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# Green Materialities

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# Green Materialities

## Marketing and the socio-material construction of green products

Christian Fuentes

### Abstract

Green products are becoming part of contemporary consumer cultures and part of everyday life. But how are green products constructed? What kind of green products are constructed? And what happens as these green products are constructed?

The aim of this paper is to contribute a socio-cultural and critical understanding of green marketing by exploring and illustrating how marketing practices work to construct green products as meaningful material-symbolic artefacts in practice.

Departing from an understanding of marketing as practice I analyse how a green outdoor product - a t-shirt - was constructed as green through the marketing practices of the Nordic Nature Shops. Focusing on this retail corporation and examining the practices of trail making, attending and selling, it is suggested that these t-shirts become green through a process of socio-material inscription. Through marketing practices green moral is generated and linked to the t-shirts potentially making them desirable consumption objects to be used in the construction of consumers green identities. However, this process of green making is a difficult accomplishment with ambiguous outcomes. While the tendency to inscribe commercial products with morality can be interpreted as an indication of the development of a more ethically reflective consumer culture, it can also be argued to lead to the commercialization of morality.

**Keywords:** Green marketing, material, critical, practice theory, environmental management, sustainability

### Introduction

Green marketing literature focuses on understanding how to accomplish the marketing of green products in an efficient and profitable manner (Kajzer Mitchell and Saren 2008, Kilbourne 1998, Meriläinen et al. 2000, Ählström et al. 2009). Attention is primarily devoted to understanding who the green consumers are and how they perceive sustainability issues (e.g., Baker et al. 2004, Burke et al. 1993, Dickson 2005, McDonald and Oates 2006, McEachern and McClean 2002, Rowlands et al. 2003, Thompson et al. 2010), how green consumers make purchase decisions (e.g., Carrigan and Attalla 2001, Harper and Makatouni 2002, Schröder and McEachern 2004), how to communicate with this segment and overcome purchase barriers (e.g., Banerjee et al. 1995, Zinkhan and Carlson 1995, Charter and Polonsky 1999, Peattie 2002, Prothero et al. 1997), and if and how to develop green marketing strategies and programmes (e.g., Grove et al. 1996, Iles

2008, Nair and Menon 2008, Prakash 2002, Wong et al. 1996, Meyer 2001, for an overview of green marketing research see Chamorro et al. 2009).

For the most part these studies produce highly abstracted, linear and rational accounts of green marketing and green consumption. The work of circulating green products is depicted as a manageable and straightforward matter. To promote green products, to make them part of everyday life, companies need only to find and categorize green consumers, develop offering that will fit this segments and communicate the benefits of the green products effectively. In this literature, green marketing is simply a matter of adapting traditional marketing to environmental issues. What this research misses is the social, cultural and material complexity involved in both the marketing and consumption of green products (see also Dobers and Strannegård 2005b, Dobers and Strannegård 2005a).

In contrast, socio-cultural studies of green consumption have shown that green products are used as symbolic resources in the construction of consumer identities (e.g., Cherrier 2006, Connolly and Prothero 2008, Cherrier and Murray 2007), the formation of consumption communities (e.g., Cherrier and Murray 2002, Jonsson 2006, Moisander and Pesonen 2002, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007b, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007a), and the production of consumption experiences (e.g., Soper 2007, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007b, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007a). These studies demonstrate that green consumption is about much more than individual choice and decision-making. In contrast to mainstream green marketing literature, these studies demonstrate that green consumption, like all consumption, is a thoroughly social and cultural matter.

In these studies, marketers are the architects of green commodities. It is through marketing that these important artefacts are constructed and environmental sustainability achieved. Prothero and Fitchett (2000: 50), for example, argue that marketing has “for many years successfully signified green issues” and “green symbols, designs, and advertising campaigns regularly depict images of nature, clean living and environmental harmony to differentiate and add sign value to consumer goods”. These authors also tend to be rather optimistic about the possibilities of using marketing to bring about more sustainable development. What we should do, they contend, is use capitalism, recode it to champion environmental issues and bring about more sustainable consumption (Prothero and Fitchett 2000). The way to do this is to reformulate the commodity discourse in ways that lead to more environmentally sustainable development. Drawing on consumer culture scholars such as Baudrillard (e.g., 2001b, 2001a), these authors propose that commodity discourse be redesigned not only to sell greener products, but to reduce consumption altogether. Therefore, these authors contend, there is no reason why the idea of fewer goods could not also be commodified. It is simply, they argue, a matter of constructing a culturally appealing green commodity.

