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Green Religion: Manipulation Transcending Ideology

Personal beliefs and opinions have a strong impact on what activities individuals engage in, whom they associate themselves with, and even how they behave. Social movements are examples of this, where people develop a belief, start trying to spread it, engage with people that share it, and even make decisions based off of it. These decisions can be big, like dedicating one's self to a cause, but are often small, like deciding what type of milk to buy. As more people become aware of the environmental consequences of their actions and decisions, corporations have moved to profit off of their rising environmental consciousness by appealing to green ideology through their products and actions. However, instead of changing their practices to actually become environmentally conscious, many corporations often instead present a false front to make our society perceive them as green when they are not, an action commonly referred to as greenwashing. This allows them to gain advantage over their competitors, some of which might actually be sustainable, by taking advantage of consumers' environmental consciousness. Despite legal action taken to stop this and federal laws putting restrictions on green advertising, greenwashing remains an issue, leading to a undermining of the goals of the environmental movement and public skepticism of green claims.

The green movement, like most movements, is ideology driven. This means that while there may not currently be literature on group dynamic and identity formation, literature from other ideology driven groups on the same topic can be used instead. While religion tends to be a positive force, there is no denying that it can be easily used for negative purposes. Many times,

this is seen through religious cults, which sometimes promote extreme ideologies that can lead to its members harm. This is true as well for fringe groups, or radical extremist groups of major religions, which can be violent and spread messages of hate. These groups manipulate and coerce individuals into following ideologies that contradict themselves. Alternatively, this can also occur within the generally accepted as “good” religion, where religion is used as a justification for certain actions or beliefs that have negative consequences. However, it is often overlooked that many of the tactics used by cults and religious groups are also used in other sectors of life, such as social movements. Like with religion, these tactics assist groups into taking positive and well-intentioned movements to use for negative purposes and con well-meaning individuals. Therefore, while greenwashing and religious manipulation may seem unrelated, connecting the current literature on how they work could allow a deeper exploration on how we respond to manipulation and understand what makes us susceptible to it, both as individuals and as a culture.

In this article, I will be looking at the tactics used by religious groups to manipulate their following as a starting point to look at those used in and on the green movement. This will be done through three hypotheses I will be proposing on the complexities of identity and group dynamics, which are: 1) People that are part of the environmental movement, especially those that associate themselves with a green group or organization, are more at risk for doublethink, 2) Advertisements, especially ones using emotional appeals, greenwash individuals’ opinions about products and brands by taking advantage of different aspects of one’s identity, and 3) Groups need to regulate information and advertisements differently between their group and the public, or, for companies, what information they present to the public. Failing to do so, be it through advertisements, publicity stunts, or transparency, can lead to damage to their public image and

economic success. These all explore different ways organizations and companies can engage in greenwashing in ways that protect them from backlash, both inside the environmental movement and with the general public. Factors such as identity and group dynamics can be manipulated or naturally occur in such a way that makes individuals and groups overlook greenwashing and sometimes even engage in doublethink. This includes manipulating individuals through their emotional responses and other various factors that affect consumer decisions. I will be using literature about religion and psychology to accomplish this as well as studies on advertisements. The activities companies and organizations engage in and the public image they have managed to maintain, be it positive or negative, will be used as examples of these hypotheses.

Context

First, it is important to look at what exactly greenwashing means and understand what it is or is not. Jay Westerveld first introduced the term “greenwashing” in a 1986 essay criticizing hotels for asking guests to save water by not having their towels washed. This he saw as a hijacking of the term green, applying it to minor advances instead of actions that would make more of a difference. Since then the term has evolved to being any misleading, false, unsupported claims that are used to create a more environmentally responsible public image. A more detailed definition is given through the Seven Sins of Greenwashing: any claim with hidden trade-offs, no proof, that is vague, uses false labels, irreverence, being the lesser of two evils, and straight out lying is considered to be greenwashing. TerraChoice, a private company dedicated to sustainability validation, created this latter definition in a study in which they determined that all but one of 1,018 they examined in 2007 were greenwashing in some way.¹

¹ “The Sins of Greenwashing: Home and Family Edition,” TerraChoice, 2007, accessed August 14, 2016, <http://sinsofgreenwashing.com/index6b90.pdf>.

However, greenwashing does not necessarily require a claim. A 2005 study showed that just images of nature provoke feelings of a brand being more ecologically responsible than its competitor is, whether or not this is true.² Therefore, there is a wide range of what greenwashing can refer to. The definition of doublethink is far less expansive. It was a concept first named in George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* for when one is able to hold two contradictory or even opposite opinions on something simultaneously and believe them both to be true.³ This definition has changed very little since its incarnation.

In the environmental movement, doublethink is prevalent for many when thinking of organizations and companies. For example, one might hold the belief that chemicals harm the environment but find no problem in using fertilizers and pesticides, both which can damage local ecosystems. Doublethink is what allows the term "environmental" to be tagged on some of the worst polluters in the country and for animal rights activists to support organizations that euthanize animals that are healthy. It is one of the things that allows greenwashing to be successful, convincing people that a product or brand is green despite contrary information. What causes doublethink can often be hard to pinpoint, but in Orwell's novel, it was due to peer pressure and a prevalent acceptance of the idea, something that is reflected in religion.⁴ An example of this is that in Christian discipleship there are violent fringe groups, continuous conflicts, and a bloody history, despite holding a message of love and acceptance.

² Béatrice, Florence Benoit-Moreau, and Cristel Antonia Russell, "Can evoking nature in advertising mislead consumers? The power of 'executional greenwashing'," *International Journal Of Advertising* 34, no. 1(2015): 123.

³ Orwell, George, *1984* (London: Secker and Warbug, 1949), 35.

