

Slogans with Effect on Sustainable Luxury Brand

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Slogans with Negations' Effect on Sustainable Luxury Brand

Abstract

The integration of sustainability within luxury brands is of increasing concern to practitioners and academics alike. Thus, it is important to consider how brands can develop effective communication strategies to promote sustainable luxury brands, particularly among an increasingly skeptical consumer base. This research thus investigates the impact of advertising slogans with negations (vs. affirmations) in this regard. Three experimental studies show that advertising slogans with negations (vs. affirmations) increase brand trustworthiness (Studies 1 and 3) and favorable brand attitudes (Studies 1 and 2) among consumers with high levels of skepticism. Notably, this effect is driven by an increased cognitive flexibility (Study 3). The findings of this research can assist sustainable luxury brand managers in developing effective communication strategies to increase favorable consumer responses to sustainable luxury brands.

Keywords: sustainable luxury; negation; brand trustworthiness; skepticism

Introduction

Sustainability is set to be the trend for the 2020s in the luxury brand industry. The COVID-19 pandemic and a consumer shift towards Millennials and Generation Z mean that many consumers are wanting to reward brands with positive social and environmental impact (Deloitte, 2020). Luxury brands are now increasingly endorsing sustainability by implementing sustainable and transparent production processes and developing sustainable product lines (Han, Seo, & Ko, 2017). For example, the Kering Group and LVMH are offsetting their carbon emissions through initiatives such as the REDD+ conservation projects, while Ralph Lauren has promised to use 100% sustainably-sourced key materials by 2025 (Deloitte, 2020). As the luxury industry is worth over \$280 billion in aggregate sales, these changing industry practices will have an impact on global environmental sustainability. Consequently, marketing practitioners and scholars have advocated luxury and sustainability should go together to advance sustainable development (Davies, Lee, & Ahonkhai, 2012; Karatzas, Kapoulas, & Priporas, 2019). However, some scholars suggest there is an inherent issue related to sustainable luxury brands (Han et al., 2017; Joy et al., 2012).

Scholars have argued that the concept of luxury is fundamentally divergent from the concept of sustainability (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014) because sustainability endorses altruism and ethics (Joy et al., 2012), whereas luxury endorses elitism and prestige (Harper & Peattie, 2011; Naderi & Strutton, 2015; Veblen, 1889). As a result, it is problematic for consumers to view luxury brands as sustainable (Han et al., 2017; Joy et al., 2012) because such brands elicit consumer objection (Han et al., 2017) and skepticism (Sengabira, Septianto, & Northey, 2020), leading to negative attitudes toward the brand (Han et al., 2017). It is thus critical to investigate

how marketers can develop effective communication strategies to improve sustainable luxury brand attitude, particularly among skeptical consumers.

The present research seeks to address this issue by testing a novel prediction and examines the potentials of advertising slogans with negations. Messages with negations consist of a statement and its reverse value simultaneously (Beukeboom, Finkenauer, & Wigboldus, 2010), thus encouraging individuals to process conflicting information and to consider different alternatives (i.e., eliciting cognitive flexibility) (Winter, Scholl, & Sassenberg, 2021). Consequently, we argue that advertising slogans with negations (vs. affirmations) can improve the trustworthiness of sustainable luxury brands and positive brand attitudes among consumers with high levels of skepticism.

We test these predictions across three experimental studies using different brands (Louis Vuitton, Rolex, and Gucci) and product categories (handbag, watch, and jacket). As such, this research theoretically contributes to the extant literature by demonstrating the role of advertising slogans with negations to increase favorable consumer responses to sustainable luxury brands, especially among those who are skeptical. These findings thus would be beneficial for luxury brand managers to develop effective advertising strategies to communicate sustainability initiatives of their brands.

Theoretical Background

Sustainable Luxury Brand

There is a growing literature investigating the concept of sustainable luxury brands (Achabou & Dekhili, 2013; Han et al., 2017; Kapferer, 2010; Septianto, Seo, & Errmann, 2021). Notably, sustainable luxury involves addressing issues related to social (i.e., labor conditions, wages) and environmental issues (i.e., pollution, recycling). For example, Gucci is able to

transform “waste materials” of luxury products into recyclable sustainable luxury products, thus reducing pollution and protecting the environment (Armitage, Roberts, & Sekhon, 2017). Some luxury brands also aim to address environmental degradation in the production (before and after) process in order to satisfy stakeholders (Godart & Seong, 2014). While marketing practitioners and scholars somewhat agree that luxury and sustainability should be integrated (Davies et al., 2012), the relationship between sustainable and luxury is more intricate than that. Indeed, there is a binomial identity of luxury brands and sustainability (Feng, Tong, & Zhu, 2020; Freire & Loussaïef, 2018).

On the one hand, the concept of sustainability is compatible with luxury brands because they share common features, such as excellent quality (Godart & Seong, 2014; Joy et al., 2012), including durability (Janssen et al., 2014), beauty (Joy et al., 2012; Kapferer, 2010) and are both against mass production and over-consumption (Kapferer, 2010). Advertisements by Hermès and Louis Vuitton have shown that sustainability and luxury can be symbolized by values such as tradition, respect, naturalness, excellence, and authenticity through scenery for example, highlighting a binomial identity (Freire & Loussaïef, 2018).

In contrast, others have argued that sustainability and luxury have opposing symbolic meanings (Han et al., 2017; Joy et al., 2012; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). That is, sustainability is linked to ethics, frugality and self-transcendence (Amatulli et al., 2017; Joy et al., 2012), while luxury is related to elitism, self-directed gain, conspicuousness and something that is not necessary but desirable (Harper & Peattie, 2011; Naderi & Strutton, 2015; Veblen, 1889). Luxury also focuses on objective rarity, such as rare skins, leathers, or other materials, which is counter to biodiversity and animal welfare efforts (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). In fact, research shows that scarcity should be downplayed if pursuing a sustainable luxury strategy (Wang

et al., 2021). Subsequently, it is dangerous if luxury brands market themselves as sustainable without clear links to how the values of luxury align with sustainability principles as many consumers remain skeptical (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). This volatility is also seen in the stock market, where research has found that stock prices fall when a luxury brand announces sustainable practices (Feng et al., 2020). Overall, research suggests consumers do not easily make the link between luxury brands and sustainability, remaining skeptical about sustainable practices (D'Anolfo et al., 2017; Sengabira et al., 2020).