But how is this done? How are *green products* constructed as meaningful consumption objects by marketing practices? What kind of green products are constructed? And, what happens as these green products are constructed? While it is often suggested that green products are loaded with symbolic meaning that make them meaningful to consumers (e.g., Dobers and Strannegård 2005a, Schaefer and Crane 2005, Dolan 2002), exactly how these products are constructed as material-symbolic artefacts is seldom studied. That is, while there

are studies that put forward arguments regarding how green products should be marketed and also studies that examine the strategies used to market green products, there are to date few studies that explore how marketing constructs green products as meaningful material-symbolic artefacts (for a notable exception see Reijonen and Tryggestad 2012).

This is the gap I want to address here. My contention is that marketing green products involves making these products meaningful for consumers (see also Connolly and Prothero 2003, Prothero and Fitchett 2000). It involves constructing material-symbolic artefacts that make sense to consumers and fit into their lives and their practices.

More specifically, the aim of this paper is to contribute a socio-cultural and critical understanding of green marketing by exploring and illustrating how marketing practices work to construct green products as meaningful material-symbolic artefacts in practice. Understanding this is important if we are to understand how green marketing works in contemporary consumer culture.

In the sections that follow I do mainly three things to accomplish this task. First, a socio-material practice perspective is outlined. To understand how marketing practices work to make green products one must have a perspective that acknowledges the social, cultural and material character of marketing. If we are to analyse how products are constructed we should do this with a theoretical framework that takes material artefacts seriously. Drawing on a specific strand of practice theory an approach that acknowledges the socio-material aspects of practice is developed. As is explained in more detail in the next section, from this perspective practices always both involve and simultaneously transform a range of material artefacts. Practices are thus not only social and cultural but also material.

Second, using this specific practice framework, I analyse how one green products – the Save the Artic Fox t-shirt - is marketed at the Nordic Nature Shop – a Swedish chain of outdoors clothing and equipment retailers. This specific case serves as an example of green marketing. What is offered is an empirically based and theoretically informed reading of how the marketing practices carried out at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets construct green products. The argument developed will be that green products are made green by being inscribed with a certain environmental morality. The analysis shows how the Save the Artic Fox is, through the marketing practices of displaying, attending and selling, constructed as specific type of material-symbolic artefacts.

Third, some of the implications of this perspective are discussed. That is, I discuss what it might mean to start thinking of green products as material-symbolic artefacts made in and through marketing practices.

## **Socio-material practices and inscriptions**

Practice Theory has been discussed and used within a number of fields. Theories of practice are, for example, used in organization studies (e.g., Miettinen et al. 2009, Orr 1996, Schatzki 2006), strategy research (e.g., Whittington 2006), consumption studies (e.g., Schau et al. 2009, Shove and Pantzar 2005, Warde 2005), design studies (e.g., Ingram et al. 2007, Shove et al. 2007), marketing studies (e.g., Andersson et al. 2008, Araujo 2007), and many other fields. There is today no unified practice approach. Instead one can find a range of different approaches that go under this label (Schatzki 2001).

Despite many differences, practice theories have some things in common. Practice advocates argue that the social consists of a nexus of practices and that it is within these practices that social life is organized, reproduced, and transformed (Schatzki et al. 2001). Accordingly, practice scholars contend that the field of practice is the appropriate place to study issues as diverse as meaning, agency, ethics and power (Schatzki et al. 2001). But what, exactly, are practices? Following Reckwitz we can say that a practice is:

“a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotions and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz 2002: 250)

Common for all practice approaches is a focus on the doings as well as sayings. Practice approaches differ then from discursive analysis in that they look at more than language and text and they are also different from phenomenological approaches in they are interested in more than minds (Reckwitz 2002). Practices are “temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings” (Schatzki 1996: 89), they are ways of moving, handling objects and understanding the world. Practices are social in the sense that they are ways of thinking and acting that appear in different time-space and are carried out by different individuals (Reckwitz 2002). The individual is here “only” an enactor of practice and the meeting point for multiple practices (Reckwitz 2002).

