

Dissertation proposal

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***Topic I: The Impact of Sustainability Marketing on Brand Image: A Case Study
Of Marks & Spencer***

***Topic II: The Influence of Sustainable Product Development on Consumer
Purchase Behavior: A Case Study of Marks & Spencer***

Introduction

The term "sustainability" refers to the process of meeting the requirements of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their wants and needs. This translates into traditional financial goals being taken into consideration in conjunction with the social and environmental impact of a company's actions in the context of business practices. According to Hahn et al. (2015), concerns over the depletion of resources, climate change, and ethical sourcing are contributing to the growing significance of sustainability that is being emphasized.

Within the realm of marketing, there is a branch known as sustainable marketing that focuses on integrating social and environmental responsibility into its marketing strategies. The demonstration of a company's commitment to sustainable practices and the endorsement of products and services that are sourced in an ethical and environmentally responsible manner are both required for this.

For the sake of this dissertation, Marks & Spencer (M&S) is a well-known retailer in the United Kingdom. Given that M&S has a well-established sustainability program called Plan A, which focuses on reducing their influence on the environment, procuring their products in an ethical manner, and providing assistance to communities, the company is an intriguing case study. In addition, M&S has a long history and a prominent marketing presence in the UK market, which contributes to the ease with which data and consumer perspectives may be obtained (M&S, 2023).

The purpose of the research is to investigate the marketing mix of M&S, which includes product, pricing, location, and promotion, in connection to the company's use of the sustainability message. This poll aims to explore the level of knowledge and trust that customers in the United Kingdom have in M&S's commitment to sustainability. The purpose of this research is to investigate the ways in which M&S's sustainability activities influence the perception of the company's brand in the United Kingdom. The study will take into consideration factors such as brand loyalty and ethical reputation.

Research Aims

The aim of this research is to investigate how Marks & Spencer (M&S) incorporates sustainable practices into their marketing mix and evaluate the impact of these strategies on customer perception as well as brand image in the UK market.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are to:

- Examine M&S's environmental policies, paying particular attention to the "Plan A" program and how it fits into the phases of the product lifecycle.
- Analyse the marketing materials used by M&S to convey their sustainability objectives.
- Determine the understanding and perspectives of UK customers about M&S's environmental initiatives.
- Analyse how consumers' purchase decisions and brand loyalty are affected by M&S's sustainability efforts.
- Ascertain the relationship between M&S's overall brand image in the UK market as well as its environmental initiatives.
- Identify opportunities for M&S to enhance its sustainability communication as well as marketing strategies

Research Question

In what ways does Marks & Spencer (M&S) include sustainable business practices into its marketing tactics, and what kind of an effect does this integration have on the way consumers perceive the brand and how it is perceived by the market in the United Kingdom?

Literature Review

Defining Key Concepts

- **Sustainable Marketing:** According to Jain (2018), sustainable marketing is a strategic approach that takes into account several factors, including social, economic, and environmental factors, as part of the marketing mix. Providing value to customers while simultaneously minimizing negative impacts on the environment and promoting social welfare is the goal of this organization.
- **Green Marketing:** Polonsky and Jay (1994) define "green marketing" as "the development and marketing of products designed to minimize negative effects on the physical environment or to benefit the environment." Green marketing allows for the promotion of environmentally friendly products. Methods and products that are favorable to the environment are often promoted in green marketing.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** As stated by Schwartz and Carroll (2003), corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the commitment made by a company to behave in a moral manner, to encourage economic progress, to improve social welfare, and to protect the environment.

Integrating Sustainability into the Marketing Mix

- **Product:** According to Connolly and Prothero (2008), increasing the sustainability of a product may be accomplished via the use of recycled materials, eco-design, and sustainable

sourcing principles. This is shown by the "Plan A" initiative that Marks & Spencer is working on, which intends to eliminate waste from packaging and obtain materials in a sustainable manner (M&S, 2023).

