

# **It Ain't Easy Being Green: Exploring the Gap between Macro and Micro Green Agendas**

**By**

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## **It Ain't Easy Being Green: Exploring the Gap between Macro and Micro Green Agendas**

**ABSTRACT:** The green gap is traditionally thought of as the gap between how consumers intend to behave in regards to green living and how they actually behave. We extend the idea of the green gap by demonstrating a gap between the macro agenda of saving the planet as exercised by green advertisers and the micro-agenda of saving one's own part of the planet, or at the very least, of not wasting one's part of it as perpetuated by consumers. We then provide suggestions for green advertisers in bridging this gap between advertising and consumers.

One of the great issues associated with green advertising is the green gap that such advertising must deal with. Generally speaking, a “green gap” involves the separation between what the consumer believes should be done to protect and improve the environment and what he or she actually does to help protect and improve the environment (Richardson 2011). For instance, according to the Global Online Environmental and Sustainability Survey (Nielson 2011), although nearly 83% of global consumers say that it is important to implement a variety of programs that protect the environment, only 22% of those surveyed would actually pay more for eco-friendly products. Additionally, Wimberly (2008) argues that customers mistrust corporate entities like electricity producers who, when promoting green products and programs, effectively ask consumers to use less of their own product. Both of these phenomena constitute a green-gap.

However, we believe that a “green-gap” also exists between the competing agendas at the macro, meso, and micro levels of the green advertising hierarchy. At the highest level, or as we term it here the macro-level, the green advertiser is attempting to save the planet, promoting a green agenda as a large-scale, global endeavor. In doing so, the effort is more about preventing or correcting global issues in a not-for-profit manner. At the intermediate or meso-level, corporate advertisers are promoting the green-ness of their product and how that same product can allow the consumer to be greener in his or her endeavors. And finally, at the micro-level, the consumer responds to those advertisements within the context of their own lives and their own realities.

The following paper explores the gap between two of these competing agendas, that which exists between the macro and micro levels. Though there is a gap between the meso level and the two other levels of this hierarchy, we choose to focus on this micro-macro gap because,

in many ways, this provides the greatest tension of any of the three relationships. As such, the purpose of this paper is to outline the competing agendas at the micro and macro levels of the green advertising hierarchy and the gaps that lie between the two. To do so, we begin with a brief literature review at each level of the hierarchy and follow it up with the presentation of our method of study. Then, after presenting our findings, we provide a discussion of how the tension between these two define the difficulties in closing the green gap and how marketers may help easing that tension.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

For all its relevance in today's economic and political environment, green advertising has received little research attention from marketing academics, and much of the attention that has been paid to it occurred during the mid-nineties (Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez 2009). At that point, efforts from a variety of researchers (e.g. Banergee, Gulas, and Iyer 1995; Kilbourne 1995; Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius 1995; Zinkhan and Carlson 1995) provided a great deal of descriptive information concerning what constitutes green advertising and how it is defined. Recently, however, there has been a renewed interest in green advertising, particularly as it relates to consumers and how they behave in relation to these ads, identifying a “green gap” between consumer intention and practice. In what follows, we provide an overview of the nature of green advertising and then describe the green gap and how it relates to this advertising.

### **Green Advertising**

Much of the descriptive work in understanding green advertising has been focused on providing a definition and setting boundaries for determining advertising to be green or not. For instance, Iyer and Banergee (1993) identified three main types of green advertisements based upon the audience the advertisements targeted: planet preservation, animal life preservation, and

personal health preservation. Banergee et al (1995) drew upon and continued this work, arguing that green advertising is defined as meeting any one or more of the following characteristics: it addresses the relationship between the product/service and the environment, it addresses a green lifestyle whether promoting a specific product/service or not, or it presents the corporate image as environmentally friendly and/or responsible.

Kilbourne (1995) complicates this definition a bit by arguing that “being green” has two distinct dimensions. The first, a political dimension, is one that “reflects the relative position one might take regarding how change is to be effected and how much change is acceptable” (8) and ranges from a reformist position to more radical position. The second, the positional dimension, relates to how the individual positions him or herself as well as the human community in relation to the biotic community. This ranges from an anthropocentric stance where the value of ecology is only in its relation to human instrumental value to an ecocentric stance where the ecology has its own inherent value. Such a framework results in at least five different types of green: environmentalism, conservationism, human welfare ecology, preservationism, and ecologism. Now, where Banergee et al (1995) defined three targets for such advertising, Kilbourne (1995) identifies at least five different targets.

More recently, there has been an attempt to simplify the definition of green advertising with Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2009) understanding the nature of green advertising to be “advertising a product or brand with environmental claims” (717). While we agree that the definitions put forth by the previous authors muddy the water with complexity, we also believe the latter authors simplify too much. As such, we feel that a new definition of green advertising should be put forth. For the sake of this paper, we define green advertising as any advertising

that explicitly or implicitly promotes an awareness of environmental issues and/or suggests behaviors useful in minimizing or correcting these environmental issues.