Notably, it is problematic for sustainable luxury brands to obtain consumer legitimacy because consumers feel ambivalent (Han et al., 2017) and skeptical (Sengabira et al., 2020). Indeed, sustainable product lines are often seen as 'greenwashing' with many consumers not trusting sustainability claims (Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2017). Thus, many luxury brands might be hesitant to highlight their sustainability efforts due to concerns about backlash from skeptical consumers (Cernansky, 2020). As such, it is essential for luxury brands to understand how to persuade consumers with high levels of skepticism in regards to the potential of sustainable luxury brands. The present research thus seeks to address this important gap in the sustainable luxury brand literature by investigating specific advertising slogans that can be beneficial to increase favorable brand attitudes, especially among consumers who are skeptical about sustainable luxury brands.

Messages with Negations and Cognitive Flexibility

From a linguistic perspective, messages with negations refute the truth value of a statement by including a negation marker (e.g., not or no), whereas messages with affirmations support the truth value of a statement (Beukeboom et al., 2010). As such, negations consist of a statement and its reverse value simultaneously (Winter et al., 2021). For example, the statement with a negation,

“She is not lazy” contains both negative (“lazy”) and positive (“not lazy”) information about that individual. On the other hand, the statement with an affirmation, “She is industrious” only expresses positive information (while still matching the overall content of the previous statement with a negation).

Such definitions of messages with negations are related to prior research examining the influence of two-sided information (containing both positive and negative information) on persuasion, such that two-sided (vs. one-sided) messages can positively leverage attitudes, behavioral intentions, and even perceived source credibility (Bohner et al., 2003; Brauer et al., 2012; Crowley & Hoyer, 1994; Ein-Gar, Shiv, & Tormala, 2011; Pizzutti, Basso, & Albornoz, 2016). This is because two-sided messages address both the negative and positive information about a target object, thus can be considered as a kind of strong argument (Kim, 2020). As a consequence, two-sided messages can change stereotypical perceptions (Brauer et al., 2012), even among strongly opposing recipients (Crowley & Hoyer, 1994).

Building on this literature, Winter et al. (2021) show that messages with negations can be beneficial to reduce negative prejudice about individuals. This is because processing such messages allows individuals to overcome well-learned associations (Vasiljevic & Crisp, 2013; Winter et al., 2021). Specifically, there is a two-step simulation when individuals process messages with negations (Kaup et al., 2007). Readers of messages with negations need to first represent a negative concept (e.g., “lazy”) and then overrule that representation with the negated concept (e.g., “not lazy”) (Mayo, Schul, & Burnstein, 2004).

This means that the processing of negations entails the understanding of conflicting information and representations (Hasson & Glucksberg, 2006; Kaup, Lüdtkke, & Zwaan, 2006), which should broaden attentional and cognitive scope (Kleiman & Enisman, 2018). Such a mental

state in which individuals have the ability to process conflicting information and to consider different alternatives has been labelled as cognitive flexibility (Braem & Egner, 2018; Crisp & Turner, 2011). Thus, these findings suggest that processing messages with negations should enhance cognitive flexibility.

Cognitive Flexibility and Sustainable Luxury Brands

As previously discussed, the key challenge for sustainable luxury brands is gaining consumer legitimacy and acceptance (Han et al., 2017; Joy et al., 2012) because the concept of sustainable luxury is laden with conflicting conceptualizations of luxury and sustainability (Han et al., 2017; Joy et al., 2012; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). Consequently, combining luxury with sustainability can make the brand seem less trustworthy (Sengabira et al., 2020), thus leading to negative consumer attitudes toward the brand (Han et al., 2017). We therefore propose that cognitive flexibility (elicited from processing messages with negations) might combat this issue.

Cognitive flexibility facilitates individuals to alter well-learned associations (Vasiljevic & Crisp, 2013; Winter et al., 2021) and to adjust their thinking in response to new information (Martin & Rubin, 1995), thus encouraging them to organize conflicting information at a superordinate level, making such information more coherent and less conflicting (Bullard, Penner, & Main, 2019). As a result, messages with negations can help mitigate previously held assumptions (e.g., prejudice) due to increased cognitive flexibility (Winter et al., 2021). In the context of this research, we propose that cognitive flexibility can help consumers to perceive interrelations among seemingly conflicting concepts (i.e., sustainability and luxury). Further, cognitive flexibility should be influential only among consumers with high levels of skepticism, as these consumers hold opposing views related to sustainability and luxury. In contrast, cognitive

flexibility should be less influential among those with low levels of skepticism as they do not hold conflicting information.

We further argue that such cognitive flexibility can increase brand trustworthiness among consumers with high levels of skepticism. This is because when we consider sustainable luxury brands, such brands “signal” their consumers (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Erdem, Swait, & Valenzuela, 2006) about their sustainability initiatives. However, in order for the signal to be effective, it must be perceived as trustworthy by consumers (Piancatelli, Massi, & Vocino, 2020). Hence, consumers need to believe that the brand is willing to honor its promises – that is, the brand is trustworthy (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Because skeptical consumers do not trust sustainable luxury brands (Sengabira et al., 2020) as they do not see the link between sustainability and luxury (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014), we predict that advertising slogans with negations (that elicit cognitive flexibility) can help skeptical consumers to trust the sustainability initiatives of the luxury brand, thus leading to favorable consumer responses (i.e., positive attitudes) (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Piancatelli et al., 2020).

In sum, we draw upon the literatures on sustainable luxury brands, messages with negations, and cognitive flexibility by proposing that: (a) advertising slogans with negations will increase cognitive flexibility; (b) cognitive flexibility will then enhance the trustworthiness of sustainable luxury brands among consumers with high (but not low) levels of skepticism; (c) brand trustworthiness will lead to favorable brand attitudes. Formally stated:

H1. Advertising slogans with negations (vs. affirmations) will (a) lead to higher levels of brand trustworthiness, which subsequently will (b) improve sustainable luxury brand attitude among consumers with high (but not low) levels of skepticism.

