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| Going Green in Digital Age |
| Book Review Essay on Sustainable Marketing |

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**Introduction to Green Marketing**

“It is a world where challenges are detected but it is the idea of Sustainability that makes them visible, urgent and provides orientation in response to them” (Pfister et al.). Sustainability is a growing trend in our economy. As business continue to change and grow, they often begin to consider what being sustainable really means. When a business switches their focus to become a greener company all aspects of the company process begin to change. When companies switch from a profit focused vision to caring about the triple bottom line, the way you market yourself to your network needs to change. With a surge in good companies, Marketing strategy has needed time to catch up and develop strategies that would prove successful in implementation. With the rise in digital media, the tradition methods have fallen to the side, but the messages continue to translate in new media. Tying in both traditional, and new methods of marketing, we create Green Marketing as a genre in itself. Environmentally conscious people do not respond to the traditional advertising model because as they improve their environment internally, they are not in the mindset of consumption and materialism which the traditional ad targets. Thus, we begin green marketing in a digital age. Looking at five specific books published in recent years, we will begin to piece together what current themes, trends and lessons are for marketing professionals focused on sustainability.

After looking for pieces of sustainability marketing, through University of Colorado at Colorado Springs library resources, and the local library system, I had come across over twenty-five different pieces which may have fit my criteria. I was looking for books published between 2015 and 2017, which had a tie between marketing and sustainability if possible. I eliminated various pieces for having focus on profit and business growth over the advertising and marketing aspect. I wanted to have sources varied between both popular titles, and academic literature in order to provide a broader perspective. The literatures I will be focusing on for this piece are:

* *Green Marketing: A Case Study of the Sub-Industry in Turkey* by Kirgiz

This book is the keystone book for this review because it involves both green marketing and an actual case study with practices. Though for the purposes of this review much of the information will be related to America, the insights in Kirgiz book will be a great stepping stone for future research in America.

* *UnMarketing everything has changed and nothing is different* by Stratten & Kramer.

As the book state, “for generation, marketing has been hypocritical. We’ve been taught to market to others in ways we hate being marketed to” (Stratten & Kramer 2017). This book focuses on unlearning the old techniques and focusing on the new techniques to reach the customers you want. This book was chosen because the suggestions in each chapter have distinct examples with proven results, and as it is so recent, I felt to would lend itself to getting the right marketing strategies to the green industry.

* *Social marketing: changing behaviors for good* by Lee & Kotler

This textbook focuses on business from a social marketing perspective, which mean getting people to get involved in causes. Green marketing is a subset of social marketing because to invest in the beliefs of sustainable living to justify the costs of the new green friendly products.

* *Customer-centric marketing: supporting sustainability in the digital age* by Richardson

Looking for a book with another green focus, I came across this piece published in 2015, which aim to “combine digital and sustainable marketing to aid decision making and strategic implementation” (Richardson et al. 2015). In our current environment, digital is the currency, so having a book with a focused digital sustainability marketing seems to be a good fit for the purposes of this discussion.

* *Sustainable Luxury Brands: Evidence from Research and Implications for Managers* by Amatulli et al.

Lastly, the piece by Amatulli et al. highlights a section of the product industry that few consider when thinking of sustainable living. Having an alternative perspective to the normal sustainable living products that most individuals would consider. This book is backed with impeccable research and gives good action steps for business managers.

I will also be using other published materials to help support my focus, and illustrate point throughout the paper, but these materials did not meet all my criteria to be included in the focused books for the overall review as they provide solid insight to where sustainability research has been, and what trends we have seen in previous years, and what holes we are looking to fill going forward. Some of the book chosen are collections of discussions at conferences to highlight multiple overall topics in the marketing realm. I feel these pieces are able to give us specific insights into a variety of themes, but were not acceptable for my focused review.

