

Global Challenges to Achieving Sustainability in Marketing Implications for Marketing Theory

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Abstract

Sustainability marketing is a provocative area of research. Through an integrated knowledge inquiry approach, the conceptual article aims to provide answers to the feasibility of a joint application of sustainability and marketing and a blueprint for future sustainability marketing studies and practices. Five issues about the credibility and ambiguity of sustainability marketing are addressed—namely, the controversial debate between the incompatibility of marketing and sustainability, what sustainability offers marketing, what marketing offers sustainability, the feasibility of adopting the sustainability concept in marketing, and sustainability marketing myopia. As an instance of Sustainability in marketing theory, tourism marketing has frequently faced criticism for its promotion of exploitative and hedonistic consumerism. The present article provides a concise overview of recent research on sustainable tourism marketing, with a focus on theories, methods, and outcomes that aim to elevate tourist destinations to not only better place to visit but also to live in. The article delves into two fundamental approaches in sustainability marketing: market development through market segmentation, and sustainable product development. It introduces a Special Issue of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism that is dedicated to sustainable marketing, offering insights into the motivations, mechanisms, and challenges those businesses face when pursuing sustainability goals and striving to positively influence consumer behavior. The article also highlights the methodologies employed in sustainable tourism marketing, which acknowledge the complexity and breadth of the subject and the numerous innovative practices that are being implemented.

Keywords: Sustainability, Marketing, Marketing Theory, Green marketing, Sustainable tourism

1 Introduction

The notion of sustainability marketing in the context of tourism raises significant inquiries regarding its alignment with corporate strategy and its influence on consumer behavior. Critics contend that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) endeavors do not completely conform to

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corporate capitalism, leading to allegations of greenwashing. Notwithstanding laws and growing demand for sustainable products and services, the profit motive remains the foremost priority for businesses, and achieving pure sustainability may not be a top priority (Demjanovičová & Varmus, [2021](#); Roy, [2017](#)). Sustainability marketing can be approached in two ways: market development and product development. The market development approach targets specific market segments that value sustainability and aims to persuade consumers to purchase more sustainable products (Amoako et al., [2022](#)). Nevertheless, the challenge lies in comprehending the varying degrees of sustainability preferences among consumers. Furthermore, the use of specific marketing appeals, such as fear-based messages, may not effectively promote sustainable behavior (Sheth & Parvatiyar, [2021](#)). The converse viewpoint is that the approach to developing products endeavors to create and promote products that exhibit a progressive increase in sustainability across the entire market. It necessitates businesses to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability through specific criteria. However, despite the potential benefits of greening production, the adoption of sustainable products in the mass market remains restricted (D'Angelo et al., [2023](#); Zint & Frederick, [2001](#)). Several studies investigate ways to influence consumers to behave more sustainably. Social marketing initiatives, including positive messages and targeting particular consumer segments, have shown some success. However, the proportion of travelers purchasing sustainable tourism products is still limited, and some consumers may engage in moral licensing, offsetting sustainable actions with unsustainable ones (Nikolić et al., [2022](#); Peattie & Charter, [2012](#)).

Overall, sustainability marketing encounters challenges in achieving transformative change within the tourism industry. Businesses must transcend mere communication of sustainability messages and concentrate on providing meaningful sustainable experiences to consumers (Mandujano et al., [2021](#)). As the industry endeavors to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, more research and innovation are necessary to promote sustainability marketing in tourism effectively. The present issue of this publication is dedicated to the examination of sustainable product marketing methods and the enhancement of social marketing techniques. Additionally, the issue seeks to expand the range of research methods utilized to assess the impact of these methods. The study of consumer behavior and sustainability intentions requires a process evaluation, which delves into the contextual factors that affect the success of sustainability interventions (Han, [2021](#); Jung et al., [2022](#)).

The research studies presented in this particular issue make use of a variety of different research methodologies. These studies primarily aim to enhance engagement in carbon offsetting by developing methods of communication and assessing their effectiveness through the use of psycho-physiological and attitudinal measures. Additionally, a hypothetical scenario planning method is employed to investigate purchase intentions based on a fictitious online brochure. The study in question is a mixed-methods study that combines both qualitative and quantitative elements to analyze the impact of social marketing initiatives on water-efficient behavior among guests. Furthermore, an action research experiment is conducted, involving the implementation and testing of a series of social marketing initiatives to evaluate their impact on consumer behavior. (Lahtinen et al., [2020](#); Ottman, [1999](#)).

