

Chapter 18. Sustainable Consumption and Sustainability Marketing

18.1. COURSE SUMMARY

Table 18–1

Audience and level of studies	Students (bachelor)	
Group size	≤ 25	
Course duration	18 weeks	
Credits	3 ECTS	
Workload	Presence: 36h Self-study: 54h	Total: 90h
Contents/primary topics	• Sustainable consumption • Sustainability marketing strategy • Promotion of innovative models of sustainable consumption	
Main course objectives	• Increasing awareness about the need to promote sustainable development principles • Mastering the skills of creating marketing programmes targeted at introducing sustainable consumption models	
Main teaching approaches	• Experiential learning • Collaborative learning	
Main teaching methods	• Sustainability-related research project • Lectures • Debate	
Learning environment	Classroom + online activities (blended learning)	
Link to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns	

Table 18–2

Impact assessment	(None) Low/ Medium/ High	Explanation
1. Degree of student participation / activeness	High	Students do project work, define their information needs and fill in the information gaps by talking with experts and potential consumers.
2. Degree of student collaboration / group work	High	Projects are performed as a team.
3. Degree of student emotional involvement	High	The topics of the course concern students' everyday life as consumers and society members.
4. Degree of inter-/transdisciplinarity	Medium	Knowledge of several related disciplines is applied such as Research Methodology, Consumer Behaviour, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
5. Degree of student (self-) reflection	Medium	Students reflect on their practices and routines as consumers.
6. Degree of experience of real-life situations	High	The course stipulates extensive communication with practitioners and conducting full-scale market research.
7. Degree of nature-related experiences	None	
8. Degree of stakeholder integration	Medium	Student projects can be initiated by local companies, local authorities or the student teams themselves. The degree of stakeholder integration may be increased in case the project results are presented in sustainability-related contests and conferences.
9. Degree of integration between theory and practice	High	Students carry out several marketing activities such as making competitor and customer analysis, organising a customer survey, and developing a promotion programme.

18.2. COURSE INTRODUCTION

The course “Sustainability Marketing” was introduced in 2018. From the research perspective, sustainability marketing is a rapidly developing field: starting from 2001, 10–30 articles with both these key words in their title have been added to the Scopus database annually. Even more often, particular issues are addressed in the research such as application of specific marketing instruments, for example, labelling or communication policy to promote sustainable behaviour (i.e. Koszewska 2021; Walsh & Dodds, 2022).

Sustainable Marketing as an academic discipline has been largely influenced by the textbook written by Belz and Peattie (2009) and supported by video lectures (Belz & Peattie, 2013). However, recently a wide range of new

textbooks have appeared (e.g. Yuldasheva et al., 2017; Carvill et al., 2021, Sharma et al., 2021). The textbook by McKenzie-Mohr (2021) focuses on targeting unsustainable behaviours, identifying the barriers to change and communicating effective messages. The discipline still suffers from an ambiguity in terminology: relevant texts can be found also under the titles “Green Marketing” (e.g. Ottman, 2011) or “Social Marketing”.

The idea of the course “Sustainability Marketing” is to show several driving forces for sustainability changes:

- Governments promoting SDGs in a top-to-bottom approach
- Consumers striving for higher quality of life and a sustainable environment
- Companies aiming at resource savings and achieving a high reputation among diverse stakeholders

The focus of this course is on changing consumer behaviour towards more sustainable choices, which has become a mighty force reshaping the business environment and the dominating narrative emanating from companies. Vice versa, without the customers who appreciate the value of contributing towards sustainability, competition will hardly be profiled by the dimensions of ethics and environmental protection.

However, the intersections of marketing and sustainability issues are still considered to be controversial: can marketing based on the idea of limitless needs and continuous consumption actually be sustainable (Kemper & Ballantine, 2019)? This controversy brings up many important issues that can be debated in class: Where is the threshold between sustainability and greenwashing? What aspects should be considered when talking about sustainable consumer behaviour: is it just turning off the lights, avoiding plastic bags and showing preference for organic products, or is it a comprehensive change in customer behaviour models accompanied by the corresponding change in companies’ business models? Is the way to sustainable consumer behaviour by pursuing healthy lifestyles? Are there some aspects of sustainability that are not given enough attention as opposed to others that are promoted intensively? These issues are also put forward in current research (e.g. Konnikova et al., 2019; Braga et al., 2019; Quoquab et al., 2021; Matharu et al., 2021).

