

# "Disarming Doubt: Leveraging Advertising Strategies to mitigate Green advertising Scepticism"

Esmée van Beek (3085481)

Faculty of behavioural, management and social sciences,  
University of Twente

Master thesis Communication Science

First supervisor: dr. A.J. Nanne  
Second supervisor: drs. M.H. Tempelman

Due date: 03-06-2025

Wordcount: 9170

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## **Abstract**

This research examines the effectiveness of two advertising strategies, the two-sided approach and the narrative paradigm, in reducing green advertising scepticism and increasing purchase intentions. This research also examines whether advertising credibility had a mediating role in the relationship between advertising strategies and green advertising scepticism.

A between-subjects experiment was designed and conducted among 122 respondents. The respondents consist of 73 females and 49 males with an average age of 27 years. The respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four different advertising strategies: the two-sided approach, the narrative paradigm, the combination of the two strategies and the control advertisement. In the survey, the level of advertising scepticism, advertising credibility and willingness to purchase were measured.

The results of the survey showed that none of the advertising strategies had a significant effect on reducing green advertising scepticism or on the purchasing intention of the consumers. The advertising strategy two-sided approach and the combination of the two strategies did increase the mediating factor of advertising credibility, but this variable did not significantly mediate green advertising scepticism.

These results suggest that green advertising scepticism is complex and the influence of advertising strategies can be different based on the context of the advertisement. Other factors as deep-rooted scepticism or perceptions in the context of the fashion industry, may affect the influence of the strategies. In future research, other approaches can be investigated to mitigate green advertising scepticism.

**Keywords:** green advertising scepticism, two-sided message, narrative paradigm, advertising credibility, purchase intention

## Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	6
2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Formation .....	10
2.1 Green advertising scepticism.....	10
2.2 Advertising strategies to mitigate scepticism.....	11
2.2.1 Two-Sided Approach.....	12
2.2.2 Narrative Paradigm .....	14
2.3 Advertising credibility.....	17
2.4 Conceptual model.....	18
Methodology .....	19
3.1 Research design .....	19
3.2 Design stimuli.....	19
3.2.1 Brand selection.....	20
3.2.2 Materials used in experiment .....	21
3.3 Measures.....	25
3.3.1 Purchase intention (dependent variable) .....	25
3.3.2 Green advertising scepticism (dependent variable).....	25
3.3.3 Advertising credibility (mediating variable) .....	26
3.3.4 Message style & sidedness (control variable) .....	26
3.3.5 Factor analysis.....	26
3.4 procedure .....	27
3.4.1 Ethical considerations .....	28
3.4.2 sampling procedure .....	28
3.4.3 Participants.....	28
4. Results .....	30
4.1 Manipulation checks .....	30
4.3 Direct effect of green advertising scepticism on the purchase intention.....	31
4.4 Direct effect of Advertising strategies on green advertising scepticism .....	32
4.5 Mediation effect of advertising credibility .....	33
4.6 Hypothesis conclusion.....	34
5. Discussion .....	35
5.1 Main findings .....	35
5.2 Absence of effect on green advertising scepticism .....	35
5.3 Limitations and Future Research.....	37

5.4	Theoretical and practical implications .....	39
5.5	Conclusion.....	40
	Reference list.....	41
	Appendix .....	47
	Appendix A – Advertisements .....	47
	Appendix B – Measurement instrument.....	49
	Appendix C – Use of Artificial intelligence .....	51

# 1. Introduction

More and more consumers are seeking products that are better for the environment, commonly referred to as green products (Liobikienė et al., 2017). This trend is especially visible in the fashion industry, where consumers expect brands to act sustainably (Khandual & Pradhan, 2019). However, this search is complicated by the fact that not all green marketing claims made by companies turn out to be true. This is evidenced in recent research by the EU, which revealed that 50% of these claims are false (Lachmeijer, 2021). The fashion industry has been frequently criticised for making false green marketing claims.

However, when companies make false green marketing claims, it leads to what known as greenwashing. The act of greenwashing is defined as the disjunction between a company's environmental actions and its pro-environmental communication. This communication misleads people regarding environmental performance by concealing negative information and spreading positive information about the organisation (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

The contradiction between consumer expectations and a brand's green practices affects the green purchasing behaviour. Which can be identified as the purchase of environmentally friendly products and the avoidance of products that are harmful to the environment. Green purchase is mostly measured as green purchase intention and behaviour. The intention refers to the willingness of the consumer to purchase green products, and the behaviour refers to the motivation and action of the consumer to purchase products (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). In an era where consumers are more aware of their ecological footprint and eager to make responsible choices, they expect a real reflection of sustainability in business practices.

The prevalence of greenwashing has led to an increase in consumer scepticism towards ecological claims, resulting in what is referred to as green advertising scepticism. This concept is characterized by a predisposition to distrust claims made about the sustainability of products.

and services (Goh & Balaji, 2016). Green advertising scepticism often arises from ambiguous advertising messages, especially those that claim environmental benefits, which lack clarity and substantiation (Bursan et al., 2022).

That is why the European Union took an important step in September 2023 by banning greenwashing and improving the transparency of information on the sustainability of products. This decision targets certain marketing practices linked to greenwashing, such as spreading misleading information about environmental claims and obliging companies to be more transparent. Furthermore, it encourages companies to display approved sustainability labels on products. These labels and signals play a crucial role in forming initial impressions when evaluating green products (Kurme, 2023).

In addition to the influence of sustainability labels, the perceived credibility of advertisements plays also a significant role in shaping consumer scepticism towards ecological claims. Advertisement credibility refers to the response of a consumer towards green claims they have received in limited attention despite the attitude the consumer have towards the brand. In other words, advertisement credibility is the extent to which the consumer perceives the green claims made by the brand to be truthful and believable. If the advertisement is not credible and seems misleading, it may trigger green advertising scepticism. This can, in turn, undermine the intended persuasive effect of the green claim in the advertisement (Carrete et al., 2023).

While scholarly interest in this scepticism has been growing, research has predominantly focused on identifying the factors that contribute to it, rather than investigating potential resolutions or examining its broader impacts (Luo et al., 2020). For example, in previous studies it was explored how misleading green claims create green advertising scepticism, but not that many studies did research on how companies can effectively change the scepticism of consumers about the misleading green practices of former brands to believing good green practices of new brands.

This study seeks to examine the strategies that can decrease the consumers green advertising scepticism and increase consumers' pro-environmental purchasing intentions. Two advertising strategies identified in scholarly discourse show promise for this purpose: the two-sided message approach and the narrative paradigm. The two-sided message approach presents a balanced view of a product by articulating both its advantages and drawbacks, providing consumers with a comprehensive perspective (Hernandez et al., 2023; Riley et al., 1954). The narrative paradigm employs storytelling, a technique which renders the communication more relatable and digestible, fostering consumer connection and empathy (Kim et al., 2023; Fisher, 2021).

The decision to use these two advertising strategies is based on the research of Kim et al., (2022) the researchers used these strategies in the hotel context and did find positive results in decreasing green advertising scepticism. This study wants to find out if these strategies also work for the fashion industry. The expectation is that they will work because to increase advertising credibility, the advertisement needs transparency and preventing prejudices. With the two-sided approach, the transparency of the brand increases. With the narrative paradigm, the consumer is less aware of the convincing appeal of the advertisement. Also, the combination of the two-sided approach and the narrative paradigm can have a positive effect in mitigating green advertising scepticism (Kim et al., 2022).

An experimental framework operationalizes these strategies, deploying them within a series of advertisements to measure their effectiveness in reducing green advertising scepticism. The research will utilize an experimental design with four distinct conditions. Each condition will be methodically analysed and contrasted with the others to identify the most effective strategy for mitigating green advertising scepticism and increasing purchase behaviours. Which leads to the first research question:



**RQ1: “What are the effects of the advertising strategies, the two-sided approach and the narrative paradigm in reducing green advertising scepticism and increasing the purchase intention?”**

The advertisement credibility will serve as a mediating variable in this study. The mediating role of advertising credibility explains the relationship between the advertising strategies and green advertising scepticism. When using effective advertising strategies, the advertising credibility increases, which in turn reduces green advertising scepticism. Which leads to the second research question:

**RQ2: “What is the mediating role of credibility in the effect of two-sidedness and narrative paradigm on reducing green advertising scepticism?”**

The following sections of this thesis will delve into the literature review and hypothesis development. Subsequent chapters will articulate the research methodology, present the experimental findings, and engage in a critical discussion of the results.

