

University of Wales Trinity St David

Marketing and Sustainability

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This essay will first define sustainability, then will discuss sustainability in the context of marketing, highlighting what it means to be sustainable within the marketing orientation. Continuing by looking at some of the key issues incorporated within sustainable marketing, interwoven into these issues will be real life examples of how they have, and are impacting upon organisations, as well as how these organisations are coping, struggling and sometimes thriving through the implementation of sustainable marketing strategies.

Before possible to critically analyse the key issues in marketing and sustainability, as well as how these issues impact upon professionals and their customers focussing on industry examples, it is crucial to define sustainability. Starting with the most widely used and well-known definition of sustainability, Bruntlands (1987) definition that states 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs.' While a more modern definition from Thiele (2013) highlights that the word sustainable has become so overused, that it has little to no meaning anymore. Thiele (2013) considers it easier to define what sustainability is not as apposed to what it is, using the following definition; 'A Relationship, Practice, or Institution is not sustainable if it undermines the social, economic, or environmental conditions of its own validity.' To simplify the central theme of both, an individual, and or an organisation is only sustainable if their current practises can be continued indefinitely, without a negative impact on themselves. Next it is important to identify the relationship marketing has with sustainability, to define sustainability within marketing.

Belz and Peattie (2012) put the idea of sustainability into a marketing context, stating that the acceptance of limitations within the marketing orientation as well as acknowledging the 'necessity of regulatory alterations to the marketing mechanism'. Continuing that sustainable marketing remains committed to the necessary adjustments to price signals and institutional settings in favour of sustainable development.

Belz and Peattie (2012) states that the 'managerial approach of sustainable' marketing encompasses six key components: Sustainable marketing strategies, Sustainable marketing transformation, Sustainable marketing mix, Sustainable marketing values and objectives, as well as Socio-ecological problems and, Consumer behaviour. Both

Molthan Hill (2014) and Belz and Peattie (2012) talks about how sustainable marketing can be broken down into sub sections, subsections including however not limited to, green marketing, social marketing, and ecological marketing.

The concept of 'The Triple bottom line' is a reoccurring theme throughout sustainable marketing. With Dahlstrom (2011) using the triple bottom line theory to identify the contemporary issues in marketing, this theory consists of three elements, Economic Performance, Social Performance, and Environmental Performance. Joyce and Paquin (2016) highlights the triple bottom line model to help bridge the gap between business models and innovation, stating that the ability to consider issues such as Economic, enviroment, and Socio-cultural, into a business's marketing strategies allows for the organisation to better understand the potential for sustainable development within their given industry. Fleming (2019) highlights how Mars as an organisation have developed a 'three prong stratagy' that takes into serious consideration the triple bottom line, however 'heavily focussed on climate change, there stratagy includes the use of KPI's (key performance indicators) to monitor their commitment to becoming, as well as remaining a sustainable brand.

Talking generally about the key sustainable issues in marketing Mahtaney (2013) refers to sustainability as survival, that individuals, as well as organisations ignoring the issue of sustainability is the reason that the world is facing the trouble that it is. Continuing to talk about the beginning of a new era, an era of environmental change, that the consumer need is there to meet the demand. However, Blythe (2013) contradicts this to some extent, stating that it isn't a new era, that in the 1950's everyone recycled, that milk bottles were taken back to the store for a return of deposit. Blythe (2013) Continues that the actual process of cleaning and re-using some products, and packaging can be more detrimental to the enviroment than the use of new packaging every time. That some companies producing 'greener options' are not actually confronting any of the key issues in sustainable marketing, Econmic, Environmental, Socio-cultural issues, just creating a greener image of themselves without any actual sustainable benefits.

Parsons and Maclaran (2009) discuss the issues within sustainable marketing in a more complex way, expanding on the triple bottom line, giving examples that fall in to each 'heading' examples such as but not limited to: Depletion of natural resources, the

gap between the rich and the poor, increased rates of change, depletion in genetic diversity (plants, animals, and soil), Local transient pollution, as well as cumulative pollution. Continuing however that environmental concerns have been discussed since the beginning of the industrial revolution, that sometimes the concerns may be considered exaggerated.

The key sustainable issues in marketing are impacting largely upon organisations, some organisations are showing a genuine commitment to sustainable development, a good example of this is represented in Marketlines (2012) case study on Unilever, keeping in mind the need for organisations to remain profitable, while attempting to implement sustainable marketing strategies, arguing that Unilever does not only manage to implement a sustainable marketing strategy, however it has succeeded in creating a 'sustainable culture' within the organisation. MarketLine (2012) continue to argue that profitability and sustainability can and will Co-exist, by bringing in 'rainforest certified' and fair trade products, changing washing product concentrations to reduce water consumption, deliberately buying renewable energy for their factory, sourcing sustainable palm oil, as well as reducing travel needs for their employees. MarketLine (2012) however does recognise that the improper use of a 'green image' claiming the use of questionable green marketing strategies could have potential detrimental effects to an organisation. That if an organisation attempt to be dishonest, or untrue to their promises, this will not 'sit well' with consumers, an organisation should however only consider implementing sustainable marketing strategies if they are as Belz and Peattie (2012) say truly committed to the sustainable development of the industry. Like Unilever, Mars is another good industry example of a consistent commitment to sustainability, Flemming (2019) states that Mars are aware that 94% of their carbon footprint is created by their suppliers, Mars is currently in the process of combating this issue, trying to convince their suppliers to create sustainable strategies, which will inevitably reduce Mars's carbon footprint even further.