Additionally, we also believe that previous definitions (and, hence, the studies that build from those definitions) confuse the issue of green advertising even further by mixing and mingling for-profit and not-for-profit green advertising. We feel that these are two different animals with distinct agendas and, therefore, exist at different levels in a hierarchical structure. Hence, the not-for-profit green advertising, which we consider in this paper, exists at a macro-level of messaging while the for-profit advertising exists at the meso-level of messaging. We also consider a micro-level agenda, that of the consumer who reads and ultimately responds to these advertisements; and we contend that there is a gap between these competing agendas.

### **The Green Gap**

There appears to be a green gap in consumer attitudes which appears to have an impact on the effectiveness of green advertising. This green gap exists when there is a difference between what the consumer intends in terms of green or eco-friendly living and how they actually live. Much of this gap seems to reflect the costs associated with going green (McNally 2011; Richardson 2011). However, little academic study has actually investigated this so-called green gap. Black and Cherrier (2010) recently discovered that it arose not just as a consumer resistance to the cost or quality associated with a green product, but it also may be result of core elements of the notion of one's self clashing with the purchase of green items. They also argue that it might come as a result of "the performance of anti-consumption rather than pro-environmental consumption to provide diversities of practice that are sufficiently flexible to allow for self-expression" (443). In other words, the authors argue that the green gap comes about as a difference between one's self and one's perceived stance on the environment.

In keeping with this thought process, Eckhardt, Belk, and Devinney (2010) ask the very basic question: why don't consumers consume ethically? The authors found that consumers provide a variety of rationales as an answer to this question and did not care much about the issues that were set before them. "Some professed to care, but when they described their actual purchasing behavior they revealed a disconnect between their beliefs and behavior" (429), using three distinct rationales to justify this. First, as with other studies, consumers used an economic rationalization that outlined the cost of behaving ethically as an important consideration when dealing with their own attitudes and subsequent behaviors. Second, consumers utilized a governmental dependency rationale, which highlights the difference between individual and institutional responsibility, claiming that "the government should protect the environment" (431). Finally, consumers used a developmental realism rationale which basically claims that such issues are the price one pays for economic development and that future technological endeavors would take care of the problems later.

Such studies point to a gap between consumer attitudes and how they actually behave when presented with an ethical situation (environmentally related or otherwise). It is also quite clear that consumer attitudes have an impact on the effectiveness of green advertising. Consumer attitudes towards green advertising have not always been the most favorable with a number of studies suggesting that consumers evaluate green advertising as vague or misleading (Carlson, Grove, and Kangun 1993; Iyer, Banerjee, and Gulas 1994; Kangun, Carlson, and Grove 1991) and address it with a great deal of skepticism (Kilbourne 1995, 2004; Scammon and Mayer 1995; Zinkhan and Carlson 1995) and even ambivalence (Chang 2011). We believe that the disconnect between consumer attitudes and the messages in green advertising constitutes somewhat of a green gap as well.

We believe that there is a gap between the distinct agendas at play at the macro-level of green advertising and the micro-level of consumer “green-ness.” As we shall see, the macro-level agenda of green advertising is to save the planet and exhorts consumers to do just that. On the other hand, consumers have a different agenda altogether, one in which they look for good deals and minimize the waste that they produce. In the following section, we provide an overview of the method used in this study.

## METHOD

This paper analyzes the tension that exists between macro-level advertisers who are attempting to convey an all-encompassing green message to consumers and the micro-level consumers who are attempting to consume in their own small part of a world that has incredibly large and overwhelming issues. To do so, we incorporate a multi-method approach (Morse 2003) to this study that includes ethnographic content analysis (Altheide 1987) and phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas 1994). The goal driving each method is to discover the various agendas underlying macro-level and micro-level participants in the green advertising communications and the tension that occurs between those agendas.

### Ethnographic Content Analysis

After collecting a variety of macro-level green advertisements—those that promoted a green agenda but not for a for-profit entity such as a brand or corporation—we analyzed these ads through an ethnographic content analysis (Altheide 1987). Unlike a quantitative content analysis which is designed to measure the frequency and variety of messages in regards to hypothesized relationships (Krippendorf 2003; Neuendorf 2001), the ethnographic content analysis (ECA) is designed to provide an understanding of the meaning inherent within the message. Based upon grounded theory principles (Corbin and Strauss 2007; Glaser and Strauss

1967), ECA involves the “constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances” (Altheide 1987, 68) within the studied texts. In other words, the advertisements were observed, interviewed, and analyzed much as one would observe, interview, and analyze individuals in the field in order to arrive at the answer to a basic question. As Mitchell (2006) would put it, what do the advertisements want? Such an approach allowed us to arrive at a number of themes that did not necessarily fit into pre-constructed boxes that accompany a more quantitative approach to content analysis. Instead, ECA allowed the themes to emerge directly from the data (Altheide 1987; Corbin and Struass 2007).