Although most practice theorists would agree that practices involve both human and non-human elements the role that these elements are assigned divides practice theorists. For the most part practice theorists view practices as (purely) *human* practices. These scholars focus on the skills, knowledge and understandings involved in practices. For them, material artefacts are part of practices but have no agency of their own. There is however what Schatzki calls an important minority of “posthumanists” (Schatzki 2001). Posthumanist practice approaches, often closely connected to the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS), draw attention to the presence of non-human entities in practices arguing that these entities do much more than simply mediate practices (Preda 1999; Schatzki 2001). The non-humans are in these accounts considered crucial to the making of social practices. In fact, artefacts are argued to “play an active part in the generation, stabilization, and reproduction of social order” (Preda 1999: 349). Things (materiality, material artefacts, objects) play a crucial role in the reproduction of social practice.

It is this second strand of practice theory that interests me here. As the term socio-material practice indicates, what is formulated is very much a materialist approach. In formulating a socio-material practice perspective, I make use of concepts and ideas from both practice theory and actor-network theory (ANT) (e.g., Latour 2005, Law and Hassard 1999). This is not a novel approach. Theories of practice and concepts from ANT have previously been combined to study and discuss issues such as market making (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2006, Araujo 2007, Kjellberg and Helgesson 2007), the invention and re-invention of consumption practices (Shove and Pantzar 2005), and role of design (Ingram, Shove et al. 2007). My intention is to continue in this vein by applying a socio-material practice perspective to green marketing.

Practices are, from this perspective, heterogeneous and performative. Practices are heterogeneous in that they draw on a number of different elements – both human and non-human (Kjellberg and Helgesson 2006). Practices are thus simultaneously social, cultural and material always involving an assembly of different entities. To think in terms of socio-material practice is to treat materiality and its meanings, image and things, humans and non-humans simultaneously and as intrinsically interlinked.

Practices are also performative in that they do not simply make use of heterogeneous materials but also transform them. Borrowing ideas and concepts developed within actor-network theory (e.g. Law and Hassard 1999; Latour 2005), one can say that practices make assemblages – they interconnect ideas, emotion and understandings with material artifacts and bodies. But the relationship is one of mutual dependency: as assemblages are made they in turn shape practices in different ways. Assemblages then are constructed in practice but they also have the ability to impact on practices – they have agency.

From this perspective, marketing practices, like all practices, are always heterogeneous and performative (Araujo 2007). Marketing is heterogeneous involving a range of different human and non-human elements. More than that, marketing involves hybrid actors – heterogeneous assemblages that “do” marketing in different ways (Fuentes 2011).

However, marketing also transforms these heterogeneous elements. The marketing of products is unavoidably also the transformation of products (and much more). Marketing inscribes products (on inscription see e.g., Akrich 2000). Just like designers inscribe their visions in the objects they design (Hansson 2006, Ingram et al. 2007) so do marketers inscribe the products they market (Fuentes 2011). Ideas of the world along with images of who the users are become parts of products through marketing practices. It is this complex process of socio-material inscription that is analysed in the sections below.

## **An ethnographic study**

At the time of writing, the Nordic Nature Shop chain consists of 27 stores, located both in larger and smaller cities across Sweden. The stores are almost exclusively to be found at city centres. They are often well organized and decorated in accordance with the “nature” theme. The products marketed include backpacks, sleeping bags, camping tents, hiking boots, sandals, jackets, t-shirts, stoves, cooking gear and various books. The Save the Artic Fox t-shirts are among the most visibly “green” products at the Nordic Nature Shop outlets. The stores serves here as an example of how green products are constructed and what happens as they are constructed.

As is often the case in ethnographic studies, the material analysed was produced through a combination of different data collecting techniques (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

I carried out approximately 80 observations during a period of 40 months. The fieldwork began in April 2006 and the last observations were carried out in August 2010. Of these observations 70 were carried out at 13 different Nordic Nature Shop outlets and 10 at other outdoors and sports stores. The stores were located both in smaller and larger cities in Sweden. The observations lasted between 10 to 45 minutes and field notes were written within a day. During my

visits to the stores I also collected marketing material available and took photographs of the stores and display windows.

