubt the underlying motives for trying to persuade them (Ham & Kim, 2020). Consumers with higher skepticism have been found to have a higher degree of knowledge of marketers' persuasion tactics and are thus more likely to know about how persuasion occurs and what tactics are used (Bae, 2018; Friestad & Wright, 1994). Research in the context of CSR communication suggests that this knowledge helps consumers to recognize possible ulterior motives with regards to a company's persuasion intention (Ham & Kim, 2020). Consumers with a higher level of skepticism, as opposed to consumers with lower levels of skepticism, are not only more likely to recognize possible ulterior motives but are thus generally more inclined to infer said motives when confronted with a company's communication message (Ham & Kim, 2020). Accordingly, as more skeptical people seem to believe that marketing

techniques related to a cause are used by companies that are motivated by profit interests rather than by social or environmental well-being (Bae, 2018; Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014), these consumers are more likely to make simplistic attributions about the promoted cause they are confronted with (Bae, 2018). Contrarily less skeptical consumers are less suspicious of firm's underlying motives and thus tend to assign intrinsic motives towards the message (Ham & Kim, 2020).

What emerges from this discussion is that consumers' dispositional skepticism towards advertisement not only directly affects consumers' brand evaluation, but moreover influences the process of making motive inferences when brands try to communicate a social or environmental cause. Despite research investigated the role of consumer skepticism in the broader context of CSR communication (Bae, 2018; Ham & Kim, 2020), its effect might be similar when consumers are set to specifically evaluate pro-environmental advertisements in the form of green marketing and green demarketing appeals. In this regard, research has conceptualized a measure of consumers skepticism towards green claims, expressing the tendency towards disbelief of environmental claims made in advertising (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Mohr et al., 1998) and thus sharing the underlying approach that it is of dispositional rather than situational nature. Moreover, despite Matthes and Wonneberger (2014) argue that the more general measure of advertising skepticism and green claims skepticism are distinct in their antecedents and effects, they are still positively related as people may transfer their general skepticism towards their judgement, and subsequently skepticism, of environmental advertising (Mohr et al., 1998; Yu, 2020).

Translating the evidence from prior research into the context of this study and interpreting both a green marketing as well as a green demarketing appeal as a form of environmental claim (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017), dispositional skepticism might not only directly affect consumers evaluation of a brand eliciting either appeal type, but moreover influence the process of making both intrinsic and extrinsic motives. More specifically, it is expected that skeptical consumers are less likely to infer intrinsic and more likely to infer extrinsic motives behind both appeal types. Based on the hypothesized indirect effects, consumer skepticism might thus weaken the positive indirect effect via intrinsic motive inferences and strengthen the negative indirect effect via extrinsic motive inferences on brand attitude. Moreover, as skeptical consumers are more likely to directly evaluate a brand less favorably, it is assumed that consumer skepticism negatively influences the direct relationship between appeal type and brand attitude. Translating the evidence

from prior research on consumer skepticism into the context of this study following hypotheses are stated:

H4: The positive indirect effect of the green demarketing appeal on brand attitude via intrinsic motive inferences is moderated by consumer skepticism. The effect becomes weaker with growing levels of skepticism.

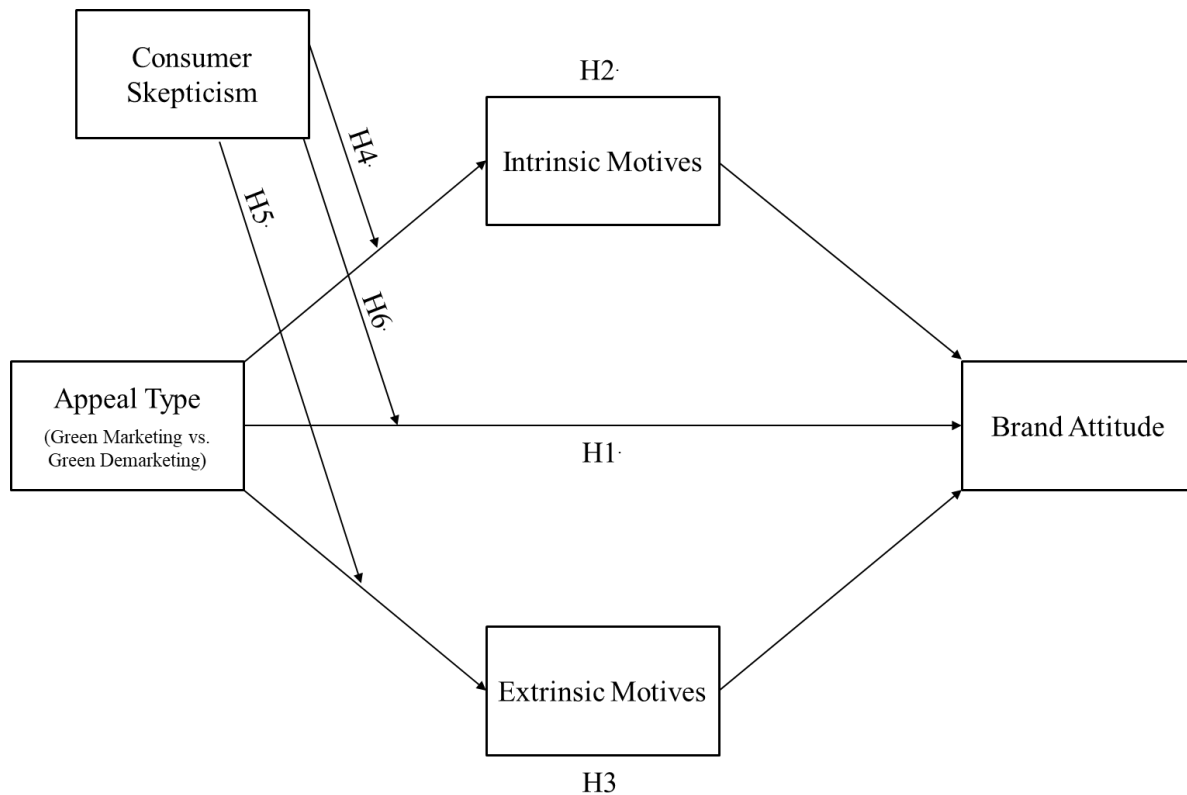
H5: The negative indirect effect of the green marketing appeal on brand attitude via extrinsic motives is moderated by consumer skepticism. The effect becomes stronger with growing levels of skepticism.

H6: The positive direct effect of green demarketing on brand attitude is moderated by consumer skepticism. The effect becomes weaker with growing levels of skepticism.

2.6 Conceptual Model

The following conceptual model gives an overview of the main constructs within the analysis and their hypothesized relationships:

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



First, it is expected that the green demarketing appeal leads to more favorable brand attitudes (H1). Moreover, this positive effect is mediated by higher perceptions of intrinsic motives (H2), whereas the comparably negative effect of green marketing on brand attitude is mediated by perceptions of extrinsic motives (H3). Both the stated indirect effects as well as the potentially persisting direct effect are moderated by skepticism. It is assumed that higher levels of skepticism negatively affect the perceptions of intrinsic motives, ultimately weakening the positive indirect effect of green demarketing on brand attitude (H4). Moreover, higher levels of skepticism are assumed to accentuate perceptions of extrinsic motives, thus strengthening the negative indirect effect of green marketing on brand attitude (H5). Ultimately, consumer skepticism is said to negatively affect the potential direct effect of green demarketing on brand attitude (H6).

3. Methodology

3.1 Experimental Design

In order to answer the stated hypotheses a quantitative research approach in the form of an online experiment was conducted, using the survey software Qualtrics. Based on the two different appeal types as independent variables within the model the research approach was based on a between-subjects design. The experimental design was chosen to aid in overcoming spillover effects that knowledge obtained through previous questions might cause, reducing potential bias on the survey results (Field & Hole, 2013).

Regarding the structure of the questionnaire, the first section introduced the respondents to the topic of the survey as part of a master thesis, stating that the overarching goal was to investigate the perception of consumers towards sustainable advertisement appeals. The respondents were then given notice about the upcoming structure of the questionnaire and the anonymous analysis of their responses. After the introduction the participants were randomly assigned to one of the two full colored advertisements, comprised of either a green marketing or a green demarketing appeal. A timer of 15 seconds was added for the presentation of the stimuli to ensure that the respondents were able to receive the information provided and not skip the advertisement.

Figure 2. Stimulus Material



Note. Green marketing condition (left); Green demarketing condition (right)

For the stimuli a fictitious apparel brand with the name of “Molecule” was chosen, ruling out potentially influential associations respondents might have with regards to a real brand. The mockup advertisement depicted a pair of jeans accompanied with an introductory message about the growing scarcity of natural resources, further stressing the importance of a conscious approach with the topic. The mockup design as well as the introductory part was the same across both conditions (see Figure 2).