### **Phenomenological Inquiry**

In terms of the consumer agenda, we took a phenomenological approach to data collection and analysis that allowed for a better understanding of the lived experience (Van Manen 1990) of our informants. The key form of data collection under this approach is the long interview (McCracken 1988) in which we interviewed 26 individuals who provided insight into their own lived experience in terms of limiting the amount of waste and “looking for good deals” in terms of their own grocery shopping and other living arrangements. Informants were not asked, directly, about any green motivation or responses to any green advertising as we wanted an unbiased view into what motivated these consumers to consume as they do. That said, most of the informants did mention some desire to at least minimize waste within their households with several expressing explicit environmental repercussions of doing so. The original study for which these informants were interviewed dealt with grocery shopping and food consumption; however, much of the data collected did deal with waste minimization in their households as a whole. As a result, the findings presented here do focus a great deal on household consumption particularly as it pertains to food and grocery shopping.

After the initial interview, the tapes were transcribed and analyzed utilizing a variety of grounded theory principles including the constant comparative analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In the initial phase of open coding, words, lines and segments of data are labeled, and the comparison process begins. That process moves from the coding of concepts to the grouping of those concepts under higher-order concepts known as categories (Corbin and Strauss 2007). Next, a more focused level (Charmaz 2006) of coding took place which sought to synthesize and explain the uncovered concepts. It is from this focused level of data analysis that the lived experiences of our informants emerged from the data, allowing us a glimpse of their own agenda in terms of “saving” and “not wasting.” It is from this emergent data that we constructed a phenomenological understanding of the stories our consumers tell, and it is this story and the tension between it and green advertising that we tell in the next section.

## FINDINGS

In the following section, we present the findings concerning the various agendas at each level of green advertising. In the first level, the macro-level agenda, we present the results of an ethnographic content analysis dealing with a series of green advertisements that promote the salvation of the planet. Then, we present the micro-level agenda which lies with consumers who are not necessarily attempting to save the planet but, instead, are simply trying to save their own little part of it.

### **Macro-Level Agenda: Saving the Planet**

At the macro-level of green advertising, the overarching agenda that dominates such ads is the salvation of the planet with most of the ads focusing on bringing an awareness of a variety of global problems to the consumer. This is, perhaps, best characterized by an advertisement created by the animal rights organization PETA. In it, the copy dominates the ad, stating

“Meat’s not green. Save the planet. Go vegan!” The copy resides next to an image of a green chicken which appears to symbolize the absurdity of green meat as expressed in the copy. The implication is that the consumer would do well to go vegan in order to truly be green. Other ads echo this call to “save the planet” however they do so in a variety of ways, mostly by urging individual consumers to save nature, to stop global warming, to prevent pollution, and ultimately to save ourselves.

**Save Nature:** Many green advertisements promote the salvation of nature as part of saving the planet. In one representative ad, the World Wildlife Fund presents a startlingly green vista consisting of an expanse of what appears to be grasslands as well as a scattering of trees and small forests. In the center of the image, there are two forests that are linked by what appears to be streams and rivers. The notable concept within the image is that the two main forests appear to be a set of lungs. One lung is obviously healthy and well-kept; however, the other lung appears to be diseased. The entire bottom half of the “lung” is brown and ugly after clear-cutting of the trees making up the bottom half, leaving the river that streams from this lung brown and corroded. The implication of the ad is that the process of clear-cutting forests for the lumber they provide and for conversion into agricultural land is harming the “lungs of the planet” much as cancer and other diseases do harm to human lungs.

In a second advertisement, a party of five meerkats is installing a solar panel on top of a Spanish tiled roof, and the advertising copy reads “If you don’t preserve nature by installing solar panels, who will?” The agenda promoted in the ad is for the reader to install solar panels because if he or she does not, nature itself is incapable of doing so. In another ad, the silhouette of a barren tree stands in front of a cloud-laden sky. At the top of the tree, a white plastic bag clings to a branch as if the wind is attempting to whip it away. The copy text reads, simply

enough, “Nature’s had enough.” In all three of these ads as well as in many others, the agenda promoted is the salvation of nature with each of the advertisers attempting to promote this idea to the consumer.

***Stop Global Warming:*** In a second set of ads, advertisers are attempting to promote the notion that humans can stop the onslaught of global warming and, in so doing, help to save the planet. In one series of advertisements, a variety of arctic animals such as polar bears and penguins are presented in front of a white background, and the animals appear to be melting. The implication of the ad is that global warming is doing irreparable harm to arctic wildlife and that by stopping global warming, humanity can save these animals and, in turn, save nature and the planet as well.

Arctic animals tend to be at the forefront of the stop global warming advertisements. In another ad, a polar bear mother with her cub lies asleep in a discarded cardboard box in what appears to be a decrepit alleyway complete with a full trashbag and a few discarded newspapers. “Global warming,” the caption reads, “is leaving many homeless.” Similarly, an ad from the World Wildlife Fund presents the image of a polar bear lounging in another broken down alleyway like some homeless vagrant. A sign in the background reads “You can help stop global warming.” The implication of these and other advertisements is that global warming is driving animals from their natural habitats and that the consumer can help to prevent such activity.

