Tracking the Effects of Groundswell Communication on the Attitudinal and Purchasing Behaviour of Consumers of Eco-Friendly Products

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Abstract: The expansion of the dialogue and individual customer values due to active development of digital communication, which is related to innovation of digital communication and its integration into all areas of marketing communication, requires examination of emotions and emotional responses in the “business - online community - customer” communication process. Globalization but also the development of digital technologies have led to the integration of traditional and digital presentation of business entities into a unified whole, contributing to the emergence of the currently popular phenomenon of the groundswell. The presence of new forms of social interaction, particularly in the realm of social media, supports the creation and dissemination of so-called community communication about businesses and their products, often without their knowledge. As a result of this phenomenon and the possibility of quickly obtaining information and comparing companies across various online channels, there is a change in consumer behaviour. The groundswell defines a new trend in communication between organizations and unofficial institutions (fans, customers, consumers), which has a significant impact on business in any industry. The popularity of environmental issues, negative news about global warming, and the occurrence of increasingly frequent earthquakes and stormy tornadoes, force consumers to become educated in the environmental field. However, the spread of hoaxes and false information about eco-products can be a problem. Social media users become victims of community opinion, and their belief in the need for eco-friendly behaviour in the purchasing process often has a decreasing tendency. Uncoordinated management of the groundswell indicates a societal issue, which is why the authors of the research article aimed to investigate and systematically describe the impact of groundswell activities on previously environmentally conscious customers, as well as on customers who were unaware of eco-products. In their scientific study, the authors present the findings of theoretical research aimed at ecological brands, products and users who have been exposed to the effect of groundswell as well as the potential of neuromarketing usage in the given field. The authors also provide general recommendations for ecologically oriented brands in the field of managing groundswell communication.

Keywords: Attitude Change, Consumer Behaviour, Ecoproducts, Groundswell, Neuromarketing.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the growing concern regarding environmental sustainability has resulted in a significant surge in consumer demand for environmentally friendly products (Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017). Simultaneously, the emergence and widespread adoption of social media platforms, online forums, blogs, and consumer review websites have facilitated the exchange of information and opinions among consumers, leading to a phenomenon known as groundswell communication (Zaušková and Ščepková, 2022). This form of communication possesses the potential to influence consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour, particularly in relation to environmentally friendly products. The purpose of this article is to examine and monitor the impacts of groundswell communication on consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour concerning environmentally friendly products.

Groundswell communication is characterized by interactions among peers, content generated by users, and online communities. Through these channels, consumers have the opportunity to share their experiences, recommendations, and concerns regarding environmentally friendly products. The influence of groundswell communication on consumer attitudes is rooted in psychological factors such as social influence, trust, and credibility (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). When individuals observe their peers expressing positive attitudes and engaging in sustainable purchasing behaviour, they are more inclined to adopt similar attitudes and behaviours themselves, and vice-versa, negative attitudes may cause a relevant response.

The impact of groundswell communication on consumer purchasing behaviour can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, it can directly affect the decision-making process by providing consumers with pertinent information, product recommendations, and comparisons (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). The availability of online reviews, ratings, and testimonials empowers consumers to make well-informed choices when selecting environmentally friendly products. Secondly, groundswell communication can influence brand loyalty and repeat purchases. Favourable online discussions and shared experiences contribute to the establishment of trust.
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and emotional connections between consumers and environmentally friendly brands (Herbes, Beuthner and Ramme, 2018). The monitoring of the effects of groundswell communication on consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour holds great significance for businesses and marketers operating in the environmentally friendly product sector. By comprehending the mechanisms through which groundswell communication operates, companies can effectively engage with their target audience, raise brand awareness, and promote sustainable consumer behaviour. This research aims to offer valuable insights and recommendations for businesses aiming to utilize groundswell communication strategies in order to better fulfil the expectations and preferences of environmentally conscious consumers.