H2. The positive impact of advertising slogans with negations (vs. affirmations) on brand trustworthiness will be mediated by cognitive flexibility.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Given the complexity of our conceptual model, we investigate our predictions in three experiments across three different luxury brands and products to provide strong empirical evidence. Study 1 tests Hypothesis 1b, whereas Studies 2 and 3 focus on examining the underlying mechanism. Specifically, Study 2 tests Hypotheses 1a and 1b, while Study 3 tests Hypotheses 1a and 2 (see Figure 1 for details of the conceptual model). In all studies, we recruited participants located in the U.S. from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). This is appropriate because U.S. was the top ranked personal luxury goods market, reaching 55 billion euros in 2020 (Statista, 2021). In addition, MTurk has been used in prior research examining luxury advertising (e.g., Kwon, Seo, & Ko, 2016; Seo, Ko, & Kim, 2021; Septianto et al., 2020). MTurk participants are representative of the population (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011) and considered to be more attentive as compared to student samples (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016). To ensure data quality, as suggested by Peer, Vosgerau, and Acquisti (2014), we also recruit respondents with a high reputation (i.e., that have had 97% of their past completed tasks approved).

Study 1

Study 1 sought to provide evidence for Hypothesis 1b, predicting that an advertising slogan with negations (vs. affirmations) should increase positive attitudes toward a sustainable luxury brand among consumers with high levels of skepticism. Following prior research (Septianto et al., 2021), Study 1 used a Louis Vuitton handbag as the product.

Method

Participants and Design. This study employed a one-factor, three-level (advertising slogan: negation, affirmation, no message) between-subjects design. As recommended by Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011), we collected at least 50 participants per experimental condition. Given the nature of the product (a handbag), we only recruited female participants in this study. Thus, one hundred and ninety-five participants in the U.S. were recruited from MTurk ($M_{\text{age}} = 41.90$, $SD = 13.23$).

Procedure. Participants were asked to evaluate a mock-up advertisement for a Louis Vuitton handbag (see the Appendix). Following prior research on sustainable luxury brands (Septianto et al., 2021), the advertisement featured a short description that “Louis Vuitton is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways.” We manipulated the advertising slogan by including the statement, “Louis Vuitton is NOT PASSIVE in protecting the environment” (negation) or “Louis Vuitton is ACTIVE in protecting the environment” (affirmation) (adapted from Winter et al., 2021). The control condition did not contain such a slogan.

Participants then indicated their attitudes toward the brand using four bipolar items as the dependent variable (“bad-good,” “unlikable-likable,” “unfavorable-favorable,” “unappealing-appealing;” $\alpha = .97$), measured on a 7-point scale (Spears & Singh, 2004). Because we used a real brand, we measured participants’ familiarity with the brand (1 = not familiar at all, 7 = very familiar) and interest in the product category (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) as control variables. Lastly, participants’ skepticism was measured using four statements ($\alpha = .92$), measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The items were: (1) “I am doubtful that luxury brands can be socially responsible brands;” (2) “I am uncertain that luxury brands are

concerned to improve the well-being of society;” (3) “I am unsure that luxury brands follow high ethical standards;” (4) “It is questionable that luxury brands act in a socially responsible way” (adapted from Sengabira et al., 2020).

Results and Discussion

A moderation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2017; Hayes, Montoya, & Rockwood, 2017). We tested the effects of advertising slogan (negation = -1, control = 0, and affirmation = 1), moderated by consumer skepticism, on attitudes toward the sustainable luxury brand. We also included brand familiarity and product involvement as covariates. As can be seen in Table 1, consistent with Hypothesis 1b, there were significant interaction effects between advertising slogan and consumer skepticism.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Among participants with high levels of skepticism (1SD above the means of skepticism scores), the advertising slogan with a negation increased positive attitudes toward the sustainable luxury brand, as compared to the advertising slogan with an affirmation ($B = -1.04$, $SE = .32$, $t = -3.27$, $p = .001$) and a control condition ($B = -.93$, $SE = .31$, $t = -2.98$, $p = .003$). In contrast, there were non-significant differences among participants with low levels of skepticism (1SD below the means of skepticism scores): between the advertising slogan with a negation and an affirmation ($B = .23$, $SE = .33$, $t = -.71$, $p = .482$) and between the advertising slogan with a negation and a control condition ($B = .31$, $SE = .33$, $t = .96$, $p = .339$; see Figure 2). These findings supported Hypothesis 1b.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was twofold. First, we used a different brand and product – a Rolex watch (Kwon et al., 2016; Sengabira et al., 2020) – to test Hypothesis 1b because such a product appeals to both male and female consumers. Second and more importantly, we established the role of brand trustworthiness in driving the effect of advertising slogans on brand attitude (H1a).

Method

Participants and Design. One-hundred and thirty participants located in the U.S. (33% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 34.28$, $SD = 10.57$) were recruited from MTurk. This study employed a one-factor, two-level (advertising slogan: negation, affirmation) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Study 2 employed similar materials and procedure to those of Study 1, with some exceptions. First, we excluded the control condition to simplify the experimental design because Study 1 has established that the affirmation condition was not different from the control condition. Second, we used different advertising stimuli featuring a Rolex watch but with identical messages (see the Appendix). Third, in addition to attitudes toward the brand ($\alpha = .97$), consumer skepticism ($\alpha = .95$), and control variables (brand familiarity and product involvement), they also completed brand trustworthiness measures. Specifically, participants rated their agreement on three statements ($\alpha = .90$) to measure brand trustworthiness (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The statements were: (1) “This brand will not betray its customers;” (2) “This brand accomplishes its value promise;” (3) “This brand is honest” (Morhart et al., 2015).

Results and Discussion

As in Study 1, a moderation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2017; Hayes et al., 2017). We tested the effects of advertising slogan (negation = -1, affirmation = 1), moderated by consumer skepticism, on attitudes toward the sustainable luxury brand. We also

included brand familiarity and product involvement as covariates. As can be seen in Table 2, there was a significant interaction effect between advertising slogan and consumer skepticism ($B = -.22$, $SE = .05$, $t = -4.81$, $p < .001$). Among participants with high levels of skepticism, the advertising slogan with a negation (vs. an affirmation) increased positive attitudes toward the sustainable luxury brand ($B = -.71$, $SE = .13$, $t = -5.36$, $p < .001$). In contrast, there were non-significant differences between the advertising slogan with a negation and an affirmation among participants with low levels of skepticism ($B = .18$, $SE = .13$, $t = 1.38$, $p = .171$; see Figure 3). These findings replicated those of Study 1 and provided further evidence to Hypothesis 1.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Insert Figure 3 about here.