The main activities of this course are organised in the form of group project work. Student teams suggest their own “greenfield” sustainability projects or help specific companies to become more sustainable. First, they do the research work to answer the questions: What is the current status of consumer behaviour in the analysed market? Are consumers ready for a change towards sustainability? What are the obstacles to this change? Then student teams develop marketing programmes to make the desired change in consumer behaviour possible.

18.3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the course is twofold: increasing awareness about the background and imperative need to promote sustainable development programmes as well as mastering the skills of creating marketing programmes targeted at introducing sustainable consumption models. Both objectives should be viewed as country-specific because both the awareness level and the challenges of unsustainability may vary.

The Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) -related competence framework by Makrakis et al. (2013) will be used for the operationalisation of learning outcomes. This framework is based on the integrated vision for education proposed by UNESCO (1996). The four initial pillars “learning to know”, “learning to do”, “learning to be” and “learning to live together” were later extended by one further pillar “learning to transform oneself and society”. Within these pillars, the clusters of sustainability-related competencies were defined. “Learning to know” competencies include experiencing, constructing and transforming knowledge for making sustainability a mode of life and being; “learning to do” comprises merging knowledge with action for building a sustainable future. “Learning to be” are practices that lead to human self-actualisation, self-regulation and cultivating a sense of being versus having. Competencies within “learning to live together” lead to a peaceful and non-discriminatory society and human co-existence with the natural world. Finally, “learning to transform oneself and society” stipulates transforming unsustainable values and behaviours towards sustainability.

Table 18–3

Learning objective dimension (UNESCO, 2017)	Operationalisation	Competency referred to (Makrakis et al., 2013)
Cognitive	Understand how individual lifestyle choices influence social, economic and environmental development.	Learning to know
	Know approaches and methods of marketing research aimed at defining drivers and barriers for sustainable consumption.	Learning to do
	Understand trade-offs related to achieving sustainable consumption and production.	Learning to do
	Know strategies and models for sustainability marketing.	Learning to do

Learning objective dimension (UN-ESCO, 2017)	Operationalisation	Competency referred to (Makrakis et al., 2013)
Socio-emotional	Feel responsibility for the environmental and social impacts of own individual consumer behaviour.	Learning to be
	Explain the construct of sustainable consumption and sustainable lifestyles for the marketing research participants.	Learning to transform oneself and society
	Understand the barriers and obstacles that avert different customer segments from sustainable practices.	Learning to transform oneself and society
	Exchange ideas within the team on the ways to overcome these barriers and obstacles.	Learning to live together
	Promote ideas and practices of sustainable consumption for the target customer segment.	Learning to transform oneself and society
Behavioural	Evaluate consumption patterns and lifestyles using existing sustainability criteria.	Learning to live together
	Design and conduct marketing research of sustainability values and sustainable / unsustainable consumer behaviour.	Learning to do
	Generate ideas to increase the level of sustainability of specific product and service markets.	Learning to be
	Cooperate in project work targeted at development and market introduction of sustainable solutions.	Learning to transform oneself and society

18.4. COURSE OUTLINE

Table 18–4

Structure		Session focus	Homework
Weeks 1–8: lectures	Lecture 1 (4 h): Sustainable development, historical record and contemporary realities	- Environmental concerns as the basis for the sustainability concept - Triple bottom line - Millennium / Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs, SDGs), Sustainability standards, indices and reports (ISO, Global Reporting Initiative, Corporate Sustainability Assessment)	Browsing United Nations website on MDGs and SDGs [5, 6] and sustainable development dashboards [4]
	Lecture 2 (4 h): Sustainable consumption	- Consumerism vs. sustainable consumption - Ecological footprint - Classifications of sustainable consumption and barriers to it - Cases and trends	Using online ecological footprint calculator [7]