## **2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Formation**

### **2.1 Green advertising scepticism**

Green advertising scepticism refers to consumers' disbelief or doubt about the accuracy of environmental claims made in advertisements (Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014). In other words, consumers fear that brands are misleading them with inaccurate or incomplete information to enhance their image. This consumer concern results in green advertising scepticism, where individuals doubt the sustainable benefits of green products (Yu, 2020). Green advertising scepticism also affects green purchase behaviours, causing consumers to less frequently opt for a green purchase.

Scepticism is derived from the Greek term 'skeptomai,' meaning 'to look closely, to examine,' as discussed by Nguyen et al., (2023). It encompasses both situational and dispositional dimensions. Situational scepticism arises in specific contexts, such as the nature of the product or the type of claim. Situational scepticism is influenced by the amount and context of available information. Malhotra and Fatehpuria (2024) note that individual perceptions change based on these contextual elements.

In contrast, dispositional scepticism is a broader tendency to question others' motives, independent of the situation. There is a debate within scholarly circles regarding the essence of scepticism. While some view it as an intrinsic personality trait (dispositional scepticism), others consider it a state of mind prompted by external, situational factors (situational scepticism) (Goh & Balaji, 2016). The research of Goh and Balaji (2016) posit that green advertising scepticism does not indicate deep mistrust but rather a careful scrutiny of environmental claims, a view supported by the earlier findings of Mohr and Ellen (1998).

Consumer scepticism can adversely affect brand perception, as those who are sceptical tend to seek additional information and may propagate negative opinions (Yu, 2020). It is

influenced by several factors, including one's socialization, market experiences, personality, and education. Misleading environmental and health benefit claims in advertising can engender scepticism and affect the likelihood of purchasing, which is heavily contingent upon trust in the green claims made about a product (Luo et al., 2020). When consumers perceive environmental messages as untrustworthy or exaggerated, the likelihood to act on those messages and purchase the product, decreases. Scepticism acts as a cognitive filter, encouraging consumers to question the credibility of the advertisement and decreasing the persuasive power of green marketing (Lima et al., 2024). Therefore, if consumers experience high levels of green advertising scepticism, they are less likely to form positive purchase intentions towards green products. Based on this reasoning, the first hypothesis reads:

**H1: Higher green advertising scepticism is negatively related to purchase intention**

Understanding and addressing green advertising scepticism is critical for creating an environment where green products are valued, yet effective strategies for overcoming this barrier remain under-researched (Do Paço & Reis, 2012; Hernandez et al., 2023). In the following section, we will delve into the strategies that have been examined in the literature to address scepticism among consumers.

## **2.2 Advertising strategies to mitigate scepticism**

Research indicates that consumer scepticism towards advertising is prevalent; however, there is a scarcity of knowledge regarding how advertising strategies could mitigate such scepticism, particularly within the realm of green advertising (Zinkhan & Carlson, 1995). Nonetheless, the literature has begun to identify promising approaches in relation to reducing advertising scepticism that may also be applicable to diminishing green advertising scepticism. The two strategies that will be explored for their potential efficacy are: the two-sided message approach as discussed by Hernandez et al., (2023) and the narrative paradigm examined by Kim et al.,(2023). Each of these strategies will be examined in detail in the subsequent sections.

### **2.2.1 Two-Sided Approach**

In communication, a one-sided approach is often used, where marketers emphasize the positive aspects and omit negative information. The two-sided approach differs in that because it also communicates negative aspects (Riley et al., 1954). When applying the two-sided approach in the sustainable fashion industry, it involves not only presenting positives about a product, like sustainable material, but also the drawbacks of higher prices or environmental impact. Although it may seem counterintuitive for marketers to communicate both positive and negative aspects, research shows that this is more effective than the one-sided approach. Admitting shortcomings makes the message more credible, reducing consumer scepticism through demonstrated transparency (Hernandez et al., 2023). Providing a balanced view can increase consumer engagement and trust (Kim et al., 2023).

In the study by Kim et al., (2023), the two-sided approach was tested in a hotel context, resulting in this approach having a positive impact on the effect of the message. The key factor was that the two-sided approach create more credibility and usability and elicited fewer counterarguments from consumers (Kim et al., 2023).

This was particularly true for consumers who already have a negative attitude towards a brand (Eisend, 2007). In the research of Eisend (2007), the psychological part of the two-sidedness was explored. The result of this research was that the two-sided message enhances attention and motivation, but also the effect of the cognitive response to previous assumptions decreased. Especially, the quality of information and arguments corresponds with the idea of the central or peripheral route suggested in the Elaboration Likelihood model (Eisend, 2007).

The Elaboration Likelihood model explains how someone process persuasive messages, which results in attitude formation and behaviour change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The model proposes two routes, the central route and the peripheral route, representing the two ways in

which a consumer can interpret the advertisement and react with attitude or behaviour change. The central route involves active engagement and thoughtful evaluation of the information provided in the advertisement. The peripheral route involves not thinking actively about the message and making simple inferences with the cues provided in the advertisement (Segev & Fernandes, 2023). The likelihood of consumers taking the central route depends on two main factors, motivation and the ability to process information. In the context of this study, it is important to consider whether participants are likely to engage in the central or peripheral route of information processing. The consumers who are more sceptical about green claims are generally more aware of environmental issues (Schmuck et al., 2018). So, a higher level of motivation to process sustainability messages is expected.

By using the ELM model the use of two-sided messages can be important. Because both positive and negative elements are presented which triggers the cognitive processing of information (Eisend, 2007). The use of negative information attracts the consumers more than positive information, according to Wang et al. (2022). Mostly due to people believing negative information posted by the company more than the promotion. When the attention is higher, it is more likely that the central route of the ELM is used to interpret the advertising and therefore actively evaluate the content of the advertisement.

One-sided information makes the decision process simple by allowing consumers to make a quick choice based on their intrinsic motivation. One-sided information connects to the peripheral route of the ELM model, where arguments are not evaluated and quick decisions are made. But the two-sided approach aims to maintain the positive self-concept by seeing themselves as green, which is in line with the central route of the ELM model by evaluating the quality of arguments. (Yang & Xu, 2024)

In another study by Hernandez et al. (2023) it was tested whether the level of scepticism influenced the purchase intention. The two-sided approach ensured that the purchase intention

was the same for people with high or low levels of scepticism, while with the one-sided approach, a clear difference was visible; people with a high level of scepticism were less inclined to purchase (Hernandez et al., 2023). The use of the two-sided approach can therefore be a good addition to the advertisement to mitigate green advertising scepticism. Therefore the second hypothesis reads:

**H2: The two-sided advertising strategy lowers green advertising scepticism in comparison to the advertisement without the two-sided advertising strategy.**

### **2.2.2 Narrative Paradigm**

The theory of the narrative paradigm suggests that stories are an essential part of how people process information (Fisher, 2021). People are more easily persuaded by engaging stories with strong arguments than by mere facts. It can be described as the process in which consumers become psychological (cognitive or emotionally) immersed in the narrative and detach from their surroundings (Deb et al., 2025). The state of cognitive and emotional engagement occurs when consumers are deeply involved with the presented story in the advertisement. This can be facilitated by storytelling, which is a powerful tool in shaping consumers attitudes (Deb et al., 2025). Shaping attitudes is a rational process, but it is a human trait to be influenced by a well-told story (Bazarova & Choi, 2014).

In a narrative message, a storytelling format is used, while in other advertising methods like infographics or visuals, only explanations and facts are provided. Stories enable people to better visualize the conveyed information and empathize more. The narrative style is beneficial for reducing green scepticism because it reduces awareness of the persuasive attempt. If consumers feel connected to the story, they are less aware of the company's persuasive intent, and are more easily convinced to believe the advertisement and purchase the product (Kim et al., 2022)

The narrative paradigm can also be connected to the ELM model. Stories can increase motivation by making the message more relevant, personal and engaging, with the result that consumers are more actively evaluating the message in the advertisement, instead of relying on superficial cues. The consumers are consumed in the story, and therefore actively thinking about the content of the advertisement which is in line with the ELM model. By increasing emotional and cognitive engagement, masking the persuasive intent and promoting credibility, the narrative paradigm can be a good addition to mitigate green advertising scepticism. Therefore, the third hypothesis reads:

**H3: The narrative advertising strategy lowers green advertising scepticism in comparison to the advertisement without the narrative advertising strategy.**

It is expected that the narrative paradigm will have the most significant effect on reducing the influence of green advertising scepticism on the green purchase intention in comparison to the two-sided approach and the advertisement without a advertising strategy. In the research of Kim et al., (2022) the message style and two-sidedness are tested in the hotel industry, the results show a higher significant effect of the narrative paradigm on the green evaluations of the advertisements due to higher advertising credibility. The narrative paradigm also offers unique persuasive advantages compared to the two-sided approach. Discussed in the research of Fischer et al., (2020) the narrative paradigm draws on the human trait to process information through stories, also storytelling allows consumers to identify with the characters of the story and be less aware of the persuasion (Fischer et al., 2020). In comparison to the two-sided approach, in which the aim is to enhance credibility through transparency and explicitly signalling persuasive intent by presenting both positive and negative facts. This can trigger more scepticism or the boomerang effect when the consumers are more focused on the negative facts. Therefore, because of the emotional engagement and more subtlety of the narrative

paradigm is may make it more effective in reducing green advertising scepticism. Given these potential benefits the fourth hypothesis is proposed.

