

The Role of Marketing Communications in Promoting Sustainable Practices.

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Abstract

Sustainability has grown as a core paradigm in modern marketing communication. Sustainable communication is defined as communication that advances the transformation process towards more sustainable development. Marketing communication tactics are critical in interacting with customers and influencing them to consume more sustainably. This conceptual study provides a thorough overview of the main obstacles to sustainable marketing communication and suggests crucial tools for addressing them. We explore obstacles like as greenwashing, stakeholder participation, and communication authenticity while focusing on environmental, social, and economic elements. In order to promote sustainable practises, we also clarify strategic marketing communication methods, such as digital media and stakeholder interaction platform.

Keywords: Sustainability, marketing communication, green marketing, strategic marketing communication.

Introduction

In response to the United Nations' initiatives promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, there is a growing global concern for sustainability in numerous countries. Both businesses and consumers now place significant importance on sustainability. Businesses are utilizing marketing communication to emphasize their commitment to sustainability. However, it is vital for companies to recognize the challenges and opportunities associated with marketing sustainability. Businesses aiming to cultivate loyalty and trust must be transparent and honest about their environmental commitments.

A strategy for engaging investors and customers in sustainability efforts is termed "sustainability communication." Demonstrating how a business generates value through ESG (environmental, social, and governance) & sustainability is acknowledged to have a positive impact on shareholder value. Investors, clients, and workers as key stakeholders are effectively engaged through sustainability communication, aligning well with the overall strategic goals of the business as outlined in the sustainability action plan. Any action plan should outline the role of communication in sustainable development. To attain the necessary non-material and material advantages, a comprehensive sustainability communication plan is essential. A sustainability communication plan should commence with a thorough analysis of stakeholders and the target audience. The dissemination of these messages can then be amplified using an appropriate mix of communication channels. The key to fostering a widespread movement for sustainability lies in effective communication. A review of the literature reveals that although considerable work has been

undertaken in the field of sustainable development, documented research linked to sustainable marketing communication remains surprisingly scarce. Insights into creating efficient communication strategies should be provided to marketing experts to champion the cause of sustainability. It is evident that there is a knowledge gap when it comes to formulating guiding principles for sustainable marketing communication. The objective of marketing communication in green marketing is to influence environmentally-conscious customers to make specific purchases aligned with the green movement.

This study aims to make a significant contribution to academia and marketing practices by reviewing and integrating marketing communication techniques with sustainability. The paper presents a conceptual framework for sustainability marketing communications, focusing on effective communication and exploring challenges such as "greenwashing," "stakeholder participation," and "authentic communication," with a specific emphasis on environmental, social, and economic factors. It also defines strategic marketing communication tools, such as digital media and stakeholder engagement platforms, to promote sustainable practices. The effort is geared towards benefiting scholars and practitioners by highlighting significant outcomes.

Methodology

The present study takes a conceptual approach, centered on a thorough review of select publications concerning sustainable marketing communication and strategies for overcoming obstacles to sustainable practices within the marketing communication domain. The primary objective is to devise a framework aimed at mitigating barriers to the advancement of sustainability in marketing practices, acknowledging the imperative for widespread initiatives in sustainable practices. Furthermore, the study places a special emphasis on communication channels essential for the promotion of sustainable practices, with the intent of elucidating the influence of marketing communication on fostering sustainability.

Role of Marketing Communication

In order to influence consumers across all categories, marketing communication is crucial. This communication's roles throughout its life cycle are a key point of study. Uncertainty reduction is one of the benefits of marketing communication. The phrase "all marketing communication" refers to communications that spread awareness and have an immediate impact. Although there are many ways to create marketing communication strategies, they all ultimately aim to achieve similar communication goals. Promoting sustainable practises now includes marketing initiatives as a key component. application of marketing communication in which the wise integration of communication instruments results in long-term sustainable growth. and testing these technologies is much more crucial. Evaluation can be particularly suitable for implementation in marketing communications.

Martin and Schouten (2015) defined sustainable marketing communication – "messages and media directed to any of an organization's stakeholders for the purpose of achieving the organization's marketing and sustainability objectives. A powerful instrument for improving sustainable practises is marketing communication. Businesses may have a good influence on the environment and society while enhancing their brand's reputation and profitability by utilising a variety of communication methods and platforms. Integrating excellent marketing communication into a company's strategy is crucial for long-term profitability and a healthy world as customers grow more aware of sustainability. Sustainability-related topics, such as environmental concerns, social responsibility, and ethical corporate practises, are made more widely known through marketing communication. By disseminating this knowledge, the general public is enlightened and given the capacity to make educated decisions. At several levels, such

as industry groups, governmental legislation, and international standards, marketing communication may promote sustainability. It can participate in public dialogue, promoting beneficial systemic change.

