

2014

BioTechnology

An Indian Journal

FULL PAPER

BTAIJ, 10(9), 2014 [3868-3881]

How to recovering biological and other brand trust after greenwashing? from legitimacy and rhetorical view

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ABSTRACT

In present China with incremental environmental problems, many companies in B2C markets create a lot of green brands to enhance their competitive advantage. However, many greenwashing biological and other brands can't keep their words about their green commitments. Thus they are facing a trust crisis. Now, the problem they need to solve is how to make them restore trust. But the extant green brand research first ignored overall social support (legitimacy) on brand trust, and was limited in trust rebuilding from a rhetorical perspective. Therefore, this study, from a rhetorical perspective, uses legitimacy, greenwashing, and green brand theories to analyze the trust rebuilding strategies and mechanism. The results from five experiment show that: (1) trust rebuilding mechanism, in which green brand greenwashing has a negative impact of legitimacy which has a positive impact on brand trust; (2) trust rebuilding strategies from a rhetorical perspective, in which except value rhetorical strategy, the instrumental and normative rhetorical strategies can improve brand trust of green brands after greenwashing. These interesting findings can not only enrich extant brand management and green marketing, but also provide vital implications to green brand companies.

KEYWORDS

Greenwashing; Green biological and other brands; Rhetorical strategies; Legitimacy; Brand trust.



INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, the environmental problems like haze have become increasingly prominent in China, and also food and water pollution being the focus of whole social. With the rising voice of environmental protection in China, customers' demand for environmental-friendly products is increasing and willing to pay higher price for them^[1]. Many famous companies create their own green brands (Green brands are those brands that consumers associate with environmental conservation and sustainable business practices^[2]) to meet the green demand and to cope with the environment stress, gain competitive advantage, enhance brand value, improve corporate impression, and seek new market. In 2007, Mintel global database shows 328 brands implement the greening of entire production process while only five green brands five years before 2007^[3]. While Interbrand published the list of "Best Global Green Brands" in July 2013, "INFZM" in China released "The Greenwashing List in 2013" in February 2014 which listed the well-known green brands but got involved in greenwashing (Greenwashing here refers to the integration of two corporate behaviors: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance^[4]). These activities caused the trust crisis of "green" brands and the loss of brand equity^[5]. Then, while the wide-spread of green brands in China, the public have deep suspicious of their behavior: are green brands really what they preach and is trustworthy?^[6]

Meanwhile, the key to solve trust crisis is seeking the rebuild strategy of green brand trust in the social support and recognize (legitimacy in institutional theory). Institutional environment is essential for the rebuilding of green brand trust, which can be seen from the following market reactions:

Toyota, 3M and Siemens gained customers' trust and higher outcomes for obtaining good communication and recognition with environmental friendly organizations^[5].

Hayao (the biggest Chinese Pharmaceutical Manufacturers), Wal-Mart, Nike lost customers' trust for the failures to obtain green certifications, and resulted in potential brand risk^[5,7].

Moreover, the institutional environments give rise to the trust crisis of green brands,^[6,8] to "obtain and extend legitimacy, maintain the existing legitimacy, make up the lost or threatened legitimacy" is the goal of green brand trust strategy^[9]. The study of green brand trust needs to from the perspective of overall support and fit (the peers, the government, the public, the media, and customers) not just from the micro-local environment (like consumers). That means to study brand trust crisis from the brand legitimacy (the social support and fit^[10]) to save the losing brand trust. So, an urgent problem appears how to gain the social support (brand legitimacy) to improve green brand trust?

Meanwhile, the study on green brand is in a new stage of research,^[11,12] main studies from the perspective of green brand program strategy and green marketing,^[11-19] but pay less attention to legitimacy which plays an important role in the development of green brand trust. Also, environmental communication is benefit to the establishment of brand legitimacy, and the content and quantity of the disclosure environmental information is important too, in this regard, appropriate rhetorical strategy is necessary^[20]. Then, few studies shed light on green brand trust from a rhetorical perspective in the condition that customers have no consensus and lose trust of green brand^[6].

Therefore, this paper introduces the legitimacy of institutional theory, uses the theories of greenwashing, green brand and brand trust to analyze the rebuilding strategies of greenwashing brand trust from a rhetorical perspective. Then, applies the experimental methods to verify the strategies and mechanism of green brand trust, guides the greenwashing biological and other brands to alleviate the brand trust crisis effectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. The effect mechanism of greenwashing brand on brand trust

According to the three levels of institution, that is, regulatory, normative, and cognitive levels, the drivers of greenwashing include: nonmarket external drivers (regulatory and monitoring context: lax

and uncertain regulatory environment; activist, NGO and the media monitoring), market external drivers (consumer demand, investor demand and competition pressure), organizational drivers (firm characteristics, incentive structure and culture, effectiveness of intra-firm communication and organizational inertia), individual psychological drivers (optimism bias, narrow decision framing, hyperbolic intertemporal discounting). They also proposed appropriate management strategies to reduce false communication of greenwashing firms: to increase the transparency of environmental performance; to enhance the understanding of greenwashing and effective coordination of intra-firm structures, processes and incentives^[4].

