


Chapter 5

Sustainability Marketing in Emerging Markets: The Case of Uganda

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ABSTRACT

In light of the importance of emerging markets in the world economy, this study seeks to illustrate how emerging market characteristics, country institutional profiles, and some elements of the task environment in these countries combine to influence sustainability marketing using examples from Uganda as a case in point. Based on a review of the literature on sustainability marketing in emerging markets and a range of theoretical approaches, the study demonstrates that regulatory, cognitive, and normative country profiles play a big role in breeding and promoting unsustainable marketing practices. The task environment consisting of infrastructure, education levels, product knowledge, and competition among others also plays a big role in this regard. Recommendations as to what should be done to promote sustainability marketing and suggestions for future research are provided.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a raging debate about the role sustainability marketing should play in the development of emerging markets (Amoako et al., 2022). This debate is relevant because emerging markets (EMs) have been defined as the growth engines of the world (Sinha & Sheth, 2018). The importance of EMs in the marketing literature is underscored by five major reasons. First, many global multinationals are now shifting their operations to emerging markets due to the fact that growth levels do not change significantly in many advanced economies (Sheth et al. 2016; Meyer & Peng, 2016) This is in line with Paul (2018) who asserts that the paybacks of doing business in emerging markets are generally rewarding. It is projected that by 2035, the GDP of emerging markets will actually exceed that of all developed markets (Wilson & Purushothaman, 2003). The second reason is that this influx of multinationals finds

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countries with peculiar institutional profiles as argued by Kostova (1997) in her countries institutional profile theory i.e., regulatory (laws and regulations) cognitive (widely shared social knowledge) and normative (value systems) all of which have an impact on domestic business operations (Busenitz et al., 2000). In particular Pels and Kidd (2012) basing their arguments on Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) divide the EM environment into firstly a general (outer) environment over which individual organizations have no control (such as social cultural issues and governance) and a task environment over which individual organizations have a level of control (such as knowledge and skills, suppliers and competition). In line with this categorization, Marquis and Raynard (2015) assert that emerging markets are characterized by weak capital markets and regulatory infrastructure, as well as fast moving change. Conceptualizations of the environment by both Kostova (1997) and Pels and Kidd (2012) are agreed that the environment in EMs is significantly different from that of the developed west (Sheth, 2011) which has serious implications for sustainability marketing on the part of firms be they local or multinationals (MNCs) and the population at large. Thirdly, the link between emerging markets and sustainability in emerging markets needs thorough examination, because EMs have to penetrate global markets, in the pursuit their development agenda. EMs will not gain a firm foothold in the global market arena if sustainability issues are ignored, as many customers the world over favour green products. Hence paying little attention to sustainability marketing is tantamount to walking the path of underdevelopment (Nkamnebe, 2010). Fourth, while a broad range of sustainability marketing research has been done over the last 30 years (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014), most of this scholarly work has taken place in the west, as evidenced by systematic reviews of the literature by Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) who covered the period 1971-1997 in 12 English speaking Journals. This was followed by another review by Leonidou and Leonidou (2011), who covered the period 1969-2008, involving 530 papers. Paul (2018) conducts a systematic literature review of 71 articles on sustainability marketing covering the period 1993-2019, and most of these focus on the west. Within emerging markets, the most prominently studied emerging markets are China and India (Paul & Mas, 2016), much to the detriment of Sub-Saharan Africa. The fifth reason is that unfortunately, “not everyone in the marketing academy sees sustainability as the pressing issue; and this is evidenced by the limited and mostly managerial, research which has been published in major mainstream marketing journals” (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014 p. 1203).

In light of this trend, the current study is a response to a call on sustainability marketing by McDonagh and Prothero (2014 p. 1206) who “urge marketing academics to further address and problematize research in this space.” It is thus important to examine how sustainability marketing can take root in developing emerging markets in Sub Sharan Africa. Although this paper focuses on Uganda, examples are provided from other East African countries (Kenya, Tanzania). These three collective countries are the original members of the now expanded East African Community, were all British colonies hence their political, legal and economic systems are similar in many ways, share common borders and their peoples have a lot in common like many of them speaking the Kiswahili language. Based on Kostova (1977) as well Pels and Kidd (2012), this study seeks to demonstrate how the various institutional profiles of these countries and some elements of their task environment impact upon sustainability marketing. The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. The next section outlines the definitional divergence of the EM concept, followed by the theoretical framework on which sustainability marketing is based. This is followed by the characterization of the EM environment. Following this discourse, the institutional profiles of the three countries and the implications this has on sustainable marketing is presented, while a conclusion sums up the paper.

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