The goal of marketing communication in green marketing is to sway consumers who are interested in the green movement's products. Companies must consider customer transaction ease together with product benefits and brand image. Consumers take into account a variety of transaction options to support electronic-based enterprises; in other words, there is a component of service acceleration through more complex company alterations, namely the implementation of the Society 5.0 period. The following components of marketing communications are required: advertising through outdoor advertising, sales promotion through web systems and the use of cloud computing, big data use in public relations, personal selling through web engineering systems, and expanding market space as a sophisticated and well-integrated strategic tool.

The concept of IMC is considered as the coordination of advertising, event marketing, promotions, and other communication tools to transmit a consistent "one voice" message through all communication channels (Lee and Park, 2021). In order to guarantee that sustainability messages are consistent, relevant, and compelling across all communication channels, integrated marketing communication is an effective tool for supporting sustainable practises. Companies may educate, inspire, and engage their audiences to adopt environmentally friendly behaviours by use IMC to express their commitment to sustainability. This helps to create a more sustainable and ethical corporate environment.

Obstacles to Sustainable Marketing Communication

Designing sustainability marketing communication strategies presents organizations with several challenges. "A one-sided emphasis on promoting environmental sustainability contributes to poor communication (Tölkes,2018). One of the primary dilemmas that encounter pertains to deciding which aspects of sustainability to prioritize and to what extent they should highlight the associated benefits. Furthermore, when marketers make efforts to address environmental concerns, they often fail to adopt a sustainable, long-term approach. Frequently, organizations lean towards emphasizing one dimension of sustainability while inadvertently neglecting other equally significant aspects.

Some wrong methods have emerged in the form of greenwashing while on the way to becoming a green and sustainable brand or business. People may suspect greenwashing when an energy company invests in environmental measures because, at first sight, this investment seems to conflict with the consequences of the company's core business (i.e. producing energy, by burning fossil fuels) (Ellemers, N., & Daamen, D. D. 2015). Recently, it has been questioned whether businesses or brands act by their green image. Thus, "greenwashing" is a term that serves as for a range of misleading claims and practises that, whether done knowingly or not, create falsely favourable opinions of an organization's environmental performance.

Effective marketing communication for sustainable practices necessitates seamless engagement with stakeholders, such as customers, investors, and regulatory bodies. However, issues with stakeholder interaction can significantly impact the role of marketing communication in promoting sustainability. These issues include challenges in aligning diverse stakeholder interests, balancing short-term profit goals with long-term sustainability, and managing public perception. Navigating these challenges is crucial for marketing communication to successfully drive sustainable practices and maintain credibility.

"A shift in the body of knowledge consequently appeared in the concept of IMC, as well as the implementation thereof in a more broad-based strategic approach, so that IC is regarded as an umbrella term for all strategic organisational communication (Kitchen & Schultz 2000: 4)". The creation of

integrated communication strategies for sustainability is a difficult task given the vast array of communication alternatives, from conventional media to digital media. Organisations must exercise extreme caution while concentrating their communication efforts on sustainability advantages, creating content, identifying media outlets, and adopting a marketing communication toolbox.

Conceptual Framework

Technology enables integration, and IMC programs have already found acceptance. In the realm of marketing communication, the integration of sustainable marketing strategies can play a pivotal role in promoting sustainable practices. Kotler and Keller (2016) explain that there are 8 components in integrated marketing communication, including advertising, sales promotion, events & experiences, public relations & publicity, online & social media marketing, mobile marketing, direct & database marketing, and personal selling. A sustainable marketing strategy revolves around the principles of environmental and social responsibility, transparency, and ethical business practices. As Porcu et al. (2019) defines IMC as "the stakeholder-centred interactive process of cross-functional planning and alignment of organizational, analytical and communication processes that permit continuous discussion by conveying transparent and consistent messages via all media in order to foster long-term profitable relations that create value". As media fragmentation increases, and stakeholders are able to share information about organizations and co-create content, social media can be expected to be incorporated into IMC. The increased usage of social media forced the brands to integrate social media in their marketing communication channel, as it becomes the need of the hour, as it determines overall brand identity, brand image, and company performance in the present marketing competition. "Social media allow customer interactions, collaboration, knowledge, and information sharing related to their preference to support brands (Carlson et al., 2018). This framework outlines how sustainable marketing strategies enhance sustainability through integrated marketing communication and the specific roles of public relations, promotion, eco-labelling, digital marketing, and direct marketing in achieving this goal. "Integrated marketing communication includes one or more promotional activities and company marketing activities that allow companies to communicate uniform information to consumers to achieve clarity in marketing communications (Porcu, et al., 2012). Direct marketing plays a key role in sustainable marketing communication. It enables personalized messages to consumers, facilitating tailored communication about sustainable practices and products. Direct marketing often includes clear calls to action, encouraging consumers to engage in sustainability initiatives or make eco-friendly choices. Moreover, it establishes a feedback loop, allowing companies to collect insights from consumers and adapt their sustainability strategies based on this feedback, ensuring continuous improvement.

