

## Chapter 7

# Sustainable Marketing Communication via Social Media: Searching for a Balance in Corporate and Consumer Dialogue

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### ABSTRACT

*Social media has transformed the processes throughout corporations communicate their CSR activities, and therefore their overall sustainable marketing strategies. While challenges arise from losing control over communication, leveraging stakeholder engagement offers significant benefits. The research emphasizes that social media should be considered an integral and dialogic part of overall sustainable marketing strategy, providing companies with opportunities to enhance their sustainability initiatives effectively in the digital era. This chapter delves into the realm of sustainable marketing communication on corporate social media, with a focus on the dialogic approach employed by two major fast fashion brands, H&M and Primark. The research explores how these organizations manage online dialogues with their users in relation to sustainability and investigates the impact of different communication strategies on their perceived credibility among stakeholders. While challenges arise from losing control over communication, leveraging stakeholder engagement offers significant benefits.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Social media is evolving into crucial elements of promoting sustainable organizational behaviors and initiatives. They are gradually transforming from merely being informative tools to platforms encouraging dialogue among various stakeholders, where the content generated is not only by the company, but also by engaged users (Romenti, et al., 2014).

In recent years, research has uncovered how social media can afford dialogic communication between organizations, fostering public engagement on social issues and enabling corporation to engage in impactful conversation (Xu, 2022; Zhou and Xu, 2022; Khazraee and Novak, 2018)

However, as the sustainability debate gains urgency, companies are encountering more and more obstacles in navigating the complex and often conflicting relationship between corporate content and consumer dialogue. These challenges prompt an examination of how companies manage their sustainable marketing communications within the broader spectrum of sustainable marketing. Sustainable marketing, with a focused lens on sustainable communication, can play a crucial role in bridging this gap, as it helps understanding how companies can utilize social media effectively in their communication strategies.

Within this context, the purpose of the chapter is to investigate how corporations communicate their sustainability strategies on social media, and how they manage the relation between what they post and what users generate in response. The chapter thus aims at understanding how corporations dialogue on social media with their public regarding their sustainability contents.

In doing so, this analysis provides insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by social networks in the context of sustainable marketing communications.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Sustainable Marketing Communication**

In contemporary business, effective sustainable marketing communication is crucial for companies seeking to establish trust, credibility, and positive stakeholder perceptions.

Sustainable marketing has therefore become a widespread practice and backdropped by significant theoretical contribution. Indeed Du et al. (2010) developed a comprehensive conceptual framework that addresses the key aspects of corporate sustainability communication, assisting companies in understanding what to communicate (message content) and where to communicate (message channel), while also considering company- and stakeholder-specific factors that influence the effectiveness of CSR communication. The objective of the proposed framework was to support companies in designing successful communication strategies that effectively minimize stakeholders' skepticism.

This theoretical contribution was pivotal in tackling the fundamental challenge of stakeholder skepticism and thus presents two scenarios regarding message content, each requiring specific considerations to address stakeholders' concerns. According to Du et al. (2010) A company's CSR message can be focused on a social cause or the firm's engagement in a particular social cause.

When a company's CSR message is related to a social cause, consumers may question the company's underlying motives. To enhance credibility, companies must emphasize the significance of the social issue and emphasize their lack of self-interest in supporting such causes, even if they are disconnected from their core business (Du e et al, 2010).

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