Currently, a firm and its brand are parts of economics and institutional environment^[10]. Legitimacy is derived from institutional theory, which refers to a generalized perception or assumption that the entity actions are desirable, proper and appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions^[21,22]. Legitimacy was divided into three types: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive^[21]. Brand legitimacy refers to a general perception or assumption that the actions or strategies of brand are justified, proper or appropriate within the social system of norms, values, beliefs, and definition^[10,21]. Brand legitimacy was also classified to three types^[21]. Pragmatic legitimacy means to benefit the audiences in various forms and is a transaction outcome of organizations or individuals (brands) with constituents^[21]. For example, if the greenwashing brand provides new environmental technologies and additional environmental support to the government, supply chain enterprises and customers, it will do well to ensure pragmatic legitimacy. Moral legitimacy reflects a positive judgment and evaluation of organizations or individuals (brands) and their actions^[21]. For example, the greenwashing brand made an apology and a timely response for its greenwashing behavior to maintain its moral legitimacy. Cognitive legitimacy refers to the comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness of organizations or individuals (brands) and their actions. It represents the most powerful sources of legitimacy, as it has unimaginable replacement of existing ideas^[21]. For example, the greenwashing brand gained the international authoritative green certification to increase taken-for-grantedness, and then its cognitive legitimacy will also improve.

Moreover, trust issue of greenwashing should be most worried about. Trust was the confidence level of anticipated behavior of another party^[23]. Previous studies suggested that trust includes three beliefs: honesty, benevolence and reliability^[24,25]. Some companies make some misleading or confusing green slogans, and exaggerate the environmental performance in the promotion of new products or brands, consumers will no longer believe their brands^[26]. Based on the research of Moorman, Zaltman & Deshpande^[27], Morgan & Hunt^[28], Chaudhuri & Holbrook^[29], brand trust is defined as: a dependence intention of consumers that is a dependence on a green brand ability to perform the expected abilities. Then, this study defines green brand trust as a dependency intention on beliefs or expectations based on the credibility, benevolence and ability of environmental performance. This trust issue not only comes from the consumers, also from public, government, peers, media and other social groups.

Firstly, we should know the relationship between greenwashing behavior, legitimacy and brand trust. Greenwashing is actually the behavior that firms maintain legitimacy with important external constituents by buffering internal routines from external uncertainties to enhance flexibility^[31]. Thus, the greenwashing of "green" brands are symbolic environmental protection behaviors with no environmental protection behavior or failure to fulfill environmental protection commitments, to alleviate the external public pressures and uncertainties and to avoid the conflict with external constituents. Some brands want to meet the demands of consumers and cope with stress from governments and constituents,^[32] but fail to reach the green commitments, which give rise to the inconsistent of commitments and practices. Then the greenwashing behavior is generating. When some green brands can't achieve the demand of "green" product, industry environment standards and government environmental protection requirements, etc, these behaviors will influence take-for-grantedness of external constituents (cognitive legitimacy^[21]), their positive evaluation (moral legitimacy^[21]), and constituents' interests from environmental protection (pragmatic legitimacy^[21]).

According to legitimacy theory, enhancing the social support and fit of brand can improve brand trust^[8,10]. Brand legitimacy is to gain social support and fit by improving pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy, and cognitive legitimacy^[10]. So brand legitimacy plays an important part in obtaining, maintaining, and improving green brand trust.

Above all, the greenwashing behaviors of brand are always “words not matched by deeds”, which will inevitably cause the direct loss of consumer trust to the brand. Meanwhile, the greenwashing brand can improve brand trust of consumers through achieving social fit and support. In addition, Chen^[8] also pointed out that green brand trust is an important factor influencing green brand equity.

H1: The “greenwashing” of green brand has a negative impact on brand legitimacy.

H2: The legitimacy of greenwashing brand has a positive impact on brand trust

Environmental responsibility is the main emphasized CSR of green brand,^[34,35] and constituents continually asked them to disclose their environmental responsibilities and actions. Therefore, environmental communication of green brand is very important. Despite the transparency and interpretability is benefit to the establishment of brand legitimacy, the content and quantity of environmental information disclosure is still stress. If the green brand have a “self-promotion” attitude in the public disclosure, which may damage the brand's credibility^[36]. Thus, the environmental communication of green brand needs careful consideration, and in this regard, appropriate rhetorical strategy is necessary^[20].

Rhetoric is a persuasive language art^[37], and the purpose is to express an implicit intent, more importantly to guide future actions^[20]. It acts the role of language understanding which constructs social behavior, and is not just a passive expression^[38]. Thus, the rhetoric strategy consider the depth structures and implicit kind of statement and expression^[39], and analyses the nature and content of its audience^[20]. Because the use of rhetoric in business activities is benefit to business or constituents, the application of rhetorical strategy for brand manager is very necessary. This paper studied the effect of rhetoric strategy on brand legitimacy and brand trust.

