

SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING: THE 7PS PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The concept of sustainability over the years has influenced the understanding of several twigs of sustainability like, sustainability marketing. In view of that, sustainability marketing like most twigs adopts the Economic, Social and Ecological (ESE) dimensions of sustainability in conceptualization or operationalization of sustainability marketing. Marketing strategy basically twirls on managerial controllable factors like price, product, promotion, place, people, physical evidence, and process (7ps). Thus, most marketing activities falls in at least one the Ps or a combination of the Ps. The current view of sustainability marketing seems not to fully integrate all the 7Ps of marketing. Consequently, the definition and conceptualization of sustainability marketing from the ESE perceptive might limit the comprehensiveness of sustainability marketing. Therefore, the aim of this investigation is to revisit the concept of sustainability marketing focusing on both the ESE and 7ps perspectives. The paper will contribute to the emerging discussion on marketing and sustainability by exploring and providing a holistic view of sustainability marketing.

Keywords: Sustainability, Marketing Mix, Sustainability Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The sustainability concept defines developments that meet the needs and wants of a present generation without conceding the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The popularity of the sustainability concept may be due to resource depletion, climate change, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, overfishing, environmental pollution and soil degradation (Dimitrova, 2014). Marketing is believed to possess the ability to inspire the use or adoption of: recycle, eating healthily, drinking sensibly, saving energy, buying Fairtrade, supporting good causes and reuse (Gordon et al., 2011). Consequently, sustainability marketing is a process of creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers in such a way that both natural and human capital are preserved or enhanced throughout (Martin & Schouten, 2014).

The marketing mix concept has contributed significantly to the advancement of the marketing management science as a basic concept (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995) with theoretical foundations in the optimization theory (Constantinides, 2006). The theoretical value of the marketing mix is highlighted by the generally held opinion that it is a pillar that is influential to the Managerial School of Marketing along with the concepts of “*Market Segmentation*”, “*Marketing Myopia*”, “*Marketing Concept*” and “*Product Positioning*” (Gardner & Garrett, 1988; Constantinides, 2006). The popularity of marketing mix concept among marketing

practitioners and students may be as a result of the intense exposure to the concept in institutions of higher learning, because marketing mix is at the heart of all introductory manuals in marketing and recognize marketing mix as a controllable parameter likely to stimulate a customer's buying behavior (Cowell, 1984; Kotler & Keller, 2011). More so, the marketing mix may be famous because of the ease to apply and memorize (Jobber, 2001). The unending discussion on marketing mix as a marketing management tool, is predominantly fought on theoretical than empirical levels (Constantinides, 2006), suggesting that a contribution on sustainability marketing and 7ps nexus is more conducted at a conceptual level rather than an empirical examination. In addition, due to sustainability and sustainability marketing becoming the focus of management research and practice, there is the need to revisit or modify the marketing mix elements along the lines of sustainability marketing (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995).

Sustainability Marketing

With the current increase in global environmental problems, being sustainable has no longer become a trend but rather a wake-up call for companies to be concerned about the impact of their activities on the environment (Abdul-Hamid, 2019). For marketers, this implies that it time to move towards the sustainability marketing concept (Belz & Peattie, 2009). Sustainability Marketing has been defined by Fuller, (1999) as the process of “*Planning, implementing, and controlling the development, pricing, promotion, and distribution of products in a manner that satisfies the customers’ needs, organizational goals, and the environment.*” Also, Sustainability marketing is a system of affairs that secures continuous and indefinite provision of welfare for society through the implementation of practices which satisfy human needs and, at the same time (Nkamnebe, 2011). The main aim of sustainability marketing is to ensure that goods and services are produced in a way that protects the environment (Brundtland, 1987).

However, traditional marketing views the world from the perspective of the ‘*Consumer.*’ Thus as someone whose needs and wants makes up and drives an organization’s actions, strategies and objectives. The problem with this assumption is that it ignores the roles of other parties. This tends to make achieving sustainable marketing difficult. Which can be solved if, we are to consider customers and their wants and needs, to socio-ecological problems to which they relate, in a balanced and coordinated way as the starting point for marketing processes. This intersection sets the context for sustainability marketing and can also create significant new market opportunities for innovative companies (Muala & Al Qurneh, 2012)

Sustainability marketing encompasses: ecological, social and economic issues. SM is a holistic marketing approach that is ecologically driven, viable, ethical, and relationship based (Belz & Peattie, 2009). Sustainability marketing offers the potential to produce significant long-term benefits for both primary and secondary stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 2010). Firms may realize market-based sustainability when it strategically aligns itself with the market-oriented product wants and needs of customers and the interests of multiple stakeholders concerned about environmental, economic, and social dimensions and social responsibility issues.