Marketing has long focused on creating the ideal life. Starting in the 1920s, advertising has promoted the image of status and what material possessions can make you feel. We are drawn towards clothes, cars, even soap because of what that will do to improve our lives. Material items became synonymous with a good life. We shopped until we dropped, and did not care about all the out of date items beginning to fill landfills, and the processing plants that destroyed forests to achieve the perfect mixture for our new t-shirts. After consumers began to realize what rampant consumerism was doing to our plant, people began to change. Slowly. Consumers have begun to shy away from the traditional retail outlets, and going towards companies that are reducing their impact on the environment. Green marketing, a subset of social marketing, is a new trend of marketing solely focused on promoting causes, like sustainability, and getting individuals to care about their impact. “Traditional marketing’s one-sided brutal exploitation of nature cleared the ground for the emergence of green marketing, which is focused on people, the environment and other living creatures, and this too has brought about changes in society’s demands for the future” (Kirgiz, 2016). We aim to advertise in a way that lets consumers know that by supporting this company they are supporting the earth, or supporting improving the lives of employees, or improving the local economy. They can promote the spending because it is making an impact. For example, TOMS is a sustainable focused footwear company who provides shoes, along with other accessories, and with every purchase donates a pair of shoes to people in other countries who cannot afford them. Shoppers are drawn to the style as well as the humanitarian aspect of shopping. The Green Gap Trend Tracker survey by Cone Communications (www.conecomm.com) found that “71% of American consumers routinely or sometimes consider the environment when making a purchasing decision,” (Kirgiz, 2016) which is a dramatic increase from previous years. Going green is not easy. When a company is unsure of how to proceed, they begin to question if they should. Changing to be a more sustainably focused company is time consuming and costly. The focus of this review is to analyze the current texts on sustainability, specifically dealing with marketing for sustainable organizations in the digital age. My goal was to choose a variety of texts with various audiences written in the last two years, and analyze the themes and lessons present in the texts and apply them to sustainable organizations so that they can implement and improve their marketing strategy to target the younger generations of environmentally conscious shoppers. As marketing changes and develops, people are constantly trying to test and tweak the most popular methods, and sustainable marketing is no different.

**Themes in Green Marketing**

**Focus on Customers**

Through any literature, the more you analyze the more the apparent the themes become. After looking through twenty five books on the subject published in the last five years, and narrowing in on the six books chosen for the review, a running theme throughout most of the literature covered on sustainability and marketing seems to be the focus on your customers. So often marketing professionals rely too heavily on data, assumption and segmentation. Seeing their customers as numbers on a spreadsheet will not accurately show the complexities of the environmentally focused consumer. “Segmentation is important; however, there are marketer who seem to reduce everything to data sets…Marketing is much more than a science. It’s as much art and philosophy as it is science” (Richardson et al.). As we mentioned earlier, 71% of the population are taking the environment into consideration when making decisions, but how many marketing firms are considering those customers? We cannot apply the same strategy to these new eco-friendly customers, because they are not coming to shop with the mindset of consumerism and lavish lifestyle. The new green consumer is focused on improving their lives by reducing their footprint. They invest in products which will have a lasting effect in their household. These eco-customers are not the same as the traditional customer model. “Consumers want to know the contents of the products they purchase, whether they contain substances harmful for their children and the living environment. B2B customers want to learn how suppliers manufacture the products and exactly what materials they use in manufacturing” (Kirgiz, 2016). These customers are more critical of what goes into their product, and what footprint the company is leaving after producing their goods.

**Pricing Strategy**

Another theme throughout the literature is focused on avoiding price concerns. As *Advertising Age* said, “Any way you cut it, green is big business. Sales of environmentally friendly products in the U.S. exceeded $40 billion last year. This includes $29.2 billion for organic food, more than $10 billion for hybrid, electric, and clean diesel vehicles, more than $2 billion on energy efficient light bulbs, and $640 million on green cleaning products.” Sustainable products are often costlier then the mass-produced goods, so pricing your goods comparatively is not always possible. The impact of caring about where your resources come from, as well as how your employees are paid tends to create issues for keeping prices as competitive as companies who outsource labor. In social marketing, you need to consider alternative strategies for pricing and desired outcome. “Monetary costs in a social marketing environment are most often related to goods and services associated with adopting the behavior” (Lee & Kotler 2016). This many mean solar panels on the roof to switch to solar powered lighting, or reusable coverings for containers to avoid plastic cling wrap. Often these products have a higher upfront cost, which can intimidate some adaptors of the practice. As an example, Kirgiz had some interesting statistics on price. Consumers were asked about their purchase of green products: a majority of consumers “seek out green products as long as cost is the same: 30%” and still many consumers “seek out green products even if I have to pay a little extra: 24%”, and finally, only a small number of consumers “seek out green products even if I have to pay a lot extra: 2%” (Kirgiz, 2016). These statistics illustrate that though price is a serious concern for businesses, sustainable businesses who are successful in their marketing, and keep their prices as competitive as possible will continue to keep and even grow your customer base.