- **Price:** According to Ottman, Stafford, and Hartman (2006), it is still feasible to justify the price premiums that are paid for sustainable products by underlining the beneficial benefits that these products have on society and the environment. Considering how their pricing practices reflect the value of their environmentally friendly product lines is something that M&S need to consider.
- **Place:** It is possible that distribution channels might also benefit from sustainable practices, such as promoting local sourcing and reducing emissions caused by transportation (Carter and Rogers, 2008). Investigating the processes that M&S uses to manage their supply chain and logistics might provide some insight on the company's efforts to be more environmentally responsible.
- **Promotion:** According to Lyon and Montgomery (2015), "greenwashing" is not an appropriate practice in marketing communications; instead, they should be transparent and honest. M&S presents a persuasive case for studying how retailers may utilize marketing efforts to tell consumers in a straightforward and honest manner about the sustainable activities they are doing.

Consumer Perception and Brand Image

Companies' environmental initiatives are starting to make a bigger splash in the eyes of consumers. Knowing how consumers in the UK see M&S's sustainability efforts and the effect they have on the company's reputation is crucial for success in this market.

According to research conducted by Kavitha (2023), there is a favorable correlation between the image of a brand and the perception of its sustainability. An examination of the manner in which M&S leverages its environmental activities to develop a powerful brand identity with consumers in the United Kingdom might prove to be enlightening.

Research Gaps and Focus on Marks & Spencer (M&S)

- Although previous research has investigated the ways in which sustainability can be incorporated into marketing in general, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the ways in which specific retailers, such as M&S, modify the components of the marketing mix (product, price, location, and promotion) in order to attract customers who are concerned about sustainability in the UK market.
- There is a paucity of information about the effectiveness of M&S's one-of-a-kind sustainability marketing strategies and how they influence the attitudes of customers in the United Kingdom. In order to further understand the relationship between M&S's "Plan A" environmental initiative and consumer awareness, it is required to do more study.
- It is essential to do more research on the influence that M&S's sustainability activities have had on the brand image, especially in the market in the United Kingdom. It is possible that

studies that compare with other big supermarkets in the UK may produce information that is enlightening.

Methodology

Research Design:

This dissertation will use a mixed-methods research strategy, integrating a UK consumer survey with an M&S case study. An extensive investigation of the study topic is made possible by this methodology.

- **Case Study:** A case study will be used to give an in-depth examination of the sustainability policies that M&S has implemented and how those policies are integrated into marketing tactics. We are able to investigate their "Plan A" campaign, advertising materials, and maybe even conduct interviews with people associated with the relevant department.
- **Survey:** We will conduct an online survey to find out how customers in the United Kingdom feel about the environmental measures that M&S is doing and how those activities influence the reputation of the firm. This takes into account the significant viewpoint of the client and extends the scope outside the framework of M&S's internal perspective.

Data Collection Methods:

- **Case Study:**
 - In order to get an understanding of how M&S communicates their commitment to sustainability, we will examine their website, in addition to their sustainability reports and marketing materials (advertising and packaging).
- **Survey:**
 - An online survey that consumers in the United Kingdom may self-administer will be given to a representative sample of those customers. In the course of the survey, the following subjects will be discussed:
 - A familiarity with the environmental initiatives undertaken by M&S.
 - A discussion about the validity and effectiveness of the environmental measures undertaken by M&S.
 - Depending on the sustainability pledges made by M&S, the elements that influence purchasing decisions are as follows.
 - Concerning the connection between the brand image of M&S and sustainability.

Data Analysis Techniques:

- **Case Study:**

- To find important themes and patterns in M&S's communication of sustainability practices, thematic analysis will be used.
- **Survey:**
 - Consumer demographics, knowledge of M&S's sustainability initiatives, and the correlations between factors (such as perceived sustainability and brand image) will all be evaluated using statistical analysis.

Ethical Considerations

- The survey will not collect any personally identifying information and individuals will remain anonymous during its whole.
- Before commencing the survey, an introductory statement will be used to ask all participants for their informed consent. This statement will provide guarantees that the participants will remain anonymous and will outline the purpose of the study and its objectives.
- Before the analysis is performed, the transcripts of the interviews will be made anonymous.
- No one other than the researcher will have access to the data in a secure manner.

