# ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY OF A CANADIAN ALPINE SPORT AREA: A CASE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT**

This Master's thesis explores environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) in the alpine sport industry. A mixed methods case with a single alpine sport provider in Quebec was performed. The first study is a qualitative examination of how and why ECSR is employed and communicated. Results indicate ECSR is strategically motivated, and as such, the focal organization runs the risk of using several greenwashing techniques in communications that could jeopardize gaining competitive advantage.

The second study quantitatively investigates alpine sport consumers' environmental expectations, engagement with environmental products, and perceptions of the focal organization's environmental reputation. The results show the focal organization's customers do indeed have environmental expectations, but believe the focal organization's environmental reputation remains neutral.

The thesis supports arguments of corporate social responsibility (CSR) being strategically motivated and other findings of skiers having conflicting environmental values. Lastly, the thesis provides insight regarding greenwashing, a phenomenon that remains unexplored in sport management.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Environmental issues continue to be discussed in the media, and the general public is awakening to the detrimental effects businesses can have on nature when proper environmental precautions are not taken. However, there is inconclusive evidence showing that the rises in media attention have re-shaped consumers' consumption preferences (HSBC Climate Partnership, 2008). While many organizations are attempting to cater to the possibility of attracting environmentally conscious consumers, only some are operating in environmentally conscious ways with others only appearing to be environmentally responsible to amass consumer support (TerraChoice, 2010; Lyon & Maxwell, 2006; Lyon & Maxwell, 2011).

Many messages regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR) reflect genuine and tangible environmental efforts, whereas others are superficial and cosmetic attempts of operating in environmentally friendly ways (Kramer & Porter, 2008; Laufer, 2003). With the immense amount of environmental claims initiated by businesses (TerraChoice, 2010), it appears that some firms have found creative ways of appearing environmentally conscious to appease the consciences of some environmentally concerned consumers, activists, NGOs, and regulatory bodies (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006; Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; Murray, 2003; Rowe, 2005). Little research exploring if or how external stakeholders acknowledge environmental messages exist, especially in the broader sport context (Walker & Kent, 2009).

To help fill this research gap, this research study will focus on the single case of a Canadian alpine sport provider and its stakeholders. The primary purpose of this research is to explore how environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) is communicated to external stakeholders in the alpine sport industry. A secondary purpose is to understand the motivations for ECSR among alpine sport providers, and to explore the demand for ECSR among alpine sport recreationists according to professionals.

**Why is this topic important for the Alpine Sport Industry?**

In recent years, climate change has created several distinct issues for alpine sport providers who are now often forced to work with shorter and warmer winter seasons. Moreover, organizations' environmental irresponsibility is frequently highlighted by mass media, and alpine sport providers are no exception. The Vancouver Olympic Committee (VANOC) for example, experienced much negative attention upon deciding to keep alpine sport competitions at the Cypress Mountain venue during the 2010 Winter Olympics, despite community members' environmental and economic concerns of doing so. VANOC subsequently chose to cover the Cypress Mountain hillside with hay, then, natural and human-made snow brought in by dump trucks, snow-cat groomers, and helicopters (Canwest News Service, 2009). Environmental activists, as well as the general public attacked the organizing committee via public protests which brought new light to the potential environmental damage of alpine sport provision. Moreover, the public outcries illustrated the reputational damage environmental irresponsibility could have for alpine sport providers, in this case, VANOC.

A second example illustrating the importance of environmental considerations for alpine sport managers occurred in 1998 when a group of environmental activists caused $12 million worth of damage by burning down several amenities at Vail Mountain (i.e., a chairlift, a lift operation hut, and a restaurant) in protest of expansions into critical lynx habitat (Glick, 2003). As a result, it is clear that maintaining an environmentally conscious reputation can lead to avoiding negative backlash from environmentally concerned external stakeholders in the alpine sport industry. It remains to be seen, however, if other competitive advantages can be gained by alpine sport providers by proactively behaving in environmentally conscious ways, rather than simply trying to avert stakeholder backlash.

The Canadian ski and snowboard market is a five-billion dollar annual industry (Canadian Ski Council, 2009), and as such, provides a context in which apparently many consumers participate. It is therefore a worthwhile endeavour to understand how the natural environment plays a role in alpine sport providers' marketing mix, and what role ECSR plays in the minds of alpine sport consumers.

**Research Study**

This case study is presented in two different studies. The focus is on a major alpine sport provider in Quebec. Quebec, of all provinces, hosts the most alpine sport areas in Canada ($n$ = 80), as well as the most annual skier visits per year (roughly 6.2 million visits, compared to 5.8 million in British Columbia and 2.4 million in Alberta) (Canadian Ski Council, 2009). Arguably, alpine sport areas in Quebec could use their environmentally responsible reputations to differentiate from the high number of other resorts in the province.

The first study of this thesis comprises a qualitative content analysis of the focal organization's external communications to understand, from an outsider's perspective, how environmental issues are framed and discussed to external stakeholders, and to explore the phenomenon of greenwashing in the alpine sport industry. The first study also incorporates data from semi-structured interviews with the focal organization's managers and two external stakeholder groups (the municipality's environmental department and the alpine sport area's resort association). These stakeholders were chosen to understand more about the focal organization's beliefs and motivations towards ECSR, as well as the organization's communication approaches.

The second study uses a survey design to explore the extent to which the focal organization's customers expect alpine providers to operate in environmentally responsible ways, the extent to which they seek and engage with environmental communications, and how they perceive the focal organization's environmental reputation. With the overall project now introduced, it is important to discuss some of the relevant literature associated with corporate social responsibility.

## Review of Literature

While some scholars have argued CSR is unrelated to business (Friedman, 1962; Freeman & Liedtka, 1991; Henderson, 2005), others contend CSR is of strategic significance (Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Portney, 2008). No universally accepted definition of CSR exists, but nearly all definitions emphasize that CSR goes beyond lawful obedience, and a company avoiding discriminating against women and minorities, for example, is not engaging in CSR; it is obeying the law (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Since 2000, environmental actions became integral parts of many CSR definitions (Bullis & Ie, 2007), and with this study's purpose focusing on environmental features of CSR, Lyon and Maxwell's (2008) definition of ECSR has guided this research: "Environmentally friendly actions not required by law, also referred to as going beyond compliance, the private provision of public goods, or voluntarily internalizing externalities" (pp. 240-41).

### Altruistic and Strategic CSR

Milton Friedman's (1962) now famous criticism of CSR plainly argues that businesses have but one social responsibility: to use resources within the boundaries of the law in activities geared on maximizing profits. Friedman, in 1970 went further, and was supported by several authors who argued an act only counts as CSR if it is unprofitable, and that, socially beneficial actions that increase profits are something else (Elhauge, 2005; Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; Reinhardt, Stavins, & Vietor, 2008). Baron (2001) first described “something else” as strategic CSR, which is allowably profitable and assumes CSR can be used to gain competitive advantages (Porter & Kramer, 2007). Despite extensive research on CSR, however, evidence of firms sacrificing profits for exclusively social or environmental interest is scarce, and limiting an examination of ECSR to altruistic cases would indeed be a short one (Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; Portney, 2008; Reinhardt et al., 2008).

There is little empirical evidence, however, showing CSR to be strategically beneficial (Portney, 2008) and that better environmental performance, for example, is associated to better financial performance (Margolis, Elfenbein, & Walsh, 2007). At best, it appears a mild positive relationship between responsible performance and positive financial performance exists (Margolis et al., 2007).

**Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility**

The literature on ECSR, in general, addresses two questions: (1) What factors convince firms to engage in ECSR, and (2) what are the benefits of ECSR (Lyon & Maxwell, 2008). The reasons for an organization’s participation in ECSR are presumably complex, and Lyon and Maxwell (2008) as well as Portney (2008) specifically discuss these reasons in detail. One key motivation for ECSR has repeatedly risen (e.g., Bullis & Ie, 2007; Margolis, Elfenbein, & Walsh, 2007; Porter & van der Linde, 1995), upon which authors have concluded that the surge of environmental programs may be a result of managers beginning to understand that wasteful by-products are symptomatic of other production inefficiencies, and minimizing inefficiencies leads to cost reduction and a strategic “win/win opportunity” (Lyon & Maxwell, 2008, p. 243).

Portney (2008), on the other hand, noted another popular reason for ECSR’s implementation; the goodwill it can generate in communities and potential consumers. Lyon and Maxwell (2008), as well as Portney (2008), further noted that environmentally aware consumers are often willing to pay more for products provided by environmentally conscious organizations, and may be another convincing factor in managers deciding to implement (or appear to implement) ECSR for strategic differentiation reasons.

Not all managers, however, are motivated to implement ECSR for socially beneficial reasons. Lyon and Maxwell (2008) explained the possibility of businesses taking active steps under the guise of ECSR to avert mandatory environmental regulation, an argument echoed by Asongu (2007), Murray (2004), Portney (2008), and Rowe (2005). Moreover, managers also often use ECSR as a defensive strategy in dealing with their damaged brand images, or when business practices are under scrutiny (Ihlen, 2009; Portney, 2008; Waller & Conaway, 2011).

There is even the possibility of managers “greenwashing” or simply appearing to have implemented ECSR without actually having done so. Greenwashing is “the selective disclosure of positive information about a company’s environmental or social performance, without full disclosure of negative information on these dimensions” (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006, p. 6). Greenwashing is problematic as it is essentially false advertising, and can be used to dupe consumers into supporting businesses on false pretences (TerraChoice, 2010).

**Legitimacy Gaps**

In industries heavily dependent on the natural environment (like the alpine sport industry), the possibility of legitimacy gaps (Sethi, 1979; Wicki & van der Kaiij, 2007) arising increases when environmentalism is claimed in communications, but not legitimately acted upon. A legitimacy gap occurs when discrepancy exists between an organization’s performance and people’s expectations of the organization (Sethi, 1979) and often results in consumers’ decreased trust in an organization (Lafferty, 2007). Wicki and van der Kaiij (2007), Ilhen (2009) and Sethi (1979) argued it is the public opinion of the organization's legitimacy that matters, and thus, organizations must effectively and honestly communicate CSR efforts, as it is the consumers' negative evaluation of the organization's discourses that lead to legitimacy gaps.

With the world of sport being so visible in the everyday media, one instance of an organization's legitimacy gap or irresponsibility often has detrimental effects on entire industries (Walker & Kent, 2009). As such, most CSR critics believe CSR in sport to be an apologetic tactic used to rectify negative publicity (Godfrey, 2009). In these cases, ECSR is thought of as a response to ethical blowback (DeCelles, Donaldson, & Smith, 2007; Godfrey, 2009), a process by which people's negative reactions to an organization lead to public and widespread negative publicity. Godfrey noted that the great deal of blowback sport organizations receive provides a fruitful opportunity for ECSR researchers. Godfrey specifically recommended future research on how organizations respond (both reactively and proactively) to blowback, and how organizations perceive their responsibility in ameliorating environmental issues.

**Mountainous Regions and Alpine Sport's Effects on the Natural Environment**

Mountains are important sources of water, energy and ecological diversity and are also sources of natural resources like minerals, forest products, agricultural products and recreation (United Nations, 1993). Mountains are relatively sensitive ecosystems, however, and are susceptible to accelerated soil erosion, landslides, and rapid loss of genetic diversity (Fischer & Wipf, 2002; Wipf et al. 2005; United Nations, 1993). Disturbances of alpine habitats and unnatural changes are likely to have negative effects on alpine ecosystems' stability and functionality (Mulder, Uliassi & Doak, 2001; Wipf et al., 2005), and thus, explicit attention from managers operating in mountain regions is warranted.

Tonge (2008) outlined alpine sport's possible environmental effects, and noted that impacts can be divided into two categories: the impacts caused by initial development (e.g., ski trails, lifts and infrastructure), and the impacts associated to maintaining alpine sport areas (e.g., snowmaking and monitoring trails). Clifford (2002) alternatively proposed that it is the "combined direct and indirect effects of ski-resort development and its associated sprawl that, cumulatively, are most damaging" (p. 178).

**Effects of Creating and Maintaining Alpine Sport Trails and Providing Lift Services**

This next section is intended to provide a non-exhaustive description of the potential environmental damage alpine sport areas could have and provide readers some background information about the alpine sport industry's public image.

Creating alpine sport trails and lifts requires the removal of trees, brush, and large rocks in a process called grading (Wipf et al., 2005) to provide clear paths for customers to ascend and descend the mountain. Changing mountains' natural compositions, however, could lead to soil and vegetation damage which can initiate further ecosystem changes (Ruth-Balaganskaya & Myllynen-Malinen, 2000). Grading processes have been found to have effects on wildlife, as food sources have been found to dwindle near graded alpine sport trails (Rolando et al., 2007). Grading has also been found to cause flooding, landslides, and increased erosion as melting water in the Spring can rush down trails unimpeded, carrying sediment into unnatural zones (Holden, 1999; Tonge, 2008).

Alpine lift services as well as snowmaking have also attracted considerable attention in the past, as these mechanisms are typically energy-draining machines. Alpine sport providers have taken notice, however, and have begun replacing diesel powered lifts and snowmakers with quieter and cleaner electric alternatives (Clifford, 2002). With technological advancements, lifts and snowmakers are even being operated with renewable electricity sources such as the Aspen Ski Company's wind powered chairlift (Clifford, 2002), or with Telluride Ski Company's current attempts to build a solar powered gondola (Green Gondola, 2011).

While snowmakers are becoming more environmentally benign, their immense water usage has been another target of environmental criticism (Clifford, 2002). Pumping large amounts of water often leaves streambeds exposed to the colder air, threatening invertebrates (Clifford, 2002), and can cause low flow rates, threatening aquatic life and biodiversity (Tonge, 2008). The additional snowpack has also been shown to have effects on the natural environment, but researchers have avoided concluding these effects are necessarily negative (Keller et al., 2004; Rixen, Stoekli, & Amman, 2003; Rixen, Haeberli, & Stoekli, 2004). For example, it is argued that human made snow from river water could have fertilizing effects on plant species, or protect soil from cold temperatures (Kammer & Möhl, 2002; Rixen et al., 2003; Rixen et al., 2004; Wipf et al., 2005), while the additional snowpack can also delay snowmelt and flowering periods (Keller, 2004; Wipf et al., 2005).

A final criticism for snowmaking has been the use of chemical additives in the mixtures of water and compressed air to aid freezing water at warmer temperatures (Clifford, 2002). The major additive used by most alpine sport providers is a snow inducer and provides an ice-nucleating protein derived from naturally occurring bacteria (Pseudomonas-syringae). While many critics of human-made snow argue snow inducers are environmentally harmful, no academic research supporting or countering the environmental effects of snowmaking chemicals was found for this study.

While it may appear that alpine sport areas have comparatively moderate environmental effects, they are by no means negligible (Wipf et al., 2005), and some alpine sport providers have introduced ECSR initiatives to limit those environmental effects; some have been successful, while others have attracted academic criticism (Abegg, Burki, & Ellasner, 2006).

Some examples of alpine sport areas' ECSR initiatives have included using renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, and biodiesels (Clifford, 2002; Ski Green Guide, 2008; Ski Green Guide, 2009; Sugarloaf, 2011) or employing more efficient equipment (e.g., snowmakers, snowmobiles, toilets and faucets) (NSAA, 2008; NSAA, 2011). Many alpine sport managers have additionally begun waste diversion programs like recycling and composting programs (NSAA, 2006). Industry wide ECSR programs have also been implemented in North America, such as the Sustainable Slopes Program (SSP) created by the National Ski Area Association (NSAA). The SSP has received much criticism and mixed reviews, however, as many critics question the program's voluntary and unmonitored nature, and doubt that ECSR can replace environmental policy (Donohoe, 2004; Khanna, 2001; King & Lenox, 2000; Rivera, de Leon, & Koerber, 2006).

Many academics (Abegg, Burki, & Ellasner, 2006; Rivera, de Leon, & Koerber, 2006; Scott, McBoyle, & Minogue, 2007) thus maintain that alpine sport area management feel no pressing environmental action on their part is required, mirroring the alpine sport industry's environmentally harmful public image. What many people believe about the alpine sport industry is that the major corporations that run alpine sport areas "care about, first and foremost, growth and income, not elk, songbirds, or the quality of life of resort workers. They do not care sufficiently about the long-term viability of skiing, ski towns, [or] the natural environment in which the sport is rooted" (Clifford, 2002, p. 203).

It is speculated that a market-based demand for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision would convince alpine sport providers to behave in environmentally responsible ways, but only inconclusive data showing that such demand exists (Tonge, 2008). Fry (1995) for example, found that skiers were unconcerned with environmental issues at alpine sport areas. Other researchers have similarly concluded that skiers and snowboarders are more concerned with other resort amenities like snow conditions, spas, restaurants, après ski activities, and other luxuries (Alexandris, Kouthouris, & Meligdis, 2006; Clifford, 2002; Edensor & Richards, 2007, Klenosky et al., 1993). Hudson and Ritchie (2001) on the other hand found that skiers and snowboarders would be willing to pay price premiums if alpine providers decided to become more environmentally responsible.

According to Scott and McBoyle (2007), literature examining the dynamics between patrons and ski area management has had little "prominence in the developing literature on climate change associated with tourism-recreation, and remains an important research gap" (p. 1412). This paper intends to begin to fill this gap by researching the dynamics between ski area management and patrons who expect certain environmental standards.

## Methodology

A case study of one alpine sport area is used to explore the perceptions towards ECSR among stakeholders (i.e., consumers, managers, the municipality's environmental authorities, and resort association). Case studies are intended to provide readers with an opportunity to view the world from the participants' perspectives and can provide a richer understanding of the investigated phenomenon compared to other methodologies (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The essence of the case study methodology is that it is used to illuminate why a set of decisions were taken, and the results of those decisions (Schramm, 1971).

Case studies often include multiple sources of evidence, including interviews (in this case with the focal organization's leadership, the municipal government, and resort association), documents and archival records (in this case, the communications of environmental actions in advertising, and on websites), and questionnaires (of the focal organization's patrons to measure the end users' evaluations of ECSR initiatives) (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2008). Using several data sources allows for more evidence and richer case descriptions, in turn, allowing for triangulating results and providing a more thorough understanding of ECSR's implementation at the alpine sport area.

A sequential exploratory design (Creswell, 2009) was used with one alpine sport provider in Quebec. It followed a linear and sequential pattern, with qualitative methods initiating the research process and concluded with a quantitative measurement of customer expectations and perceptions of the focal organization (Creswell, 2009).

## Case Description

The focal organization resides in a small rural Quebec town with a population of about 9000 people (Statistics Canada, 2006a). The average age of residents is 44 years old, and the average household income was $45,523 in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006b) compared to $70,400 nationally in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2006b). 90% of the population is francophone, and 7.7% is Anglophone. The region takes up about 250km squared, and is made up of three, amalgamated townships. According to Statistics Canada (2006a), there are 6,628 private dwellings in the region, 3,873 of which are occupied by usual residents. This indicates about 42% of private dwellings in the region are occupied by part-time or seasonal residents, meaning, many private dwellings are used as vacation homes or cottages, exemplifying the community's high tourism value. Moreover, the region's residences have, on average, a 30% higher property value ($257, 389) than the provincial average, indicating those non-usual residencies are probably occupied by cottagers or vacationers with higher incomes.

With over one billion dollars of investment since the 1990s, the alpine sport area is one of the largest tourist investment projects in eastern North America. Residing in a provincial park, the community's economic hub is centred on the alpine sport area which hosts nearly 90% of jobs in the region. Almost half of those jobs are directly related to sport and recreation tourism (Municipality Website).

The focal organization is a subsidiary of a multinational resort-destination conglomerate and employs 1500 people during the high season in a range of departments. With the elevated importance on environmental issues, the focal organization created an environmental department in the mid1990s, and has endorsed the Sustainable Slopes charter created by the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA), an American organization that helps alpine sport providers ensure the sustainable use of natural resources. In the early 2000s the focal organization won a series of environmental awards. Most notably, it was recognized in 2000 for its trend-breaking trail construction and innovative layout that left untouched strips of vegetation beside mountain streams on narrow, winding trails to reduce sediment contamination and erosion.

## Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection period began in September 2010 by collecting communications and documents available to external stakeholders (e.g., pamphlets, brochures, newsletters, newspaper articles, trail maps, flyers, posters, and websites). The researcher then conducted a qualitative content analysis in October, 2010 of those communications to understand how the focal organization's ECSR was being framed or communicated to other stakeholders. This data was used to form the qualitative interview questions which began in November 2010. In total, 10 managers from the focal organization were interviewed, as well as the municipality's environmental director, along with the resort association's vice president. The interviews lasted between 35 and 95 minutes, and were subsequently transcribed verbatim.

The results from the interviews then helped formulate the survey questions used to understand how the patrons interpreted the focal organization's ECSR actions, and general thoughts about environmentalism in the alpine sport industry. The surveys with patrons took place on six different days (four week-days, and two weekend-days) between January and February 2011 at the focal organization's main summit lodge.

**Study One: Qualitative Methods**

This phase of analysis is presented in two parts. The qualitative content analysis was used to understand what environmental information is passed on to external stakeholders, to verify how the natural environment was framed in those communications, and to explore the phenomenon of greenwashing in the alpine sport industry.  The interviews focussed on how environmental decisions were made, how specific ECSR initiatives were implemented, the perceived demand for ECSR and its strategic implications, as well as environmental regulation. The semi-structured interview was most fitting since it allowed for breadth in the motivations for implementing environmental initiatives, while keeping the interview specific and related to environmentally responsible strategies (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

Tellis (1997) asserted that interviews are one of the most significant sources for case study information. Interviews were especially fitting for this case study because responses are contextually bound to the interviewees' social and historical situation (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Scheurich, 1995). Of the 12 interviews conducted, 11 were conducted over the phone, and one was conducted face-to-face. The interviews were semi-structured based on a pool of 25 questions, and were conducted in both English and French, while sometimes briefly switching from language to language.

According to Tellis (1997), documents are also beneficial for case study research, and they can encompass any written or photographical material that is connected to the investigation, and are usually instances of communication between parties in the study. By understanding which environmental issues are communicated, it is possible to later verify if managerial directions “lack resonance amongst the relevant public” (Feindt & Oels, 2005, p. 162), in this case, by surveying the patrons and external stakeholders in subsequent phases of research.

As with all methods, certain pitfalls exist with content analyses and interview data. To avoid overstating the value of one document or one interview participant, the researcher triangulated results between several documents or interviewees’ comments as a confirmation process (data triangulation) (Denzin, 1970). To further avoid the pitfalls of many qualitative methods, a reflexive approach was used, with the researcher consciously checking for objectivity in the analysis. “Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining ‘outside of one's subject matter’ while conducting research” (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999, p. 228). Similarly, researcher reflexivity “entails careful consideration of the phenomenon under study, as well the ways a researcher’s own assumptions and behaviour may be impacting the inquiry” (Watt, 2007, p. 82). While all content analyses or qualitative data require researcher interpretation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), the conclusions for this study were finalized only after the researcher explored his own personal biases (Watt, 2007) towards environmental advertising, greenwashing, the alpine sport industry, CSR, and the goals of private business in general. The results reported in the thesis, then, are not completely devoid of personal bias (they never could be), although the researcher did attempt to remain objective as possible. The results are presented in the form of quotations to show how the researcher came to certain conclusions and are further based on analytical direction from Kilbourne's (1995) framework for analyzing degrees of environmental ethics in environmental advertisements and Henriques and Sadorsky's (1999) framework for assessing ECSR.

**Study Two: Survey Design**

A 27 question survey based on the qualitative content analysis, the information garnered from interviews, and existing literature was used to understand how consumers respond to the focal organization's ECSR attempts. All items were responded to on a seven-point Likert-type scale (where 1 = completely disagree, 4 = a neutral response, and 7= completely agree). Overall, the survey attempted to investigate if alpine sport customers indeed have environmental expectations from alpine sport providers, if they engage with environmental information and products provided in the general marketplace, and lastly, how the customers view the focal organization's environmental reputation.

Surveys were conducted at the alpine area's main summit lodge with individuals who had skied or snowboarded that day and had the opportunity to view and experience the focal organization's ECSR. In total, 512 people were approached, and 345 accepted to participate in the study. Of those 345 surveys, 338 were returned. Of those 338, five were deemed unusable due to missing responses, leaving 333 useable surveys. As the survey included 27 items, having 333 useable surveys ensured an adequate 10-to-1 item to participant survey ratio (Newton & Rudestam, 1999).

## Thesis Format

The paper-based format was most appropriate for presenting the thesis. As such, the thesis is organized sequentially with qualitative research (i.e., qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interview data) preceding the quantitative study (i.e., surveys). The thesis is then concluded by a section discussing the studies along with suggestions for future research.

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# Chapter 2:

## Exploring the Motives and Communication of Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility from a Canadian Alpine Sport Area

Since the early 2000's, the alpine sport industry has received criticism related to its ecologically damaging practices linked to over consumption of natural resources like water, fuel sources, and land resources (Rixen et al., 2003; Rixen et al., 2004; Kammer & Möhl, 2002; Wipf et al., 2005). At worst, the alpine sport industry's ecological impacts have been compared to those of the logging and mining industries (Hudson, 2006), and have attracted specific criticism when operated within national parks. Gadd (1998) argued that alpine sport is,

> The crack cocaine of recreational economies: dirty, damaging, and addictive as hell. Like trail-motorcycling, like snowmobiling, like road building, logging, mining, and a host of other wilderness-wrecking activities that started small and got out of control before they were stopped, mechanized skiing should have ended in the national parks long ago. (pp. 1-2)

The alpine sport industry appears to have at least acknowledged these accusations, and appears to have begun "greening" the industry. Major evidence exemplifying a "green revolution" can be illustrated by industry-wide initiatives like the National Ski Areas Association's (NSAA) Sustainable Slopes Program (SSP) or individual environmental corporate social responsibility (ECSR) initiatives from individual alpine sport areas. Several authors have argued, however, that the SSP, as well as many individual ECSR initiatives within the alpine sport industry are purposeful attempts of making it seem the industry is "greener" than it really is (Clifford, 2002; Rivera & de Leon, 2004; Rivera, de Leon, & Koerber, 2006). Many alpine sport providers, for example, have been accused of using deceitful environmental communications, and the industry “appears committed to an aggressive spin campaign to portray itself as environmentally friendly in the face of countervailing facts” (Clifford, 2002, p. 187).

In the past 10-15 years, ecological issues have also gained attention in the broader marketplace, and have proven to be consequential for top-level decision makers (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999; Waller & Connaway, 2011). Consequently, many companies including alpine sport providers have begun to detail environmental protection efforts through publicly available communications, and have pledged to deliver core products and services while operating in environmentally conscious ways. In turn, ECSR has gained exposure among management research. From that research, two themes are most relevant to this study’s examination of ECSR in the alpine sport industry. The first has been a consistent investigation of companies’ reasons for investing into ECSR (Asongu, 2007; Baron, 2001; McWilliams & Siegel, 2010; Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Murray, 2004). The second has centred on how managers can effectively communicate environmental initiatives without attracting negative attention (Waller & Connaway, 2011; Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007).

Accordingly, truth and honesty in advertising regarding environmental communications has become a concern within both, the general marketplace and alpine sport industry (Hudson, 2000; Clifford, 2002). For example, organizations like the Ski Area Citizens’ Coalition and grassroots websites like the “Ski Green Guide” have attempted to highlight the deceptive environmental marketing techniques (otherwise known as greenwashing) used to confuse or entice skiers and snowboarders who desire environmentally responsible alpine sport options.

The first purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the greenwashing phenomenon in the alpine sport industry and to further understand how nature and ECSR actions are framed in external communications. The second purpose of this study, is to better understand why alpine sport managers do or do not implement ECSR, and equally, do or do not communicate about ECSR.

To do so, two qualitative methods were used. Firstly, qualitative content analysis was used examining a Canadian alpine sport provider's promotional materials to understand how nature is used in those communications, and secondly, explore greenwashing in the alpine sport industry. After the researcher gained an appreciation for the organization's environmental actions through examining external communications, semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand more about alpine sport managers' feelings towards ECSR.

The alpine sport industry provides an interesting context for the examination of these ECSR issues. Firstly, while there is evidence that outdoor recreationists are willing to support companies that effectively protect the natural environment (Brymer, Downey, & Gray, 2009; Hudson & Ritchie, 2001; Teisl & O'Brien, 2003), there is also evidence showing skiers and snowboarders are more concerned with other resort amenities (e.g., snow conditions, spas, restaurants, etc.) (Alexandris, Kouthouris, & Meligdis, 2006; Clifford, 2002; Edensor & Richards, 2007). Secondly, according to Abegg, Burki, and Ellasner (2006), as well as Scott, McBoyle, and Minogue (2007), only a minority of alpine sport providers have acknowledged the industry's destructive habits and the majority has been reluctant to admit to the damaging bi-products of alpine sport provision. This majority has been additionally accused of actively deceiving stakeholders into thinking effective environmental protection efforts are in place (Clifford, 2002; Rivera, de Leon, & Koerber, 2006).

Moreover, the sport presents participants and providers a dubious predicament in which both parties enjoy yet simultaneously exploit the very resources that provide the service. Without a regulatory body specific to the alpine sport industry, however, alpine sport providers are left to apply their own ECSR initiatives to protect the natural environment (Clifford, 2002; Rivera & de Leon, 2004; Rivera, de Leon, & Koerber, 2006).

## Review of Literature

### Strategic and Altruistic CSR

Baron (2001) was the first to define strategic CSR, and noted that if CSR was in place to benefit the financial agenda of an organization, CSR was strategic. Thus, strategic CSR is allowably profitable, and assumes CSR can be used to gain competitive advantages (Porter & Kramer, 2007). If, on the other hand, a CSR action is socially motivated, and occurs at the cost of company profits, the CSR action is altruistic, or separate from strategic motives (Latnos, 2001; McWilliams & Siegel, 2010). Despite extensive research on CSR, however, evidence of firms sacrificing profits for exclusively social or environmental interest is scarce (Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; Portney, 2008; Reinhardt et al., 2008).

Regardless, there is little empirical evidence showing CSR to be strategically beneficial (Portney, 2008) and that better environmental performance, for example, is associated to better financial performance (Margolis, Elfenbein & Walsh, 2007). At best, it appears a mild positive relationship between responsible performance and positive financial performance exists (Margolis et al., 2007; Porter & Kramer, 2007). Porter and Kramer (2007) offered a reason for the lukewarm strategic results CSR has been found to create thus far, and argued that a major weakness of many strategic CSR campaigns is that managers tend,

> To focus on the tension between business and society rather than on their interdependence… and the result is oftentimes a hodge-podge of uncoordinated CSR and philanthropic activities disconnected from the company's strategy that

> neither make any meaningful social impact nor strengthen the firm's long-term competitiveness. (p. 5)

Accordingly, managers must decide whether to reveal the practical and strategic motives for engaging in CSR as some stakeholders may view CSR activities "more favourably if divorced from any discussion of the bottom line" (McWilliams & Sigel, 2010, p. 4). By managers choosing to limit certain discourses, the resulting lack of communication has resulted in stakeholders having difficult in assessing CSR (McWilliams & Siegel, 2010).

Among the many strategic benefits of implementing CSR (e.g., brand differentiation, attracting consumers, etc.), many CSR critics have questioned the voluntary roots of the concept, and are often sceptical of companies adhering to CSR principles when not obliged to do so by law. In turn, many critics argue that CSR is also a tactic companies use to persuade governments and the general public that additional regulation is unnecessary for a given cause (Baron, 2001; Khanna, 2001; King & Lenox, 2000; Murray, 2004). It is speculated that by taking (or appearing to take) measures to improve a given social situation, "corporations wish to pre-empt government intervention and regulation" (Asongu, 2007, p. 13). As a result, authors like, Murray (2004), and Rowe (2005), have explored further into the worries about strategic CSR's implementation for the purpose of avoiding more compulsory, and stringent policies. These authors have specifically noted that by engaging in CSR, "corporations have found a burrow through which they can escape from the hound-dog sniffing of the government's regulating bodies" (Asongu, 2007, p. 13). Authors who argue CSR is used as a regulation-avoiding-tactic further dispute that if corporations were genuinely concerned with the social situations their CSR efforts are to aid, they would then encourage governments to formalize those efforts as mandatory laws (Asongu, 2007; Rowe, 2005).

The same criticisms have been put forth of the alpine sport industry's most visible ECSR program, the National Ski Area Association's (NSAA) Sustainable Slopes Program (SSP) whose voluntary nature has been questioned by detractors (Clifford, 2002; George, 2003). Research has found, for example, that institutional pressures motivated alpine areas to participate in the program and participation in the SSP is correlated with lower environmental performance (Rivera & de Leon, 2004; Rivera, de Leon, & Koerber, 2006). Rivera et al. (2006) thus concluded that participation in the SSP "is related to coercive and normative pressures in the form of enhanced federal oversight and higher state environmental demands exerted by state agencies, local environmental groups, and public opinion" (p. 216). In effect, the SSP has been deemed a "greenwashing" technique due to its lack of mandatory performance standards and third party oversight (Tonge, 2008) to which critics further question the value of "voluntary programmes where ski resorts opt in with non-binding obligations" (Tonge, 2008, p. 18).

**Greenwashing**

Greenwashing is the practice of misleading stakeholders by promoting environmental initiatives to leave the impression that the firm is operating in environmentally conscious ways (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006). While some companies have lied outright about their environmental actions in hopes of reaping competitive advantages, the primary greenwashing concern (among NGOs and academics) appears to be the practice of presenting "positive information out of context in a way that could be misleading to individuals who lack information about the company's full portfolio of activities" (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006, p. 5). While there is evidence of greenwashing being purposeful and calculated (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006), others admit greenwashing is also done accidentally (TerraChoice, 2010).

Greenwashing is problematic because, whether intentional or not, over-emphasizing a product or service's positive traits can mislead consumers into purchasing products or services based on unmerited environmental credit (Gibson, 2009; TerraChoice, 2010). TerraChoice (2007) argued greenwashing had several other negative consequences, which included usurping market-share and limiting the penetration of companies with genuine, environmentally responsible products. Moreover, TerraChoice (2007) argued that as consumers gain experience with greenwashing, cynicism may develop towards all environmental claims that could result in eliminating the market-based financial incentive for real "green" product innovation (TerraChoice, 2007).

Greenwashing has proliferated in the alpine sport industry (Schendler, 2008), but where many people regard greenwashing as a monolithic process, Carlson, Grove and Kangun (1993), and TerraChoice (2010) demonstrated greenwashing occurs in a variety of ways. TerraChoice, for example, noted seven "sins" of greenwashing exist (which are based on Carlson Grove and Kangun's (1993) study). "The sin of the hidden trade-off" for example, occurs when a product is claimed to be green based on an unreasonably narrow set of attributes while ignoring other (more) important environmental issues. "The sin of vagueness" is committed when claims are overly broad or so poorly defined that meaning is likely to be misinterpreted.

Since no systematic investigations of the alpine sport industry's greenwashing techniques exist, the researcher felt the criteria designed by Carlson et al. and TerraChoice fit perfectly; more information on the methodology used for the research is provided in the methodology section, but first, research regarding communicating CSR and ECSR is synthesized in the following section.

**Communicating Corporate Social Responsibility**

Throughout the 1990s, building corporate reputations based on CSR efforts became a main concern for many successful companies that now incorporate information regarding CSR efforts in annual reports and other communications (Conaway & Wardrope, 2010; Waller & Conaway, 2011). These communications have developed a whole new set of considerations for managers who must now evaluate how to best communicate CSR efforts to stakeholders (Porter & Kramer, 2007; Waller & Conaway, 2011).

While only about 10% of firms actually report their CSR efforts (Wigley, 2008), evidence demonstrating consumers wish to know more about companies' CSR exists (Zadek, 2001). The current state of CSR reporting, however, is largely cosmetic or superficial, and often does not reflect actual operations (Porter & Kramer, 2007). Several researchers have further delved into the challenges of communicating CSR, and have found managers are often hesitant to communicate especially about environmental initiatives (Burgess, Harrison, & Filius, 1998; Friedman & Miles, 2001; Peloza, 2005).

**Reluctance to communicate ECSR.** One factor leading to managers' reluctance to communicate about ECSR initiatives is the belief that "green fatigue" is developing among many consumers (Greenberg, 2008; VanDeveer, 2003) who are simply tired of hearing or seeing environmental claims from businesses. Subsequently, these consumers either ignore environmental claims altogether, or even act purposefully to support other organizations.

Another possible reason leading to managers' reluctance to communicate about environmental initiatives is the belief that environmental claim scepticism is rising among many consumers (Kilbourne, 1995; Lyon & Maxwell, 2006; Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007) and is a direct result of the immense amount of false advertising regarding supposed environmentally friendly products (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006; TerraChoice, 2010). Several authors have pointed to organizations over-emphasizing the positive effects their ECSR actions can have, and argue that since customers can not readily test many intangible ECSR actions, green claim scepticism has increased (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006; Gibson, 2009). Peloza (2005) thus argued that with increasing green claim scepticism, managers are beginning to withhold environmental communications to avoid attracting any potential backlash or negative attention.

Consumer scepticism is a direct result of consumers' perceiving legitimacy gaps in a company's communications (Lafferty, 2007; Sethi, 1979). Legitimacy gaps occur when stakeholders recognize discrepancies between an organization's actual performance, and what those stakeholders have come to expect based on the organization's previous brand promise or communication (Sethi, 1979). In other words, legitimacy gaps are the gaps "between the CSR image that companies are pursuing as a brand and the actual identity of that brand as a corporate citizen" (Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007, p. 317).

Since many organizations pursue CSR-based identities without altruistically engaging in CSR, many researchers have argued CSR is used strategically by managers to enhance corporate reputation and gain trust from stakeholders (Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Portney, 2008). While Miles and Covin (2000) argued superior ECSR performance can lead to improved corporate reputations, appearing overly strategic without fulfilling ECSR commitments often leads to legitimacy gaps that damage corporate reputations (Wicki & van der Kaiij, 2007).

To increase the likelihood of reaping strategic benefits from a positive corporate reputation, several authors have argued that ECSR should be part of a wide range of operations, and the organization's image should rather be an organic reflection of an internal identity as to narrow or eliminate legitimacy gaps (Pruzan, 2001; Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007). Heikkurinen and Ketola (2009) equally argued that organizations should concentrate on living or being their image rather than trying to project or manage one. Heikkurinen (2010) as well as, Aurand, Gorchels and Bishop (2005) thus concluded that although communicating CSR efforts externally to consumers can be fundamental for generating value from CSR, corporate images are not solely developed by marketing employees, but rather, an entire staff striving to deliver on a brand promise. Boone (2000) described the unfortunate disconnect between many companies' external communications and brand promise:

> Many companies do a brilliant job of advertising and marketing to customers. Then comes the hard part; delivering. While they put millions of dollars into marketing [external branding], most companies invest little to ensure that employees transform brand messages into reality in terms of the customer's experience. It's one thing to tell customers who you are and quite another to show them who you are. Employees have to be engaged to make the brand come alive. Therefore, the messages sent to employees about the brand are just as important as the ones sent to customers. (p. 36)

## Methodology

As previously mentioned, two qualitative methods were used for this research: a directed, qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. 19 individual documents were analyzed for the content analysis (e.g., brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, website, activity guides). These documents originated from the focal organization and were analyzed prior to interviewing 10 managers from the alpine sport area, along with the municipality's environmental director, and the resort community's vice president. The communication pieces considered for the content analysis were collected on-site at the alpine sport area, and are accessible for any customers who enter any of the lodges, customer service areas, or seek environmental information on the organization's website.

Directed content analyses are used when existing theory or research exists about a phenomenon that can benefit from further description and analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Only communications with an environmental aspect were analyzed, and to determine if a communication piece included an environmental element, Iyer, Gulas, & Banerjee's (1995) green communication delineations were used. Iyer et al. (1995) argued that an environmental discourse:

1. Explicitly or implicitly addressed the relationship between a product/service and the biophysical environment.
2. Promoted a green lifestyle with or without highlighting a product/service.
3. Presented a corporate image of environmental responsibility.