Structure		Session focus	Homework
Weeks 1–8: lectures	Lecture 3 (4 h): Sustainability marketing vs. greenwashing	- Seven sins of greenwashing - Sustainability marketing: definitions and principles - Cognitive marketing - Customer involvement	Browsing websites of ecolabels (i.e. [2]) and finding out rules how to differentiate them from greenwashing
	Lecture 4 (4 h): Sustainability marketing strategy and policies	- Segmentation – Targeting – Positioning - Timing of market entry - Sustainable value proposition, sustainable communications and sustainable pricing	Selecting the best ads of sustainable brands
Weeks 5–12: guest lectures and workshops	Guest lectures (2–4 h): Ongoing projects of promoting sustainable solutions	Real practices of for-profit and/or non-profit organisations introducing sustainable solutions and overcoming barriers in customer behaviour	Preparing questions for guest speakers
	Workshops: (2–4 h): On-demand classes on the required competences	Supporting student projects by providing necessary competencies, i.e., questionnaire design, quantitative research methods, project management, environmental studies	Discovering the deficits in the student team's competence base
Weeks 7–18: own projects	Kick-off meeting (2 h)	Solving organisational issues: team formation, introduction into the project work	
	Consultation 1 (20 min per team)	Specifying and approving students' project ideas	Coming up with the idea of a change in business practices and customer behaviour in a specific market leading to higher sustainability
	Consultation 2 (20 min per team)	Approving market research design	Elaborating methodology of consumer behaviour research in the chosen market
	Consultation 3 (20 min per team)	Refining sustainable value proposition on the basis of research results	Conducting market research of current consumer behaviour, drivers and obstacles to sustainable consumption. Coming up with sustainable value propositions
	Consultation 4 (20 min per team)	Discussing marketing programme to introduce sustainable value proposition	Developing communication and pricing decisions, testing available distribution channels
	Final presentation (4 h)	Team presentation of the project results and evaluation by the jury consisting of academic staff and practitioners	Creating presentation and hand-outs

18.5. TEACHING APPROACHES AND METHODS

Sustainable development is a hot topic: literally hundreds of academic articles, case studies, TV programmes, business reviews appear regularly. Most of them also have implications for sustainability marketing. It means that the role of teachers shifts from informing students towards structuring the abundant information, showing emerging trends and stimulating students' interest towards independent learning and participation.

Problems of unsustainability have a profound social significance and affect everybody. That is why teaching and learning sustainability marketing can be done in an emotional way leading to high involvement. However, it is important to separate facts from opinions in the debates and look for deeper cause-and-effect relationships rather than rely upon superficial a priori reasoning and widespread stereotypes.

The knowledge about sustainable development as well as the individual and organisational readiness to contribute to it might vary from country to country. It can be hypothesised that this level of knowledge depends on numerous factors: among others, if a country is a post-industrial society or just on its way to industrialisation, deficit of certain resources, the level of public welfare, acute social problems, governmental policies, and media attention. It should be considered in the study programme from two points of view. On the one hand, it is important to develop the students' perceptions based on their experience and background, taking into account specific barriers to sustainability that exist in their country. It might be challenging in case of an international audience, which educators encounter more and more often in bachelor programmes with a major in management. On the other hand, this situation provides numerous interesting cases for international marketing of sustainable products, where physical distance is multiplied by the cultural problems caused by the different levels of understanding of sustainability issues. It is important to suggest that students research international aspects in their own study projects.

Several *lectures* are interspersed with a *debate* on a topical issue, which varies depending on what is discussed in public and social media. To provide students with some reference points for such debates, several videos are suggested to be viewed before every lecture. The examples of possible debate topics are listed in the subchapter "Exercises". The aim of these debates is to inspire students' search for project topics and to show obstacles to sustainability caused by the lack of awareness and usual consumer habits. Several studies show that debate-based teaching is effective in engaging students in course content, stimulating critical thinking, helping students to appreciate the complexities involved in practice (Doody & Condon, 2012) and promoting the

ability to take ethical decisions (Kim & Park, 2019). These advantages are relevant for covering ethical issues in sustainability-related courses.

It is recommended to invite one or two practitioners to give *guest lectures* and talk about the projects they are currently working on. Examples of companies that might be especially valuable for the course “Sustainability Marketing”:

- A company organising separate collection of waste
- Food producer entering the market with a green brand
- A chain of coffee shops introducing the service philosophy of new sincerity
- Donation-based club of healthy lifestyle

Students are supposed to not only listen to their presentations but also to participate actively by asking questions and reflecting on their own consumer behaviour in the analysed market. The focus is again on promoting interesting actual projects to the students and showing the real-life challenges of changing customer behaviour towards sustainability.

