

# Research on the Contrast Marketing Strategy of Sustainable Fashion Brands: A Case Study of the Integration of Environmentally Friendly Conception and Luxury Positioning

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## Abstract:

In recent years, fashion brands have tried to enhance brand value by integrating environmentally friendly concepts in their products. However, the cognitive conflict between environmentally friendly conception and luxury has led to a polarization in market acceptance. This research takes “contrast marketing” as the perspective to explore how to keep the balance between environmentally friendly conception and luxury positioning by using the contrast effect in marketing strategies. This research shows that using strategies about contrast marketing can significantly enhance purchase intention on eco-friendly luxury goods. Meanwhile, consumers tend to prefer the legitimacy narrative strategy when only just one single contrast marketing approach is chosen. This research suggests that merchants of eco-friendly luxury brands can increase their brands’ market penetration and strengthen their corporate social responsibility (CSR) by designing contrast scenarios precisely and specifically in terms of marketing strategies, for example they can make suitable advertisements for the consumers with different levels of environmental knowledge.

**Keywords:** contrast marketing; environmentally friendly conception; luxury positioning; marketing strategy.

## 1. Introduction

At present, the global fashion industry has faced problems in that it is difficult for them to stimulate consumers’ purchasing desire through traditional

marketing. In this way, the industry is under heavy pressure about marketing. Therefore, many luxury brands, such as Patagonia, have chosen to transform towards sustainable and environmentally friendly products. However, a McKinsey report in 2023 in-

indicates that 60% of consumers believe that eco-friendly products should be cheaper than common products, and only 25% consumers show a willingness to pay for premium-priced products with eco-friendly luxury attributes [1]. This conclusion has shown the conflict between the cheap stereotype of environmentally friendly conception and luxury positioning in marketing. Therefore, contrast marketing would reshape consumers' cognition and enhance their purchasing intention by juxtaposing these contradictory attributes together. This research mainly uses empirical analysis methods to analyze the influence of contrast marketing on purchase intention, environmental protection cognition conflicts and consumers' perception of related environmentally friendly luxury goods, as well as the different roles of contrast marketing among consumers with different levels of environmental knowledge.

## 2. Literature Review

Contrast marketing is an emerging strategy that is essentially based on the synergistic effect of the contrast effect and the cognitive dissonance theory. It reshapes the consumer cognitive marketing strategy by juxtaposing contradictory attributes.

Kardes et al. pointed out that the contrast effect juxtaposes brand attributes, such as performance and cost amplifies consumers' perceived differences, but this effect is controlled by information credibility and brand loyalty [2]. However, too many complex strategies may cause cognitive overload with negative influence [3]. In the real business cases of the current society, Patagonia promoted a positive increase of 30% in sales by using the reverse advertisement of „Don't Buy This Jacket“ and the means of contrast marketing. This data confirms the potential of „contrast marketing“ that integrates luxury marketing and environmental protection concepts compared to traditional marketing methods. However, behavioral deviations in luxury purchases are still quite obvious now [4]. This kind of contradiction reflects that the effect of contrast marketing is restricted by environmental perception conflict in real practice. Between the concept of environmentally friendly conception and the positioning of luxury, the contradiction between consumers' expectations of low prices for environmental products and the expected positioning of luxury is prone to trigger cognitive dissonance. Therefore, some researchers suggest alleviating conflicts and promoting the possibility of purchase intention by increasing relevant authentic narratives [5]. Additionally, similar designs can be made to reduce the cognition of related conflicts [6]. Meanwhile, because of Hermes' case about mushroom skin handbags priced over 10,000 yuan, this has sparked controversy over „pseudo-environmental protection“. Some researchers have emphasized that luxury brands need to establish a synergy mechanism between