Directed content analysis is a deductive, structured, and guided method, upon which the researcher attempts to deduce applicable and preconceived categories in a new research context (Hickey & Kipping, 1996; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The first motive in conducting the research in this manner was to further explore the greenwashing phenomenon in the alpine sport industry; the second motive was to understand how the focal organization framed ECSR actions and the natural environment in its external communications.

In exploring the focal organization's external communications, the seven types of greenwashing created by Carlson, Grove and Kangun (1993) and TerraChoice (2010) were used as preconceived codes. This is a logical method of doing so as Carlson et al. originally proposed the framework so that researchers could employ an instrument that had "the potential to pinpoint problem areas present among environmental advertisements" (p. 27). To determine how the focal organization framed the natural environment and their environmental protection efforts, the "green" philosophies discussed in Kilbourne's (1995) analytical framework were used as pre-conceived codes.

Kilbourne's analytical framework was also used in analysing interview data. Semi-structured phone interviews were conducted during November 2010, a month prior to the focal organization's 2010-2011 season-opening. In total, 10 of the focal organization's managers were interviewed from a range of departments (e.g., sales and marketing, distribution, finance, ski patrol, mountain operations, food & beverages, maintenance, risk management, mountain development, public relations).

Semi-structured interviews focus on the respondent's subjective experiences which, "allow those respondents to describe in detail the situation as it is meaningful to them" (Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 107). The major disadvantage of the semi-structured interviews, however, is that the researcher "is vulnerable to the interpretations and subjective insights of the informant" (Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 107). The subjectivity inherent to interview data may also be considered an advantage in this case, however, as it is each manager's subjective opinions of environmental issues and ECSR that eventually shape, influence and inform each manager's eventual business decisions.

To help mitigate the "weaknesses" of content analysis, semi-structured interviews, and other qualitative methods, the results have been triangulated to present only information that was cross verified by at least three sources (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006), and as such, results are represented by several quotations from various sources to ensure each particular result is well supported (e.g., respondents from different managerial departments, passages from several advertisements).

**Analytical Framework**

Kilbourne (1995) proposed a model based on environmental ethics for assessing environmental discourses and ECSR motives in the management context. Kilbourne's model was used deductively to compare managers' comments regarding motives for ECSR, and to better compare the focal organization's ECSR communications. The framework included two intersecting continuums; a political and positional continuum. The positional dimension was anchored by environmentalism on one end, and ecologism on the other. Environmentalism assumes humans are separate from the rest of nature, and environmental protection efforts are in place for anthropocentric reasons that often depend on technological fixes to "solve" environmental problems. Ecologism, on the other hand, involves a more ecocentric perspective, and assumes humans are part of nature and other species have equal and inherent value.

It is important to note another main difference between ecologism and environmentalism. Ecologism places an almost political importance on creating fundamental changes in values and patterns of production and consumption. Ecological communications, for example, would not promote using technological advances to sidestep environmental issues to maintain current usage patterns; ecological communications would alternatively aim at curving those usage patterns (Mol & Spaargaren, 2000; Tilley, 2000).

Kilbourne (1995) also proposed several other rankings within the "positional" continuum, and between the two extremes already discussed, came conservationism, human welfare ecology, and preservationism which respectively become less anthropocentric (positional) and more radical (political). These delineations are important for this study as it is assumed by the researcher that a dichotomy of businesses being “green” and “not green” does not actually exist. Rather, there are many non-mutually exclusive degrees of being “green” with some more appropriate for business in the sport and recreation field. Some communications, for example, emphasize sidestepping environmental consequences by using technological innovations so natural resources are preserved for future generations (Hansen, 2002), while other communications emphasize protecting the natural environment for its own inherent value (Kilbourne, 1995). Kilbourne (1995) thus noted that, while deciding to go beyond what environmental laws require is commendable, some ECSR actions are greener than others. With these environmental ethics now reviewed, it is possible to gauge how the natural environment is framed in the focal organization’s external communications and among managers’ ECSR perceptions.

The interview data was also analyzed according to Henriques and Sadorsky’s (1999) RDAP framework which provided a classification system directly grounded in CSR literature (Hunt & Auster, 1990; Roome, 1992). Henriques and Sadorsky’s framework outlined four environmental managerial approaches (Reactive, Defensive, Accommodative, and Proactive).The authors described different managerial actions taken associated to environmental issues and categorized the degrees to which managers take on different environmental responsibilities. For example, the authors noted that corporations having and communicating environmental plans to internal and external stakeholders, or having units and committees dedicated to dealing with ecological issues are some examples of proactive corporate approaches to the natural environment. The interview data from focal organization’s management was deductively compared to the nomenclature provided by Henriques and Sadorsky to better understand how ECSR is implemented within the focal organization, and the motivations for the focal organization's ECSR according to the interview participants.

## Results

### Qualitative Content Analysis

The focal organization's concern for environmental issues is certainly present throughout much of the firm's external communications. Most brochures and pamphlets, for example, clearly state the materials' fabrication of "100%" and "50 %" recycled post-consumer fibres. The promotional materials also often allude to the natural world, and to the out-of-the-ordinary natural scenery available at the alpine sport area.

The researcher's readings of these materials have thus resulted in an understanding that the focal organization communicates its environmental protection efforts based on an anthropocentric philosophy of valuing nature (Kilbourne, 1995). Of the limited environmental communications the organization does disseminate, some important points can be added to the existing knowledge regarding greenwashing in the alpine sport industry. Specifically, the results show that communicating about environmental initiatives in an overly vague manner may be occurring, as well as overemphasizing the value of some environmental initiatives while not informing consumers of other "hidden" tradeoffs (TerraChoice, 2010).

**Anthropocentric valuation of nature.** The focal organization's anthropocentric valuation of the natural environment was most often displayed in customers' testimonials scattered across both print and online communication.

For instance, an activity guide from the 2010-2011 alpine sport season read: "We walked through the village after dinner… the moon, the lights, the crisp clean air, the music…and the mountain right there! It was pure magic!" This testimonial is representative of many instances of the focal organization emphasizing the aesthetic pleasure nature can provide. Communicating nature's re-creative abilities and aesthetic value is indicative of "human welfare ecology" (Eckersley, 1992), however, nature is still presented as something that is valuable because it provides something for humans; not for its own inherent value.

Another example of the focal organization using environmental appeals to attract customers occurs in its exclamation of its superior snow cover: "The Mountain's drop dead gorgeous. It has impeccably groomed trails…amazing snow parks… and snow – tons of it – thanks to over 1000 snow guns, one of the biggest snowmaking systems in North America." While this passage does not necessarily promote an ECSR initiative, it denotes the use of technological advancements (snow guns) to provide outdoor recreation. Where this particular passage again values the natural environment's aesthetic beauty, it is also evidence of an environmentalist valuation because of the reliance on "techno-fixes" to sidestep environmental challenges. Other environmental ethics were presented in the focal organization's communications, but were usually more anthropocentric; they are presented throughout the following sections exploring greenwashing.

**Communicating in an overly vague manner.** Vague environmental communications occur when a claim is overly broad or so poorly defined that stakeholders are likely to misunderstand the claim (e.g., calling a product or service "green" or "environmentally friendly" without any further elaboration (TerraChoice, 2010)). Several vague terms were used in the focal organization's communications, such as "green" and "environmentally friendly" to describe mountain operations. One brochure for the 2009-2010 ski season for example, opened with the alpine area's attested environmental consciousness:

> "My Green Mountain: We take our environmental responsibility very seriously (which is only natural- we owe it all to Mother Nature). For all the details, visit our website."

In this example, the focal organization professes its innate relationship with Mother Nature, yet, instead of specifically discussing what is "green" about its operation, the communication relies on vaguely appealing to the consumers' desires to be "green" without denoting how supporting this particular organization helps benefit Mother Nature.

A similar example of the focal organization's vague ECSR communications comes from a 2010-2011 season brochure:

> "It's totally natural. We're as green in the winter as we are in the summer. Like you, environmental responsibility is a natural part of everything we do. For more details, visit our website."

In this example, the organization compares its "greenness" to the literal green colour of its natural summer surroundings. While ignoring the fact that being "green" does not necessarily promote greater biodiversity, the passage is again guilt of using the vague, green/not green dichotomy, in which little, if any, information about the organization's actual environmental efforts and actions is communicated. Additionally the overly vague discourse makes it unclear if the organization's alpine sport provision is totally natural (e.g., it does not use chemicals in artificial snow, etc.), or if the organization's relationship with nature constitutes an organic connection, a more ecocentric ethic.

Another example of the organization using vague environmental messages occurs in its communication of its environmental charter, the SSP. The organization's trail map declares, "Protecting the Forest: We are proud to take part in Sustainable Slopes, a program that backs environmentally-friendly operations and development." The focal organization again offers little detail as to what “protecting the forest,” or “environmentally-friendly operations and development” actually entail. Consumers are left wondering what exactly the alpine area does as a member of the SSP.

In addition to alluding to the SSP on the trail map, as with the previous passages, the alpine area invites interested parties to read more about the organization’s environmental actions on its website. The website only offers the organization’s rationale for participating in the SSP, and a list of SSP principles; no information regarding how each principle is applied at the focal organization. The focal organization’s communication of the SSP is thus representative of its other environmental communications; vague mentions of ECSR are awarded, but no detailed information regarding actual ECSR actions are communicated.

**Promoting hidden tradeoffs.** Promoting hidden trade-offs is a technique used when a product’s particular green attribute distracts consumers from the product’s greatest environmental concern. When this type of greenwashing occurs, environmental claims are often true, but are used to make the organization or product appear more environmentally responsible than a more thorough environmental analysis would provide (TerraChoice, 2010).

The focal organization’s printed communications often incorporated instances of promoting hidden tradeoffs. For example, a message on printed communications declares the organization’s environmentally responsible printing practices. The materials collected for this research, however, never discuss any tangible environmental protection efforts related to alpine sport provision, the primary duty of the focal organization, and where most potential for environmental degradation lies. A possible example of this type of greenwashing occurred in the official winter activity guide:

> The Ski Area's Official Guide is printed on Rolland Opaque paper, Produced in St-Jérome and contains 50% post-consumer fibres. It is certified Eco-Logo, chlorine-free, and is manufactured using Biogaz energy.

What is not mentioned in any of the print communications obtained for this study is any information regarding attempts to mitigate the environmental impacts related to providing alpine sport (e.g., creating trails, producing snow, bringing clients up a mountain). By not discussing ECSR directly related to alpine sport provision, the focal organization appears "green" based on a tangential environmental initiative.

Other examples of the focal organization promoting hidden tradeoffs arise in activity guides that promote outsourced activities from partner organizations. Problematically, however, these activities were claimed to be operated with strict environmental standards when many are consistently criticized for their environmentally damaging characteristics. The 2010-2011 activity guide, for example, promoted activities certified by an organization called "Aventure Ecotourism Quebec" (AEQ).

Throughout the activity guide, the AEQ logo is placed beside descriptions of activities available to those interested in ecotourism, to which the focal organization claims its AEQ certified partners "are committed to respecting high standards of safety, security, and environmental practices." While debates exist investigating the real environmental worth of "ecotourism" (Dolnicar, Crouch, & Long, 2008), the AEQ logo is shown throughout the activity guide to certify companies that provide activities with questionable environmental value like snowmobiling (Baker & Buthmann, 2005). Specifically, the focal organization promotes a hidden trade-off by promoting its affiliation with organizations that provide eco-tourism activities while diverting attention from its own environmentally damaging behaviour. Moreover, promoting a hidden trade-off is further committed by attempting to convince consumers that by also partaking in other activities which may be environmentally-less-harmful, the environmental damage caused by skiing and snowboarding can thus be ignored or offset, and that the "greener" attributes of those activities outweigh the environmental concerns of skiing or snowboarding.

**Semi-structured Interviews**

Several themes emerged regarding managers' beliefs about ECSR and environmental responsibility in the alpine sport industry:

1. ECSR initiatives would be easier to implement if ROI were foreseeable;
2. Customers do not base their alpine sport decisions on environmental practices;
3. Communicating ECSR efforts come with many challenges;
4. ECSR is not used to avoid further environmental regulation.

**ECSR initiatives would be easier to implement if ROI were foreseeable.** Respondents often mentioned a need to conscientiously balance the economic and environmental desires of different stakeholder groups and expressed a feeling of being "tied-down" when considering their economic and environmental responsibilities. Several managers mentioned an obligation to maintain the firm's profitability by developing services that attract tourist spending, while simultaneously limiting development to minimize environmental destruction. Managers pointed to two distinct sub-groups among community members who demanded a balanced management strategy between economic and environmental success:

> There are two groups. There is one group that is pro-development; they want to make sure we keep going with our development program, but make sure that we are within the rules and laws of each governmental body. Then there is another group that can't stand development anymore. Whatever we do is no good; it's damaging to the

> environment, to society, to the economy. So, there are the two ends of the spectrum. (Focal Organization Manager 1)

This common sentiment showed that managers were aware of different stakeholder desires, and the belief that environmental actions are at the expense of profitability. The interviewees often conveyed that the economic viability of environmental initiatives is a major obstacle limiting the focal organization's environmental actions. Many respondents thus mentioned that if the probability of ROI was promising, implementing ECSR would occur more often; one interviewee said:

> We do respect the environment, but we definitely do not do more than that, and I don't feel that someday it will be a driving value; as long as we do not see it as profitable, we won't really spend our energy on it. (Focal Organization Manager 2)

So, although the natural environment seems to play a minor role in the organization's managerial direction, its role appeared to be solely strategic.

A different economic perspective arose from another manager who noted that ECSR initiatives are also in place to save economic resources in the future:

> I think that sometimes, yes, economics come against initiatives that we could take, but sometimes, there *is* a money problem here. For example, special lids [for garbage dumpsters] cost a couple of thousand, did we have that money? Who cares, we needed them and we were going to find that money from somewhere else. But in the long run, we'll probably save money because paying people to go pick up the crows' mess is expensive. (Focal Organization Manager 3)

Although this manager noted that environmental initiatives are often not implemented because of economic reasons, s/he noted that, when necessary (i.e., when an environmental issue will cost the company money), the organization will collectively find a way to fund environmental projects; in this case, to prevent staff from cleaning up after wild animals that penetrate refuse containers.

Some environmental initiatives were nonetheless implemented despite managers' belief that they were financially detrimental because protecting the environment "was something a good citizen would do" (Focal Organization Manager 4), and that the organization had a responsibility to the local community:

> We knew [building trails this way] would be more expensive, and it was going to be financially… it was not a financial investment if you look at it that way, but it's something a good citizen would do, and we want to be part of that group. (Focal Organization Manager 4)

The respondents' common notion that ECSR was antithetical to profitability was summarized by one last respondent who felt pressure from community members to operate in more environmentally responsible ways:

> Right now, the community is looking more towards actions for fossil fuels, electric cars or motors instead of gas engines. And at the mountain, everybody is trying to get those things within their operation, but those items… we run a business, and so it's all a question of budgets. (Focal Organization Manager 5)

The dilemma of balancing both, economic and environmental desires from stakeholders has been evidenced by several quotations from the alpine area's management. These managers, however, see the two desires as mutually exclusive and adversative. This was in opposition of what the municipality's environmental director had to say regarding ECSR, who argued it is an antiquated viewpoint to perceive economic and environmental initiatives as at odds with each other, and that ECSR, especially conservation initiatives, could in fact be profitable for organizations:

> The financial aspect is never absent, it is always a preoccupation, but the environment, ecology, and the economy are also always interconnected. For example, many conservation principles allow the company to also save money. It is a historic perspective to believe economics and environmental initiatives are at odds. I remember it was really about 25-30 years ago when this belief started; now that connection is beginning to become more and more popular.

Some managers also identified the link between environmental protection and profitability, and thus supported the environmental director, and further illustrate the strategy behind ECSR: "the environment should always be the top priority for ensuring a financial 'pérennité' of the resources…because it is the primary source of our revenue" (Focal Organization Manager 6).

**Customers do not base their alpine sport decisions on environmental practices.**

As many managers predicted ECSR would be antithetical to profitability, managers fittingly believed customers' demand for ECSR was low. According to these managers, communicating environmental dimensions was not an intelligent way of using company resources. One manager remarked,

> I don't think that a person or a family, or a group for that matter, will hold [environmental issues] in their decision balance. But, it's clear, some groups, or families, or part of the community is sensible to that, and may decide to go elsewhere if another ski area is more sensible to those things. (Focal Organization Manager 5)

Other managers also noted that although ECSR is unlikely to attract customers, if ECSR actions were not taken, the possibility of driving customers away increased. When asked if environmental initiatives influenced customers' destination decisions, one manager noted:

> I doubt it. I don't think it really attracts them. I don't think people would come here because we were environmentally friendly, but it may be something that would keep them from coming if we weren't. (Focal Organization Manager 4)

Accordingly, managers who were familiar with the focal organization's marketing process easily identified that the natural environment played a minor role in the marketing mix because of a low perceived level of demand for ECSR:

> I don't think it's up there in the advertising package, and it's not part of the culture, because not many people say 'I choose the ski area because it's a green resort,' and I don't think our messages are built that way either. (Focal Organization Manager 1)

Another respondent (Focal Organization Manager 6) echoed the same sentiment: "I don't' think the marketing is headed in that direction, that's all.  From my part, it's obvious, that it's not part of our marketing process."

Managers, nonetheless, wished the company would cater to the customers that desired ECSR. In fact, when asked if the organization as a whole communicated its environmental efforts, enough, too much, or not enough, seven out of ten managers responded "not enough." Managers admitted, however, that the market for environmentally concerned skiers and snowboarders was relatively small, but also argued, that current environmental trends indicate emerging niche markets for strategic ECSR:

> Because we know some people decide their trips like that, even though it's not a big part of the market, let's say maybe something like 10%, we should be more

> proactive. We should be doing something to be creative to get those consumers here, and get them to say, "Wow!" we are leaders in the industry. (Focal Organization Manager 7)

Even managers that are heavily involved in the organization's marketing admitted that communicating their environmental efforts was not at the desired level. These managers argued they are specialists in marketing, however- not ecological issues- and if they are not receiving the relevant information from the organization's ecological experts, communicating it themselves is impossible. When asked if enough information about environmental efforts was being communicated to customers, one of the marketing managers responded by saying:

> Probably not- we do not receive all of the information and we don't believe it is a decision factor for our customers. I think if we did receive more of that information, we'd be happy to communicate it… but it wouldn't be the main message in our communications. It's more about integrating different environmental elements in our work. (Focal Organization Manager 2)

With the perceived lack of customer demand for information regarding ECSR and the additional lack of internal communication, respondents further commented on other challenges they felt in communicating ECSR, and are presented in the next section.

**Communicating ECSR efforts comes with many challenges.** The managers mentioned consciously avoiding communicating any information regarding ECSR efforts, and acknowledged the lack of environmental information available: "Honestly, if a customer were to go to our website, I'm not sure they could find anything concerning the environment" (Focal Organization Manager 7). On the whole, most managers agreed that communicating the organization's environmental efforts was deficient, and "informing the community and clients about all these environmental initiatives needs to improve" (Focal Organization Manager 4). When probed further, managers revealed several reasons why they believed so little was communicated about ECSR. Some respondents offered simple justifications, such as quick-changing environmental preferences, or that, "instead of printing or communicating environmental actions, the alpine industry needs to show that it is protecting the environment" (Focal Organization Manager 5).

Two main reasons emerged, however, for not communicating about the focal organization's ECSR; the first was "green fatigue" among the public. For example, one manager asserted:

> The thing is, people are sick of being told about all the "good" ecological things companies are doing. That's why I think we're doing the right thing by not super-advertising it. We are doing things for us, we're not doing it to impress anybody- we're doing it for us and for the environment, and to make sure that we respect nature that's around us. (Focal Organization Manager 3)

Another manager summarized the second reason for not emphasizing the organization's environmental protection efforts and referred to the scepticism and potential backlash some stakeholders bring against the organization:

> I don't think right now we can improve on communication because whatever we say, can sometimes be turned around. The way I've seen it before, is that anytime we would communicate an action, it would come back to bite us in the ass, and people would say 'but what are you doing about *this'* or, 'this is a smoke screen because you are doing *that*…' We need to be careful about what we say because environmental issues are a touchy subject- so whenever you try to communicate

> something in that fashion, it can return in a bad way. So sometimes our actions are not really communicated because of that. (Focal Organization Manager 5)

Pointedly, Manager Number 3 again echoed the same sentiment:

> There's always someone who will come back to you and tell you 'wow, you're doing this, but what about this?' so I think it's better to give a little bit, say that we are putting forward some effort, but not go overboard, and say 'look at us, we're an example, do like us,' because there's always something we can do a little better.