Eco-labelling is a valuable aspect of sustainable marketing communication. "Besides searching for connections to eco-labels and some certifications, the presence of a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) website or declaration was also required to determine the richness of sustainable tourism contact" (Aliffianto, A. Y., & Andrianto, N. 2022). It offers credibility by using certifications and seals to assure consumers of a product alignment with sustainable practices. Eco-labels serve as clear tools for conveying a product's environmental and social attributes, aiding consumers in making informed choices. Moreover, eco-labelling can provide a competitive advantage to companies by showcasing their dedication to sustainability, differentiating them in the market.

Public Relations (PR) is integral to sustainable marketing communication. It involves engaging with various stakeholders, including customers, investors, and the public, to communicate a company's sustainable initiatives and establish trust. Public relations values refer to the value of the business organization in the minds of the people for making the worth of the organization with the unique identity, and its vision and

mission (Logan, 2021). However, according to Shah (2021) developing public relations values is not an easy task for organizations, but it is a long and time taking activity that could be fulfilled with the help of marketing and public relations managers. PR also plays a key role in crisis management, ensuring timely and transparent responses to maintain public trust during sustainability- related crises. Additionally, PR leverages storytelling to convey the company's sustainability journey, humanizing the brand and making sustainability relatable to the audience.

Digital marketing is a powerful tool in sustainable marketing communication. According to Saura, Ri-beiro-Soriano, and Palacios-Marqués (2021), digital marketing is playing a key role in business communication because with the help of technology, it has become important for business entities to spread the message to the target market with the help of digital tools with more frequency. It offers a broad reach through various channels like social media, email, and online content, allowing companies to convey sustainability messages to a wide audience. Interactive digital marketing campaigns engage consumers in discussions on sustainability topics. "The role of digital marketing is not limited to the role of traditional marketing, but digital marketing can customize the messages, and provide it to the target market according to their demographics or lifestyle, to communicate about the business organizations, and develop public relations by getting feedback and recommendation for the business organizations (Cowley et al., 2021)". Additionally, data-driven insights collected through digital marketing enable companies to refine their sustainable marketing strategies based on audience feedback and preferences, making the efforts more effective and tailored to their target audience.

Promotion within sustainable marketing communication encompasses three critical aspects. First, it involves creating educational campaigns to inform consumers about sustainable practices and the advantages of eco-friendly products. Second, it seeks to encourage behavioural change by persuading consumers to opt for sustainable alternatives, promoting a shift towards sustainable consumption. Finally, promotional materials emphasize the sustainability benefits of products, influencing consumers' purchasing decisions by highlighting their positive environmental and social impacts. The above framework of Marketing Communications for Sustainable Consumption can be adopted with the help of suggested marketing communication mix elements and integrated in the marketing programmes. Each dimension of the framework represents a unique phase and communication action points in the evolution of a sustainable consumer.

Conclusion

Beyond the word's popularity, sustainability serves as a business strategy. Companies and organisations can gain by aligning their sustainability strategy's goals with stakeholder expectations, particularly those of investors and consumers. Although a top-line plan, this strategy positively impacts the company's bottom-line growth. Engaging your consumers and investors through sustainability communication is a strategy to show off how well you're doing on your sustainability obligations. When you demonstrate how you produce business value with ESG & sustainability, it is recognised to have a favourable impact on shareholder value. Investors, clients, or workers are the major stakeholders who can be effectively engaged through sustainability communication, and this matches nicely with the broader strategic goals of the business as set forth in the sustainability action plan. A sustainable marketing strategy prioritizes eco-friendly practices, sustainable sourcing, and reducing the environmental impact of products and services. It extends beyond environmental concerns to include social responsibility, emphasizing fair labour practices, community engagement, and ethical sourcing. Transparency in marketing messages is crucial, ensuring consumers receive clear information about sustainability efforts. Moreover, sustainable marketing strategies are designed with a long-term perspective, emphasizing the need for enduring

commitment to sustainability rather than short-term measures.

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