ethical and environmental attributes and high-end images to avoid the situation of similar „pseudo-environmental protection“ and the negative impact of contrast marketing [7]. From the perspective of purchase intention, contrast marketing (such as self-exposure of shortcomings, saying the opposite, etc.) enhances consumption motivation by reducing decision-making pressure [3,8]. On this basis, some researchers have further proposed that the contrast marketing strategy can reduce consumers' guilt and sensitivity through „environmental legitimacy“ after purchasing [9]. This view reflects the stereotype of extravagance and waste in luxury goods. Moreover, it justifies the consumption decisions related to environmental protection in consumers' minds. However, nowadays, most of the existing studies focus on a single dimension of luxury marketing or marketing of eco-friendly products. These researches lack systematic exploration between the integration mechanism of environmentally friendly conception and luxury and the boundary conditions of contrast marketing strategies

## 3. Research Hypothesis

### 3.1 The Contrast Marketing Effects on Consumers' Purchase Intentions for Eco-Luxury Products

With 30% increasing sales in Patagonia's case by using contrast marketing, one method of contrast marketing like reverse advertisement called counter-statement marketing. In addition, the point about the positive effect through „environmental legitimacy“ after purchasing can also lead a method of contrast marketing by shifting the motivation of purchasing behavior from „luxury consumption“ to „social contribution“, which is called legitimacy narrative marketing. Therefore, this research proposes the following two hypotheses related to contrast marketing to compare with traditional marketing approaches:

H1: Contrast marketing can enhance consumers' intentions to purchase eco-friendly luxury products. This marketing is based on its combination with current actual cases and methods. In this way, it can currently be classified as follows:

H1a: The counter-statement strategy can simultaneously enhance consumers' feedback on the brand's environmentally friendly conception attributes and luxury attributes. This can have a positive synergy effect. When a brand builds a contrasting scene through a combination of highly credible contradictory information, consumers' cognitive evaluation and acceptance of the brand's environmental protection value and luxury value will be significantly higher than that of the traditional single-appeal advertisement and marketing strategy.

H1b: Legitimacy narrative marketing can enhance the purchase intention by shifting attribution in terms of responsibility, especially when the brand can clearly indicate or announce that the premium portion is used for environmental protection projects.

### 3.2 The Mediating Effect of Product Perception Conflict

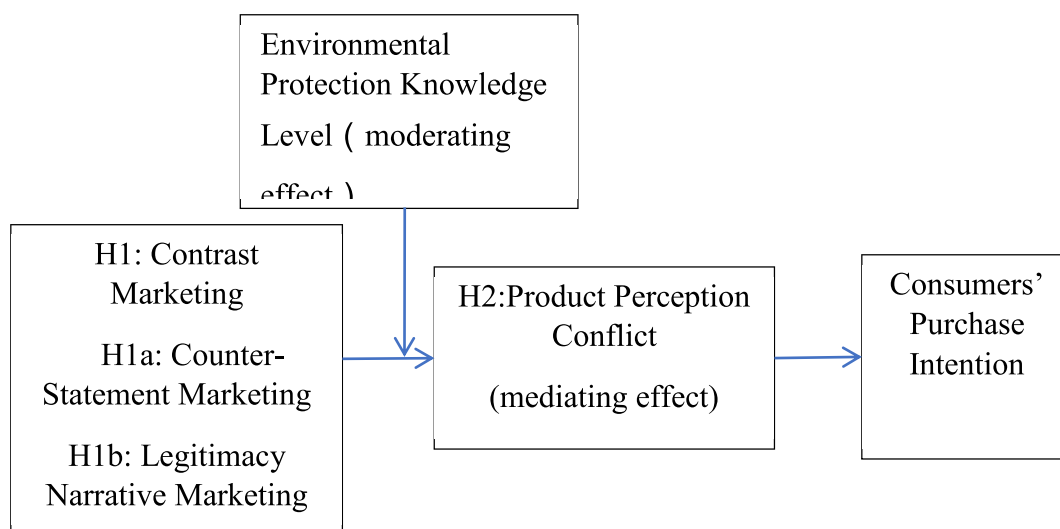
The conflict in product perception stems from the contradiction between consumers' stereotype that „environmentally friendly products are often low-priced“ and the stereotype that luxury brands themselves set high prices. According to the cognitive load theory, moderate conflicts can stimulate cognitive curiosity and promote information processing and purchasing decisions [10]. However, when the intensity of the conflict exceeds the individual coordination threshold, such as when the information complexity exceeds the „ $7\pm 2$ “ cognitive capacity of Miller's Law, it will cause a value recognition crisis and even lead to consumers' decision avoidance on purchasing [11]. There-