I also conducted ethnographic interviews (Spradley 1979, Holt 1997) with consumers and company staff. To get an idea of how outdoors practitioners enacted their worlds 12 interviews with outdoors practitioners that also shopped at the Nordic Nature Shop were carried out. The consumers differed in terms of gender, age, and educational background, occupations and outdoors interest. The interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and revolved around three broad themes: their outdoor practices and the role that products played in them, the Nordic Nature Shop, and the outdoors world more generally. The interviews were transcribed in full. In addition, to get a better understanding of those working at the Nordic Nature Shop and how they co-produced the outdoors world two store assistants were also interviewed about their work and their outdoors practices. These interviews lasted about 50 minutes in length and were also transcribed in full.

Finally, I have also carried out what I refer to as “collecting” – that is, the gathering of different artefacts available and deemed relevant for analysis. Different artefacts were collected while doing observations – for example, catalogues, brochures, tags, and products from the stores – and also other texts such as company documents, reports on the outdoors industry, marketing material, newspaper articles (using web based databases), and information from the webpage’s of outdoors companies.

Together these research practices produced the materials that made up the empirical database used in the analysis. One can say that I traced the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts in two different ways and at two different times. First, I followed them as they were moved through the stores when carrying out my observations. Later on, when conducting the analysis, I followed them through the material, searching the field notes, interview transcripts, photographs, documents and products in order to examine what happened to these t-shirts as they moved from practice to practice within the stores. The analysis was guided by three overarching questions: what kinds of practices are carried out here? How do these practices work to green this outdoors products?

## **Greening the t-shirts**

So, how are green products made in practice? To investigate this question I examine the Nordic Nature Shop and the marketing of the Save the Artic Fox T-shirts. The practices discussed will be recognizable to those familiar with the world of retailing. To be clear, my ambition is not to “discover” new marketing practices. Nor am I saying that these marketing practices are specific to green marketing. Instead the objective is to examine how these everyday marketing practices worked to construct green products.

### **Showing the t-shirts: inscribing green products**

First, and perhaps most importantly, the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts were made green through the marketing practices of *trail making*. By trail making practices I refer to a set of marketing practices performed by store assistants aimed at constructing a trail for consumers. The aim of trail making was to organize products and store space in a way that facilitated exchange. The underlying idea is



simple: to make the products visible and available for browsing. The products were unpacked, labeled and arranged by store assistants on a daily basis. T-shirts were folded and put on display tables, jackets were put on rails, GPS devices were placed in display cupboard and hiking boots were mounted on shelves. The products were organized according to different logics. Some products were organized according to product category. One could for example often find an entire section of the Nordic Nature Shop outlets devoted to backpacks. Other products were instead organized around an activity, brand or intended user.

Through the practices of trail making a number of materials were interlinked. The decorative elements, products, display arrangements, poster and signs were interlinked constructing a socio-material assemblage designed to facilitate exchange. This socio-material assemblage facilitated exchange by being both informative and enjoyable – it enabled consumers to find their products but also put these products into a context. That is, like many other contemporary retailing spaces the Nordic Nature Shop outlets performed a multitude of social, cultural and economic tasks in order to market their products (see e.g., Kozinets et al. 2002, Peñaloza 1999, Sherry 1998). Informants talked about the “atmosphere” of the Nordic Nature Shop outlets and seemed to enjoy and appreciate both the more “experiential” aspects of this shopping space and the fact that the Nordic Nature Shop had a broad assortment of outdoor products and information.

You get a special feeling when go in [to the Nordic Nature Shop outlet]. You get an outdoors feeling...I don't know exactly what we bought there but we sure visited the stores a lot (interview with David).

In this interview extract it becomes clear that the stores were appreciated for more than their assortment of quality products.