Beaton (2018) highlights how in the near future organisations that have not already implemented sustainable marketing strategies will begin to suffer; Using the meat industry as an early example Beaton (2018) highlights their inability to market sustainability due to the nature of their product, unlike some of their competitors, alternative food organisations are currently boasting about their sustainable products. Beaton (2018) states that because the meat industry is not able to compete with

competitors on a sustainable level it is slowly but surely driving them out of the market, with their growth currently in decline. However, it is arguable that due to the meat industry having been in the maturity stage of the product life cycle for some time now this decline was to be expected (MarketLine 2019). Beaton (2018) continues to talk about the success of 'Lab-Grown Meat' and how it has the potential to dominate the traditional meat market. Beaton's (2018) way of thinking can be directly transferred to any industry, with the argument that eventually, sustainability will become a serious competitive advantage, organisations that have the inability to become sustainable, such as those processing and or trading in fossil-fuels will be forced out of the market place. The final point taken from Beaton's (2018) 'clean meat' case study was what the current meat industry market leaders are engaged with, they are investing, investing in clean meat; For 'food Giants' such as Tyson Foods and Cargill to invest, as well as individuals including Bill Gates and Richard Branson then sustainably sourced clean meat must be considered a 'Gamechanger'.

Lyons (2019) discusses the initiatives some organisations have chosen to create as, removing consumer choice, that if plastic packaging or unnecessary waste is not available for customers to even choose, then they will not be able to have it. This eliminates a consumer's ability to unknowingly be unsustainable, the business will have made the decision on the consumers behalf. A good example of the no choice initiatives is Lush (2019), Lush have created a line of 'naked stores' first tested in Europe, Lush are currently in the process of pushing these stores across the UK as well. Lush's (2019) naked stores boast a variety of exclusive products, with an arguably trendy edge. Letten (2019) explains that these stores are 100% packaging free, adding that Lush has been committed to reducing their packaging since their very first day trading. This arguably shows continuous commitment to sustainable marketing throughout.

Lyons (2019) also uses the example of plastic straws, with many businesses becoming committed to sourcing alternative options, with McDonalds use of paper straws as well as small businesses across Europe introducing the use of pasta straws. However, Lyons (2019) argues as to whether this type of action can truly be considered a serious commitment to sustainable development as the concept of a straw itself is not sustainable, when put into context of the human ability to drink straight from glass to mouth.

Coca-Cola (2019) are an interesting example, as they have website pages dedicated to information on their commitment to becoming a sustainable brand, with statements including: Their aim to use 40% recycled or renewed materials in their packaging by 2020, that they have exceeded that and their packaging is already made from 100% recycled materials, finally claiming they sent 'zero waste' to landfill last year. However, Coca-Cola (2019) also state that what consumers might or might not choose to do with their packaging after it has been sold has nothing to do with the company, as Coca-Cola (2019) claim that they have 'no control' over this aspect of their sustainability. Coca-Cola's (2019) attitude towards their responsibility over their consumers choices would contradict with Lyons (2019) argument that removing the choice for consumers to be wasteful is somewhat the companys responsibility, if the company genuinely is committed to the sustainable development of their future. Vizard (2018) identifies Coca-Colas current marketing campaign in relation to recycling, as well as the information they are providing to their customers as to, what, where and how to recycle their packaging. It is evident that Coca-Cola (2019) is not able to become as sustainable as Lush (2019), this is mostly due to the nature of the products that they sell, it is arguable that the inability to make a product 100% sustainable may eventually force it out of the market.

It is clear that marketers have a vast range of options, when it comes to how they choose to market their products sustainably; However, what has become clear is that it is detrimental now more than ever for marketers to have a legitimate interest in the sustainable development of their products, services and industry as a whole in order to continue successfully. There are two categories that need to be distinguished between when offering recommendations on how marketers in the industry should respond to the discussed sustainable issues.

The first is organisations selling a non-sustainable product, using traditional meat as an example, MarketLine (2019) discuss how Tyson Foods who is frequently referred to as the world biggest meat producer, has 'Muscled in' on meat alternatives. Continuing, that this has been achieved by their investment into 'Laboratory Grown' meat as well as bringing out their own range of plant-based meat alternatives. This can be transferred to any unsustainable product, for organisations trading in Fossil-Fuel for example it would be recommend that they explore their options in the field of sustainable energy such as wind farms. This is not only a safe decision for

organisations to respond to the key issues in sustainable marketing, but also a responsible one.

The second set of recommendations is relating to organisations selling a reasonably sustainable product in a way that may not currently be deemed sustainable enough. An example of where this has been done well is Lush (2019) who have removed 'consumer choice' this could be transferred to an organisation such as Starbucks (2019) who already have a recycling policy in place, as well as currently trying to encourage the use of reusable cups. However, if the model Lush (2019) are adopting was implemented or tailed across Starbucks stores with the complete removal of paper cups, removing the customers choice to be part of such a disposable society. However, this would force customer to purchase re-useable cups, Starbucks lovers are still likely to continue buying coffee from the chain, while creating a more sustainable habit. Finally, it is important to remember that organisations do not need to make such drastic changes to become more sustainable, simply creating sustainable strategies, action plans, and cultures within an organisation would go along way. With it being significantly beneficial if organisations remain transparent in their commitment to sustainable development, this means that they can admit to 'not having all the answers right now' while showing their commitment to finding them.

Due to both the limitations of this essay, as well as the academic literature not all key issues of sustainable marketing could be looked into in real depth at this time, however further studies should consider looking into in more depth the psychological effect that perception of an organisations 'green image' has on consumer behaviour.

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