⁴ *ibid*

Some of what makes it easy to hold contradictory ideas can be explained by peer pressure. In Festinger's essay "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," he explores various hypotheses concerning opinion influence processes within social groups through how people compare themselves to others and, in turn, evaluate themselves through that comparison. Important here are some of the latter hypotheses and corollaries, such as the greater relevance or importance an opinion is to a group, the more pressure there is to be uniform on the opinion and more pressure there is to reduce discrepancies. Overall, groups tend to try to reduce discrepancies and promote the adoption of certain ideas. It is not hard to see how this could lead to doublethink: despite holding a contrary opinion on something, an individual may adopt the new idea and even believe it due to encouragement from a group they are a part of. Per Festinger's hypotheses, they would have joined this group initially due to other members holding similar opinions as to best evaluate their beliefs. Discrepancies within the group would lead either to changes in the individuals' beliefs or to the individual trying to change others beliefs.⁵ Of course, for doublethink to work for greenwashing in this context, it requires one to already be part of a group that promotes environmental ideas and claims.

Hypothesis 1

Peer pressure is a powerful force and, as mention previously, can easily lead to doublethink. When one is a part of a group, they are subjected to social pressures not only from their society to hold certain beliefs, but also the group they are a part of. In the environmental movement and organizations associated with it, this means sometimes people are pressured to see and support companies, products, or even individuals due to believing them to be in-line with

⁵ Festinger, L, "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," *Human Relations* (1954):117-135.

ones ideas and values. Doublethink easily arises from this when what people are pressured to support and believe are representative of their belief and values are different or even contrary to them in actuality. This leads to my first hypothesis, which is: People that are part of the environmental movement, especially those that associate themselves with a green group or organization, are more at risk for doublethink.

Ingroup-outgroup dynamics easily influence and control group members in both how they perceive things and how they act. This mostly depends on how group members perceive each other's attitudes. If members perceive that others disapprove with interacting with certain outgroups, other members will avoid them due to anxiety over facing disapproval or even rejection. This leads to the formation of social norms within the group and strengthens ideas over what is acceptable.⁶ However, disapproval of outgroups can lead to the group isolating itself, and therefore only having itself for feedback on its ideas. As mentioned before, groups tend to discourage discrepancies in ideas, so in an isolated group this would likely become more prevalent. In addition, ingroup favoritism further prevents members from interacting with outgroups due to fear and anticipation of rejection from them due to the beliefs that outgroups strongly favor their own members as well.⁷ This leads to further incentive to follow ingroup norms and ideas. Situations like this could easily lead to doublethink due to the pressure to conform to the ideas and standards of the group one is a part of. Without outgroup interaction to

⁶ De Tezanos-Pinto, Pablo, Christopher Bratt, and Rupert Brown, "What will the others think? In-group norms as a mediator of the effects of intergroup contact," *British Journal Of Social Psychology* 49, no. 3 (September 2010): 508-510, 518.

⁷ Nawata, Kengo, and Hiroyuki Yamaguchi, "Perceived group identity of outgroup members and anticipated rejection: People think that strongly identified group members reject non-group members," *Japanese Psychological Research* 56, no. 4 (October 2014): 306.

mediate these effects, it is likely that it would be harder to recognize that one was holding two contradictory ideas as true.

While it might be difficult to influence a group with such strict social norms by external means, manipulation would be easy from the inside, especially if one was in a place of higher authority. By spreading ideas and expressing displeasure at criticism, especially if it comes from external sources, can create pressures for others in the group to follow lead and even result in “us vs. them” thinking within the group about certain topics. This would make it easier for greenwashed organizations to engage in actions contrary to their ideology without major consequences. Creating an “us vs. them” dichotomy also can lead to stress and uncertainty, both which have been found to cause people to rely more on ideologies and defamation of opposing viewpoints⁸. An example of this happening is Greenpeace, one of the biggest and most influential green organizations. They claims to support sustainable food sources but fight against a GMO strain of rice introduced for poverty areas to help with reducing Vitamin-A deficiencies, which cause blindness and child mortality. All of this is just to fight against GMO’s in general despite the help it might provide their cause.⁹ There are examples that are more common, such as individuals believing that local, organic, or vegan foods are better than the environment than alternatives, even in situations where this might not be true. A situation like this might be with organic food where, while it uses less potentially harmful inputs, its lower yield makes it less

⁸ McGregor, Ian, Reschma Haji, Kyle Nash, and Rimma Teper. "Religious zeal and the uncertain self." *Basic And Applied Social Psychology* 30, no. 2 (2008): 186.

⁹ Achenbach, Joel, "107 Nobel laureates sign letter blasting Greenpeace over GMOs," *Washington Post*, June 30, accessed July 27, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/speaking-of-science/wp/2016/06/29/more-than-100-nobel-laureates-take-on-greenpeace-over-gmo-stance/>.

sustainable.¹⁰ Alternatively, with local foods, growing food in local areas may use more energy than those grown further away due to crops being less suited to the local region.¹¹

However, the most dramatic example of doublethink comes in the form of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), an alleged animal rights activist group and private animal shelter. Their commonly referred to motto is “animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any other way,” which seems like it would belong to a group dedicated to protecting animals.¹² Yet persistent accusations against them for euthanizing perfectly healthy animals, some of which workers have admitted to stealing, shows otherwise.¹³ Some of the most notable accusations actually come from ex-PETA workers who decided to spread information about their experiences with the group such as Mimi Porter. In 2009, Porter posted on her blog her experiences with PETA, most notably a dog she helped euthanize called Black Boy. She calls this the point she became disillusioned with PETA, “sitting on the cold warehouse floor, holding into his wet fur I completely cracked open. I realized I had strayed far from my own belief system, and if I continued to walk the road I would become a fanatic out of necessity...I was wrong to be complicit in his death, and, to this day, a part of me still hates myself for that.”¹⁴ When Porter started to express unhappiness with euthanizing all the animals

¹⁰ Gunther, Marc, “Organic food is not as “green” as you think,” *MarcGunther*, May 8, 2016, <http://www.marcgunther.com/organic-food-is-not-as-green-as-you-think/>.