fore, this research proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: Product perception conflict has a mediating effect between contrast marketing and purchase intention, and this is manifested differently among different groups.

### 3.3 The Moderating Effect of Individual Cognitive Differences (Environmental Protection Knowledge Level)

The level of consumers' environmental protection knowledge reflects their cognition and purchasing intentions, specifically, consumers with more knowledge about environmental protection have a stronger tolerance for contradictory information conflicts in contrast marketing. For example, environmental consumers are more easy to accept and practice green consumption, and they will be more sensitive to products with green labels and more willing to purchase [12,13]. Therefore, the environmental protection knowledge level of consumers was added to the experiment as a moderating variable.



**Figure 1 Contrast Marketing's theoretical model about Purchase Intention**

As shown the details in Figure 1's model, contrast marketing influences consumers' purchase intention from the categories of counter-statement marketing and legitimacy narrative marketing as dependent variables. Additionally, product perception conflict plays the role of mediating effect in the influences and using environmental protection knowledge level as moderating value to keep the accuracy of the result.

## 4. Research Method

In this experiment, 300 test participants were first asked to observe three comparison group advertisements (traditional marketing, counter-statement marketing and legitimacy

narrative marketing) and measure the difference between the participants' purchase intentions with traditional marketing before and their intentions after contrast marketing. The questionnaire used in the test is based on the Likert scale, with items 1 to 7 as the measurement items for consumer agreement and intentions between traditional marketing and contrast marketing (in the scale, 1 can be seen as strongly disagree, 7 can be seen as strongly agree, increasing according to the degree of recognition). Subsequently, the questionnaire was further designed according to the Cognitive Dissonance Reduction Index to measure and get quantitative indicators about the mediating variable product perception conflict. Then, the difference in environmental protection knowledge level is taken as the

moderating variable to keep the experimental results' accuracy. Finally, the personal information of the subjects is collected, such as participants' ages, purchase frequency and genders.

## 5. Research Result

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics

This is an experiment with 300 test participants. In the sample, there were 101 males and 199 females. The part of males accounted the proportion about 33.7% of the total and the part of females accounted the proportion about 66.3%. This gender distribution revealed that there were significantly more women than men participating in this experiment. In terms of age, the largest number of participants were aged 26-35, with 133 people, accounting for 44.3%, followed by those aged 18-25, with 93 people, accounting for 31.0%, the participants' age between 36-45 has 53 people, accounting for 17.7%; and those over 46, with 21 people, accounting for 7%. This indicates that most of the participants are concentrated between the ages of 18 and 35, especially in the group aged 26 to 35, which

accounts for the highest proportion. Most of these participants only bought luxury products once or twice last one year.

### 5.2 Reliability Tests

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient served as a metric for evaluating the questionnaire's reliability. In this way, the higher coefficient can reflect the better internal consistency of the scale. In the questionnaire, this experiment takes Q9, Q10, Q11 and Q12 as the indicators of counter-statement marketing; Q13, Q14 and Q15 as the indicators of legitimate narrative marketing; Q16, Q17, Q18 and Q19 as the indicators of product perception conflict; and Q23, Q24 and Q25 as the indicators of environmental protection knowledge level. Thus, the results show that Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is 0.786 for counter-statement marketing, 0.870 for legitimacy narrative marketing, 0.706 for product perception conflict and 0.713 for environmental protection knowledge level. This means high inter-item reliability indicates measurement precision sufficient for path modeling. It can measure the factors related to purchase intention more reliably.