2. Theoretical background

In our paper, several key terminologies will be employed to examine the ramifications of groundswell communication on the attitudes and purchasing conduct of consumers in relation to eco-friendly products. It is imperative to elucidate these terms in order to ensure clarity and comprehension among readers.

- **Groundswell communication**: First things first, we need to state what is groundswell communication. Groundswell communication denotes the interactive dissemination of information, opinions, and experiences among consumers through diverse online platforms, including social media outlets, online forums, blogs, and consumer review websites (Shabana and Firoz, 2019). It represents the collective voice of consumers, providing them with a forum to exchange and deliberate upon their perspectives and encounters pertaining to specific products or subjects.

- **Attitudinal behaviour**: Attitudinal behaviour encompasses the cognitive, affective, and evaluative responses manifested by individuals towards specific entities, such as eco-friendly products (Ajzen, 2005). It encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, and intentions that shape an individual’s decision-making process and subsequent actions with regard to the adoption or rejection of a product or conduct.

- **Purchasing behaviour**: Purchasing behaviour refers to the actions and choices made by consumers when acquiring products or services (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2018). It encompasses factors such as purchase frequency, brand loyalty, product preferences, and the influence of external factors, such as advertising or recommendations from acquaintances.

In our paper we are focusing on eco-friendly products and their consumers, so some background on the chosen segment is also appropriate. One of the principal catalysts driving the demand for eco-friendly products is the growing recognition of environmental issues and the imperative to mitigate the adverse consequences of human activities on the planet (Fraccascia, Ceccarelli and Dangelico, 2023). Consumers are acknowledging the significance of embracing more sustainable consumption patterns to curb pollution, conserve natural resources, and diminish carbon emissions. Consumers are progressively apprehensive about the potentially detrimental effects of conventional products containing toxic chemicals and pollutants (De Canio et al., 2021). Eco-friendly alternatives, such as organic food, natural skincare products, and non-toxic cleaning agents, are perceived as safer options that promote personal well-being.

Ethical concerns also impel the demand for eco-friendly products (Chi, 2022). They endeavor to align their purchasing behavior with their values, favoring products that champion social responsibility and contribute to the welfare of communities and the environment. The significance of eco-friendly products transcends individual consumer preferences as it resonates with governmental and regulatory bodies, which have instituted policies and incentives aimed at promoting sustainability and mitigating the environmental impact of industries (Ready and Truelove, 2011). Businesses that embrace eco-friendly practices and offer sustainable products stand to benefit from favorable regulations, access to new markets, and the enhancement of brand reputation.

Groundswell communication can be shared by users through various channels on the web. Among them are:

- **Social media platforms**, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, are among the most used ones (Statista, 2023). Only on Facebook, for example, more than half a million comments are being posted every minute (Kohout et al., 2023). They have emerged as prominent conduits for groundswell communication. Users can share their experiences with eco-friendly products, proffer product recommendations, and engage in discussions with like-minded individuals (Zaušková et al., 2022). Social media platforms furnish a space for consumers to voice their opinions, raise awareness about sustainability concerns, and cultivate a sense of community among individuals committed to environmental consciousness.
Groundswell communication exerts a notable influence on consumer attitudes towards eco-friendly products. The consumption of others' experiences can influence consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour (Dong et al., 2023). User-generated content and social proof manifest an increased inclination to make purchases and embrace sustainable consumption practices. Positive peer recommendations serve as significant channels for groundswell communication (Kozinets, 2010). By observing their peers' positive experiences and engaging in sustainable purchasing behaviour through groundswell communication channels, individuals are more likely to adopt similar attitudes and behaviours themselves (De Vries et al., 2012). Peer recommendations act as social proof, enhancing the perceived value and desirability of eco-friendly products. The significance of social proof in propelling sales of eco-friendly products through groundswell communication cannot be overstated. Consumers often rely on the experiences and opinions of others to shape their decision-making processes, particularly when personal experiences are lacking (Helversen et al., 2018). By witnessing that others have encountered positive experiences with these products, consumers manifest an increased inclination to make purchases and embrace sustainable consumption practices.