¹¹ Koch, Wendy, “Local food is trendy, but is it really more eco-friendly?,” *USA Today*, August 9, 2012, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/environment/story/2012-08-08/local-food/56892452/1>.

¹² “What PETA REALLY Stands For,” *PETA*, accessed July 27, 2016, <http://www.peta.org/features/what-peta-really-stands-for/>

¹³ Cooper, Douglas Anthony, “WHISTLEBLOWER: PETA Ex-Employee Alleges She Was Encouraged to Steal and Kill Pets, and to Falsify Records,” *The Huffington Post*, April 12, 2015, accessed July 29, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/douglas-anthony-cooper/whistleblower-peta-employee-allegations_b_6648696.html.

¹⁴ Porter, Mami, “Rescued by Black Boy: how a neglected dog set me back on my path, away from PETA,” *mom2nomads*, February 9, 2015, accessed July 29, 2016. <https://mom2nomads.wordpress.com/2015/02/09/rescued-by-black-boy-how-a-neglected-dog-set-me-back-on-my-path-away-from-peta/>

brought into PETA, the group fired her to maintain uniformed opinions throughout the workforce. Other members, when pointing out misleading information the group was spreading, have also been fired, and several ex-members claimed that the group was brainwashing them into believing killing pets was an act of mercy.¹⁵

Members that joined due to the message of helping and protecting animals have either left the group or come to believe the hidden message PETA carries: killing domesticated animals is the best help they can ever get. Disagreeing and holding different opinions leads to, at best, alienation and tensions within the group, and at worst, eviction from the group to help PETA maintain a fully supportive and ideologically uniform group. Those who adopt PETA's bloody ideas are deaf to the countering beliefs from outgroups; PETA's constant disapproval of disagreeing outgroups has lead members to defame and attack opposition.¹⁶ All of these are signs that members are engaging in doublethink due to group dynamics, placing the ideas and beliefs of the group over their own and therefore agreeing with things they would otherwise disagree with.

Hypothesis 2

External sources tend to take different tactics to appeal to individuals through environmentalism. Unlike green groups and organizations, companies are usually faced with consumer skepticism, greatly due to greenwashing. Some companies, like those involved in "dirty" fossil fuel energy production, consumers see as being insincere when investing in green

¹⁵ Winograd, Nathan J, "The (Death) Cult of PETA," *Nathanwinograd*. accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.nathanwinograd.com/?p=15160>.

¹⁶ Porter, Mami, "PETA's Silence About Cyber-Stalking Speaks Volumes," *Mom2nomads*, April 8, 2016, accessed July 29, 2016, <https://mom2nomads.wordpress.com/2016/04/08/petas-silence-about-cyber-stalking-speaks-volumes/>.

technology or products.¹⁷ Companies with a bad reputation, or that work in industries that directly affect human health, such as the food industry, also face heightened skepticism. Some companies, however, are not as closely watched and therefore are able to be less careful about hiding greenwashing. Many use advertisements and mission statements to express eco-friendly sentiments. Some of the more successful come in the form of emotional appeals to the public, which leads to my second hypothesis: Advertisement, especially ones using emotional appeals, greenwash individuals' opinions about products and brands by taking advantage of different aspects of one's identity.

Identity is separated into three distinct facets: cultural, social, and personal. Cultural identity refers to specific cultural values and beliefs gathered over time, while social identity refers to attachments to various social groups and the feelings and beliefs about those groups and those not a part of them. Personal identity, of course, refers to one's personal goals, beliefs, and values as well as unique perspective on the world.¹⁸ These all add up to what is generally referred to as one's identity, but for the purpose of the argument, we'll only be looking at personal and social parts of identity.

For one who has the goal of being more environmentally conscious and associate themselves with the green movement, it might be harder to fall to greenwashing due to being more aware of the problem. However, there are still some more subtle advertisements that fly under the radar. This is because greenwashing doesn't always occur through claims. Merely associating a product or brand with images of nature or endangered species could leave even so-

¹⁷ Vries, Gerdien, Bart W. Terwel, Naomi Ellemers, and Dancker D. L. Daamen, "Sustainability or Profitability? How Communicated Motives for Environmental Policy Affect Public Perceptions of Corporate Greenwashing," *Corporate Social Responsibility & Environmental Management* 22, no. 3(2015): 151.

¹⁸ Schwartz, Seth, Curtis Dunkel, and Alan Waterman, "Terrorism: An Identity Theory Perspective," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32 (2009): 540-545.

called “expert consumer” thinking more positively about the brand and believing them to be more ecologically conscious.¹⁹ This is likely due to appealing to aspects of one’s identity that makes people see being environmentally conscious as a goal and, associating nature images with being more sustainable, unknowing associate a brand with being more eco-friendly despite whether it actually is or not.

Advertisements that use emotional appeals are easier to pick out for using greenwashing, but it still can be difficult. This is especially true when advertisements appeal to guilt and pride. These emotions are unique due to being self-conscious emotions, hindering neutralization and rationalization techniques which would otherwise allow a temporary smothering of values. This makes it harder to resist greenwashing as it brings one’s personal identity and the values associated with it to the forefront and makes rationalizing not supporting or purchasing a product one perceives as supporting one’s goals or beliefs difficult. Guilt and pride act this way as a form of a self-regulating learning process, as a way to get feedback on one’s actions and decisions and how they relate to one’s personal values and goals.²⁰ These emotions, ideally, lead to better behavior over time through feedback and the want to experience pride and not guilt.

However, guilt also works differently for individuals depending on their proximity to the issue and how environmentally conscious they are. This includes looking at social identity in addition to personal now, as both issue proximity and environmental consciousness would likely depend on their social groups and what they deemed important as well as what concerns they were committed to on a personal level. For example, different situations are caused by guilt

¹⁹ Béatrice *et al*, "Can evoking nature in advertising mislead consumers? The power of 'executional greenwashing'," 116-118.