**H4: Green advertising scepticism is lower for the narrative paradigm strategy compared to (a) the advertisement without advertising strategy and (b) the advertisement with the two-sided advertising.**

Previous research has shown, that the persuasive effect of the narrative style is enhanced when combined with the two-sided approach (Kim et al., 2022) In the research of Kim et al. (2022) is stated that the persuasive impact of narrative style is amplified when integrated with the two-sided approach. Narrative messages should be more credible than only presenting facts, but for it to work, the content of the narrative message needs to include specific positive and negative facts (Gray & Harrington, 2011). To create a narrative message with specific facts, the combination of the narrative paradigm and two-sided approach can be used. Especially related to green messages, which include mostly general, idealistic or exaggerated claims, both the narrative messages and a two-sided approach provide advantages ( Kim et al., 2022). The narrative messages helps to make vague green claims concrete and reliable through stories and increased the emotional involvement. The two-sided approach enhances credibility by presenting limitations by mentioning positive and negative facts. The combination can be more effective in this study than the strategies separated. The combination of these strategies can help mitigate green advertising scepticism by adding transparency, realism and emotional engagement to an advertisement. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis reads:

**H5: The combined advertising strategies (two-sidedness and narrative paradigm) mitigate green advertising scepticism more compared to only the (a) narrative paradigm or (b) two-sided approach**



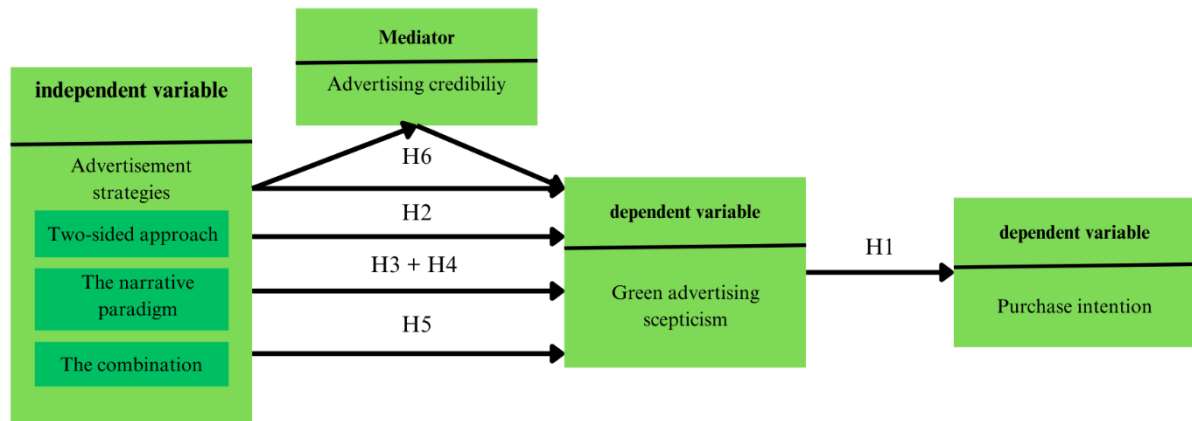
## 2.3 Advertising credibility

The credibility of the message and the consumers' attitude are crucial in how scepticism is expressed and how sceptical the consumer is towards the advertisement. In this study, advertising credibility is defined as the extent to which consumers perceive the advertisements as believable or trustworthy (Hussain et al., 2020). Consumers evaluate the advertising and determine its credibility. False claims are mostly perceived as greenwashing, especially because of lies or half-lies. Only true green claims about the processes, financial performance and quality can affect the credibility of the advertisement (Carrete et al., 2023). High advertising credibility can reduce green advertising scepticism and positively influence green purchase intentions, according to (Carrete et al., 2023). Advertising strategies such as the two-sided approach and narrative messaging are expected to enhance credibility by increasing transparency. The two-sided approach for example was studied in the study by Hernandez et al. (2023), the two-sided approach was investigated in relation to credibility. It was found that sceptical consumers found a message communicated with a two-sided approach more credible. Also the narrative paradigm increases engagement and realism, which enhances credibility (van Krieken, 2020). These strategies work by increasing the credibility of the advertisement, which in turn reduces green advertising scepticism and encourages consumers to green purchases.

The mediator shows why an independent variable exerts influence on a dependent variable. As shown in the conceptual model (figure 1), advertising credibility is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between the advertising strategies and green advertising scepticism. These strategies work by increasing the credibility of the advertisement, which in turn reduces green advertising scepticism and encourages consumers to green purchases. Therefore the sixth hypothesis reads:

**H6: The effect of narrative paradigm (a) and two-sided advertising (b) on green scepticism is mediated by credibility**

## 2.4 Conceptual model



**Figure 1:** Conceptual model

**Table 1: Hypotheses overview**

<b>H1:</b> Higher green advertising scepticism is negatively related to purchase intention
<b>H2:</b> The two-sided advertising strategy lowers green advertising scepticism in comparison to the advertisement without the two-sided advertising strategy
<b>H3:</b> The narrative advertising strategy lowers green advertising scepticism in comparison to the advertisement without the narrative advertising strategy.
<b>H4:</b> Green advertising scepticism is lower for the narrative paradigm strategy compared to (a) the advertisement without advertising strategy and (b) the advertisement with the two-sided advertising.
<b>H5:</b> The combined advertising strategies (two-sidedness and narrative paradigm) mitigate green advertising scepticism more compared to only the (a) narrative paradigm or (b) two-sided approach
<b>H6:</b> The effect of narrative paradigm (a) and two-sided advertising (b) on green scepticism is mediated by credibility

# Methodology

## 3.1 Research design

The methodology for investigating the hypotheses is outlined below. The aim of this study is to determine which strategy is most effective in reducing and overcoming green advertising scepticism. For this purpose, a between-subjects experiment is designed. In a between-subjects study, participants are exposed to only one condition of the experiment. This research design allows for a comparison of the experimental conditions with the behaviour of participants in the other conditions. This is possible because of random group assignments and maintaining equal groups (Charness et al., 2012). By comparing the advertising strategies, it can be investigated which one most effectively increases the mediation effect of credibility and mitigates the effect of green advertising scepticism and increases purchasing intention.

After selecting the brand for the experiment, the advertisements which will be used in the study will be developed. Each advertisement will employ one of the advertising strategies hypothesized in the literature review. Specifically, there will be an advertisement applying the two-sided approach, another utilizing the narrative paradigm, and a third one combining these approaches. The fourth advertisement will be the control advertisement, which is a real advertisement of the brand.

## 3.2 Design stimuli

The brand selected for the experiment is identified through a preliminary test, with a focus on ensuring that it has a high level of green advertising scepticism. For this research, the decision is made to work with a brand which has a high level of green advertising scepticism, to see if the advertising strategies had an influence on this green advertising scepticism. When the brand did not have a high level of scepticism, the effect of the advertising strategies would be more difficult to measure. See 3.2.1 for an explanation of the pre-test to ascertain this. To

evaluate the efficacy of the test materials, a second pretest will be conducted. The details of this process will be elaborated upon in section 3.2.2.