User-generated content, including reviews, ratings, and testimonials, also play a significant role in shaping consumer attitudes (Dong et al., 2023). The consumption of others' experiences can influence consumer perceptions of product quality, performance, and overall satisfaction. Positive user-generated content not only imparts valuable information but also contributes to the cultivation of trust and credibility in eco-friendly brands and their products (Chen & Xie, 2013). Moreover, consumers gain access to a diverse array of product attributes, advantages, and performance evaluations through user-generated content, discussions, and recommendations (Helversen et al., 2018). This wealth of information empowers consumers to make well-informed choices tailored to their specific needs and preferences. By comprehending the distinctive selling points of eco-friendly products, consumers can evaluate their alignment with personal values and sustainability objectives.

Online communities fostered by groundswell communication platforms further impact consumer attitudes. These communities bring together individuals with a shared interest in eco-friendly products, creating spaces for discourse, support, and information exchange. By actively engaging in these communities, consumers gain access to a diverse array of perspectives, insights, and recommendations (Hajli, 2014). Interaction with like-minded individuals who prioritize sustainability reinforces and strengthens consumer attitudes towards eco-friendly products, fostering a sense of belonging and underscoring the significance of sustainable choices. Groundswell communication may also influence consumer brand loyalty. Positive experiences shared by consumers on groundswell communication platforms contribute to the development of trust and loyalty towards eco-friendly brands (Wang et al., 2022). When consumers perceive a brand to be trustworthy, dedicated to sustainability, and responsive to customer feedback, their propensity to become loyal advocates and repeat customers is heightened (Fe, 2023). The sense of community fostered by groundswell communication platforms...
further fortifies brand loyalty, as consumers feel a sense of connection with like-minded individuals who share similar values and preferences.

To support our statements above, let’s take a look at some statistics gathered in external publications and agencies’ surveys.

- The findings of a survey conducted by BrightLocal (2023) demonstrate that a substantial majority of consumers, specifically 87%, engage in the practice of reading online reviews for local businesses. Moreover, the survey reveals that the purchasing decisions of 93% of consumers are influenced by online reviews.
- In alignment with these results, a survey conducted by Podium (2017) affirms that 93% of consumers perceive online reviews as impactful on their purchasing decisions, while 82% assert that the quality of a company’s reviews directly shapes their trust in said company.
- Supporting the significance of reviews, Bazaarvoice’s study (2022) reveals that products boasting average ratings of 4 stars or higher exhibit a nearly fourfold increase in the likelihood of being purchased when compared to products with ratings below 4 stars.
- Insights provided by Nielsen (2015) indicate that a notable 66% of consumers are willing to allocate additional financial resources towards products and services offered by companies that espouse positive social and environmental impacts.
- Expanding the scope of influence, various articles (Cheng et al., 2020) reveals that consumers who actively engage with online communities centered around eco-friendly products demonstrate a higher propensity for brand loyalty and recurrent purchase behavior.
- The older research conducted by McKnight and Chervany (2002) substantiates the notion that consumers are more inclined to trust and be influenced by recommendations originating from individuals they perceive as similar to themselves.

These statistics underscore the considerable impact of groundswell communication, notably through online reviews, ratings, and peer recommendations, on consumer purchasing behavior and show the paramount significance of social proof, and thus groundswell communication and marketing in driving sales of eco-friendly products.

From the information above we may summarize, that groundswell communication enables consumers to develop trust and credibility in eco-friendly brands. The transparent and authentic nature of user-generated content allows consumers to evaluate others’ experiences and opinions (Yang et al., 2023). Consistent positive reviews and recommendations from multiple sources increase the likelihood of individuals trusting the brand and perceiving it as credible. This trust and credibility have an impact on consumer attitudes by shaping a positive brand image, enhancing perceptions of the brand’s commitment to sustainability, and instilling confidence in the eco-friendliness of its products.

