

A1. Evaluating Greener Marketing

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The module *Greener Marketing* reflects the increasing importance and integration of sustainability in consumer and business decision-making. The module explores and critiques the (non)-adoption of sustainability *via* the connections between management actions, political statements, individual and group behaviour and societal norms and values. Students are encouraged to consider these issues when making personal decisions as well as contributing to organisational decisions within their future business careers. Thus, this module constitutes an object of study in its own right, and also contributes to students' wider understanding of and engagement with contemporary societal issues.

In this module, sustainability is examined from environmental, human, social, and economic perspectives – informed by critical thinking in consumption, economics, marketing, philosophy, politics, psychology and sociology, and illustrated in a variety of ways including climate change predictions, levels of environmental degradation, the (re)use of finite resources, waste and disposal, the distribution of wealth and resources and the different facets of 'capital'. No fixed definitions of sustainability are used on the course. Instead students are encouraged to share their thoughts on their understanding of sustainability, and thus their perceptions of greener marketing. They are invited to comment on a variety of descriptions originating from sources including the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987), the United Nations, Department of Trade and Industry, Forum for the Future, Charter and Polonsky (1999) and McIntosh (2003). Usually a shared, broad understanding emerges that embraces notions of corporate and individual citizenship, changing consumption patterns, social capital, personal values-driven behaviour, politics and legislation, the fair distribution of economic, environmental and social assets, and proactive personal and collective responsibilities – wrapped within an organisational and individual behavioural context that includes fairly-traded products and services, reduction in energy usage, increasing use of public transport and decreasing use of personal cars, local organic

food, eco-tourism, reducing air miles, and non-supermarket shopping. Students are also encouraged to examine the arguments for human derived climate change – and to draw their own conclusions in relation to consumption, economic development and sustainability.

With the mixed, final-year student cohort (for example, students from marketing, business management, geography, psychology, sports, tourism), students, initially, do not have an absolute conviction that marketing can contribute towards sustainability. This is typically because their understanding of sustainability is limited and because they are using rather narrow definitions of marketing. This module challenges their preconceptions and raises many questions for them to consider. As the course progresses they are encouraged to question their existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and they learn to evaluate organisational and consumer behaviour, decisions and ideas that purport to facilitate greener marketing. Inevitably, by the end of the module, having engaged with the many paradoxes of marketing and sustainability, students emerge with analytical, informed and proactive perspectives, combined with healthy scepticism about organisational and individual commitment and behaviour.

Aims

As part of the module, students research, present and lead a discussion on a greener marketing topic, in groups, to their class peers and tutors. Examples of greener marketing topics include persuading consumers to pay more for their cars; greening business-to-business relationships; changing attitudes and behaviour: by promoting 'cycling to work'; campaigning for conservation and reducing consumption. Three of these examples are illustrated in table 1.

Each group is required to research the context of the issue, integrate appropriate academic theory, evaluate current thinking and practice and offer marketing insight and solutions. They should design a 55-minute discussion-presentation that will engage their peers and contribute to the understanding and evaluation of greener marketing.

This work is not formally assessed, but can inform the development of individual, assessed essay papers.

Accordingly, the discussion-presentations aim for students to:

1. Critically evaluate the role industry can and does make in shaping and responding to sustainability requirements
2. Critically assess ecologically-conscious consumer behaviour and its impact on greener marketing practice and more sustainable consumption
3. Assemble and present their arguments to both their tutors and their peer group.

As such, this activity aims to develop a community of learners.

Rationale

Sustainability is a complex subject area, with a myriad of meanings and executions. The philosophies underpinning marketing can be understood as both complementary to and the antithesis of the sustainability agenda. Students need to develop a good understanding of sustainability very quickly, to appreciate its different stakeholders and their perspectives, and to evaluate this within the context of contemporary marketing thinking. They then need to be able to apply their comprehension to a range of marketing contexts – green alliances, competitive advantage, new product development, consumer behaviour, campaigning, and so on. The degree of reading and analysis is significant. Many complex questions are raised in which students can engage. Where lecturers lead every session, some students can become quite complacent in their learning, and this can have negative individual and cohort ramifications. Through this exercise students have to read, examine evidence, apply theory, build argument, relate to a chosen context and present an informed, coherent argument that encourages their peers to reciprocate with their own thoughts. The module has been designed to encourage students to self-reflect in a thoughtful and critical manner. This is preparation for life-long, active learning – as students continue to reflect on sustainability and marketing in respect of their personal choices and the decisions they make in their chosen careers. This approach has been commended by visiting speakers to the University.