***Stop Pollution:*** A third set of ads promotes the goal of preventing pollution and its consequences on the environment and even on humanity. The image of an atomic cloud appears in more than a few of these ads. An ad from Unicef presents a splash of water in the form of an atomic cloud with the copy stating that “1.5 million children die every year from drinking polluted water.” In this case, the polluted water itself is the destructive device. Greenpeace also

co-opts the image of nuclear armageddon by presenting a plastic bag that has been sculpted into the form of atomic cloud and setting it on a field of grass. The implication of both ads is twofold: on the one hand, pollution is a phenomenon that is potentially as destructive as a nuclear bomb; on the other hand, consumers need to be just as scared of this activity as they are of potential nuclear armageddon.

Additionally, a number of advertisements are focusing on how pollution is coming to replace aspects of nature, effectively destroying it. In one, a regal-looking deer stands atop a hill staring off into the smoky distance. Only, this deer and the hill it stands on is made up of trash, and the caption informs the consumer that “Rubbish can be recycled. Nature cannot.” Another had presents a giant bucket in the center of a mountain landscape. The contents of the bucket are spilling into the brown and muddy river that cuts through the mountainscape. The implication of these ads is that human activity and the pollution that it produces is irreparably transforming nature into something that will not necessarily support life.

***Save Ourselves:*** The ultimate goal of these ads and in promotion the salvation of the planet is the notion that we are indeed saving ourselves from doom and gloom in some dystopian future. This potential future is represented in another ad that presents the following copy: “Stop climate change before it changes you.” This copy accompanies the image of a man who has apparently evolved in such a way as to live in a watery environment as his head has been transformed into that of a fish. This ad states boldly what all the other advertisements only hint at. The act of going green, as promoted in these advertisements, will ultimately help humanity save itself and our ability to live on this planet.

### **Micro-Level Agenda: Avoiding Waste**

The consumer agenda is decidedly different from that of the advertisers who are using the green advertisements provided above. In regards to the macro-agenda, though many of our informants did express a concern for the environment, they also mentioned their inability to do anything about it. For instance, Wesley, a 63 year old retired business owner, indicated that “I certainly would like to save the planet, but I can’t save the planet. It’s much too big. All I can really do is watch what I bring in to my home and try not to waste anything that I have. I have to use it all.” Helena, a 25 year old graduate student, echoed Wesley, stating “I can’t even save enough money to last to the end of the month. How do they expect me to save the whales or anything like that?” Several of our informants even went so far as to express their concern that much of this macro agenda is driven by corporate concerns. Wesley quipped, “I don’t trust ‘em. Not at all. They’re just trying to make money off of the environment and most of what they say is false anyway.” Al, a 41 year old retailer, argues that “it’s all misdirection. They make you believe one thing while they do something completely different behind your back.”

In other words, these informants tended to look upon the macro-level agenda with skepticism and, to a somewhat greater extent, helplessness much in keeping with past findings (i.e. Kilbourne 1995, 2004; Scammon and Mayer 1995; Zinkhan and Carlson 1995). Instead, they focused on their own micro-level agenda which typically involved not wasting their own resources. These particular informants spoke of avoiding waste in the context of grocery shopping and meal consumption. Al spoke of a lot of the food he buys “going to waste,” and Kent tries really hard to “not throw too much stuff away.” Carter complains that the sheer amount of leftovers he produces results in “wasted space” in his refrigerator, and Wesley frets over all the packaging waste we are creating in this country and the damage it is doing to the environment. Beth does not want to be wasteful as she purchases food nor when she uses energy

in her home. Maxine does not want to waste money by going to an organic grocery store across town even though it has healthier food than the one near her home.

***Wasting Food:*** Shopping often produces wasted food, both in terms of the leftovers that one gets tired of eating several days in a row and in terms of the food one keeps in one's refrigerator and pantry. Al discusses his own experience with wasting food.

I find a lot of the food I buy sometimes goes to waste. Especially the way a lot of food is offered in the grocery store. Most of the time, unless it's frozen, it's really not aimed at the single person. If you go to buy chicken breasts, there's four chicken breasts. Usually, for me, if I'm going to eat chicken I eat it once every two weeks, three weeks. Produce you can buy what you want. If you just want an orange, you can buy an orange, but I don't think as a single person I consume as much as a household of two, definitely. And even then, I find myself buying stuff and two months later, it's still sitting in my cupboard. I think, you know, I should probably eat that. I'll buy fruit and forget about it. Vegetables and forget about them.

To be fair, Al acknowledges that he is partially responsible for the food he wastes either through forgetfulness or simply being unable to eat some mundane or reheated meal yet again; however, he also points the finger at the grocery stores and manufacturers that produce packaged meats and produce in bulk.