Therefore, in order to enhance the cognitive legitimacy of green brand, green brand should provide constituents the tangible environmental commitment, and describe how to comply with industry rules, that is the normative rhetorical strategy. Therefore, it is necessary to use rhetoric in the expression of environmental responsibility for green brand^[20]. As to the interest legitimacy, the rhetorical strategy can meet constituents' demands by emphasizing on green brand commitments that is instrumental rhetoric strategy. This rhetorical strategy is focus on business performance, such as attracting excellent staff, improving product quality, more innovation and cost reduction and so on^[20]. In terms of moral legitimacy, rhetoric strategy should be focus on valuable and moral principles,^[20,40] that is value rhetorical strategy. The rhetorical strategies can be implemented by a CEO who is important in improving the brand legitimacy,^[20] CEO is better than other employees to represent the brand in the professional, legal and social aspects^[41]. However, extant literatures are silent on the communication about social or environmental issues from the rhetoric perspective,^[20,42] even less studies explore how the rhetorical strategy solve trust crisis of green brand to improve brand legitimacy. And when the green brand is in crisis, such as the economic downturn, financial difficulties, environmental pollution or other ethics scandals, these rhetorical strategies become more important, even can help green brand enhance its legitimacy and reputation^[43].

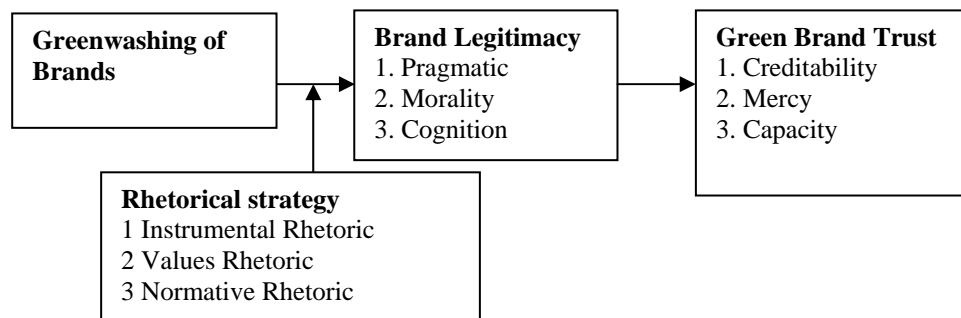


Figure 1 : Theoretical framework of this study

As a result, we predict:

H3: The instrumental rhetoric strategy has negative impact between greenwashing and green brand legitimacy.

H4: The value rhetoric strategy has negative impact between greenwashing and green brand legitimacy.

H5: The normative rhetoric strategy has negative impact between greenwashing and green brand legitimacy.

Based on greenwashing definition of Delmas & Burbano^[4], the greenwashing behavior of Meyer & Rowan^[31] and rhetorical theory of Marais^[20], combining with the process model (Figure 1) of Kimberly & Sutton^[44], this paper proposes a conceptual model (Figure 1).

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN AND HYPOTHESIS TEST

According to customer-based brand equity theory of Aaker^[45] and Keller^[46], the controllability of experiments and research focus, we use experimental methods to collect data to test hypotheses and research framework.

Experiment 1: Effects of greenwashing on green brand legitimacy

1 Experimental design

(1) This experiment 1 designed the inter-group model of one single factor (greenwashing level: low vs high greenwashing). First, we randomly divided participants into high and low greenwashing group (HGG/LGG), gave them textual description of greenwashing degree, and asked them write down their informed greenwashing behavior. We rated the greenwashing level of two groups with seven scales to have the manipulation check. Then, the participants were told attending an activity about understanding greenwashing. We showed some greenwashing biological and other brands, explained their greenwashing actions to participants, and asked them to answer a questionnaire of green brand legitimacy which was based on the scale of Pratima & Clelland^[47]. After knowing one greenwashing brand, one questionnaire should to be filled out. The questions are: "The brand's environmental performance is satisfactory"; "The brand's environmental performance is appropriate"; "The brand's environmental performance is benefit to the public "; "The brand's environmental performance is conform to industry and social norms"; "The brand's environmental performance is consistent with your intuition "; "The brand's environmental performance is consistent with your cognition ".

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Manipulation check. Results of manipulation check about greenwashing level showed the grouping was successful ($t=4.563$, $p<0.01$). Mean value of perceived greenwashing in high group was 5.32, which higher than 2.58 in low group.