The advertisements utilized in this study consist of brief social media posts, primarily featured on Facebook or Instagram. The platform Facebook was chosen due to its capacity to accommodate concise text alongside visuals, facilitating the integration of advertising strategies. Each of the four versions shares identical text, except for the elements modified to facilitate the intended manipulations

### **3.2.1 Brand selection**

For this experiment, it was decided to select an existing brand known to have a significant level of green advertising scepticism. Firstly, the most suitable brand for this purpose is determined. Pre-test 1 is conducted for this purpose. In this pre-test, a brief media research is conducted to see if there have been previous studies on brands scoring high in green advertising scepticism or brands previously accused of greenwashing practices. Based on this, the 8 most common brands are selected. These 8 brands are included in a short survey distributed among 10 fellow students. In the survey, the participants are asked to read short news headlines about a brand in which the brand is accused of greenwashing, after seeing the headline the participants answered a yes/no question if in their opinion the headline qualifies as greenwashing. At the end of the survey, the participants were asked to rank the brands from 1 to 10 to which brand they feel the most sceptical about. The choice to conduct the pre-test among students is based on the fact that the primary target audience is likely within this age group.

In table 2 the results of the first pre-test are shown. Of the 10 respondents, 3 did not complete the survey and therefore are shown as missing. When comparing these brands with each other, you can see that H&M, Primark and Boohoo are most commonly identified with greenwashing in this survey. Primark and H&M have similar results with a mean of the third

position in the ranking, but due to the smaller standard deviation, H&M is chosen as the brand in the stimuli materials.



**Table 2: Results pre-test 1**



	H&M	Decathlon	Zara	Primark	Zeeman	ASOS	Boohoo	Hunkemoller
Valid	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Missing	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Mean	3.571	4.857	4.000	3.143	5.714	4.143	3.857	6.714
Std. Deviation	2.573	2.478	2.236	2.734	1.799	1.345	2.340	1.254
Minimum	1.000	2.000	2.000	1.000	3.000	3.000	1.000	5.000
Maximum	7.000	8.000	8.000	7.000	8.000	6.000	8.000	8.000

### 3.2.2 Materials used in experiment

After determining the experimental brand, the identified advertising strategies from the literature can be translated into advertisements. The participant was randomly assigned to one of the 4 fake advertisements of the H&M. H&M is used because from the pre-test was concluded that the participants in the pre-test have more scepticism about the advertisements of H&M. The aim of using a brand with high green advertising scepticism is that the participants are more biased about the brand, in this way it was better to test the effect of the advertisement strategies. To provide a more realistic advertisement, a real advertisement of H&M was used as the advertisement without advertising strategies. For the other advertisements, the same advertisement is used, but with integration of the advertisement strategies. The final advertisements are included in Appendix A and table 3 an explanation about how the advertising strategies are integrated in the advertisements can be found.

**Table 3: Advertisements**

	<p>Original advertisement</p>	
	<p><b>Party time!</b></p> <p>Je loopt samen met je beste vriendin in de stad, zaterdag hebben jullie dat feestje bij die leuke jongen. Dus gaan jullie vandaag een outfit scoren. Ook al heb je vorige week ook een jurkje gekocht voor een feestje, eentje die je waarschijnlijk nooit meer aan gaat doen. Zonde eigenlijk, maar 2x met het zelfde aankomen is echt een no-go.</p> <p>Je hebt weer iets leuks gevonden maar niet de goede maat, dus vragen jullie aan een van de medewerkers of de maat nog achter ligt, wachtend bij de service balie zie je een flyer. De H&amp;M start met een nieuw initiatief 'Close the Loop' je kunt de kleding die je niet meer gebruikt inleveren en deze worden dan gerecycled. Zal wel onzin zijn denk je bij jezelf.</p> <p>Het is bijna zaterdag en je kan niet wachten om je nieuwe jurkje aan te doen en de show te stelen. Maar eerst moet je de laatste les overleven over duurzaamheid op school. Tijdens deze les praat de leraar meer over de onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk wat textiel achterlaat en hoe slecht de fast-fashion industrie is voor het milieu. Op de weg terug naar huis zet dit je toch aan het denken.</p> <p>Dan is het eindelijk zover het feestje kan beginnen en je ontvangt super veel complimenten over het leuke jurkje die je hebt gekocht een paar dagen geleden. De volgende dag zit het je toch nog niet lekker waarom kan je kleding niet vaker dragen? en kleding die je niet meer draagt kun je beter recyclen.</p> <p>Dus het is tijd om die kleding kast eens goed onderhanden te nemen. Oude kleding die je niet meer draagt kan worden gerecycled en die kleding die nog steeds super leuk is moet niet in de kast blijven liggen.</p> <p>De zaterdag erop ga je naar een feestje met een jurkje die al in je kast lag en je krijgt net zoveel complimenten als eerst! Wauw dus zo kan het dus ook en het is goed voor het milieu. Doe jij ook mee met 'Close the Loop'?</p> <p>Meer informatie op onze website</p>	<p><b>... Narrative elements</b></p> <p><b>Identification</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Je loopt samen met je beste vriendin in de stad, zaterdag hebben jullie dat feestje bij die leuke jongen.</li> <li>- Ook al heb je vorige week ook een jurkje gekocht voor een feestje,</li> </ul> <p><b>Time-bound</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Je loopt samen met je beste vriendin in de stad (beginning)</li> <li>- Tijdens deze les praat de leraar meer over de onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk (Middel)</li> <li>-De zaterdag erop ga je naar een feestje met een jurkje die al in je kast lag (End)</li> </ul> <p><b>Emotion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-je ontvangt super veel complimenten over het leuke jurkje</li> <li>-waarom kan je kleding niet vaker dragen?</li> <li>-Wauw dus zo kan het dus ook en het is goed voor het milieu</li> </ul> <p><b>Call to action</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Doe jij ook mee met 'Close the Loop'?</li> </ul>

 <p><b>Sorry!</b> We zijn minder duurzaam dan we dachten</p> <p>De Fast-Fashion heeft een grote impact op het milieu, vooral door de hoeveelheid Textiel afval. Daarom zijn wij als H&amp;M begonnen met het initiatief 'Close the Loop'. In dit initiatief kunnen jullie de oude kledingstukken inleveren en worden deze gerecycled.</p> <p>Nu blijkt het alleen dat dit initiatief lastiger uit te voeren is dan gedacht. Sommige kledingstukken belanden toch nog op de grote hoop en hebben een te grote afstand afgelegd waardoor er een onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk ontstaat.</p> <p><b>En nu?</b></p> <p>Nu zeggen we sorry en gaan we opzoek naar een beter oplossing op het probleem van Textiel afval aan te pakken. We gaan opzoek naar duurzame manieren van produceren en recyclen. Help jij ons mee?</p> <p>Meer informatie is te vinden op onze website.</p> <p>#H CONSCIOUS</p>	<p><b>Sorry! We zijn minder duurzaam dan we dachten</b></p> <p>De Fast-Fashion heeft een grote impact op het milieu, vooral door de hoeveelheid Textiel afval. Daarom zijn wij als H&amp;M begonnen met het initiatief 'Close the Loop'. In dit initiatief kunnen jullie de oude kledingstukken inleveren en worden deze gerecycled.</p> <p>Nu blijkt het alleen dat dit initiatief lastiger uit te voeren is dan gedacht. Sommige kledingstukken belanden toch nog op de grote hoop en hebben een te grote afstand afgelegd waardoor er een onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk ontstaat.</p> <p><b>En nu?</b></p> <p>Nu zeggen we sorry en gaan we opzoek naar een beter oplossing op het probleem van Textiel afval aan te pakken. We gaan opzoek naar duurzame manieren van produceren en recyclen. Help jij ons mee?</p> <p>Meer informatie is te vinden op onze website.</p>	<p>Two sided elements</p> <p><b>Positive:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Daarom zijn wij als H&amp;M begonnen met het initiatief 'Close the Loop'.</li> <li>-In dit initiatief kunnen jullie de oude kledingstukken inleveren en worden deze gerecycled.</li> <li>-We gaan opzoek naar duurzame manieren van produceren en recyclen</li> </ul> <p><b>Negative:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Nu blijkt het alleen dat dit initiatief lastiger uit te voeren is dan gedacht.</li> <li>-Sommige kledingstukken belanden toch nog op de grote hoop en hebben een te grote afstand afgelegd waardoor er een onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk ontstaat.</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Sorry!</b> We zijn minder duurzaam dan we dachten</p> <p>De Fast-Fashion heeft een grote impact op het milieu, vooral door de hoeveelheid Textiel afval. Daarom zijn wij als H&amp;M begonnen met het initiatief 'Close the Loop'. In dit initiatief kunnen jullie de oude kledingstukken inleveren en worden deze gerecycled.</p> <p>Nu blijkt het alleen dat dit initiatief lastiger uit te voeren is dan gedacht. Sommige kledingstukken belanden toch nog op de grote hoop en hebben een te grote afstand afgelegd waardoor er een onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk ontstaat.</p> <p><b>En nu?</b></p> <p>Nu zeggen we sorry en gaan we opzoek naar een beter oplossing op het probleem van Textiel afval aan te pakken. We gaan opzoek naar duurzame manieren van produceren en recyclen. Help jij ons mee?</p> <p>Meer informatie is te vinden op onze website.</p> <p>#H CONSCIOUS</p>	<p><b>Sorry! We zijn minder duurzaam dan we dachten</b></p> <p>Ons team van Fashion designers doen hun uiterste best om elke keer weer een nieuwe collectie te ontwerpen zodat jij weer kan stralen op dat aankomende feestje maar De Fast-Fashion heeft een grote impact op het milieu, vooral door de hoeveelheid Textiel afval. Daarom zijn wij als H&amp;M begonnen met het initiatief 'Close the Loop'. In dit initiatief kunnen jullie de oude kledingstukken inleveren en worden deze gerecycled.</p> <p>Dus als je samen met je vriendinnen aan het shoppen bent voor dat feestje aankomende zaterdag van die leuke jongen, kun je gelijk iets goeds doen voor het milieu! Een goed idee toch? Dus hup neem die kledingkast onderhanden en recycle jou oude kledingstukken! En die complimenten die je gaat ontvangen voelen nog beter wanneer je iets goeds hebt gedaan.</p> <p>Nu blijkt het alleen dat dit initiatief lastiger uit te voeren is dan gedacht. Sommige kledingstukken belanden toch nog op de grote hoop en hebben een te grote afstand afgelegd waardoor er een onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk ontstaat.</p> <p><b>En nu?</b></p> <p>Nu zeggen we sorry en gaan we opzoek naar een beter oplossing op het probleem van Textiel afval aan te pakken. Maar samen met jou hulp door duurzamere keuzes te maken kunnen we proberen de wereld een stukje beter te maken.</p> <p>Meer informatie is te vinden op onze website.</p>	<p>... Narrative elements</p> <p>Two sided elements</p> <p>Narrative: The first sentence begins the story by introducing the personages and a situation. The second part makes it personal and identifiable. The third part strengthens the story by adding an emotional element.</p> <p>Two-sided approach: the first part gives a clear recognition of the problem. The second part centres on the limitations of the company and admits to them. The third part, the company takes initiative to improve.</p>

