

**Finding gold at the end of the rainbowflag? Claim vagueness and presence of
imagery as factors for rainbowwashing**

Tim Wulf¹, Brigitte Naderer¹, Zoe Olbermann², & Julian Hohner¹

¹Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Department of Media and
Communication, Munich, Germany

²Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media, Hannover, Germany

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Tim Wulf (corresponding author), LMU Munich, Oettingenstr. 67, 80538 Munich; email: tim.wulf@ifkw.lmu.de; phone: +49 89 2180 9448



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The acceptance of the LGBTQIA* (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender-Queer Intersex Asexual/Ally) movement has substantially increased throughout Western societies within the last 40 years (Flores & Park, 2018) and so has the number of companies that publicly show their support to the community (Champlin & Li, 2020). However, not all companies take a stance for queer rights wholeheartedly but rather aim at selling their products by appealing to a liberal-minded, “woke” audience. Appropriating support for the LGBTQIA* community in promotional messages without actual sincere engagement is called *rainbowwashing* (Ciszek, 2018). Yet, there is little research on factors people rely on to assess whether companies’ engagement for the LGBTQIA* movement was motivated by true convictions or image- and financial gain. Such research is necessary to support customers in identifying deceptive advertising claims and to guide companies that want to support the LGBTQIA* community to communicate their corporate social responsibility meaningfully.

Research on greenwashing, which is companies over-selling or even lying about sustainability efforts (De Freitas Netto et al., 2020) showed that companies can deceive customers using ambivalent or vague claims (Kangun et al., 1991), distract them with nature imagery (Parguel et al., 2015), or by using a combination of both (Schmuck et al., 2018a). In fact, ads that entail beautiful landscapes lead to better evaluation of ad and brand, independent of claim correctness (Parguel et al., 2015). Also, individual factors such as knowledge and involvement can interplay with presented claims and imageries (Matthes et al., 2014). Schmuck and colleagues (2018b) found that participants who identified false claims due to their knowledge fell for executional greenwashing. Thus, emotional pictures seem to be particularly

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problematic because people who are highly involved and educated about sustainability appear to respond particularly strongly to nature imagery.

Guided by this research, we assume for rainbowwashing that advertising with LGBTQIA* imagery (H1) and with statements providing concrete support (H2) are rated better (and perceived as rainbowwashing to a lesser extent) than advertising without this imagery and advertising with vague statements. We also assume that personal involvement and knowledge of the LGBTQIA* community moderate these effects (H3).

We conducted a preregistered Study¹ and employed a 2 (imagery × no imagery) by 3 (vague × concrete × no claim) experimental design. Participants ($N = 616$; 65.5% female, 38% male, 1.1% non-binary, 4.4% no gender indicated; age $M = 50.00$, $SD = 13.64$) saw one of six ads (Figure 1) and were asked for their perceived rainbowwashing (adopted from Chen & Chang, 2013; $M = 2.96$, $SD = .77$, $\alpha = .83$), ad ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 1.00$, $\alpha = .91$) and brand ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 0.87$, $\alpha = .94$) attitude (Chang, 2011), LGBTQIA* concern (adopted from Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995; $M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.99$, $\alpha = .80$) and knowledge measured by an 8-question-multiple-choice-test of policies concerning the LGBTQIA* community ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.73$).

We will evaluate data with a MANOVA and follow-up moderation analyses and discuss findings at the conference.

¹ <https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=56gg9a>

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Figure 1
Stimuli used in the study

Concrete Claim, Picture



No Claim, Picture



Vague Claim, Picture



Concrete Claim, No Picture



No Claim, No Picture



Vague Claim, No Picture



Note. Participants saw one of the six ads containing (no) photo and one of three claim variants. The concrete claim reads *With every pack of Twizzlers Rainbow we donate 50 cents to the youth network Lambda, a drop-in center and counseling center for queer young people*; the vague claim reads *With Twizzlers Rainbow we set a sign for free love and support the LGBTQIA* community* (translated). All conditions included a #loveislove Hashtag above the Twizzlers Logo.