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Economic Aspects of the Essence of Sustainable Marketing

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ABSTRACT: Sustainable marketing is a strategic approach that combines the economic objectives of businesses with responsibility towards society and the environment. It promotes long-term value creation through ethical business practices, efficient resource management, and the development of trust between companies and consumers. In the context of the modern economy, sustainable marketing has become an essential factor for competitiveness, innovation, and sustainable development. By integrating ecological and social considerations into marketing strategies, organizations can improve their public image, strengthen customer loyalty, and contribute positively to society and the environment.

KEYWORDS: sustainable marketing, sustainable development, green economy, corporate social responsibility, environmental practices, consumer trust, economic sustainability.

At its core, sustainable marketing benefits from the growing environmental awareness of consumers. However, many marketing strategies, often disguised as greenwashing, prioritize growth over sufficiency goals (Jones, P., Clarke-Hill, C., Comfort, D., & Hillier, D., 2007). Sustainable marketing is closely linked to pro-environmental behaviour, which is shaped by both internal factors (such as attitudes, intentions, and values) and external factors (such as pricing and infrastructure) (Islam, Q., & Ali Khan, S.M.F., 2024).

The aim of this article is to present the main economic aspects of the essence of sustainable marketing.

In general, most paradigms related to climate change management employ mechanisms that can be classified as economic in nature. This should not come as a surprise to contemporary society, especially considering that a number of researchers define modern individuals as homo economicus, that is, as people who act as rationally as possible in pursuit of improved material well-being (Rizova, T., 2024).

Early approaches experimented with marketing practices oriented towards sufficiency, rethinking business models and promoting transformative initiatives.

The application of sustainability is increasingly recognized as a viable marketing strategy capable of influencing consumer behaviour. By adopting sustainable practices, companies can position themselves positively in the minds of consumers, often as “heroes” contributing to environmental protection. In this sense, the concept of sustainability becomes highly market-oriented, driven largely by marketing efforts that shape or respond to consumer perceptions and demands.

Over the past decade, the concept of sustainable development has increasingly appeared in academic literature, corporate management programmes, as well as in public governance policies. As a result of this process, a considerable diversity of definitions of sustainable development has emerged (Rizova, T., 2025).

This type of marketing recognizes the fundamental role of customers as decision-makers in the transition towards sustainability through measures such as reducing carbon emissions, recycling increasing amounts of waste, supporting fair trade initiatives, and adopting healthier lifestyles.

Attractive packaging that meets sustainability requirements resonates with consumers’ perceptions of a company and its brand. Therefore, sustainability must be effectively communicated to consumers, as they expect companies to be sensitive to environmental issues and to assume social responsibility.

Consumers are increasingly purchasing products from companies that demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability, regardless of price. Long-term customer satisfaction is of great importance, particularly because the perspective is shifting from selling products to selling benefits. It is the continuous delivery of benefits, such as mobility or cleanliness, that maintains meaningful communication with consumers.

The actual opinions of consumers become particularly important during the post-purchase phase. Complaints, suggestions for improvement, or expressions of satisfaction create reference points for further optimization, profiling, and relationship management.

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Objectively speaking, sustainable marketing is still relatively new and has not yet been widely implemented. Furthermore, there are still no universally accepted Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that can be used to measure sustainability in this field. The use of KPIs is important because they can reveal numerous opportunities for companies.

Companies that employ sustainable marketing often observe higher conversion rates, which essentially reflect the relationship between website visitors and completed purchases or interactions. Typically, this is measured over a period of 24 hours or, at most, one week from the first contact.

In general, the focus is on the long-term Return on Investment (ROI) generated by a consumer who values the brand and its products, rather than on the short-term ROI resulting from a quick sale. The ROI indicator itself describes how much revenue has been generated relative to the budget used for a specific activity.

For companies, the greatest challenge in calculating ROI lies in the accurate allocation of investment costs and profits. If this allocation is inaccurate or incorrect, there is a risk of drawing misleading conclusions regarding the profitability of a campaign or a digital marketing channel.

Another important KPI is Cost per Acquisition (CPA). This includes all expenses incurred in relation to customer interactions, as well as the promotion and ongoing support of a mobile offering, which are incorporated into acquisition costs. These expenses include advertising expenditures for marketing campaigns, app store promotion, other communication channels, and social media support. They can be calculated separately based on the conversion rate of each medium.

Cost per Lead (CPL) is an advertising success indicator designed to place different advertising campaigns on a comparable basis. It evaluates the success of marketing campaigns not according to achieved sales, but according to the number of interested parties who seek more detailed information about a product.

Customer Lifetime Value (CLV) represents the average value that a customer generates for a company throughout their entire "customer lifecycle" and is expected to continue generating in the future.

If we examine the significance of sustainable marketing through an economic lens, the indicators can be assessed at three levels (see Figure 1). At the first level are formal economic indicators used to determine the company's final financial results. These include indicators related to profit, sales, and financial security, such as the liquidity ratio.

At the second level, activity-related indicators are relevant and can be used to assess specific core tasks performed by the company. Classical core tasks include customer acquisition, customer loyalty measures, innovation in services, and customer support. The way in which these core tasks are managed reflects part of the company's sustainable marketing strategy. If these tasks are performed successfully, they influence financial outcomes (e.g., increasing sales through new customers).

The third level encompasses customer and market indicators for sustainability marketing. These indicators reflect the potential that a company possesses within the market or among its customers. One example is Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). This value reflects the contribution margin that a customer will generate throughout their lifetime. Market indicators primarily relate to the development or size of a market segment.