The manipulation of the two conditions was twofold. First, the message on how the brand wants to contribute to the stated problem in the introductory part was manipulated based on the appeal type. Regarding the green marketing appeal, the brand’s focus was on sustainable processes along their whole supply chain following the general definition of green advertising (Matthes, 2019). Within the green demarketing condition the focus was on reminding the consumer, that more is not always better and invoke the consumers to consider, if they really needed something new. Second, the green marketing appeal was accompanied by the motto “Choose Well, Buy Green”, whereas the motto for the green demarketing appeal read “Buy Less, Choose Well”, further emphasizing the commitment to lower consumption. Notably, the arguments for both appeal types did not draw on recycled materials or more specific product attributes to prevent quality perception bias (Da Vilasanti Luz et al., 2020).

The following parts in the questionnaire followed the logic of the conceptual model, starting with an assessment of the respondents’ attitudes toward the brand, their perceived intrinsic and extrinsic motives, their general tendency of being skeptical towards green claims, and subsequently a manipulation check. The final part of the questionnaire consisted of basic demographic questions about the respondents’ gender and age. The survey concluded with a debriefing message, explaining the goals of the survey and the subsequent analysis in more detail, further stressing the anonymity of the data collection, and thanking the respondents for their participation.

3.2 Sample Characteristics

Respondents were recruited through convenience sampling by embedding the survey link within the web service SurveyCircle. In addition, snowball sampling was used to recruit more participants. The data was collected in a four-week time span, ranging from the 12th of June to the 11th of July 2022. After this period a total of 177 respondents were obtained, of which 151 participants completed the survey ($N = 151$, $M_{Age} = 32.95$, $SD = 13.67$, $Min_{Age} = 17$, $Max_{Age} = 71$, 60.3% female).

Importantly, online surveys are prone to problems, because respondents might not carefully read the questions and instructions provided or disrupt the answering procedure altogether (Geuens & Pelsmacker, 2017), which might result in either an exceptionally low or high amount of time needed to conduct the survey (Spilski, Gröppel-Klein, & Gierl, 2018). Thus, the subsequent sample was checked for outliers regarding the overall duration of the questionnaire ($N = 151$, $M_{time} = 931.19$ sec., $SD = 4797.16$ sec., $Min_{Time} = 63.00$ sec., $Max_{Time} = 46446.00$ sec.). A visual inspection of the boxplot indicated a total of nine outliers, who needed an exceptional amount of time¹. After excluding these outliers through a filter, the means and standard deviations indicated more comprehensible values for the duration time of the questionnaire ($M_{time} = 281.87$ sec., $SD = 159.22$ sec., $Min_{Time} = 63.00$ sec., $Max_{Time} = 841.00$ sec.). As Qualtrics does not indicate the time respondents needed for each part of the survey, no specifications were provided at which point of the questionnaire respondents could have interrupted the answering procedure. Accordingly, respondents might have dropped out right after the stimulus presentation, biasing the subsequent construct assessments (Spilski et al., 2018). Given the outlined arguments and results, the outliers were dropped, leaving a final sample of 142 respondents ($N = 142$, $M_{Age} = 32.66$, $SD = 13.57$, $Min_{Age} = 17$, $Max_{Age} = 71$, 60.6 % female), evenly shared across the green marketing ($N = 72$) and green demarketing condition ($N = 70$).

3.3 Measures

As the survey was intended to reach predominantly German speaking respondents, the wording for the description of the questions as well as the respective original items were translated. Moreover, all scale items were randomized within the questionnaire.

For the measurement of respondents' brand attitude, the construct of Spears and Singh (2004) was employed, offering a unidimensional measure for brand evaluation. After viewing one of the two conditions, the respondents were asked to indicate their overall feelings about the brand "Molecule" on a 7-point differential scale. The five items assessed were bipolar, consisting of *unappealing/appealing* (1), *bad/good* (2), *unpleasant/pleasant* (3), *unfavorable/favorable* (4) and *unlikeable/likeable* (5). All five items reliably measured the same underlying construct

¹ $N = 9$, $M_{Time} = 11176.00$, $SD = 17478.05$, $Min_{Time} = 1015.00$, $Max_{Time} = 46446.00$

(Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Accordingly, the mean of the four items was calculated to create the variable brand attitude ($M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.40$).

To measure the mediating role of motive inferences, the items for perceived intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were adapted from Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017) and Vlachos, Panagopoulos, and Rapp (2013). Respondents should express their opinion about the brand based on the advertisement they were shown on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*). The perception of intrinsic motives was assessed with the help of five statements about the brand "Molecule": "*is genuinely concerned about the welfare of nature*" (1), "*tries to give something back to the environment*" (2), "*feels morally obligated to help the environment*" (3), "*wants to do the right thing for the sake of the environment*" (4) and "*is honestly interested in acting in an ecologically responsible manner*" (5).

The assessment of extrinsic motives followed the same approach, again advising the respondents to express their opinions about the brand based on five statements "*is only following the sustainability trend because other companies are doing it too*" (1), "*is only trying to improve its image*" (2), "*has no real interest in environmental issues*" (3) "*tries to gain more customers through this*" (4) "*is hoping for more profit as a result*" (5). The internal consistency was excellent for the items comprising intrinsic motives (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$), and high for extrinsic motives (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). Thus, the items were averaged to form the respective constructs for intrinsic ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.44$) and extrinsic motives ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.31$).

Next, scales from of Matthes and Wonneberger (2014) and Mohr et al. (1998) for green claim skepticism were employed to measure dispositional consumer skepticism. Before indicating whether they agree or disagree with statements about green claims made in advertising, again on a 7-point Likert scale, the respondents were informed about the terminology of green claims and what can generally be understood by this term. The final scale then consisted of four items. The first three were adapted from the original scale of Matthes and Wonneberger (2014), stating "*Most green claims in advertising are intended to mislead rather than to inform consumers*" (1), "*I do not believe most green claims made in advertising and on packaging*" (2) and "*Because green claims are exaggerated, consumers would be better off if such claims in advertising were eliminated*" (3). The last item was reverse coded and adopted from Mohr et al. (1998), stating "*Most green claims made on package labels or in advertising are true*" (4).

After recoding the last item, the average of all four items then formed the construct of consumer skepticism ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 1.13$). The original scale based on these four items offered acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$). The consultation of the item statistics offered an improvement in reliability. Thus, item three and the reverse coded item four were eliminated. The final two items still had acceptable reliability but indicated substantially higher internal consistency as the original scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$). Accordingly, the variables were then computed through the means of the respective items to form the final construct of consumer skepticism ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.35$).

Lastly, the binary independent variable appeal type was constructed by assigning the value 0 for the green marketing, and the value 1 for the green demarketing condition. To check if respondents interpreted the stimuli as intended the respondents were asked to remember the advertisement at the beginning. They should indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement, Molecule wants to encourage customers to consume less.

4. Results

4.1 Manipulation Check

The manipulation check was assessed through an independent samples t test. Respondents in the green demarketing condition ($N = 70$, $M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.23$) reported significantly higher values than respondents in the green marketing condition ($N = 72$, $M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.63$) with respect to the manipulation check variable ($t(131.57) = -8.61$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.45$). Based on these results, the manipulation of the advertisement appeal was deemed successful.

4.2 Parallel Mediation

In order to examine the first three hypotheses a parallel mediation analysis was performed using model four of the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2022). Bootstrapping with 5000 samples together with heteroscedasticity consistent standard errors (Davidson, Davidson, & MacKinnon, 1995) were employed to compute the confidence intervals and inferential statistics. The indirect effects were deemed significant when the respective confidence interval did not include zero. More specifically, it was analyzed whether advertisement appeal (X) predicted brand attitude (Y) and whether this relationship would be fully or partially mediated by intrinsic (M1) and extrinsic motive inferences (M2).

Firstly, the total effect of appeal type on brand attitude indicated that the green demarketing appeal predicted significantly higher values for brand attitude compared to the green marketing appeal ($b = 0.54$, $t(140) = 2.34$, $p = .021$). The green demarketing appeal further elicited higher values of intrinsic motives ($b = 0.63$, $t(140) = 2.65$, $p = .009$), which subsequently led to more favorable brand attitudes ($b = 0.64$, $t(138) = 7.90$, $p < .001$). Contrary, despite the green marketing appeal led to a higher perception of extrinsic motives than the green demarketing appeal ($b = -0.54$, $t(140) = -2.47$, $p = .015$), the relationship between extrinsic motive inferences and brand attitude had no significant influence within the model ($b = -0.02$, $t(138) = -0.24$, $p = .808$). Table 1 offers an overview of the regression models.

