

Chapter 5

Sustainability Marketing: The Intersection of Sustainability and Marketing for a Better World

Meziyet Uyanik

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1027-2558>

Istanbul Topkapi University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide readers with a holistic perspective on sustainability marketing by evaluating the sustainability focus in marketing within the historical development process and with a critical eye. Different sustainability-based marketing approaches were examined comparatively, and the role of marketing in the sustainable development agenda was discussed. Thus, it contributed to the ongoing debate on whether sustainability and marketing are mutually inclusive or exclusive concepts. Although important marketing steps have been taken to address the world's sustainability problems, these are insufficient to produce comprehensive solutions. For this reason, the need for a transformative sustainability marketing approach and the factors that will enable and hinder this transformation are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

With the Brundtland Report (Our Common Future) published by the United Nations (UN) in 1987, the need for initiatives toward a more sustainable world has become more apparent (Lim, 2022b; Peattie, 2016; Voola et al., 2022b). International awareness of sustainable societies and economies has increased with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide a strategic road map for a better and sustainable world, by UN member states in 2015 (UN, 2015). Many disciplines, institutions, and organizations have begun to discuss sustainability as a “mega-trend” worldwide (Harrison et al., 2023; Jung & Kim, 2023), and there has been a rapid increase in conceptual and applied initiatives in this field (Ahmad et al., 2021; Jung & Kim, 2023; Lloveras et al., 2022).

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Sustainability Marketing

The intersection of sustainable development goals and the focus on sustainability in marketing brings to the fore the concept of better marketing for a better world (BMBW). This understanding includes the belief in the positive contribution of marketing beyond organizational boundaries to create a better and more sustainable future for the entire world in the long term. It requires companies to think about their long-term social, economic, and environmental outcomes on the world beyond their financial performance in all their activities (Chandy et al., 2021; Rashkova & Moi, 2023).

There are different views on the role of marketing in initiatives towards a sustainable world. Marketing is closely related to many of the SDGs, especially the aim of responsible production and consumption (Lim, 2016, 2022a; Voola et al., 2022b). In addition, marketing has a significant opportunity to bring current problems to the public's agenda by utilizing the power of media and advertising to achieve a sustainable future for everyone, thus creating social awareness and consciousness and building a sustainable consumption culture (Mont & Power, 2010; Rakic & Rakic, 2015).

A society conscious of sustainable development goals will be a driving force in implementing structural changes to achieve these goals. However, the solution to the economic, social, and environmental problems, which are firmly interconnected and form the basis of the sustainable development agenda, will only be possible with a global consensus, interdisciplinary cooperation, and transformative approaches (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019; Lloveras et al., 2022).

On the other hand, marketing has been widely blamed for promoting an unsustainable culture of overconsumption and is seen as an obstacle to sustainable development (Heath & McKechnie, 2019; Kemper & Ballantine, 2019; Kilbourne et al., 1997; Peattie, 2001; Pereira Heath & Chatzidakis, 2012; Spry et al., 2021). When marketing is defined as constantly encouraging consumption and making more sales, and sustainability is defined as consuming less and responsibly, it is a widespread tendency to consider these two concepts mutually exclusive (Jones et al., 2018; Lim, 2016). However, before establishing a direct causal relationship between marketing and unsustainable practices, it would be more appropriate to evaluate the current economic system and dominant social paradigm (DSP) based on continuous growth through consumption, which is the basis of marketing (Gordon et al., 2011). Under this perspective, what moves the world away from sustainability is not marketing itself but the DSP that shapes marketing practices (Gollnhofer & Schouten, 2017; Kilbourne, 2010; Spry et al., 2021).

Today, in light of the UN's SDGs, incorporating sustainability themes into marketing by combining them with new technologies is very important for businesses to stay current (Kotler et al., 2024). Understanding the role and potential of marketing in the social, economic, and environmental problems the world faces will thus allow all innovative marketing approaches to be evaluated through the lens of sustainability.

Based on this information, in this chapter of the book, a comprehensive evaluation of the historical development process of marketing's sustainability agenda is made, and the role and responsibilities of marketing in sustainable development goals are critically examined. By comparatively discussing different approaches in sustainability marketing, which expresses the intersection of marketing and sustainability principles for a better world, it is aimed to provide readers with information about the prominent trends in the marketing discipline in achieving sustainable development goals from a holistic perspective.

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