With the influx of environmental claim scepticism, the focal organization's managers have become reluctant to discuss ECSR efforts in hopes of limiting damage to the organization's public image:

> We are trying to implement some environmental actions, but we are still using a lot of fossil fuels for all of our skidoos, ski groomers, and other things. So, we cannot say that we are 100% environmentally friendly, but I don't know what the right word is, but maybe it is hypocritical to show some of the things that we are doing, while at the same time, some other critical areas are not touched enough. (Focal Organization Manager 1)

It seems that managers are tentative to communicate their environmental initiatives to ensure backlash is entirely avoided, and to safeguard the organization's image. Overall, a hesitancy to communicate ECSR initiatives exists among the focal organization's managers that appear to be based on customers' environmental claim scepticism, and green fatigue.

**Environmental laws might help the alpine sport industry.** Many of the focal organization's managers actually suggested further environmental regulation in the alpine sport industry- a contradictory point to some CSR research. One manager discussed alpine areas' diverse reasons for implementing ECSR:

> In the past 10 years, I've seen the ski industry become more environmentally conscious for all kinds of reasons. Some ski areas believe that if they don't do it, they'll get nailed for it (by the government), or, simply because their clients demand it. (Focal Organization Manager 4)

This quotation is representative of many academics' doubts of CSR being employed for altruistic reasons, and displays the possibility of implementing ECSR to avoid government penalty. The same manager continued, however, and said that alpine sport areas need to find solutions for,

> Anything that could affect immediate or long-term future, and anything that could affect the quality of life of local communities. If ski areas know they will be destroying something down the line, especially if it is something they can't fix or build themselves, don't do it. It is as simple as that, and if it has to become mandatory by law, then let it be. (Focal Organization Manager 4)

The majority of managers interviewed for this research echoed that sentiment and were in favour of environmental regulation. When asked to complete the sentence "Regarding the natural environment, alpine sport areas should…" managers often discussed creating "benchmarks," "measurable standards," or went as far as saying alpine sport areas "should get more government interventions to change certain practices" (Focal Organization Manager 1). One caveat before concluding that the ski industry as a whole is craving more regulation is that most managers also qualified wanting additional environmental regulations by asserting that supplementary laws would not affect the focal organization. The interviewees mostly believed the company, as a whole, was already operating in an environmentally responsible manner:

> I would say we're doing well right now, but if there is a ski area that is not considering their environmental effects, on water, for example, yes, there should be laws in that case to avoid [environmental damage] from the businesses that don't do the right thing. I don't know if it is the standard to behave the way we do in the industry, but I don't think additional regulation will change a lot for us. (Focal Organization Manager 7)

The managers seem to be correct in assessing their environmental actions, and their beliefs match the perceptions of the external stakeholders interviewed for this research. The municipality's environmental director vouched for the focal organization's environmental record in the past. There have been no major concerns since the major development stage in the early 1990s, and the focal organization often goes beyond what the municipality asks. According to the municipality's environmental director, "the municipality has a great relationship with the alpine area, and has had an overall good experience working together." Moreover, when interviewing executive members of the resort association, it was revealed that resort members have few complaints of the organization's environmental performance.

Three managers, nevertheless, discussed the dangers of over-regulating the alpine sport industry, especially noting the seasonality of the industry. Managers distinctively noted the risk of damaging financial viability because of elevated environmental protection obligations. For example, one manager noted that regulating the industry could be, "a slippery slope… but if its overkill, it may kill the business. So, there's a thin line of which matters need to be regulated while still making profits possible" (Focal Organization Manager 8).

Summarizing the idea of possible further environmental regulation, one respondent described crucial considerations and steps for successful environmental policy in the alpine sport industry. When asked, “what will be the most important challenges for the alpine sport industry in the next few years?” this particular manager said:

> I think it is the financials around a seasonal business, and dictating regulated best practices. Second, it is to make sure the finances of these regulations meet the reality of a seasonal business. Thirdly, it’s to talk about or address the fact that we don’t communicate our best practices. (Focal Organization Manager 1)

## Discussion

Although the focal organization has included discourses related to the natural environment in its external communications, according to Kilbourne’s (1995) conceptualization, the firm’s environmental protection efforts are implemented under the “environmentalist” ethic, the ethic most associated to strategic management and anthropocentrism. The focal organization’s “environmentalist” approach is also evidenced by the paramount importance managers placed on creating a ROI from ECSR efforts during interviews. The managers’ strategic objectives for ECSR support authors who argue CSR is rarely implemented altruistically (Baron 2001; Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; Portney, 2008). Despite being part of Kilbourne’s lowest form of environmental ethic, these environmental efforts are nonetheless valuable, and remain examples of the focal organization doing more than is required of them by law. The strategic motives for ECSR, however, may have created several new challenges for the managers as many interviewees noted several obstacles to communicating ECSR while attempting to generate strategic value.

However, by not including any information in its external communications about tangible environmental protection efforts, the resulting vague communications indicate the focal organization could do more to avoid being accused of greenwashing in the future and may need to publicize more information regarding actual ECSR efforts to gain competitive advantage. The focal organization's managers often spoke about the possible factors leading to withholding environmental communications, and conveyed that the lack of consumer demand for ECSR (and thus, ROI), legitimized limiting ECSR communication. The managers felt obliged to operate in "environmentally friendly" ways nonetheless due to economic and environmental responsibilities to the local community members, and is demonstrated by managers endorsing the proposition of further environmental regulation.

Managers also reported limiting ECSR communications because many consumers were either sceptical or tired of environmental communications. The theme of managers hesitating to communicate about ECSR is beginning to find momentum in management research (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006; Peloza, 2005; Wicki & van der Kaiij, 2007), but the reluctance among the focal organization's managers to communicate ECSR efforts was also caused by fears of attracting negative public attention or appearing "hypocritical" regarding environmental actions. While the broader trend among management research has attributed managers' reluctance to communicate ECSR to avoiding public backlash, interviewees of this research also conveyed feelings of hypocrisy when communications were limited to a narrow set of actions or a single ECSR project (e.g., forest protection while not focussing on other environmental issues like fossil fuel usage).

The reluctance to communicate regarding a single ECSR initiative (including its success or failure) may be problematic in the future, however, as strategic ECSR is reliant on communication. Future research, therefore, needs to explore how single environmental initiatives can be independently presented and assessed by stakeholders so that concerns about "what else a company can be doing" does not dilute the value of a single environmental protection effort and discourage managers from implementing and communicating any ECSR efforts whatsoever.

By not communicating about its environmental protection efforts, the focal organization may be indeed missing opportunities to develop the competitive advantages it intended by implementing ECSR. As previously explained, communicating environmental initiatives is key, not only for Henriques and Sadorsky's (1999) framework, but also for reaping value from strategic ECSR, as firstly, "going public" creates awareness among internal and external stakeholders which can attract customers, as well as dedicated employees who believe in fulfilling environmental promises (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999; Werther & Chandler, 2005).

Secondly, going public can reinforce an internal commitment to achieving promised outcomes (Werther & Chandler, 2005) and is a sign of a proactive environmental corporate approach according to Henriques and Sadorsky's (1999) framework, as it formalizes a company's conscious environmental approach with external stakeholders. By withholding ECSR information, it appears as though the focal organization takes a reactionary approach to the natural environment (Henriques & Sadorksy, 1999) and is not yet ready to formalize a relationship with external stakeholders based on ECSR. Consequently, the focal organization may not be able to garner competitive advantages from its ECSR. For the broader sport management field, researchers and practitioners need to find out how customers and other external stakeholders most favourably interpret environmental messages so managers in the field can honestly communicate strategic ECSR without attracting negative attention.

One example of the focal organization's environmental communications that could be labelled as greenwashing and as having the potential to attract negative public attention is the "My Green Mountain" campaign described in the results section. The focal organization broadly communicates a vague environmental corporate consciousness. However, without further communication detailing what exactly the company considers "green," consumers are left wondering what exactly the organization is concretely doing. Claiming to be "green," then, advises the consumer little about actual environmental practices. Rather, claims of being "green" seem to be used as simple appeals to some customers' desires to do minimal damage to the biophysical world without providing any concrete information as to how the product may do so. As such, organizations are encouraged to use terms like "greener" or "less green" accompanied with descriptions of tangible efforts when discussing environmental options (TerraChoice, 2010) as doing so allows for conceptualizing environmental actions on a continuous scale with many levels of "greenness" ranging between environmentalism and ecologism (Banerjee et al., 1995; Devall & Sessions, 2010).

Furthermore, vaguely claiming to be "green" can be problematic as it does not concretely detail what actions are being taken. This is problematic as consumers with "ecological" standpoints may be duped into believing the organization's "environmental" stance adequately matches their viewpoint (Eckersly, 1992; Kilbourne, 1995). Each consumer likely has dynamic standards as to what he or she considers "green," and hence, "being green is not a dichotomous state (green vs. nongreen)" nor is it mutually exclusive (Banerjee et al. 1995, p. 22). Thus, when the focal organization claims, "Like you, environmental responsibility is a natural part of everything we do" it is impossible from the vague communications to come to the conclusion that the focal organization's environmental responsibility "is just like mine" and runs the risk of misleading consumers with more advanced environmental considerations.

Similarly, claims of being "totally natural" or "all-natural" are no longer acceptable according to TerraChoice (2010) in claiming environmental consciousness, as these claims, although sometimes true, have been used as deceptive methods by organizations in appearing "greener" than they really are. For example, many substances are indeed all natural, but their use in many industries have questionable, if any, environmental value. For example, substances like arsenic, mercury, uranium, or formaldehyde are all naturally occurring but can certainly have adverse effects on both, living and non-living elements (TerraChoice, 2010). The focal organization actually used the phrase "Totally-Natural" to describe its environmental responsibility as being an inherent part of its operation, but the communication is so vague that it can be argued the phrase was used deceivingly to have unknowing consumers believe the organization's provision practices are "totally natural." Totally natural, in the context of an alpine provider, may suggest that human-made snow is not used at the resort, and that chemical snow inducers or other technology is not used in the snow making process; it is in these situations where terms like "totally natural" could be used to mislead consumers.

Many of the managers did however provide examples of successful ECSR actions during interviews, and, for example, included installing secure dumpsters, developing trails in novel, environmentally responsible manners, and using a computer operated snowmaking system that could more efficiently spread and control water output compared to obsolete manual technology. Although these initiatives were indeed examples of ECSR, not only were many explicitly strategically and anthropocentrically motivated, they were examples of "techno-fixes" (Kilbourne, 1995; Colehour, 2009), and exemplary of Kilbourne's (1995) "environmentalist" approach to protecting the natural environment. The common sentiment of depending on "techno-fixes" (Ehrenfeld, 1978; Clift, 2007) to solve any environmental issues that exist have become a key component of the "environmentalism" ethic, and is likely to be seen in other areas of purported environmentalism in the alpine sport industry (e.g., energy efficient snowmakers). Similarly, the focal organization's "environmentalist" ethic is presented in external communications by relying on technological advancements in paper production to present an environmentally responsible image. Although printing communications on recycled paper may be considered "green" finding ways to effectively communicate without paper could be a "greener" option, and it is the reliance on a techno-fix that inhibits the focal organization from finding alternative ways of interacting with the natural environment.

While using technology to mitigate the environmental damage of alpine sport provision is considered beyond what the law requires (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001), the reliance on "techno-fixes" reinforces current behaviours and attitudes towards the natural environment (Colehour, 2009) by allowing humans to continue using resources at the same rate. By acknowledging the need to use technology to mitigate damage to the natural environment without re-conceptualizing the ways in which the alpine area's stakeholders interact with the natural world, the most basic approach to protecting and preserving nature is taken where the status quo can be maintained (Kilbourne, 1995).

Moreover, although it may be comforting for environmentally conscious consumers to know the focal organization uses responsible printing practices, it is ironic that attention is awarded to responsible printing practices, an arguably tangential environmental threat, instead of ECSR actions associated to the core business function of providing alpine sport. In so doing, the alpine area illustrates how some organizations are able to endorse a relatively narrow set of environmental actions to appear environmentally responsible.

Regardless, none of the ECSR actions managers reported during interviews were discussed in the external communications found for the content analysis. The tendency of this organization withholding environmental communications may be representative or a larger withdrawal from environmental discourse within management which seems to be caused by destructive, rather than constructive criticism and rather than improving environmental protection efforts and communication, a total cease of environmental discourse seems to be occurring. This is unfortunate because the parties who originally criticize firms for disingenuous environmental claims likely do so in hopes of ultimately improving organizations' environmental performance. Instead, what seems to be happening is a disengagement from environmental discourse where it is difficult for external stakeholders to gauge or assess ECSR actions.

If the focal organization's managers have in fact felt backlash based on their environmental communication (as several noted during interviews), it may stem from framing ECSR as a dichotomous state where only two options exist; being "green" or "not green" (Banerjee, Gulas, & Iyer, 1995). Simply purporting to be "green" may be problematic, however, because environmental improvement should be viewed as "an ongoing process that has to be communicated as such," not a finite distinction (Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007, p. 314). Communicating an absolutist dichotomy where the organization is "green" can have negative effects because when a stakeholder sees or experiences an instance of environmental irresponsibility, he or she has no choice but to perceive a legitimacy gap based on the organization's "either-or" communications. Instead, ECSR actions may need to be introduced as an ongoing process.

ECSR actions may also need to be communicated gradually. Managers of firms deciding to launch ECSR campaigns, such as the focal organization, must acknowledge that by not consistently communicating environmental efforts in the past, promoting themselves as top-performers or environmental leaders in the industry may not be a wise strategy. This may be another reason for the limited environmental content in the focal organization's communications. Current stakeholders have come to expect a certain level of environmental performance, and drastic changes in the communications promoting environmental protection efforts may act to increase legitimacy gaps, as well as the amount of greenwashing accusations returning to the firm (Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007). Wicki and van der Kaaij (2007) thus concluded that "big changes in a company's CSR profile can cause suspicion" (p. 317) and to avoid creating scepticism towards environmental claims, managers should try to "communicate progress (or lack thereof)… and take stakeholders by the hand by communicating in small incremental steps" (p. 317). Therefore, the focal organization's current ECSR communications, as these authors have suggested, could in fact be the first part of a gradual increase in environmental discourse.

While the focal organization has developed an environmental unit to implement and monitor ECSR commitments, the disconnect between the environmental unit and other divisions responsible for communicating information to stakeholders indicates a piecemeal and reactionary (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999) approach actually exists where environmental issues do not play an interconnected role among departments. The lack of internal communication regarding ECSR was exemplified by several managers noting not having received information from the environmental department. This finding leads the researcher to conclude, that although an environmental department exists within the focal organization, the inter-departmental communication between the environmental division and other units may be indicative that a proactive approach has been initiated, but not yet fully reached.

Regardless of firms' ECSR stages or placement on Henriques and Sadorsky's RDAP scale, the focal organization's environmental communications and manager's comments may provide valuable lessons for other managers and researchers. Specifically, the focal organization's greenwashing does not appear to be a purposeful attempt of duping consumers, but rather, the lack of providing detailed, tangible, and concrete information regarding specific efforts. By providing detailed information regarding ECSR initiatives, the focal organization and other organizations can inevitably eliminate vague communications by explaining how, and why environmental initiatives have been implemented along with some of their outcomes. Communicating those specific actions will additionally minimize the chances of promoting hidden tradeoffs as the communications will naturally present information about the initiatives designed to minimize the environmental impacts of alpine sport provision (in this case)- and the impacts most pertinent to alpine sport providers' operation.

## Conclusion

While it is impossible to decipher if the focal organization deliberately used greenwashing techniques in its communications, the outcomes of misleading customers in attempting to appear more environmentally friendly occur regardless of intent. By using overly vague language and emphasizing peripheral environmental actions instead of the most pertinent environmental impacts related to alpine sport provision, the focal organization promoted its environmental efforts by employing two greenwashing techniques outlined by Carlson, Grove and Kangun (1993), as well as TerraChoice (2010).

As deduced from Kilbourne's (1995) conceptualization of green ethics, it is clear that interview participants and the focal organization's external communications convey environmentalist motives when discussing the organization's ECSR. Still, incorporating any ECSR, even if the actions are anthropocentrically motivated, is better than firms that simply abide by environmental regulations, or worse, disobey environmental laws. However, only by first admitting that the alpine sport industry can be environmentally destructive, and then taking mitigating steps to prevent that destruction (Scott, McBoyle, & Minogue, 2007) will alpine sport providers be able to operate with more developed, and more proactive (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1999) approaches to the natural environment. It is doubtful that the alpine sport industry (or any business, for that matter) will ever reach a full-fledged ecological ethic (Kilbourne, 1995), as most of the industry exists in the private sector whose operators will most likely seek economic gains for fulfilling anthropocentric desires for recreation. This conclusion echoes arguments put forward by Purser, Park, and Monturi, (1995) who stated "environmental management approaches are incommensurable with ecocentric management paradigms" (p. 1053).

Although the focal organization could do more to eliminate greenwash from its external communications thus minimizing the potential to attract public criticism, the development of an environmental department is a sign that the focal organization is becoming more proactive (Henriques & Sadorsky 1999). Additional research and constructive criticism from both internal and external stakeholders may help improve communication processes and the ECSR initiatives the focal organization chooses to apply.

"Constructive" is the operative word in the previous sentence, and by stakeholders being quick to criticize failure and slow to acknowledge success, firms that attempt to provide environmentally responsible products may be reluctant to incorporate ECSR in future operations. Managers that perceive too much risk in ECSR may eventually look for competitive advantage elsewhere if they see the risk of backlash is too great upon failing to meet ECSR objectives. Managers withholding environmental information would likely be counter-productive for those criticizing stakeholders as the quantity and quality of ECSR may diminish as firms could also begin withholding information regarding environmental practices in addition to stalling genuine and effective environmentally responsible business. Without communicating ECSR, firms may lose the strategic benefit of operating in more environmentally responsible ways, and as it appears that ECSR is in place for strategic reasons, firms may simply stop using ECSR and abide by environmental laws.

Coincidentally, Werther and Chandler (2004) noted that when attempting to implement strategic CSR, it may be a better idea for firms to under-promise and over-deliver on CSR initiatives to manage stakeholder expectations. Since the alpine sport industry's environmental habits have been criticized in the past, it may be more appropriate for alpine sport area managers, and managers of firms that have been criticized, to implement slow changes to ECSR repertoires while gradually reporting on outcomes from ECSR efforts, and not just on the efforts themselves (Porter & Kramer, 2007). A future research opportunity in this vein, then, could explore how transparently communicating failure to meet ECSR objectives may still provide strategic value as there is a possibility of still creating trust and developing relationships with external stakeholders.

**Future Research**

While this case only examines the communications of a single firm, the potential opportunities for further investigating environmental communications in the broader sport context are vast. With environmental programs being implemented within each of the big four

North American sports leagues, informing sport practitioners on how to effectively communicate ECSR without being accused of greenwashing could prove to be critical research. By avoiding accusations of greenwashing, the chances of managers implementing more successful ECSR initiatives that can protect the natural environment as well as obtain competitive advantages are increased, providing a win/win scenario. Research needs to be conducted, however, to understand if stakeholders (internal and external) actually consider the greenwashing techniques described by Carlson, Grove and Kangun (1993) and TerraChoice (2010) to, in fact be greenwash, and if those stakeholders identify those greenwashing techniques in sport practitioners' communications.

Additionally, the reasons behind managers' decisions to withhold environmental communications could use more examination. Specifically it may be important for future research to further consider how environmental communication can remain strategic without attracting negative attention, or which green ethic(s) can be most appropriately incorporated in sport and recreation managers' communications.