Table 1. Regression Models for Parallel Mediation

Predictor	Outcome Variable		
	Intrinsic Motives (M1)	Extrinsic Motives (M2)	Brand Attitude (Y)
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Appeal Type (X)	0.63 (0.24)**	-0.54 (0.22)*	0.13 (0.18)
Intrinsic Motives (M1)	/	/	0.64 (0.08)***
Extrinsic Motives (M2)	/	/	-0.02 (0.09)
Model Summary	$R^2 = .05$ $F(1,140) = 7.04$ $p = .009$	$R^2 = .04$ $F(1,140) = 6.12$ $p = .015$	$R^2 = .46$ $F(3, 138) = 31.45$ $p < .001$
Model Summary (Total Effect)	/	/	$R^2 = .16$ $F(1,140) = 5.48$ $p = .021$

Note. Regression coefficients (b) are unstandardized. Standard errors (SE) are heteroskedasticity consistent (HC3).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Overall, the indirect effect through intrinsic motives was positive and significant ($b = 0.40$, $SE = 0.15$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.72]), whereas the indirect effect through extrinsic motives was not significant ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.08, 0.14]). Finally, the direct effect of advertisement appeal on brand attitude was not significant ($b = 0.13$, $t(138) = 0.72$, $p = 0.474$), demonstrating that the positive relationship between the green demarketing appeal and brand attitude is fully mediated by the perception of intrinsic motives.

Accordingly, given the significant positive total effect of green demarketing on brand attitude, hypothesis one can be accepted. The significant indirect effect of intrinsic motives fully explaining the positive relationship between the green demarketing appeal and brand attitude further supports hypothesis two. Contrarily, despite the green marketing appeal elicited higher extrinsic motives compared to the green demarketing appeal as expected, the overall indirect effect of extrinsic motives was not significant, leading to a refusal of hypothesis three.

4.3 Moderated Mediation

Next, PROCESS model eight (Hayes, 2022) was used to analyze the moderating influence of consumer skepticism (W) on the stated direct and indirect effects, altogether comprising hypotheses, four, five and six. Again, 5000 bootstrapped samples were employed together with heteroskedasticity consistent standard errors (Davidson, Davidson, & MacKinnon, 1995) to compute the confidence intervals and assess the indices of moderated mediation and the conditional indirect effects. As with the parallel mediation, the effect for moderated mediation is deemed significant, if zero does not fall within the lower and upper bound of the interval. Further, following the recommendations of Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007), consumer skepticism was mean centered ($M = 0$, $SD = 1.35$) to facilitate the interpretation of the results.

Supporting the results from the previous model, path coefficients indicate that the green demarketing appeal led to higher intrinsic motive inferences ($b = 0.52$, $t(138) = 2.46$, $p = .015$), positively influencing brand attitude ($b = 0.61$, $t(136) = 7.09$, $p < .001$), whereas the green marketing appeal led to higher extrinsic motives inferences ($b = -0.43$, $t(138) = -2.16$, $p = .033$). Again neither the relationship between extrinsic motives and brand attitude ($b = 0.003$, $t(136) = 0.03$, $p = .977$) nor the direct effect of the advertisement appeal on brand attitude was significant ($b = 0.14$, $t(136) = 0.74$, $p = .462$). Table 2 gives an overview of the regression models.

Table 2. Regression Models for Moderated Mediation

Predictor	Outcome Variable		
	Intrinsic Motives (M1)	Extrinsic Motives (M2)	Brand Attitude (Y)
Predictor	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>b</i> (<i>SE</i>)
Appeal Type (X)	0.52 (0.21)*	-0.43 (0.20)*	0.14 (0.183)
Intrinsic Motives (M1)	/	/	0.61 (0.09)***
Extrinsic Motives (M2)	/	/	0.003 (0.10)
Skepticism (W)	-0.62 (0.13)***	0.47 (0.13)***	-0.11 (0.09)
Interaction (X*M)	0.42 (0.19)*	-0.12 (0.18)	0.06 (0.12)
Model Summary (Interactions)	$\Delta R^2 = .04$ $F(1, 138) = 4.58$ $p = .034$	$\Delta R^2 = .003$ $F(1, 138) = 0.43$ $p = .516$	$\Delta R^2 = .001$ $F(1, 136) = 0.24$ $p = .627$
Model Summary	$R^2 = .21$ $F(3,138) = 8.91$ $p < .001$	$R^2 = .22$ $F(3,138) = 8.40$ $p < .001$	$R^2 = .47$ $F(5, 136) = 20.56$ $p < .001$

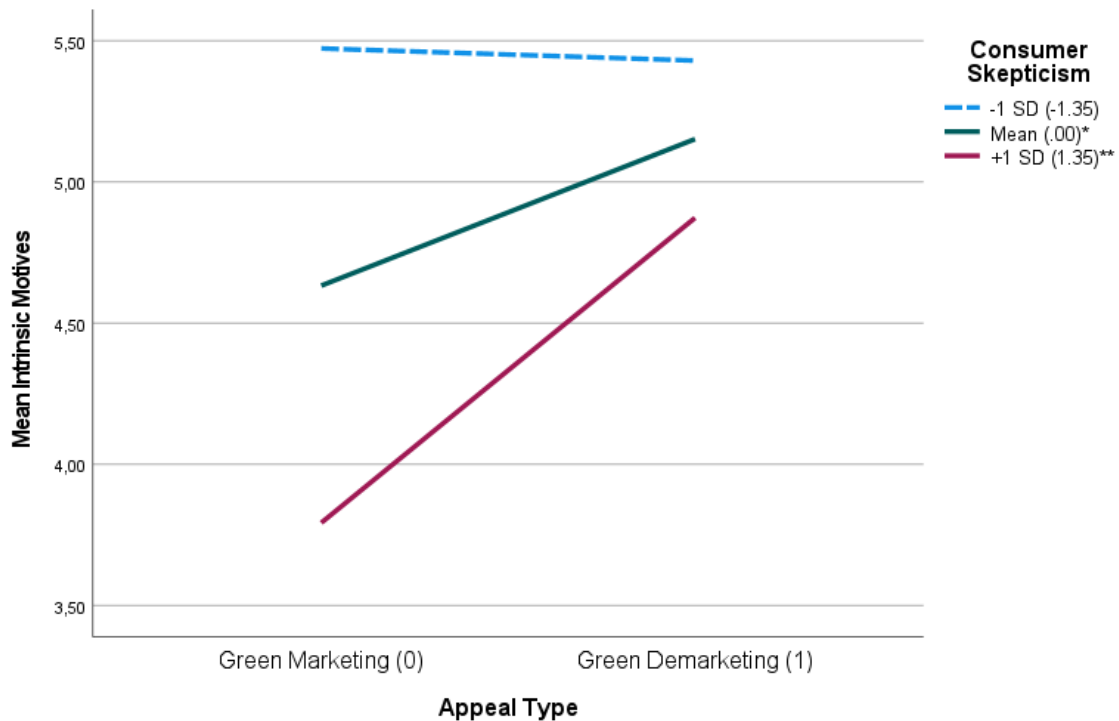
Note. Regression coefficients (*b*) are unstandardized. Standard errors (*SE*) are heteroskedasticity consistent (HC3).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The interaction term (X*W) had a significant effect on the relationship between appeal type and the perception of intrinsic motives ($b = 0.42$, $t(138) = 2.14$, $p = .034$, $\Delta R^2 = .04$), denoting the moderating influence of consumer skepticism. Contrarily, the interaction term had no significant effect on the relationship between appeal type and extrinsic motives ($b = -0.12$, $t(138) = -0.65$, $p = 0.516$, $\Delta R^2 = .003$) and subsequently appeal type and brand attitude ($b = .06$, $t(136) = -0.49$, $p = 0.627$, $\Delta R^2 = .001$).

In this regard, looking at the conditional effects from the advertisement appeal on intrinsic motive inferences, results of the simple slope analysis indicated a significant moderation on high (+1 SD, $b = 1.08$, $t(138) = 3.00$, $p = .003$) and moderate levels of consumer skepticism (Mean, $b = 0.52$, $t(138) = 2.46$, $p = .015$), but not at low levels of skepticism (-1 SD, $b = -0.04$, $t(138) = -0.14$, $p = .892$). Figure 3 visualizes the conditional effects.

Figure 3. Conditional Effects on Mean Intrinsic Motives



Note. Skepticism is mean centered with a standard deviation of 1.35. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Further, the conditional direct effects of appeal type on brand attitude were not significant. The inspection of the 95% confidence intervals indicated no changes in effects different from zero for the different levels of consumer skepticism (see Table 4). The index of moderated mediation indicated that the conditional indirect effect via extrinsic motives ($b = 0.00$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.05]) was not significant. The conditional direct effects of appeal type on brand attitude were also not significant. Contrarily, the index of moderated mediation for the conditional indirect effect of intrinsic motives was significantly different from zero ($b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.52]). Given this finding, an inspection of the conditional effects portrays a similar picture as the ones for the path between the advertisement appeal and intrinsic motives. The conditional indirect effect for

the relationship is again only significant at high (+1 SD, $b = 0.66$, $SE = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.21, 1.17]) and moderate levels of skepticism (Mean, $b = 0.32$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.58]), but not at lower levels of skepticism (-1 SD, $b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.18$, 95% CI [-0.42, 0.29]).