²⁰ Antonetti, Paolo, and Stan Maklan, "Feelings that make a difference: How guilt and pride convince consumers of the effectiveness of sustainable consumption choices," *Journal Of Business Ethics* 124, no. 1(2014): 118-122.

advertisement depending on the viewers having different levels of environmental consciousness and how close in proximity the issue was to the them, physically and psychologically. The study found that guilt advertisements work well for high proximity issues to viewers with low environmental consciousness, especially when concerning issues that can affect the viewers' health. However, the same situation backfires with individuals with high environmental consciousness, who may feel insulted by the advertisements and find more appeal in low proximity issues.²¹ These differences depend on the viewer identity in relation to their community and ideologies. As mention earlier, major factors contributing to green purchases include environmental concern, perception of self-expressive benefits, and perceptions of fulfilling social norms from the product or brand. The latter concerns dealing with expectations built from one's social interactions and identity, while the first deals more with personal identity. Self-expressive benefits works both as an aspect of social and personal identity as it refers to the ability to show one's individuality to others and to feel value from doing this. This allows people to feel physiological benefits, such as feeling pride, while also showing their concern for the environment to others, which they can receive recognition of from their community. It is not hard to see how companies can easily greenwash through advertisements by to these aspects of ones' identity.

To look at this more in-depth, three previously aired advertisements will be used. These will be from TOMS, Seventh-Generation, and PETA. All of them are associate with the green movement, with TOMS producing vegan shoes and helping with water availability and Seventh-

²¹ Chang, Chun-Tuan, "Are guilt appeals a panacea in green advertising? The right formula of issue proximity and environmental consciousness," *International Journal Of Advertising: The Quarterly Review Of Marketing Communications* 31, no. 4(2012): 760-761.

Generation creating plant-based cleaning products. However, they all approach advertising their green association in very different ways.

The most subtle is the TOMS advertisement. In fact, they do not include any mention of their efforts to be green. Their advertisements, instead, focus on other initiatives of the company, most notably their One For One program which makes it so every pair of shoes purchased is matched by the company to give away. The advertisement shows clips from various people, all clearly from different cultures than the ones in the clip previous to them. These clips parallel each other in their content, showing people make breakfast, put on shoes, travel to school, look at TOMS glasses, and more. It follows this with a montage of people wearing TOMS shoes, and then engaging in various activities, from holding a babies hand to cliff jumping. Between the upbeat music and positive message of helping coming from their advertisements, TOMS creates a perception of the company of it being socially responsible, allowing it to gain the public's attention and trust.²² The idea of it being a green company comes more from further research from those interested in them. However, these advertisements can still easily cause pride in the viewer that support the company, as the company is sourcing consumption of their products as a way to help others. This can cause loyalty to the brand, even more so when in conjunction to the knowledge that TOMS not only helps the poor but also the environment.

In comparison, Seventh-Generation is more upfront about their association with the green movement. In it, they clearly state that they “are a brand that is about caring for people and caring for the planet. We are thoughtful of the ingredients, the packaging, and the way we run

²² “For One, Another - TOMS TV Commercial,” YouTube video, 1:00, posted by “TOMS” Sep 21, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xkF4X5MfW0w>.

our business.”²³ Adding to this are clips of nature in the beginning and near the end of the advertisement, showing a bird on a tree and lavender plants. These both appeal to pride and guilt: pride, if you use the product, for supporting a brand that protects both your family and the environment. Guilt, if you do not use to product, for not using things from a brand that is safer for the environment. The associations of the product to natural things caused by the nature images are likely to increase these effects. In addition, since the company deals with products that relate to childcare emotional responses are probably amplified for new parents, who would be trying to find the product best for their young children who, at best, can be described as vulnerable.

Finally, the PETA advertisement is very clearly meant to incite guilt and, perhaps, even shame. While many of their advertisements include erotic images and violent depictions, one of the most watched on YouTube is more eerie than shocking. Set to peaceful, almost music box sounding tunes, the advertisement depicts people playing and interacting with body bags as if they were living dogs. No audio besides the tinkling music plays as children play with body bags or other disturbing images. At the end, the lines “If you buy a dog, what will you do with the shelter dog you kill?” appear on the screen before fading into “Adopt. Never buy.”²⁴ It is clear how this can incite guilt or pride. If the viewer has adopted a dog previously, they feel pride and a maybe even relief that they are not equated to the people depicted in the advertisement. Alternatively, if the viewer has bought a dog, they will feel guilt or perhaps shame at the idea of the death of another dog being due to their decision. Viewers who do not own a dog might use

²³ “Seventh Generation & Target: Made to Matter,” YouTube video, 0:26, posted by “Seventh Generation,” May 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLmTBdA6sSo>.

²⁴ “PETA's 'Everyday Dogs' Ad,” YouTube video, 1:00, posted by “PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals),” Dec 7, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iErz6lThokg>.

the message as a guide to be avoid guilt if they decide to own a dog in the future or as a way to evaluate the actions based on the advertisement.

These three commercials, though radically different, all employ tactics to influence viewer decision by appealing to their emotions and sense of environmental responsibility. The TOMS advertisement focused on image association to lead viewer to believe them as socially conscious and to do more research on their programs. The Seventh-Generation used images associated with nature, green claims that could incite emotional responses, and made their products have high proximity to parents. The PETA advertisement use music, images, and claims to incite emotional responses, most notably guilt and shame. These are all different ways companies and groups approach advertising and, in their own ways, use aspects of the viewer's identity to affect their opinions about products, brands, and decisions.