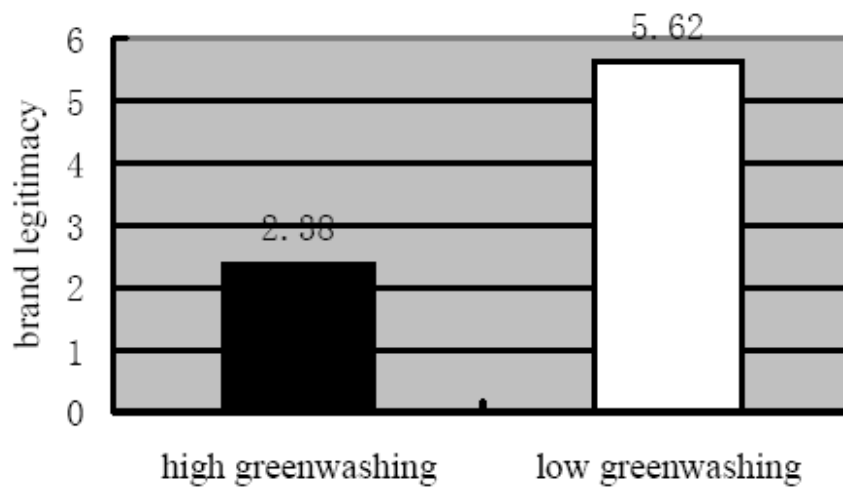


Figure 2 : Brand legitimacy at the high/low level of greenwashing

(2) Green brand legitimacy. We took greenwashing level as grouping variable, conducted an independent-samples t-test on the test variable of green brand legitimacy. Mean value about green brand legitimacy of LGG was 5.62, which significantly higher than 2.38 of HGG. This result showed that the difference between two groups was very significant ($t=4.268, p<0.01$) (Figure 2). That meant greenwashing had a negative impact on green brand legitimacy, thus H1 was verified.

The results showed green brand legitimacy was down in consumers' minds when greenwashing level was high, and legitimacy was up when greenwashing level was low. Because public really hated greenwashing and considered to be deceived by the inconsistent behavior of words and deeds. The bad emotions had a negative impact on the interests, ethical and cognitive. This was what H1 have proved and lays the foundation for the impression strategy research of rebuilding trust.

Experiment 2: Effects of green brand legitimacy on brand trust

1. Experimental design

(1) This experiment designed the inter-group model of one single factor (legitimacy level: low vs high legitimacy). First, we randomly divided the participants into high and low legitimacy group (HLG/LLG), gave them textual description of legitimacy degree, and asked them write down their informed legitimacy situation. We rated the legitimacy level of two groups with seven scales to have the manipulation check. Then, the participants were told attending an activity about understanding greenwashing. We showed some greenwashing biological and other brands, explained their legitimacy actions to participants, and asked them to answer a questionnaire of green brand trust which was based on the scale of Chaudhuri & Holbrook^[29]. After knowing one greenwashing brand, one questionnaire should to be filled out. The questions are: "I trust this brand"; "I rely on this brand"; "This brand is honest "; "The brand is safe".

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(1) Manipulation check. Results of manipulation check about legitimacy level shows the grouping is successful ($t=4.568, p<0.01$). The mean value about perceived legitimacy of HLG was 5.69, which higher than 3.16 of LLG.

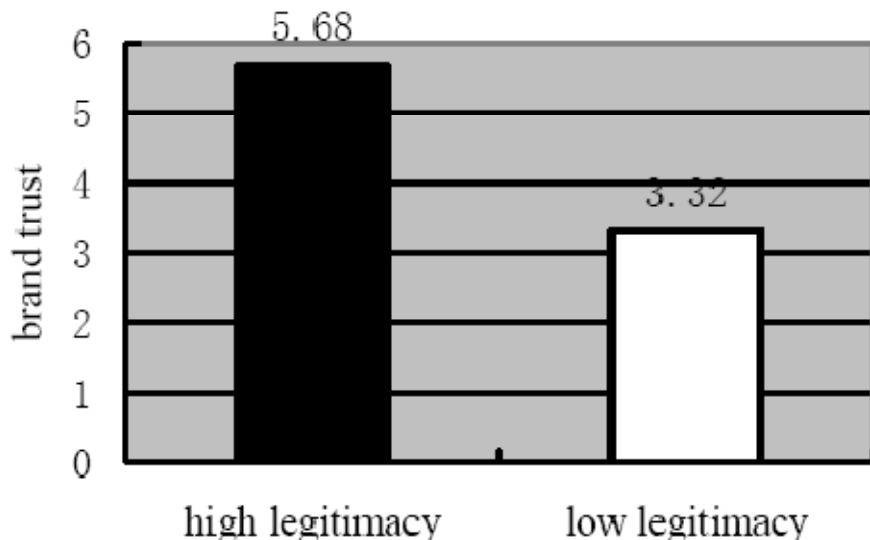


Figure 3 : Brand trust at the high/low level of legitimacy

(2) Green brand trust. We took legitimacy level as a grouping variable, conducted an independent-samples t-test on the test variable of green brand trust. Mean value about green brand trust in HLG was 5.68, which is significantly higher than 3.32 in LLG. This result showed that the difference between two groups was very significant ($t=3.682$, $p<0.01$) (Figure 3). That means legitimacy had a negative impact on green brand trust, thus H2 was verified.

The results showed the green brand which had high legitimacy meant its social fit was high, also meant that the brand performed well in meeting the interests of stakeholders, industry evaluation and public awareness. So the public especially consumers were more confident in this brand. The green brand with low legitimacy got the opposite responses. This was what H1 wanted to prove.