Suffice it to say that the focal organization from this study does not yet appear to be ready to reap competitive advantage based on its reactive and disjointed environmental management strategy. Although the interviewed managers conveyed the strategic motives for their ECSR, a hesitance to communicate about environmental efforts is likely keeping the organization from generating the competitive advantage it seeks. Of course, this study does not measure the focal organization's actual reputation according to external stakeholders, and as such, requires further research to confirm whether or not the firm has created, missed an opportunity for competitive advantage, or hurt its reputation by not communicating environmental actions.

NOTE: While this study may appear to be critical of the focal organization's environmental communications, all efforts were made to remain constructive so that researchers and other firms faced with the dilemma of communicating environmental information may learn from some communication challenges. If future research can use a similar scope of attempting to help organizations improve ECSR communication (assuming ECSR initiatives are in fact in place), rather than publicly humiliating those firms, a collaborative research environment may be developed where steps can be taken in ensuring sport consumers' confidence in environmental communication as well as practitioners' confidence in communicating their own valid environmental efforts.

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# Chapter 3: Study # 2

## Skiers' and Snowboarders' Perceptions of Environmental Corporate Social Responsibility and Demand for Environmentally Responsible Alpine Sport Provision

More than 6000 alpine sport areas exist across 70 countries around the world (Thorne, 2000). While there are about 70 million skiers and snowboarders worldwide (Hudson, 2000) and about 19 million annual skier visits to Canadian alpine sport areas, the existing information regarding skiers' and snowboarders' environmental attitudes and awareness remains contradictory (Hudson & Ritchie, 2001).

According to Hudson and Ritchie (2001), Canadian alpine sport providers have to satisfy increasing demand for alpine sport provision while simultaneously facing public criticism for over-development and environmental destruction (Castle, 1999). For that reason, Hudson (1996) argued a strategic opportunity existed for alpine sport providers who wished to use environmentally responsible reputations for competitive advantages. Yet, with a dearth of research regarding skiers' and snowboarders' environmental preferences, any attempt to inform alpine sport providers' decisions regarding environmentally responsible actions would be misguided. Hence, this study sought to contribute to the lack of research regarding skiers and snowboarders' environmental attitudes, with the objective of understanding environmental expectations and the likelihood of engaging with environmental communications. This study focused on a single case of an alpine sport provider in Quebec, Canada. Like Hudson & Ritchie's (2001) study, this research also examined, with survey research, some of the differences between major consumer sectors (e.g., Anglophones and Francophones; young vs. old; locals vs. tourists) of the single alpine sport provider.

## Review of Literature

According to Dickson (2006), if returns on investment were more probable and skiers' or snowboarders' demand for environmentally sustainable operations were well-understood, alpine sport managers' decisions to invest into ECSR would be made easier. It is believed that if sufficient demand existed for ECSR, managers would more willingly implement environmental initiatives as the potential for strategic benefits would increase (Marxt & Hacklin, 2005; Siomkos, Vasiliadis, & Lathiras, 2005). Since alpine sport participation rates have been dropping since the 1990s (Clifford, 2002; Tuppen, 2000), capitalizing on any opportunities could prove beneficial for alpine sport providers; as such, an examination of strategic ECSR in the alpine sport industry is warranted.

### Strategic Benefits of ECSR in the Alpine Sport Industry

Developing CSR initiatives with the end goal of improving a corporate reputation, brand differentiation, or any other strategic motive has been referred to as "strategic CSR" (Baron, 2001). Strategic CSR is considered to be any socially responsible action taken to gain competitive advantage (Baron, 2001). Strategic CSR opposes what some researchers have called "altruistic CSR" which assumes investing into CSR must occur at the cost of a firm's profit, and that true socially responsible actions are taken without strategic intentions (Elhauge, 2005; Friedman, 1962; Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; Reinhardt, Stavins & Vietor, 2008). Despite extensive research on CSR, however, evidence of firms sacrificing profits for exclusively social interest is scarce (Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; Reinhardt et al., 2008).

The strategic opportunities for alpine sport areas using ECSR have been outlined, and Pro Natura (2000) specifically noted that alpine sport areas will likely implement ECSR strategically, but to varying degrees and on individual bases. Although the alpine sport industry is projected to lose many skiers and snowboarders as baby boomers age (Clifford, 2002), many young people are still involved in the sport (Canadian Ski Council, 2009), and are often those more inclined to support environmentally responsible causes and companies (Diamoantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics, & Bohlen, 2003; Grendstad & Wollebaek, 2001); thus a strategic opportunity may indeed exist. ProNatura (2000) further outlined the potential strategic benefits for alpine sport managers who choose to implement environmental initiatives. These benefits included attracting environmentally aware consumers, enhancing trust with environmental protection authorities, improving the chances of hosting winter sport events, cost reduction, risk reduction and overall organizational benefits. This research aims to provide further insight into the strategic opportunities that may exist for alpine sport providers.

**Greenwashing**

When using ECSR strategically, communicating environmental initiatives becomes a key to success (Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008). Greenwashing is "the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service" (Terra Choice, 2010, p. 1). So, when using strategic ECSR and communicating environmental efforts, managers must carefully disseminate information to avoid misleading customers, especially considering the reputational damage and backlash greenwashing can attract (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006). Greenwashing is considered problematic because, whether intentional or not, over-emphasizing a product's positive traits can mislead consumers into purchasing products or services based on unmerited environmental credit (Gibson, 2009). Many organizations dishonestly communicate environmental efforts because ECSR initiatives often cannot be readily tested by consumers (Gibson, 2009). Because of this intangibility, organizations are able to develop corporate reputations based on ECSR that plainly does not exist (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006; Gibson, 2009). This has become problematic, because with the current levels of dishonest environmental marketing, many consumers have become sceptical of all environmental claims (TerraChoice, 2010) and companies that are truly operating in environmentally responsible ways lose potential customer support (TerraChoice, 2010). While examples certainly exist of companies outright lying about their environmental actions in hopes of attracting the environmentally concerned consumer, the primary greenwashing concern (among NGOs and academics) appears to be the practice of presenting "positive information out of context in a way that could be misleading to individuals who lack information about the company's full portfolio of activities" (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006, p. 5)

Greenwashing has proliferated in the alpine sport industry (Schendler, 2008). The alpine sport industry "appears committed to an aggressive spin campaign to portray itself as environmentally friendly in the face of countervailing facts" (Clifford, 2002, p. 187). Clifford further argued that the industry as a whole has in fact become very environmentally unfriendly, and invites such cynicism by intentionally trying to deceive skiers and snowboarders about its environmental record and habits. Although little research regarding the results of greenwashing in the alpine sport context currently exists, research indicating environmental claim scepticism and green fatigue are on the rise in the general public (Greenberg, 2008; Kilbourne, 1995; Lyon & Maxwell, 2006; VanDeveer, 2003; Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007). This research attempts to shed further light on this phenomenon within the alpine sport context.

**Alpine Sport Customers' Demand for Environmentally Responsible Alpine Sport Provision**

One of the earliest examinations of skiers' destination decisions was published in 1970 by Echelberger and Shafer, who noted that skiers were attracted by snow accumulation, skiable terrain, groomed area, and minimal travel distance. Since then, several other researchers have found a multitude of factors attracting skiers and snowboarders, but have repeatedly included: snow conditions, skiable terrain, lift service wait-time, snowmaking capacity, snow grooming quality, other activities offered, price, crowding, accommodation, travel time, and food services (Englin & Moeltner, 2004; Greig, 1983; Ormiston, Gilbert & Manning, 1998; Riddington, Sinclair, & Milne, 2000; Siomkos et al., 2005).

Interestingly, little is known regarding the role environmental actions play in skiers' and snowboarders' destination decisions (Dickson, 2006). Of the existing research regarding skiers' and snowboarders' environmental preferences, findings are highly contradictory (Hudson & Ritchie, 2001; Tonge, 2008). Clifford's (2002) commentary, for example, showed an expectation for skiers and snowboarders to hold a superficial concern for the natural environment:

> Few skiers probably know or think deeply about the environmental implications of their sport (although many consider themselves to be environmentalists). Yet, paying to ski on man-made snow – to take a single illustration -- supports an extraordinarily destructive set of environmental practices. (p. 181)

Fry (2006) similarly noted that alpine skiers had forgotten about appreciating nature in winter, and skiing had become a version of conspicuous leisure, where skiers are seen as "yo-yoing up and down crowded slopes, ears bombarded by music blaring from loudspeakers, [and] riding lifts whose chairs now occasionally bore paid advertising" (p. 190). Fry (1995) actually found evidence showing many skiers, especially those with advanced skills, were unconcerned with environmental issues, and would rather alpine sport area managers focus attention on expanding alpine sport areas rather than protecting, preserving or conserving natural land. Other authors have similarly concluded that skiers and snowboarders are relatively unconcerned with environmental issues as compared to other resort amenities (e.g., snow conditions, spas, restaurants, variety of other activities, etc.) and other leisure choices (Alexandris, Kouthouris, & Meligdis, 2006; Clifford, 2002; Edensor & Richards, 2007; Klenosky, Gengler, & Mulvey, 1993). Brymer, Downey, and Gray (2009), on the other hand, found that highly skilled skiers were found to feel connected to nature, and have a desire to care for the natural world. Hudson and Ritchie (2001) additionally found that 70% of skiers and snowboarders believed alpine sport was environmentally friendly, but that environmental considerations were absent in destination decision processes for 63% of their sample. Overall, Hudson and Ritchie (2001) found that a lack of awareness or consideration existed from skiers and snowboarders regarding the natural environment yet the majority of respondents noted they would be more likely to visit alpine areas with environmental policies in place.

Finally, several authors have found skiers and snowboarders were even willing to pay price premiums for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision. For example, Hudson and Ritchie (2001) found that skiers and snowboarders would be willing to pay price premiums at Banff/Lake Louise if alpine providers could prove their environmentally responsible operation. Weiss et al., (1998) additionally found that 59% of alpine sport participants in an Austrian study would pay an “environmental tax” if the natural environment was adequately protected. Those participants, however, were not prepared to restrict their sport or recreation habits to protect the environment, as they also valued quick lift services, unlimited slope choices, and quality ski conditions. Weiss et al. (1998) thus concluded that these conflicting expectations from skiers who desire technological efficiency and authentic natural-world experiences may pose threats to the natural environment. Dickson (2006) similarly found that British Columbian skiers were willing to pay 5% price premiums for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision, but similarly found that those respondents also preferred alpine sport areas with a range of skiable terrain, and shorter ski lift wait times.

Due to the ongoing debates regarding skiers' and snowboarders' environmental preferences, Hudson and Ritchie (2001) argued more research is "clearly" required (p. 8). This being said, Hudson (1996) warned that if too radical of a change towards an ECSR based alpine resort occurred too quickly, the risk of alienating or dissuading potential customers could occur; a point echoed in CSR research by Wicki and van der Kaiij (2007).

## Method

The most efficient and common quantitative method for understanding demand of transient stakeholders (like many skiers and snowboarders) is survey based research, and is coincidentally a standard shared by market research (Dickson, 2006). Based on the qualitative portion of this thesis, as well as consultation of sport management experts and sport practitioners, a survey was created to test the demand of ECSR according to consumers. Specifically, a scale was designed to measure customers' perceptions of ECSR in the alpine sport industry developed through a review of existing measures of ECSR (e.g., Jain & Kaur, 2004; Walsh, Beatty & Shiu, 2009; Webb, Mohr & Harris, 2008), interview data ($n$ = 10) and findings from study one. As an example, the interview data indicated that ECSR was in place for strategic reasons, that management did not expect skiers and snowboarders to consider environmental issues when choosing an alpine sport destination, and that consumers do not regularly engage with environmental information provided from alpine sport areas. Hence, questions were embedded in the survey to explore those findings further with consumers.

The items were then tested for clarity, methodological issues, and content validity with a group of sports management graduate students ($n$ = 4), academics in the sport and recreation management field ($n$ = 5), and alpine sport industry professionals ($n$ = 2). Items were then refined based on the feedback provided by the panel.

**Questionnaire**

In total, 27 items were included in the scale. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree) the extent to which they felt each item reflected their perceptions towards ECSR at the focal alpine area, as well as in the broader alpine sport industry. Participants were additionally asked their age, gender, if they were employed by the focal organization, if they were primarily a skier or snowboarder, how often they frequented the focal organization, how far away they lived from the focal organization, the length of their stay, and their household income. This data was collected to understand the sample demographics, and if perceptions towards ECSR differed among different types of customers.

**Participants and Procedure**

The survey respondents were all active alpine sport participants on the day they filled out the surveys. This was ensured by having respondents fill out surveys at the summit lodge which is only accessible by gondola or chairlift for paying customers after being granted access by the alpine area's staff. The investigator set up a booth from which the surveys were given to willing participants. The booth had a short description of the study, and informed customers of free hot chocolate or coffee in return for participation. As participants passed the booth, the investigator asked if they would be willing to participate in a study regarding their perceptions of environmentalism in the alpine sport industry. Willing participants were given the choice to fill out the survey at the booth or at another table in the lodge, as well as in English or in French. Once the survey was completed and returned, a coupon for a free drink (provided by the focal organization) was given to the participant.

**Data Analysis**

As this was the first time that this particular scale had been implemented to examine ECSR within the research context, it was deemed appropriate to examine the strength of the items and factors through an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). According to Devellis (2003), this technique is most appropriate in the early stages of the instrument development. Standard procedures were followed in that additional criteria was employed to first examine Eigenvalues >1.0 (Stevens, 2002), item loadings > .4 and not within .1 of any other factor, as well as the actual conceptual fit with all items in that factor structure (Stevens, 2002).

A varimax rotation procedure yielded six possible factors. Upon further examination of item loadings within each factor, and other problematic correlations of items with multiple factors (see Stevens, 2002), a number of items and subsequent factors were eliminated from further consideration in the study. Table 4-1 displays shortened versions of the items in their three factors and the factor loadings (See Appendix A for the full survey).

Hence, this procedure yielded three factors labelled as: 1) Environmental reputation; 2) Environmental engagement; and 3) Environmental expectations. Several results based on individual items that did not correlate highly enough in factors are described in the results section nonetheless, as this study is exploratory and these individual items may be able to guide future researchers in trying to measure similar concepts.

Table 4-1: *Varimax Rotation, Factor Loadings, Eigenvalues, and Percentages of Total Variance Explained for ECSR Scale Items: Three Factor Solution*

| **Factors**<br>Items | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Environmental Reputation** | | | |
| 1. Alpine providers adequately protect the environment. | .60 | .08 | -.03 |
| 2. The focal organization is an environmental leader. | .72 | .12 | -.02 |
| 3. Would pass on positive information about the organization's environmental actions. | .70 | .07 | .08 |
| 4. Can recall evidence of environmental initiatives. | .69 | .05 | -.07 |
| 5. Environmental efforts are communicated to customers. | .65 | -.27 | -.04 |
| 6. I can trust this organization to be environmentally friendly. | .79 | .11 | -.06 |
| 7. Continue attending based on organization's environmental actions. | .71 | .08 | .26 |
| **2. Environmental Engagement** | | | |
| 1. I seek environmental information when purchasing | .18 | .74 | .01 |
| 2. Alpine sport providers' environmental responsibility is important. | .24 | .58 | .28 |
| 3. Buy products from responsible companies | .07 | .75 | .13 |
| 4. Buy highest quality product, regardless of environmental impact. | -.12 | .54 | .23 |
| 5. Would not attend alpine provider if environmental efforts not made. | .19 | .57 | .08 |
| 6. Would attend alpine provider because of environmental actions. | .18 | .57 | .19 |
| 7. Switched brands for ecological reason. | -.06 | .65 | .06 |
| **3. Environmental Expectations** | | | |
| 1. Ski areas should strive for peak conditions regardless of the effects. | -.11 | .30 | .67 |
| 2. Alpine providers should go beyond environmental requirements | .17 | .35 | .49 |
| 3. The environment should be considered by alpine providers. | .08 | .39 | .59 |
| Eigenvalue | 4.07 | 1.81 | 5.68 |
| % Variance | 15.07 | 6.73 | 21.04 |

## Psychometric Properties

All three factors demonstrated acceptable levels of internal consistency with Cronbach alpha values above .70 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The Cronbach reliability coefficients for the three factors were as follows: 1) Environmental Reputation ($n$ = 7 items, $\alpha$ = .84); 2) Environmental Engagement ($n$ = 7 items, $\alpha$ =.79); and 3) Environmental Expectations ($n$ = 3 items, $\alpha$ = .71). Further, there was no evidence of multi-co-linearity, suggesting that the factors were independent from each other. The inter-correlation matrix for factors is presented in Table 4-3, preceded by the survey's item-total correlations presented in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2: *Survey Item-total Correlations for all Three ECSR Scale Factors and 17Items*

| **Factors** | **Environmental Reputation** | **Environmental Engagement** | **Environmental Expectations** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Items | | | |
| **Environmental Reputation** | | | |
| 1 | .64** | .10 | .01 |
| 2 | .74** | .16** | .04 |
| 3 | .72** | .17** | .05 |
| 4 | .72** | .13* | .03 |
| 5 | .66** | -.06 | -.09 |
| 6 | .78** | .19** | .01 |
| 7 | .71** | .24** | .21** |
| **Environmental Engagement** | | | |
| 1 | .25** | .74** | .41** |
| 2 | .27** | .67** | .49** |
| 3 | .12* | .75** | .51** |
| 4 | -.04 | .57** | .40** |
| 5 | .13* | .64** | .35** |
| 6 | .17** | .60** | .36** |
| 7 | .02 | .70** | .42** |
| **Environmental Expectations** | | | |
| 1 | -.06 | .39** | .78** |
| 2 | .11 | .52** | .78** |
| 3 | .107 | .60** | .81** |

* p<.05, ** p<.01

Table 4-3: *Inter-correlation Matrix of Factors for ECSR Scale: Three Factor Solution*

| Factor | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Environmental Reputation | 1.00 | .185 | .052 |
| Environmental Engagement | | 1.00 | .627 |
| Environmental Expectation | | | 1.00 |

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also used to examine if significant differences existed between the demographic variables included in the survey, and the three factors. The ANOVAs were used to better understand if alpine sport providers could target certain market segments with their ECSR efforts, and cater future communications to certain groups.

## Results

### Respondents

In total, 512 people were asked to participate in the study. 345 people accepted the invitation, of which, 338 people returned the survey. Of those 338, five were deemed unusable because a large portion of responses were missing, or it was clear that the respondent did not read the items on the survey (e.g., investigator observed respondent fill out the survey without reading the items, or one response was circled by the respondent for every item in one continuous circle). Thus, 333 surveys were interpreted for this study for a final response rate of 65.04%.

The sample was evenly distributed between males and females. In total, 180 participants identified as males (54.1%) and 153 identified as females (45.9%). The sample distribution was also evenly divided between French and English speakers. Of the 333 participants, 192 identified as primarily English speakers, whereas 141 participants identified as primarily French-speaking.

Table 4-4: *Language & Gender Cross-Tab for Survey Participants*

| | Sex | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Language | Male | Female | Total |
| English | 117 | 75 | 192 |
| French | 63 | 78 | 141 |
| Total | 180 | 153 | 333 |

The participants' ages were also evenly distributed. The modal age category shows a higher interest to participate in the study among younger customers as 26.7% of the sample (*n* = 89) was filled out by participants between 18 and 24 years old (see Table 4-5). Fittingly, the Canadian Ski Council (2009) noted the Canadian skier is more likely to be part of that age range than any other.

Participants differed in terms of the distances they travelled to visit the alpine area: 32.1% came from more than 250kms away; 28.8% came from between 101-250kms away; 28.5% came from less than 25kms away; and 10.5% of the sample came from 25-100kms away (see table 4-5). Notably, 39% of the sample lives within about a one-hour drive from the mountain (< 100km away).

Of the 333 participants, 80.2% (*n* = 267) identified as skiers, 17.7% (*n* = 59) identified as snowboarders, and 2.1% identified as 'other' (snowbladers or tele-markers) (Table 4-5).
Of the 333 participants, 12 preferred not to disclose their annual household incomes. Most of the participants who did share, reported household incomes of more than $115,000 (*n* = 112). The median household income bracket for the sample was between $75,000-$94,999. Fittingly, the Canadian Ski Council (2009) noted most skiers in Canada fall within that income range (household income of 75,000+).