Table 3. Conditional Direct and Indirect Effects

Conditional (in)direct Effects	Path		
	Intrinsic Motives (M1)	Extrinsic Motives (M2)	Brand Attitude (Y)
	b (SE) [95% CI]	b (SE) [95% CI]	b (SE) [95% CI]
Low Skepticism	-0.03 (0.18) [-0.42, 0.29]	-0.001 (0.04) [-0.08, 0.08]	0.06 (0.21) [-0.36, 0.48]
Moderate Skepticism	0.32 (0.13) [0.06, 0.58]	-0.001 (0.04) [-0.08, 0.10]	0.14 (0.18) [-0.23, 0.50]
High Skepticism	0.66 (0.24) [0.21, 1.17]	-0.002 (0.04) [-0.11, 0.15]	0.21 (0.27) [-0.31, 0.74]
Index of moderated Mediation	0.26 (0.12) [0.03, 0.52]	0.00 (0.02) [-0.04, 0.05]	/

Note. Skepticism is mean centered with a standard deviation of 1.35. Levels of skepticism are indicated through low (-1 SD), moderate (Mean) and high (+1 SD). 95% confidence intervals and standard errors of the indirect effects are bootstrapped with 5000 samples. b represents unstandardized coefficients. Bold coefficients are statistically significant.

Based on these results the stated hypotheses can be evaluated. As the findings showed no significant index of moderated mediation for consumer skepticism on the indirect effect of appeal type on brand attitude via the perception of extrinsic motives, and further no significant conditional direct effects of appeal type on brand attitude at different levels of consumer skepticism, hypotheses five and six were rejected. Differently, the index of moderated mediation was significant for the indirect effect of appeal type on brand attitude via intrinsic motives. The conditional effects showed no significance on lower levels of skepticism on the positive relationship between the green demarketing appeal and brand attitude but were significant on moderate and higher levels of skepticism. More specifically, the findings indicate that with growing levels of consumer skepticism, the positive relationship of the green demarketing appeal on brand

attitude via the perception of intrinsic motives becomes stronger rather than weaker. As this is contrary to what was expected, hypothesis four was rejected.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to broaden the understanding of consumers' attitudes towards green demarketing appeals compared to the more commonly applied concept of green marketing. To augment the research stream on green demarketing and provide further insights into the process of consumers' brand attitude formation, the structural approach of this thesis was twofold. Firstly, this study investigated the differing effects of green demarketing appeals and green marketing appeals on consumers' attitudes toward a fictional brand through message framing. Further, attribution theory was applied to gain insights on what underlying motives consumers infer behind the respective appeal type and how these motives subsequently affect brand attitudes through a mediating role. Secondly, it was explored how the direct and indirect effects are conditional on different levels of dispositional consumer skepticism.

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The results of this research led to several conclusions. Firstly, confirming the first hypothesis, regression results of the parallel mediation analysis revealed that the green demarketing appeal led to more favorable attitudes towards the brand compared to the green marketing appeal (H1). Secondly, the results further supported the hypothesized indirect positive effect of the green demarketing appeal on brand attitudes via intrinsic motives (H2). Respondents perceived the reasons behind the green demarketing advertisement as more intrinsically motivated than those of the green marketing appeal, which further led to more favorable brand attitudes. The stated indirect effect through extrinsic motives on the other hand was not significant (H3). Despite the green marketing appeal led to more extrinsic motives as expected, their subsequent effect on the respondents' attitudes toward the brand was not significant. Moreover, the direct relationship between appeal type and brand attitude became not significant after including the mediators into the model, indicating that the formation of favorable attitudes toward the brand using the green demarketing appeal is fully explained by the respondents' perceptions of intrinsic motives.

The subsequent parallel moderated mediation supported the results for the respective paths of the prior model. Further, consumer skepticism had no influence on the stated indirect and direct

relationships between the two different appeals and brand attitude. The results neither indicated significant differences in the strength of the proposed relationship between the appeal type and brand attitude (H6) nor for the relationship between the appeal type and extrinsic motive inferences (H5) for varying levels of consumer skepticism. On the other hand, the influence of consumer skepticism was significant for the indirect effect of intrinsic motives but offered contrary results. Surprisingly, the positive effect of the demarketing appeal on intrinsic motives became stronger rather than weaker at higher levels of consumer skepticism, which was counterintuitive to what has been stated. Accordingly, hypothesis four (H4) was rejected.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Interpreting the findings for the total effect in the context of message framing, the results are supported by research spanning both social marketing and green advertising, indicating that when communicating a higher order goal such as health (Amatulli et al., 2019) or even the preservation of the environment, a positively framed message is less effective in affecting a person's attitude than a negative one. When communicating the goal of environmental sustainability, a negative framed message in the form of a green demarketing appeal seems to be more persuasive than a positive framed one in the form of a green marketing appeal. More specifically, people seem to evaluate a brand, which calls consumers to prevent the potential threat of environmental degradation by consuming less more favorably compared to a brand trying to reach the same goal by persuading people to buy products that are less detrimental for the environment. Thus, in the pursuit of countering said environmental degradation as a higher order goal, a negative framed demarketing appeal emphasizing the prevention aspect might influence the consumers attention towards the message more than a positive framed marketing appeal that stresses potential gains. This heightened attention might in turn influence consumers comprehensions about the goal prior to making their judgements (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 2004), subsequently making them evaluate a green demarketing appeal as more believable and in turn positively influence their judgements about the brand eliciting it.

Despite this explanatory approach through message framing might be suitable to illustrate the favorable consumer responses towards a green demarketing appeal, the results indicate that the total effect persists because of the mediators, somewhat diminishing the theoretical explanation of message framing. Rather, these results accentuate the suitability of including attribution theory

when investigating brand attitude formation towards sustainable marketing appeals and are supported by research findings within the context of CSR communication (Olsen et al., 2014), green advertising (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Parguel et al., 2011; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013) and green demarketing (Hwang et al., 2016; Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016).

The current study demonstrated the importance of integrating the role of motive inferences with somewhat surprising results. First, overarching support was found for the differing influence of the advertisement appeals on motive inferences. Altogether, the results from the path analysis indicate that the green demarketing appeal elicited higher intrinsic and lower extrinsic motive inferences than the green marketing appeal. These findings attest to the theoretical explanation of Kelley's (1973) covariation model, stating that consumers draw on specific types of evidence regarding a certain behavior to form their motive inferences, namely distinctiveness, consistency and consensus. When drawing on the latter, consumers evaluate the extent to which others adopt the same behavior and may perceive the company's advertised engagement as extrinsically motivated, when the majority of competitors behave similarly at the same time (Parguel et al., 2011). In this context, firms eliciting a green demarketing appeals using promotions which explicitly aim at decreasing consumption, engage in a different behavior than their competitors, at least from a promotional point of view, and thus arguably do not act in consensus to them. In a market where green demarketing appeals are the exception rather than the rule, consumers participating in that market seemingly infer that a brand eliciting such an appeal is acting in a unique and authentic way (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). Thus, they are likely to think the message within this appeal represents the character of the firm, which convinces them about their true intentions and subsequently leads them to make intrinsic attributions about the brands underlying motives (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Vlachos et al., 2013). Differently, as green marketing appeals are the norm rather than the exception when promoting a brand's contribution to environmental sustainability, consumers are more likely to infer that said brand emulates its competitors and uses this appeal type as a reaction to external pressures rather than to represent its true commitment, making consumers ascribe more extrinsic motives towards the sender.

Contrarily, being the only study known to similarly compare the two appeal types, the findings from Reich and Armstrong Soule (2016) paint a different picture. Their findings suggest that green demarketing appeals are perceived worse than green marketing appeals with regards to consumer's motive inferences when promoting a specific product, but better when used in an institutional

setting. They argue that when a green marketing appeal is employed within a product advertisement, consumers perceive the act of advertising a specific product inherently as an effort by the brand to encourage consumption. More specifically, using a fictional brand for household trash bags, Reich and Armstrong Soule (2016) focused on product attributes to convey the argument of the respective appeal type. In their stimuli material, the green marketing appeal stressed the use of something less detrimental for the environment (“*made from recycled materials*”), whereas the green demarketing prompted respondents to use less in general (“*made from stronger plastic*”). In this context an appeal focusing on lowering consumption at the product level might appear confusing or contradictory to consumers, further eliciting less genuine motive inferences compared to a traditional green appeal (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). Contrarily, institutional advertisements do not focus on specific products, but are intended to establish a corporate identity and influence the perception of a brand’s position and its overall cause (Solomon, Barnes, Marshall, Mitchell, & Stuart, 2013). In the context of this study, despite using a depiction of Jeans as a product for both appeal types, the advertisements used can be interpreted as institutional. The manipulation did not center around specific product attributes to transport the arguments for the respective appeal but was rather in line with the idea of influencing the brand’s perception. In this regard, Reich and Armstrong Soule (2016) argue that in the absence of a particular product being advertised, consumption is not implicitly encouraged and a green demarketing appeal is perceived as more congruent and legitimate towards the cause it is promoting, further leading to more genuine motives inferences. Moreover, the current findings imply that consumers infer intrinsic motives when consumption reduction is promoted in the form of a green demarketing appeal on the brand level and that the sole depiction of a specific product does not contradict with such an appeal. Overall, the results of the present study suggest that consumers infer a brand using a green demarketing appeal to inherit a sincere environmental consciousness as part of the company’s DNA, whereas they tend to interpret comparable green advertising appeals rather as taking opportunistic advantage of sustainable development trends.

