

Marketing Communication about Sustainable Fashion

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The Effects of Construal Level Theory on Marketing Communication about Sustainable
Fashion

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Abstract

The recent increase of low-cost fashion production has severe negative impacts on our environment. Consumers often are aware of this, yet largely refrain from purchasing sustainably produced fashion. This study examined how Construal Level Theory could be employed to increase consumers' attitude towards sustainable fashion and purchase intention of sustainable fashion. This theory suggests that consumers think in psychologically close (low construal) and psychologically distant (high construal) levels. Consumers are thought to think in a low construal level when shopping, which was confirmed by a pre-test. Five slogans containing a low vs. high construal element, minimizing psychological distance and containing the elements low-high vs. high-low have been constructed to assess the use of construal level in marketing communication. None of the slogans showed a significant effect on attitude towards and purchase intention of sustainable fashion. Other factors such as temporal orientation of the consumers were looked at, and significant effects were found. This implies that Construal Level Theory might not be a useful tool to change consumers attitude towards and purchase intention of sustainable fashion, yet might impact other factors that can potentially be useful in marketing communication.

Keywords: sustainable fashion, Construal Level Theory, marketing communication

Introduction

In recent years, cheap mass production of apparel has increased tremendously. By outsourcing labour to low-cost production countries, fashion brands are able to produce large amounts of extremely low-priced textiles (Frankel, 2007). With this steady supply of inexpensive fashion, consumers are constantly triggered to participate in fashion trends and wear most items only a few times before purchasing new ones (McAfee, Dessain & Sjoeman, 2004). Niinimäki (2009) argues, that this could result in unsustainable buying behaviour, as consumers often do not take into account the consequences of unsustainable fashion. Not only are workers in low-cost production countries often exploited, large quantities of water, fuel and pesticides are required for textile production, which has severe impacts on the environment (Fletcher, 2008, p.7). There is a growing awareness for such problems, which results in a growing demand for and increased production of sustainable fashion (Joergens, 2006; Niinimäki, 2010). Despite this, in 2007, sustainable fashion still only accounted for 1% of the global apparel industry (Lipson, 2008).

There are several reasons for consumers to refrain from purchasing sustainable apparel. Kang and Kim (2013) have identified financial reasons to be the greatest barrier for consumers, as sustainable fashion is seen to be rather high-priced. Other research confirms these findings (Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi, 2010; Attalla, 2001; Joergens, 2006; Kang, Liu & Kim, 2013). Most consumers have a positive attitude towards sustainable fashion, yet this is usually not reflected in buying behaviour. This attitude-behaviour gap could be explained by the financial barrier, yet there might be additional explanations. Attalla (2001) pointed out, that consumers are often unconvinced that their buying behaviour as individuals can contribute to significant improvements. Recent research showed, that consumers' attitude towards sustainable fashion could become more positive, if they believed that their purchase behaviour could actually positively affect the environment (Kang et al., 2013).

Current marketing communication appears to have been unsuccessful in changing consumers' buying behaviour. More efficient marketing communication could not only stimulate more consumers to purchase sustainable fashion, but could also indirectly decrease the production of unsustainable fashion. The latter could have significant positive effects on the environment (Fletcher, 2008, p. 125) and is therefore of significant interest to society as a whole. The aim of present research is to improve marketing communication about sustainable apparel. This is hoped to be achieved by means of Construal Level Theory.

Construal Level Theory

Construal Level Theory proposes that people form mental representations of objects or events: ‘construals’. They can range from high to low, depending on the psychological distance a person has to an object or event (Trope & Liberman, 2003, 2010; Liberman & Trope, 2008; Trope, Liberman & Wakslak, 2007; Dhar & Kim, 2007). If an object or event is psychologically near, it would be a low construal and if it is psychologically distant it would be a high construal. Low construals tend to be rather concrete and context-based whereas high construals tend to be rather abstract and decontextualized (Trope et al., 2007). Construals can be seen as a continuous scale from low to high, yet for the purpose of this study, the extreme ends of the scale (low and high) will be taken into account to be able to show more distinct results.

Construals play a central role in processes of evaluation, prediction and an individual’s behaviour (Trope et al., 2007). When buying clothes, consumers usually base their choice on concrete, context-based details. When, for example, looking for a specific dress or jacket, consumers base their purchase decision rather on concrete factors such as price, colour or fit than on abstract factors such as environmental effects in the future or the carbon footprint. Therefore, shopping induces a low level construal.

Mental construals are impacted by four dimensions of psychological distance: time, space, social distance and hypotheticality (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Most research has examined the dimension of time (Trope & Liberman, 2000; Lutchyn & Yzer, 2011; Kim, Rao & Lee, 2009). This dimension suggests that there is a difference in abstraction of proximal and distal events (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Proximal events are those that seem temporally close to the self and have an effect in the here and now. Distant events seem temporally distant and have more long-term oriented effects. With regard to sustainable fashion, a proximal perspective could be ‘I will wear this dress to the party this weekend’ and a more distant perspective could be ‘buying this dress contributes to a more environmentally friendly future’. Distant events might be mentally represented in a more abstract, structured way, while proximal events might be represented in a more concrete manner (Lutchyn & Yzer, 2011). Supporting this view, Trope and Liberman (2000) found a positive interaction between temporal distance and abstractness in five different studies. In one of the experiments, participants were given either abstract or concrete instructions to rate a near or distant event. The results showed that the more distant an event, the more attractive the abstract instructions were to the participants (Trope & Liberman, 2000).

Especially with regard to this dimension of time, consumers could be in a low level construal when purchasing fashion. In most cases, marketing stresses the long term impacts of

sustainably produced fashion, such as a cleaner environment or the reduction of resource consumption (Fletcher, 2008; Joergens, 2006). These are rather abstract concepts, matching a high construal level and are therefore far from the self of the consumer in a purchase situation. Little current marketing communication about sustainable fashion seems to include low level construal information. It would therefore be interesting to evaluate the effects of a marketing message that matches the construal level of the consumer.