Implementation

The module tutor, in consultation with the module team, should choose the topic areas. These should reflect contemporary challenges for greener marketing. Examples of topic areas are presented in table 1.

Table 1 - Examples of Greener Marketing Discussion-Presentations**Persuading British consumers to pay more for their cars.**

The EU has just fudged the issue of CO₂ emissions from cars. Some EU Ministers are arguing for the need for consumers to have to pay more for their cars. Your team is the marketing department for a leading car manufacturer. Your company recognises that this 'need to pay more' is an inevitability of the climate change agenda, and as marketers you view this as an opportunity to enhance the reputation of the company to its stakeholders. Your Chief Executive has asked you to prepare and present a report to senior managers on the marketing strategy you will be adopting to encourage consumers to purchase your more expensive, more sustainable cars.

Key literature: (a) Strategic marketing (b) Persuasion (c) Personal values and motivation (d) Corporate citizenship.

Greening B2B Relationships

You are a marketing consultancy tasked with examining how B2B relationships can influence the integration of environmental issues into business decision-making. You have been asked to focus on how a company influences its suppliers to become environmentally responsible, thereby enabling the organisation and its stakeholders to become 'green'. You have been asked to present your findings to business leaders at a CBI Breakfast Meeting on 'Sustainability and Business'.

Key literature: (a) IMP model (b) B2B marketing (c) Marketing relationships (d) Green adaptation.

The Ultimate Challenge: Reducing Consumption

You are a radical pressure group, frustrated by the perceived inactivity of the British government and consumers in taking action to alleviate the ensuing problems of climate change. You believe, absolutely, that over-consumption is a primary cause of climate change and you want action NOW. You are determined to persuade consumers to reduce their consumption by bombarding them and government with messages that (a) 'force' consumers to address the consequences of their consumption behaviour, and (b) pressure government to initiate measures to 'force' consumers to change their consumption habits.

You have decided to use guerrilla marketing to achieve your aims. You will be presenting your campaign, complete with visual work, to your members for approval.

Key literature: (a) Guerrilla marketing (b) Persuasion (c) Consumption (d) Dominant social paradigm (e) Pressure groups.

The discussion-presentations are scheduled to run in the latter part of the module, to enable students to build their understanding, progressively, through more lecturer-led classes and independent study.

Students are required to organise themselves into groups (normally no greater than five per group) and select a topic area. Details of group membership and first and second choices of a topic must be emailed to the module tutor no later than four weeks after the module has started. Topics are assigned, by the module tutor, on a 'first come first served' basis. The module tutor has the right to allocate a topic to a group, if necessary.

Approximately one month before the first discussion-presentation is due to take place, two hours of class-time is allocated to students to discuss their work-in-progress with the module tutors. Additional email support is also available, particularly if the module is interspersed with a vacation period.

Two, related (by theme) discussion-presentations typically take place each week for the required duration. Each one should last 55 minutes - a formal presentation lasting approximately 30 minutes, accompanied by a 25-minute discussion with tutors and peers – which must be generated and managed by the group. This allocation of time may be flexible, for example a 30 minute presentation, followed by a 25 minutes discussion, or:

- Presentation – part 1 – context, evidence, and conceptual framework (15-20 minutes)
- Group-led student activity based on part 1 of the presentation (10-15 minutes)
- Group-led discussion of the activity – with further questioning (10 minutes)
- Presentation – part 2 – conclusion and reflections (10-15 minutes)

While tutors will aid the management of these classes, students are wholly responsible for the content and delivery of their discussion-presentations. Thus tutors should ensure they do not dominate the class. Ideally they should take a seat at the back of the room and always encourage the presenters and their peers to engage in dialogue – and contribute to this discussion, not lead it.

Tutors should ask for a copy of the group's presentation at the start of the class. At the end of each class, tutors should provide immediate verbal feedback on the content of the discussion-presentations, how they were managed, and students' presentation skills.

