

Facts over stories: How sustainability storytelling can backfire

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Abstract

Communicating sustainability effectively to consumers is a challenge for brands. In light of this, storytelling has been proposed as an advertising tool for sustainability. While in a general advertising context, narrative ads have shown to be particularly persuasive, this may not be true for sustainability advertising. Especially in communication areas in which consumer scepticism prevails, consumers often have a greater desire for information. We therefore investigate the impact of narrative sustainability ads compared to factual and hybrid ads. Our experimental study shows that narrative ads without factual sustainability information negatively influence consumer responses due to increased greenwashing perceptions and a lower perceived amount of information. The study contributes empirical evidence to the discourse on narratives in sustainability advertising, highlighting the need for a careful integration of emotional storytelling and factual information to for practitioners.

Subject Areas: *Advertising, Branding, Consumer Behaviour*

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