Table 4-5: *Descriptive Statistics of Survey Participants*

| Variable | Group | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Female | 153 | 45.9 |
| | Male | 180 | 54.1 |
| Language | French | 141 | 42.4 |
| | English | 192 | 57.6 |
| Age | 18 to 24 | 89 | 26.7 |
| | 25 to 34 | 57 | 17.1 |
| | 35 to 44 | 33 | 9.9 |
| | 45 to 54 | 60 | 18.0 |
| | 55 to 64 | 52 | 15.6 |
| | 65 and over | 42 | 12.6 |
| Travel Distance | Less than 25km | 95 | 28.5 |
| | 25 to 100km | 35 | 10.5 |
| | 101 to 250km | 96 | 28.8 |
| | 250km plus | 107 | 32.1 |
| Activity | Skier | 267 | 80.2 |
| | Snowboarder | 59 | 17.7 |
| | Other | 7 | 2.1 |
| Household Income | <15,000 | 43 | 13.4 |
| | 15,000-34,999 | 32 | 10.0 |
| | 35,000-54,999 | 46 | 14.3 |
| | 55,000-74,999 | 30 | 9.3 |
| | 75,000-94,999 | 30 | 9.3 |
| | 95,000-114,999 | 28 | 8.7 |
| | 115,000+ | 112 | 34.9 |

**Customers' Perceptions**

The descriptive analysis for customers' perceptions of the focal organization's Environmental Reputation revealed a sample mean of 4.28 on the scale of 1-7 (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). The factor included seven items. Particularly notable is the sample's low assessment of the focal organization's ability to communicate its environmental actions.

Customers' environmental purchasing and engagement habits were measured by a factor also including seven items. This factor yielded an overall sample mean of 4.87, and indicates the sample sometimes engages with organizations' environmental communications, and have slightly positive responses to including environmental considerations in purchasing decisions.

The descriptive analysis for Customers' Environmental Expectations of Alpine Sport Providers revealed that respondents do indeed have environmental expectations with a sample mean of 5.27. The factor and item means are presented in Table 4-6 on the next page, along with their standard deviations.

Table 4-6: *Factors, Items, Sample Means and Standard Deviations for ECSR Scale's Three Factors and 17 Items*

| Factor & Items | Mean | S.D |
|---|---|---|
| **Environmental Reputation** | | |
| 1. Alpine sport providers are adequately protecting the natural environment. | 4.51 | 1.46 |
| 2. The organization is an environmental leader | 4.26 | 1.44 |
| 3. I would tell my friends and family positive things about the focal organization's environmental actions. | 4.51 | 1.47 |
| 4. I can recall evidence of the focal organization's environmental initiatives. | 4.02 | 1.70 |
| 5. The environmental efforts put forward by the focal organization are clearly communicated to customers. | 3.41 | 1.48 |
| 6. The focal organization is an organization I can trust to be environmentally friendly. | 4.38 | 1.40 |
| 7. Because of the focal organization's environmental efforts, I would continue skiing or snowboarding there. | 4.85 | 1.53 |
| **Factor Total** | **4.28** | **1.06** |
| **Environmental Engagement** | | |
| 1. I look for information about a product's or service's environmental attributes when I buy everyday items | 4.62 | 1.54 |
| 2. The environmental responsibility of alpine sport providers is important to me. | 5.48 | 1.44 |
| 3. I am inclined to buy products from companies I believe to be ecologically responsible. | 5.48 | 1.30 |
| 4. I buy the highest quality product, regardless of its impact on the environment. | 4.47 | 1.71 |
| 5. I would no longer attend an alpine provider if no attempt to limit environmental impact was made | 4.31 | 1.70 |
| 6. I would continue attending an alpine provider because of its attempts to limit environmental damage | 5.14 | 1.41 |
| 7. I can recall an instance when I switched brands for ecological reasons | 4.60 | 1.99 |
| **Factor Total** | **4.87** | **1.05** |
| **Environmental Expectations** | | |
| 1. Alpine sport providers should provide quality conditions, regardless of environmental effects. (R) | 4.72 | 1.85 |
| 2. Alpine sport providers should exceed what is required of them to limit environmental damage. | 5.29 | 1.46 |
| 3. The environment's wellbeing should be considered by alpine sport providers. | 5.80 | 1.45 |
| **Factor total** | **5.27** | **1.26** |

## Individual Items

Several items were embedded in the survey that did not load highly enough into a single factor and were consequently eliminated from that portion of the analysis. However, as this is an exploratory study, the items were retained to further explore the prominence of customers' degree of environmental claim scepticism and green fatigue in hopes of guiding future research. Table 4-7 outlines these individual items' means and standard deviations.

**Table 4-7: Individual Item Descriptive Statistics**

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. The alpine sport industry is environmentally damaging. | 3.69 | 1.67 |
| 2. Organizations (in general) embellish their environmental protection efforts. | 4.76 | 1.45 |
| 3. Environmental concern shown by companies is a sales gimmick. | 4.51 | 1.43 |
| 4. I am sceptical about organizations' motives for implementing environmental initiatives. | 4.36 | 1.45 |
| 5. I am growing tired of environmental messages from organizations. | 3.27 | 1.75 |
| 6. I would pay more for a lift ticket (increase of 5%) if I knew the provider was more environmentally friendly than others. | 4.15 | 2.04 |

The first item included in the previous table was designed to understand if the sample believed alpine sports were environmentally damaging. The sample mean of 3.69 indicates that, on average, the participants did not believe alpine sport was environmentally damaging. The next three items were designed to measure customers' environmental claim scepticism. From the descriptive analysis based on sample means, it appears the sample had an overall neutral perspective towards environmental claim scepticism with means ranging between 4.36 and 4.76.

Interestingly, the sample identified that it did not have feelings of "green fatigue," by answering with a sample mean of 3.27 (out of 7) to the statement "I am growing tired of environmental messages from organizations." The last individual item that could be useful for future research, and is quite telling of this sample, is that respondents did not clearly indicate a willingness to pay for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision. Rather, a neutral sample mean of 4.15 out of 7 resulted when participants were asked if they would pay five percent more for an environmentally responsible alpine sport lift ticket.

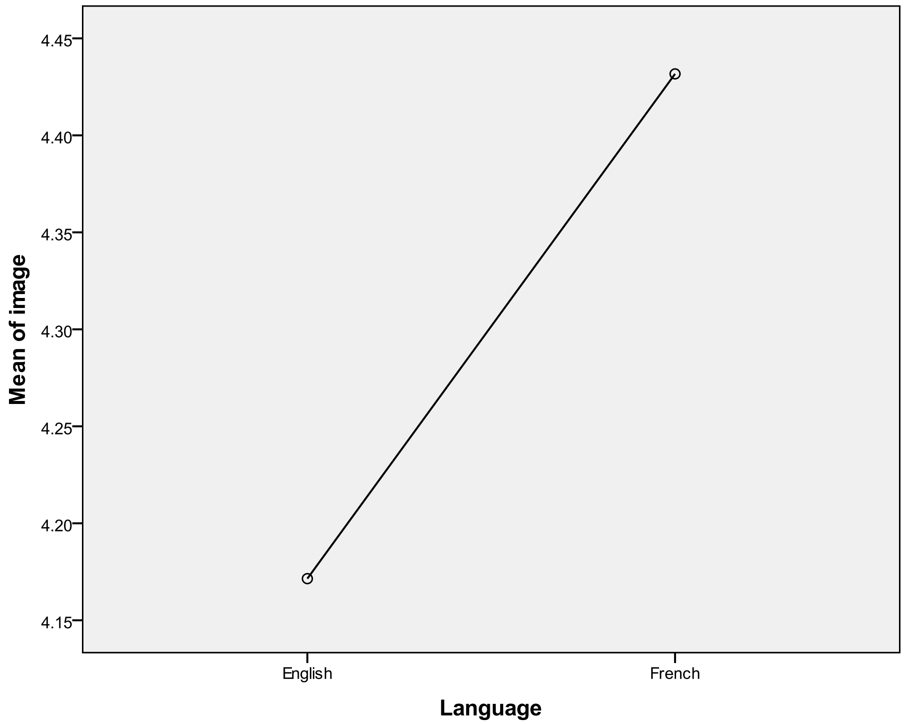
**ANOVAS**

ANOVAs were used to determine if differences existed between groups' perceptions towards the three factors emerging from the EFA depending on their native language, distance to the ski hill, attendance at the ski hill, and age. The ANOVA results are presented in Table 4-8, including each group's mean and standard deviation for each factor.

**Language.** The most notable demographic that affected the three factors was a person's native language. There are significant differences (at least $p < .05$) between the ways primarily English-speaking and French-speaking participants responded to the three factors.

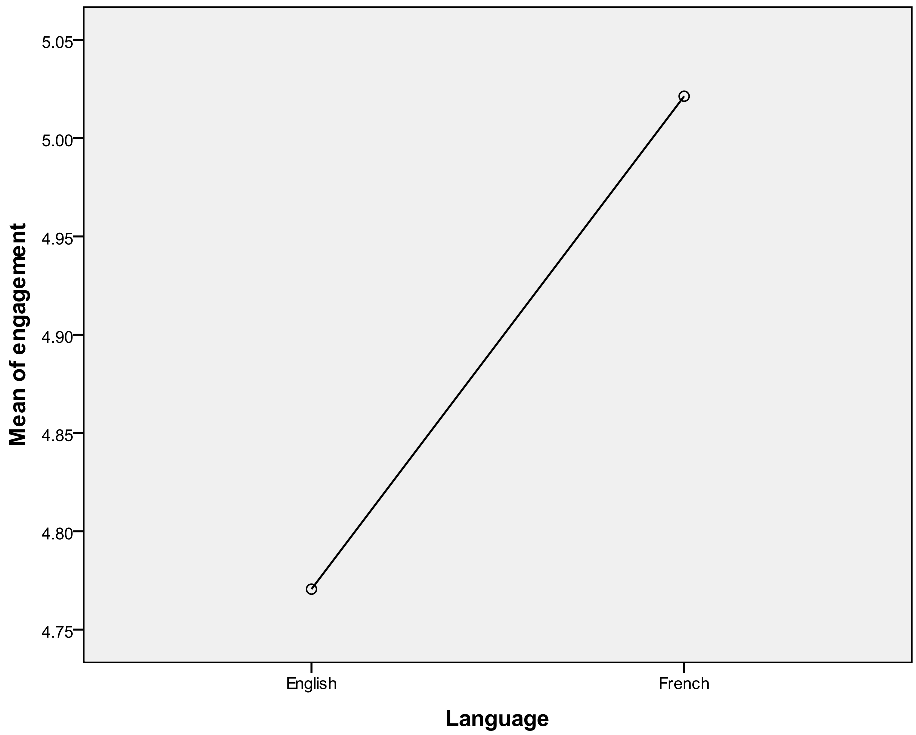
Respondents' perceptions of the organization's environmental reputation differed depending on the respondent's native language. French speakers had significantly ($p < .05$) more favourable perceptions of the focal organization's environmental reputation compared to English speakers (Factor 1: Environmental Reputation). Where French Speakers responded with a mean of 4.43 (S.D. = 1.15), English speakers responded with a mean of 4.17 (S.D. = .98) (Figure 4-1).

Figure 4-1: *Organizational Environmental Reputation Perception Differences between English and French Speakers*



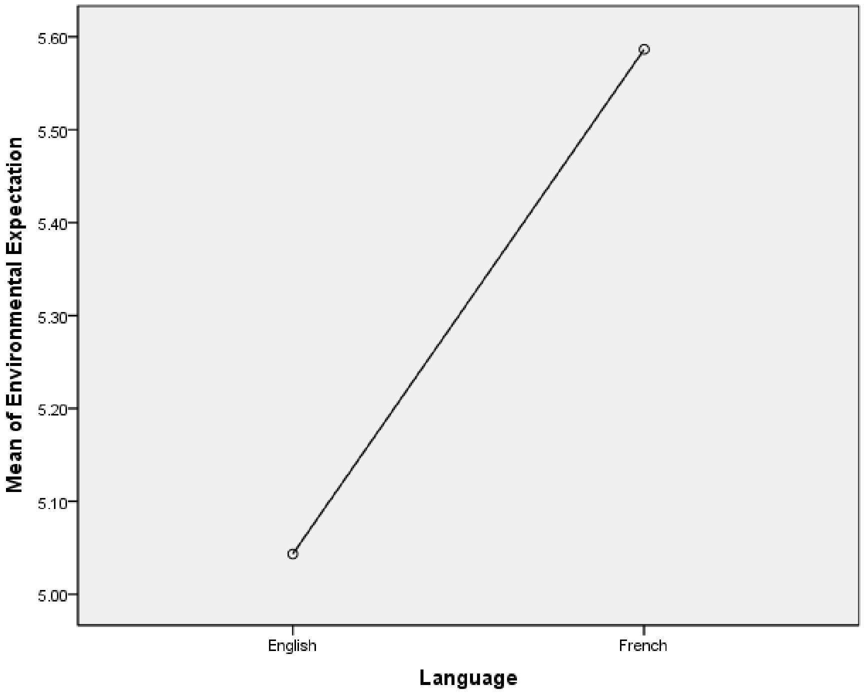

There was also a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) between the ways primarily French-speaking and primarily English speaking people responded to how they engaged with environmental information (Factor 2: Environmental Engagement). Whereas English speakers had a mean of 4.77 (S.D. = 1.03), French speakers responded with a mean of 5.02 (S.D. = 1.06) (see Figure 4.2). This signifies that French speakers from the sample were more likely to seek and interact with the environmental discourse the alpine provider put forward compared to the English respondents.

Figure 4-2: *Environmental Engagement between English and French Speakers*




Lastly, language also affected the third factor, Environmental Expectations. Although both English and French speakers did indeed have environmental expectations with an overall sample mean of 5.27 (S.D. = 1.26), French speakers had significantly higher expectations ($p < .001$) from alpine sport providers. English speakers responded with a mean of 5.04 (S.D. = 1.17) representing their environmental expectations, whereas French speakers responded with a mean of 5.58 (S.D. = 1.31) (see Figure 4.3).

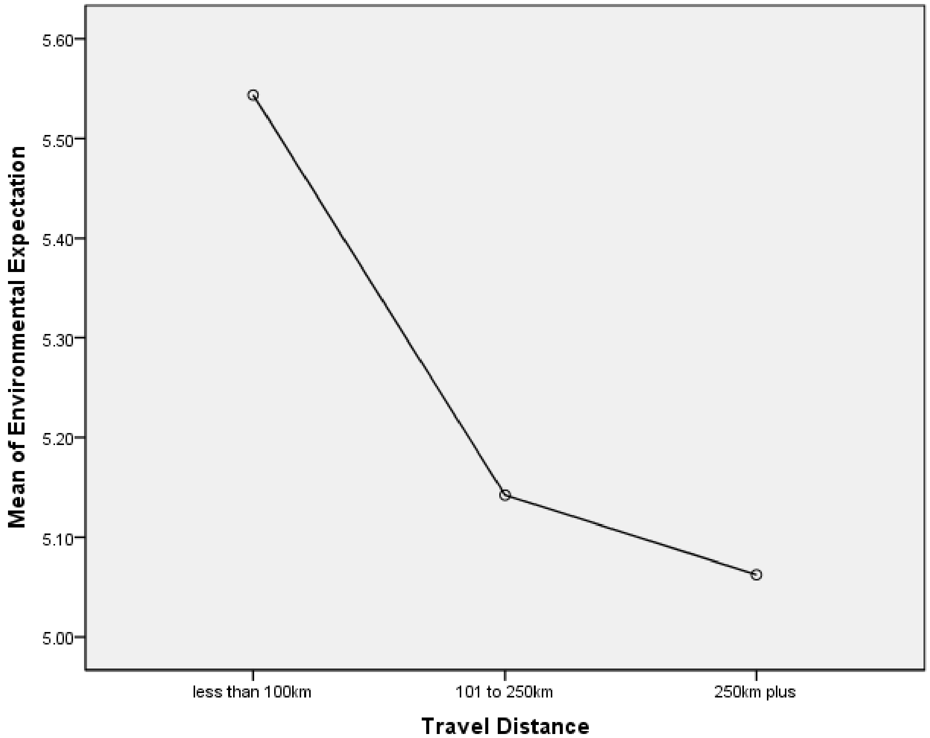
Figure 4-3: *Environmental Expectations between English and French Speakers*




All in all, language seemed to be an important variable that affected what customers expected from an alpine provider, how likely customers were to engage with environmental communications, and how customers viewed the focal organization's environmental reputation.

**Travel distance.** The distance respondents travelled to get to the focal organization's slopes also had an impact on environmental expectations from alpine sport areas (Factor 2: Environmental Expectations). Specifically, respondents that lived less than 100kms away from the organization had significantly higher environmental expectations for alpine providers. As seen in Table 4-8, survey participants that lived less than 100kms away responded with a mean of 5.54 out 7 (S.D. = 1.24), whereas people who lived further away reported less desire for alpine areas to be environmentally conscious (statistically significant at $p< .01$) (see Figure 4-4).

Figure 4-4: *Environmental Expectations According to Distance Travelled*



**Attendance frequency.** There was an additional significant difference between the ways respondents perceived the focal organization's environmental image depending on how frequently they skied or snowboarded at the alpine area. Respondents who skied or snowboarded at the focal organization on a weekly basis had more favorable perceptions of the focal organization's environmental image (M = 4.54*,* SD = 1.10) compared to other groups. These values are presented in Table 4-8.

**Age.** Lastly, there was a significant difference ($p < .001$) between the ways older and younger participants responded to all three of the factors. As seen in Table 4-8 and Figure 4-5, younger age groups believed the organizations environmental image to be significantly lower, reported lower levels of environmental engagement, and had lower overall environmental expectations from alpine sport providers.