**Table 1. Reliability Statistics**

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
index of counter-statement marketing	0.786	4
index of legitimacy narrative marketing	0.870	3
index of product perception conflict	0.706	4
index of environmental protection knowledge level	0.713	3

### 5.3 Validity Test

As shown in Table 2, The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure quantifies sampling adequacy for factor analysis. This can be seen as suitability if it is higher than 0.60. Generally, the higher KMO value shows that the data would be more suitable for doing factor analysis.

The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is used to test the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. The results showed that the KMO value (0.892) was suitable for factor analysis. The P value of Bartlett's test of Sphericity is 0.000, indicating the rejection of the null hypothesis. These evidences show that there is a sufficient correlation and that they are suitable for factor analysis.

**Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.892
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2551.703
	df	190
	Sig.	.000

Using Principal Component Analysis (PCA), it can be seen in Table 3 that five principal components with eigenvalues exceeding 1 were retained after subsequent rotation. Five principal components are 6.865, 2.149, 1.287,

1.261 and 1.146 which can cumulatively explain 63.542% of the total variance. The percentage of variance explained by the figure of the sum of squared extracted loadings is consistent with that of the rotated loadings, this means



that the principal components retained after factor analysis are stable. It can also be effective for capturing the relationships among variables. The Rotated Component Matrix indicates that the component 1 mainly reflects the promoting effect of environmentally friendly conception attributes on purchase intention, the component 2 mainly represents the influence of legitimacy narrative marketing on purchase intention, the component 3 mainly displays the influence of counter-statement marketing on purchase

intention and the component 4 mainly shows the influence of the mediating variable perception conflict on purchase intention. The component 5 mainly indicates the influence of differences in environmental protection knowledge as moderating variables on purchase intention.

To sum up, five major components have a significant impact on consumers' purchase intention of products with environmentally friendly - luxury attributes.

**Table 3. Rotated Component Matrix**

	1	2	3	4	5
Q4	0.763				
Q5					0.858
Q6	0.737				
Q7					
Q8	0.714				
Q9			0.750		
Q10			0.793		
Q11			0.700		
Q12			0.662		
Q13		0.777			
Q14		0.839			
Q15		0.807			
Q16				0.780	
Q17				0.862	
Q18				0.791	
Q19					
Q20					
Q21	0.554				
Q22	0.578				
Q23					0.671
Q24					0.516
Q25					0.712
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis					
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization					
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations					

## 5.4 Correlation Test

After using PCA in Table 3, it is reasonable that the relevant variables could be integrated to reflect the overall variable trend. Thus, the mean values of the variables in component 2 were taken and integrated into the legitimate narrative indicator and using the same integrated method in components 3, 4 and 5 as an index about counter-statement marketing, product perception conflict and environ-

mental protection knowledge level.

Table 4 shows that there are significant correlations between consumers' purchase intentions and counter-statement marketing, legitimate narratives marketing, environmentally friendly conception attributes, and environmental protection knowledge levels.

**Table 4. Correlation Analysis**

		Q4 environmentally friendly conception attributes	Q8 purchase intentions	counter-state- ment market- ing	legitimate narratives marketing	environmental pro- tection knowledge levels
Q4	Pearson Cor- relation	1	0.469**	0.313**	0.262**	0.271**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
Q8	Pearson Cor- relation	0.469**	1	0.525**	0.515**	0.332**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
counter-statement marketing	Pearson Cor- relation	0.313**	0.525**	1	0.463**	0.289**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
legitimate narra- tives marketing	Pearson Cor- relation	0.262**	0.515**	0.463**	1	0.264**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.000
	N	300	300	300	300	300
environmental pro- tection knowledge levels	Pearson Cor- relation	0.271**	0.332**	0.289**	0.264**	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	
	N	300	300	300	300	300
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2-tailed)						

### 5.5 Linear Regression

The results' data of linear regression analysis show that the adjusted R-squared value of the model is 0.45, this means that this model can explain 45% of the changes in purchase intentions. The F value of the regression is about 62.114 and the P value is 0.000, indicating that this regression model is significant as a whole.