It is then within this enjoyable and informative retailing space that the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts were put on display. And it is through the practices of trail making that these t-shirts were constructed as green. The Save the Artic Fox display arrangement could be found in most of the Nordic Nature Shop outlets. They were often similar in terms of design and location. Normally, a display table made of wood and dark green in colour was placed close to the cash register. On this display table stores assistants would fold two stacks of t-shirts according to colour. In one stack there would be the t-shirts in the colour “olive”, in the other those in “graphite”. A sign explaining the Save the Artic Fox project was placed behind the t-shirts. On the sign, which consisted of a plastic frame and a sheet of paper with letters in black font printed on it, consumers could read:

Save the Swedish Artic Fox! The Swedish Artic fox has long been threatened by extinction but now the situation is worse than ever. New genetic analyses conducted by the Zoological Department at Stockholm University shows that the Artic fox population has slowly but surely genetically deteriorated. SEFALO is a Swedish – Finish - Norwegian cooperation project and the Nordic Nature Shop and the outdoor company Fjällräven have join together to provide economic support to SEFALO's work. For each t-shirts sold 50 Crowns are donated to the project. (Text from Nordic Nature Shop website, 5 June 2009).

This artefact was one of the most visible actants of the arrangements and gave them an informative character. The signs clearly signalled that there was information to consider when purchasing these t-shirts.

Of course, the signs were not the only communicative actant of the display arrangements. On the chest and sleeve of the t-shirts the text “Save the Artic Fox” was printed in large letters accompanied by the image of a white fox contrasting against the green (or grey) background. The brand – Fjällräven – and its signature red logo depicting a fox were placed on the sleeve, on the chest and inside the t-shirts.

A paper tag was also attached to each t-shirt. On these tags the Fjällräven brand and red logo figured no less than three times accompanied by the address to the Fjällräven webpage and information about price, size and colour of the t-shirts. Also, the word “Travel” and an image of a caravan of camels walking in the dessert figured on the t-shirt indicating that this item was part of the Fjällräven “Travel” concept. The travel concept is one of five concepts that Fjällräven uses to categorise their products. On the tags consumers could read:

Travel means adventure no matter if you go to the archipelago of Stockholm or the rain forests of Amazons. Our Travel products will simplify your adventure and you will always be able to put your trust in them. The result of our product development gives you UV protection, multipurpose function, low weight, fast drying and easy care products (Tag on the Save the Artic Fox t-shirt).

What I am describing is the construction of socio-technical assemblages. Through the marketing practices of trail making a specific arrangement of artefacts and ideas were interconnected to perform a specific marketing task. Together the display table, t-shirts, sign and tags worked to show consumers that the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts were desirable products. These assemblages communicated a particular message with the aim of attracting consumers. And indeed, they seemed successful. At the Nordic Nature Shop outlets one could observe a stream of consumers passing by these arrangements at different hours of the day. Some consumers only glanced at them before moving on, others approached to get a closer look. Some only showed interest in the t-shirts, others read the sign carefully and with apparent interest. A few, attracted by the t-shirts design, the message on the signs or a combination of the two, interacted with the t-shirts. The t-shirts were then carefully examined. Consumers touched the material and checked the tags. In some instances the t-shirts were carried away to fitting rooms and tried on.

But how were the products constructed as green? My argument is that green products were made green by inscribing them with specific moralities. That is, these products were, through socio-material marketing practices, connected to a specific set of understandings and ideas of right of wrong. In arguing this I am drawing on specific notion of morality, or rather moralities, as materialized. As Jelsma so eloquently puts it:

this socio-technical landscape is also a *moral* landscape. It reflects the collective notions of the good life. As a result of earlier inscriptions, the scripted materiality of the landscape creates all kind of gradients for behaviour, encouraging and rewarding what is acceptable, desirable and

comfortable while counteracting what is strenuous, contemptible and forbidden. (Jelsma 2003: 107)

So, artefacts are moral. I will show how the marketing practices of the Nordic Nature Shop inscribe (Akrich 2000) the Save the Arctic Fox t-shirt with a specific morality. In the practices of trail making green moralities were produced, or rather materialized, in the connections made between different actants. The key actant in the construction of moral was the sign displaying the SEFALO project text. Drawing on a scientific discourse this text argued that the Arctic Fox is in great danger. It made clear that there was a pressing need to take action. The environment should be preserved and it should be preserved through consumption. The t-shirts on display also promoted this message. The text written on the chest “Save the Arctic Fox” connected to and supported the text on the sign. In the same way, the soft texture and grey and green colours of the t-shirts, as well as the dark green colour and wood material of the display tables came together to collectively produce this “green” message. That is, the different actants were configured to produce this specific message. But what kind of message was it?