We then conducted a moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 8 with 5,000 bootstrap resamples (Hayes, 2017; Hayes et al., 2017). That is, we tested the effects of advertising slogan (negation = -1, affirmation = 1), moderated by consumer skepticism, on attitudes toward the sustainable luxury brand via brand trustworthiness. We also included brand familiarity and product involvement as covariates. Results revealed that the indirect effect of advertising slogan (negation vs. affirmation) on brand attitudes via brand trustworthiness was significant among participants with high levels of skepticism ($B = -.360$, $SE = .124$, 95% CI: $-.608$ to $-.126$) but non-significant among participants with low levels of skepticism ($B = .082$, $SE = .073$, 95% CI: $-.042$ to $.244$). These findings provided evidence for Hypotheses 1a and 1b. Table 3 presented the full results.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Study 3

We conducted Study 3 with three important purposes. First, we used a different brand (Gucci) as the luxury brand (Jackson & Haid, 2002), to test Hypothesis 1a. Second, we developed our theoretical rationale by arguing that messages with negations (vs. affirmations) could broaden attentional and cognitive scope (Winter et al., 2021). Thus, we sought to offer empirical evidence showing the mediating role of cognitive flexibility (H2). Third, we also aimed to control for different message attributes (e.g., surprising, valence, credibility, difficulty, and awkwardness) that might influence our predictions (Winter et al., 2021).

Method

Participants and Design. This study employed a one-factor, three-level (advertising slogan: negation, affirmation, no message) between-subjects design. Two-hundred and two participants located in the U.S. (45% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.42$, $SD = 9.97$) were recruited from MTurk.

Procedure. Participants were asked to evaluate a mock-up advertisement for a Gucci jacket (see the Appendix). We used similar contents as those in Studies 1 and 2 to manipulate the sustainability initiative of the brand; however, we used different advertising slogans. Adopting from Winter et al. (2021), we used the statement, “We’re not lazy! Let’s save the environment together!” (negation) or “We’re hard-working! Let’s save the environment together!” The control condition simply used the statement, “Let’s save the environment together!”

Participants then indicated brand trustworthiness ($\alpha = .90$), consumer skepticism ($\alpha = .93$), and control variables (brand familiarity and product involvement). To measure cognitive flexibility (Martin & Rubin, 1995), participants then responded to 12 items ($\alpha = .92$; see Table 4), measured on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; see Table 4). We noted that this scale was originally developed to measure a trait-based cognitive flexibility (Martin & Rubin, 1995).

However, recent research has empirically demonstrated that this scale could be employed to measure the state-based cognitive flexibility (Bullard et al., 2019; Nallaperuma, Septianto, & Bandyopadhyay, 2021), by explicitly asking participants to rate the scale based on “how they feel at this time” (Bullard et al., 2019, p. 666). In addition, participants also indicated the extent to which the advertising slogan was “positive,” “credible,” “surprising,” “complicated,” and “awkward” (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) (adapted from Winter et al., 2021).

Insert Table 4 about here.

We conducted a moderation analysis using PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2017; Hayes et al., 2017). We tested the effects of advertising slogan (negation = -1, control = 0, and affirmation = 1), moderated by consumer skepticism, on brand trustworthiness. We also included brand familiarity and product involvement as covariates. As can be seen in Table 5, there were significant interaction effects between advertising slogan and consumer skepticism, consistent with Hypothesis 1a.

Insert Table 5 about here.

Among participants with high levels of skepticism (1SD above the means of skepticism scores), the advertising slogan with a negation increased brand trustworthiness, as compared to the advertising slogan with an affirmation ($B = -.73$, $SE = .26$, $t = -2.81$, $p = .006$) and the control condition ($B = -.88$, $SE = .27$, $t = -3.22$, $p = .001$). By contrast, there were non-significant differences among participants with low levels of skepticism (1SD below the means of skepticism scores): between the advertising slogan with a negation and an affirmation ($B = .43$, $SE = .27$, $t = 1.59$, $p = .113$) and between the advertising slogan with a negation and the control condition ($B = .43$, $SE = .26$, $t = 1.64$, $p = .102$; see Figure 4). These findings supported Hypothesis 1a.

Insert Figure 4 about here.

We then conducted a moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 15 with 5,000 bootstrap resamples (Hayes, 2017; Hayes et al., 2017). That is, we tested the effects of advertising slogan (negation = -1, control = 0, and affirmation = 1) on brand trustworthiness via cognitive flexibility, moderated by consumer skepticism. In addition to brand familiarity and product involvement, we also included message attributes (surprising, valence, credibility, difficulty, and awkwardness) as covariates.

Examining negation versus control, results revealed that the indirect effect of advertising slogan on brand trustworthiness was significant among participants with high levels of skepticism ($B = -.234$, $SE = .124$, 95% CI: $-.502$ to $-.035$) but non-significant among participants with low levels of skepticism ($B = -.028$, $SE = .033$, 95% CI: $-.103$ to $.035$). Similarly, examining negation versus affirmation, results showed that the indirect effect of advertising slogan on brand trustworthiness was significant among participants with high levels of skepticism ($B = -.254$, $SE = .132$, 95% CI: $-.547$ to $-.040$) but non-significant among participants with low levels of skepticism ($B = -.031$, $SE = .037$, 95% CI: $-.114$ to $.040$). These findings provided evidence for Hypothesis 2. The full results are presented in Table 6.

Insert Table 6 about here.

General Discussion

Across three experimental studies examining different brands and products, we examine how advertising slogans with negations (vs. affirmations) can improve sustainable luxury brand attitude among consumers with high levels of skepticism. Notably, we demonstrate that this effect is driven by brand trustworthiness (Studies 2 and 3). We further shed light on the underlying mechanism driving the effect by showing that advertising slogans with negations (vs. affirmations)

enhance cognitive flexibility, thus increasing brand trustworthiness and favorable brand attitude among consumers with high levels of skepticism (Study 3).

Theoretical Contributions

First, the findings of our research make a significant theoretical contribution to the literature on sustainable luxury brands. This is because past research in this area has demonstrated that there is an inherent disconnect between the concepts of luxury and sustainability (Han et al., 2017; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014), as sustainability is related to altruism and ethics (Joy et al., 2012), whereas luxury endorses elitism and conspicuousness (Harper & Peattie, 2011; Naderi & Strutton, 2015; Veblen, 1889). This disconnect thus leads to consumers feeling skeptical when luxury brands engage in sustainability initiatives (Sengabira et al., 2020). While there is a growing literature examining how some factors can influence consumer acceptance of sustainable luxury brands, such as emotional appeals and product conspicuousness (Septianto et al., 2021; Talukdar & Yu, 2020), it remains unclear whether these findings can be useful for consumers with high levels of skepticism. The present research thus adds to our understanding of this research area by empirically demonstrating how advertising slogans with negations can enhance brand trustworthiness and favorable brand attitudes among skeptical consumers.