4. Usage of neuromarketing for tracking the effects of groundswell communication

Neuromarketing techniques offer a unique perspective for tracking and understanding the effects of groundswell communication on consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour. This can be especially relevant related to eco-friendly products, since their communication usually includes focus on the features those products have or include. By examining neural responses, emotional engagement, and subconscious associations, neuromarketing provides valuable insights into the underlying processes that drive consumer decision-making. The field of neuromarketing is vast and in this part of our paper we want to mention some neuromarketing tools and techniques which neuromarketing can be utilized to track the effects of groundswell communication:

1. EEG (Electroencephalography): EEG measures electrical brain activity and can track attention, engagement, and emotional responses. By analyzing EEG data, researchers can identify changes in brainwave patterns associated with groundswell communication exposure.
2. Eye Tracking: Eye tracking technology enables the measurement and analysis of consumers' visual attention and gaze patterns. It helps determine which elements of groundswell communication draw the most attention and guide subsequent actions.
Facial Expression Analysis: Facial expression analysis software tracks and analyzes micro-expressions to gauge consumers’ emotional responses to groundswell communication. By identifying specific emotions, such as happiness or surprise, researchers can assess the effectiveness of the communication in eliciting desired emotional reactions.

Neuroimaging (fMRI): Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) (Bozek et al., 2023) measures brain activity by detecting changes in blood flow. It can provide insights into consumers’ cognitive and emotional responses to groundswell communication.

Galvanic Skin Response (GSR): GSR measures changes in skin conductance, reflecting participants’ emotional arousal and engagement. By monitoring GSR during exposure to groundswell communication, researchers can assess emotional reactions and identify content that elicits stronger responses.

Biometric Wearables: Biometric wearables, such as heart rate monitors and skin temperature sensors, provide real-time physiological data related to consumers’ emotional and physical responses. By collecting biometric data during groundswell communication exposure, researchers can assess the impact on consumers’ physiological arousal levels and overall engagement.

Implicit Priming: Implicit priming techniques (Morgan et al., 2022) involve presenting subtle environmental cues to influence subsequent attitudes and behaviour. In the context of groundswell communication, implicit priming can be used to assess the impact of exposure to eco-friendly content on consumers’ subsequent attitudes and choices.

The usage of certain techniques should always be decided based on a specific need of the brand and the product. As we can see, there are many ways in which consumers’ emotions may be researched, and the selection of the most appropriate may result in the best outcome for the brand and the product. For the purpose of this article, we were not able to find a complex study that researches tracking the effects of neuromarketing communication using neuromarketing techniques. However, we think that neuromarketing may help to understand insights of customers’ groundswell communication, and the information provided can serve as a starting point for further research in this field.

5. Case Studies

In this part of our paper, we want to demonstrate examples of real case studies of how groundswell communication can influence consumer behaviour in the eco-friendly product sector. By researching real experiences from the market, other brands may get valuable insight into why and how they should approach groundswell communication. Here are a few notable examples:

5.1 Patagonia's Worn Wear Campaign

Patagonia’s Worn Wear campaign was an innovative initiative that aimed to promote sustainability and reduce environmental impact by encouraging customers to repair and reuse their Patagonia products rather than purchasing new ones. The campaign focused on engaging customers through groundswell communication channels, such as social media platforms, online forums, and the Patagonia website. The Worn Wear campaign effectively utilized groundswell communication by creating a community of environmentally-conscious consumers who shared their stories and experiences. Customers were encouraged to upload photos, videos, and personal narratives showcasing their repaired and well-loved Patagonia gear. The campaign went beyond mere advertising and connected customers on a personal level, fostering a sense of pride and loyalty among Patagonia enthusiasts.