In the narrative paradigm advertisement, the narrative structure is used to convey the message. Sentences as *shopping with a friend, preparing for a party and the moment of awareness at school*, make that the story contains a personage, has a time loop and a conflict and solution, which are key elements of the narrative paradigm (Fischer et al., 2020). Also, because the reader is central in the story, identification can happen through sentences as *you walk through the city, or you look at the advertisement*. In the two-sided advertisement, the key element is to mention the negative and positive sides of the fast fashion industry. A positive sentence is *H&M introduces 'Close the Loop' to recycle clothing*. A negative sentence is that they admit that not everything was good in the sentences like *the initiative was more difficult in practice than initially thought, and some clothing pieces were still not properly disposed of*. For the advertisements, a simple photo was used to not distract the participants by the photo but only focus on the text.

After creating the stimulus conditions, these were checked in a second pre-test among 3 students if it is clear which technique had been applied to the advertisements. The participants of the second pre-test saw all the stimulus conditions and were asked in multiple-choice questions which strategy was used in the advertisements. The original advertisement was marked with 1, the narrative paradigm with 2, the two-sided approach with 3 and the combination of the two advertising strategies with 4. The result of the second pre-test is presented in table 4

**Table 4:** Results second pre-test

	Advertisement 1	Advertisement 2	Advertisement 3	Advertisement 4
Valid	3	3	3	3
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	1.000	2.000	3.000	4.000
Std. Deviation	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Minimum	1.000	2.000	3.000	4.000
Maximum	1.000	2.000	3.000	4.000



### 3.3 Measures

To measure the variables, a 5-point Likert scale is used during the experiment. The 5-point Likert scale allows the participant to indicate the extent to which they agree with a certain statement. The 5-point Likert scale is ranging from 'strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)'.

#### 3.3.1 Purchase intention (dependent variable)

The purchase intention is measured through the scale from (Baker & Gilbert A. Churchill, 1977). The first scale is to measure the willingness of the participants to purchase green products. Especially after seeing the advertisement with the different advertising strategies. The scale includes 4 items, with questions as *I would buy this product if I saw it in an advertisement or I would like to try this product/ service from the advertisement*. The complete measurement instrument can be found in Appendix B. The reliability of the scale was tested with the Cronbach's Alpha, which was  $\alpha = .58$  ( $N=119$ ). The Cronbach Alpha indicates a low reliability of this scale, it can be improved when one item is deleted, which increases the Cronbach Alpha to  $\alpha = .61$ . For this study it was chosen to continue with all the items of the scale because the item was different from the other items but added value to scale. This item was more focused on the willingness to change behaviour and the other items were focussed on the willingness to buy the products.

#### 3.3.2 Green advertising scepticism (dependent variable)

Green advertising scepticism is measured with the scale from (Mohr & Ellen, 1998). This scale is used to measure the scepticism the respondents have towards an advertisement. The scale includes 4 items, with questions as *sustainability claims on packaging labels or in advertisements are always true or when I see sustainability claims on packaging labels or in advertisements I question the company's intentions*. The Cronbach alpha of this scale is  $\alpha = .47$  ( $N=119$ ). Also this Cronbach alpha shows a low reliability of the scale. When one item is

deleted from the scale, the alpha increases to  $\alpha = .58$ , which is still low in reliability. In this research, it is still decided to use all the items because it is a key variable of the model and dropping items alters the meaning of the model.

### **3.3.3 Advertising credibility (mediating variable)**

The mediating variable advertising credibility is measured with the scale from ( Kim et al., 2022). The scale includes 5 items, with questions as *the advertisement is credible, the advertisement is sustainable or the advertisement is based on the truth*. The reliability of this scale is measured with a Cronbach's alpha, which was  $\alpha = .87$  ( $N = 119$ ). This indicates a good reliability of the scale

### **3.3.4 Message style & sidedness (control variable)**

The control scale message style & sidedness is measured with the scale from ( Kim et al., 2022). This scale is used as a manipulation check to verify the two-sided approach and the narrative paradigm. The scale includes 3 items, with questions as *this advertisement reads like a story or this advertisement has both positive facts and negative facts*. The reliability of this scale is measured with the Cronbach alpha, which was  $\alpha = .68$  ( $N = 119$ ). Which is a bit low but indicates that the scale is reliable.

### **3.3.5 Factor analysis**

To measure the validity of the measures, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted and the Cronbach alpha of each variable was measured. The factor analysis is conducted for each scale separately to measure how strongly each question cohort with the underlying factors. First, the purchase intention scale, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) is 0.54, which indicates the data is acceptable for the factor analysis. A parallel analysis identified 2 factors in this scale. Questions 3 and 4 determine almost factor 1 and Question 2 dominated factor 2. This first question suggests a low contribution.

In the scale of green advertising scepticism, no factors could be identified in the parallel analysis. The overall KMO is 0.56, which is moderate to weak for using a factor analysis.

The KMO of the advertising credibility scale is 0.84 which makes it applicable for a factor analysis. In the scale of advertising credibility, the parallel analysis identified 1 factor which represents all the questions. All the variables have high factor loadings (all  $>.60$ ), which means that they strongly correlate with the factor. This factor explains 58,2% of the total variance, which means a strong factor solution.

The overall KMO of the message style and sidedness scale is 0.66, which indicates the data is suitable for use in the factor analysis. The scale message style and sidedness also show 1 factor in the parallel analysis. All the variables have a reasonable factor loading above .50, which suggests a general underlying construct. Question 3 has the highest factor loading .75, which is the strongest related variable to this factor. The factor explains 42.6% of the variance, which is acceptable, but ideally it will be above 50%.

### **3.4 procedure**

The online survey and the experiment can be conducted using Qualtrics, a program used by the University of Twente. This allows the researcher to design questions and customize the question design. Additionally, Qualtrics allows for the collected data to be exported to the R program. R is a statistical software program used to organize, analyse, and interpret data. Using Qualtrics and R provides a structured approach of conducting and analysing the research, contributing to the reliability and validity of the results. The participation of the survey was voluntary and they did not receive anything in return. The survey took around 3 to 5 minutes to fill in.