Second, this research establishes the mediating role of cognitive flexibility in driving the effect of advertising slogans with negations on brand trustworthiness and brand attitudes. This is in line with past research suggesting that cognitive flexibility can help consumers process conflicting and ambivalent information (Rothman et al., 2017; Winter, Scholl, & Sassenberg, 2020), thus making consumers respond more favorably to such information. In this regard, we show the relevance of cognitive flexibility in the context of sustainable luxury brands, in which

consumers perceive a conflict between the two concepts (Han et al., 2017; Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014).

In addition, we empirically control for other potential message attributes that might explain the predicted effect of messages with negations, including surprising, valence, credibility, difficulty, and awkwardness (Study 3). In particular, we find that message credibility and positiveness can also increase brand trustworthiness (see Table 6). Furthermore, given that we examine three different luxury brands (Louis Vuitton, Rolex, and Gucci) and product categories (handbag, watch, and jacket), we note that there might be differences in which the control variables, brand familiarity (a significant positive effect in Study 3) and product involvement (significant positive effects in Studies 1-3), might influence brand trustworthiness and brand attitude. More importantly, we provide strong empirical evidence to our hypotheses beyond these control variables.

Managerial Implications

Major social, economic, environmental, cultural, and competitive shifts in luxury landscapes have resulted in calls for luxury brands to better attain and connect with consumers (Shin & Iyer, 2020). Indeed, the concerns about potential backlash from skeptical consumers may be one reason many luxury brands do not yet highlight their sustainability efforts (Cernansky, 2020). Given increasing skepticism about brands contributing positively to society in general (Edelman, 2019), finding ways to navigate and circumvent such skepticism is of extreme importance.

In this regard, the findings of the current research indicate that luxury brand managers need to be considerate of how sustainable luxury brands are communicated. As such, our research can help them to develop effective advertising strategies in promoting the sustainability initiatives of

luxury brands, especially among consumers with high levels of skepticism. That is, our research suggests that advertising slogans with negations (vs. affirmations) should be used in advertising as they are more effective in leveraging the trustworthiness of sustainable luxury brands, especially, and most importantly, amongst skeptical consumers.

As illustrations, marketing communications could use negation slogans highlighting that they are ‘not’ associated with a known issue previously connected to the brand. Companies would be encouraged to conduct market research, through sentiment analysis for example (Micu et al., 2017), to understand the current negative brand associations. Such messages may include we “do NOT use child labor”, “we do NOT tolerate racial discrimination” or “we do NOT pollute our rivers” to address issues of social and environmental sustainability. These strategy may also be especially helpful when acknowledging past brand failings. Based on our findings, such slogans with negations can help skeptical consumers to trust the sustainability initiatives of the luxury brand, leading to more positive attitudes towards the brand.

Limitations and Future Research

We acknowledge the limitations of this research. First, we recognize the limitations of contextual methodologies of this research. Specifically, we only measured brand trustworthiness and attitudes toward sustainable luxury brands as the dependent variables. Future research should explore other behavioral intentions (e.g., purchase intentions, sharing intentions) (Septianto et al., 2021) and even behavioral outcomes (e.g., real purchase behaviors using field experiments). In addition, although we provide evidence to our hypotheses, we acknowledge that we did not test our full conceptual model (a moderated serial mediation analysis), given the complexity of the model. Second, our research examines three different luxury brands (Louis Vuitton, Rolex, and Gucci) and product categories (handbag, watch, and jacket). However, it would thus be of interest

to extend the examinations of the predicted effects across different luxury products (e.g., luxury cosmetics) and services (e.g., luxury tourism) (Seo et al., 2021) because of the complexity of luxury brands (Kwon et al., 2016; Peluso et al., 2017).

In conclusion, across three experimental studies, this research shows that advertising slogans with negations can increase favorable attitudes toward sustainable luxury brands among consumers with high levels of skepticism.

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Table 1. Moderation Analysis (Study 1)

	Attitudes toward the Brand (Y)					
	Coeff	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Constant	4.581	0.612	7.488	< 0.001	3.374	5.788
Control (X1)	1.411	0.671	2.103	0.037	0.087	2.736
Affirmation (X2)	1.359	0.685	1.985	0.049	0.008	2.710
Skepticism (W)	0.051	0.105	0.485	0.628	-0.156	0.258
Negation (vs. Control) × Skepticism	-0.398	0.144	-2.766	0.006	-0.682	-0.114
Negation (vs. Affirmation) × Skepticism	-0.410	0.149	-2.749	0.007	-0.703	-0.116
Brand Familiarity (Covariate)	-0.009	0.068	-0.133	0.894	-0.143	0.125
Product Involvement (Covariate)	0.248	0.051	4.832	< 0.001	0.147	0.350
Model Summary	$R^2 = 0.252, F(7, 187) = 8.995, p < 0.001$					

Table 2. Moderation Analysis (Study 2)

	Attitudes toward the Brand (Y)					
	Coeff	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.950	0.513	11.601	< 0.001	4.935	6.965
Advertising Slogan (X)	0.604	0.203	2.980	0.003	0.203	1.006
Skepticism (W)	-0.336	0.047	-7.212	< 0.001	-0.428	-0.244
Advertising Slogan × Skepticism	-0.224	0.047	-4.809	< 0.001	-0.317	-0.132
Brand Familiarity (Covariate)	0.121	0.089	1.367	0.174	-0.054	0.297
Product Involvement (Covariate)	0.109	0.050	2.166	0.032	0.009	0.209
Model Summary	R ² = 0.659, F(5, 124) = 19.030, p < 0.001					

Table 3. Moderated Mediation Analysis (Study 2)