These study activities prepare students for the main part of the learning process in this course – the *sustainability-related research project*. In the framework of this research project, action-orientated *experiential learning approach* (Kolb, 1984) is realised. It creates links to real-life practices and encourages creation. Experiential learning increases the students’ involvement in synthesising information in an active immersive environment (Feinstein, 2002). To reach the learning objectives, it is important to follow the complete Kolb’s (1984) “Experiential Learning Cycle” and not omitting the stages of reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation.

At present, the project method is considered to be an effective instrument in higher education in various fields, flexible in reflecting the changing needs of the labour market. It influences positively cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning outcomes (Guo et al., 2020). This approach showed particular effectiveness in the context of sustainability-related studies (Manolis & Manoli, 2021). Project-based learning contributes to building not only professional hard skills but also universal soft skills such as self-study ability, teamwork, interpersonal communications, critical and creative thinking, and problem-solving skills. Project results can have an immediate impact on the development of specific companies and the regional economy (Trischenko, 2020).

The research project consists of three main parts:

1. Generating ideas on sustainability-related changes in consumer markets and formulating sustainable value proposition

2. Studying current consumer behaviour in this market as well as drivers and obstacles for the change towards sustainability
3. Developing a marketing programme to promote a sustainable value proposition

Study projects usually bear an interdisciplinary character. They form a holistic approach to the managerial decision-making. At the same time, they help students discover and fill in the gaps in their knowledge base. After the project start, the teacher organises one or two *workshops* covering these deficits. Most often, these workshops cover topics connected with conducting marketing research of customer behaviour: questionnaire design and quantitative methods of data analysis relevant for market segmentation. However, sometimes students' projects require knowledge about the markets of venture capital or consultations on the environmental impact of particular industries.

The organisation of such workshops facilitates student-centred learning. When the students receive each sub-task for the next consultation, the teacher discusses their previous knowledge about different aspects of market functioning and marketing activities. The students should try to select the most challenging tasks and justify the need to attract external help in the form of a workshop. Some workshops might be arranged by the teacher him/herself, but an external expert might bring extra drive and new viewpoints to the course. It is important that the students themselves feel the need to gain further knowledge and prepare questions for the expert beforehand.

We suggest that students work on their projects not individually but in teams because the task requires the combination of different competencies and perspectives. A competitive spirit is supported throughout the project, so that the students can benchmark their progress against other teams. Teamwork facilitates *collaborative learning* – the pedagogical approach stimulating knowledge co-creation between students (Doolan, 2013). Students perceive that each team member is responsible for the team's learning. This interdependency encourages them to actively engage in learning themselves (Biggs, 2003) and motivate their teammates.

The final presentation is made in front of a jury consisting of one or two teachers and one or two business / NGO representatives. The jury gives feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of each presentation and chooses the best presentation. Several categories can be awarded to student teams: the most creative solution, the best market insights, the solution best prepared for the realisation phase.

18.6. EXERCISES

Debates

Debates are organised as a group exercise in the class during lectures. As home preparation, several topical videos can be suggested for viewing. The group size can be five to seven students. Students can choose which debates they would prefer to take part in.

The debate can be organised in a classic way: arguments, questions to the opposite team and final speech with counterarguments. The duration might vary from 30 to 45 minutes.

Examples of possible debate topics:

- Fast fashion in high-income societies: will it end in the near future?
- Sustainable city mobility: the battle between car owners, pedestrians, and cyclists / scooter riders.
- Body positivity: advantages for self-consciousness or drawbacks for health?
- Should mankind become vegetarian?
- What is the best way towards sustainable consumption: healthy lifestyle, saving the family money or saving the world?
- Vaccination against COVID-19 in different countries: what influences the vaccination levels – availability of vaccines or public opinion?
- Who should deal with garbage in lakes, on shores, and in forests – public authorities or the local community?
- Who should deal with a lake's waterlogging near a village – public authorities or the local community?

The goal of such debates is not only to increase involvement, or to transfer passive listeners into active participants but also to show the variety of opinions and solutions in different sustainability-related areas. The choice of debate topics depends on the territory-specific problems and public stereotypes. The debates promote the choice of challenging and varying topics of student projects, which otherwise might mostly revolve around few popular themes like sorting waste and reducing the amount of plastic.

Sustainability-related research project

The work is carried out in student teams of three to five students. The normal duration of the project is about two months. Such duration stimulates students to focus and start working on the project without delays. The project work is facilitated by regular consultations with the teacher. The consultations are organised individually for each team. The aim of the consultations is to ensure smooth and productive workflow, to correct methodological mistakes and to

answer students' questions. The consultations are organized according to a waterfall project methodology. The content of the task for each consultation is presented below.