The survey was deployed between the period of September 24th 2024 and October 29th 2024. The participants took voluntary part in the online experiment and randomly assigned to

one of the four conditions. Each participant in the experiment receives a brief introductory text about the research, after which, one manipulation is shown. After having seen the advertisement, the participants are asked questions regarding purchase behaviour, level of green advertising scepticism and advertising credibility

### **3.4.1 Ethical considerations**

To prevent ethical issues during the research, participants in the study must provide explicit consent to participate in the experiment, and they must be at least 18 years old. If a participant does not consent to this permission, they are excluded from participating in the experiment. This consent is obtained at the beginning of the experiment, including participants being informed that they can withdraw from the experiment at any time. Additionally, a clear explanation of maintaining participant anonymity is provided at the beginning of the experiment, and the confidentiality of their information is ensured. Furthermore, the experiment requires approval from the ethical committee of the University of Twente. The ethical approval was granted on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2024 (request nr 241055).

### **3.4.2 sampling procedure**

To reach a reliable number of participants a convenience sampling was used. In a convenience sampling, the participants are selected to participate in the experiment. This strategy is chosen for practical feasibility and efficiency. Participants are randomly assigned to one of the conditions after agreeing to participate in the experiment. The participants are approached directly by the researcher. The criteria for participating in the survey are that the participant is older than 18 years old.

### **3.4.3 Participants**

In total there were 131 participants who filled in the survey. Only the experiments of the participants who filled in the complete survey and met the criteria for the experiment were considered valid. This resulted in a sample size of 122 ( $N = 122$ ). The distribution across the

four conditions is balanced, with around 30 participants in each condition. The sample characteristics of the cleaned data are presented in table 5.

**Table 5:** *Sample characteristics*

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std.Dev</b>
Age	122	18	56	27	8

<b>Demographic</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Male	49	36,0%
	Female	73	59.8%
Knowledge of Greenwashing	Yes	77	63.2%
	No	45	36.8%
Knowledge of Social media	Yes	121	99.1%
	No	1	0.9%

<b>Distribution of the conditions</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Original advertisment H&M	30	12	18	24.6%
Narrative paradigm strategy	29	14	15	23,8%
Two-sided apporach strategy	31	13	18	25.4%
Combination of advertising strategies	32	10	22	26.2%

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Manipulation checks

An ANOVA test was conducted to find out if the right advertising strategy was identified. The first question of the manipulation check was linked to the advertising strategy narrative paradigm. With the ANOVA test the p-value was calculated  $p = .026$ , which means a significant relation to the participants seeing the narrative advertising manipulation and the manipulation question. Table 6 shows the results of the manipulation check, which also shows that the advertising strategy's two-sided approach is not significant ( $p = .118$ ) for the first question.

The second question of the manipulation check was linked to the advertising strategy's two-sidedness. With the ANOVA test, the p-value was calculated  $p < .001$ , which means a significant relation to the participants' seeing the advertisement strategy two-sidedness and the manipulation question. The narrative paradigm shows not a significant relation to the second question with a  $p = .467$

The participants who saw the combination of the two advertising strategies could identify the narrative paradigm and the balanced information of the two-sided approach which is showed by the first question with a significant  $p < .001$  and for the third question  $p = .014$ . The results of the ANOVA tests indicate that the right strategy can be linked to the right advertisement by the participants

**Table 6:** Results Manipulation check

Control questions	Narrative paradigm	Two-sided approach	Narrative paradigm : Two-sided approach
The advertisement reads like a story	$F(1, 112) = 5.12,$ $p .026^*$	$F(1, 112) = 2.48,$ $p .118$	$F(1, 110) = 21.41,$ $p < .001^{***}$
This advertisement has both positive and negative facts	$F(1, 112) = 0.53,$ $p .467$	$F(1, 112) = 19.52,$ $p < .001^{***}$	$F(1, 110) = 2.76, p = .100$
The advertisement presents balanced information	$F(1, 112) = 1.65,$ $p .202$	$F(1, 112) = 21.04,$ $p < .001^{***}$	$F(1, 110) = 6.23, p = .014^*$

*Significant results are indicated with \**

## 4.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics of the four advertising strategies with their relation to green advertising scepticism and advertisement credibility. The variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. For example, to read and interpret the results, the mean of the original advertisement scored 2,68 with a standard deviation of 0.54, which indicates that the answer was between neutral or disagree. The same works for the variable advertisement credibility, the mean of the narrative paradigm is 3.42 with a standard deviation of 0.65, which indicates that the answer was between neutral and agree.

**Table 7:** Descriptive statistics

			Original advertisement			Two-sided approach			Narrative paradigm			Combination		
			N	Std.Dev	Mean	N	Std.Dev	Mean	N	Std.Dev	Mean	N	Std.Dev	Mean
Green advertising scepticism			29	0.54	2.68	27	0.62	2.67	30	0.69	2.88	28	0.47	2.86
Advertisement credibility			29	0.71	2.73	27	0.83	3.09	30	0.65	3.42	28	0.62	3.08

## 4.3 Direct effect of green advertising scepticism on the purchase intention

The linear regression model is used to determine how the variable green advertising scepticism predicts the purchase intention variable. The model indicates that there is not a meaningful linear relationship between the two variables. The variable green advertising scepticism does not predict the variable purchase intention  $F(1,112) = 0.13$ ,  $p = 0.72$ . The variable green advertising scepticism explains almost none of the variance ( $R^2 = .001$ ) for the variable purchase intention.

By the use of this analysis hypothesis 1: *Higher green advertising scepticism is negatively related to purchase intention* is rejected . Because there is not an significant linear relationship between the variable green advertising scepticism and the variable purchase intention.

#### 4.4 Direct effect of Advertising strategies on green advertising scepticism

In this research is hypothesized that the use of advertising strategies can mitigate the green advertising scepticism. To analyse this hypothesis an ANOVA test is conducted. The effect of the independent variables (narrative or sidedness) on the dependent variable (green advertising scepticism) is measured. None of the three advertising strategies (a) narrative paradigm, (b) two-sidedness and (c) the combination had a significant p-value

The advertising strategy narrative paradigm showed a insignificant effect on the variable green advertising scepticism  $F(1,110) = 0.02, p = .89$ . Although the descriptive statistics in table shows an overall higher score for the narrative advertising strategy. The two-sided approach has almost an significant effect on green advertising scepticism  $F(1,110) = 3.05, p = .08$ , which can indicate that two-sidedness has a marginal effect on the variable green advertising scepticism but it is weak. The combination of the narrative paradigm and two-sided approach has also showed an insignificant effect  $F(1,110) = 0.01, p = .92$ , on the variable green advertising scepticism

Hypothesis 2: *The two-sided advertising strategy lowers green advertising scepticism in comparison to the advertisement without the two-sided advertising strategy.* is rejected because the two-sided approach did not have an significant effect on the variable green advertising scepticism. Hypothesis 3: *The narrative advertising strategy lowers green advertising scepticism in comparison to the advertisement without the narrative advertising strategy* is rejected based on the analysis because the narrative paradigm showed not a significant effect on the variable green advertising scepticism. Because of these results also hypothesis 4: *Green advertising scepticism is lower for the narrative paradigm strategy compared to (a) the advertisement without advertising strategy and (b) the advertisement with the two-sided advertising* is rejected. The use of the two-sided approach and the use of the advertising strategy narrative paradigm showed a insignificant effect on the variable green advertising scepticism.



The combination of the two strategies also did not show a significant effect on the variable green advertising scepticism and therefore, hypothesis 5: *The combined advertising strategies (two-sidedness and narrative paradigm) mitigate green advertising scepticism more compared to only the (a) narrative paradigm or (b) two-sided approach* is rejected.

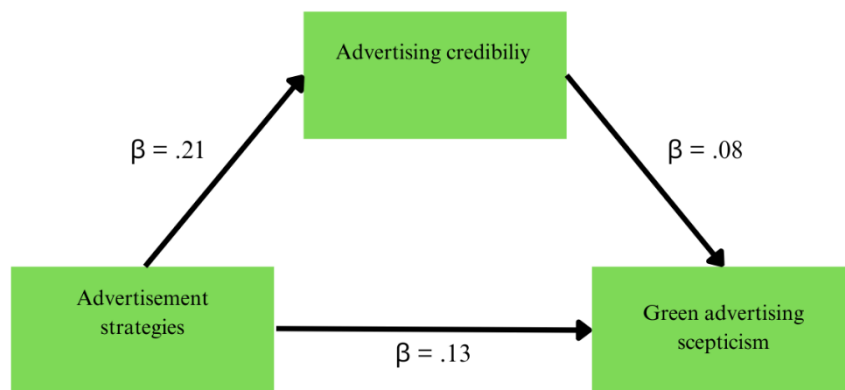
#### **4.5 Mediation effect of advertising credibility**

First to analyse the mediation effect of advertising credibility on the advertising strategies narrative paradigm and two-sided approach in decreasing green advertising scepticism, an ANOVA-test is conducted. The ANOVA test shows a significant effect with the use of the two-sided approach  $F(1,110) = 7.04, p = .009$  and with the use of the combination  $F(1,110) = 6.95, p = .009$  there is not a significant effect when using the narrative paradigm  $F(1,110) = 0.00, p = .99$ .