When interconnected in practice, the different materials of the Save the Arctic Fox display produced a specific morality that told consumers two things. First, it instructed them that biological diversity was good. And second, it told them that they had a moral obligation as consumers to contribute to biological diversity through their purchase choices.

At first glance what we see is a common message. After all, the idea that consumers, as individuals, are responsible for ecological damage produced by modern consumption is at the centre of all forms of green consumption (Connolly and Prothero 2008). But if we examine the work of this specific socio-technical assemblage more closely we can see that what is produced here is a specific type of green moral – one that differs from a variety of other green moralities. Allow me elaborate. The idea of biological diversity implies a specific outlook on nature and animals. Animals are important primarily as carriers of their species. This means that the protection of animals is only pertinent when the species is in danger. Biological diversity takes a system approach to animal life. Here the ecological system is what matters and the ideal is genetic diversity. Value is attributed to the species rather than the animal itself. This contrasts with, for example, the moral promoted by animal rights activists in where the protection of all animals is important. Their position is that all life forms capable of suffering should be respected. That is, animals should not be treated as property or resources of humans ([www.djurensratt.se](http://www.djurensratt.se)) but as “individuals” with their own rights. Nature is in this case not “just” a natural system but is conceived of as comprised out of different life forms to which we as humans have a moral obligation. According to this latter view the animals have rights of their own; they are not only carriers of a species.

So, a green morality emphasising biological diversity was produced and linked to the Save the Arctic Fox t-shirts. That is, through the marketing practices of trail making the t-shirts were inscribed with a specific morality. This inscription was also embodied and reinforced by the t-shirts design. The “Save the Arctic Fox” text printed in large letters on the chest accompanied by the image of a white fox is a clear materialization of this morality.

This was, however, not the only inscription produced in these practices. This green product was inscribed with more than a green message. Although these

particular human and material assemblages clearly produced a specific type of green moral this was not the only moral they produced and materialized. For example, on the small paper tag attached to the t-shirts consumers could also read about the pleasures of travelling. These t-shirts were part of the “Travel” concepts and imagery of distant landscapes was used in their marketing. Through these texts and reinforced by the retailing space of the Nordic Nature Shop outlets - a commercial space completely devoted to the promotion of travel in different forms - the “mobility is good” principle so closely connected to capitalism and modern life (Sheller and Urry 2006) was being inscribed into the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts. The mobility moral is in many ways contradictory to the green moral discussed above. As has been noted in the past, the production of a travelling culture in where flows of people travelling across the globe in search of adventure (Franklin 2004) has severe environmental consequences (Hall 2005). Also, although these assemblages promoted green consumption, they had little to say regarding the level of consumption and environmental degradation. In fact, the assemblages were configured to promote a form of green consumption that does not, in contrast to for example voluntary simplicity (Cherrier and Murray 2002; Cherrier and Murray 2007), take a critical stance towards the overall level of consumption. Built into these socio-technical assemblages was the notion of economic growth as both necessary and good that is so central to contemporary market economies. The work of these assemblages involved selling more products, boosting not only the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts but also the products of both the Fjällräven Company and the Nordic Nature Shop. In the end, what is materialized through this assemblage is a hybrid and contradictory morality, one that tells consumers to preserve nature but also to travel around the world and consume.

### Talking about the t-shirts: re-forming green products

The marketing practices of *attending* also played a crucial role in the construction of the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts. By attending practices I refer to practices that aim at providing direct service to consumers. Attending practices can thus involve answering consumers’ questions, greeting them and helping them to choose among the products of the store.

Attending is usually considered an important part of the provision of service in marketing literature. How to treat customers, the training of the service personnel and the connection between “good” service and purchase are all crucial topics with marketing literature in general and retail marketing in particular. These issues are given topics in most marketing textbooks (e.g., Grönroos 2008, McGoldrick 2002) and are now often considered by retailing companies (Bäckström and Johansson 2006). The Nordic Nature Shop seemed to be no different. At the stores visitors were usually greeted within seconds of entering by cheerful and helpful store assistants. The typical store assistant was a man in his 20s (although there were both female and older store assistants) – an athletic active outdoors person with extensive knowledge about both the products on display and outdoors life in general. They were therefore in a position to give advice not only regarding products but also regarding the outdoors in general.