Figure 4-5: *Focal Organization's Image According to Participant Age Group*

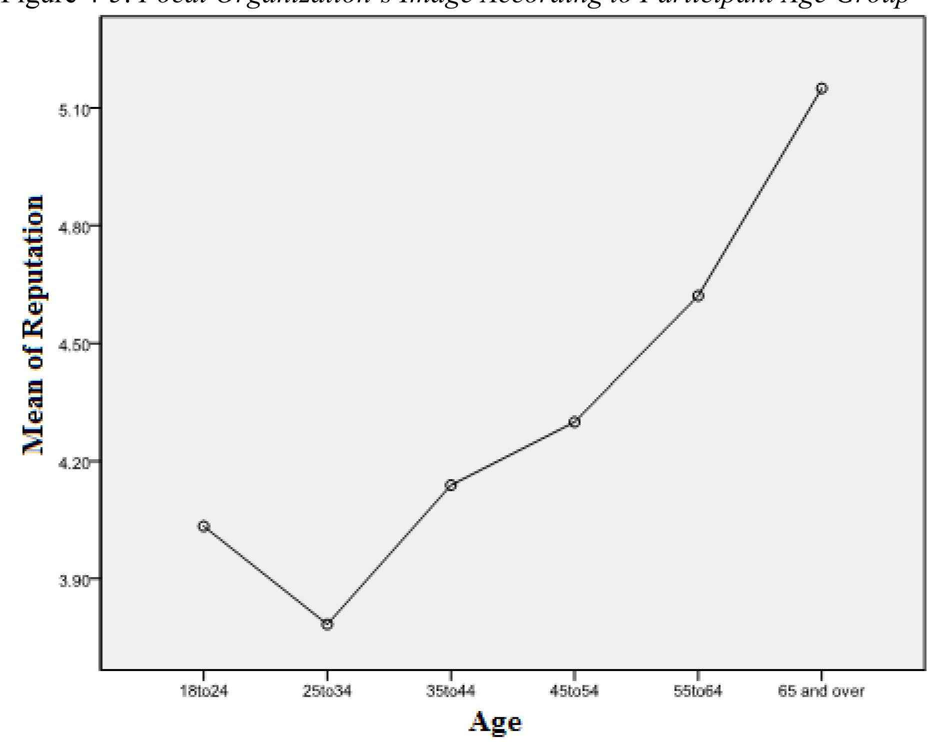


Table 4-8: *ANOVA Results for All Three Factors and Customer Characteristics*

| Factor | Environmental Reputation *M (SD)* | Environmental Engagement *M (SD)* | Environmental Expectations *M (SD)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Group** | | | |
| **Language** | | | |
| French | 4.43 (1.15) | 5.02 (1.06) | 5.58(1.31) |
| English | 4.17(.98) | 4.77(1.03) | 5.04 (1.17) |
| F (1, 332) | 4.93* | 4.64* | 15.79*** |
| **Dist. Travelled** | | | |
| <100km | 4.35(1.60) | 4.92(1.07) | 5.54(1.24) |
| 101-250km | 4.09 (1.03) | 4.87 (1.08) | 5.14(1.31) |
| >250km | 4.36 (.95) | 4.82 (1.01) | 5.06(1.18) |
| F(1, 332) | 2.17 | .250 | 5.15** |
| **Frequency** | | | |
| Weekly | 4.54 (1.10) | 4.94(1.08) | 5.39 (1.28) |
| Biweekly | 3.95 (1.01) | 4.82 (1.12) | 5.28 (1.55) |
| Monthly | 4.05 (.93) | 4.14 (1.09) | 4.80 (1.55) |
| Bimonthly | 3.97 (1.01) | 5.02 (.87) | 5.38 (.96) |
| Yearly | 4.13 (.91) | 5.00 (.84) | 5.30 (1.07) |
| Less than | 4.11 (1.01) | 4.67 (1.20) | 4.91 (1.23) |
| F (1, 332) | 3.97** | 1.96 | 1.53 |
| **Age** | | | |
| 18 to 24 | 4.03 (.95) | 4.36(1.05) | 4.74(1.31) |
| 25 to 34 | 3.78 (.88) | 4.84(1.03) | 5.25)1.42) |
| 35 to 44 | 4.13 (.99) | 4.91(1.09) | 5.40(1.34) |
| 45 to 54 | 4.29 (1.08) | 5.17(.92) | 5.48(1.02) |
| 55 to 64 | 4.62 (1.07) | 5.10(1.05 | 5.71 (1.15) |
| 65+ | 5.15 (.88) | 5.30(.85) | 5.50 (.89) |
| F (1,332) | 12.20*** | 7.84*** | 5.54*** |

* = p < .05 ; ** = p < .01; *** p = <.001

## Discussion

Several notable implications from the results emerge for practitioners in the alpine sport industry. The results lend credence to Clifford's (2002) comments of skiers and snowboarders considering themselves' environmentalists while not fully contemplating their actions' effects on the natural environment. For example, the respondents' displayed a clear expectation for alpine sport providers to be environmentally responsible. Judging by the sample's elevated mean for the environmental expectations factor, one would assume the sample would show a similar willingness to seek environmental information regarding their destination and product choices. The factor analysis regarding customers' environmental engagement, however, did not as clearly demonstrate the respondents' readiness to curb purchasing habits based on environmental attributes, engage with "greener" products, or discontinue attending alpine sport providers who make no efforts to protect the natural environment. This point echoes Dickson's (2006), as well as Weiss et al.'s (1998) findings who noted skiers' often have conflicting values of wanting to protect the natural environment without giving up their current alpine sport opportunities.

Suitably, the respondents did not show a clear willingness to pay a 5% price premium for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision. This is contrary to Dickson (2006) and Weiss et al. (1998) who found skiers were willing to pay price premiums or "environmental taxes" for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision.

The third factor, measuring the focal organization's environmental reputation according to its customers, indicated that the firm's environmental reputation is neutral. While it is commonly agreed upon that CSR and ECSR are implemented strategically (Baron, 2001; Lyon & Maxwell, 2008; Portney, 2008), it does not appear that the focal organization is gaining a reputational competitive advantage based on ECSR. True, this research is cross-sectional, and therefore does not measure how the focal organization's reputation has changed over time; it could have, for example, improved due to its current ECSR efforts from a negative reputation a few years ago. What is particularly notable, however, and what makes this doubtful, is the little communication the focal organization disseminates to external stakeholders regarding ECSR efforts. For example, the survey item "the environmental efforts the focal organization puts forward are clearly communicated to its customers" yielded a relatively low sample mean, and is an indication of the low level of environmental information being exchanged. One must wonder, then, if the focal organization's strategic approach to ECSR is being undercut by a lack of communication since several researchers have concluded strategic CSR programs require communication for success (Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008; Wicki & Van der Kaiij, 2007).

Additionally, it does not seem increasing the communication of ECSR efforts would hurt the organization's reputation, as the sample did not show high environmental claim scepticism. As such, communications regarding the focal organization's ECSR should not be withheld because of concerns for environmental claim scepticism. Although the survey only included one item designed to measure the sample's level of green fatigue, the item shed further light on the sample's feelings towards environmental communications and that there was no grounds to assume customers were tired of seeing or hearing about environmental initiatives. Despite being based on a single item, the focal organization's managers should also not hesitate to communicate about ECSR based on concerns of green fatigue. Combined with the sample's high environmental expectations from alpine sport providers, and neutral levels of environmental claim scepticism, it is likely that increasing the communication concerning environmental issues will not have negative effects on customers' perceptions of the focal organization.

Hudson (1996) warned, however, if an alpine sport area implemented too radical of a change towards an ECSR based reputation too quickly, the risk of alienating or dissuading potential customers could occur; a point echoed in CSR research by Wicki and van der Kaaij (2007). Seeing as the focal organization currently has a neutral environmental reputation, communications would need to be genuine, greenwash-free, and report on actual outcomes from environmental efforts in order to improve its environmental reputation.

Reaping strategic benefits from a positive corporate reputation requires actual environmentally responsible actions incorporated throughout daily operations, and the organization's image should rather be an organic reflection of those actions (Pruzan, 2001; Wicki & van der Kaaij, 2007). Therefore, despite the emphasis the researcher has placed on actually communicating ECSR throughout this study, managers must realize the fundamental importance of legitimately acting in environmentally responsible ways before communicating an environmentally responsible image. Otherwise, the risk of increasing legitimacy gaps and causing further damage to an organization's environmental reputation could occur.

**Practical Implications**

The results highlight some possible market segments that are likely to be more responsive to environmentally responsible initiatives. Firstly, consumers' native languages appear to be a key variable with English and French respondents having significant differences towards each of this study's three factors. The study's francophone respondents, for example, had significantly higher responses regarding their own levels of engagement with environmentally responsible products and services, and held the focal organization's environmental reputation in higher regard. Furthermore, while both Anglophones and Francophones had elevated expectations from alpine sport providers, French speakers had significantly higher expectations than English speakers. Consequently, it appears as though the French-speaking respondents are more mindful of environmental issues affecting the alpine sport industry, and could be better targets for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision. The results from this study appear to support findings from Laroche, Tomiuk, Bergeron and Barbaro-Forleo (2002), who found French-Canadians as opposed to their English counterparts were more concerned about ecological issues, and had more belief in corporations acting responsibly toward the environment. This being exploratory research in its initial stages however, and despite statistically significant differences between English and French respondents, it may not yet be wise for the focal organization to heavily invest in targeting French consumers without further market research and analysis showing greater consumer behaviour differences.

Respondents who travelled less than 100kms to arrive at the alpine sport area also had significantly higher environmental expectations from alpine sport providers compared to participants who travelled more than 100kms. Since the participants who live within 100kms of the focal organization are more likely to also be community stakeholders, and thus, more likely directly affected by the organization's operation, this segment is probably more interested in the organization's ECSR. Consequently, these individuals may be a good market segment to test the effectiveness of ECSR communications before further communicating with all consumers and other external stakeholders.

Moreover, respondents who attended the focal organization weekly had significantly higher perceptions of its environmental reputation than other groups; yet, their perceptions still did not indicate they viewed the firm's environmental reputation positively. This result echoes findings from Walker and Kent (2009) as well as Fry (1995) who found highly dedicated sports fans and skiers were less concerned with CSR or ECSR and were more interested in the provision of a quality product.

It cannot be determined from this survey, however, why weekly consumers had more positive perceptions of the focal organization's environmental image, and furthermore, why there is the greatest disparity between weekly customers and bi-weekly customers. It would be possible that weekly consumers, as Fry (1995) suggested, are simply less concerned with the focal organization's environmental attributes, and have come to believe positive things about its environmental reputation based on their attachments to the focal organization's other reputational qualities.

It could also be possible that the weekly skiers only experience alpine sport from the focal organization, where bi-weekly consumers experience other alpine sport providers who, they feel, more adequately address environmental issues. Before blindly attempting to improve overall perceptions, however, it may be wise for the focal organization to understand the reasoning behind the disparity between these two consumer-groups, especially if that reasoning may have something to do with its competitors' environmental protection habits. Regardless, a logical theme appears to be emerging among CSR and corporate reputation research in which highly dedicated consumers tend to regard a focal organization in a more favourable light.

Further, the significant difference between the ways younger and older people perceived the focal organization's environmental image was not surprising. It is well documented that younger demographics are more concerned with the planet's environmental issues (Diamoantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics, & Bohlen, 2003; Grendstad & Wollebaek, 2001), and it was respondents under the age of 35 who perceived the focal organization's environmental reputation to be the lowest. This may be due to higher degrees of environmental claim skepticism among younger people in the general marketplace, and if reliable factors had been formed based on environmental claim skepticism for this research, this phenomenon would have been further tested. On the other hand, older age groups surprisingly responded with significantly higher sample means regarding their environmental engagement and environmental expectations from alpine sport providers. Older respondents' higher expectations and engagement levels could be due to a variety of reasons, and more research is certainly required to understand why. One could claim, however, that alpine sport culture has changed over time, and where older generations of skiers enjoyed the sport for being able to spend time outdoors and appreciate nature, younger generations participate for different reasons that are less associated to natural-world experiences, thus affecting their levels of environmental engagement and environmental expectations.

**Limitations**

Younger people were more willing to participate in the study (based on respondent demographics), and this may indicate that a higher interest exists among younger (18-35) people regarding the alpine sport industry's environmental habits. On the other hand, younger people could have been more willing to participate in the study as they may have been more comfortable with the recruiting researcher who was in the same age demographic, or due to the free beverage offered in return for their participation. Therefore, understanding more about different environmental awareness and claim scepticism between age groups could provide valuable research, and is just one of the suggestions for future research further explained in the next section.

Another limitation of this research is that it does not provide a thorough understanding of how customers actually interpret environmental communications. Although there is some evidence indicating customers have neutral levels of engaging with environmental communications, that environmental claim scepticism is neutral, and that green fatigue is anticipated to be low among the focal organization's customers, more nuanced, and perhaps qualitative, understandings of how alpine sport customers react to environmental claims are required.

**Future Research**

As several researchers have delved into the ways skiers and snowboarders perceive environmental issues or their willingness to support alpine sport providers who employ ECSR, this study begins to shed light on the ways they interpret and interact with the communications regarding those ECSR initiatives. This is important as strategic ECSR not only requires the actual environmental protection efforts, but also, effective communication on those grounds to reap competitive advantages (Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008; Wicki & van der kaiij, 2007).While some strategic management implications have been discussed, the exploratory nature of this research certainly leaves opportunities for future investigation. Firstly, fruitful research opportunities exist for researchers desiring to inspect sports enthusiasts' levels of environmental claim scepticism, green fatigue, as well as alpine sport enthusiasts' willingness to pay price premiums for environmentally responsible products. More specifically, identifying the possible different levels of claim scepticism for different environmental claims (e.g., water quality, air quality, energy reduction, soil erosion, etc.) could provide important guidance for alpine sport practitioners.

More detailed and likely mixed-methods research also needs to be conducted to understand how community stakeholders view alpine sport areas. Perhaps more importantly, it could be crucial to understand how community stakeholders who do not use the alpine sport facilities view the firms, since these stakeholders can also influence and impact organizations.

More broadly, however, a more comprehensive examination of external stakeholders who have an impact on environmental issues (e.g., suppliers, conservation groups) could provide crucial information for alpine sport providers. Lastly, researchers are urged to use a pre and post experimental design to understand how external stakeholders' perceptions of sport and recreation organizations' environmental reputations change upon the launching of ECSR campaigns.

## Conclusion

Despite there being evidence that the sample did not believe the alpine sport industry was environmentally destructive, respondents clearly displayed a desire for alpine sport providers to operate in environmentally responsible ways, and actually expected alpine sport providers to do so. As opposed to Dickson (2006), however, this study demonstrated that there is no evidence to suggest alpine sport customers would pay a price premium of 5% for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision. Further, there is no conclusive evidence indicating that customers would stop attending an alpine sport provider if no environmentally protective actions were taken. Consequently, it is not suggested that alpine sport providers expect to fund future ECSR programs by implementing price premiums without also expecting some customer backlash.

As found in this study, alpine sport consumers' engagement levels are neutral, suggesting that they do not actively look for environmental information from alpine providers (despite their high environmental expectations). This presents alpine sport providers with several challenges given that customers expect providers to be environmentally responsible, while not actively seeking and supporting providers whom engage in such activities. Logically, these contradictory feelings could slow the competitive advantages many managers seek from implementing ECSR. While the focal organization did indeed have many ECSR initiatives in place, consumers believe the focal organization is not adequately communicating them, and furthermore, the sample did not show it was actively seeking and engaging with environmental communications. The combination of low information-seeking behaviour as well as low information dissemination may be obstructing the focal organization from capitalizing on the strategic ECSR that it has implemented. It is therefore concluded, as suggested by Webb and Mohr (2008) as well as Wicki and van der Kaiij (2007), that if managers wish to fulfill customer expectations and reap strategic benefits from CSR, they must not only provide for those outcomes, but also effectively communicate their successful achievement.

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**Final Discussion**

Researchers (e.g., Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Peloza, 2005) have noted that managers have become hesitant to communicate their ECSR efforts due to the potential negative attention it can attract from some stakeholders (e.g., customers, community members, NGOs, lobby groups). This proposition was similarly found when interviewing managers as part of this study. Several managers at the focal organization actually noted withholding environmental discourse to circumvent attracting negative attention towards the organization. Concomitantly, the managers noted that despite the potential for attracting negative attention, if ECSR initiatives were to garner adequate returns on investment, implementing environmentally protective actions could be worthwhile. Managers thus supported the idea of strategic ECSR playing a role in the focal organization’s overall direction, but doubted enough customer demand existed for ECSR to have a significant impact on the organization’s financial bottom line. Despite some managers discussing the natural environment’s aesthetic beauty and rejuvenating abilities (arguably less anthropocentric values (Kilbourne, 1995), most managers believed ECSR and profitability were almost incommensurable, yet still wished that future ECSR initiatives would be profitable.

The environmental communications the focal organization did disseminate reflected those strategic ECSR motives, and were irrefutably anthropocentric, rarely awarding the natural environment its own inherent value (Kilbourne, 1995), a crucial component of more ecocentric environmental management systems. These communications were often divorced from any explanation of ECSR attempts, and used vague hints towards an overall “green consciousness” to appeal to environmentally concerned consumers, resulting in the use of two greenwashing techniques explained by Carlson, Grove, & Kangun (1993) and TerraChoice (2010).

Based on the qualitative content analysis and semi structured interviews with managers, the researcher concluded that the strategic nature of the focal organization's ECSR attempts supported arguments advanced from Baron (2001), Lyon and Maxwell, (2008), and Portney (2008) who noted that CSR is rarely implemented for altruistic motives. The environmental communications, for example, avoided informing stakeholders how environmental efforts were benefiting nature, and rather, used anthropocentric appeals to strategically attract potential customers searching for an aesthetically rejuvenating milieu. By not detailing actual ECSR attempts (e.g., attempts to minimize soil erosion, mechanisms for neutralizing water runoff temperatures), the external communications convey that environmental considerations do not warrant the same detailed attention awarded to some of the other offerings.

While there is nothing innately problematic with using ECSR for strategic reasons, appearing overly strategic may convince interested stakeholders that ECSR actions are only in place for the firm's economic benefit; not for any actual concern of the environment. Consequently, it may be important for the focal organization to outline actual ECSR actions to avoid initiating or causing customers' environmental claim scepticism, which would, in turn, make it difficult to reap any competitive advantage; apparently a key component of implementing ECSR in the first place.

Fittingly, many of the managers interviewed for this research remarked that they believed consumers had already become sceptical of environmental claims. Several managers felt they struggled with a dilemma where they did not want to add to customers' environmental claim scepticism or attract backlash, but still wished to inform interested parties of the organization's ECSR actions. What may have been surprising for some managers interviewed for this research, however, was that on average, respondents' identified they had rather neutral levels of environmental claim scepticism. The managers' fears of attracting backlash are in themselves indications that they need to learn how to more "safely" communicate ECSR actions, and that attention to organizations' environmental discourses warrant further attention. To remedy some of the managers' hesitations, two-way communication processes may be necessary where external stakeholders are able to inform and guide an organization's environmental actions. By conducting focus groups or hosting forums where stakeholders are able to express their environmental expectations, managers may be able to directly address ECSR actions in communications, and thus, avoid using vague descriptions such as those explained in study one that result in legitimacy gaps and increased environmental claim scepticism.

While the focal organization's managers felt their customers held some scepticism to their environmental claims, managers also felt a level of "green fatigue" existed among their consumers. Some managers noted that environmental communications were not being disseminated because of that perceived level of green fatigue. The survey results shed some light on this contention and indicated that there is a low level of green fatigue amongst customers, demonstrating the focal organization's managers should not be hesitant to communicate about their ECSR efforts based on concerns for green fatigue.

Another key finding from the survey research revealed some insight into the strategic results of the focal organization's current CSR actions. As the focal organization's managers divulged, and as the qualitative content analysis revealed, the focal organization's ECSR is in fact strategically motivated. Judging by the firm's environmental reputation according to survey respondents, the focal organization does not appear to be reaping competitive advantages based on its environmental reputation, which according to the sample, remains neutral. One item was specifically notable within the factor measuring the focal organization's environmental reputation; participants responded that the focal organization does not effectively communicate its ECSR actions. While it is well noted that strategic CSR requires effective communication (Waller & Conaway 2011; Wicki & van der Kaiij; 2007), the focal organization does not yet appear to be conveying its ECSR actions effectively, and in turn, does not appear to be reaping reputational competitive advantages.

An additional reason managers revealed for not fully communicating their ECSR efforts was the belief that customers' destination decisions were un-swayed by alpine sport providers' environmental actions. What customers revealed in the survey portion of this research, however, was that they actually did expect alpine sport providers to operate in environmentally responsible ways.  This finding not only supports the argument that the focal organization needs to communicate its environmental actions in more detail (perhaps on its website, where space is relatively unlimited and inexpensive), but also adds to the literature that has found skiers and snowboarders to be concerned with alpine sport's environmental effects (Brymer, Downey, & Gray, 2009; Hudson & Ritchie, 2001). What managers may have correctly identified, however, was that customers were not willing to pay price premiums for environmentally responsible alpine sport provision; the sample did not, for example, show a willingness to pay a price premium of 5% for lift tickets. This result contradicted findings from Hudson and Ritchie (2001) who found customers were willing to pay price premiums for environmentally responsible alpine sport.

Finally, during their interviews many managers commented that they believed several market segments (e.g., locals, younger people) would be more interested in the focal organization's ECSR. The quantitative portion of this research confirmed some of their propositions. Customers who lived less than 100km away from the alpine sport area had significantly higher expectations regarding the focal organization's environmental habits. Thus, it may be logical to include more information regarding the focal organization's ECSR efforts in the communications catered to local customers. In the same vein, seeing as customers who attended the alpine sport area less often had significantly lower perceptions of the focal organization's environmental reputation, it may also be important to provide some detailed information regarding ECSR to improve those customers' perceptions, as these customer are likely to spend more money and time at the alpine sport area (e.g., lodging, food, entertainment, etc.).

For the managers who noted younger customers to be more interested in the organization's ECSR efforts, the sample results could be surprising, as older age groups reported higher levels of environmental expectations and environmental engagement. Where it is common to believe younger people are more interested in the planet's well-being, this research may indicate that among skiers and snowboarders, alpine sport organizations may find it valuable to communicate ECSR attempts to older customers as well.