Congruency

Previous research suggests that a message is more persuasive if the construal level used in the message matches the construal level of the receiver (Katz & Byrne, 2013; Liberman, Trope & Wakslak, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Spence, Poortinga & Pidgeon, 2012; Martin, Gnoth & Strong, 2009). This situation is referred to as *congruency* between the message and the receiver. In their study on temporal framing and energy saving Tangari and Smith (2012) suggested that future-oriented consumers had a higher construal level and would be more open to distant arguments, such as long-term energy saving. They showed that future-oriented consumers were more influenced by the temporally distant message, than present-oriented consumers. These findings seem to support the effectiveness of a congruent message. Bar-Anan, Liberman, Trope and Algom (2007) also found, that participants were able to respond faster to tasks that were congruent with their psychological distance. In nine different experiments, participants were to classify words and pictures, and to decide on their temporal or spatial distance. It was found that congruency facilitated response capacity.

In line with this, Kim et al. (2009) examined why congruency may be beneficial. They found, that if the abstractness and temporal distance of a political message were congruent with the construal level of the receiver, then this message was easier to process and perceived as more fluent than a message which was not congruent with the receiver's construal level. Congruency between message and receiver also lead to a more positive attitude towards the message and its sender. The positive effects of congruency between message and receiver on processing, responsiveness, and persuasiveness were also discussed in other research (Dhar & Kim, 2007; Tangari & Smith, 2012; Katz & Byrne, 2013; Spence et al., 2012). A congruent message might therefore also positively affect consumers' attitude towards sustainable fashion and improve the efficiency of marketing messages. As previously described, consumers may have a low construal level ("This dress suits me now") rather than a high one ("This dress contributes to a cleaner environment") when shopping. It would be interesting to

examine whether a message is most effective when it is congruent with a consumer's construal level (H1).

H1. *A marketing message containing a low construal element and therefore being congruent with consumers' low construal level will have a more positive effect on the attitude towards sustainable fashion and the purchase intention of sustainable fashion than a message with a high construal element.*

As mentioned above, most persuasive communication about sustainable apparel includes high construal characteristics, which are thought to be incongruent with consumers' (low) construal level. For sustainable apparel it would, however, be more advantageous if consumers were less focused on today, themselves and their current location and more focused on the future, all inhabitants of the world and global environment. In order to achieve a construal fit between the consumers' construal level and a message, it is possible to create a message which is congruent with the level of the receiver. Another possibility would, however, be to remind consumers of the high construal level way of reasoning. Although this technique could be a useful marketing tool, little research seems to have focused on this. Spence et al. (2012) assume, that if communication would make a topic such as climate change, which is psychologically far, be perceived as psychologically closer, it could positively affect the attitude towards that topic and the intention to act upon this. One approach could therefore be to lower the perceived psychological distance of a consumer choice. If this is applied to a marketing message about sustainable fashion, the distant positive effects of sustainable apparel might seem more proximal to consumers. An example of this could be "a cleaner environment is closer than you think". It would be interesting to investigate whether this approach has more effect on attitude towards sustainable fashion and purchase intention of sustainable fashion than congruency between the message and its receiver (Q1). A similar reasoning can be found in Katz and Byrne (2013), who refer to this technique as *traversing*.

Q1. *Does a message aimed at minimizing perceived psychological distance of a consumer lead to a more positive attitude towards sustainable fashion and a higher purchase intention of sustainable fashion than congruency between the construal level of the message and the construal level of the receiver?*

As outlined above, consumers are thought to be in a low construal when shopping. For sustainable fashion it would be beneficial if consumers were more aware of the long-term

effects of sustainable fashion. Another approach could therefore be, to include both levels (low and high) in a marketing message. A message could start with the low construal element, which is thought to match the consumer's construal level. Then the positive effects of congruency between a message and its receiver, such as facilitated cognitive processing, would seem to apply (Kim et al., 2009). The message could end in a high construal level, so that the consumer would be stimulated to think of more future-oriented aspects of sustainable fashion. This order could also be reversed, starting with a high element and ending in a low one. It would be interesting to examine which order of construal elements is more effective in improving consumers' attitude towards and their purchase intention of sustainable fashion (Q2). This line of thought can also be found in Katz and Byrne (2013), who refer to the process as *bridging*.

Q2. *Does a message with a low and high construal lead to a better attitude towards sustainable fashion and higher purchase intention of sustainable fashion than a message with a high and low construal?*

Method

Materials

The independent variables of the main study were the different construal levels in marketing slogans. Five slogans were constructed and presented on a label of a T-shirt, in order to simulate a purchase situation (see Appendix I). The first slogan included a low construal, focusing on the proximate effects of sustainable fashion ("Sustainable fashion laat je er elke dag goed uitzien"). A second slogan included a high construal, focusing on the distant effects of sustainable fashion ("Sustainable fashion draagt bij aan een schonere toekomst"). A third slogan aimed at minimizing perceived temporal distance of the effects of sustainable fashion ("Met sustainable fashion is een schonere toekomst dichtbij"). A fourth slogan included both construal levels to attempt to make consumers aware of the long-term effects of sustainable fashion, beginning with a low construal and ending with a high construal (low and high: "Draag vandaag sustainable fashion en zorg voor een schonere toekomst"). A fifth slogan also contained both construal levels, yet began with the high level ending in the low construal (high and low: "Zorg voor een schonere toekomst door vandaag sustainable fashion te dragen"). Apart from the construal level, the slogans were kept as similar as possible. Similar words were chosen and the visual effects were the same for all conditions.