Hypothesis 3

Public image is an important factor in greenwashing, dictating how much skepticism a group or company faces and in turn, how careful they need to be with their actions and advertisements. How a group presents itself to the public, or in some cases, specific individuals, helps build a better public image and builds trust. This, of course, could be a positive force, appealing to different groups to appeal to a common goal. However, it can also be used to conceal and hide information, trick consumers, and manipulate group members. To maintain a positive public image requires upkeep, and more importantly, and bridge of trust between various stakeholders, including the public as a whole, and the group. This trust can easily be lost through leaks of information to the wrong stakeholder, perceptions of a group being pretentious or condescending, and perceptions hypocrisy or contradiction, among other things. This leads to

my third and final hypothesis, which is: Groups need to regulate information and advertisements differently between their group and the public or, for companies, what information they present to the public. Failing to do so, be it through advertisements, publicity stunts, or transparency, can lead to damages to their public image and economic success.

Some information regulation done by companies can already be seen in existing literature. Depending on what stakeholders are relevant to the company and whom they are trying to appeal to, companies engage in different activities to create a positive public image. For many trying to appeal to green sentiment, this means trying to associate themselves with sustainable practices. This can be done by investing in environmental technology and research, but for some companies, particularly dirty energy ones, this can seem insincere and backfire, leading to economic damage. For companies that are faced with skepticism when engaging in green activities, being completely transparent in their intentions mitigates the potential damages.²⁵ Likewise, depending on the stakeholders, market, and reputation of the company, some face pressures to be more transparent. Brown companies, which are those with bad environmental reputations, tend to be more transparent due to heightened skepticism from the public. If working in the global market, they will also be more transparent due to social norms demanding it from the market and other companies.²⁶ Transparency, and in turn, selective disclosure, are forms of information regulation with the public and other stakeholders, deciding how much of the company's activities and what exactly to reveal, if not all. Selective disclosure

²⁵ Vries, *et al.*, "Sustainability or Profitability? How Communicated Motives for Environmental Policy Affect Public Perceptions of Corporate Greenwashing," 151.

²⁶ Marquis, Christopher, Michael W. Toffel, and Zhou Yanhua, "Scrutiny, Norms, and Selective Disclosure: A Global Study of Greenwashing," *Organization Science* 27, no. 2(2016): 498.

in some markets and communities can lead to damaged reputations as consumers might perceive the action as insincere or symbolic.

Companies also regulate advertisements and publicity stunts for their audiences. One example of the negative effects companies being unaware of their audience are seen with social media: when users perceive the company to be presenting contradictory or hypocritical information, they might hijack a social media campaign to punish them or point out the hypocrisy.²⁷ One notable occasion of this happening is when McDonalds started the McDStories hashtag in hope for some positive PR, but it was instead filled with stories with consumers unhappy with the service they received.²⁸

When the public perceives a company negatively, it is often due to a mixture of having a bad reputation due to past actions, continued unsustainable or damaging actions, a lack of transparency, bad spin control, and the media presenting information about them negatively to the public. This is most notable in companies that attempt social responsibility tactics to appeal to the public that inevitably backfire, such as those attempting to appeal to green conscious. To look at the concepts supported by my second hypothesis more in-depth, I'll be looking at the experiences and actions of Monsanto, Nestle, and Ben & Jerry's. All of these companies have engaged in actions to present a socially responsible image to the public. However, out of the three of them only Ben & Jerry's has been successful in this front consistently.

²⁷ Lyon, Thomas P., and A. Wren Montgomery, "Tweetjacked: The Impact of Social Media on Corporate Greenwash," *Journal Of Business Ethics* 118, no. 4(2013): 747-754.

²⁸ Mashable Video, "Not Lovin' It: Twitter Users in Revolt Over McDonald's Promotion [VIDEO]," *Mashables*, January 24, 2012, accessed July 30, 2016, <http://mashable.com/2012/01/24/mcdonalds-twitter-campaign/#0KggB6o3OmqE>.

Monsanto is an international corporation based in food production. They provide farmers with a variety of tools for food production, including fertilizers, herbicides, and most notably, genetically modified (GM) seeds. It is also one of the most hated companies in the United States. From blogs and twitter hashtags, to documentaries and new coverages, Monsanto is constantly under attack, boasting one of the worst modern public relations. Monsanto is acutely aware of this, something shown by their efforts to sway opinion to be more positive. These efforts have faced backlash, if only because the public found out about them. One example of this is Monsanto's attempts to appeal to the public over social media through bloggers, inviting some to invitation-only events to educate them on the truth of the food industry.²⁹ Another example, though far less well received, was apparently to "enlisted allegedly independent public university scientists in a deceptive campaign to lobby state legislators in Pennsylvania, interfere with ballot initiatives in Oregon and Colorado and paper over risks of high pesticide usage on the Hawaiian island of Kauai."³⁰ These leaks of information from Monsanto's efforts far from help their public image. If anything, it alienates more consumers and creates a lack of trust between the public and the company. However, what actually brought attention to the corporation to begin with was their attempt to market GM seeds to Europe right after the Mad Cow Disease epidemic in 1996. There was a harsh backlash from the U.K. and in an attempt to fix things Monsanto ended up making things worse and had an awful public image tacked onto them. This continued with their almost emotionless treatment of their seeds, failure to refute claims about GM foods being safe for consumption in a sensitive manner, and controlling behavior over their products, leading to

²⁹ Lappé, Anna, "Big Food uses mommy bloggers to shape public opinion," *Al Jazeera*, August 1, 2014, accessed July 30, 2016, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/8/food-agriculturemonsantogmoadvertising.html>.

³⁰ Murphy, Dave, "University Scientists Caught Conspiring with Monsanto to Manipulate Public Opinion on GMOs," *Nation of Change*, September 13, 2015, accessed July 30, 2016, <http://www.nationofchange.org/2015/09/13/university-scientists-caught-conspiring-with-monsanto-to-manipulate-public-opinion-on-gmos/>.

lawsuits that further solidified the perception of them as a bully.³¹ Between public fears over GM foods and the corporations disability shake off their bad reputation, Monsanto has failed at regulating information, advertisements, and publicity stunts to be in their favor.