ESE of Sustainability Marketing

1. Environmental Issues of Sustainability Marketing
2. Social Issues of Sustainability Marketing
3. Economic Issues of Sustainability Marketing

Marketing Mix

The marketing mix is an utmost vital concept in marketing describing a set of controllable marketing tools which firms may use in creating preferred reactions in their targeted market. The marketing mix elements are tactical and basic components of any marketing plan. The idea of a “*Marketing Mix*” was slightly debated. Numerous contending contributions were offered: two elements (Frey, 1961), three elements (Kelly & Lazer, 1962), and twelve elements (Chichester & Borden, 1964), among others. Eventually marketing mix description suited what is currently; the most universal and standardized recognized characteristics of the marketing landscape. Several marketing researchers and practitioners agree that the mix is a toolkit of marketing transaction and operational marketing archetype planning (Gronroos, 1994). Despite the fact that empirical data on the precise role and influence of marketing mix on firm success is quite scarce, some few investigations confirm that the marketing Mix is certainly a reliable conceptual dais for marketing practitioners to deal with operational or tactical marketing issues (Romano & Ratnatunga, 1995; Coviello et al., 2000). The marketing mix has been criticized for being a production-oriented definition and not a customer-oriented of marketing (Popovic, 2006). The marketing mix elements includes: price, product, promotion, place, personnel, physical evidence and processes.

Price and Sustainable Pricing

Price is anything given up to get a product (Nakhleh, 2012). Price may also describe how much customers are willing to pay due to different needs. So, a price perception to the same product may vary among customers. Price may be a main positioning strategy in differentiating products. Customers may use price as a gage for product benefits or quality and an extrinsic cue. A high priced product may often be perceived to be of less vulnerable and higher quality to other products (Kamakura & Russell, 1993). Higher prices may lead to higher profitability mostly in the short term, conversely, it may lead to lower sales and profits. Finally, price may be used to reinforce other activities in the marketing mix program.

Sustainability pricing on the other hand is defined as the sum of the existing market price of a commodity plus the additional price charged to meet social and environmental sustainability values (Hall, 2018). Thus sustainability pricing helps to provide a measure that communicates to the consumer the sustainability issues of pollution, climate change and poverty and further address UN GSP recommendation for the need for social and environmental cost to be included to move towards a sustainable economy

Employee Empowerment and Organizational Performance

The concept of workplace empowerment has become an important topic in most organisations. It has led to academic debate by human resources and managers who affirm that workplace empowerment enhances organizational performance (Wilkinson, 1998). Efficient employee empowerment techniques and strategies promote positive employee attitudes, contribute to job satisfaction and lead to corporate commitment (Nick et al., 1994).

Employee empowerment offers employees a certain degree of autonomy and decision-making for their particular tasks (Dobre, 2013). It enables decision-making at the lower level of an organization in which employees have a unique view of the challenges and problems at the specific level of the organization. Empowerment has become an important theme in management in recent years. The management encourages their employees to be free to use their full potential and their ability to achieve the general goals of the Organization. The value of empowerment has recently been recognized in numerous project management environments (Williams, 1997). Employee performance, on the other hand, is a key element in retaining employees and is closely tied to both the intention to quit and actual turnover.

According to Carriere & Bourque, non-working employees are more likely to leave the company (2009). Though turnover is a multi-stage process, the low organizational performance of many occupational groups in the public sector had a strong and direct impact on intent to quit and actual turnover (Lambert et al., 2007).

Many firms empower their staff to boost the results of corporate performance. Employee empowerment and business performance have a positive relationship, as reported by Ng'ang & Moronge (2017). In addition, empowerment is a means of reducing decision-making centralization which results in faster processes (Busara, 2016).

Promotion and Sustainability Promotion

Promotion is an important part of business or marketing activities and processes (Goi, 2011; Abdul-Hamid, 2019). Promotion takes the form of advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, direct marketing and public relations. Promotion may assist would-be customers on product knowledge and where to acquire it. Promotion is relevant in marketing strategies since: delivers the needed information, sways target customers on product benefits, and inspire customers in taking purchase decisions.

Communication is an important element for an organization when communicating your sustainable effort. This is because, without effective communication it will be impossible to make consumers aware or exposure of the sustainability solutions that have been developed, and how consumers' can integrate it into their lifestyles in order to meet their needs (Belz & Peattie, 2009). Therefore, as a sustainable marketer, effective communication is needed to create and develop long-term relationships with consumers which is critical in ensuring that the life cycle requirement in attaining sustainability is met (Belz & Peattie, 2009).