Informants spoke of wasting food prior to being able to consume it, claiming that they either forgot that the item is sitting in the refrigerator or that they simply do not have enough time to finish perishables before they spoil. For example, Beth wants to buy her produce in bulk to save money, but she argues that "then I'm wasting all this food that I'm not eating because I

can't get myself to eat enough fruits and vegetables to make it worthwhile." Kendra laments that "I go to the grocery store and I get all these things and I don't actually make them and forget that the pepper is sitting in the cooler drawer." Rex will not keep food around because "I don't like to keep a lot of food around... 'cause a lot of it spoils so... because I just don't eat it."

On top of wasting food prior to being able to consume it, my informants also mentioned wasting food after preparation. Helena does not cook large quantities or cook in advance very much because "I'm not really good about taking care of leftovers. Um... if it's something I can freeze, yes. If it's something that goes in the fridge, I try not to make too much, 'cause I'm really bad about things going bad." Karen also has a problem with the serving sizes by which food is often packaged; however, she also holds herself partially accountable. "I'm not a big fan of leftovers," Karen observes. "Um... like... there's a couple things, there's a couple things that I will eat as leftovers, but they're very few. Um, like wild rice, I'll eat that as leftovers. But it would have to be like the next day, or the rice is just thrown in the trash." Each informant talked about wasting food as a problem within the household and constantly strove to avoid wasting if they could.

***Wasting Money:*** The wasting of food is also tied to the wasting of money since when one wastes the food he or she has purchased, the money spent to purchase that food is also essentially thrown away. "I don't want to waste money either," Jennifer states, providing a reason as to why she will not purchase a "humongous box" of Clementine oranges even though she would save money by doing so. "I don't want to buy stuff and not consume it." Jesse thinks of it in terms of not being able to justify purchasing a certain amount.

Lots of it's just justification of buying, like if I'm making hamburgers, I've got to buy onions, I have to buy ground beef, I've got to buy... I like to put bell pepper

in my hamburger. Then I've got to buy cheese, I've got to buy hamburger buns, and I've got... lots of items to buy just to make one thing, and I'm not going to buy all of the items when I could... I'm buying all those items just to prepare a hamburger for me when the exact same amount of items that I buy could actually feed four people. I just don't... I just don't buy those types of things.

Jesse sees the purchase of all the items necessary to make the hamburgers she likes as a potential waste of money as well as the waste of all the food that could feed four people.

The desire to not waste money is also intimately tied to the notion of price and to the budgets that people have. As most consumers do, Jack tries to "get what I can get at... the best price. And I try not to get the stuff that's the higher price just because it's... you've heard it's better." He is, as Archibald et al. (1983) might say, looking for a good buy which can be interpreted as the quality of the product in relation to its price. However, it might also be interpreted as not wasting money on attributes of the food that one does not need such as the brand name or better packaging. Individuals like Joan, Thom, and Todd also do not want to waste their budget by purchasing items that they do not need or that they cannot consume over the period of time they have budgeted for.

***Wasting Time and Effort:*** Most informants describe their shopping goals in a very succinct manner. "I want to get in and get out," says Thom, and Ted claims that "I'm in and out pretty quick." Even many of the women in this study echo the desire to get in and get out of the grocery store. Courtney states, "But I'm usually get in and get out. I mean, I usually know what I want, so I go in there, get it, and then get out." It seems that there is a desire to not spend too much time or effort within the grocery store. People also did not want to waste time in other household endeavors such as chores and mealtime consumption. Pieter and Jim both do not want

to waste their time at home with household chores, so both hire a cleaning woman to come in. Jim justifies it by saying “so, I think my time is very valuable, and um... so paying somebody 25 dollars an hour... it doesn’t bother me.” These informants are using a variety of time saving or time-buying strategies (Nickols and Fox 1983; Strober and Weinberg 1980) to reduce the amount of time they spend performing household chores.

However, other informants also spoke of their efforts to prevent the unwise use of time on their parts. For instance, some informants recognize the potential to waste time and effort in the meal preparation process. Jay states:

But yeah, if I... if I make something at home, yeah, I probably almost will look at it and say, God, you know, what... what a waste if I spend all this time putting something together and then I'm just gonna scarf it down, you know, in a few minutes. So yeah, I guess in... in a sense... the microwaveable meals are nice because I spend no time preparing it. Um... but then again, the quality of the food's pretty crap so... yeah, I guess you know, you get what you put the effort into.

And Jesse also recognizes the amount of time she wastes cooking just for herself. “I’d love to do it, but I guess I just don’t do it, I don’t feel like there’s justification for it when I could just do something in half the time.” They see the act of cooking big, involved meals as a waste of time even though they would much rather consume bigger and more involved meals; however, they simply cannot rationalize the time spent creating such meals for only one person. It is not only about time savings, but also about using their time wisely, particularly since the single-person is responsible for maintaining the household, for the most part, by themselves.