Figure 1: Patagonia “Worn Wear” campaign creative
But what impact, if any, did this campaign have? The Patagonia’s Worn Wear Surf Tour advertisements, which were a part of the campaign in 2018, were exposed to a considerable audience of 4,694,206 individuals throughout Europe through Facebook and Instagram advertising. The engagement with these advertisements amounted to 256,574 interactions, and a total of 16,863 users were motivated to click through and access the surf-related content on the Patagonia website. Notably, the utilization of Facebook as a promotional platform proved highly effective, as social advertisements accounted for 66% of all event responses in France, Spain, and the UK (Nativve, 2018). According to Batten (2020), Patagonia has reportedly sold approximately 120,000 repurposed items during the campaign. It has been suggested by some estimations that opting to purchase used garments instead of new ones has the potential to reduce an individual’s carbon footprint related to apparel by as much as 60%. Additionally, a 10% increase in second-hand sales, resulting in a 50% extension of garment life, could lead to a 3% reduction in carbon emissions per tonne of clothing and a 4% decrease in water usage (WRAP, 2017). However, it is important to note that these figures may vary depending on the duration of the product’s extended lifespan and the patterns of its use, including frequency of washing (Circular X, 2020). The overall engagement surrounding these events contributed to the expansion of the Patagonia Surf audience, thereby enhancing the potential for future campaigns. As we may see from the numbers above, campaigns that engage users’ groundswell communication concerning eco topics have a vast potential on the market. Based on the numbers from above, the engagement rate was almost 5.5%. Considering the type of distribution and topic of the campaign, we consider it to be good, once again showing the prominence of groundswell communication in the field. Another conclusion we may state is that social advertisements are also a good way of engaging users in groundswell communication with the brand since in researched campaign around two-thirds of all responses came from ads.

5.2 Method’s People Against Dirty Campaign

Method, a household cleaning product brand, launched the People Against Dirty campaign, leveraging groundswell communication to raise awareness about the harmful chemicals found in traditional cleaning products. The campaign aimed to position Method as a socially responsible and eco-friendly alternative in the cleaning product market. The People Against Dirty campaign utilized various groundswell communication channels, including social media platforms, online forums, and user-generated content. Method engaged consumers by encouraging them to share their experiences, concerns, and preferences regarding cleaning products and their impact on the environment and personal health. People Against Dirty adeptly stimulated individuals to reevaluate their perception of cleanliness, educated them about the effectiveness of green chemistry, and even encouraged them to clean in the nude using non-petroleum-based products. The strategic implementation of a single magazine insert effectively showcased the essence, products, philosophy, and mission of Method, leading to a remarkable 20% increase in sales. Impressively, this boost in sales was sustained at a 15% increment (Odysseus Arms), underscoring the profound impact of the campaign on revolutionizing a conventional yet flawed commodity.

![Figure 2: Method’s people against dirty campaign creative](image)
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The success of Method’s People Against Dirty campaign can be attributed to their strategic use of groundswell communication. By tapping into the growing consumer concern for the environment and health, Method created a dialogue that resonated with their target audience. Through the campaign, Method not only educated consumers about the potential harms of traditional cleaning products but also positioned themselves as a viable and sustainable alternative. Method’s campaign is a great example of how a brand may increase sales while creating a good public image of the brand without breaking the bank completely. By using groundswell communication, Method was able to create better connections with the customers, building trust in their relationship due to the helpful information they were sharing, while also gaining a remarkable increase in their sales. This campaign shows us the giant potential that groundswell communication brings with itself in the field of eco products if used correctly and appropriately by the brand.

6. Implications and recommendations

The findings regarding the effects of groundswell communication on consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour in the eco-friendly product sector have significant implications for businesses, marketers, and eco-friendly product manufacturers. Understanding these implications can help companies effectively leverage groundswell communication to engage with consumers, build trust, and drive sustainable consumer behaviour. Based on the information we were able to collect in our paper, the following recommendations for businesses, both small and big, can be made:

- **Embrace and Leverage Groundswell Communication:** Actively engaging with consumers on these channels provides the potential to create meaningful connections, encourage discussions, and share relevant information about eco-friendly products. By embracing and leveraging groundswell communication, businesses can tap into the collective knowledge and experiences of consumers, building brand loyalty and advocacy.