Most studies demonstrate some level of success in changing consumer behavior, highlighting valid theoretical constructs applicable in various contexts. Nonetheless, measuring the impact of social interventions is infrequent, and evidence of effectiveness is often lacking or context-specific (Kelly et al., [2020](#)). Furthermore, studies seldom consider the influence of contextual variables on results. Future research should aim to provide realistic evaluations of campaign impact, considering the formation and influence of behavior. A deeper understanding of contextual factors can determine the success of social marketing projects and aid in risk reduction

during project preparation (Hasan, [2020](#))

It demonstrates how contextual issues affect outcomes, emphasizing the importance of recognizing complexity in interventions. To enhance the replicability and scalability of sustainability marketing initiatives, further research should explore the conditions under which successful outcomes are achieved. Adopting a pragmatic research approach can help contextualize and assess the effectiveness of social marketing interventions (Fotis et al., [2022](#); Fuller & Allen, [2013](#)).

1.1 Sustainable Development

A comprehensive review of the multidisciplinary literature on sustainable development reveals a significant gap: there is no overarching theoretical framework to fully grasp its complexities. The definitions of sustainable development are often vague and lack clear operational definitions. There is considerable debate over what elements should be periodized for sustainability and the concept itself is not well defined in terms of emotional commitment. It remains a topic marked by confusion and contradictions with no unified approach to how to translate the concept into actionable practice. Additionally, some view sustainability development as primary symbolic rhetoric redefined by different interests to suit their political agendas, rather than as sustainability as desirable there is still a need for precise definitions and detailed elaborations.

1.2 Components of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a multifactorial concept that seeks to balance environmental economic and social institutional goals for long-term harmony and resilience. Environmental sustainability involves managing natural resources wisely, conserving biodiversity, controlling pollution, and addressing climate changes through mitigation and adaptation strategies (Ahmad et al., [2022](#)). Economically sustainable development focuses on fostering growth that is inclusive and does not deplete resources enhancing resources investing in sustainability technologies and ensuring fair employment opportunities and livelihood (Widyastuti, [2019](#)).

Socially sustainability emphasizes promoting quality and justice improving health and well-being providing quality education (Hale, [2022](#)). Institutions play a crucial role in sustainable development but establishing transparent and accountable governance enforcing supportive legal framework encoring community participation and fostering international cooperation to tackle global challenges.

1.3 Adoption of eco-marketing orientation as a business philosophy

The success of organizations in green or sustainable marketing depends on reorganizing, restructuring, and redesigning various internal processes and systems. It is a misconception to think that developing a green marketing orientation is the sole responsibility of the marketing department. Like total quality management, sustainable marketing requires the involvement of employees from all functional areas, including marketing, production, procurement, accounting, and information systems. Ottman ([1999](#)) has proposed a variety of strategies to help companies make meaningful progress toward an environmentally-focused business philosophy. These strategies include:

- (i) Performing an environmental audit to assess current performance and set a benchmark for future progress measurement.
- (ii) Implementing proactive measures that exceed the requirements of the government and other stakeholders.
- (iii) Leading as a committed CEO who visibly prioritizes environmental concerns.
- (iv) Educating employees through engaging programs focused on ecological issues.
- (v) Consistently integrating, learning, and improving products and processes.
- (vi) Providing regular updates on environmental performance in annual reports and using targeted advertising and public relations campaigns.

2 Methodology

A study on the use of social media tourism was conducted by Pakistan during the last quarter of 2019 and extended into 2020. After the initial screening of the collected questionnaire 397, respondents qualified for further analysis. Surpassing the minimum random sample of a376. The survey consisted of seven questions and the first three questions focused on the respondents and general social media behaviors inquiring about the duration and frequency of their social media use and their profile settings. Response to these questions was measured buying nominal and ordinal scales. The remaining four questions were detailed and aimed at understanding respondents’ opinions on using social media in tourism. These questions explored how respondents used social media in the trip-planning stage and their behavior during this process. The responses to these questions were measured using a liked chart. The selection of an intermediary response indicated a neutral stance towards the matter being evaluated or a lack of opinion on the specific subject. The acquired responses were encoded in a manner that assigned a value of 2 to a positive disposition towards a given phenomenon if the response was strongly positive, or a value of 1 if the positive response was only partially supported. In the event of a negative rating, the assigned value was -2, unless it was partially negative, in which case the assigned value was -1. A value of 0 was assigned to a neutral rating. By utilizing this coding system for the responses, a mean value higher than zero for a particular variation of the response indicated a positive attitude towards the matter among all participants, while a negative mean value suggested a negative attitude towards the opinions of all participants. This facilitated the comparison of responses provided by nonparametric statistical tests within distinct groups identified by generational categorization. The primary inquiries were accompanied by a notation detailing the respondents' gender, age, and education, as well as their tourist experience, which was differentiated by the duration and frequency of their trips.

