

Chapter 3

Sustainable Marketing and Retailing: Demystifying the Emerging Themes and Future Research Directions

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ABSTRACT

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations are the focus of researchers and practitioners worldwide. Despite the proliferation of studies on sustainability in marketing and retailing, the existing studies on the subject are fragmented. To address the key issues relating to ‘sustainable marketing’ and ‘retailing’, this study seeks to conduct a thematic analysis to decipher the essential themes in sustainable marketing and retailing research. This study has used the Scopus database and the biblioshiny platform in R Studio to ensure that the findings of this investigation are as rigorously scientific as possible. This study has also shown numerous co-occurrences of the keywords and their inferences to summarize and synthesize the area. The study’s main conclusion states that sustainability in retailing depends upon the retailer’s contribution through empowering sustainable consumption, such as through choice editing, implementing CSR, and promoting slow fashion culture. The future research scope and limitations of the study have also been discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

Marketing has undergone significant changes in the modern era, markedly different from the myopic selling concept prevalent in the early nineties (Levitt, 1984; Murphy et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2010). The American Marketing Association (AMA) highlighted this shift, emphasizing that marketing should not be limited to selling but should be utilized to create value for customers, organizations, and society as a whole (AMA, 2013). Over the years, consumers have also become aware of the consequential effects of their purchases and have shown interest in sustainable offerings (Ahn, 2019; Castaño et al., 2016; Naidoo & Gasparatos, 2018; Schlaile et al., 2018). This increased consumer demand for sustainable offerings has made ‘sustainable marketing’ a topic of pivotal importance in academia and industry (Deloitte, 2022; Henninger et al., 2017; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2021). Considering the importance of sustainable consumption, the shift between retailers’ focus on distributing sustainable offerings and marketers’ focus on creating value for these offerings has become apparent (Naidoo & Gasparatos, 2018). Big retail brands such as H&M and TOMS are classic examples of integrating sustainable practices in the manufacturing of their products (Pavarini, 2021; Schwartz, 2017). According to one of *Deloitte’s* published reports in 2022, there are various enablers behind the increased focus of retailers on sustainability. These include ‘responsible consumers’, ‘shareholder support for sustainability’ and ‘positive pressure from the boardroom’ (Sheehan, 2022). The first enabler, i.e., ‘responsible consumers’, is the consumers who demand sustainable offers. In *Deloitte’s* survey, it is found that 55% of consumers have purchased sustainable items in the last few weeks. Of those consumers who have shopped sustainably, 32% have said that they pay significantly more than the price of an alternative product for their sustainable purchase or are willing to wait longer to buy it. The second enabler, i.e., ‘shareholder support for sustainability’, is retailers’ pressure from their shareholders and investors to adopt sustainable strategies. As a result, investors are aware of how their brand and reputation are impacted by the retailers they support. Around 59% of the investors surveyed invest in companies that match their values. The third enabler, i.e. the ‘positive pressure from the boardroom’, explains the actions of businesses required to solve general environmental problems such as ‘climate change’ (Sheehan, 2022).

Since the retail sector has grown to be a substantial contributor to global economic growth, multinational organizations like the United Nations (UN) have taken a keen interest in the necessity of sustainable marketing in the retail sector (Businesswire, 2016). The sector represents 31% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and employs billions of people worldwide, with hypermarkets and supermarkets currently accounting for 35% of global direct retail sales. At the same time, retailers can significantly impact the environment and society. These include immediate consequences arising from retail operations (Bradley, 2016; Brancoli et al., 2017) and indirect impacts arising from the production of retail goods and other ancillary activities (Cimini & Moresi, 2018). Retailers are specifically put in a position of influence to encourage sustainable consumption and production as active mediators between primary producers, manufacturers, and end customers. Retailers have an excellent opportunity to use their job and exert control over the entire ecosystem to promote sustainability (Sheehan, 2022; Styles et al., 2012; Vadakkepatt et al., 2021)

The influence of retailers and marketing on driving sustainability cannot be hidden (Atkinson, 2013; Bianchi & Gonzalez, 2021; Naidoo & Gasparatos, 2018; Sheehan, 2022). However, the existing research on the topic is fragmented regarding emerging trends. Therefore, this study attempts to conduct a thematic analysis to address the essential themes of sustainable marketing and retailing. Thematic analysis helps scholars and practitioners understand various essential factors that can contribute to integrating and

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