Subjects

A total of 190 Dutch participants took part in this study. Their age ranged from 18 to 75 ($M = 26.85$, $SD = 11.11$) and 65.8% were female. The majority of participants had university education (41.6%) or higher education (32.6%). A Chi-square test revealed no significant relation between construal level of the slogan and gender ($\chi^2(4) = .789$, $p = .940$), which showed that gender was equally distributed among the five versions. A one-way analysis of variance showed that age was also equally distributed among the versions ($F(4, 185) = 1.66$, $p = .161$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that level of education was not equally distributed among the versions ($F(4, 185) = 3.65$, $p = .007$). The version of the slogan with a low construal ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.33$) was seen significantly more often by participants with a lower educational level than both the slogan minimizing psychological distance ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.19$) and the slogan containing both a low and high construal description, ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.22$) (Bonferroni-correction, $p < .05$).

Research design

This study had an experimental design with the between subject factor construal level with five conditions (construal level: low vs. high vs. minimizing psychological distance vs. low and high vs. high and low). Participants were only exposed to one of the five conditions.

Instruments

A pre-test was carried out to establish a consumer's construal level while shopping for clothes. A total of 43 participants took part in the pre-test, which consisted of an online questionnaire that was distributed via social media. Filling in the questionnaire took approximately 5 minutes. Participants were asked to imagine a shopping situation, in which they see a T-shirt to their liking, take it out off the rack and evaluate it (see Appendix II for the pre-test scenario and scales). To measure participants' construal level, participants were asked what they think about in this situation. A scale comprising 11 items with seven-point semantic differentials was made, with 1 representing a low construal and 7 representing a high construal. This scale was inspired by Vallacher and Wegner's (1987) Behaviour Identification Form and modified to fit a fashion context. To the researchers' knowledge, no prior scale has been developed to measure consumers' construal level in a fashion context. Items of the scale for example included (1)now/(7)later, consequences of my purchase for (1)me/(7)others and

(1)today/(7)next year.

To determine participants' temporal orientation in this shopping situation, they were asked to answer a scale of 12 statements, consisting of 7 seven-point Likert scales and 5 seven-point semantic differentials. Examples of the seven-point Likert scales included: during shopping I think of... "the consequences of my purchase now/in the future" and "how I can combine this T-shirt with my current/future wardrobe". The Likert scales had the endpoints (1)agree-(7)disagree. Examples of the five statements with the seven-point semantic differentials included "during shopping I think of ..." (1)whether I like this piece of clothing now/(7)whether I will continue to like this piece of clothing for a long time" and "what happens now is more important to me than what happens in the future", which the participants indicated on a scale as (1>true/(7)not true. These scales were derived from the Temporal Orientation Scale of Lasane and Jones (1999), used in Kim et al. (2009).

On an overall seven-point scale, with 1 being related to a low construal and 7 to a high construal, participants scored between 2 and 4 ($M = 3.2$, $SD = .52$). This confirms the researchers' expectation that most consumers are in a rather low construal level when buying clothes.

For the main study, participants were asked to fill in an online questionnaire in which they imagined the same shopping scenario as in the pre-test. Then they were asked to look at the label of the T-shirt and evaluate the marketing slogan (see Appendix I for the slogans; see Appendix III for the scenario and full scales). Purchase intention of and attitude towards this sustainable fashion item after reading the information on the label were measured. The purchase intention was defined as the plan to buy fashion in the future that has been produced in a sustainable way (www.businessdictionary.com). Participants responded to the question: "How likely is it that you would buy a T-shirt with this label?", with three semantic differentials: (1)very unlikely/(7)very likely, (1)certainly not/(7)certainly, (1)I expect not/(7)I expect so, using scales from Miniard et al. (1990, used in Tangari & Smith, 2012). Participants also evaluated two statements ("when I would be looking for a white T-shirt, then the chance that I would buy this T-shirt is big/small", Kamins and Gupta (1994)), on seven-point Likert scales from (1) disagree to (7) agree. The reliability of purchase intention comprising five items was good: $\alpha = .86$.

Participants' attitude towards the product was defined as the tendency of consumers to respond positively/negatively to the sustainable fashion item (www.businessdictionary.com). Participants were asked to answer "what do you think of the T-shirt after reading the information of the label?" on nine seven-point semantic differentials, such as

(1)negative/(7)positive, (1)unattractive/(7)attractive and (1)bad/(7)good. The scales were derived from Miniard et al. (1990, used in Tangari & Smith, 2012) and Batra and Ahtola (1990). The reliability of attitude towards the product comprising nine items was good: $\alpha = .93$.

In order to examine which other variables the manipulation might have affected, several additional variables were measured. Attitude towards the slogan was measured with the question “what is your attitude towards the slogan on the label?” by three seven-point semantic differential scales ranging from (1)unfavourable/negative/bad to (7)favourable/positive/good (Batra & Ahtola, 1990; Miniard et al., 1990, used in Tangari & Smith, 2012). In addition, attitude towards the slogan was measured by three seven-point semantic differentials answering the statement “give your opinion of the slogan on the label”. The semantic differentials were (1)I dislike/(7)like the slogan, (1)the slogan did not/(7)did appeal to me and (1)I reacted negatively/(7)positively to the slogan (Holbrooke & Batra, 1987). This variable served as manipulation-check of the slogan and no difference in scores was expected between conditions. The reliability of attitude towards the slogan comprising six items was good: $\alpha = .91$

Processing fluency was measured by three semantic differentials including: “the slogan felt ...” (1)wrong/(7)right, (1)boring/(7)exciting and (1)not/(7)very convincing (Labroo & Lee, 2006, used in Kim et al., 2009). As previous research showed positive effects of congruency between a message and its receiver on processing fluency, those conditions including congruency (low construals) were thought to facilitate processing fluency. The reliability of processing fluency comprising three items was good: $\alpha = .84$.

As in the pre-test, effects of the slogan on construal level of the participants were measured. This served as a test of consumers’ construal level during shopping. The reliability of effect on construal level comprising ten items was good: $\alpha = .83$.

