

Chapter 21

Self–Laundering for Marketing: Maintaining Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, consumption brings contentment. Consumers are glad, thinking themselves as being wealthier and more prominent by buying and consuming more, whereas companies are delighted with the increased profitability resulted by higher production levels. However, given the data on economic and social inequalities in addition to environmental resources which are coming to an end, the happiness cannot continue forever. Therefore, in this chapter, the role of marketing in the formation of consumption culture and the concept of sustainability are reviewed. Moreover, the interaction between marketing and sustainability and what these two concepts can offer for each other is discussed. To guide the companies in forming sustainability strategies, practices of respectable and pioneer companies that are included in the Guardian's "Best Sustainability Practices in Business List" are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Identifying the unmet needs and trying to satisfy them with the correct offer, also known as marketing, is considered to be a function which is crucial for mankind. It stems back to prehistoric times, where the needs of men were possible to be acquired directly from mother earth through hunting, agriculture or by personal abilities. Later in time, the needs of people exceeded the limits of personal efforts and with barter mechanisms people started to exchange goods with other parties in order to maximize their marginal utility (Oppenheimer, 1908). As time passed, it is known that in the ancient Greece, the travelling salesman were transformed to settled sales specialists (Dixon, 2002). There, in the settled marketplace, the exchange of products was made in order to satisfy the needs and wants of the society and thus the first grains of marketing were thrown.

Without any dispute, consumption is an indispensable element of human life. However, it is seen that during the flourish period of marketing, people started to consume more than needed and even in an unconscious way. This is mostly due to effect of marketing in changing the culture of the society in a

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-8491-9.ch021

way that people are going to need more variety and quantity of products. By this way, companies were able to sell more to make more profits, which is only natural in the new world order. Consequently, marketing function was accepted as the favorite function from the company perspective. Moreover, as products are given a personality, the consumers started to define themselves over the brands they use in the popular culture. It is seen that in time, the marketing slogans became the mottos of people.

As years passed, however, the effects of inconsiderate consumption have started to show itself. Data reveals that only in the last 30 years, one third of the earth’s natural resources are completely destroyed (Ozbakir and Yurtanis Velioglu, 2010) and more people are diagnosed as “shopaholics”. The urge to purchase something in these people reach to an uncontrollable level, where the disruptive anxiety can only be relieved by shopping. This behavioral disorder is called as “omniomania” and is observed on nearly 6% of the American society (Black, 2007).

While effects of over-consumption on individuals are and exhaustion of resources in the world requires an urgent intervention, other issues such as social welfare, poverty, ethics and environment friendly, non-anthropocentric acts also started to attract attention. Even though these streams are accepted as “activist acts”, it is promising and pleasing that for the last couple of years, companies are thinking more on these issues. The increasing tendency of companies to act more responsibly and consciously, have raised the necessity of implementing the concept of sustainability in all areas, including marketing.

In this study, concepts of consumption and consumerism, the relation of marketing and consumerism and the paradigm shift towards sustainability in marketing are discussed and sustainability programs of pioneer companies are presented.

THE CONCEPT OF CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMERISM

Consumption is one of the most discussed topics of everyday life. It is sometimes praised and sometimes criticized by almost everyone. The difference between the reactions is due to the complex nature of the concept of consumption.

The concept of consumption cannot be understated as “the action of fulfilling the needs”, but it is a rather complicated action. In his work, Ransome (2005) defines six different modes of consumption in two categories- simple and complex consumption-, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Typology of consumption (Adapted from Ransome, P. (2005), Work, Consumption and Culture: Affluence and Social Change in the Twenty-First Century, Sage Publications, London)

Consumption Typologies	
Simple Consumption	Necessary Consumption
	Elaborated Consumption
	Indulgent Consumption
Complex Consumption	Affluent Consumption
	Conspicuous Consumption
	Symbolic Consumption

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