Nestlé is an international corporation based in food and drink production. Their products include baby food, medical food, and breakfast cereals, among many other things. One of most controversial products recently is bottled water, not for the product itself but where the resources to make it come from. Recently, the company has been pumping water from California, which has been suffering from a drought since 2011. They avoid state regulations limiting water extraction by pumping near Native American reservation grounds which, being the land of a sovereign nation, are not included under state regulation, leading to a decline in the aquifer.³² However, this is far from the only incidence of this. The Arkansas River, Cascade Locks, Oregon, McCloud, California, Fryeburg, Maine, and Mecosta, Michigan, all received similar treatment, where the company manage to gain rights to the water in the area and pump enough that it incited anger in nearby residents. In Mecosta, Michigan, the effects of the pumping where noticeable enough and the anger of the residences loud enough that the company stopped pumping, but only after a court ordered them to.³³ To make things worse, Nestlé pays considerably less for the water than what they sell it for to the public.³⁴ This all gives them the image of a company that is uncaring of their consumers and only care for the profit they gain.

³¹ Anderson, Lessley, "Why Does Everyone Hate Monsanto?," *Modern Farmer*, March 4, 2014, accessed July 30, 2016, <http://modernfarmer.com/2014/03/monsantos-good-bad-pr-problem/>.

³² "Nestle continues to sell bottled water sourced from California despite record drought," *RT*, July 15, 2014, accessed July 31, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/usa/172764-nestle-california-bottling-plant/>.

³³ Pangburn, DJ, "Nestlé Corporation Vs. America's Water Supply," *Death and Taxes*, October 18, 2016, accessed July 31, 2016, <http://www.deathandtaxesmag.com/32828/nestle-corporation-vs-americas-water-supply/>.

³⁴ Metzger, Richard, "Maybe Nestle is the World's Most Evil Corporation," *Popular Resistance*, June 10, 2013, accessed August 3, 2016, <https://www.popularresistance.org/maybe-nestle-is-the-worlds-most-evil-corporation/>.

Nestlé has a continuously negative public image for quite a while. This is mostly due to the controversy over infant formula while the company was handing out samples of it to women in developing nations. This led to child mortality and malnutrition as the woman would dilute the formula to make it last long, mix it with contaminated water, and dry up from a lack of breastfeeding, leaving them without a food source for their children when the formula eventually ran out. This is a publicity stunt gone wrong, a promotion that led to international boycotts against baby formula.³⁵ Furthermore, it is one of the main events that gave Nestlé its apathetic image for the public. This harsh public perception leads to an overlooking of any of the actual achievements of the company, including their transparency and dedication to trying to improve their social responsibility. Due to their failure to control what information most controls public opinion on the company, it faces constant backlash and boycotting efforts despite any good it might be doing.

Ben & Jerry's is a US based company that produces sorbet, frozen yogurt, and most popularly, ice cream. Despite being only an ice cream company, they are surprisingly political active, and with that, face a fair amount of controversy from time to time. Despite this however, the company has managed to maintain a delicious but also caring image to the public, overriding criticisms with a constant onslaught social responsibility and dedication to caring for the planet and society. Ben & Jerry's, overall, have remained consistently transparent with their goals and have not stray often from their core values. One of the most recent criticisms was a claim against Ben & Jerry's usage of the word natural in reference to their ice cream despite including alkalized cocoa, corn syrup, and hydrogenated soya bean oil in their ingredients. Ben & Jerry's

³⁵ Krasny, Jill. "Every Parent Should Know The Scandalous History Of Infant Formula." Business Insider, June 25, 2012. Accessed August 3, 2016. <http://www.businessinsider.com/nestles-infant-formula-scandal-2012-6?op=1>.

quickly removed the offending label and more heavily focused on other core values, easily recovering from the accusation.³⁶ Ben & Jerry's makes its dedication to different social movements and other values they hold apparent to the public often through the names of their ice cream. For gay marriage, they came out with "I Dough, I Dough," while for climate change they have "Save our Swirl."³⁷ These fun pun filled flavors show a dedication that the public easily recognizes and is consistently exposed to, allowing the company to maintain their positive public image.

The experiences Monsanto, Nestlé, and Ben & Jerry's have had with the public is all a result of the stunts, advertisements, and actions of the companies and how well they controlled public perception of themselves through them. Monsanto faces constant resistance due to past rejection and continuous insensitivity when dealing with the public and failure to hide their manipulation attempts. Nestlé's failure to successfully advertise their positive traits and achievements over their offending actions has left them with boycotts and an image of apathy. Alternatively, Ben & Jerry's consistent dedication to their values and successful campaigning that aligns them with progressive movements easily allows consumers to overlook any offending actions the company has taken in the past. The perceptions the public has of these companies are a result of information regulation in how well the companies spread positive information about themselves and do damage control for negative information about themselves.

³⁶ GreenBiz Editors, "Ben & Jerry's Backs Off 'All Natural' Claims," *GreenBiz*, September 29, 2010, accessed August 5, 2016, <https://www.greenbiz.com/news/2010/09/29/ben-jerrys-backs-all-natural-claims>.

³⁷ "How Ben & Jerry's Got Bought Out Without Selling Out," *Knowledge @ Whartons*, January 15, 2015, accessed August 5, 2016, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/ben-jerrys-got-bought-without-selling/>.