At the end of each class, each member of the group should be invited to personally reflect on the issue they have investigated. Tutors can facilitate this by asking students what they feel they have learnt from the exercise, and the implications for implementation of greener marketing and the sustainability agenda into organisational and individual behaviour.

Sustainability focus

The discussion-presentations encourage students to examine and develop their understanding of environmental, social and economic sustainability. The topic areas interweave these different facets of sustainability; however there are differences in emphasis depending on whether the topic is business or consumer orientated. With respect to environmental sustainability, in preparing their work students must consider the depletion and degradation of natural capital, and the need to balance our ecosystem with consumption. The topic area 'The Ultimate Challenge: Reducing Consumption' enables students to explore environmental sustainability in some depth and to consider the relationships between natural capital, human population and consumption. In so doing students will also consider social capital – for example, a strong, civil society, shared values, societal norms – all facets of social sustainability. The topic areas 'Greening B2B Relationships' and 'Greening for Competitive Advantage' while also examining natural capital, give greater attention to the maintenance of economic capital - economic sustainability. Here students are asked to investigate how, by becoming green, organisations and their suppliers can enhance their greener credentials and gain competitive advantage.

Active learning

The discussion-presentations aim to transform students into active and collaborative researchers, investigating topical issues, undertaking pedagogic research, critiquing theory and practice and presenting and discussing their analysis, ideas and solutions with their peers and tutors, in a reflective manner. The discussion element gives all members of the student cohort an opportunity to explore their own ideas in relation to the topic, to ask questions of the group, each other and the tutors – within the

topic and across topics, and the opportunity for personal self-reflection. The real and contemporary nature of each topic helps the learning experience to be pertinent and enjoyable for everyone. In all cases students are researching real scenarios using real data and marketing intelligence, for example, from company websites, Mori or Mintel, and generating genuine marketing recommendations in exactly the same way as they will be required to do in their future marketing careers.

Feedback

Students, initially, are cautious about the discussion-presentations. However module evaluations and discussions with the cohort on completion of the module indicate very positive feedback from them. Initially they find the exercise challenging, however once they begin to engage with the topic, and complete their discussion-presentations, they find it has been very enjoyable and valuable in helping them to develop their understanding of sustainability and marketing, to evaluate the behaviour of organisations and individuals and to question their own current behaviour and intentions for the future. In addition they welcome the opportunity to develop their presentation, interpersonal and analytical skills, which they will need in their future careers.

Specific student comments include:

- *We started the module thinking marketing is all about manipulation. We still think a lot of it is, but we also think it can be used to make consumers become greener.*
- *This module has really changed how I think about my own behaviour. It's made me think and I've really enjoyed it.*
- *Sustainability is really complicated, most people are never going to understand it, and most won't change their behaviour. Business is just pretending.*
- *Many of us started the module believing that the responsibility for addressing climate change belongs to the government and to business. Now I realise the responsibility is everyone's – but I still want to be able to buy a fast car and have nice things.*
- *I am much more confident in presenting my ideas to other people now.*
- *We learnt so much from doing the presentations, more lecturers should make students do things like this.*

Strengths and weaknesses

The majority of students actively engage with the exercise and, ultimately, enjoy it and find it a valuable learning experience. Conscientious students excel in the discussion-presentations, while students who are a little more 'relaxed' in their studies also demonstrate an appropriate level of cognisance of greener marketing. Students also develop and enhance a range of academic and practical skills, for example, their ICT talents – all of which have high currency value in their future careers. Students (eventually) welcome the opportunity to explore and discuss what they really think.

Nevertheless timing can be an issue for modules running later in the academic year. Dissertation submission can play havoc with the intentions of even the most committed students and poor attendance can be an issue. Inequitable contribution from group members can also cause tensions, and these need to be carefully managed by the module team. Tutors need to project manage this exercise, since if students are ill-prepared, the value of the learning experience has to be questioned. This can place additional workloads on tutors.

Programmes

Greener Marketing is 15 CATS option module at Level 3.

The module originates from the Marketing Management programme in the Gloucestershire Business School. It is available to all undergraduate students providing they have studied one of the prerequisite modules at Level 1. These are *Introduction to Marketing* or *Marketing and Branding Fundamentals*.

Key words:

Green Marketing; active learning; communication skills, personal reflection.

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