**Going Green in the Digital Age**

Finally, the last theme that seemed to connect the pieces, even the ones without a strict sustainability focus was leveraging digital advertising. For example, Stratten & Kramer’s book *UnMarketing* is heavily focused on digital marketing, and how to become more effective in this new digital age. Bringing up concerns addressed in other books, like transparency or millennials, everything ties back to the digital age. Knowing what social platforms to target for your core sustainable brand is priority because trying to be present unsuccessfully on multiple platforms can hurt your brand worse than being present and engaged on only one. But building on the wrong platform can impact the audience that sees your messages. “Digital technologies are creating new eco-productivity opportunities behind the factory gates. The internet, which brings together the buyers and sellers online, while reducing the search costs, it spearheads the establishment of markets which would never have been possible previously” (Kirgiz, 2016). As price was one of the earlier themes, we can see how digital ties into that. Marketing has become cheaper and more effective now that most of the world’s is shopping online. “Online shopping retail sales are predicted to grow steadily to $370 billion in 2017, up from $231 billion in 2012” (Abramovich, 2014). People are increasingly turning to online marketplaces to find their perfect products, and in turn the online stores are reaffirming their commitment to sustainable living.

Amazon.com explains, “Amazon strives to be Earth’s most customer-centric company. That means Amazon works every day to innovate for our customers, and to be transparent and lowest environmental impact shopping experience on the planet. We are constantly looking for ways to further reduce our environmental impact and provide even great transparency to customers. One example of this is our Amazon Elements Baby Wipes, which provide an unprecedented level of detail about each Amazon Elements item. We evaluated each ingredient to determine whether it should be included—these are all common components to baby wipes, and together they make the wipe more effective and help keep it fresh. We've included details on the ingredients and their origins, giving our customers transparency into the products they buy for their families. And the Amazon Elements Baby Wipes' plastic lid and cardboard box used in shipment can be recycled” (Amazon.com).

These themes in recent literature suggest that businesses are starting to realize that because customers are changing, it will begin to trickle into other areas. Pricing and Digital marketing are two very important ways that customers begin to find and trust your brand. Strategy is just one part of being a green organization, but more importantly, taking actionable steps from these trends will allow you increase the customer base as well as make a larger impact on the environment.

**Lessons in Green Marketing**

Themes of customer focus, price concerns and digital advertising were present in most of the pieces that make up this review, but what do those themes tell us about actual marketing practices? Each of these themes lends itself to a lesson that green companies especially need to be aware of. Marketing is the groundwork for any business to succeed, because you need to get your product out there for consumers to find you and shop with you. This doesn’t change just because the product that you are promoting will improve the environment. If people have not heard of you, then they cannot purchase your goods. If they do not trust that you are a quality company that aligns with their goals and objectives, then they will not give their money to you. Each lesson presented in this section of the paper illustrates core components of a successful green marketing strategy as supported by the resources.

**Trust and Transparency**

This lesson may in fact be the most important of all. Transparency. You need to brand yourself so that the intended audience sees and receives your actual message, but you have to be careful because “green washing” has caused an influx in marketing messages that are not based in facts. When presenting your brand to the public, you need to be clear and honest with your objectives and intentions. For example, “Exxon Valdez oil spill, the country’s largest oil spill. Because of the disaster, the ship spilled approximately 10.8 million gallons of crude oil into the Prince William Sound, Alaska. Since that time, ExxonMobil has spent millions of dollars to regain the public’s trust. To continue to improve the way the company is perceived, it has begun to aggressively market its green initiatives” (Burdick, 2009). But after that major misstep, all efforts to suggest that they cared about the ecosystem felt fake and pressured. To this day, Exxon Valdez is remembered for the damaging effect that oil spill almost 30 years ago, this enforces that the lesson that your actions have direct effect on your business because overall consumers are still unsure of green marketing and what sustainability really means. “A survey by GfK (www.gfk.com) found that many consumers are confused by green marketing. Twenty-two percent (22%) of survey respondents said they don’t know if companies’ claims are accurate, and 10% said they don’t know how well businesses fulfill their responsibility to the environment. Among consumers who weren’t confused, more than 40% thought green claims were inaccurate” (Kirgiz, 2016). Though the digital age has made things more affordable and more attainable, the influx in news has created generations of people who are more critical and distrusting then before.