First consultation: Situation with the product

- Choose a market / life situation and generate an idea of sustainable value proposition in this market / situation.
- Identify market landscape and structure.
- Analyse strengths and weaknesses of competitive offers.
- Answer the questions: How the customer needs are satisfied at present? What are financial and non-financial expenditures? What are customer pains? In what respect is the present situation unsustainable?
- Conduct international benchmarking and find best practices.

Second consultation: Market research design

- Formulate hypotheses on the current customer behaviour, willingness to change it, motivation and obstacles for sustainability changes, differences in attitudes and behaviour between different demographic segments.
- Choose quantitative or qualitative research design.
- Plan the market research: face-to-face or online survey, number of respondents, content of the questionnaire.

Third consultation: Situation in the market

- Student teams should take the following steps:
- Conduct the planned market research and approve or reject hypothesis.
- Choose reasonable segments to target and describe customer portraits in each segment.
- Estimate market potential and its dynamics.
- Revisit the sustainable value proposition based on the customer opinions.

Fourth consultation: Promotion programme

- Outline the business model.
- Check the project for greenwashing accusations.
- Define the pricing policy for the sustainable solution.
- Check the available distribution channels.
- Suggest the communication campaign

The project ends with a presentation of its results in front of a jury. However, the possibility of disseminating the results of successful projects should be considered. One way to do it is to motivate students to apply for sustainability-related competitions and contests on the university and regional levels.

The projects might be structured according to the contest rules from the very beginning.

18.7. ASSESSMENT

Table 18–5

Evaluation	Criteria	Percentage (%)
Debates & consultations	• Timeliness and participation in debates (participation in debates is evaluated on the basis of students' engagement and following the rules of debating, without assessing the correctness of opinions). • Completeness of tasks prepared for each consultation.	30 %
Project presentation & handout	• Potential impact and innovative aspects of the proposed project. • Skilful application of market research instruments. • Good understanding of consumer behaviour and market insights. • Realistic promotion programme. • Appealing visual presentation and logical organization of oral presentation.	40 %
Final test	• Main concepts and models of sustainability marketing (questions with short answers, duration 45 minutes).	30 %

18.8. PREREQUISITES

Required prior knowledge from students:

- Basics of marketing
- Basics of business management
- Quantitative / qualitative research methods

Required instructors and their core competencies:

- Lecturer (competencies: marketing, project management)
- Guest speakers (competencies: real-life expertise in sustainability projects)
- Jury members (competencies: real-life business expertise)

18.9. RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Topic 1:

- United Nations (2015). *Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
- Sachs, J., Lafortune, G., Kroll, C., Fuller, G. & Woelm, F. (2022). *From Crisis to Sustainable Development: the SDGs as Roadmap to 2030 and Beyond*. Sustainable Development Report 2022. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- United Nations (2022). *The 17 Goals*. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. <https://sdgs.un.org/>

Topics 2–4:

- World Wildlife Foundation (n.d.). *How Big Is Your Environmental Footprint? WWF Footprint Calculator*. WWF. <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/#/>
- Our Changing Climate (n.d.) *Home* [Youtube channel]. Retrieved September 13, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/c/OurChangingClimate/featured>
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- Global Ecolabelling Network (n.d.). *Linking a world of environmentally preferable products and services*. <https://globalecolabelling.net/>

18.10. GENERAL TIPS FOR TEACHERS

We recommend supporting pluralism of opinions in this course because it helps understand different viewpoints expressed by the customers. In marketing, it is dangerous to transpose one's own worldview onto the whole market.

It is also very important to lay the foundation for the further development of students' actions. In the feedback after the course (n=113), 90.3 % of students reported an increased awareness about the modern social and ecological challenges, 77.0 % agreed that the course helped them to develop their research skills. 72.6 % of respondents shared that as a result of the course their behaviour became more responsible, healthy and/or environmentally friendly. 69.0 % reported about an increased willingness to deal with the issues of corporate social responsibility, sustainable marketing and sustainable development in their future career. Though the overall feedback is satisfactory, it is seen that the scores on the cognitive learning outcomes are higher than on the behavioural. Thus, the students should be motivated to disseminate results of their project work even after the course is over.

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