Many informants characterized stores assistants as knowledgeable and reported that they relied heavily on their advice. The shopping assistants undoubtedly played an important role, adding a great deal of credibility to the Nordic Nature Shop and enforcing the stores role as central nodes in Swedish

outdoors life. The staff's role as "experts" on the outdoors was intrinsically linked to their image as active outdoors people. Or as Lars, one of my informants expressed it:

You get the idea that they know what they are talking about ...cause they are active themselves... the personnel working at the Nordic Nature Shop seem to be interested in the outdoors. That's important, after all it's pretty expensive stuff...(interview with Lars)

In this specific case, attending involved knowing about as well as answering questions concerning the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts. Sometimes consumers needed more information than what was supplied by the Save the Artic Fox display arrangement. The signs and tags so carefully arranged and displayed were not always enough. In these cases, consumers interacted with store assistants asking a range of questions. Most questions concerned the t-shirts themselves and focused on issues such as fabric (e.g., does the fabric breath?), form (e.g., do they have women's models?) and availability (e.g., do you have the t-shirt in stock or can you order it? How long will it take to deliver?). Other questions concerned the SEFALO project and campaign. In order to answer questions store assistants made use of more than their knowledge; they looked up answers on the Internet, checked the Nordic Nature Shop catalogue or consulted colleagues. In other words, they relied on other, non-human actants to carry out the task of providing service.

What the practices of attending did was to modify the t-shirts in different ways. In these practices the green moral inscribed into the t-shirts was sometimes reinforced and sometimes weakened. Every time a consumer enquired into the issue of the Artic fox preservation he or she was strengthening the production of green moral, contributing to the green inscription. Every time the store attendant responded, the production of green moral was supported, undermined or simply altered. When store assistants provided an answer that reinforced the "green" aspect – such as accentuating the importance of buying the product or providing more information about the SEFALO project – they were contributing to the green inscription by coupling new ideas and making new supporting links. When they instead produced an answer that ignored or marginalised the "green" aspect – such as responding that they simply do not know much about this project or telling the consumer that the product is basically the same as any other product – they were weakening the production of green moral by decoupling the green links established by other practices. The observations indicate that both types of answers were common. That is, the green moral produced in the practices of trail making was both strengthened and weakened by the practices of attending.

### Moving the t-shirts: mobilizing green products

The third marketing practice involved in the construction of the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts was selling. Of course, without selling practices there would be no market for the Save the Artic Fox t-shirts. Also, selling is considered an important part of service provided by the store. It is a last chance to produce a favourable experience and an important aspect included in almost all service quality studies (Underhill 1999).

The simple yet consequential practice of selling involved registering sales, charging money and producing a receipt. During the minute or so it took to sell

this product a number of technologies were put to use and electronic registrations made that linked the company, product and consumer. For the consumer, the most visible evidence of this linkage was the receipt he or she obtains. This piece of paper contained information regarding what was bought, where it was bought, when it was bought, who the seller was, the price of the product, taxes paid, and - if one used a credit card - information about the consumer as well. Hence, selling was a practice that produced numerous connections. In addition, as part of the selling practice, store assistants also answered, or tried to answer, any last minute questions such as “How long is the guarantee valid?” or “Is it possible to return the t-shirt if it does not fit?” It was at this moment that questions not asked before were dealt with and for many consumers this was the only interaction with store assistants they had. The selling point was also important in that it offered a last opportunity to market the stores and their products. One could see special offers on display close to the counter, the opportunity to sign up for the Nordic Nature Shop newsletter and other point-of-sale arrangements.

Selling practices offered an opportunity to reinforce the green morality of the Save the Artic Fox. Here store assistants could comment on the t-shirt, say something about the SEFALO project or mentioned the “toy fox” stuffed animal also connected to the project. This opportunity was however seldom taken and most of the time the t-shirt was simply registered, charged and packed without any comment that would reinforce the greening process. However, selling still constituted a crucial moment in the making of the Save the Artic Fox t-shirt as a green product but for another reason. Through these practices the green product and moral inscribed into the t-shirts was mobilized. The Save the Artic Fox t-shirts were moral artefacts that could, through purchasing, move and potentially become part of other practices. These t-shirts could facilitate the greening of consumption practices. That is, by promoting green moral and green uses these t-shirts could play a part in the re-invention of consumption practices (Shove and Pantzar 2005) or the establishment of new ones. For example, the use of a Save the Artic Fox t-shirt when walking in the woods has the potential to transform this practice, from a “mere” hike to hiking as an environmental friendly practice.