According to results of experiment 1 and 2, we could clearly see the effect path of "greenwashing" brand to regain brand trust, greenwashing had a negative impact on brand legitimacy, and legitimacy has a positive impact on brand trust. This lays the foundation for the rebuilding trust research of greenwashing brand.

Experiment 3: Effects of rhetorical strategy (instrumental rhetoric strategy) on greenwashing of green brand

1 Experimental design

To verify H3, this experiment designed the inter-group model of 2 (greenwashing level: high vs low greenwashing) * 2 (instrumental rhetoric strategy in rhetorical strategy: high vs low instrumental rhetoric). We invited college students as participants. First, we conducted the similar startup operation in experiment 1 and 2, and told participants they were attending an activity about understanding greenwashing of green brands. They were randomly divided into two groups (high vs low instrumental rhetoric). Then, we showed them the words and pictures of greenwashing biological and other brands which taking different instrumental rhetoric, and asked them to answer a questionnaire of green brand legitimacy.

Brand legitimacy. In high /low instrumental rhetoric group (HIRG/LIRG), participants would see the high/low level of instrumental rhetoric for green brand greenwashing. After participants completed brand legitimacy questions, they were required to answer following questions: "The CEO claims that the brand can attract excellent staff "; "The CEO claims that product quality is improved "; "The CEO claims that the brand can have more innovation"; "The CEO claims that the brand can reduce costs constantly" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). Then, we took the mean of above four items as the

distinction indicator of brand instrumental rhetoric level. The higher of the value, the higher of instrumental rhetoric level was. In pre-test, the instrumental rhetoric level of HIRG (M=5.63) was higher than LIRG (M=3.12) ($t=3.261, p < 0.01$), in line with pre-test requirements. Then, the methods of measuring greenwashing and brand legitimacy were the same with Experiments 1 and 2.

2. Experimental results

Manipulation check

Instrumental Rhetoric Strategy. We conducted an independent-samples t-test on instrumental rhetoric, the results showed the evaluation of HIRG was higher than LIRG ($M_h = 5.73$ and $M_l = 3.06, t=4.526, p < 0.01$).

Green brand greenwashing. Manipulation check of green brand greenwashing showed that the grouping of greenwashing is successful ($t=3.462, p < 0.01$), the evaluation of HGG (M=5.62) was better than LGG (M=2.81).

(2) Brand legitimacy analysis

We had the variance analysis taking green brand greenwashing and instrumental rhetoric as fixed factor, green brand legitimacy as dependent variable, the results showed that the interaction effect was significant ($F=7.232, p < 0.01$). Instrumental rhetoric had a significant effect on brand legitimacy ($F=6.526, p < 0.01$), green brand greenwashing had a significant positive effect on brand legitimacy ($F=6.236, p < 0.01$).

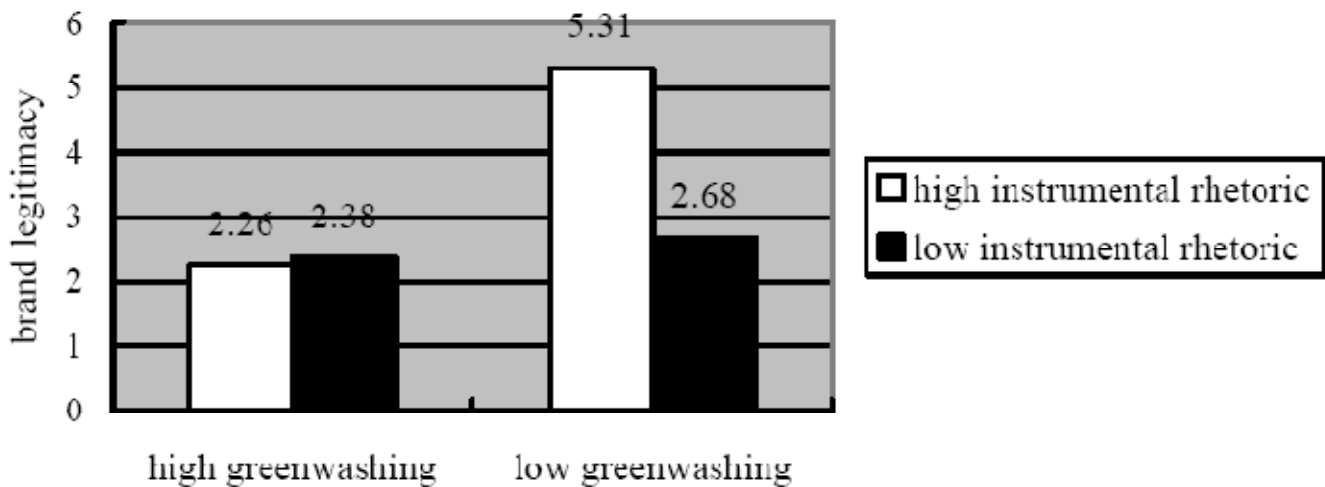


Figure 4 : Brand legitimacy in different instrumental rhetorical strategy at the high/low level of greenwashing

Figure 4 showed for high greenwashing biological and other brands there was no difference in brand legitimacy whatever the level of instrumental rhetoric ($M_h=2.26, M_l=2.38, t=0.186$, not significant). For low greenwashing biological and other brands, brand legitimacy with high instrumental rhetoric was higher than low instrumental rhetoric ($M_h=5.31, M_l=2.68, t=4.468, p < 0.01$), thus H3 was verified.