Consistent with the pre-test, the effects of the slogan on temporal orientation were measured by means of scales from the Temporal Orientation Scale (Lasane & Jones, 1999, used in Kim et al., 2009). Of the 12 scales used in the pre-test, four were used for the main study, as these were considered to be most essential for determining temporal orientation in a fashion context. It was expected that the slogans including low construal levels evoked more present-oriented responses than the slogans with high construal levels. The reliability of temporal orientation comprising four items was acceptable: $\alpha = .76$.

The overall attitude towards sustainable fashion was measured by two items with three seven-point semantic differentials. The first item asked the participants’ opinion of

sustainable fashion in general and comprised the answers (1)unfavourable/negative/bad to (7)favourable/positive/good. The second item asked how participants perceived buying sustainable fashion, answers were (1)bad/negative/unwise versus (7)good/positive/wise. The scales were derived from Miniard et al. (1990, used in Tangari & Smith, 2012). This also served as a manipulation-check of the slogan and different scores were not expected between conditions. The reliability of overall attitude towards sustainable fashion comprising two items was good: $\alpha = .96$.

To measure both perceived social norm and self-efficacy (hereafter referred to as “social norm”) with regard to buying sustainable fashion, a seven-point Likert scale comprising five items was used, based on scales from Ajzen (1991). Items for example included “if I want to, I can buy sustainable fashion” or “people like me buy sustainable fashion” and had endpoints of (1)disagree/(7)agree. This served as another manipulation-check of the slogan and no differences in scores were expected between conditions. The reliability of social norm comprising five items was acceptable: $\alpha = .70$.

Participants were also asked how frequently they bought sustainable fashion, measured by a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1)never to (7)always. Lastly, they indicated their age, gender and level of education, the latter ranging from middle school to university.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted by means of an online questionnaire. Participants were approached via e-mail, social media or in person, and sent one of the five links that were created for the different slogans. Filling in the questionnaire took 16 minutes on average. At the end of the questionnaire participants were asked to describe what they thought the purpose of the study was. None of the participants were aware of the goal and research questions of the study. Debriefing was made possible by emailing one of the researchers.

Statistical treatment

To measure the effects of the different slogans on attitude towards and purchase intention of sustainable fashion, two one-way univariate analyses of variance were used. As a Chi-square test revealed that educational level of the participants was not equally distributed among all conditions, educational level was included in the analyses as a covariate. It was furthermore examined whether any differences regarding attitude towards and purchase intention of

sustainable fashion found between the five conditions might be explained by a mediation process with other factors. These factors (attitude towards the slogan, processing fluency, construal level, temporal orientation, overall attitude towards sustainable fashion and perceived social norm) were measured by means of a one-way multivariate analyses of variance, also including educational level as covariate.

Results

The current study examined the effects of construal level in five slogans on attitude towards and purchase intention of sustainable fashion. The slogans included a low vs. high construal element (H1), an element aimed at minimizing perceived psychological distance (Q1) and the elements low and high vs. high and low (Q2).

A one-way analysis of variance with construal level of the slogan as factor and educational level as covariate did not show a significant effect of educational level on purchase intention of sustainable fashion ($F(1, 184) < 1$) or of the construal level of the slogan on purchase intention of sustainable fashion ($F(4, 184) < 1$). A one-way analysis of variance with construal level of the slogan as factor and educational level as covariate did not show a significant effect of educational level ($F(1, 184) < 1$) or of construal level of the slogan on attitude towards the product ($F(4, 184) < 1$).

These results imply that none of the different slogans seem to positively affect consumers' attitude towards or purchase intention of sustainable fashion. Congruency between a message and its receiver did not prove to be more effective than a message without such congruency (H1). A message aiming at minimizing psychological distance did not prove to be more effective in improving consumers' attitude towards or purchase intention of sustainable fashion than congruency between a message and its receiver (Q1). Also, a message using both construals low and high vs. high and low (Q2) did not seem to be effective, as it was shown that the order of the construal elements did not have a significant effect on consumers' attitude towards or purchase intention of sustainable fashion. Table 1 shows these findings for the low vs. high construal element (H1), the element minimizing psychological distance (Q1) and the elements low and high vs. high and low (Q2).

Table 1. Participants’ attitude towards as well as purchase intention of the sustainable fashion item per construal level of the slogan (1 = low/negative, 7 = high/positive, a higher score thus indicates a higher purchase intention respectively a more positive product evaluation).

Construal level slogan	Purchase intention	Attitude towards the product	<i>n</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Low construal	4.98 (1.16)	4.99 (1.09)	42
High construal	5.32 (.93)	5.02 (1.18)	36
Minimizing distance	5.01 (.92)	4.97 (1.18)	38
Low and high	5.16 (1.22)	5.41(1.23)	35
High and low	5.21 (.74)	4.95 (1.25)	39

It was presumed that there may be other factors that were influenced by the varying conditions and might have affected the main variables. These are therefore included in this analysis.

A one-way multivariate analysis for processing fluency, attitude towards the slogan, construal level, temporal orientation, social norm and attitude towards sustainable fashion with construal level of the slogan as factor and educational level as covariate did not show a multivariate effect of educational level ($F(5, 180) < 1$), but a significant multivariate effect was found for construal level of the slogan ($F(20, 597) = 1.94, p = .008$).

The univariate analyses showed a marginal effect of construal level of the slogan on processing fluency ($F(4, 184) = 2.53, p = .042$). The slogan with both construals high and low ($M = 5.01, SD = .18$) was perceived as marginally more fluent than the slogan with a low construal ($M = 4.29, SD = .18$). No other significant differences between the slogans were found (Bonferroni-correction, $p < .05$). This indicates that congruency between the construal level of the slogan and the (low) construal level of the receiver did not seem to facilitate processing fluency (H1). Other slogans including a low construal level did also not seem to facilitate processing fluency (Q2).

