

# Looking Better by Making Others Look Worse: The Competitive Spillovers of Sustainability

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Cite as:

Subrtova Kristina, de Hooge Ilona, Trijp Hans, Loo Ellen J. (2020), Looking Better by Making Others Look Worse: The Competitive Spillovers of Sustainability. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 49th, (64778)

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020.



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## **Abstract**

Despite the ubiquitous presence of spillover effects in consumers' lives, research on the impact of spillover effects on competing brands is scarce. Especially when one brand introduces a new product attribute to an assortment, e.g. by adding information to its packaging, it is unclear how this affects competing brands in the same product assortment. With two eye-tracking studies (total N = 395), the present research demonstrates that the introduction of a new attribute (sustainability) in a product assortment sets a new standard in the assortment, which subsequently negatively affects both attitude formation (study 1) and product choice (study 1 and study 2) for competing brands. This effect spreads equally among all competing brands. We further show that this process depends on attention: when consumers notice the presence of a new attribute, they engage in a verification search, which is manifested in increased attention to competing brands. Finally, we show that the effect of introducing a new product attribute on product choices decreases when the new attribute is combined with a price premium, and is strengthened for consumers who value the new attribute.

**Keywords:** *Spillover effects; Choice; Attention*

**Track:** Consumer Behaviour