Brand Trustworthiness (M)						
	Coeff	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Constant	5.185	0.529	9.799	< 0.001	4.137	6.232
Advertising Slogan (X)	0.465	0.209	2.222	0.028	0.051	0.879
Skepticism (W)	-0.318	0.048	-6.618	< 0.001	-0.413	-0.223
Advertising Slogan × Skepticism	-0.177	0.048	-3.671	< 0.001	-0.272	-0.081
Brand Familiarity (Covariate)	0.197	0.092	2.155	0.033	0.016	0.379
Product Involvement (Covariate)	0.086	0.052	1.659	0.100	-0.017	0.189
Model Summary	R ² = 0.379, F(5, 124) = 15.122, p < 0.001					
Attitudes toward the Brand (Y)						
	Coeff	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.700	0.523	5.160	< 0.001	1.664	3.735
Advertising Slogan (X)	0.313	0.158	1.976	0.050	-0.001	0.626
Skepticism (W)	-0.137	0.041	-3.291	0.001	-0.219	-0.054
Advertising Slogan × Skepticism	-0.114	0.038	-3.019	0.003	-0.188	-0.039
Brand Familiarity (Covariate)	-0.002	0.069	-0.035	0.972	-0.140	0.135
Product Involvement (Covariate)	0.055	0.039	1.412	0.161	-0.022	0.132
Brand Trustworthiness (M)	0.627	0.067	9.405	< 0.001	0.495	0.759
Model Summary	R ² = 0.671, F(6, 123) = 41.783, p < 0.001					
Indirect Effects						
Skepticism		Effect	SE		95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
-1SD (1.89)		0.082	0.073		-0.042	0.244
Means (3.88)		-0.139	0.067		-0.271	-0.009
+1SD (5.88)		-0.360	0.124		-0.608	-0.126
Index of Moderated Mediation		-0.111	0.039		-0.189	-0.041

Table 4. Cognitive Flexibility Measures (Martin & Rubin, 1995)

-
1. I can communicate an idea in many different ways
 2. I avoid new and unusual situations (Reversed)
 3. I feel like I never get to make decisions (Reversed)
 4. I can find workable solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems
 5. I seldom have choices when deciding how to behave (Reversed)
 6. I am willing to work at creative solutions to problems
 7. In any given situation, I am able to act appropriately
 8. My behavior is a result of conscious decisions that I make
 9. I have many possible ways of behaving in any given situation
 10. I have difficulty using my knowledge on a given topic in real-life situations (Reversed)
 11. I am willing to listen and consider alternatives for handling a problem
 12. I have the self-confidence necessary to try different ways of behaving
-

Table 5. Moderation Analysis (Study 3)

	Brand Trustworthiness (Y)					
	Coeff	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Constant	2.989	0.529	5.646	< 0.001	1.945	4.033
Control (X1)	1.521	0.534	2.851	0.005	0.469	2.574
Affirmation (X2)	1.397	0.540	2.588	0.010	0.333	2.462
Skepticism (W)	0.113	0.080	1.425	0.156	-0.044	0.270
Negation (vs. Control) × Skepticism	-0.404	0.117	-3.454	0.001	-0.634	-0.173
Negation (vs. Affirmation) × Skepticism	-0.358	0.115	-3.105	0.002	-0.586	-0.131
Brand Familiarity (Covariate)	0.144	0.066	2.171	0.031	0.013	0.275
Product Involvement (Covariate)	0.213	0.050	4.300	< 0.001	0.115	0.311
Model Summary	$R^2 = 0.239, F(7, 194) = 8.718, p < 0.001$					

Table 6. Moderated Mediation Analysis (Study 3)

	Cognitive Flexibility (M)					
	Coeff	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Constant	4.822	0.530	9.090	< 0.001	3.775	5.868
Control (X1)	-0.475	0.203	-2.342	0.020	-0.875	-0.075
Affirmation (X2)	-0.516	0.203	-2.539	0.012	-0.917	-0.115
Brand Familiarity (Covariate)	0.148	0.075	1.980	0.049	0.001	0.296
Product Involvement (Covariate)	-0.050	0.059	-0.856	0.393	-0.166	0.066
Surprise (Covariate)	0.067	0.058	1.155	0.249	-0.047	0.182
Credibility (Covariate)	-0.157	0.087	-1.791	0.075	-0.329	0.016
Complexity (Covariate)	-0.202	0.063	-3.212	0.002	-0.326	-0.078
Awkwardness (Covariate)	0.058	0.058	1.005	0.316	-0.056	0.172
Positiveness (Covariate)	0.137	0.100	1.377	0.170	-0.059	0.334
Model Summary	R ² = 0.141, F(9, 192) = 3.513, p < 0.001					

	Brand Trustworthiness (Y)					
	Coeff	SE	t	p	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Constant	3.186	0.810	3.931	< 0.001	1.587	4.785
Control (X1)	0.623	0.488	1.276	0.204	-0.340	1.587
Affirmation (X2)	0.731	0.520	1.407	0.161	-0.294	1.757
Cognitive Flexibility (M)	-0.299	0.116	-2.576	0.011	-0.528	-0.070
Skepticism (W)	-0.515	0.170	-3.024	0.003	-0.850	-0.179
Negation (vs. Control) × Skepticism	-0.202	0.106	-1.897	0.059	-0.412	0.008
Negation (vs. Affirmation) × Skepticism	-0.223	0.109	-2.055	0.041	-0.437	-0.009
Cognitive Flexibility × Skepticism	0.133	0.028	4.700	< 0.001	0.077	0.189
Brand Familiarity (Covariate)	-0.040	0.062	-0.649	0.517	-0.162	0.082
Product Involvement (Covariate)	0.147	0.049	3.011	0.003	0.051	0.242
Surprise (Covariate)	0.023	0.048	0.482	0.630	-0.071	0.117
Credibility (Covariate)	0.302	0.072	4.184	< 0.001	0.160	0.444
Complexity (Covariate)	0.002	0.053	0.044	0.965	-0.101	0.106
Awkwardness (Covariate)	-0.009	0.050	-0.180	0.857	-0.108	0.090
Positiveness (Covariate)	0.165	0.081	2.034	0.043	0.005	0.325
Model Summary	R ² = 0.465, F(14, 187) = 11.607, p < 0.001					

Table 6 (Cont'd). Moderated Mediation Analysis (Study 3)

Indirect Effects (Negation vs. Control)				
Skepticism	Effect	SE	95% CI	
			LLCI	ULCI
-1SD (2.69)	-0.028	0.033	-0.103	0.035
Means (4.32)	-0.131	0.073	-0.290	-0.014
+1SD (5.95)	-0.234	0.124	-0.502	-0.035
<hr/>				
Index of Moderated Mediation	-0.063	0.033	-0.137	-0.010
<hr/>				
Indirect Effects (Negation vs. Affirmation)				
Skepticism	Effect	SE	95% CI	
			LLCI	ULCI
-1SD (2.69)	-0.031	0.037	-0.114	0.040
Means (4.32)	-0.143	0.079	-0.319	-0.015
+1SD (5.95)	-0.254	0.132	-0.547	-0.040
<hr/>				
Index of Moderated Mediation	-0.069	0.035	-0.148	-0.013