Information regulation is much easier to recognize in groups and organizations, if only due to the more clearly defined groups they target. There is, of course, those already involved in the group, and those who are not, such as the public. For the most organizations, the information sent to the public would be more general, meant to inspire interest in the issue through advertisements and publicity stunts. For those already in the group, the organization would more likely send them updates on their efforts, information on how they can get more involved, and lifestyle tips, among other things. This difference is partially due to the reactions people have to the information: those more informed may feel insulted if given information that they already clearly know, like why an issue matters, while those who are unfamiliar with the topic might not care about the information given due to not caring enough.³⁸

For genuine groups, information regulation presents people with the information most useful and relevant for them. For greenwashed groups, however, information regulation leads members into doublethink and presents a positive public image that better allows them to greenwash and further their agenda. How groups lead members to doublethink has already been partially covered, and for means of consistency and clarity, PETA is going to be used as an example again.

PETA tends to present similar information to both the public and members, but in different contexts and with different messages. The organizations teaches members that people are incapable of caring and raising animals, instructed to watch emotional, sometimes purposely misleading films, and that death is the best option for pets. The results of these actions are people that mindlessly support, defend, and engage in the kidnapping and killing of healthy, happy

³⁸ Chang, "Are guilt appeals a panacea in green advertising? The right formula of issue proximity and environmental consciousness," 761.

animals.³⁹ However, the main base of PETA is made up of donors, who here will be referred to as ‘supporters’ to differentiate from active ‘members,’ who are those who work for PETA. The casual donors, that is, those that donate less than \$500, typically receive magazines from the organizations that include “packed with vegan recipes, animal rights stories, and PETA campaign updates.”⁴⁰ According to a former supporter, they were also “filled with photos of tormented animals...they continue doing so today.”⁴¹ For those who donate more than \$500, PETA makes them a part of the Vanguard Society and invites them to spend a weekend with PETA every year. Here, members are assigned to Society donors with information on their dislikes and personal information to prevent concerns about the organizations actions.⁴² In this way, PETA makes sure that big donors do not find out the truth of the organizations actions and intentions and continue to donate.

PETA’s relationship with the public is similar to that of their supporters: a constant PR battle to hide their actions. They run campaigns, some of which actually bring up legitimate problems, that align with animal rights ideology while advertising itself as both a lobbying activist group and a private animal shelter. Their radical techniques make them among the most recognizable and vocal groups, using shock advertisements and publicity stunts to draw attention to them and their cause. Shock advertisements are unique in their usage of taboo topics such as violence, eroticism, and death. These tend to cause strong emotional responses that lead to a temporary leave from common sense for some viewers, inciting feelings of insecurity,

³⁹ Winograd, “The (Death) Cult of PETA.”

⁴⁰ “Animal Times Magazine,” *PETA Catalog*, accessed August 17, 2016, http://www.petacatalog.com/products/Animal_Times_Magazine-352-39.html.

⁴¹ “Confessions of a Former PETA Member,” *Veganacious*, accessed August 7, 2016, <http://www.veganacious.com/peta-member.html>.

⁴² Winograd, “The (Death) Cult of PETA.”

uncertainty, and anger, which can lead to boycotts or free publicity for the company through consumer outrage. However, this usage of taboo subjects also has the side-effect of making them topics of public interest and discussion, which may lead to a change in cultural values, for better or for worse.⁴³ Inciting strong emotions, as done through shock advertisements, can lead individuals to strengthen their convictions for or against certain things, a result that is certainly useful to PETA. Through strengthening convictions, they can lead people into supporting animal rights more or PETA itself, be it out of agreeing with what the organization stands for (to their knowledge) or through associating them with the animal rights movement. Additionally, by aligning themselves with genuine efforts and rising real criticism about animal welfare, PETA is able to create a relatively positive public image. Due to the radical tactics the group tends to employ, they often receive criticism which they dismiss being too serious about their advertisements⁴⁴ or that their tactics are necessary to make a difference.⁴⁵ Despite the disgust and anger often brought from their advertisements and publicity stunts, the organization still seems to be gaining supporters.

However, PETA has allowed too much information to be revealed by their members about their operations to the public, leading to major damages to the public image and success. PETA has found itself facing criticism from other animal shelters, many of which are joining the

⁴³ Koszembar-Wiklik, M, "CONTROVERSIAL THEMES IN ADVERTISEMENTS: ON MANIPULATING THE EMOTIONS OF AUDIENCES AND EXTENDING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SOCIAL 'TABOO'," *Communication Today* 7, no. 1(2016): 22-30.

⁴⁴ Hamad, Ruby, "PETA asks teens to 'go all the way'," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 1, 2013, accessed August 10, 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/national/peta-asks-teens-to-go-all-the-way-20130901-2syxg.html>.

⁴⁵"Animal Rights Uncompromised: PETA's Tactics" *PETA*, accessed August 10, 2016, <http://www.peta.org/about-peta/why-peta/peta-tactics/>.

No-Kill movement, where at least 90% of animals are homed.⁴⁶ This is in part due to their practices, but also due to their consistent attacks on the movement.⁴⁷ Even major news outlets, such as the Huffington Post⁴⁸ and Washington Post,⁴⁹ are publishing articles revealing the actions of the group. However, the most telling of PETA's damaged reputations is a bill recently passed in Virginia as a response to PETA's activities. This bill adds to the definition of shelters, saying that they must be a "facility operated for the purpose of finding permanent adoptive homes and facilitating other lifesaving outcomes for animals that is used to house or contain animals."⁵⁰ This means that PETA must actually work towards trying to adopt out animals instead of euthanizing them, at least in Virginia.

However, PETA is still considered to be widely influential and popular in the States. As the most prolific and recognizable of the animal rights movement, there is still an inherent trust the public affords them due to the association between animal rights and the protection and assistance of animals. People still surrender animals to them, support the group, and see them as at the forefront of the animal rights movement. They still are about to boast being "largest animal rights organization in the world, with more than 5 million members and supporters."⁵¹ PETA

⁴⁶ Winerip, Michael, "PETA Finds Itself on Receiving End of Others' Anger," *The New York Times*, July 6, 2013, accessed August 11, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/07/us/peta-finds-itself-on-receiving-end-of-others-anger.html?pagewanted=2&_r=2&hp&.