Moreover, whereas the two different appeal types influenced the attribution formation, only intrinsic motive inferences mediated the positive relationship between green demarketing appeals and brand attitude as expected, whereas extrinsic motives had no significant mediating role within the model. In fact, given the full mediating effect of intrinsic motives, consumers seem to form

their favorable responses towards the green demarketing appeal solely based on inferring genuine and predominantly altruistic motives.

Although comparable research generally found support for the positive influence of intrinsic motive inferences and negative influence of perceived extrinsic motives on an array of consumer's attitudes and behavioral intentions (Ellen et al., 2006; Ginder et al., 2021; Groza et al., 2011), similar patterns of results appear in the works of Leonidou and Skarmetas (2017) and Parguel et al. (2011) on the role of extrinsic motives in the context of green advertising. The results of Parguel et al. (2011) showed that poor sustainability ratings have a negative effect on corporate brand evaluations due to lower intrinsic motive inferences, whereas extrinsic motives did not influence said evaluations. They argue that, even though consumers perceive extrinsic motives, these motives appear well accepted, as consumers seem to understand the economic motives and external pressure that underly a company's sustainable development efforts. Similarly, in employing structural equation modeling (Leonidou & Skarmetas, 2017) found a negative influence of consumers perceived intrinsic motives on their skepticism towards green products, whereas the influence of extrinsic motives on skepticism was not significant. They imply that consumers recognize and accept that firms need to preserve profitability to survive, given the rise of sales and profits that arise with the increase of environmentally friendly products. Thus, in the context of green products, consumers' doubts are neither raised nor resolved (Leonidou & Skarmetas, 2017).

In this regard, the results of the current study offer several important findings. First, they attest to the multidimensional nature of consumer attributions as consumers are seemingly able to recognize the distinctive nature of intrinsic and extrinsic motives. Motives thus do not represent opposite sides of the same construct, ranging from altruistic to opportunistic, but rather form two different dimensions (Parguel et al., 2011). Second, these two dimensions seem to hold differing roles in their influence on consumer responses, in that the only dimension that affects brand attitude are perceived intrinsic motives. Given the fully mediating role of intrinsic motives within the current study, consumer must perceive intrinsic motives in order to form favorable attitudes towards the brand. Yet, consumers clearly infer extrinsic motives as well. In the presence of intrinsic motives, extrinsic motives might arguably not be regarded as being unethical, when interpreted in the light of the two self-centered motives encompassing the extrinsic dimension (Ellen et al., 2006; Ginder et al., 2021). As Ellen et al. (2006) contends, consumers tend to react positively to strategic and negatively to egoistic motives, although both are deemed self-centered. Thus, in the context of this

study, people may judge the perceived extrinsic motives of green marketing as strategically driven rather than egoistic. It seems that consumers accept these motives, understanding the potential economic drivers that underly sustainable development efforts, and try to balance the meanings and weights of these two motivational constructs to determine, in favor of green demarketing appeals, their attitude towards a company.

Moreover, this study further set out to augmented research on green demarketing with integrating a measurement for dispositional consumer skepticism as a potentially influential factor in attribution formation and brand evaluation. Whereas prior research has primarily investigated its role as a situational reaction towards persuasive communication tactics (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Skarmeas & Leonidou, 2013) research neither in the context of green marketing or green demarketing has examined its influence on the formation of motive inferences. The current results did not support the hypothesized detrimental effect of higher levels of consumer skepticism on the direct relationship between the green demarketing appeal and brand attitude. As the direct effect between appeal type and brand attitude was not significant, the missing influence of consumer skepticism on said relationship can be traced back to the overarching influence of intrinsic motive attributions. Moreover, given the significant positive relationship between the green marketing appeal and extrinsic motives, the missing influence of consumer skepticism is somewhat surprising. A possible reason for this finding could be, similar to the explanation of the missing indirect effect of extrinsic motives. Consumers seem to accept that, despite their negative predispositions against companies' persuasive tactics, firms do business in order to make profits (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017).

Differently, results for the moderating influence of consumer skepticism on the process of making intrinsic attributions demonstrated the hypothesized effect to a certain degree. Despite lower levels of intrinsic motives for consumers with higher stated levels of skepticism for both advertisements, the differences were far less pronounced for the green demarketing appeal than for the green appeal. These results evoke suspicion about the dispositional character of consumer skepticism. Moreover, given that the positive relationship between the green demarketing appeal and intrinsic motives becomes stronger at higher levels of skepticism, this is contradictory to what was expected. It could be argued that consumer skepticism is influenced by the advertisement itself, rather than being independent of it. A possible explanation could be that the concept of consumer skepticism employed within this study can be interpreted as a form of dispositional persuasion knowledge,

suggesting that people learn to interpret and evaluate the goals and tactics of marketers (Rim & Kim, 2016). An important prerequisite for its development are the direct and indirect experiences individuals have with advertising (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Specifically, direct experiences, classified as the amount of advertising and the variety of tactics used, is an important mechanism for individuals' development of persuasion knowledge (Evans & Park, 2015). Besides aiding in the activation of persuasion knowledge, these direct experiences further help consumers to recognize the use of persuasive tactics and understanding the situational motivations behind them (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Ham & Kim, 2020; Rim & Kim, 2016). Thus, individuals with higher dispositional persuasion knowledge are more likely to recognize hidden persuasion intentions in communication messages and thus more inclined to assign ulterior motives to those messages, than individuals with lower persuasion knowledge (Rim & Kim, 2016).

In the context of the current study, it can be argued that the degree of persuasion knowledge differs with respect to the two appeal types used. In the case of green marketing appeals people might have developed higher levels of dispositional persuasion knowledge through repeated exposure to such advertisements and the use of different marketing tactics to convey sustainability. Differently, as green demarketing appeals are less conventional and commonplace, this might result in less direct experiences and thus less dispositional persuasion knowledge for such an advertisement. Hence, the stronger indirect effects of intrinsic motives at higher levels of consumer skepticism in favor of the green demarketing appeal can be explained by people's lower dispositional persuasion knowledge. People are arguably less likely to recognize persuasion intentions behind a green demarketing appeal and are more likely to assign less extrinsic and subsequently more intrinsic motives towards it. Accordingly, it could be assumed that the reason behind a green marketing appeal would be perceived as more extrinsically motivated due to peoples' higher persuasion knowledge. But, given the results of the current study, consumers' acceptance of a company's need to stay profitable seems to balance out their awareness of persuasive tactics, again diminishing the influence of consumer skepticism in the process of making extrinsic motive inferences. Overall, these findings still indicate the influential role of consumer skepticism in the context of green demarketing and the process of attitude formation, but given the conflicting results, they should be interpreted with caution. As consumers draw on their persuasion knowledge developed by the exposure to predominantly green claims to recognize ulterior motives by marketers, consumer skepticism towards green claims might just be what it states it is, a negative predisposition against

green marketing rather than green demarketing appeals. When exposed to a green demarketing appeal, consumers seem to reward the sender of such an appeal with the attribution of intrinsic motives, when they cannot recognize the potential of extrinsic motives.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several implications for marketers and practitioners. Consumers seem to infer that a brand using a green demarketing appeal is driven by its sincere environmental consciousness rather than taking opportunistic advantages of the prevalent sustainability trend. Importantly, the perception of intrinsic motives is strong enough to explain the favorable brand attitudes elicited by the green demarketing appeal. Despite these findings would imply that the use of a green demarketing advertisement is a suitable communication strategy for improving consumers' attitudes towards a brand without any shortcomings, it should be noted that its effectiveness might be dependent on whether its argument is conveyed on the product or brand level. As this study arguably employed the green demarketing appeal to influence brand perception and its cause towards doing something beneficial for the environment (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016) the implications have to be adapted. Hence, when marketers aim at using the merits of green demarketing with regards to brand evaluation, the reasoning to encourage consumption reduction should happen on the brand level, rather than focusing on specific product attributes. More specifically, to be perceived as genuinely doing something good about the environment, a green demarketing appeal should be employed to establish a corporate identity, and not to directly advertise a product.