In Table 5, the variance inflation factor (VIF) value is 1.169 for environmentally friendly conception attributes, 1.372 for counter-statement marketing, 1.32 for legitimacy narrative marketing, and 1.155 for environmental protection knowledge levels. All of the VIFs above are less than 5. Thus, this means that there are no significant multicollinearity problems among the variables.

**Table 5. Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF

1	(constant)	-0.276	0.422		-0.654	0.514		
	Q4 environmentally friendly conception attributes	0.233	0.039	0.28	6.037	0	0.856	1.169
	counter-statement marketing	0.349	0.064	0.274	5.459	0	0.729	1.372
	legitimate narratives marketing	0.318	0.054	0.289	5.858	0	0.758	1.32
	environmental protection knowledge levels	0.15	0.069	0.1	2.178	0.03	0.866	1.155
a. Dependent Variable: Q8(Purchase Intentions)								

There is a clear regression equation with significant dependent variables can be generated which is based on the above analysis:

$$y = -0.276 + 0.233x_1 + 0.349x_2 + 0.318x_3 + 0.15x_4$$

The y means the dependent variable (purchase intentions). Then, the  $x_1$  means environmentally friendly conception attributes, the  $x_2$  means counter-statement marketing,

the  $x_3$  means legitimate narratives marketing and the  $x_4$  means environmental protection knowledge levels. This equation indicates that the two kinds of contrast marketing have a significant positive impact on enhancing consumers' purchase intention.

## 5.6 Pared Samples Ttest

**Table 6. Paired sample statistics**

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Deviation
Pair 1	Q6(traditional marketing)	4.95	300	1.459	0.084
	counter-statement marketing	5.3883	300	1.11561	0.06441
Pair 2	Q6	4.95	300	1.459	0.084
	legitimate narratives marketing	5.468	300	1.290	0.07448

As shown in Table 6, it can be seen from Pair 1 that the purchase intention about eco-friendly luxury products was 4.95 points before contrast marketing. Then, the index of purchase intention increased to 5.38 after counter-statement marketing and the latter was 0.43 points higher than the former. Meanwhile, in Pair 2, the latter index was 5.468

and it was 0.518 points higher than the former after legitimate narratives marketing. These pieces of evidence indicate that under the two kinds of contrast marketing strategies, consumers' purchasing intentions have increased significantly.

**Table 7. Paired Samples Correlations**

		N	Correlation	Sig
Pair 1	Q6(traditional marketing)& counter-statement marketing	300	0.428	0
Pair 2	Q6& legitimate narratives marketing	300	0.508	0

As shown in Table 7, it can be seen that the correlation between the purchase intention of traditional marketing and counter-statement marketing is 0.428. Additionally, the index with legitimate narratives marketing is 0.508. Both

of their P value is 0.000. This means that null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that there is a significant correlation between them. This means these two pairs are applicable for the paired sample t-test.

To further compare whether the two kinds of contrast marketing have reached the level of statistical difference, it is necessary to do a paired sample t-test.

**Table 8. Paired samples test**

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Devia- tion	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Q6 - counter-state- ment marketing	-0.43833	1.40738	0.08126	-0.59824	-0.27843	-5.395	299	0
Pair 2	Q6 - legitimate narra- tives marketing	-0.5188	1.37153	0.079185	-0.67472	-0.363057	-6.553	299	0

In Table 8, the t value in pair 1 is -5.395 with a P value less than 0.001 and the t value in pair 2 is -6.553 with a P value less than 0.001. Both of the two pairs are significant. Thus, it can be seen that the null hypothesis emphasized the significant difference in purchase intention before and after contrast marketing. Meanwhile, two kinds of contrast marketing significantly increase the purchase intention

based on traditional marketing at different levels.