Univariate analyses also showed an effect of construal level of the slogan on temporal orientation ($F(4, 184) = 3.99, p = .004$). Participants that had seen the slogan with a high construal ($M = 5.48, SD = .19$) as well as participants that had seen the slogan minimizing

perceived psychological distance ($M = 5.56, SD = .19$), seemed to be more future-oriented than participants that had seen the slogan with both construals low and high ($M = 4.70, SD = .20$) (Bonferroni-correction, $p < .05$). This shows, that the slogan with a high construal as well as the slogan minimizing psychological distance stimulated a more future-oriented perspective (H1, Q1). The slogans with both construals low and high/high and low did not lead to such a future-oriented perspective (Q2).

Univariate analyses showed no effect of construal level of the slogan on the attitude towards the slogan ($F(4, 184) < 1$), attitude towards sustainable fashion ($F(4, 184) < 1$) or social norm with regard to purchasing sustainable fashion ($F(4, 184) = 1.81, p = .130$). Univariate analyses also showed no effect of construal level of the slogan on effects on construal level ($F(4, 184) < 1$), which implies that the different construal levels used in the slogans did not seem to change consumers' own construal level. Table 2 shows participants' processing fluency, attitude towards the slogan, effects on construal level, temporal orientation, attitude towards sustainable fashion and social norm.

Table 2. Participants' processing fluency, attitude towards the slogan, effects on construal level, temporal orientation, attitude towards sustainable fashion and social norm (1 = low/negative, 7 = high/positive).

Construal level slogan	Processing fluency <i>M (SD)</i>	Attitude towards slogan <i>M (SD)</i>	Effect on construal level <i>M (SD)</i>	Temporal orientation <i>M (SD)</i>	Attitude towards sustainable fashion <i>M (SD)</i>	Social norm <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>
Low construal	4.33(1.28)	4.30 (.58)	3.31 (.85)	4.88(1.46)	4.30(.58)	4.14(1.01)	42
High construal	4.92(1.00)	4.31(.70)	3.58 (1.12)	5.55(.88)	4.31(.70)	4.31(1.05)	36
Minimizing distance	4.50(1.30)	4.29 (.44)	3.73 (.88)	5.55(1.08)	4.29(.44)	4.29(.96)	38
Low and high	4.73(1.20)	4.29(.46)	3.54(.92)	4.69(1.17)	4.29(.46)	4.39(1.08)	35
High and low	4.99(.85)	4.36 (.52)	3.50 (1.01)	5.01(1.07)	4.36(.52)	3.83(1.03)	39

Altogether, none of the different slogans (H1, Q1, Q2) seemed to affect the main variables: consumers' attitude towards and their purchase intention of sustainable fashion. In addition,

no mediation process with other factors seemed to affect these main variables. The effects found for processing fluency were only marginal and the effects found for temporal orientation might be attributed to the fact that the focus of this study was construal level with regard to the dimension of time.

Conclusion & discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of Construal Level Theory in marketing communication about sustainable fashion. A pre-test was carried out to measure consumers' construal level in a shopping situation. In line with the researchers' expectations, consumers appear to be in a lower construal level when shopping. This could be of great value in marketing communication, as no earlier attempts seem to have been made to determine consumers' construal level in a purchase situation. Subsequently, the effects of construal levels used in marketing slogans on consumers' attitude towards and purchase intention of sustainable fashion were examined. This was done in three different ways: by creating a construal fit between a slogan and consumers (H1), by minimizing perceived psychological distance (Q1) and by using two construal elements, low and high vs. high and low, in one slogan (Q2).

It was found, that neither of the different slogans had an effect on the attitude towards or the purchase intention of the sustainable fashion item, which does not fully concur with the researchers' expectations. Previous literature found positive effects of congruency between the construal level of a message and that of its receiver on the receivers' attitude (Dhar & Kim, 2007; Tangari & Smith, 2012). It was therefore assumed that consumers' attitude towards sustainable fashion as well as their purchase intention of sustainable fashion might be positively affected by a slogan that fits consumers' construal level (H1). The results of this study reject this hypothesis, which might indicate that message-receiver congruency is not sufficient in changing consumers' attitude towards sustainable fashion and impact their purchase intention of sustainable fashion. Based on the literature, it was also presumed that a construal fit would have a positive effect on processing fluency (Kim et al., 2009; Trope & Liberman, 2010; Martin et al., 2009). A marginal effect for processing fluency was found in current study, as the slogan using both construals high and low seemed to be processed marginally more fluently than the slogan with a low construal. This, however, seems to be in contrast with previous findings, as there is thought to be no congruency between this slogans' initial (high) construal level and consumers' (low) construal level. One possible conclusion

might be that cognitive processing can be facilitated by other means than message-receiver congruency. This finding should, however, be taken with caution, as the effect found was only marginal.

Previous literature also found positive effects on consumers' attitude towards a topic if that topic was made psychologically closer in time (Spence et al., 2010). In current study a slogan minimizing perceived psychological distance was used to examine, whether this might be more effective than a construal fit between a message and its receiver (Q1). The results showed, however, that this was not the case.

Another approach to improve consumers' attitude towards as well as purchase intention of sustainable fashion was to use construal levels low and high vs. high and low in one slogan (Q2). This did also not seem to have an effect. Previous literature (Katz & Byrne, 2013) had suggested that this might be an efficient use of Construal Level Theory.

Concurrent with the researchers' expectations, however, an effect on temporal orientation was found. Current study has shown, that consumers seem to be more future-oriented when they were presented with a high construal slogan or a slogan minimizing psychological distance, than when they were presented with a slogan containing both construals low and high. This seems to suggest that a more future-oriented state of mind can be achieved by means of construal level, which would be highly beneficial for sustainable fashion. It is, however, remarkable that no differences in temporal orientation were found between the slogan with a low construal and the other conditions, as previous literature suggested that messages with a low construal might evoke a more present-oriented view than messages with a high construal (Tangari & Smith, 2012). The effects found for temporal orientation might be attributed to the fact that current study, and therefore the manipulation material, focused on the psychological dimension of time. A difference in temporal orientation seemed bound to be found. Therefore, these findings should also be taken with some caution.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

Due to the distribution of the online questionnaire by means of social media and personal contact, the randomisation of this study might have been compromised. Future research should pay particular attention to this aspect.