- **Foster Online Communities and Influencer Partnerships:** Companies can create and nurture online communities centered around eco-friendly products, where consumers can connect, share insights, and support each other. Additionally, partnering with influencers who align with the brand’s values and have a strong presence on social media can amplify the reach and impact of groundswell communication. Influencers can serve as authentic advocates, providing personal experiences and recommendations that resonate with their followers.

- **Monitor and Respond to Consumer Feedback:** As we described earlier, customer feedback and reviews play a giant role in the purchasing decision-making of other consumers. Actively monitoring consumer conversations and feedback on social media platforms, online reviews on platforms like Yelp or Google, and other groundswell communication channels, while may seem insignificant, brings a lot of potential for attracting new customers. It is also important to respond promptly and transparently, both to positive and negative reactions, to address any concerns, provide clarifications, and demonstrate a commitment to customer satisfaction to show that the company values consumer opinions and fosters a sense of trust and credibility.

- **Encourage User-Generated Content:** Companies should encourage consumers to create and share user-generated content related to their eco-friendly products. This can include testimonials, reviews, photos, videos, and success stories. User-generated content serves as powerful social proof and can influence the attitudes and purchasing decisions of others.

- **Incorporate Neuromarketing Research:** Utilizing neuromarketing research techniques may help brands to gain deeper insights into consumer behavior and emotional responses. This can involve studying consumer reactions to eco-friendly product messaging, packaging, and branding through neuroimaging, eye-tracking, and physiological measurements. Understanding the subconscious triggers and emotional drivers behind consumer behavior can help companies tailor their marketing efforts more effectively.

7. In conclusion

Groundswell communication has emerged as a powerful force in shaping consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour in the eco-friendly product sector. Through various channels such as social media platforms, online forums, user-generated content, and influencer marketing, consumers are actively engaging in discussions, sharing experiences, and influencing the opinions of others. In our article we have explored the effects of
groundswell communication on consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour, highlighting its significance in driving sustainable consumer behaviour and the success of eco-friendly product brands.

By actively participating in conversations, fostering online communities, partnering with influencers, and encouraging user-generated content, companies can effectively engage with consumers, build trust, and drive positive brand perceptions. The impact of groundswell communication on consumer attitudes is evident through the role of peer recommendations, user-generated content, and online communities in shaping perceptions, trust, and credibility. Consumers rely on the experiences and opinions of others to make informed decisions, and groundswell communication provides a platform for sharing and accessing this valuable information. Moreover, the influence of groundswell communication extends to consumer purchasing behaviour, with online reviews, ratings, and social proof playing a significant role in driving sales of eco-friendly products.

We also provided information on how neuromarketing can be used while working with groundswell marketing and communication. By utilizing tools such as EEG, eye tracking, implicit association testing, facial expression analysis, neuroimaging (fMRI), galvanic skin response (GSR), biometric wearables, and implicit priming, researchers can track neural responses, emotional engagement, and subconscious associations, providing a deeper understanding of consumer decision-making processes. This approach provides a unique perspective and enables brands to optimize their groundswell communication strategies, resulting in more effective and impactful campaigns. By leveraging the power of neuromarketing, brands can enhance their understanding of consumers and tailor their communication efforts to drive positive attitudes and behaviours. Examples such as the Patagonia Common Threads Initiative and Method’s People Against Dirty campaign marketing have showcased how companies can successfully leverage groundswell communication to drive positive attitudes and increased sales.

To conclude, groundswell communication has become a vital tool for businesses and marketers seeking to engage with consumers and drive sustainable consumer behaviour in the eco-friendly product sector. By understanding the implications and recommendations outlined in this article, companies can harness the power of groundswell communication to better connect with their target audience, build trust, increase sales and ultimately contribute to a more sustainable future.

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