In summary, as the t-shirts were removed from the display table to the cash register the greening work of the stores was completed. It had, at least in some cases, been able to qualify a product (Callon et al. 2002, Reijonen and Tryggestad 2012), load it with green moral and other values, and send it own its way. So, although the travel of green moral certainly is possible through the simple browsing of the t-shirts, its full potential to travel was not realized until the Save the Artic Fox t-shirt was sold and bought. As this happened green moral could travel and be translated into other fields of practices. It could now spread.

### Green products as moral artefacts

This section showed that the Save the Artic Fox was made green through a process of moral inscription. The argument was that these products were inscribed with a specific environmental morality through the marketing practices of displaying, attending and selling. Through this marketing practices the t-shirts become moral artefacts that can, potentially, be meaningful to consumers. By being inscribed with this particular message these products are singled out as being “green” and can thus be incorporated into different green identity projects (Cherrier 2006; Cherrier and Murray 2007; Connolly and Prothero 2008), form part of alternative eco-communities (Cherrier and Murray 2002; Moisander and

Pesonen 2002; Jonsson 2006; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) or perhaps produce an alternative green consumption experience (Soper 2007; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

## **Conclusions**

In this paper the argument has been that products become green through a process of socio-material inscription. Through mundane marketing practices a specific environmental morality is generated and linked to green products. This practice analysis contributes to the field of green marketing studies by questioning the simplistic accounts generated by managerial green marketing research. That is, it shows what is often implied but seldom studied in socio-cultural green marketing/consumption studies; that green marketing is a complex social, cultural and material accomplishment.

More specifically, the critical socio-material practice approach taken here has generated an account of the marketing of green products that differs from that of managerial green marketing research in some important ways.

To begin with, the account developed here differs in that it illustrates the active, complex, socio-material, and political role that marketing plays in constructing green products. In contrast to managerial green marketing research, the socio-material practice approach taken here demonstrates that the marketing of green products involves more than the “the uncritical application of various methods, tools and ways of thinking in relation to marketing activities” (Tadajewski and Brownlie 2008: 4). And, the marketing of green products is more than “purely” socio-cultural. The marketing of green products is instead seen to involve a set of complex socio-material practices that result in the construction of green products through a process of moral inscription.

This analysis also indicates that the construction of green products is at times a complex accomplishment with uncertain outcomes. In contrast to the rational, abstract and highly simplified accounts of green marketing found in the mainstream literature it shows that the construction of green products could be difficult and messy and that the “green” quality constructed is specific. The making of green products required marketing practices to be configured to inscribe a specific green morality. Proper display arrangements had to be organized and store assistants had to be educated and willing to talk about the green project. As we saw this was not always the case. Even when marketing practices were configured to inscribe morality what was produced was not a “pure” green product. Although the t-shirts were inscribed and in turn promoted the green morality of biological diversity they also promoted other contradictory morals. These green products did not only encourage the preservation of the Arctic fox but also worldwide travelling and increasing consumption. And even if the inscription of the Save the Arctic Fox would work, in the sense that they read the products in the way they were intended to be read, there is no guarantee that consumers’ will find this products relevant to their lives. That is, there is no way of being completely sure if this specific green product is meaningful to consumers. The construction of green products is a heterogeneous accomplishment that is difficult to control.

With this in mind it is difficult to be overly optimistic about the possibilities of using the marketing and “commodity discourse” (Prothero and Fitchett 2000, Prothero et al. 2010) to bring about a greener consumer culture. The recoding of

capitalism is certainly not an easy task. And, not only does the accomplishment of market lead greening seem to be a difficult endeavour, one can also be critical of what happens as we engage in the commercialization of green. What does it mean for our society that morality is being so forcefully commercialized? While this tendency to inscribe commercial products with morality might be seen as an indication of the development of a more ethically reflexive consumer culture, it can also be argued that it simultaneously leads to the commercialization of morality. If more dilemmas are solved through the purchase of specific products, what does this mean for our moral reasoning? And what does it mean for our society if corporations are now responsible for the production of morality?



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