⁴⁷ Winograd, Nathan J, "PETA Can't Go 'Just One Day' Without Promoting Killing," *Nathanwinograd*, accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.nathanwinograd.com/?p=13122>.

⁴⁸ Winograd, Nathan J, "Shocking Photos: PETA's Secret Slaughter of Kittens, Puppies," *The Huffington Post*, April 2, 2013, accessed July 29, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nathan-j-winograd/peta-kills-puppies-kittens_b_2979220.html.

⁴⁹ Chumley, Cheryl K, "PETA kills 2,000 dogs and cats each year: report," *The Washington Times*, July 8, 2013, accessed August 11, 2016, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/jul/8/peta-kills-2000-dogs-and-cats-each-year-report/>.

⁵⁰ Cooper, Douglas Anthony, "PETA's Killing Machine Loses in Landslide 95-2 Vote in Virginia," *The Huffington Post*, February 23, 2015, accessed August 11, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/douglas-anthony-cooper/petas-killing-machine-los_b_6737238.html.

⁵¹ "Our Mission Statement," *PETA*, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://www.peta.org/about-peta/>.

does do some good, bringing issues concerning animals to light and spreading an ideology of helping animals that can, in many cases, bring good despite the groups less than desirable methods. However, their hidden actions clearly contradict that and if ingroup information continues to leak to the public the group will face damages to their success, support, and overall image. Their failure to regulated information within the specific groups they appeal to and keep them separate has led increasingly to stuttering support and criticism of their tactics and beliefs.

Implications

Greenwashing is sometimes hard to pick out because of personal values and beliefs. However, public initiatives to make the green activities of unappreciated companies better known, and in turn, the environmentally damaging actions of others, are making it easier to find the truth. Continued public demand for more transparency from groups and companies allow for better understanding of green claims and less chances of greenwashing being left unexposed.

This article points to people needing to be more aware of the activities of organizations and trying to come to their own conclusions for what is best, for not only them, but also the environment. Resisting pressures from peers, groups, and advertisements is difficult, but not impossible. Reevaluating ones goals and how the groups they are a part of or support help achieve that goal can help with avoiding doublethink as well as be more critical of green groups. Criticism can lead to improvements within the green movement and make sure those within it stay on the right path and own up to their mistakes in environmental protection.

As an individual, working to be aware of greenwashing and what one is supporting through their actions and purchases can be a difficult and even overwhelming task. It is easy to cut corners, to judge a group or brand simply on their advertisements. However, taking the extra

step to look closer at their products and actions can help provide the pressures necessary to lead a group or company away from greenwashing. Spreading information about brands, punishing and rewarding them with signs support or rejection, can all help, especially when shared with others that one knows. Sharing and creating resources online for others to quickly evaluate the trustworthiness of companies and organizations, as well as using those provided by others, allow for a greater understanding on where they stand in the green movement. Using and trusting these resources, to a certain degree, should help mitigate pressures from peers, groups, and advertisements and allow for a more informed decision.

However, this article also points at the power that groups do have. Utilizing that power for good can lead to great effects, be it in lobbying, boycotting, petitioning, or just spreading information. While it is good to be on the lookout for greenwashing groups, it is also important to reward those that are not, given that they continue to avoid bad behavior.

In addition to the implications for consumers, there are also implications for the future of greenwashing groups and companies. With the rising ease that comes with the internet and social media to spread information, it is becoming harder to continue greenwashing. TerraChoice has even noticed this, noting in its 2010 report that the longer a company greenwashes, the harder it is to avoid detection and punishment from consumers.⁵² Public blogs and forums have made it easier to expose greenwashing organizations and companies as well as point cautious supporters in the direction of more genuine groups to support.

Further Research

⁵² “The Sins of Greenwashing: Home and Family Edition.” *TerraChoice*, accessed August 14, 2016. <http://sinsofgreenwashing.com/index35c6.pdf>.

There is still much to explore when it comes to greenwashing. For starters, greenwashing very much is an issue of perceptions. While this sometimes means how one perceives a specific product, it also means how one perceives the brand or company that the products come from. Companies might use tactics such as selective disclosure of their activities, claim to be ecologically conscious in press releases and mission statements, or invest in environmental projects to cultivate a public image that is ecologically caring. Looking at the role group dynamics play in consumer reactions and even activist reactions could add more insights to how the two topics work with each other. Examining organizations more and the dynamics they create can also give more information on activist campaigns. Additionally, they could provide insights on how groups might help cultivate negative attitudes about themselves, other organizations or people, and the green movement as a whole. Social media is also a source of interest for the unique platform for information exchange it allows between companies, organizations, individuals, and other stakeholder. Seeing how they interact with each other on such an open platform can give even more insight on the roles of group dynamics, both with relationships between ingroups and outgroups and relationships within ingroups.

Conclusions

In this article, three hypotheses were looked at. The first posited the idea that being active in the environmental movement actually puts one more at risk for doublethink. The second hypothesis looked at how emotional appeals may greenwash consumers through manipulating aspects of their identity. The third examined the importance of treating various stakeholders differently and regulating what information the group or company gives each. By looking at various theories and studies, we were able to examine the possibility of these hypotheses being true. These answers allow for a better understanding of the challenges facing the green

movement, specifically in green consumerism, and may lead to better solutions on how to counter them in the future. Greenwashing is no joke-it takes attention away from genuinely green companies and organizations, creates a highly skeptical market, and cultivates negative attitudes towards the green movement as a whole. Greenwashing even has economic consequences for businesses, both those greenwashing and those merely perceived as doing so, and causes negative perceptions by the public on allegedly green businesses. However, this is far from the end of the green movement. Greenwashing is a single problem with many potential solutions. It is just a matter of understanding it better and implementing the right solutions. Through understanding what makes us vulnerable to manipulation we can start to create a better, more honest world.

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