Experimental results proved that rhetorical management strategy (instrumental rhetoric) had moderate effects between greenwashing and brand legitimacy. Brand of low greenwashing got litter negative impact because the public felt they can be benefited from this brand when it claims to improve product quality, innovate and continuously cost reduction. It certainly got more social support and recognition than high greenwashing brand. In addition, the inconsistent behavior of words and deeds of high greenwashing brand caused harm to society and environment, so it would not get sympathy, also social support and recognition (brand legitimacy) whatever the benefit of its instrumental rhetoric claim.

Experiment 4: Effects of rhetorical strategy (value rhetoric strategy) on greenwashing of green brand

1 Experimental design

To verify H4, this experiment designed the inter-group model of 2 (greenwashing level: high vs low greenwashing) *2 (value rhetoric strategy in rhetorical strategy: high vs low value rhetoric). We invited college students as participates. First, we conducted the similar startup operation in experiment 3, and told participants they were attending an activity about understanding greenwashing of green brands. They were randomly divided into two groups (high vs low value rhetoric). Then, we showed them the words and pictures of greenwashing biological and other brands which taking different value rhetoric, and asked them to answer a questionnaire of green brand legitimacy.

Brand legitimacy. In high /low value rhetoric group (HVRG/LVRG), participants would see the high/low level of value rhetoric for green brand greenwashing. After participants completed brand legitimacy questions, they were required to answer following questions: "The CEO claims that the brand is emphasizing moral "; "The CEO claims that the brand is valuable" (1= strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). Then, we took the mean of above two items as the distinction indicator of brand value rhetoric level. The higher of the mean, the higher of value rhetoric level was. In pre-test, the value rhetoric level of HVRG (M=5.48) was higher than LVRG (M=2.32) ($t=4.162$, $p < 0.01$), in line with pre-test requirements.

2 Experimental results

Manipulation check

Value Rhetoric Strategy. We conducted an independent-samples t-test on value rhetoric, the results showed the evaluation of HVRG was higher than LVRG ($M_h=5.14$ and $M_l=2.42$, $t=4.162$, $p < 0.01$).

Green brand greenwashing. Manipulation check of green brand greenwashing showed that the grouping of greenwashing is successful ($t=4.328$, $p < 0.01$), the evaluation of HGG (M=5.34) was better than LGG (M=2.26).

(2) Brand legitimacy analysis

We had the variance analysis taking green brand greenwashing and value rhetoric as fixed factor, green brand legitimacy as dependent variable, the results showed that the interaction effect was significant ($F=5.168$, $p < 0.01$). Value rhetoric had a significant effect on brand legitimacy ($F=6.218$, $p < 0.01$), green brand greenwashing had a significant positive effect on brand legitimacy ($F=4.638$, $p < 0.01$).

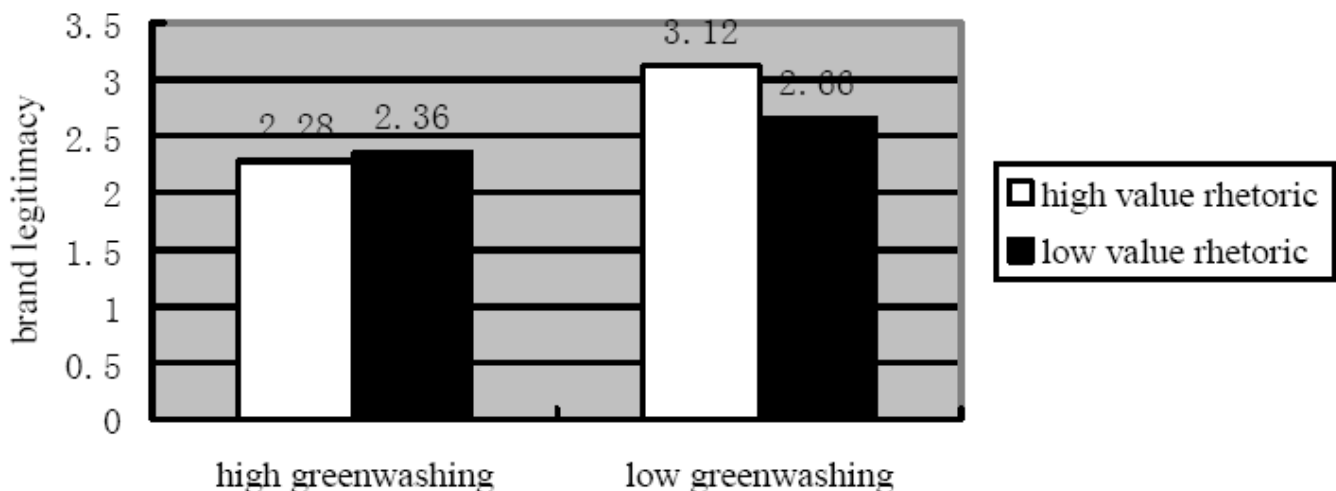


Figure 5 : Brand legitimacy in different value rhetorical strategy at the high/low level of greenwashing