***Wasting Natural Resources:*** Any mention of waste in the current era of American culture would not be complete without a mention of environmental waste or the waste of our natural resources. A number of my informants, unprompted, brought up that they are sickened by the rampant waste perpetrated by the culture and state their desires to prevent such waste. Todd wants to use less energy. “You know, I don’t use lights all over the house... I tend to conserve water. I use the microwave instead of the stove because the stove takes a while to heat up. I may... I mean, I do, out of a conscious effort, I try not to be wasteful.” Beth also attempts to conserve: “I try not to be wasteful either. I mean, just thinking about... well, it’s just me in the apartment, I don’t need lights on everywhere.”

Wesley ranted about the packaging of foods in the grocery store, claiming that there is simply too much of it and too many types of plastic packaging that simply cannot be recycled. “Yeah, to me, packaging waste is a pretty important thing,” he says. “I tell you, any store that would be a lot more aware of package recycling and just... by carrying good food, they would get all my business.” Wesley was not the only individual to complain about the glut of packaging and other forms of waste on the grocery shelves. When asked how he prepares to go to the grocery store, Jay answered, “I guess, well I recently bought... us for environmental reasons I wanna quit, I wanna quit using plastic or paper bags, and so I bought some cloth bags.” Kent brought up the notion of packaging in his interview. “Ummm... yeah... you get to a lot of foods that are convenience foods and that type of thing and you have a lot more packaging,” he states. “I don’t know if you can make a feasible product anyway that would... you know... that would still be reasonably priced between packaging costs and getting rid of all that extra packaging.” The individuals in this study, in one form or another, held some desire to reduce

their own part in the waste running rampant within American culture and even desired to see grocery stores begin the process of reducing that waste as well.

Wasting takes many forms. Individuals may waste the food that they purchase and do not have the time or the wherewithal to consume, and as a result they waste the money they spent to purchase it. They also find that they sometimes waste time in the preparation process and feel like they waste time throughout the grocery shopping trip. Additionally, there is a sense that they are playing a part in laying waste to the environment, and there is a concerted effort on their part to reverse that trend. As such, grocery shopping and mealtime consumption have become a contested arena in which they find themselves navigating these collective activities from an individual's perspective. In the next section, the mealtime and grocery shopping strategies individuals utilize are described in an effort to cut down on their waste.

## **DISCUSSION**

As we have shown here, there are different agendas at play among the different constituents within the green advertising hierarchy. At the macro-level, green advertising attempts to exhort consumers and other entities to help save the planet by salvaging nature, stopping global warming, ceasing pollution, and ultimately saving ourselves in the process. This is, of course, a noble endeavor; however, consumers have a different agenda at play. They are less concerned, it seems, with saving planet than they are with saving their own little part of it by not wasting the resources that they are consuming. It is in this set of differing and often competing agendas that there exists a green gap we define as the gap between the green-oriented intentions of differing entities.

### **Consumer Saving Agenda**

One of the issues most closely associated with the green gap is the gap between what a consumer intends to do and what a consumer actually does (Richardson 2011). In other words, a consumer may have the desire to be green and may in fact state that desire quite adamantly, but a closer look at that consumer's attempts to be green reveals that there is a gap between intention and follow-through. The crux of this particular gap may lie in how macro-level green advertising may not be addressing the micro-level agenda of consumers, particularly as it relates to shopping for and purchasing goods.

It is through various shopping activities that consumers fill their coffers and stock their cupboards and maintain the many and varied needs of the household and the people living within its walls. Often, we shop for the best deals and the best prices (Archibald, Haulman, and Moody 1983; Granbois 1977) in a utilitarian process that, for many, ties self-worth to the amount of money saved on a great bargain. This utilitarian notion of shopping is associated with the “work of shopping. It is a rational (Batra and Ahtola 1991) undertaking performed by homo economicus (Sherry 1990) that ultimately results in a decision to purchase or to not purchase. The utilitarian paradigm is one that is based upon “the assumption of a goal-directed, information processing consumer” (Granbois 1977, 259).

One of the principles underlying this economic or utilitarian view of shopping (as just one aspect of consumer behavior) is that shoppers buy in such a way as to acquire the most at the least possible cost. In fact, the notion of the competent shopper (Mallalieu and Palan 2006) is one that makes good shopping decisions concerning prices, styles, and durability and does so within a particular budget. Consumers seek to make purchases at the lowest cost possible holding quality constant. It is this view of shopping and saving that Miller (1998) defines as “the specific search for lower prices based on systematic comparative shopping” (49). In so doing,

one of the primary concerns is the notion of price and, specifically, of finding and acquiring the lowest possible price for the goods obtained.

Furthermore, the objective of any consumer search, according to Archibald, Haulman, and Moody (1983, 347), “is to locate a ‘good buy,’ defined as a high quality product sold at a relatively low price.” Consumer decisions, in short, are made within this context of finding a good buy or a good deal that allows them to save money as well as time, effort, and other resources. Green advertising, at least on the macro-level, may not provide enough information to help consumers make micro-level decisions that will allow them to save those resources.

