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Abstract

Our physical environment has been gaining more importance in the world economy since the early 1990s. In response to that, several companies have started to produce products that are less harmful for the environment. Due to the greening of products, the concept of green marketing is becoming more familiar to the companies, which again introduces the firms to the special characteristics of green marketing communications. Environmental issues are rather complex by nature, and since products can be green in various different ways, the use of diverse concepts and terminology is often rather demanding.

The aim of this thesis is to explore how green product attributes go together with other product features such as price, quality/durability and fashion, and how companies communicate about the green attributes in their advertising practices. The research approach chosen for conducting the thesis is qualitative by nature. To answer the research question, altogether six interviews were conducted at three companies, who all have environmental aspects incorporated to their businesses. The case companies of the thesis were a large Finnish wholesaler and retailer, a Dutch jeans producer and a Belgian producer of washing and cleaning products.

The results of the study suggest that green product attributes have indeed been in conflict with other product features, as green product alternatives have commonly been more expensive, less performing and less attractive, when compared to conventional products. However, due to the improvements in product development, the conflict has begun to diminish and in some cases it has disappeared altogether. Nevertheless, although the factual conflict would seem to be disappearing, a conflict still seems to persist at the imaginary level. Even though it might be based on outdated views, the consumers are unlikely to convert to green products if they are found inferior to other product alternatives.

It was stressed in all case companies that green advertising claims should essentially be based on factual, verifiable information. The advertisements should address only issues that have relevance for the consumers' purchasing decision-making. As most consumers still seem to base their purchasing decisions on the traditional product attributes, green claims should generally be placed with a secondary emphasis, while leaving the primary emphasis on the core function of the product. Furthermore, it is often very complicated or even impossible to communicate about complex environmental attributes through short advertising messages. One commonly used way to tackle the problem is to use official ecolabels, or to employ other more informative means of communication for detailed environmental information, such as the company's Internet pages or the product packaging. The Internet as an additional source of information appears as a good alternative also for companies, who for competitive or other reasons do not wish to position themselves as a green company. For those who are interested, the environmental information is available on the Internet.

Key words	Green marketing, green product attributes, competitive advantage, marketing communications, advertising
Further information	