This research tested whether the relationship between the independent variable (advertising strategy) and the dependent variable (green advertising scepticism) was mediated by a third variable (advertising credibility). The classic mediation steps were used where path (c) tested if the advertising strategy had a direct effect on green advertising scepticism, path (a) checked if advertising strategy influences advertising credibility and path (b) tested if advertising credibility predicts green advertising scepticism. The result of the mediation analysis shows that there is a significant effect (a) between the advertisement strategy and the advertisement credibility  $\beta = .21, p = .019$ , which suggests that the manipulation has influence on the mediation variable. However, the effect (b) of the advertisement's credibility on the green advertising scepticism was not significant  $\beta = .08, p = .43$ . Even as the direct effect (c) of the condition on the dependent variable green advertising scepticism  $\beta = .13, p = .19$ . These results show a insignificant indirect effect ( $a * b$ ) that advertisement credibility plays a mediating role in this relationship  $\beta = .02, p = .45$ . Also, the total effect ( $c + (a * b)$ ) is not significant  $\beta = .14, p = .13$ . Although the ANOVA test and the influence of the condition on the advertisement

credibility suggest an effect, there is not a significant effect on the dependent variable green advertisement scepticism. Therefore also hypothesis 6: *The effect of narrative paradigm (a) and two-sided advertising (b) on green scepticism is mediated by credibility* is rejected.

**Figure 2:** Overview of the mediation analysis



#### 4.6 Hypothesis conclusion

After presenting the results of the ANOVA tests and the mediating effects on the purchase intention, 6 of the 6 hypotheses are rejected, as shown in the table below. The results are further discussed in the next section.

	Hypotheses	Outcome
H1	Higher green advertising scepticism is negatively related to purchase intention	Rejected
H2	The two-sided advertising strategy lowers green advertising scepticism in comparison to the advertisement without the two-sided advertising strategy	Rejected
H3	The narrative advertising strategy lowers green advertising scepticism in comparison to the advertisement without the narrative advertising strategy.	Rejected
H4	Green advertising scepticism is lower for the narrative paradigm strategy compared to (a) the advertisement without advertising strategy and (b) the advertisement with the two-sided advertising.	Rejected
H5	The combined advertising strategies (two-sidedness and narrative paradigm) mitigate green advertising scepticism more compared to only the (a) narrative paradigm or (b) two-sided approach	Rejected
H6	The effect of narrative paradigm (a) and two-sided advertising (b) on green scepticism is mediated by credibility	Rejected

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Main findings**

This study investigates the effectiveness of the two-sided approach and the narrative paradigm in reducing green advertising scepticism and promoting purchase intentions. It was expected that the strategies, separately and in combination, would have a positive effect on the credibility of advertisements compared to the original advertisement and therefore reduce green advertising scepticism and increase the purchase intention. However, contrary to the expectations, the results showed that the advertising strategies' two-sidedness, the narrative paradigm or the combination were not effective in reducing green advertising scepticism. Moreover, there was no significant effect of green advertising scepticism on the purchase intention.

### **5.2 Absence of effect on green advertising scepticism**

A possible explanation for the insignificant effects of the use of advertising strategies on the variable green advertising scepticism, can be that consumers already have a deep-rooted scepticism towards green marketing. This especially occurs in the fashion industry, which is known for greenwashing practices. This was also found in a previous research of Luo et al., (2020) which stated that consumers often maintain sceptical attitudes even when brands try to communicate transparently and honestly. It can also be due to the sector in which this research is conducted. Some strategies can have more effect in other sectors. From the theory, it can be concluded that the narrative paradigm and the two-sided approach are effective in the hotel industry, but in this research, it was identified that the fashion industry was not sensitive to these strategies. Possibly because of external factors like beliefs and existing brand perceptions. Which are stronger and more important for people in the fashion industry due to the environmental impact than in the hotel industry, which has less impact on the environment.

Another explanation can be that the advertisements used are not strong enough to convince people to change their minds. Although the manipulation checks showed that the manipulations were recognized by the respondents, this did not mean that the advertisements were persuasive enough to reduce scepticism. Other factors, such as existing beliefs or attitudes and familiarity with the brand, may have more influence than advertising strategies. Especially because of the use of an existing brand with already a high level of scepticism. It is possible that consumers who already have a negative image towards the brand are less interested in credible messages. It can also be questioned to what level the participants were actually engaged in the advertisements.

During this study a significant effect of increased credibility when using the advertising strategies was found. But apparently, increasing the credibility is not enough to reduce the scepticism in green advertising. So you can question if increasing credibility is a good strategy if a brand does not want to be victim of green advertising scepticism.

There can be several possible explanations for why the advertising strategies did not have a significant effect on mitigating green advertising scepticism. A possible explanation can be linked to the theory of Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1997). Consumers who want to be sustainable can feel uncomfortable with the idea that some purchases are not sustainable. Which could lead to rejection or ignorance of information (Festinger, 1997). This could have affected the stimuli used in this research because in the two-sided approach also the negative aspects are mentioned. A company shows in this case that not everything can be sustainable. Consumers can feel uncomfortable because of this and reject the presented advertisement.

Also, it is possible that the respondents processed the advertisements in a more superficial way. When using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the way consumers process information is examined. Consumers can process information via the central or peripheral route (Petty, R.E & Cacioppo J.T, 1986). If the respondents only process the information in the

advertisements superficially, the effect of the content in the advertisements may be little because the focus is higher on the visuals. With the two-sided approach and the narrative paradigm, the intention is to make people think about it on a deeper level. The consumers are expected to take the central route and pay attention to the content instead of only reading it. But when the consumers choose the peripheral route, they are not involved, and the advertising strategy has a lower degree of effect. It can be the case that the participants only took the peripheral route because they were not motivated enough to take the central route of the ELM model.

An explanation why the two-sided approach may not always be effective is the Boomerang effect (Hovland et al, 1953). The boomerang effect is a psychological phenomenon where convincing a person has the opposite effect; the person only strengthens their original opposing attitude. In the context of the two-sided advertising strategy, it can happen when a brand presents both positive and negative sides. The intention of the brand is to increase its credibility by being transparent, but mentioning negative sides can reinforce negative perceptions instead of reducing scepticism. Especially in the fashion industry, where brands still face sustainability challenges, the message can be transparent and still backfire. Because consumers focus disproportional on the negative aspects, increasing their scepticism by assuming there must be more hidden flaws. So, in some situations, the two-sided approach does not mitigate green advertising scepticism but amplifies it through the boomerang effect.

### **5.3 Limitations and Future Research**

Despite the insights generated through this study, several limitations must be considered to interpret the findings. The study had a reasonable sample size with 122 respondents and approximately 30 participants in each group. but maybe a more diverse sample could have yielded better results. The sample was less diverse because most respondents were students. It is possible that students are more concerned with sustainability and also have more information

available to form an opinion. Also, research shows that students already engage with sustainable practices actively and are less persuaded to believe brands which are known for greenwashing (Aleixo et al., 2021)

In this study, only the fashion industry is studied. The fashion industry is chosen because they are confronted with a lot of green advertising scepticism, and there is a history of greenwashing. Companies with good intentions face the challenge of green advertising scepticism and struggle with convincing people to purchase green products. That is why the fashion industry was an interesting sector to investigate. The results can not be generalised to other sectors because there are differences in people's beliefs and perceptions about different sectors. Future research could investigate if the advertising strategies had more effect in industries with less deeply grounded scepticism towards the advertisements, but then also the added value is less important.

Given the absence of significant effects in this study, future research can focus on alternative strategies to mitigate green advertising scepticism. Some possible suggestions to investigate are interactive campaigns, in which consumers are more actively involved in the sustainability impact of the brand, but also the psychological barriers, such as deep-rooted distrust and cynicism towards green advertising scepticism (Mohr & Ellen, 1998).