Another limitation might also be that participants did not fill in the questionnaire in a distraction-free surrounding. Although they were asked to focus on filling in the questionnaire

only, external influences cannot be excluded and future research could repeat current study in a laboratory setting. Another possibility would be to repeat current study in an actual shopping setting, to make the purchase scenario more realistic.

It might also be valuable to determine, whether the manipulation of the slogans used in this study was strong enough. Previous literature (Attalla, 2001) has established, that consumers' purchase decisions are based on personal rather than socially responsible factors. This buying behaviour might be so deeply rooted, that it cannot be changed by one slogan alone. Future research could focus on exposing participants repeatedly and via different media to the stimulus material, to evaluate whether this might have an effect on the attitude towards or purchase intention of sustainable fashion.

Present study examined psychological distance with regard to time, as most research has focused on this. It might be interesting for future research to examine whether the other dimensions of psychological distance (hypotheticality, space and social distance) show different effects on consumers' construal level in a marketing context.

Some limitations also lie within the pre-test. Current research measured the construal level of consumers in a shopping situation. To our knowledge, however, consumers' general, construal level has not been previously examined. It is therefore difficult to determine whether the low construal level found in the pre-test is a deviation of consumers' general construal level. It would be possible that consumers are always in a low construal level, regardless of the context. Knowing consumers' general construal level would be very valuable for marketing communication, as it could then be determined whether there is an overall incongruency between current marketing messages and consumers' state of mind. Future research should therefore investigate the general construal level of consumers.

In general, the results of this study indicate that Construal Level Theory might not be an effective marketing tool to improve consumers' attitude towards or purchase intention of sustainable fashion. Construal Level Theory has, however, proven to impact buying behaviour in other shopping situations, for example in the supermarket. Van Kerckhove, Geuens and Vermeir (2015) showed, that consumers associated perceived distance with a concrete (low construal) or abstract (high construal) level and selected different products depending on distance cues (upward/downward head movements). It can therefore be said that Construal Level Theory can influence buying behaviour and could be very useful in encouraging sustainable purchase decisions. This could have great positive impacts on the environment and shows one of the strong ethical components of Construal Level Theory

research in marketing communication.

Construal Level Theory is one form of nonconscious influencing, as consumers are aware of the stimuli used (in this study marketing slogans), yet are unaware of the influence these might have on their behaviour (Bargh, 2002). Nonconscious influencing is predominantly used to stimulate purchase decisions (Simonson, Cameron, Dhar, Drolet & Nowlis, 2001, as cited in Bargh, 2002). Construal Level Theory can, however, not only stimulate purchase decisions, but can for example also induce a more future-oriented view of a topic (Tangari & Smith, 2012). This shows another ethical aspect of the theory, as a more future-oriented outlook might lead to a greater awareness of environmental factors related to purchase behaviour. Changing this behaviour can have significant positive effects on our environment, such as an increased use of eco-friendly materials or the reduction of resource-use. Construal Level Theory applied to marketing communication can therefore be a valuable contribution to our society and can benefit every consumer as well as our environment.

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Appendix I - Manipulation of the marketing slogan

1. Condition: Low construal level



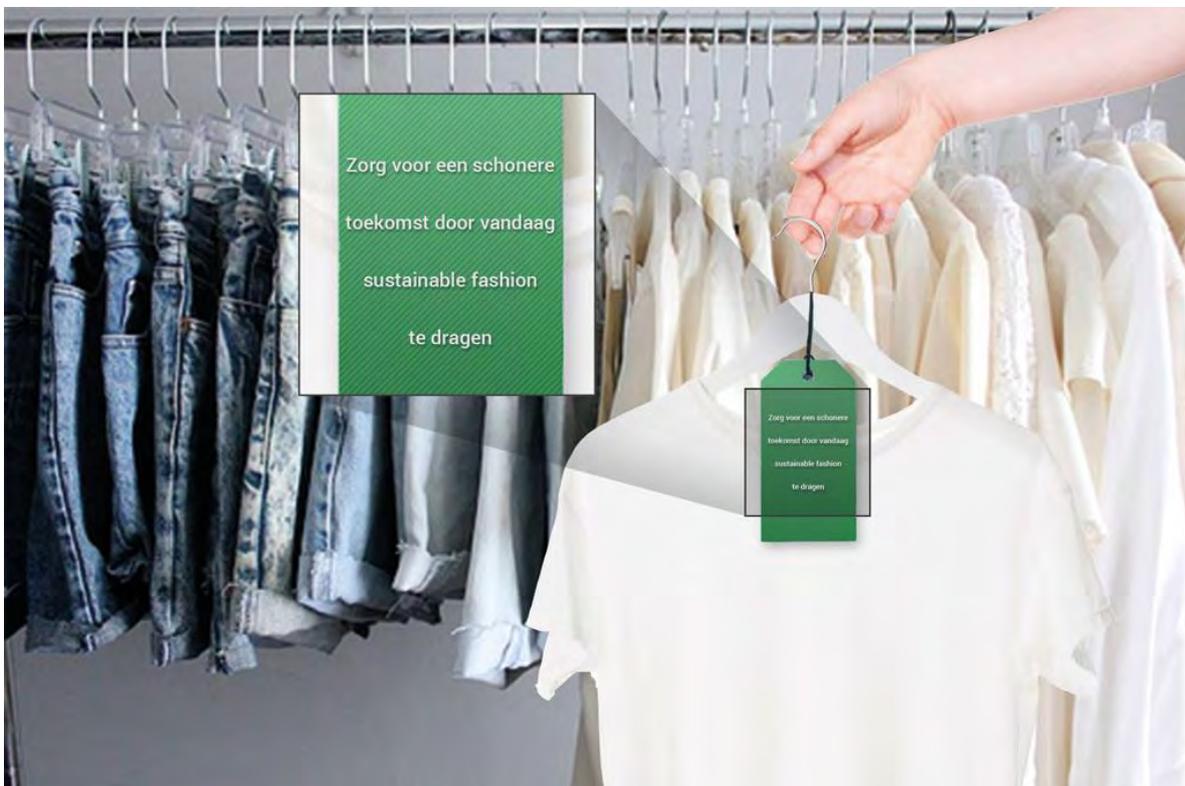
2. Condition: High construal level



3. Condition: Minimizing distance in time



4. Condition: Bridging from high to low



5. Condition: Bridging from low to high



Appendix II - questionnaire pre-test

Introduction:

Probeer op onderstaande vragen zo eerlijk mogelijk antwoord te geven. Ook wanneer dit minder sociaal wenselijk is. Het gaat er niet om of je antwoord goed of fout is, maar dat het weergeeft hoe jij je voelt. Je gegevens worden volledig anoniem behandeld. Het invullen van deze enquête zal niet langer duren dan 10 minuten. Alvast bedankt voor het invullen.

Probeer je jezelf het volgende scenario over winkelen voor te stellen. Bedenk je hoe jij je voelt op zo'n moment, waar je wel en niet aan denkt en hoe jij je dan doorgaans gedraagt.

Stel je voor: Je hebt een gaatje gevonden in je volle leven om een dag goed te gaan shoppen. Je hebt een aantal dingen nodig, maar je wilt ook rondneuzen in verschillende kledingzaken. Je hebt al een aantal winkels gehad en stapt dan je favoriete kledingzaak binnen. In een kledingrek zie je een leuk T-shirt hangen. Je weet al precies waar je dat bij aan gaat doen. Je haalt het hangertje en T-shirt uit het rek en beoordeelt de vorm, kwaliteit en prijs. Waar denk je op dit moment aan?

1. Construal level in shopping situation with regard to time
scales inspired by Vallacher & Wegner, 1987

Geef bij de volgende schalen aan waar je tijdens het shoppen het meeste aan denkt.

Ik	<input type="radio"/>	Anderen						
Mijn sociale kring	<input type="radio"/>	Alle Nederlanders						
Nu	<input type="radio"/>	Later						
Dit T-shirt	<input type="radio"/>	Alle kleding overal						
Deze winkel	<input type="radio"/>	Alle winkels in Nederland						
Mijn lichaam	<input type="radio"/>	Alle mensen op de wereld						
Vandaag	<input type="radio"/>	Volgend jaar						
Kleding uitkiezen voor een leuke gebeurtenis binnenkort	<input type="radio"/>	Kleding uitzoeken voor een leuke gebeurtenis in 2016						
Gevolgen van aankoop voor mij	<input type="radio"/>	Gevolgen van aankoop voor de wereld						
gevolgen van aankoop voor mij	<input type="radio"/>	Gevolgen van aankoop voor anderen						

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of het kledingstuk de mode is of de kwaliteit van het in kledingstuk jaren goed blijft.

2. Orientation in time

derived from Temporal Orientation Scale, Lasane & Jones, 1999, as used in Kim et al., 2009

De voordelen die het T-shirt me nu of binnenkort kunnen opleveren

Oneens eens

De gevolgen die mijn aankopen in de toekomst kunnen hebben

Oneens eens

De gevolgen die mijn aankopen nu kunnen hebben

Oneens eens

De gevolgen die mijn aankopen op het volgende jaar kunnen hebben

Oneens eens

De gevolgen die mijn aankopen op het einde van de dag kunnen hebben

Oneens eens

Hoe ik dit T-shirt bij mijn huidige kleding kan combineren

Oneens eens

Hoe ik dit T-shirt bij mijn garderobe in de toekomst kan combineren

Oneens eens

Of ik het kledingstuk nu leuk vind of ik het kledingstuk voor lange tijd leuk blijf vinden

Appendix III - questionnaire main study

Introduction:

Beste deelnemer,

Fijn dat je mee wilt werken aan dit onderzoek. De vragenlijst start op de volgende pagina. Probeer op alle vragen zo eerlijk mogelijk antwoord te geven. Ook wanneer dit minder sociaal wenselijk is. Het gaat er niet om of je antwoord goed of fout is, maar dat het weergeeft hoe jij je voelt. Je gegevens worden volledig anoniem behandeld. Tijdens het invullen van deze vragenlijst graag geen andere activiteiten ondernemen. Bij voorkeur dus niet bellen, teksten, eten, drinken, etc. Het invullen van deze vragenlijst zal ongeveer 10 min duren.

Alvast bedankt voor het invullen!

Probeer je het onderstaande scenario over winkelen voor te stellen. Het grootste gedeelte van deze vragenlijst zal over deze situatie gaan, dus neem de tijd om je dit goed voor te stellen. Bedenk je hoe jij je voelt op zo'n moment, waar je wel en niet aan denkt en hoe jij je dan doorgaans gedraagt.

Stel je voor: Je hebt een gaatje gevonden in je volle leven om eens goed te gaan shoppen. Je hebt een aantal dingen nodig, maar je wilt ook rondneuzen in verschillende kledingzaken. Je hebt al een aantal winkels gehad en stapt dan je favoriete kledingzaak binnen. In een kledingrek zie een leuk T-shirt hangen. Je weet al precies waar je dat bij aan gaat doen. Je haalt het T-shirt op het hangertje uit het rek en je oog valt op het opvallende label aan het shirt.

1. Purchase intention

Scales from Miniard et al. (1990), as used in Tangari & Smith (2012)

Hoe waarschijnlijk is het dat jij dit T-shirt met dit label zou kopen ?