### 5.7 Mediation Effect Analysis

According to the theory of cognitive dissonance in contrast marketing, this research integrated component 4 in Table 3 as an index of mediating variable cognitive conflict called perception conflict.

**Table 9. The mediation effect of cognitive conflict in counter-statement marketing**

Regression(N=300)		Fit Indices				Significance
Explanatory Variable	Outcome Variable	R	R2	F	$\beta$	P value
counter-statement marketing	purchase intentions	0.4276	0.1829	66.6854	0.5591	0.000
Cognitive Conflict	purchase intentions	0.096	0.0092	2.7738	-0.1024	0.0969
counter-statement marketing	purchase intentions	0.4614	0.2129	40.1708	0.5373	0.000
	Mediator variable (Cognitive Conflict)				-0.2136	0.0009

**Table 10. Decomposition table in counter-statement marketing**

	Effect value	Boot SE	ULCI	ULCI	Effect Size
Total Effect	0.5591	0.0685	0.4244	0.6939	
Direct Effect	0.5373	0.0676	0.4042	0.6704	96.08%
Indirect Effect	0.0219	0.0158	-0.0052	0.0568	3.92%

As is evident from Table 9 and Table 10, although cognitive conflict has an impact on the influence of using counter-statement marketing and purchase intention, cognitive conflict is not significant and it is not the mediator

variable. This shows that eco-friendly luxury products are more directly attractive for the consumers than the indirect way of being affected by cognitive conflict.

**Table 11. The mediation effect of cognitive conflict in legitimate narratives marketing**

Regression(N=300)		Fit Indices				Significance
Explanatory Variable	Outcome Variable	R	R2	F	$\beta$	P value

legitimate narratives marketing	purchase intentions	0.5078	0.2578	103.5189	0.5742	0.000
Cognitive Conflict	purchase intentions	0.2383	0.0568	17.9466	-0.2198	0.000
legitimate narratives marketing	purchase intentions	0.5166	0.2669	54.0681	0.5477	0.000
	Mediator variable (Cognitive Conflict)				-0.1204	0.05

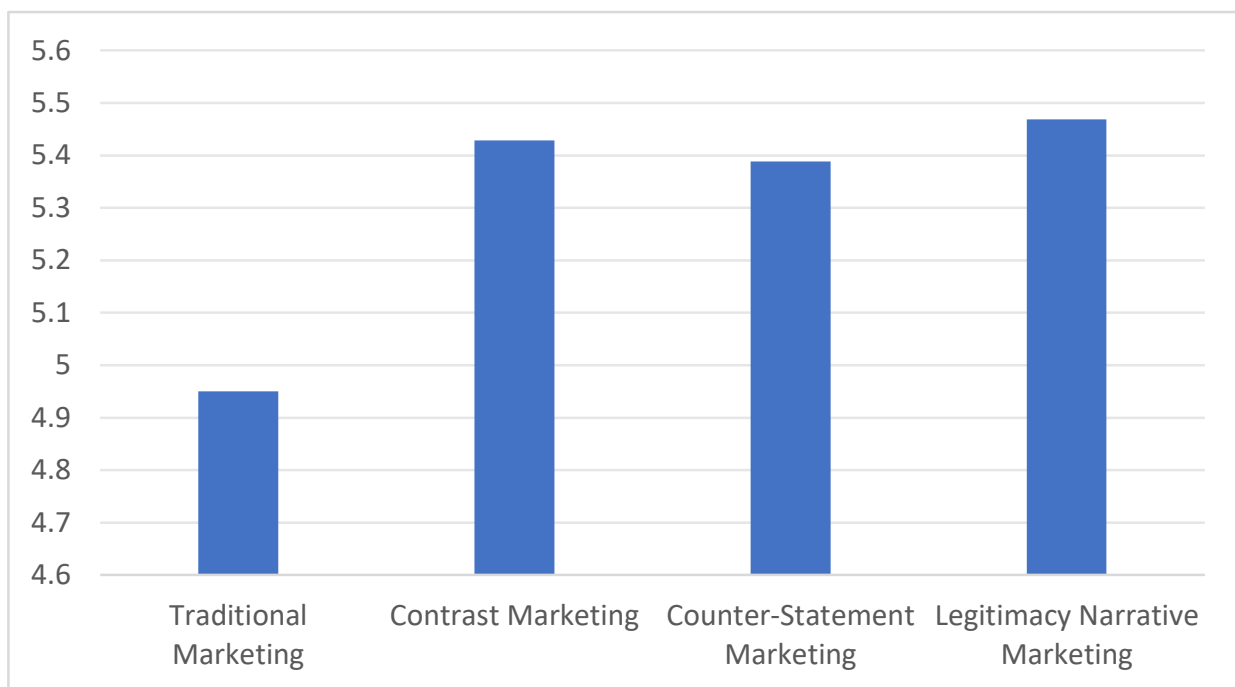
**Table 12. Decomposition table in legitimate narratives marketing**