Place and Sustainability Place

The Place describes an accessibility and convenience of a firm's product to customers (Kotler & Keller, 2011). Also, a place strategy is how a firm may distribute its product to end users (Goi, 2011). Therefore, place entails ease of access that customer may link to a product such as distribution and location. Being sustainable under the place mix variable is all about being convenient through the provision of easy access to your product without compromising the socio-ecological environment. As compared to the sustainable place mix, Belz and Peattie highlights 3 weaknesses in the conventional Place mix variable. Firstly, the convention place variable emphasized on the physical distribution of products. Secondly, the conventional place variable focus more on the point of exchange, whereas total consumption process goes beyond the acquisition of products to encompass their use and their disposal. Finally, the conventional

concept of place is becoming less relevant as companies as well as retailers are beginning to adopt and introduce online platform. Convenience represents a challenge for sustainability marketers since historically, there has often been a trade-off between convenience and environmental performance. While some commentators argue that successful marketing of sustainability solutions will depend on matching conventional products for convenience (Ottman et al. 2006), others argue that our devotion to, and knowledge of convenience may have to change (Shove, 2003).

Personnel and Sustainable Personnel

People are the employees who produce or deliver services (Muala & Qurneh, 2012). Services encompass personal interactions between employees and customers, which may be a source of service quality perceptions. Personnel are also considered as the key element in a customer centered organization as well as a way to differentiate variables with product, services, channel, and image. The actions of employees generally influence success of action and function of a firm and with training, communication, learning, skills, and to show an optimum value of a firm.

Process and Sustainable Process

Process is the implementation of action and function that raises value for products with low cost and high advantage to customer and is vital for products (Muala & Qurneh, 2012). The pace of the process as well as the skill of the service providers are clearly revealed to the customer and it forms the basis of customer satisfaction. In the face of simultaneous consumption and production of the process management, balancing services demand with service supply is extremely difficult. The design and the implementation of product elements are crucial to the creation and delivering of product.

Study by Xie et al. (2019) found that sustainable processes have positive impact on product, which can help improve on a company's financial performance. Recently, sustainable technology has gained constant attention from the business sector (eg. Tesla). Singh et al. (2018) explained that, the conventional processes convert various inputs into products that meet consumer needs. But sustainable process aims to produce the same output with fewer inputs so as to reduce overall consumption and environmental impact and reduce waste.

Physical Evidence and Sustainable Physical Evidence

The environment in which the service and any tangible goods that facilitate the performance and communication of the service are delivered (Muala & Qurneh, 2012). This holds great importance because the customer normally judges the quality of the service provided through Physical Evidence. Alike, noticeable environs can influence impressions perceived by customers about quality service. The physical environment comprises of: ambience, services cape, the comfort of the seating, background music, physical layout of the service facility, and the appearance of the staff can greatly affect a customer's satisfaction with a service experience (McCarthy, 1960; David, 2001; Al Muala & Al Qurneh, 2012).

Sustainability Marketing and 7ps Nexus

The marketing mix and sustainability marketing has since evolved and conceptualize. For example, social marketing mix, relationship marketing, service marketing mix and now sustainability marketing mix. Notwithstanding the criticisms level against marketing mix phenomenon, this paper argued that, it remains easily memorable and easy to recall. As such, if the concept of sustainability marketing is conceptualized akin to the marketing mix concept, the acceptability and usage of sustainability marketing among practitioners, researchers and students may be enhanced. In addition, the continual criticism of “*Where is the marketing in sustainability marketing*”, when most arguments are discussed along the triple bottom line (economic, social and environment). This paper brings to the attention of marketing scholarship about the lack of conceptualization or operationalization of sustainability marketing like the case of market orientation, service quality and many other marketing concepts. Although, there could be several ways of operationalizing the sustainability marketing concept, an initial operationalization is presented from the marketing mix standpoint. In addition, the marketing mix elements of price; place; people; promotion; product; physical evidence; and process remains unchanged in name with some modifications and introduction of descriptors. For example, with the product of firms remaining unchanged, the focus of sustainability marketing mix element of products emphasis the creation or delivery of products that are economically, environmentally and socially acceptable. Accordingly, all marketing mix elements are required to be operationalizing with the concepts in sustainability.

CONCLUSION

The marketing mix remains a potent concept in marketing that easily handles and tolerates a distinction of marketing from other activities of a firm as such sustainability marketing should be explored from. The sustainability marketing mix utilized by a firm may vary according to firm resources, market conditions and changing needs of clients. In addition, the importance of some elements of sustainability marketing mix may vary. Finally, decisions on sustainability marketing mix elements should not be made on only an element without recourse to its impact on other elements of the sustainability marketing mix marketing researchers and practitioners are reminded that The number of possible strategies of the marketing mix is infinite.

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