For future research it can be useful to look at other variables such as environmental concern, environmental knowledge and environmental perception, which can be positioned as a moderator as it can change the relation between variables. In this research, by using a brand with already known scepticism the level of scepticism is indicated. But when first measuring the environmental concern of the consumers, a deeper understanding can be established. Scepticism affects the environmental perception and environmental knowledge of the consumer, which has a negative impact on the green purchase intention (Tetrevova et al., 2025). Also, the best way to communicate with the consumers about the green intentions of a company

can be further explored. Maybe the use of social media advertising is not the best way to approach green consumers. But it can also be interesting to explore the psychological side of scepticism, maybe personalised forms and interactive communication can build trust, which mitigates scepticism.

## **5.4 Theoretical and practical implications**

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of green advertising scepticism by highlighting that reducing green advertising scepticism seems to be a complex challenge than previously assumed. In previous research, transparency and storytelling did increase the green purchase intention in the hotel industry, but the results of this research show that these strategies are not sufficient to break through the scepticism in the fashion industry. What indicates that the industry plays a crucial role in how consumers respond to green marketing efforts.

The fashion industry has deep-rooted problems with the environment, mostly because the fashion industry is known for causing pollution and fast fashion (Tetrevova et al., 2025). This makes it more difficult to decrease scepticism for an existing brand with a greenwashing history even when the credibility is increased by using the two-sided advertising strategy or narrative paradigm..

Strategies which are more focused on the central route of the ELM model can be successful, especially when the consumers are motivated and feel like they need to make a well-balanced decision. For example, the advertising strategy of Patagonia ‘Don’t buy this jacket’ addresses the moral appeal in combination with concrete information. They force consumers to think about what is said in the advertisement and what the company stands for, using the central route of the ELM model.

From a practical point of view also the example of Patagonia can also be used. The advertising is not only clever messaging, but it aligns with their brand actions. In the fashion industry, advertising needs to go beyond persuasive storytelling by using claims with tangible and verifiable actions. Such as clear environmental commitments and transparent supply chains, to receive the involvement of the consumers

Another key takeaway is not to focus on the advertising only, because when consumers are already sceptical it is harder to persuade them. If a brand already has a negative image, trust needs to be restored instead of promoting a new product. But advertising strategies could work when a brand is new or in an industry with a lower level of scepticism. The advertising strategies can be used to communicate their good intentions or generate transparency when something goes wrong. This research found a significant effect of increased credibility when using the two-sided approach.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Although this study did not find a significant effect on the advertising strategies examined on green advertising scepticism, it provides valuable insights into the complexity of green advertising scepticism. This research underscores the need for the next step in reducing green advertising scepticism and suggests that using the advertising strategies' two-sided approach or narrative paradigm is not enough. Future research can investigate more effective methods in reducing green advertising scepticism and encourage more sustainable purchase behaviour



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# Appendix

## Appendix A – Advertisements



**H&M CONSCIOUS**  
For a more sustainable fashion future

Control advertisement



**Party time!**

Je loopt samen met je beste vriendin in de stad, zaterdag hebben jullie dat feestje bij die leuke jongen. Dus gaan jullie vandaag een outfit scoren. Ook al heb je vorige week ook een jurkje gekocht voor een feestje, eentje die je waarschijnlijk nooit meer aan gaat doen. Zonde eigenlijk, maar 2x met het zelfde aankomen is echt een no-go.

Je hebt weer iets leuks gevonden maar niet de goede maat, dus vragen jullie aan een van de medewerkers of de maat nog achter ligt, wachtend bij de service balie zie je een flyer. De H&M start met een nieuw initiatief 'Close the Loop' je kunt de kleding die je niet meer gebruikt inleveren en deze worden dan gerecycled. Zal wel onzin zijn denk je bij jezelf.

Het is bijna zaterdag en je kan niet wachten om je nieuwe jurkje aan te doen en de show te stelen. Maar eerst moet je de laatste les overleven over duurzaamheid op school. Tijdens deze les praat de leraar meer over de onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk wat textiel achterlaat en hoe slecht de fast-fashion industrie is voor het milieu. Op de weg terug naar huis zet dit je toch aan het denken.

Dan is het eindelijk zover het feestje kan beginnen en je ontvangt super veel complimenten over het leuke jurkje die je hebt gekocht een paar dagen geleden. De volgende dag zit het je toch nog niet lekker waarom kan je kleding niet vaker dragen? en kleding die je niet meer draagt kun je beter recyclen. Dus het is tijd om die kleding kast eens goed onderhanden te nemen. Oude kleding die je niet meer draagt kan worden gerecycled en die kleding die nog steeds super leuk is moet niet in de kast blijven liggen.

De zaterdag erop ga je naar een feestje met een jurkje die al in je kast lag en je krijgt net zoveel complimenten als eerst! Wauw dus zo kan het dus ook en het is goed voor het milieu. Doe jij ook mee met 'Close the Loop'?

Meer informatie op onze website

**H&M CONSCIOUS**  
For a more sustainable fashion future

Narrative paradigm





# Sorry!

## We zijn minder duurzaam dan we dachten

De Fast-Fashion heeft een grote impact op het milieu, vooral door de hoeveelheid Textiel afval. Daarom zijn wij als H&M begonnen met het initiatief 'Close the Loop'. In dit initiatief kunnen jullie de oude kledingstukken inleveren en worden deze gerecycled.

Nu blijkt het alleen dat dit initiatief lastiger uit te voeren is dan gedacht. Sommige kledingstukken belanden toch nog op de grote hoop en hebben een te grote afstand afgelegd waardoor er een onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk ontstaat.

### En nu?

Nu zeggen we sorry en gaan we opzoek naar een beter oplossing op het probleem van Textiel afval aan te pakken. We gaan opzoek naar duurzame manieren van produceren en recyclen. Help jij ons mee?

Meer informatie is te vinden op onze website.

**H&M CONSCIOUS**  
For a more sustainable fashion future

Two-sided approach



# Sorry!

## We zijn minder duurzaam dan we dachten

Ons team van Fashion designers doen hun uiterste best om elke keer weer een nieuwe collectie te ontwerpen zodat jij weer kan stralen op dat aankomende feestje maar De Fast-Fashion heeft een grote impact op het milieu, vooral door de hoeveelheid Textiel afval. Daarom zijn wij als H&M begonnen met het initiatief 'Close the Loop'. In dit initiatief kunnen jullie de oude kledingstukken inleveren en worden deze gerecycled.

Dus als je samen met je vriendinnen aan het shoppen bent voor dat feestje aankomende zaterdag van die leuke jongen, kun je gelijk iets goeds doen voor het milieu! Een goed idee toch? Dus hup neem die kledingkast onderhanden en recycle jou oude kledingstukken! En die complimenten die je gaat ontvangen voelen nog beter wanneer je iets goeds hebt gedaan.

Nu blijkt het alleen dat dit initiatief lastiger uit te voeren is dan gedacht. Sommige kledingstukken belanden toch nog op de grote hoop en hebben een te grote afstand afgelegd waardoor er een onuitwisbare ecologische voetafdruk ontstaat.

### En nu?

Nu zeggen we sorry en gaan we opzoek naar een beter oplossing op het probleem van Textiel afval aan te pakken. Maar samen met jou hulp door duurzamere keuzes te maken kunnen we proberen de wereld een stukje beter te maken.

Meer informatie is te vinden op onze website.

**H&M CONSCIOUS**  
For a more sustainable fashion future

Combined strategy approach



## Appendix B – Measurement instrument

Questions to measure Purchase behaviour
I am willing to exchange my purchase of regular products for green products
I try to buy products that can be recycled
I would buy this product if I saw it in an advertisement
I would like to try this product/ service from the advertisement

Questions to measure Green advertising scepticism
Sustainability claims on packaging labels or in advertisements are always true
Because sustainability claims are exaggerated, people would be better off if there were no sustainability claims on packaging labels or in advertisements
Most sustainability claims on packaging labels or in advertisements are the reason that people are misled and misinformed
When I see sustainability claims on packaging labels or in advertisements, I question the company's intentions

Questions to measure AD credibility
The advertisement is credible
The advertisement is honest
The advertisement is sustainable
The advertisement is truth-based
The advertisement is reliable

<b>Questions to measure Message style &amp; sidedness</b>
The advertisement reads as a story
The advertisement contains positive and negative facts
The advertisement presents balanced information

## **Appendix C – Use of Artificial intelligence**

“During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used Chat GPT in order to check grammar or spelling differences or suggest academic synonyms. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the work.”