### **Waste and Waste-Avoidance**

Aside from challenging green advertisers to reframe their advertisements to help consumers save their own part of the world, this study contributes to a more general marketing literature by introducing the notion of waste-avoidance within the green-consumer mindset. Consumer behavior is often described as the acquisition and consumption of goods, expending little effort on the disposal of goods. Here, the disposal or prevention of wasteful disposal appears to be the key influence on the meal consumption and grocery shopping strategies employed by the informants.

Waste, in this study, is referred to in two distinct ways. First of all, there is the idea of waste as an unwise use of resources. This notion of waste involves individuals consuming in a way that may be deemed careless and often involves the wasting of both physical and non-physical resources (Winthrop 1980). Given this definition of waste, individuals may waste time, effort, money, food, opportunities, talents, natural resources, and a host of other possibilities. This actually aligns with the intent of green advertising and green advertisers who while attempting to save the planet are also attempting to promote not wasting the planet’s resources.

A simple reframing of the message to help individual consumers learn how to not waste their own resources will, perhaps, reduce the gap in agendas.

Second, waste includes all those items that have faded from usefulness through misuse, disuse, or deterioration. Food is a major source of household waste as is the packaging that our consumer items are packaged in. It is also a major source of a more macro-oriented industrial or institutional waste. The way food is manufactured in the United States is incredibly wasteful (Bryce 2009; Lappé 2009) in terms of oil and water usage, land abuses, and other resource issues. Again, reframing green messages in a way that demonstrates the amount of waste that is produced as a result of the way food and other products are manufactured would help to align the competing macro and micro level agendas.

## **CONCLUSION**

What we have presented in this paper is an exploration of the green gap as it pertains to the differing agendas of distinct entities within the green advertising hierarchies, specifically the macro-level agenda of green advertisers who are seeking the salvation of the planet and the micro-level agenda of consumers who are simply trying to avoid wasting their own corner of the same planet. Unfortunately, these two agendas are often at odds with one another, but a simple reframing of the message may be all it takes to bring these competing agendas more into alignment. However, we did not discuss a third entity within this hierarchy, that being the meso-level agenda of the corporations that seek to promote their brands, products and/or services utilizing a “green” message. Future research should take this part of the dynamic into account when addressing each of these competing agendas.

Additionally, future research should investigate consumer wastefulness and attempts to avoid such wastefulness. Americans in general generate quite a bit of waste. In 1980, it was

estimated that Americans produced over seventy percent of the world's solid waste and approximately 224 million tons of food waste (Borghese 1981). More recently, researchers estimate that each American household is responsible for approximately 1.28 pounds of food waste in a given day, not including the scraps that are given to pets, placed in compost piles, or simply dumped down the garbage disposal (Jones et al. 2002). That amounts to approximately 467.2 pounds of wasted food in each household per year and costs a family of four about \$589.67 annually (Jones 2004). As these results indicate, food waste is a big issue in American households especially from a public policy perspective, as a recovery of ten percent of this waste could easily feed about eight million people (Kantor , Lipton, Manchester, and Oliveira 1997). Cutting down on the amount of waste in our culture would help both green advertisers and consumers to achieve their goals.

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## APPENDIX: GREEN ADS ANALYZED







[www.greenpeace.org.il](http://www.greenpeace.org.il)

GREENPEACE



WHITE IS THE NEW GREEN

EMPTY YOUR BOTTLE WHITE REACHES  
ONE HUNDRED MILLION PLASTIC BOTTLES  
REACHING THE OCEAN. IN THE PAST, GREENPEACE  
ACTIVISTS HAVE BEEN SPOTTED SWIMMING  
BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THE  
OCEAN, WHILE OTHERS ACT AS THE  
GUARDIANS OF THE COAST. NOW, GREENPEACE  
ACTIVISTS ARE IN ACTION AT A DUSTY SITE.

GREENPEACE





RUBBISH CAN BE RECYCLED. NATURE CANNOT.



for a living planet





The first signs of global warming are now clearly visible. We urgently need to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Nothing and no one will be spared from climate change. This warning is therefore to all people, all countries and, in particular, to the Belgian Council of Ministers who on the weekend of March 20 and 21 will have to decide what action to take regarding essential measures linked to the Kyoto Protocols.



IF YOU DON'T PRESERVE NATURE BY INSTALLING SOLAR PANELS, WHO WILL?