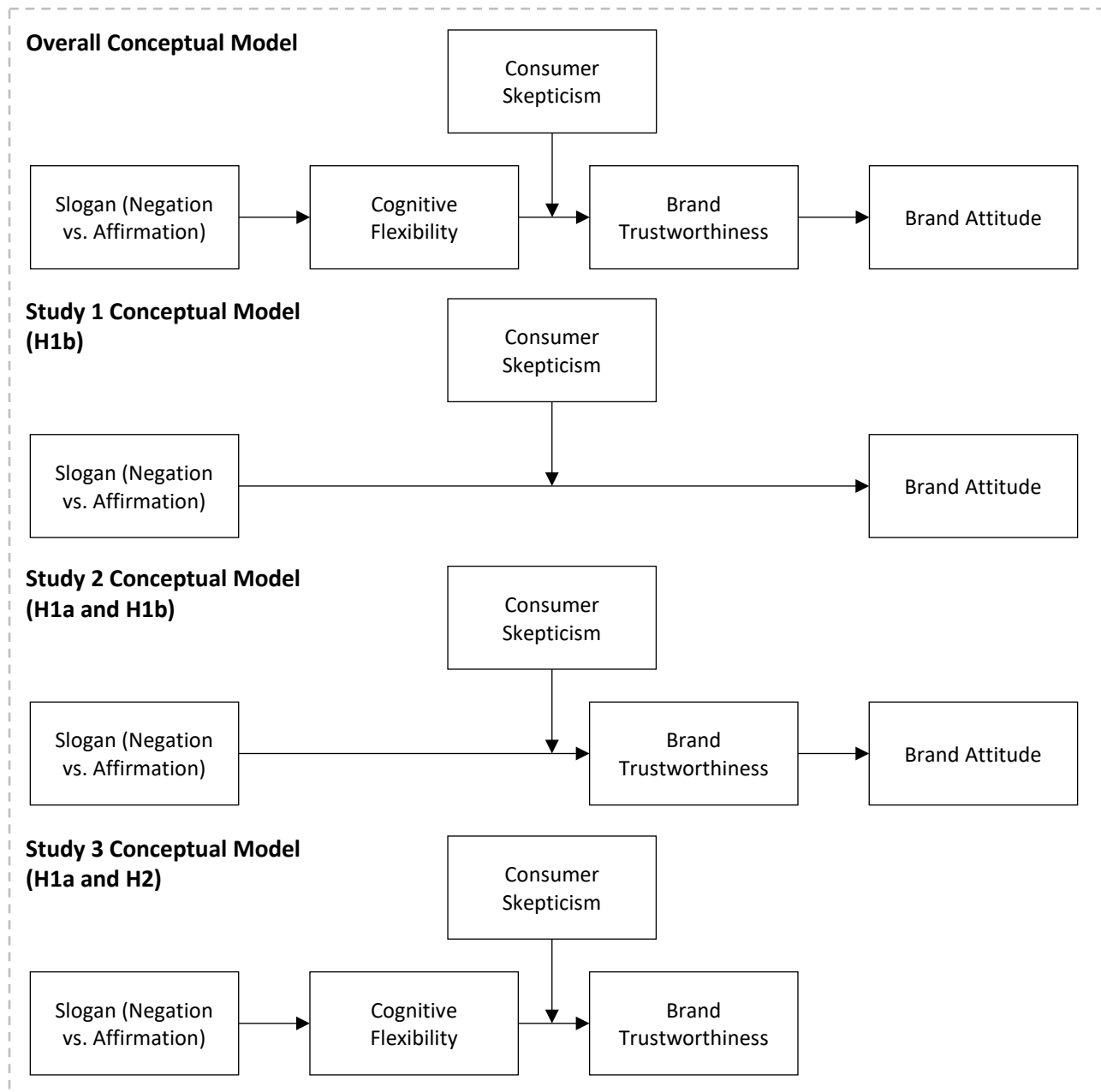


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

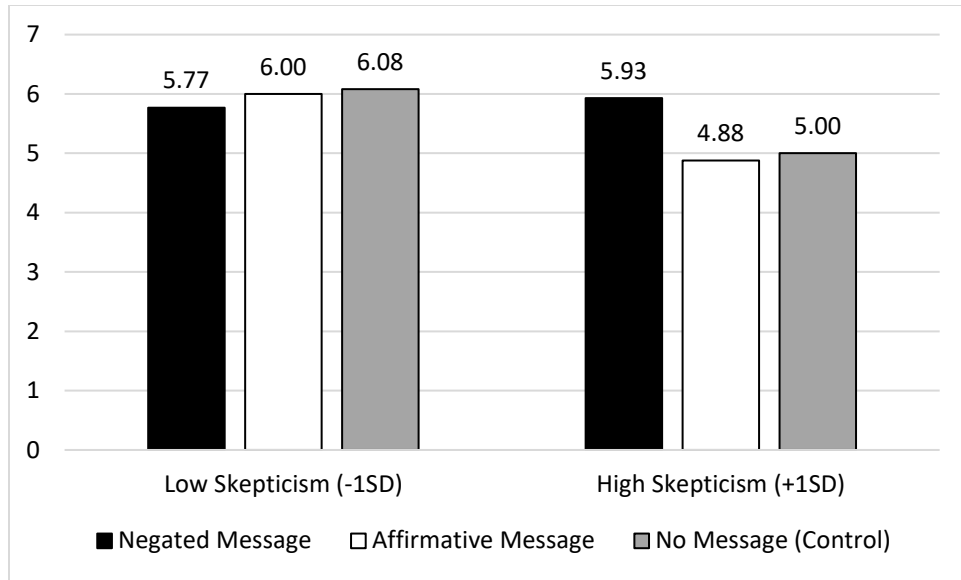


Figure 2. Consumer Attitudes by Advertising Slogan and Skepticism (Study 1)