Heel onwaarschijnlijk waarschijnlijk	<input type="radio"/>	heel						
Zeker niet	<input type="radio"/>	zeker wel						
Ik verwacht van niet	<input type="radio"/>	ik verwacht van wel						

Scales from Kamins & Gupta (1994)

Wanneer ik op zoek ben naar een wit T-shirt, dan is de kans dat ik dit T-shirt zou kopen groot

Oneens	<input type="radio"/>	eens						
--------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	------

Wanneer ik op zoek ben naar een wit T-shirt, dan is de kans dat ik dit T-shirt zou kopen klein

Oneens	<input type="radio"/>	eens						
--------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	------

2. Attitude towards the product (sustainable fashion item)

Scales from Batra and Ahtola (1990) and Miniard, Bhatla and Rose (1990), as used in Tangari & Smith (2012)

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Wat vind je van dit T-shirt nadat je de informatie op het label hebt gelezen?

Ongunstig	<input type="radio"/>	gunstig							
Negatief	<input type="radio"/>	positief							
Slecht	<input type="radio"/>	goed							
Onplezierig	<input type="radio"/>	plezierig							
Niet leuk	<input type="radio"/>	leuk							
Onaantrekkelijk	<input type="radio"/>	aantrekkelijk							
Onprettig	<input type="radio"/>	prettig							
Niet bij mij passen	<input type="radio"/>	wel bij mij passen							
Onvoordelig	<input type="radio"/>	voordelig							

3. Processing fluency

Scales from Labroo and Lee (2006) as used in Kim et al. (2009)

Hoe heb je het de boodschap op het label ervaren ?

Voelde fout	<input type="radio"/>	voelde juist							
Erg Saai	<input type="radio"/>	erg boeiend							
Niet overtuigend	<input type="radio"/>	helemaal overtuigend							

4. Attitude towards the slogan

Scales from Miniard et al. (1990), as used in Tangari & Smith (2012)

Wat is jouw houding tegenover de boodschap op het label?

Ongunstig	<input type="radio"/>	gunstig							
Negatief	<input type="radio"/>	positief							
Slecht	<input type="radio"/>	goed							

Scales used from Holbrooke & Moore (1987)

Geef je mening over de boodschap op het label

Ik vindt de boodschap leuk	<input type="radio"/>	o Ik vindt de boodschap niet leuk							
De boodschap spreekt mij aan	<input type="radio"/>	o o de boodschap spreekt mij niet aan							

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Ik reageer positief op de boodschap Ik reageer negatief op de boodschap

5. Effects on construal level

Modified scales inspired by Vallacher and Wegner (1987)

Geef bij de volgende schalen aan waar je tijdens het shoppen het meeste aan denkt.

Ik	<input type="radio"/>	Anderen						
Mijn sociale kring	<input type="radio"/>	Alle Nederlanders						
Nu	<input type="radio"/>	Later						
Dit T-shirt	<input type="radio"/>	Alle kleding overal						
Deze winkel	<input type="radio"/>	Alle winkels in Nederland						
Mijn lichaam	<input type="radio"/>	Alle mensen op de wereld						
Vandaag	<input type="radio"/>	Volgend jaar						
Kleding uitkiezen voor een leuke gebeurtenis binnenkort	<input type="radio"/>	Kleding uitzoeken voor een leuke gebeurtenis in 2016						
Gevolgen van aankoop voor mij	<input type="radio"/>	Gevolgen van aankoop voor de wereld						
gevolgen van aankoop voor mij	<input type="radio"/>	Gevolgen van aankoop voor anderen						
of het kledingstuk de mode is	<input type="radio"/>	of de kwaliteit van het in kledingstuk jaren goed blijft.						

6. Orientation in time

Scales used from Temporal Orientation Scale, Lasane and Jones (1999), as used in Kim et al. (2009)

Hoe ik dit T-shirt bij mijn huidige kleding kan combineren

Oneens eens

Hoe ik dit T-shirt bij mijn garderobe in de toekomst kan combineren

Oneens eens

Of ik dit T-shirt nu leuk vindt

Oneens eens

Of ik dit T-shirt voor lange tijd leuk blijf vinden

Oneens 0 0 0 0 0 0 eens

7. Attitude sustainable fashion

Scales from Miniard et al. (1990), as used in Tangari & Smith (2012)

De volgende vragen gaan over je mening over sustainable fashion over het algemeen. Het gaat dus **niet** specifiek om het T-shirt en de informatie op het label dat je eerder gezien hebt.

Wat is jouw houding tegenover sustainable fashion over het algemeen?

Ongunstig 0 0 0 0 0 0 gunstig

Negatief 0 0 0 0 0 0 positief

Slecht 0 0 0 0 0 0 goed

Geef je mening: Als ik sustainable fashion koop dan is dat... →

slecht 0 0 0 0 0 0 goed

negatief 0 0 0 0 0 0 positief

verstandig 0 0 0 0 0 0 onverstandig

8. Social norm (+ self-efficacy) with regard to purchasing sustainable fashion

Scales used from Ajzen (1991)

De meeste mensen die belangrijk voor me zijn vinden dat ik sustainable fashion moet kopen

Oneens 0 0 0 0 0 0 eens

De meeste mensen van wie ik het oordeel belangrijk vind, zouden het goedkeuren als ik sustainable fashion zou kopen.

Oneens 0 0 0 0 0 0 eens

De meeste mensen die ik respecteer en bewonder zouden sustainable fashion kopen.

Oneens 0 0 0 0 0 0 eens

Mensen zoals ik kopen sustainable fashion.

Oneens 0 0 0 0 0 0 eens

Als ik dat wil kan ik sustainable fashion kopen

Oneens 0 0 0 0 0 0 eens

9. Purchasing frequency

Hoe vaak koop je sustainable fashion?

Nooit altijd

10. General questions

Leeftijd:

Geslacht: man
 vrouw

Hoogst genoten opleiding: MAVO
 VBO
 VMBO
 HAVO
 VWO
 MBO
 HBO
 WO

11. Debriefing

Waar denk je dat dit onderzoek over ging?

Bedankt voor het deelnemen aan deze vragenlijst!

Wanneer je geïnformeerd wil worden over de uitslagen van dit onderzoek, dan kun je na 30 mei 2015 een email sturen naar marie.marcus@student.ru.nl