3 Results

Answering the initial inquiry in the field of research, RQ1, the aforementioned frequencies were examined and subjected to statistical analysis through the application of the Chi-square test of independence, the Kruskal-Wallis test, and correspondence analysis. Furthermore, the correlation coefficients between individual pairs of social media were also scrutinized, while regression and association analyses were carried out. An investigation into the frequency of social media usage has revealed that Generations X, Y, and Z have been utilizing social media platforms for a duration exceeding four years or have no recollection of the exact length of time, whereas Baby Boomers represent a cohort that has only recently adopted social media, with a usage period not exceeding two years. As the predominant market comprises Generation X, Y, and Z, their social media usage patterns indicate that Sustainability may be achieved in Marketing for tourism or other purposes through social media marketing.

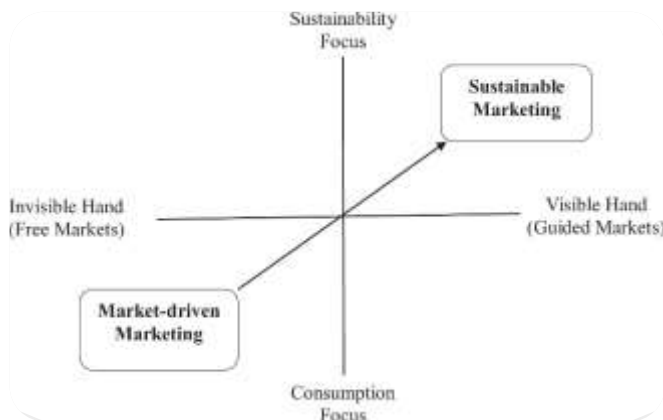


Table 1: Market Failures, Environmental Degradation, and Opportunities for Environmental

Entrepreneurship

Market Failure Category	Market Barrier	Implications for Environmental Degradation	Opportunity for Environmental Entrepreneurship	Category of Entrepreneurship
Public Goods	Resource Non-excludability	Tragedy of the Commons scenario (e.g., depletion of international fisheries)	Develop property rights regimes to create excludability (e.g., market Montana paddlefish caviar)	Coasian Entrepreneurship
Externalities	Prohibitive Transactions Costs	Lack of market exchange for environmental resources (e.g., toxic effects of pollutants)	Reduce transaction costs through the establishment of economic institutions (e.g., Chicago Climate Exchange)	Institutional Entrepreneurship
Monopoly Power	Market Power	Mixed effects: Positive – reduced output in pollution-intensive industries; Negative – Industries slow to implement beneficial technologies and products (e.g., electric utilities)	Break the monopoly position of incumbent firms (e.g., PURPA legislation, incentivizing renewable energy resources)	Market Appropriating Entrepreneurship (A. Statutory/B. Scale Related)
Inappropriate Government Intervention	Public Policy: Subsidies and other structural incentives	Inappropriate support for pollution-intensive industries (e.g., subsidies for oil extraction/refining)	Alter the nature of government subsidies and other incentives through the political process (e.g., petroleum taxes in Europe)	Political Entrepreneurship
Imperfect Information	Information Asymmetry: Across producers regarding the nature of supply and demand	Environmentally superior means of supply or environmental market niches unknown	Discover new environmentally superior means of supply or customer segments with environmental preferences	Producer-focused Informational (Austrian) Entrepreneurship
Imperfect Information	Information Asymmetry: Between producers and consumers regarding product attributes	Lack of consumer information on environmental impacts prevents them from expressing preferences	Enhance customer information regarding environmental attributes of products or processes (e.g., LEED Green building certification program)	Customer-focused Informational Entrepreneurship

In the context of market failures and environmental degradation, numerous obstacles hinder the effective management of environmental resources. One such obstacle is the non-excludability of resources, which results in the tragedy of the commons scenario, where resources such as international fisheries face depletion. Under these circumstances, environmental entrepreneurship presents an opportunity to develop property rights regimes to establish excludability, consequently enabling the creation of markets for resources, such as Montana paddlefish caviar. Externalities represent another market failure, where prohibitive transaction costs impede market exchange for environmental resources, resulting in issues such as the toxic effects of pollutants. Entrepreneurship can address this by reducing transaction costs through the establishment of economic institutions, such as the Chicago Climate Exchange, which facilitates environmental trading and encourages pollution reduction. Monopoly power poses a complex situation. While it may lead to reduced pollution in certain industries, it can also slow down the adoption of beneficial technologies and products, such as in the case of electric utilities. Entrepreneurial opportunities emerge by breaking the monopoly positions of incumbent firms, thus fostering innovation in cleaner energy resources.