Figure 5 showed for high greenwashing biological and other brands there was no difference in brand legitimacy whatever the level of value rhetoric ($M_h=2.28$, $M_l=2.36$, $t=0.286$, not significant). For low greenwashing biological and other brands, brand legitimacy with high value rhetoric was higher than low value rhetoric ($M_h=3.12$, $M_l=2.66$, $t=0.362$, $p>0.05$), thus H4 was not verified.

Experimental results proved that rhetorical strategy (value rhetoric) had moderate effects between greenwashing and brand legitimacy. Brand of low greenwashing got litter negative impact. However, unlike the experiment 3, although the brand claims to conform to the ethical principles and values, but consumers may think that the dishonest of green brand have been serious against corporate ethics and responsibility, and explanations about the lack of business ethics or responsibility are disgusted and unaccepted. So, H4 was not verified.

Experiment 5: Effects of rhetorical strategy (normative rhetoric strategy) on greenwashing of green brand

1 Experimental design

To verify H5, this experiment designed the inter-group model of 2 (greenwashing level: high vs low greenwashing) *2 (normative rhetoric strategy in rhetorical strategy: high vs low normative rhetoric). We invited college students as participates. First, we conducted the similar startup operation in experiment 3 and 4, and told participants they were attending an activity about understanding greenwashing of green brands. They were randomly divided into two groups (high vs low normative rhetoric). Then, we showed them the words and pictures of greenwashing biological and other brands which taking different normative rhetoric, and asked them to answer a questionnaire of green brand legitimacy.

Brand legitimacy. In high /low normative rhetoric group (HNRG/LNRG), participants would see the high/low level of normative rhetoric for green brand greenwashing. After participants completed brand legitimacy questions, they were required to answer following questions: "The CEO claims that the brand complies with industry standards "; "The CEO claims that the brand obeys law and discipline" (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). Then, we took the mean of above two items as the distinction indicator of brand normative rhetoric level. The higher of the value, the higher of normative rhetoric level was. In pre-test, the normative rhetoric level of HNRG ($M=5.72$) was higher than LNRG ($M=2.46$) ($t=3.824$, $p<0.01$), in line with pre-test requirements.

2 Experimental results

Manipulation check

Normative Rhetoric Strategy. We conducted an independent-samples t-test on normative rhetoric, the results showed the evaluation of HNRG was higher than LNRG ($M_h=5.82$ and $M_l=2.26$, $t=4.283$, $p<0.01$).

Green brand greenwashing. Manipulation check of green brand greenwashing showed that the grouping of greenwashing is successful ($t=3.256$, $p<0.01$), the evaluation of HGG ($M=5.62$) was better than LGG ($M=2.98$).

(2) Brand legitimacy analysis

We had the variance analysis taking green brand greenwashing and normative rhetoric as fixed factor, green brand legitimacy as dependent variable, the results showed that the interaction effect was significant ($F=4.685$, $p<0.01$). Normative rhetoric had a significant effect on brand legitimacy

($F=5.284$, $p<0.01$), green brand greenwashing had a significant positive effect on brand legitimacy ($F=4.586$, $p <0.01$).