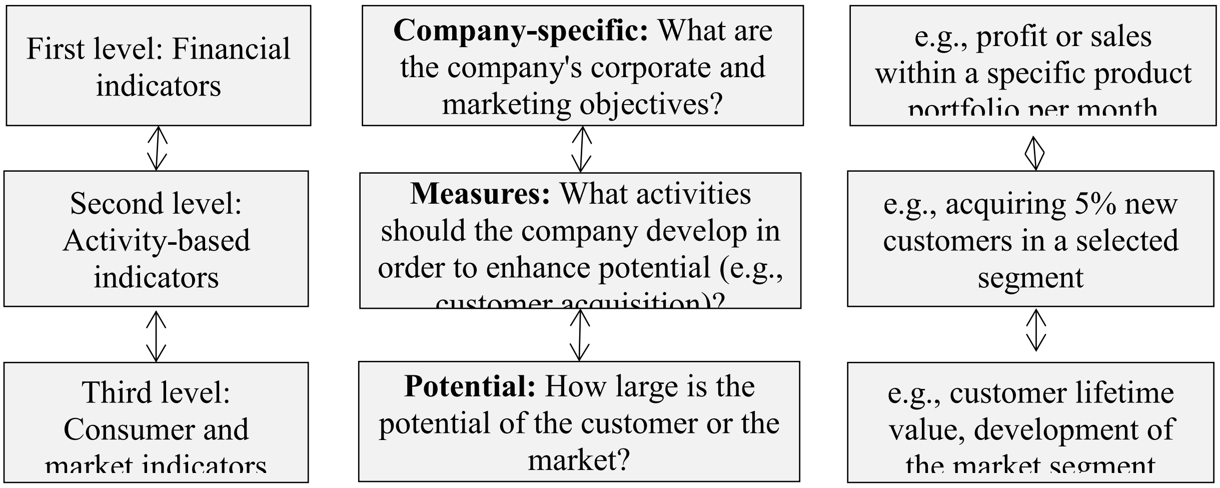

Figure 1. Key Performance Indicators Oriented Towards Sustainable Marketing

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First Level: Financial Indicators
Company-specific: What are the company's corporate and marketing objectives?
e.g., profit or sales within a specific product portfolio per month
Second Level: Activity-Based Indicators
Measures: What activities does the company develop in order to build potential (e.g., customer acquisition)?
e.g., acquiring 5% new customers in a selected segment
Third Level: Customer and Market Indicators
Potential: How large is the potential of customers or the market?
e.g., customer lifetime value, development of the market segment
(United Kingdom)

An example of an environmental KPI is the percentage of recycled materials. This is measured through the use of recycled packaging. Another KPI is waste reduction, which is measured by the percentage of waste generated per thousand product units (Hristov, I. & Chirico, A., 2019).

KPIs used from a social perspective include Net Promoter Score (NPS), engagement rate, and repeat customers. NPS is a key indicator that indirectly quantifies customer satisfaction and directly measures the willingness to recommend a product or service to others. The competitive advantage of NPS lies in its simplicity, while its disadvantage is that it does not provide any well-founded qualitative explanation as to why someone is dissatisfied or satisfied with a product, service, or company. Nevertheless, NPS is undoubtedly useful for conducting a quick and straightforward assessment of customer satisfaction.

The difference between the relative proportions of promoters and detractors yields the Net Promoter Score, which is expressed as a percentage. This value can then be used to compare different products or services with one another.

Another key performance indicator (KPI) that forms part of the social dimension is the engagement rate. It is used to determine the percentage of interactions per advertising impression. This applies to advertisements with which users can interact through likes, comments, or shares, for example.

Repeat purchases, or so-called returning users, are also essential. This concept represents the key indicator of returning visitors. Social KPIs also include the integration rate, stakeholder satisfaction rate, employee satisfaction rate, and customer satisfaction rate. All of these, except customer satisfaction, can be measured through questionnaires. Customer satisfaction can be measured through cost analysis (Hristov, I. & Chirico, A., 2019).

The source of some KPIs (primarily those derived from websites) is Google Analytics, although CRM systems and questionnaires can also serve as valuable sources (United Nations, 2021). KPIs have both advantages and disadvantages, and from a sustainability perspective it is important to adopt a long-term view and incorporate all three dimensions—social, environmental, and economic. The use of qualitative indicators, such as Cost per Lead (CPL) or Cost per Acquisition (CPA), increases Customer Lifetime Value (CLV). This helps organizations listen to customers and focus on building long-term relationships. Such KPIs are considered more valuable than indicators such as reach or cost per thousand impressions (CPM) (Roberts, M., 2018).

In the application of sustainable marketing, it is important to use more customer-oriented KPIs and fewer purely financial indicators. Many companies have already recognized and implemented this approach. Customer-oriented KPIs can be used to measure how effectively a company pursues its customer-focused objectives. Examples of such KPIs include brand awareness, website engagement, and click-through rate (CTR).

CTR represents the number of clicks generated per impression of a banner advertisement. Strategic KPIs are particularly suitable for monitoring and tracking long-term objectives, which is of great importance for sustainability. In general, it can be stated that the measurement and evaluation of potential measures in the field of sustainability management are essential. Achieved success can only be assessed through the evaluation of the relevant measures.

In summary, both the sustainability of individual products, including their components, and the sustainable orientation of the entire value creation process are important for the measurement and evaluation of sustainability. When implementing sustainable marketing, a company must be fully aware of its vision and mission with regard to the three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic, and social). Strategic orientation is generally based on the sustainability standards of international companies and the goals and achievements derived from them.

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