A final point worth reiterating is the difference between the focal organization's manager's feelings towards environmental regulation, and many CSR researchers' arguments that CSR is used to avoid further mandatory environmental laws. Most managers interviewed for this research actually endorsed more stringent environmental regulations for the alpine sport industry, and especially noted that those regulations would ensure the natural environment's protection from organizations that do not operate in environmentally responsible ways. Consequently, this point may require further research, either within the alpine sport context, or in other industries.

**Future Research**

Examining the ECSR initiatives that are most favourable amongst skiers and snowboarders could provide useful information for alpine sport practitioners who are clearly seeking strategic benefits from their ECSR initiatives. More research is required to determine how skiers and snowboarders actually receive or react to environmental messages particularly given the distinct subcultures of these alpine sports. For example, understanding different responses to environmentalism in the alpine sport industry among skiers vs. snowboarders, or young vs. old could provide alpine sport providers and alpine retailers valuable information and guidance for future products and services.

More research reassuring alpine sport providers that skiers and snowboarders expect them to be environmentally responsible could help speed up the adoption of more environmentally responsible practices, since it appears environmental protection is strategically motivated. Moreover, further detailing market segments that would be more likely to support alpine providers' ECSR efforts could further guide alpine sport providers in targeting their communications.

Lastly, more research must be conducted to understand how, not only alpine sport providers, but all sport practitioners can effectively communicate their ECSR efforts without using greenwashing techniques. By minimizing the potential of being accused of greenwashing (and in turn, likely minimizing environmental claim scepticism) managers may be more likely to implement and communicate about ECSR, ultimately benefitting the planet, people, and profit margins.

If more media attention is awarded to climate change and other environmental issues in the future, organizations will likely continue to seek competitive advantages on those trends and niche markets. Future research must identify, then, if and how ECSR actions are fulfilling stakeholder desires, and how organizations can best communicate those efforts. Without such research, ECSR may remain a point of contention for many academics as little conclusive evidence exists regarding its strategic benefits.

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## Appendix A: Consent Form

### Environmental Responsibility of a Canadian Ski Area: Comparing Perceptions Between Stakeholders

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to understand what ski areas are doing to minimize environmental degradation, how to improve the communication of environmental efforts, and lastly, to understand how different stakeholder groups respond to the ski area's environmental actions.

**Participation:** My participation will consist of completing a survey regarding my perceptions of the organization's environmental performance. I will be asked questions about environmental corporate social responsibility in daily operations, how the environment is discussed in advertising or other communication processes, and about how the ski area's environmental actions' influence my patronage.

**Invitation to Participate:** I am invited to participate in the above mentioned research study conducted by Nicolas Apostolis and Eric MacIntosh.

**Risks:** My participation in this study will not entail any foreseeable risk or force me to divulge any sensitive information.

**Benefits:** My participation in this study will allow me to reflect on the ski area's environmental practices and provide information to later understand if the operational actions match the desires of customers, community members and tourists. Doing so will allow the ski area to target appropriate environmental demands that will, in turn, have potential to improve the ski area's environmental performance and customer satisfaction.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** I have received assurance from the researchers that all information will remain anonymous and in the locked office of the principal researcher for five years upon publication. I understand the findings will be used only for academic purposes (publication, presentation, technical report), will be compiled with other people's responses, and will be made available upon the project's completion. Further, only the researchers will have access to the information in my responses.

**Voluntary Participation:** I am under no obligation to participate, and there will be no negative consequences of my choosing not to participate in the study. If I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I withdraw from the study, I will decide at that point if I want the researchers to use the data I have given them up until that point, or destroy and discard it.

**Acceptance:**

I, ____________________________________, agree to participate in the previously mentioned research study conducted by graduate student Nicolas Apostolis (School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa) and Dr. Eric MacIntosh (School of Human Kinetics, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ottawa). I understand that by accepting to participate, I am in no way waiving my right to later withdraw from the study.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researchers. If I have any ethical concerns regarding my participation in this study, I may contact the University of Ottawa's Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research.

Participant's signature:_______________________ Date:_____________________

Researcher's signature:______________________ Date:_____________________

**La responsabilité environnementale d'une zone de ski canadienne: une comparaison entre les perceptions des intervenants**

**But de l'étude :** Le but de l'étude est de comprendre les initiatives prises par les stations de ski pour minimiser la dégradation environnementale, de comprendre comment elles tentent d'améliorer leurs efforts en matière de communication environnementale, ainsi que de comprendre les réactions des différents types d'intervenants envers ces initiatives environnementales.

**Participation:** Ma participation consiste à remplir un questionnaire concernant ma perception des performances environnementales produites.

Je serai questionnée au sujet du degré prioritaire de la responsabilité sociale de l'entreprise envers l'environnement, la considération de l'environnement envers la publicité et d'autres types de communications, ainsi que l'impact des initiatives environnementales de la station de ski sur mon patronage.

**Invitation à participer:** Je suis invitée à prendre part à l'étude mentionnée ci-dessus menée par Nicolas Apostolis et Eric MacIntosh.

**Risques :** Ma participation à cette étude ne comporte aucun risque prévisible ou bien à divulguer aucune pièce d'information sensible.

**Avantages:** Ma participation à cette étude me permettra de réfléchir sur les pratiques environnementales de l'organisation et de fournir des détails afin de mieux comprendre si les actions environnementales de l'organisation correspondent aux désirs des clients, des employés, des membres de la communauté et des touristes. Ceci permettra à la station de ski de cibler les désirs environnementaux appropriés.

**Confidentialité et anonymat :** J'ai reçu l'assurance de la part des chercheurs que toutes les informations demeurent anonymes et seront verrouillées au bureau du chercheur principal pour cinq ans après la publication. Je comprends que les résultats seront utilisés uniquement à des fins académiques (publication, présentation, rapport technique), seront combinés avec les réponses des autres participants et mis à ma disposition à la suite de l'achèvement du projet. De même, seuls les chercheurs auront accès aux détails de mes réponses.

**Participation volontaire :** Il n'y a aucune obligation à participer à cette étude et aucune conséquence négative ne sera associée au refus de participation. Si je désire participer, j'ai le droit de me retirer de l'étude à tout instant et/ou refuser à répondre à n'importe quelle question, sans subir des conséquences négatives. Si je me retire de l'étude, j'ai l'option de permettre aux chercheurs d'utiliser le contenu des réponses déjà répondu ou bien de les détruire.

**Consentement :**

Je, ____________________________________, accepte de participer à l'étude mentionnée ci-dessus menée par l'étudiant gradué Nicolas Apostolis (École des sciences de l'activité physique, Faculté des sciences de la santé, Université d'Ottawa) et le professeur Eric MacIntosh (École des sciences de l'activité physique, Faculté des sciences de la santé, Université d'Ottawa). Je comprends qu'en acceptant de prendre part à cette étude, je ne renonce pas mon droit à me retirer ultérieurement de l'étude

Je peux communiquer avec les chercheurs si j'ai des questions au sujet de l'étude. Pour les inquiétudes éthiques concernant ma participation au projet de recherche, je peux communiquer avec le responsable d'éthique en recherche de l'Université d'Ottawa.

Signature du participant:______________________ Date:_____________

Signature du chercheur:_______________________ Date:_____________

## Appendix B: Survey

## Environmental Responsibility of a Canadian Ski Area: Comparing Perceptions Between Stakeholders

Thank you for participating in this survey regarding environmental practices in the alpine sport industry. We are interested in your feedback regarding your environmental preferences and experiences regarding alpine sports. Completing this survey will help alpine sport providers better understand the environmental expectations of skiers and snowboarders; we appreciate your participation.

Please mark the response that best describes you and your experiences with an "X".

1. **Please identify your age range:**
   ___ 18-24 ___ 25-34 ___ 35-44 ___ 45-54 ___ 55-64 ___ 65+

2. **Please identify your sex:**
   ___ Male ___ Female

3. **Are you an employee at this ski area?**
   ___ Yes ___ No

4. **Are you primarily a:**
   ___ Skier
   ___ Snowboarder
   ___ Other (Please Specify) ___________________________

5. **How often do you ski or snowboard at this ski area?**
   ___ Once a week or more often
   ___ Once every 2-3 weeks
   ___ Once a month
   ___ Once every 2-3 months
   ___ Once a year
   ___ Less than once a year

6. **How far did you travel to get to this ski area?**
   ___ Less than 25 kilometres
   ___ 25-100 kilometres
   ___ 101-250 kilometres
   ___ More than 250 kilometres

7. **Are you**
   ___ Here on a day trip
   ___ Here on an overnight trip
   ___ Currently living in the community

8. **Which of the following best describes your total annual household income before taxes?**
   ___ Under $15,000
   ___ $ 15,000-34,999
   ___ $ 35,000-54,999
   ___ $ 55,000-74,999
   ___ $ 75,000-94,999
   ___ $ 95,000- 114,999
   ___ $ 115,000 +

| **Please circle the number that best represents your feelings to the statement.** | **1= completely disagree<br>2= disagree<br>3= somewhat disagree<br>4= neither agree or disagree<br>5= somewhat agree<br>6= agree<br>7= completely agree** |
|---|---|
| 1. I look for information about a product or service's environmental attributes when I buy everyday items. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 2. The environmental responsibility of alpine sport providers is important to me. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 3. Alpine sport providers are adequately protecting the natural environment. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 4. Organizations embellish their environmental protection efforts. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 5. I am inclined to buy products from companies I believe to be ecologically responsible. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 6. I look into alpine sport providers' environmental practices before buying my lift ticket(s). | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 7. I think this ski area is an environmental leader in the alpine sport industry. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 8. The alpine sport industry is environmentally damaging. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 9. I would tell my friends and family positive things about this ski area's environmental actions. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 10. I buy the highest quality product, regardless of its impact on the environment. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 11. I would no longer attend an alpine provider if no attempt to limit its environmental impact was made. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 12. Environmental concern shown by companies is a sales gimmick. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 13. It is reasonable to expect alpine sport providers to sacrifice profit to implement environmental initiatives. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 14. I can recall evidence of this ski area's environmental initiatives. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 15. I would continue attending an alpine sport provider because of its attempts to limit environmental damage. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 16. I am sceptical about organizations' motives for implementing environmental initiatives. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 17. Alpine sport providers should strive to provide the best quality ski and snowboard conditions, regardless of the environmental effects. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 18. The environmental efforts this ski area puts forward are clearly communicated to customers. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 19. I can recall an instance when I switched brands for ecological reasons. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 20. Alpine sport providers should go above and beyond what is required of them to ensure minimal damage to the environment. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 21. I am growing tired of environmental messages from organizations. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 22. I would pay more for a lift ticket (5% more) if I knew the provider was more environmentally friendly than others. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 23. The well-being of the environment should be considered by alpine sport providers. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 24. I buy the lowest priced product, regardless of its impact on the environment. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 25. This ski area is an organization I can trust to be environmentally friendly. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 26. I believe organizations, in general, implement environmental initiatives genuinely for environmental purposes. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 27. Because of this ski area's environmental efforts, I would continue skiing or snowboarding here. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

**La responsabilité environnementale d'une zone de ski canadienne: une comparaison entre les perceptions des intervenants**

Merci de votre participation à ce sondage concernant les pratiques environnementales dans l'industrie des sports alpins. Nous nous intéressons à votre opinion et votre attitude concernant l'environnement, ainsi qu'à vos expériences pertinentes à ce sujet en sports alpins. L'objectif de ce sondage est de permettre aux propriétaires de stations de ski de mieux comprendre les attentes de plusieurs skieurs et planchistes dans ce domaine.

Parmi les options ci-dessous, marquez la réponse qui décrit vos expériences de manière la plus juste.

1. Indiquez le groupe d'âge dans lequel vous vous situez.

___ 18-24 ___ 25-34 ___ 35-44 ___ 45-54 ___ 55-64 ___ 65+

2. Vous êtes de sexe

___ Féminin ___ Masculin

3. Êtes-vous un(e) employé(e) de la station de ski ?

___Oui ___Non

4. Vous êtes surtout un :

___ Skieur
___ Planchiste à neige

___ Autre (veuillez spécifier) ________________________________

5. À quelle fréquence faites-vous du ski ou de la planche à la station de ski ?

____ Au moins une fois par semaine

____ Chaque deux ou trois semaines

____ Au moins une fois par mois

____ Au moins une fois à chaque deux/trois mois

____ Une fois par année

____ Moins qu'une fois par année

6. Quelle distance parcourez-vous pour vous rendre à la station de ski ?

____ Moins de 25 kilomètres

____ 25-100 kilomètres

____ 101-250 kilomètres

____ Plus de 250 kilomètres

7. Êtes-vous

___ Ici pour la journée

___ Ici pour un séjour d'une (ou plusieurs) nuit(s)

___ Résident.

8. Lequel des énoncés suivants décrit le mieux votre revenu annuel familial avant les impôts ?

___ Moins de15,000$

___ 15,000-34,999$

___ 35,000-54,999$

___ 55,000-74,999$

___ 75,000-94,999$

___ 95,000- 114,999$

___ 115,000$ +

| **Entourez la réponse qui représente le mieux votre sentiment quant aux déclarations ci-dessous** | **1.** Totalement en désaccord<br>**2.** En désaccord<br>**3.** Plutôt en désaccord<br>**4.** Ni d'accord ni en désaccord<br>**5.** Plutôt d'accord<br>**6.** D'accord<br>**7.** Entièrement d'accord |
|---|---|
| 1. Je m'informe des attributs environnementaux d'un produit ou service lors de mes achats quotidiens. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 2. La responsabilité environnementale des fournisseurs des sports alpins est importante pour moi. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3. Le milieu naturel est adéquatement protégé par les fournisseurs de sports alpins. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 4. Les organisations exagèrent leurs efforts concernant la protection de l'environnement. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 5. Je suis enclin à acheter des produits d'entreprises qui sont, à mes yeux, responsables écologiquement. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 6. Je me renseigne au sujet des pratiques environnementales des fournisseurs de sport alpin *avant* d'acheter mes billets de ski. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 7. Je crois que la station de ski fait partie des leaders environnementaux dans l'industrie des sports alpins. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 8. L'industrie des sports alpins est nocive pour l'environnement. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 9. Je dirais à mes amis et à ma famille des commentaires positifs sur les actions environnementales de la de ski. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 10. J'achète des produits de qualités supérieures sans tenir compte de leurs effets néfastes possibles sur l'environnement. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 11. Je mettrais fin à mon support des propriétaires de stations de ski si aucun effort pour limiter les impacts environnementaux n'était fait. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 12. Les préoccupations environnementales avancées par les sociétés commerciales sont des astuces promotionnelles. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 13. Il est raisonnable de s'attendre à ce que les propriétaires de stations de ski sacrifient des profits afin de mettre en œuvre des initiatives environnementales. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 14. Je peux donner des exemples des initiatives environnementales de la station de ski. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 15. Je continuerais ma fréquentation chez un fournisseur de sport alpin en raison des initiatives qu'il a prises pour limiter les dommages environnementaux. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 16. Je suis sceptique concernant les motivations des organisations pour la mise en œuvre des initiatives environnementales. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |
| 17. Les propriétaires de stations de ski devraient s'efforcer d'offrir les meilleures conditions de ski et de planche sans se soucier des effets sur l'environnement. | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18. Les efforts environnementaux déployés par la station de ski sont clairement communiqués à la clientèle. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 19. Je peux me souvenir d'une occasion où j'ai changé de marque pour des raisons écologiques. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 20. Les fournisseurs de sport alpin doivent aller au-delà de ce qui est exigé d'eux pour assurer un minimum de dommages à l'environnement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 21. Je suis de plus en plus irrité des messages des organisations sur l'environnement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 22. Je serais prêt à payer plus cher (5% de plus) pour un billet de ski si je savais que le fournisseur est plus respectueux de l'environnement que d'autres. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 23. Le respect de l'environnement devrait être considéré par les fournisseurs de sports alpins. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 24. J'achète le produit le moins cher, peu importe son impact sur l'environnement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 25. La station de ski est une organisation sur laquelle je peux avoir confiance concernant son respect de l'environnement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 26. En général, je crois que les organisations sont sincères dans leurs initiatives environnementales pour des fins écologiques. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 27. En raison des efforts environnementaux de la station de ski, je continuerai à la fréquenter. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

## Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Schedule

**Background Questions: 5 Minutes (5/60max)**

1. What is your current role with the organization?
2. How long have you been in your current role with the organization?
3. Have you worked for the organization in other capacities? (What were they and for how long?)
4. Generally speaking, how do environmental issues influence your daily duties (…pertaining to your role with the organization)?

**Environmental Stewardship: 25 min (30/60max)**

Next, I would like to ask you about some of the environmental aspects of the ski area and about environmental stewardship in particular. Environmental stewardship is the responsible use (including conservation) of natural resources in a way that takes full and balanced account of the interests of society, future generations, and other species, as well as of private needs, and accepts significant answerability to society (Worrell & Appleby, 2000).

***Environmental Actions taken at the ski area***

5. When considering the natural environment, which factors do you consider to be the highest priority for the community? What about the ski resort? How does the resort try to address these issues (if at all)?
6. Do you feel your ski area has the responsibility of being environmental stewards... if yes, why. If not, why not?
7. “Can you please describe some of the environmental stewardship actions which your organization currently is engaged? Can you comment on any (other) environmental stewardship actions which may be minor compared to what we’ve spoken about already?
8. How is the environmental performance of the organization (or any of the individual actions) specifically monitored at the ski area?
9. How do you personally evaluate the organization’s environmental performance? (maybe even rate it on a scale from 0-10). Why?
10. Next, I would like you to finish this sentence for me in whichever way you feel is most appropriate: “Environmentally, I think ski areas should...”

***Communication of Environmental Actions***

11. Based on the information you have provided so far, do you think the ski resort communicates its environmental efforts to the public enough/too much/ just the right amount? Why is that?
12. How are your environmental initiatives promoted or communicated to those inside and outside of the organization? How do you think each group is responding?
13. Do you believe the communications are easily accessible for someone who may be looking for information about the ski area’s environmental performance?
14. Do you think the ski resort markets itself as an environmental steward, why or why not?

***Effects of environmental actions***

15. What kind of role do you think the ski area’s environmental performance has on customers’ decisions to visit your ski area if any at all? On employees’ decisions to work for the organization?

*(only if time permits)*

16. In your opinion, has there been a change in the ski industry's emphasis concerning environmental stewardship since you have worked in the industry, (how so)? What about your ski area?
17. Do you think the communications address the environmental concerns people may have about the ski area's performance?

**Legitimacy and Social Responsibility (30min)**

Next I would like to ask you about the concept known as "greenwashing". Greenwashing is often defined as the attempt to appear more environmentally friendly by selectively disclosing positive information about environmental performance, without disclosure of negative information on these dimensions. (Lyon & Maxwell, 2006). This topic is becoming important for ski areas as it is believed outdoor recreationists are more environmentally concerned than the consumers of other industries, and may be becoming doubtful of environmental claims. As such, they may bring on image-damaging publicity that can have further effects on the organization.

***Backlash***

16. With this in mind, can you recall any instances in which the ski area's environmental actions were questioned or criticized?
17. Do you have any personal duties which require you to consider how to effectively communicate your environmental efforts to staff or to the community? If yes, how do you communicate these efforts? Have you received any backlash for such efforts in the past?

***Consultation***

18. What do you think community members want (environmentally) from the ski resort?
19. How (if at all) are community member's suggestions taken into account in environmental strategies? Are there certain avenues community members can take to have their voices heard by the ski resort?
20. Do you believe environmental priorities should ever be given precedence over financial performance?
21. Do you think it is likely that ski areas in general implement environmental initiatives if they know these initiatives may hurt them financially? (Can you provide any examples where this has happened?)
22. What are your feelings towards mandatory environmental standards for ski areas?

*If time permits*

23. What other (if any) social responsibility programs does the ski area work with?
24. How do you balance different stakeholders' needs?
25. Do you think the organization's motives for implementing environmental initiatives are important for people external to the ski resort? For example, do you think community members would be concerned if the ski area's environmental initiatives allow them to financially profit in some way, or do you believe community members want environmental initiatives to be altruistically about the environment?
26. Would it be fair for people to expect ski areas to take financial losses in order to implement environmental efforts?

**Wrapping up**

27. Looking forward, what do you believe to be the most important environmental challenges for ski areas?
28. Would you like to add anything else concerning environmental stewardship at the ski area?