Further, the findings demonstrated the influential role of consumers' skepticism towards green claims. Interestingly, higher levels of skepticism did not only influence the formation of intrinsic motives but strengthened the relationship between the green demarketing appeal and brand attitude via intrinsic motives. Consumers have arguably formed their skepticism based on their experiences with the persuasive tactics of green advertisements. They seem to not only accept possible ulterior motives of green demarketing appeals, but rather reward this kind of appeal with inferring more genuine motives and subsequently evaluate a brand eliciting a demarketing advertisement as more favorable compared to a brand using a green marketing advertisement. Given the negative influence high levels of consumers skepticism have on the evaluation of a green marketing appeals, these findings accentuate the suitability of employing green demarketing appeal. Especially in a

marketplace where a growing number of companies could be accused of greenwashing, an important antecedent to skepticism (Farooq & Wicaksono, 2021; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017), employing a green demarketing appeal not only offers a possibility to circumvent these detrimental effects, but also seems to be beneficial regardless of prevailing skepticism. Importantly, practitioners should observe the environmental tactics used by other marketers, as consumer skepticism is not an inherently stable belief, but formed as the result of experiences.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

The present study has certain limitations, which can provide future research opportunities. First, the use of a non-probability sample might diminish the generalizability of the results. More specifically, employing both convenience and snowball sampling could result in a biased sample as some members of the population are more likely to be included than others (Bryman, 2012; Spilski et al., 2018). The use of an online questionnaire could limit the sample to more internet savvy and thus arguably younger respondents and potentially exclude older individuals, confounding the intended examination of a more general population. Moreover, respondents who are more involved in environmental topics could be more inclined to participate in the current study, further affecting the representativeness of the sample. Importantly, despite randomly assigning participants to either condition, selection bias might occur (Spilski et al., 2018) and respondents' individual differences with regards to their environmental involvement might affect the current results. Individuals with higher levels of environmental involvement regard environmental protection as important and personally relevant (Cheng et al., 2020) and are more motivated to process the information and arguments within green advertisements (Matthes, Wonneberger, & Schmuck, 2014; Schmuck et al., 2018). Research has shown that people who are concerned about the environment tend to be more appreciative of the information utility of green claims, resulting in lower skepticism toward green advertising (Cheng et al., 2020; Matthes et al., 2014; Mohr et al., 1998), generally more positive attitudes towards green advertisements (D'Souza & Taghian, 2005) and higher purchase intentions (Grimmer & Woolley, 2014) compared to non-green consumers. Thus, differences in respondents' green involvement within the current sample might have influenced the results, affecting not only their skepticism towards green claims, but also the evaluation of the brand. The inclusion of a measure for green involvement would not only

account for said external influences, but also help to distinguish whether the findings can be applied to the general population or green consumers.

Another limitation must be made with regards to the stimulus material. First, despite designing the stimuli to make both appeal types comparable and establish ecological validity (Spilski et al., 2018), the rather abstract nature of the claims used within the stimuli might have negatively influenced the perception of the green marketing appeal, outside the intended manipulation. Research on claim specificity in the context of green advertising suggests that abstract claims are typically less influential in affecting consumers' responses to advertising appeals (Yang, Lu, Zhu, & Su, 2015). More specifically, in delivering ambiguous and subjective information, abstract claims are perceived as more deceptive and manipulative than concrete claims, which use more detailed and objective information to convey their arguments (Shin & Ki, 2021; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Yang et al., 2015), specifically when communicating sustainable product in the form of green advertisements (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014). Thus, the use of abstract claims within the current study might be another explanation for the negative relationship between the green marketing appeal, intrinsic motives, and subsequently less favorable brand attitudes, possibly confounding the findings. Thus, the results should be interpreted with caution and future research might further investigate differences in claim specificity, when comparing green marketing and demarketing appeals.

Second, even though the discussion of the results would indicate that the product advertised is secondary, the current findings might not be generalizable across other product categories. Consumers' might differ in their involvement with the advertised product, causing variation in the processing and persuasiveness of each appeal type (Kong & Zhang, 2013). For high involvement products, consumers diligently evaluate the message within the advertisement (Bauer, Sauer, & Becker, 2006) and their responses towards the brand are more likely to be influenced by the strength of the argument (Kong & Zhang, 2013; Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006). Contrarily, for low involvement products consumers draw on the superficial analysis of available cues rather than analyzing the argument within the message (Coulter, 2005). This differentiation suggests a potential influence in the generalizability of the current findings, as respondents higher involved in the advertised product might be more willing to evaluate either the green demarketing or green demarketing appeal based on their respective arguments as intended. To account for this influence, future research might use

a measure of product involvement to control for possible variations or employ different product categories.

Moreover, the present study only incorporated a dichotomous approach for the mediating role of motive inferences. With regards to the scales employed, the items for intrinsic motives consisted of values-driven motives, whereas extrinsic motives contained items comprising egoistic, stakeholder-driven, and strategic motives (Leonidou & Skarmas, 2017; Vlachos et al., 2009), which might have confounded the results of this study. The findings imply that not only the missing influence of extrinsic motives on brand attitude, but also the missing influence of consumer skepticism on the process of making extrinsic motive inferences might be due to the consumers' acceptance of a brand's strategic motives. In this regard, future research could expand beyond the dichotomous approach of intrinsic and extrinsic motive inferences used in the current study to examine a more complex and multidimensional attribution model. The separate use of the stated four attribution dimensions driven (Ellen et al., 2006), would help in explaining distinct consumer reactions in the light of green marketing and demarketing and possibly diminish the limitations of the current study.

Another limitation might be the somewhat contradictory role of consumer skepticism. The findings imply that consumer skepticism might be influenced by the advertisement itself or at least be not independent of the respective appeal type. First, as the scales measured consumers skepticism towards green claims (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014; Mohr et al., 1998) a definition of the term green claims was employed to explain respondents the underlying concept of the subsequent questions. Green claims might be perceived as a form of green marketing rather than green demarketing. This association could prime respondents into reporting higher values of skepticism when they are exposed to the green marketing condition, whereas this association might not hold for the green demarketing condition, ultimately resulting in lower skepticism. Second, given the strong relationship between consumer skepticism and motive inferences (Ham & Kim, 2020) its position within the questionnaire could determine the strength of consumer skepticism. As respondents perceived a green demarketing appeal as more intrinsically motivated, they might discard possible skepticism for the appeal based on the inferences made, resulting in overall lower levels of skepticism. Contrarily, as the green marketing appeal was perceived as more extrinsically motivated respondents might confirm their already negative perceptions with higher levels of skepticism. These explanations point out the limitations regarding the internal validity of consumer

skepticism within the current study, as it is seemingly influenced by the advertisement, rather than measuring the respondent's predisposition. This could also be reflected through the comparably low internal consistency of the scale (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Thus, in the context of comparing the two appeal types, future research might use a more general measure for dispositional consumer skepticism (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998) to avoid possible associations with either appeal type, and give attention to its placement within the questionnaire. Further, the use of situational skepticism as an outcome variable would lead to practical contributions, as it is directly related greenwashing perceptions (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017).

With regards to the dependent variable, future research might use a different outcome measure than the evaluation of a brand. Despite research attests to the antecedent role of brand attitude in predicting behavioral intentions (Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992; Spears & Singh, 2004), even in an environmental protection context (Gadenne, Sharma, Kerr, & Smith, 2011) this is not always the case (Reich & Armstrong Soule, 2016). As consumers might behave differently to a green demarketing appeal in a real consumption context, future research could go beyond measuring brand attitudes and purchase intentions, and possibly investigate real purchase behavior.

Further, besides the covariation model (Kelley, 1973) might be suitable in theoretically explaining higher intrinsic motives for the green demarketing appeal within the current study, different antecedents should be investigated. In this regard, brand-cause fit, describing the perceived congruence between a social issue and a brand's core business (Du et al., 2010) has been shown to influence consumers' process of attribution formation (Ellen et al., 2006; Marín, Cuestas, & Román, 2016). When investigating green demarketing in the context of attribution theory, future research might employ a measure of brand-cause fit, to explore whether consumption reduction can be communicated by all brands equally, or if company action should match the appeal to elicit favorable motive inferences. This would widen the understanding of consumer attribution formation and further give external validity and practicality to the results.

Lastly, future research could look into a different mechanism other than consumer motive inferences when comparing these appeal types. Both the argument that consumers infer higher intrinsic motives for the green demarketing appeal because the eliciting brand acts differently than its competitors, as well as the arguably lower persuasion knowledge for such appeals might lead to the conclusion that consumers perceive green demarketing as contradictory to what they expect

from environmental marketing. Consumers might not expect an advertisement to specifically discourage consumption and such an appeal may appear more novel and somewhat innovative than a more traditional green appeal. In this regard, research conceptualizing this idea has shown that novelty perceptions enhance attitudes towards the advertisement and the brand (Sheinin, Varki, & Ashley, 2011). As these novelty perceptions might be also prevalent within the current study and thus act as a potential alternative mechanism in eliciting favorable brand attitudes for the green demarketing appeal, future research could examine its role as an explanatory approach in predicting attitudes towards green demarketing.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to deepen the understanding on how consumers perceive the somewhat contradictory approach of green demarketing compared to more common green marketing strategies and shed a light on the role of dispositional consumer skepticism as a potentially influential factor. In this regard, the following research questions were stated:

How do consumers' attitudes towards a brand using either a green demarketing or a green marketing appeal differ, and how can motive inferences explain these differences? To what extent does consumer skepticism influence this process?