**Unique and Valuable**

Your product must remain unique. This lesson, most directly referenced in *Sustainable Luxury Brands: Evidence from Research and Implications for Managers*, deals with keeping your product as unique as possible and worth the investment. As the eco-friendly trend continues, more and more businesses are going to attempt to position products in this niche to tap into the market potential. As Amatulli et al discusses, Luxury brands are already in a place where they can overlook pricing objections because of the high quality of the products they are selling, but the lessons in the book can be applied in some ways to all sustainable businesses. “Sustainability may become a crucial value for attracting luxury consumers and make them happy to buy products that are aspirational not only because they allow to project a positive image of consumers in social contexts and/or to fulfill their personal tastes, but also because they make consumers feel they are at the same time making a positive contribution to the society they live in” (Amatulli 2017). This is an important insight because it is important to take the feelings of the consumer into consideration, and how their purchase actions make them feel.

**Conclusion**

As sustainability grows, the material studying the marketing impact of sustainability will also need to evolve and change. “Every time someone makes a decision about whether to purchase a service it has the potential to contribute to a more or less sustainable pattern of consumption” (Richardson et al. 2015). Throughout all sustainability research, we are finding that more and more people are beginning to adopt characteristics of a greener lifestyle. “Global consumers echo that high standard in their own lives and shopping behavior: 84 percent of consumers globally say they seek out responsible products whenever possible, though 81 percent cite availability of these products as the largest barrier to not purchasing more” (2015 Cone Communications/Ebiquity Global CSR Study). That barrier is slowly dissolving as more brands figure out that to continue to be competitive they need to change and reposition their products to fit within the new green strategy. If a company is not already providing products that are eco-friendly the current research highlights that it is not too late to begin a strategy to improve your footprint.

Looking towards future potential and implications, there are some potential holes in research that do not seem to have comprehensive research. A large part of the active and engaged population are millennials. This population has specific sustainability marketing for millennials. The environmentally conscious millennial individual is “up from 55% in 2014 to 72% in 2015” ("The Sustainability Imperative", 2015). If this trend continues, we will be seeing a rise in a population that no one has been able to research. The way the millennial generation was raised changes their expectations about how products and services should be available, and the quality and immediacy of the need. Another section that seems to be lacking on concrete research is finding best practices for mainstream business transitioning to sustainability. If the end goal of sustainability is to help the whole population of the planet transition to making the world better, then giving guiding resources to businesses to improve their sustainability would be very important. These holes would allow researchers to apply the lessons and themes from the current research, and do an in-depth case study with millennials or with a currently non-green business and focus on how these challenges are overcome and what impact the current lessons in research have had.

So why does green marketing matter? As we begin to wrap up the overall themes, lessons and trends in the current literature, but can find a few actionable items that all professionals can begin to apply to their businesses, especially those who are attempting to make their business both profitable and sustainable. First: Don’t sell, tell your story. As a sustainable business, you cannot always compete on price or on the accessibility of your product, but you have a unique business model and a more interesting story. Your platform is your selling point. You need to explain why you have created your business, why you care about the environment, why you are different from the other brands out there. People resonate with people who call to pathos, or relate to them on an emotional level. They want to know that purchasing a pair of shoes will give a pair to a starving child in another country. They want to know their daily coffee habit is making it possible for a village to have clean water. That is the motivation. Know your customer, and tell your story. You also need to be unafraid to try new tactics. As the research, has shown us throughout this paper, the old ways do not work. Those who are successful in the marketing realm are trying new tactics, approaching the problem from a more creative vantage point and making mistakes to learn.

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