

Editorial

# Challenges for Marketers in Sustainable Production and Consumption

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## 1. Introduction

As one of the biggest issues facing today's global society, sustainability cuts across all areas of production and consumption and presents challenges for marketers who attempt to understand and incorporate sustainability in their everyday practices [1–3]. Evidence suggests there is increasing pressure from stakeholders around the social and environmental responsibilities of companies, including how products are sourced and manufactured, and marketed to consumers [4]. Recent events have illustrated unacceptable and unethical practices in production, for example unsafe working conditions in factories creating fast fashion items, prompting a media backlash against the companies involved [5]. One of the many challenges for marketers is to differentiate their sustainable brands from competing brands and to communicate this to consumers; and for consumers to recognise what makes a brand more sustainable [6,7]. The interface between companies and consumers in communicating sustainable production and consumption is reflected in contact points such as advertising, labelling and social media [7]. Such points are key providers of information concerning how products are sourced, manufactured and used [7]. However, consumers themselves are faced with a bewildering range of product choices and increasing information, which raises questions about links between sustainability in production and consumption.

For this Special Issue, we invited papers which address production, consumption, and/or the relationship between them in a context of sustainability. We accepted and published fifteen papers which form the content of this Special Issue. These papers are introduced below.

## 2. Contributions to the Special Issue

The fifteen papers which make up this Special Issue all address the challenges posed to sustainable production and/or consumption in today's marketing environment. To set an appropriate context, we place the paper by Emeritus Professor Michael Baker [8] as a position piece, providing a review of social business and marketing as practices which have the capacity to transform society towards a more sustainable lifestyle. The following papers then pick up on this theme in several different ways.

Three papers focus on the home environment: Gentina and Singh [9] examine the role of adolescents in socialising their parents to behave more sustainably. The process of ecological reverse socialisation is researched in two countries, India and France, in which family and parenting are performed within distinct cultural settings. Their study has clear implications for social policy and education initiatives in making more of the potential of adolescents to influence the family. The second paper to take a domestic focus, this time in the UK, is by Scott, Oates and Young [10]. The aim of the paper is similar to that of Gentina and Singh's article: to explore what happens in the household around environmental

activities. The two papers address some common themes such as communication and decision making but approach the topic from different perspectives. Scott *et al.* argue for the household as a unit of research rather than an individual approach to understanding sustainability in the home, and present a conceptual framework aimed at advancing our understanding of household decision making and environmental actions. This framework brings together two literatures (household decision making and individual sustainable behaviour) to propose a holistic understanding of how environmental behaviour is adopted and practiced. The third paper to use a domestic setting, this time in Norway, is by Westskog, Winther and Saele [11], who look at in-home displays and electricity consumption. This is a key strand of research which aims to explore how such devices might be used to reduce energy consumption. Westskog *et al.* demonstrate that use of in-home displays is not uniform, and differences are found between households. This qualitative study probes contextual factors to explain variations in potential effects of in-home displays. All three of these papers increase our understanding of this particular site of consumption and offer both theoretical and practical implications for increasing sustainable behaviours.

The next set of three papers takes labelling as its focus. Starting with Alevizou, Oates and McDonald's study [12], which looks at two countries (Greece and UK), the role of knowledge is examined in relation to consumer decoding of sustainability labels on fast moving consumer goods. Using a qualitative methodology, this paper takes an insightful approach to understanding what it is that consumers know about sustainability, and what kinds of knowledge are drawn upon. Various types of claims that are prevalent in a European context are scrutinised for their familiarity and relevance to consumers, with clear recommendations to marketing to facilitate sustainable consumption. The second paper to look at labelling is by Henninger [13], and this focuses on a largely neglected area in marketing—micro-organisations operating in the UK slow-fashion context. Henninger explores the range of labels already existing and uses primary research to understand both the micro-organisations' perspective and the views of consumers. Confusion around labels is evident and Henninger takes the opportunity to propose a new way forward—that of traceability, thus transparently linking both production and consumption. The third paper in this area of labelling research is by Grinnall and Burnett [14]. Like Henninger's [13], it looks at current labelling practices including eco-labels, but in a very different context—the marketing of fish. Their paper concentrates on how such an eco-label for sustainable fish might look, and considers several design features. The development and production of such a label is explored, with many criteria to be included, making it difficult to decide on a single design. The authors conclude that more research with producers, retailers and consumers is needed. All these three papers take the same focus—eco-labelling—and examine it in very different product sectors, but emerge with similar findings of confusion around such labels.