The results revealed that a green demarketing appeal outperformed a green marketing appeal with regards to the consumers' attitudes towards the advertised brand. The results further underline the importance of employing motive inferences when exploring consumers' processes of brand attitude formation in the current context. The perception of intrinsic motives fully mediated the positive relationship between green demarketing and brand attitude. On the other hand, despite the green marketing appeal elicited higher extrinsic motive inferences as expected, they had no subsequent influence on brand attitude. Additionally, consumer skepticism had no influence on the formation of extrinsic motives and the overall relationship between appeal type and brand attitude, but significantly influenced the formation of intrinsic motives. But other than weakening the indirect effect via intrinsic motives as expected, it strengthened the positive relationship between the green demarketing appeal and brand attitude.

These findings accentuate the suitability of attribution theory and the use of a dichotomous measure for motive inferences as explanatory variables. Consumers infer distinct motives when confronted with an appeal type. Whereas intrinsic motives are heavily involved in the attributional process of forming favorable brand attitudes for green demarketing, consumers seem to accept the economic drivers behind brands sustainable efforts in the form of extrinsic motives. This acceptance might not only balance out their skepticism towards green claims but moreover their subsequent brand evaluation. Furthermore, the findings shed a light on the role of dispositional skepticism on the process of making motive inferences and its interpretation as a form of persuasion knowledge. Consumers have seemingly formed their skepticism based on experiences with green marketing, somewhat rewarding a brand using an appeal calling for consumption reduction with heightened perceptions of sincere environmental commitment.

Whereas these findings would imply that a green demarketing appeal could be used by brands without drawbacks, the limitations of the current study should be acknowledged. The construct of consumer skepticism employed could be either directly or indirectly influenced by the respective appeal type other than being independent of it. Moreover, the missing influence of extrinsic motives on brand attitude and its missing interaction with consumer skepticism might be due to consumers' acceptance of strategic reasons to use an environmental appeal. Future research might thus use a more general measure for skepticism towards advertisements or investigate it as a situational reaction. Research could further use a more differentiated approach on motive inferences.

Overall, green demarketing might be a promising strategy for firms aiming to communicate their environmental responsibility. In a market where most brands are trying to be sustainable by promoting the purchase of their green products, doing the contrary and advertising the aspect of consumption reduction is seemingly rewarded by consumers. Moreover, using such a strategy might have the potential to circumvent skepticism towards environmental appeals. Given the apparent dynamics of consumer perceptions towards environmental appeals and the comparably scarce literature on green demarketing, the topic still offers fruitful ground to extend both the demarketing and sustainability research streams. Especially in times where consumption holds a fundamental part within our current society, ways to contribute to favor of less or at least more mindful consumption should be targeted as a focal direction in marketing research.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Questionnaire

[INTRODUCTION]

Liebe Teilnehmerin, lieber Teilnehmer,

im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit an der Universität Wien würde ich Sie bitten ein paar Fragen zu beantworten. Die folgende Umfrage beschäftigt sich mit der Wahrnehmung von Konsumentinnen und Konsumenten in Bezug auf nachhaltige Werbebotschaften und wird nicht länger als 4 Minuten Ihrer Zeit in Anspruch nehmen.

Zu Beginn dieser Umfrage wird Ihnen eine Werbeanzeige präsentiert. Im Anschluss daran werden Ihnen sowohl generelle Fragen als auch Fragen in Bezug auf besagte Werbeanzeige gestellt.

Sie werden nicht die Möglichkeit haben zwischen der Anzeige und den Fragen wechseln zu können. Bitte nehmen Sie sich also genug Zeit und lesen zu Beginn sowohl den Inhalt der Anzeige als auch die darauffolgenden Fragen sorgfältig und in Ruhe durch. Für die Beantwortung ist anzumerken, dass es weder richtig noch falsch gibt - was zählt ist Ihre Meinung.

Ihre Eingaben werden natürlich anonymisiert gespeichert und verarbeitet. Falls Sie dazu Fragen oder Einwände haben sollten, kontaktieren sie mich bitte: a11936833@unet.univie.ac.at
Vielen Dank, dass Sie sich die Zeit nehmen und mich bei meiner Masterarbeit unterstützen!

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Janik Sachs

[GREEN MARKETING CONDITION]

Im Folgenden sehen Sie eine Werbeanzeige der Marke Molecule. Bitte lesen Sie in aller Ruhe die Botschaft, die Ihnen die Marke vermitteln will:

Molecule®

„ChooseWell, Buy Green“

Momentan nutzen wir mehr Ressourcen als uns die Erde zur Verfügung stellen kann. Nachhaltigkeit und ein bewusster Umgang mit diesen Ressourcen sind also zentrale Themen für unsere und kommende Generationen.

Wir von **Molecule** sind uns bewusst, welchen Einfluss die Herstellung von Kleidung auf die Umwelt hat. Ganz nach unserem Motto legen wir deshalb großen Wert auf Nachhaltigkeit und umweltschonende Prozesse entlang unserer gesamten Produktionskette.

Denke **bei** deinem nächsten Kauf daran, dass die Umwelt auch deine Verantwortung ist.

Choose Well, **Buy Green!**



Foto: Molecule®

[GREEN DEMARKETING CONDITION]

Im Folgenden sehen Sie eine Werbeanzeige der Marke Molecule. Bitte lesen Sie in aller Ruhe die Botschaft, die Ihnen die Marke vermitteln will:

Molecule®

„Buy Less, ChooseWell“

Momentan nutzen wir mehr Ressourcen als uns die Erde zur Verfügung stellen kann. Nachhaltigkeit und ein bewusster Umgang mit diesen Ressourcen sind also zentrale Themen für unsere und kommende Generationen.

Wir von **Molecule** sind uns bewusst, welchen Einfluss die Herstellung unserer Kleidung auf die Umwelt hat. Ganz nach unserem Motto möchten wir deshalb daran erinnern, dass mehr nicht immer besser ist. Überlege dir bitte, ob du gerade wirklich etwas Neues brauchst.

Denke **vor** deinem nächsten Einkauf daran, dass die Umwelt auch deine Verantwortung ist.

Buy Less, Choose Well!



Foto: Molecule®

[BAND ATTITUDE]

Bitte geben Sie im Folgenden an, welche Wörter für Sie die Marke Molecule am besten beschreiben:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Negativ	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Positiv
Sagt mir nicht zu	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Sagt mir zu
Nicht Ansprechend	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Ansprechend
Unsympathisch	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Sympathisch
Gefällt mir nicht	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Gefällt mir

[INTRINSIC MOTIVES]

Was halten Sie von der Marke Molecule basierend auf der Werbeanzeige, die Sie gesehen haben. Molecule ...

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu
sorgt sich ernsthaft um das Wohlergehen der Natur.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
versucht der Umwelt etwas zurückzugeben.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
fühlt sich moralisch verpflichtet der Umwelt zu helfen.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
will der Umwelt zuliebe das Richtige tun.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ist ehrlich daran interessiert, ökologisch verantwortungsvoll zu agieren.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

[EXTRINSIC MOTIVES]

Wie beurteilen Sie die Marke Molecule basierend auf der Werbeanzeige, die Sie gesehen haben. Molecule ...

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu
folgt nur dem "Nachhaltigkeitstrend", weil andere Firmen es auch machen.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
versucht nur sein Image zu verbessern.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
hat kein echtes Interesse an Umweltthemen.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
versucht dadurch mehr Kunden zu gewinnen.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
erhofft sich dadurch mehr Profit.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

[CONSUMER SKEPTICISM]

Im Folgenden geht es darum, was Sie generell von nachhaltigen Claims in der Werbung halten.

Unter nachhaltigen bzw. grünen Claims versteht man Aussagen, welche auf die positiven Auswirkungen eines Produktes oder einer Marke auf die Umwelt hindeuten. Diese werden vom Unternehmen selbst initiiert und können Aussagen zu selbst auferlegten Ansprüchen wie Klimaneutralität, Umweltschutz oder Ähnlichem beinhalten.

Bitte geben Sie in diesem Kontext an inwieweit sie den folgenden Aussagen über nachhaltigen Claims zustimmen oder nicht:

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu
Die meisten nachhaltigen Claims in Werbeanzeigen sind dazu gedacht Konsumenten zu täuschen, anstatt sie zu informieren.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Den meisten nachhaltigen Claims in der Werbung und auf Verpackungen glaube ich nicht.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Da nachhaltige Claims übertrieben sind, wäre es für Konsumenten besser, wenn solche Behauptungen in der Werbung abgeschafft würden.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Die meisten nachhaltigen Claims in Werbeanzeigen und auf Verpackungen sind wahr.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

[MANIPULATION CHECK]

Erinnern Sie sich noch einmal an die Werbeanzeige zu Beginn der Umfrage. Wie beurteilen sie folgende Aussage:

	Stimme überhaupt nicht zu	Stimme nicht zu	Stimme teilweise nicht zu	Weder noch	Stimme teilweise zu	Stimme zu	Stimme voll zu
Molecule möchte Kunden dazu aufrufen, weniger zu konsumieren.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

[DEMOGRAPHICS]

Abschließend noch zwei Fragen zu Ihrer Person. Bitte versuchen Sie wahrheitsgemäß zu antworten. Falls Sie das nicht wollen, haben Sie auch die Option keine Angabe zu machen.