	Effect value	Boot SE	ULCI	ULCI	Effect Size
Total Effect	0.5742	0.0564	0.4631	0.6852	
Direct Effect	0.5477	0.0578	0.4339	0.6615	95.4%
Indirect Effect	0.0265	0.0147	0.0006	0.0575	4.6%

As is evident from Table 11 and Table 12, the cognitive conflict has a significant influence between legitimacy narrative marketing and purchase intention and it plays a role of indirect mediating effect. Thus, it is necessary to consider the relevant information in marketing advertisements in legitimacy narrative marketing. In this way,

fashion brands can use cognitive conflict to promote information processing speed and avoid cognitive dissonance caused by excessive cognitive conflict.

## 6. Discussion



**Figure 2 The Impact of Contrast Marketing and Traditional Marketing**

As shown in Figure 2, according to regression analysis results and other data, there is a macroscopic comparison between traditional marketing and contrast marketing

while conducting a horizontal comparison of the two types of contrast marketing. It can be found that contrast marketing can enhance consumers' purchase intention with



the phenomenon of intentions to purchase eco-friendly luxury products increasing after applying contrast marketing. Additionally, through the separate analysis of two representative contrast marketing strategies, it can be seen that consumers tend to prefer the legitimacy narrative strategy when only just one single contrast marketing approach is chosen.

Meanwhile, consumers with full environmental knowledge generally have a higher degree of tolerance for cognitive conflict than those in low-knowledge groups. This can make the effect of contrast marketing more significant, especially in counter-statement marketing. In contrast, low-knowledge groups have lower tolerance for cognitive conflict, the feature of telling the truth in legitimate narratives marketing makes this marketing more suitable for this kind of group.

## 7. Conclusion

This research found the positive impact between contrast marketing and consumers' intentions through empirical analysis. These research findings would enrich the research on contrast marketing as an emerging marketing and the marketing method of eco-friendly luxury products. Moreover, these results can provide relevant contrast marketing methods for fashion brands, such as Patagonia. For example, fashion brands can insert footage of eco-friendly supply chains and materials in products that reflect the features of environmental friendliness and durability of goods. In this way, they can make their products more attractive while weakening the stereotypes of luxury goods, such as being expensive and not durable. And they can complete the design of contrast scenes successfully. On the other hand, fashion brands can highlight the clear premium of the product to emphasize its legitimacy. For the consumers, the information in advertisements can be simplified more by using certification labels and story-telling expressions to reduce the possibility of cognitive overload. Additionally, the price should be reasonable to avoid the problems about "pseudo-environmental protection" like Hermes.

However, this research has certain limitations because the academic community lacks a clear definition of contrast marketing. Meanwhile, the size of the empirical analysis is 300 people, which is relatively small. Additionally, the quantitative indicators for analyzing contrast marketing would be further adjusted and developed in future studies.

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