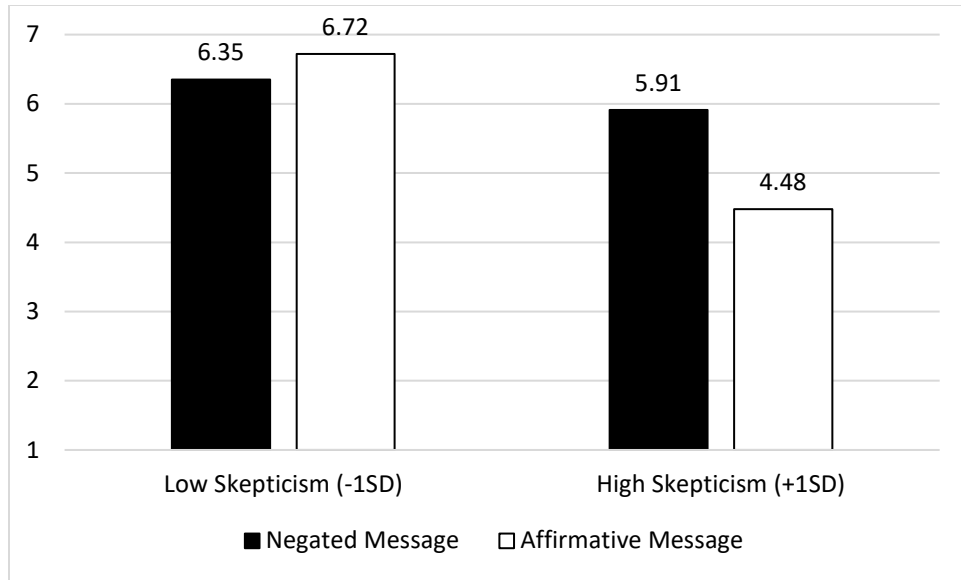


Figure 3. Consumer Attitudes by Advertising Slogan and Skepticism (Study 2)

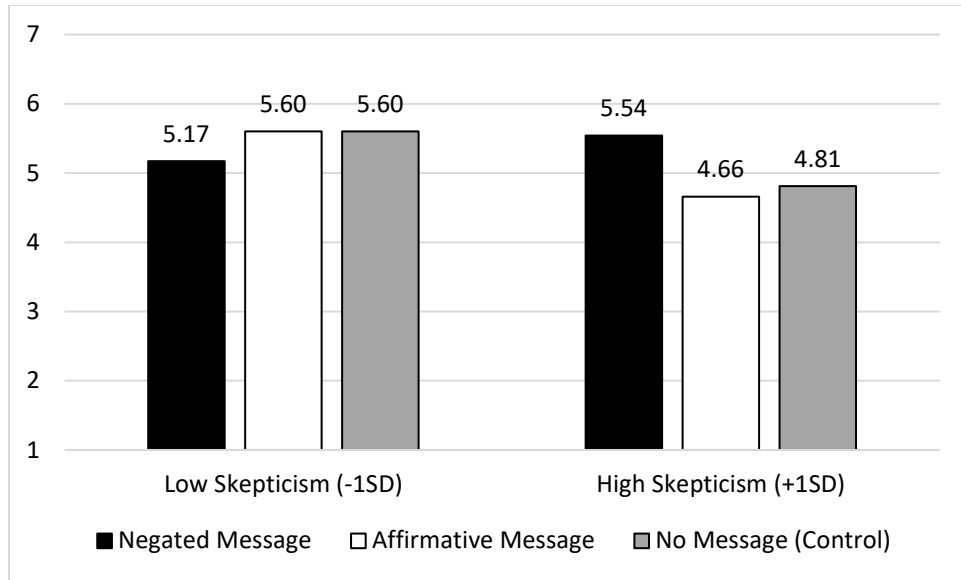




Figure 4. Brand Trustworthiness by Advertising Slogan and Skepticism (Study 3)

Appendix



LOUIS VUITTON

**Louis Vuitton is NOT PASSIVE
in protecting the environment.**



Louis Vuitton is universally recognized as a symbol of luxury, status and admiration.

Every detail is considered when designing it, because everyone will notice you with it. Louis Vuitton is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways. Show others you value clean oceans, with Louis Vuitton.

Sold exclusively in Louis Vuitton stores.

Study 1 – Negation



LOUIS VUITTON

**Louis Vuitton is ACTIVE
in protecting the environment.**



Louis Vuitton is universally recognized as a symbol of luxury, status and admiration.

Every detail is considered when designing it, because everyone will notice you with it. Louis Vuitton is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways. Show others you value clean oceans, with Louis Vuitton.

Sold exclusively in Louis Vuitton stores.

Study 1 – Affirmation

LV
LOUIS VUITTON




Louis Vuitton is universally recognized as a symbol of luxury, status and admiration.

Every detail is considered when designing it, because everyone will notice you with it. Louis Vuitton is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways. Show others you value clean oceans, with Louis Vuitton.

Sold exclusively in Louis Vuitton stores.

Study 1 – No Message (Control)

Rolex is universally recognized as a symbol of luxury, status and admiration. Every detail is considered when designing it, because everyone will notice you with it.

Rolex is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways. Show others you value clean oceans, with Rolex.

Rolex is NOT PASSIVE in protecting the environment.




Study 2 – Negation

Rolex is universally recognized as a symbol of luxury, status and admiration. Every detail is considered when designing it, because everyone will notice you with it.

Rolex is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways. Show others you value clean oceans, with Rolex.

Rolex is ACTIVE in protecting the environment.




ROLEX

Study 2 – Affirmation

Gucci is universally recognized as a symbol of luxury, status and admiration. Every detail is considered when designing it, because everyone will notice you with it.

Gucci is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways. Show others you value clean oceans, with Gucci.

GUCCI

**WE'RE NOT LAZY!
LET'S SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT
TOGETHER!**



Study 3 – Negation

Gucci is universally recognized as a symbol of luxury, status and admiration. Every detail is considered when designing it, because everyone will notice you with it.

Gucci is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways. Show others you value clean oceans, with Gucci.

GUCCI

**WE'RE HARD-WORKING!
LET'S SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT
TOGETHER!**



Study 3 – Affirmation

Gucci is universally recognized as a symbol of luxury, status and admiration. Every detail is considered when designing it, because everyone will notice you with it.

Gucci is pairing the sale of our handmade products with an environmental action. For every item sold, we remove one pound of trash from waterways. Show others you value clean oceans, with Gucci.

GUCCI

**LET'S SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT
TOGETHER!**



Study 3 – No Message (Control)