The third set of papers moves the sustainability debate into particular product sectors which act as a focus to allow specific theories to be applied. The first paper in this set is by Moons and De Pelsmacker [15] and centres on the electric car, explored through the lens of a decomposed theory of planned behaviour. The research is situated in Belgium and assesses usage intention of the electric car. In a detailed and quantitative paper, the authors provide valuable implications aimed at various stakeholders including marketers who seek to persuade consumers to choose electric cars over conventional models. A second paper [16] takes sustainable holidays as the focus, examining neutralisation and mental accounting to explore (non)consumption of sustainable holidays. This paper by Schütte and Gregory-Smith is based on qualitative interviews with German holidaymakers. Findings suggest that much more needs to be done by marketers in positioning tourism as sustainable, in an attempt to challenge the belief that holidays are for hedonistic purposes, by using emotions in marketing communications. The next two papers [17,18] focus on food: the article by Qendro [17] examines how organic food is sold in farmers' markets and supermarkets in Albania and UK, and how consumers perceive these differently. In both countries Qendro collected qualitative data in this exploratory study. Findings show differing perceptions around organic food between participants in the two countries, and between farmers' markets and supermarkets in terms of food quality and

price. The author points out the lack of research in Albania, not just around organic food, but around sustainability in general. The final paper in this set, also about food, looks at the production and marketing of chili products in Bolivia [18]. Three new products are marketed in malls in major Bolivian cities, offering taster sessions to shoppers. In an experimental design using an auction procedure, consumers' willingness to pay is tested. Findings offer useful implications for the marketing of such products, suggesting it is more effective to refer to their environmental attributes rather than to stress on improving the farmers' quality of life. All these four papers have something of note to offer to marketing practitioners in terms of increasing uptake of sustainable products and services.

Continuing the theme of communication, which came out strongly in the previous papers, we then move to two papers specifically addressing marketing communications—advertising [19] and viral marketing [20]. The first paper by Visser, Gattol and van der Helm [19] looks at the advertising of sustainable shoes. In a quantitative study with 200 adults in the Netherlands, the authors investigate the most effective way to advertise shoes to mainstream (*i.e.*, not green) consumers. Sustainability is found to have an effect on purchase intention but other buying criteria (fashion image, price, brand) are considered first. The creation of a “sustainable image” is suggested as a topic for further research. The second paper on communications is by Chang [20], and it looks at green viral communications in Taiwan, and its effects on green purchase intentions. 338 questionnaires comprise a large data set, analysed using SEM, and the findings are significant for the key role that opinion leaders can play in the influencing of green purchase intentions. The use of social media is recommended to increase communication flow, whilst spend on more traditional marketing communications like packaging design is less important. Both these papers offer ideas for further research and identify challenges for marketers.

The final two papers [21,22] in our Special Issue both centre on the workplace. The first, by Wang and Zha [21], addresses technical inefficiency and congestion in regional industries in China, contributing to a better trade-off between economic development and environmental protection. The second paper by Oke [22] offers a very useful meta-analysis review of waste recycling behaviour in the workplace. This analysis provides insights into the factors influencing workplace recycling behaviour and suggests these can be usefully classified into predictors, motivators and barriers. Gaps are identified in extant studies, with suggestions for future research.

### 3. Conclusions

In conclusion, the fifteen papers in our Special Issue cover a range of methodologies, theoretical approaches, topics, and geographical regions, and all aim at increasing our understanding of the challenges facing marketers in sustainable production and consumption. The wide spectrum of topics addressed demonstrates the complexity of sustainability facing producers, marketers and consumers. Many of the papers offer significant ways forward, both theoretically and practically, to academics and practitioners around the world.

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