Bitte geben Sie Ihr Alter an:

Wie identifizieren Sie sich?

- ☐ Weiblich
- ☐ Männlich
- ☐ Divers

- ☐ Keine Angabe

Appendix B. Output Process Model 4

```
***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.1 *****

      Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D.      www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

*****
Model   : 4
  Y     : Attitude
  X     : Appeal
  M1    : Intrins
  M2    : Extrins

Sample
Size: 142

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  Intrins

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F (HC3)      df1      df2      p
      ,220      ,048      1,984      7,043      1,000      140,000      ,009

Model
      coeff      se (HC3)      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant      4,550      ,184      24,784      ,000      4,187      4,913
Appeal         ,630      ,237      2,654      ,009      ,161      1,099

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  Extrins

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F (HC3)      df1      df2      p
      ,206      ,043      1,649      6,117      1,000      140,000      ,015

Model
      coeff      se (HC3)      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant      4,686      ,146      32,113      ,000      4,398      4,975
Appeal        -,538      ,217      -2,473      ,015      -,967      -,108

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  Attitude

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F (HC3)      df1      df2      p
      ,679      ,460      1,075      31,445      3,000      138,000      ,000

Model
      coeff      se (HC3)      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant      1,906      ,725      2,630      ,010      ,473      3,339
Appeal         ,130      ,181      ,717      ,474      -,228      ,488
Intrins        ,636      ,081      7,901      ,000      ,477      ,795
Extrins        -,023      ,093      -,244      ,808      -,206      ,161
```

***** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL *****

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

Attitude

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F (HC3)	df1	df2	p
,195	,038	1,888	5,478	1,000	140,000	,021

Model

	coeff	se (HC3)	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	4,694	,173	27,171	,000	4,353	5,036
Appeal	,543	,232	2,340	,021	,084	1,001

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se (HC3)	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
,543	,232	2,340	,021	,084	1,001

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se (HC3)	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
,130	,181	,717	,474	-,228	,488

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
TOTAL	,413	,161	,117	,746
Intrins	,401	,154	,113	,721
Extrins	,012	,053	-,077	,139

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

95,0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:

5000

NOTE: A heteroscedasticity consistent standard error and covariance matrix estimator was used.

----- END MATRIX -----

Appendix C. Output Process Model 8

```
***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.1 *****

      Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D.      www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

*****
Model   : 8
  Y     : Attitude
  X     : Appeal
  M1    : Intrins
  M2    : Extrins
  W     : Skept

Sample
Size: 142

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  Intrins

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F(HC3)      df1      df2      p
      ,461      ,213      1,665      8,910      3,000      138,000      ,000

Model
      coeff      se(HC3)      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant      4,633      ,153      30,334      ,000      4,331      4,935
Appeal         ,519      ,211      2,455      ,015      ,101      ,937
Skept         -,623      ,126      -4,937      ,000      -,872      -,373
Int_1          ,416      ,194      2,140      ,034      ,032      ,801

Product terms key:
  Int_1      :      Appeal      x      Skept

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
      R2-chng      F(HC3)      df1      df2      p
X*W      ,037      4,579      1,000      138,000      ,034
-----
      Focal predict: Appeal      (X)
      Mod var: Skept      (W)

Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s):

      Skept      Effect      se(HC3)      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
-1,349      -,042      ,311      -,136      ,892      -,658      ,573
,000      ,519      ,211      2,455      ,015      ,101      ,937
1,349      1,080      ,361      2,995      ,003      ,367      1,794
```

```

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  Extrins

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F(HC3)      df1      df2      p
    ,464    ,216    1,371    8,402    3,000    138,000    ,000

Model
      coeff      se(HC3)      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant    4,624      ,130    35,620    ,000    4,367    4,881
Appeal      -,427      ,198    -2,158    ,033    -,819    -,036
Skept       ,468      ,129    3,612    ,000    ,212    ,723
Int_1       -,115      ,177    -,651    ,516    -,465    ,235

Product terms key:
  Int_1      :      Appeal      x      Skept

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
      R2-chng      F(HC3)      df1      df2      p
X*W      ,003      ,424      1,000    138,000    ,516

*****
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
  Attitude

Model Summary
      R      R-sq      MSE      F(HC3)      df1      df2      p
    ,682    ,466    1,080    20,558    5,000    136,000    ,000

Model
      coeff      se(HC3)      t      p      LLCI      ULCI
constant    1,903      ,755    2,521    ,013    ,410    3,395
Appeal      ,135      ,182      ,738    ,462    -,226    ,495
Intrins     ,614      ,087    7,091    ,000    ,443    ,785
Extrins     ,003      ,098      ,029    ,977    -,192    ,197
Skept      -,113      ,086    -1,320    ,189    -,283    ,056
Int_1       ,056      ,116      ,487    ,627    -,173    ,286

Product terms key:
  Int_1      :      Appeal      x      Skept

Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):
      R2-chng      F(HC3)      df1      df2      p
X*W      ,001      ,238      1,000    136,000    ,627

```

***** DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Conditional direct effect(s) of X on Y:

Skept	Effect	se (HC3)	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-1,349	,058	,212	,276	,783	-,361	,478
,000	,135	,182	,738	,462	-,226	,495
1,349	,211	,266	,794	,429	-,314	,736

Conditional indirect effects of X on Y:

INDIRECT EFFECT:

Appeal -> Intrins -> Attitude

Skept	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
-1,349	-,026	,183	-,424	,292
,000	,319	,134	,064	,584
1,349	,663	,242	,213	1,166

Index of moderated mediation:

	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Skept	,255	,124	,033	,519

INDIRECT EFFECT:

Appeal -> Extrins -> Attitude

Skept	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
-1,349	-,001	,036	-,084	,075
,000	-,001	,043	-,081	,100
1,349	-,002	,062	-,111	,153

Index of moderated mediation:

	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Skept	,000	,020	-,036	,053

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

95,0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:

5000

W values in conditional tables are the mean and +/- SD from the mean.

NOTE: A heteroscedasticity consistent standard error and covariance matrix estimator was used.

NOTE: The following variables were mean centered prior to analysis:

Skept

----- END MATRIX -----

Appendix D. Translated Abstract

Als Reaktion auf den gegenwärtigen konsumorientierten Lebensstil und seine negativen Auswirkungen auf die Umwelt haben einige Marken begonnen Green Demarketing zu praktizieren – eine aktive Senkung der Nachfrage nach ihren Produkten im Interesse der ökologischen Nachhaltigkeit. Angesichts dieses etwas unkonventionellen Ansatzes und der allgemein zunehmenden Skepsis gegenüber grünen Werbeaussagen ist es wichtig zu verstehen, wie Verbraucher eine Marke wahrnehmen, die einen solchen Aufruf zur Konsumreduktion verwendet. Auf der Grundlage von Attributionstheorie und vergleichend zu üblicheren Green Marketing Strategien untersucht diese Studie die Auswirkungen von Green Demarketing auf die Markeneinstellung von KonsumentInnen. Es wird angenommen, dass potenzielle Unterschiede hinsichtlich der Markeneinstellung durch die Motive erklärt werden können, die KonsumentInnen hinter dem beworbenen Umweltengagement einer Firma vermuten. Darüber hinaus wird erwartet, dass die Neigung skeptischer Verbraucher, diesen besagten Motiven von Firmen misstrauisch gegenüberzustehen, den Prozess der Motivbildung und damit die anschließende Markenbewertung negativ beeinflusst. Die Ergebnisse der parallelen und moderierten Mediationsanalyse deuten auf eine positivere Einstellung gegenüber der Marke hin, die eine Green Demarketing Strategie verfolgt. Der Effekt wurde vollständig durch die erhöhte Wahrnehmung intrinsischer Motive erklärt. Darüber hinaus moderierte die Skepsis von KonsumentInnen den angegebenen indirekten Effekt, wenn auch entgegen den Erwartungen. Die positive Beziehung wurde mit zunehmender Skepsis nicht abgeschwächt, sondern vielmehr verstärkt. Diese Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass die Skepsis der KonsumentInnen durch ihre Erfahrungen mit grünem Marketing geprägt ist. Dies macht es unwahrscheinlicher, dass sie extrinsische Motive hinter einer Green Demarketing Werbung vermuten und somit Marken belohnen, die einen solchen Appell verwenden. Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen das Potenzial den Aspekt der Konsumreduktion zu bewerben, da dieser nicht nur als aufrichtiger motiviert wahrgenommen wird, sondern auch die weit verbreitete Skepsis von KonsumentInnen gegenüber grünen Werbeaussagen zu umgehen scheint.