Today, with simple everyday actions, everyone can help protect the environment and save power at the same time! For more information go to [www.edf-nature.com](http://www.edf-nature.com)







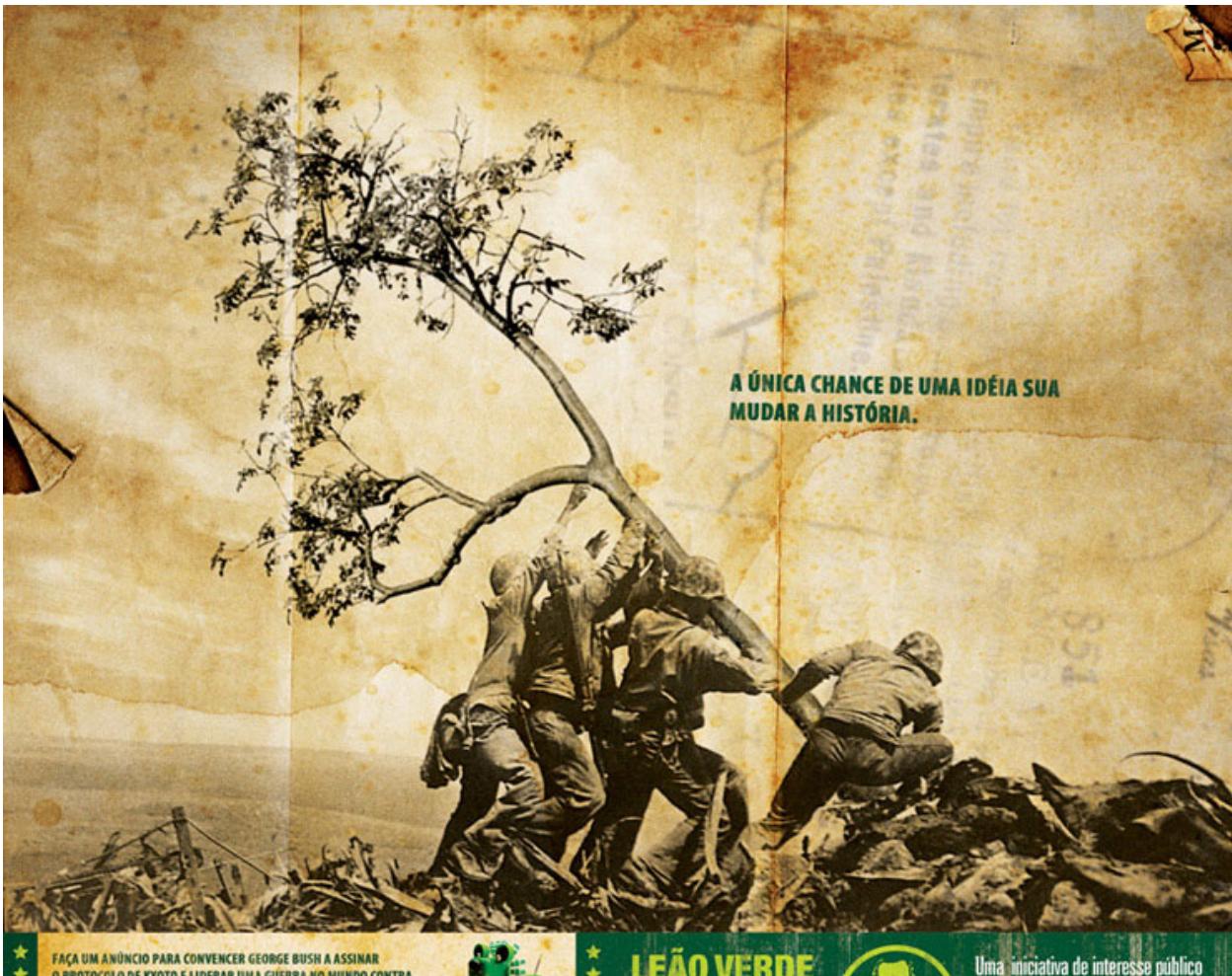
**MEAT'S  
NOT  
GREEN**

Save the planet. Go vegan! **peta2**  
FREE FOR ALL

Lockers: © iStockphoto.com/Joseph C. Justice Jr.

A green chicken stands on a row of white school lockers. To the left of the chicken, there is a graphic of a wall made of lockers with the text "MEAT'S NOT GREEN" overlaid. The "NOT GREEN" part is in green, matching the chicken's feathers. Below this, the text "Save the planet. Go vegan!" is followed by the peta2 logo and the tagline "FREE FOR ALL". The chicken is facing towards the right. The background shows a row of white lockers.





A ÚNICA CHANCE DE UMA IDÉIA SUA  
MUDAR A HISTÓRIA.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FAÇA UM ANÚNCIO PARA CONVENCER GEORGE BUSH A ASSINAR O PROTOCOLO DE KYOTO E LIDERAR UMA GUERRA NO MUNDO CONTRA O AQUECIMENTO GLOBAL. A MELHOR PEÇA GANHA 2 PASSAGENS, ESTADIA E INSCRIÇÕES PARA O FESTIVAL DE CANNES. ACESSE [WWW.LEAOVERDE2007.COM.BR](http://WWW.LEAOVERDE2007.COM.BR) E VEJA O REGULAMENTO.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

PARTICIPE. MANDE O SEU ANÚNCIO DE 2 DE ABRIL A 2 DE MAIO DE 2007.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

**LEÃO VERDE**  
**2007**



Uma iniciativa de interesse público  
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Idéias que movem pessoas.