Inappropriate government intervention, including subsidies for pollution-intensive industries like oil extraction and refining, can exacerbate environmental degradation. Entrepreneurship can play a role in altering the nature of government subsidies and incentives through the political process, such as introducing environmental taxes in Europe to promote sustainability. Imperfect information about environmentally superior means of supply or unknown environmental market niches can hinder progress (Benedetto & Chandran, [2013](#)). Here, entrepreneurial opportunities lie in discovering and promoting eco-friendly alternatives, catering to customer segments with

environmental preferences. Furthermore, information asymmetry between producers and consumers regarding product attributes can impede environmentally conscious choices. Entrepreneurship can address this by enhancing customer information on the environmental attributes of products or processes, as seen with initiatives like the LEED Green Building certification program (Carlson et al., [2005](#); Chen et al., [2019](#)).

4 Discussion:

Sustainable development necessitates the implementation of what is known as "sustainable marketing," which refers to marketing efforts that not only maintain their competitiveness over time but also consider ecological sustainability (Polonsky, [2008](#); Sheth & Parvatiyar, [2021](#)). It is widely acknowledged that marketing plays a crucial role in the development process. A significant portion of economic activity is instigated by the marketing process, which provides and stimulates consumption to fulfill human needs and desires. However, the true significance of marketing's role in development will only be fully recognized when it embraces sustainable marketing practices, thereby ensuring that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Kinoti, [2011](#); Tollin & Christensen, [2019](#)).

In light of the daunting task at hand of making progress in the field of economic development, tackling the challenge head-on, and addressing the multifaceted complexities that are inherent to this endeavor, it becomes imperative for all stakeholders involved in this enterprise to adopt a holistic approach that considers the multitude of factors that influence economic growth and prosperity and environmental protection as the sustainable development demand companies. Academics and industry professionals have developed and implemented various green marketing and cooperate strategies. Key strategies include green products development green logistics and green pricing (Chen et al., [2019](#); Hadi et al., [2020](#)). Additionally, efforts focus on shifting consumer behaviors from a culture of consumption to one of ecological concern and adoption of eco-marketing as a business philosophy advocating for government intervention utilizing lifecycle and collaborations.

4.1 Conclusion

This particular edition aims to provide insight into the complexities of sustainable tourism and the potential impact of marketing on achieving sustainable outcomes. The research presented in this collection represents cutting-edge work in this field, showcasing various methods to encourage consumers to make sustainable choices while retaining their motivations. It also examines ways in which sustainability can be incorporated into tourism businesses through product design and persuasive marketing messages. Given the critical juncture reached by the global tourism industry, this research offers innovative solutions and momentum toward the successful development and promotion of sustainable tourism products (Lim, [2016](#); Lim, [2022](#)).

The purpose of this article collection is to inspire greater cooperation between the fields of tourism marketing and sustainability, promoting a collaborative approach towards shared objectives. The vision is of a thriving, environmentally responsible industry that respects the needs of all stakeholders, including tourists, residents, the tourism industry, and destination services, to achieve positive and long-term outcomes. This special issue aims to serve as a platform for enhancing cooperation and stimulating further research in this area (Font & McCabe, [2017](#)).

It is crucial to address the issue of subject specialization among researchers in sustainable tourism. Marketing sustainable tourism necessitates collaboration among various subject specialists, which is often uncommon in the academic world (Ngo et al., [2019](#); Peattie & Charter, [2012](#)). Although research on behavioral change in tourism has been published in specialized journals, the role of marketing in influencing tourist behavior has received limited attention. Bridging this gap between marketing and sustainable tourism research can lead to more impactful and practical outcomes (Kilbourne, [2001](#); Streimikiene et al., [2022](#)).

Furthermore, researchers should consider exploring the role of travel writers and journalists in shaping the image of sustainable tourism, as they play a significant but under-researched role. Additionally, there is a need for better implementation of sustainable tourism practices, where marketing specialists in the industry must understand the critical role of sustainability and researchers should effectively disseminate their findings to both marketers and their clients (Ingenbleek et al., [2015](#)).

4.2 Conflict of interest

The authors show no conflict of interest regarding this research article.

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