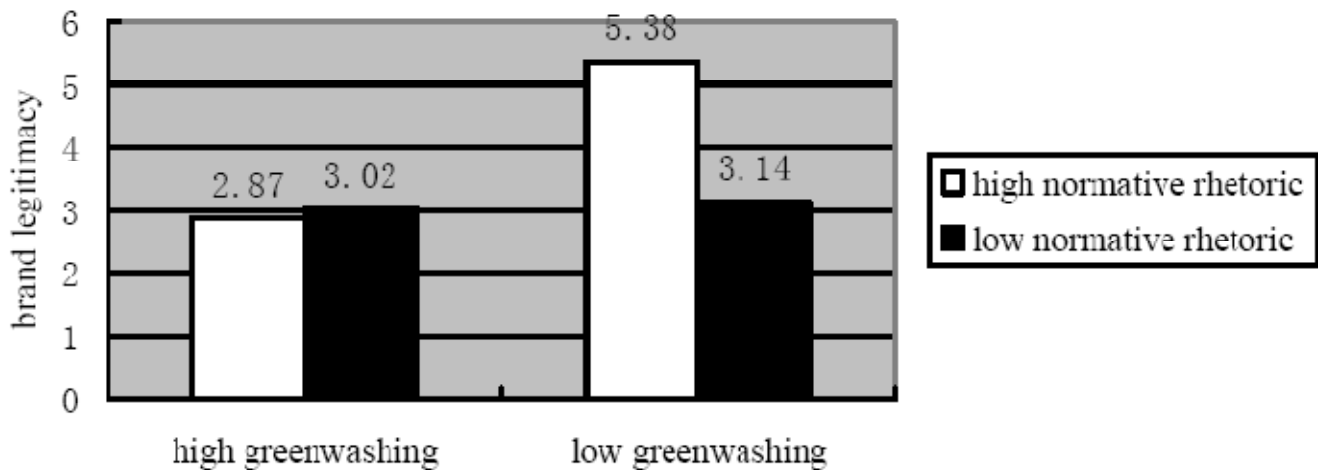


Figure 6 : Brand legitimacy in different value rhetorical strategy at the high/low level of greenwashing

Figure 6 showed for high greenwashing biological and other brands there was no difference in brand legitimacy whatever the level of normative rhetoric ($M_h=2.87$, $M_l=3.02$, $t=0.281$, not significant). For low greenwashing biological and other brands, brand legitimacy with high normative rhetoric was higher than low normative rhetoric ($M_h=5.38$, $M_l=3.14$, $t=3.526$, $p<0.01$), thus H5 was verified.

Experimental results proved that rhetorical management strategy (normative rhetoric) had moderate effects between greenwashing and brand legitimacy. Brand of low greenwashing got litter negative impact because the public felt that the brand could be forgiven. The brand as the model of high level of following rules and law-abiding, this brand certainly got more social support and recognition than high greenwashing brand.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Recently, consumers in China are more concerned about environmental problem, they desire to solve the problems like food safety, water pollution, and haze through the consumption of green products. Thus, many firms have introduced varieties green brands to meet consumers' demand. However, due to information asymmetry and lack of supervision, the green brands being "words not matched by deeds". Then the emergence of "greenwashing" phenomenon (the enterprise in order to deal with insitutional pressure, taking the inconsistent behavior patterns of actual operations and commitments^[31]) confuses consumers about green brands, and seriously affecting green brand trust. More serious is the gradual trust loss of green brand which previously enjoyed a good reputation.

However, extant research on green brands is always from a green marketing while silent on the institutional view on the trust rebuilding of greenwashing biological and other brands. Therefore, this article from a rhetorical perspective uses legitimacy, greenwashing, and green brand theories to analyze the trust rebuilding strategies and mechanism. Through five group of experimental verification, we find that: (1) greenwashing of green brand has a negative impact on brand legitimacy; (2) the legitimacy of greenwashing brand has a positive impact on brand trust; (3) the instrumental rhetorical strategy (claiming the benefit advantage) of rhetorical strategy can improve brand legitimacy, thus enhance brand trust; (4) the value rhetorical strategy (claiming the moral and value advantage) of rhetorical strategy cannot improve brand legitimacy, greenwashing is a behavior which being lack of moral, value and

responsibility, the explanation of moral and values cannot bring the understanding and recognition of the social. Therefore, value rhetorical strategy in this study did not save the brand trust loss of greenwashing; (5) the normative rhetorical strategy (claiming to follow rules and law-abiding) of rhetorical strategy also can improve brand legitimacy, thus enhance and rebuild brand trust as the instrumental rhetorical strategy.

Therefore, rebuilding greenwashing brand trust requires not only from marketing mix and theory perspective, but also from the perspective of the whole society support and fit. Moreover, green brands can take full advantage of corporate representatives like CEO to alleviate the brand trust crisis of greenwashing through using rhetorical strategies (such as claiming the benefit and utility advantage of brand, namely instrumental rhetoric; claiming the moral and value advantage of brand, namely value rhetoric; claiming to follow rules and law-abiding, namely normative rhetoric). Although in this research, the value rhetoric is not verified in experiment, but other two strategies (instrumental and normative rhetoric strategy) are supported in experiment. That means we can use these two rhetoric strategies to rebuild green brand trust. Green brand corporations should pay attention to benefit the public, as the brand can attract excellent employees, products quality is improved, the brand can have more innovation, and the brand can constantly reduce cost for attaching importance to the publicity of complying with the regulations and rules. Emphasis is that these rhetorical strategies through the social support and fit (brand legitimacy) to improve greenwashing brand trust.

As to the research limits, this study focused on greenwashing brand trust problems in China, in fact, the wild greenwashing phenomenon has been the focus of scholars at home and abroad. So, the study about rebuilding trust strategy of greenwashing brand in other countries, the comparison studies with Chinese and cross-cultural research is also necessary. These studies can help academic and industry understand and use different brand strategies and mechanism to rebuild brand trust in different market. In addition, future studies could consider studying from other perspectives and theories. Finally, the consistency of brand trust rebuilding strategy in B2C market and B2B market is also worthy of further study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research is supported by National Natural Science Funds (71002072 and 71272063) and Youth Project (12YJC630187) of Humanities and Social Science of The Ministry of Education.

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