Case Study: The Major UK Retailer (Marks and Spencer)

Background

One of the most reputable retailers in the United Kingdom, Marks & Spencer (M&S) was established in 1884 and is well-known for the quality of its food, clothing, and home items (Marks & Spencer, n.d.). They play a significant part in the retail industry in the United Kingdom (BBC, n.d.).

Sustainability Initiatives

Through the implementation of its "Plan A" plan in 2007, M&S has shown its unwavering dedication to the concept of sustainability (M&S, 2023). This course will primarily concentrate on the following five topics:

- When it comes to the procurement of commodities, such as cotton and animal products, M&S puts a strong focus on the ethical and environmentally responsible purchase of these items.
- The company's goal is to reduce its total energy use while simultaneously increasing its usage of renewable energy sources.
- M&S has implemented policies to decrease waste in many sectors of its business, including their "Shwopping" clothing donation scheme, which is one example of the company's efforts to reduce waste.

- Regarding water, M&S is making efforts to reduce the quantity of water that is used across its supply chain and activities.
- M&S has established ambitious goals to reduce carbon emissions from all of its business operations in response to the issue of climate change.

Marketing Strategies and Sustainability Communication

When it comes to marketing, M&S includes messaging about sustainability across a variety of channels, including:

- Website and Marketing Materials: M&S utilises their website and marketing materials to display their sustainability successes and "Plan A" activities. These platforms are used to showcase their sustainability efforts.
- Product Labelling: According to the website of M&S, a number of their products have labels that highlight characteristics that are environmentally friendly, such as recycled materials.
- Social media: M&S uses social media platforms to disseminate information and initiatives related to sustainability (M&S was spotted using social media platforms).

Alignment with Research Objectives

Because of the following factors, M&S is an ideal case study for this research:

- A Strong Focus on Sustainability: M&S has a sustainability plan (referred to as "Plan A") that is clearly documented and offers a systematic framework for examination.
- Marketing Prominence: Due to the fact that M&S is a significant shop in the United Kingdom, it is feasible to conduct an analysis of the communication tactics that they use.
- Accessibility of Information: M&S makes a lot of information about its marketing strategy and sustainability actions accessible to the public via its website, reports, and presence on social media.
- Consumer Awareness: M&S is a well-known brand in the United Kingdom, which makes it simpler to discover survey respondents who are undoubtedly familiar with the company.

Through an analysis of M&S's "Plan A" initiatives, marketing material and the case study will give valuable information on the manner in which the company incorporates sustainability into its marketing strategies. In order to directly address the objectives of the research, the consumer survey will then examine how consumers in the United Kingdom perceive these efforts and how they influence the perception of the brand.

Timescale and Work Plan

PROCESS	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	WEEK 5	WEEK 6	WEEK 7	WEEK 8	WEEK 9	WEEK 10	WEEK 11	WEEK 12	WEEK 13	WEEK 14	WEEK 15	WEEK 16
Introduction																
Literature review																
Research																
Methodology																
Findings of the data from the survey																
Analysis of the data																
Conclusion																
Recommendations																
Formulation of the draft																

Conclusions

The objective of this dissertation research is to investigate the ways in which sustainable practices are integrated into the marketing strategies used by Marks & Spencer (M&S) in the United Kingdom market, as well as the ways in which these effects the perceptions of customers and the image of the company. The research will give vital insights into how M&S promotes its sustainability activities and how consumers in the UK evaluate these efforts. The research will be conducted using a mixed-methods methodology, which includes a consumer survey and a case study of M&S. The findings will be helpful in gaining an understanding of sustainable marketing in a certain national market and consumer niche.

Considering that it provides valuable data on how customers perceive M&S's sustainability initiatives and how those efforts effect their brand image, this research may be beneficial to M&S on several fronts. It is possible that M&S might profit from this by enhancing their marketing strategies and communication methods in order to leverage sustainability as a competitive advantage and boost their brand image among consumers who are concerned about sustainability. It is possible that the marketing industry as a whole might benefit from the insights that were

gathered about the influence on customer behaviour and the effective communication of sustainable practices. The findings of this research may, in the end, contribute to the development of more effective strategies for marketing sustainability that increase the value of brands while also being beneficial to society and the environment.

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