# FRAMEWORK FOR RESPONSIBLE (SUSTAINABLE) MARKETING

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## Abstract

Corporates and consumers are aware of the environmental consequences of consumption. However, forty per cent of environmental degradation is known to have been caused by human consumption behaviour while marketing has been blamed for promoting materialism (irresponsible consumption). Literature suggests that adopting responsible marketing strategies would not only promote responsible consumption (Abutaleb & El-Bassiouny, 2020) but also build long-term competitive advantage (Agrawal, Kumar, & Rahman, 2017) and help companies financially (Eccles, Ioannou, & Serafeim, 2011). Building responsible marketing strategies would, however, require changes at both, the organisational and the marketing level (Rudwaska, 2019). This paper, using a theory-building methodology, proposes a framework that identifies the organisational values (necessary condition) and the responsible marketer's role (sufficient condition) for responsible marketing that ensures responsible consumer behaviour for all the different stages of the marketing planning process. Themes from papers presented in an International Conference on Responsible Marketing were analysed to suggest how corporates could develop responsible marketing strategies and promote responsible consumption. Applicability, limitations, and areas for future research are identified.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Environmental Issues, Ethics

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The extent of environmental degradation to the tune of about forty percent is known to have been caused by human consumption behaviour (Jarin, 2014), yet marketing has, so far, not been very successful in promoting responsible consumption (White, Hardisty, & Habib, 2019). Environmental initiatives by companies were largely seen to be responding to regulations (Peattie & Crane, 2005). Jones, Clarke-Hill, Comfort, and Hillier (2008), on the other hand, state that marketing is perceived to be "manipulative, devious, unethical and inherently distasteful" and one that promotes materialism. Trudel (2019) went a step ahead to state that marketing is an antithesis to sustainability.

While Schaefer (2005) claimed that companies do have difficulty in adopting sustainable practices,

Abutaleb and El-Bassiouny (2020) stated that companies that actually adopted sustainable marketing strategies could, in effect, influence consumers to purchase sustainable products (White et al, 2019). Eccles et al. (2011) found that companies high on sustainability exhibit better financial performance. Hunt (2017) therefore states the imperative need for marketing to promote sustainable development. Ferdous (2010) suggests that marketing could be integrated with sustainability using a macro marketing framework. It is in this context that this paper develops a comprehensive framework for responsible marketing that ensures responsible consumption. The framework would integrate organisational issues, consumption, and the operating environment as suggested by Nkamnebe (2011). In this paper, sustainable marketing and responsible marketing are considered to be synonyms.

The rest of the paper is as follows. Section 2 presents the literature review which identifies the need for adopting responsible marketing. This is followed by Section 3 that defines the research objective. Subsequently, the methodology for building the framework is described in Section 4. The themes for developing the framework are presented in the Section 5. Section 6 discusses the applicability of the proposed framework.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers are conscious of environmental issues (Gleim, Smith, Andrews, & Cronin, 2013; Peattie & Crane, 2005) and they express intent of buying environmentally friendly products, too (Nielsen, 2015), but this does not necessarily translate into purchases as these products compromise on immediate benefits for future intangible benefits (Sodhi, 2011) and societal benefits (Kasulis, Huettner, & Dikeman, 1981; Osterhus, 1997). Jones et al. (2008) found that shopping for sustainable products is "hard work". Additionally, factors such as price (Peattie & Crane, 2005), brand and availability (Jones et al., 2008) compound against responsible consumption. Overall, the current consumption behaviour is contrary to the objective of sustainability (Nkamnebe, 2011).

Marketing activities of the companies have also failed to increase responsible consumption. The absence of appropriate business models (Sodhi, 2011) makes marketing sustainability a challenge (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015). A survey of The Economist (as cited in Galpin et al., 2015) found that four per cent of managers considered being socially and environmentally responsible a "waste of time and money". Further, inappropriate marketing strategies for green products (Fodness, 2015) and overpriced "green" goods did not satisfy consumer needs, leading to consumer mistrust (Peattie & Crane, 2005). Therefore, in spite of the growing emphasis on sustainability (Tate, Dooley, & Ellram, 2011), many companies still struggle with implementing it successfully (Lieb & Lieb, 2010; Schneider, Wallenburg, & Fabel, 2014). Further, the current financial target-oriented business models neglect sustainability goals (Jones et al., 2008). As a consequence, the introduction of green products that spiked in the 1990s has subsided (Peattie & Crane, 2005).

Agrawal et al. (2017), Schulz and Flanigan (2016) state that sustainable practices would help build long term competitive advantage. Hermawati (2020) found that sustainable practices helped in building a competitive advantage in the tourism sector also. Therefore, the need to build a framework to promote responsible marketing exists.

## 3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Sustainability Development Goal No. 12, adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, focuses on sustainable consumption. Focusing on the need for increasing sustainable consumption, responsible (sustainable) marketing is defined as "creating, producing and delivering sustainable solutions with higher net sustainable value whilst continuously satisfying customers and other stakeholders" (Charter, Peattie, Ottman, & Polonsky, 2006).

Responsible (sustainable) marketing will require "marketers to consider consumer and societal welfare, and take responsibility for guiding consumers towards more sustainable behaviour" (Peattie & Crane, 2005). Kotler (2011) states that companies must balance their growth goals while pursuing sustainability. Sodhi (2011) states that sustainable marketing should attempt "reassessment of basic marketing principles and practices, over evolutionary extension of the same".

While, Nkamnebe (2011) states that sustainable marketing needs "ecological, social (equity and equality), and economical balance in time and space", Charter et al. (2006) maintains that creating such a value proposition for which customers are willing to pay would be a challenge. Becker (as cited in Jones et al., 2008) suggests that this should be addressed by "integrating the additional costs into the marketing mix" and addressing the concerns of the consumers. Otherwise, as Galpin et al., 2015, suggested, it would run the risk of "greenwashing". The objective of this paper is, therefore, to build a holistic framework to develop responsible marketing strategies that would result in responsible consumption.

## 4. METHODOLOGY: BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK

Based on the literature, a theory-building methodology aimed at developing a framework by way of which sustainable marketing becomes a part of corporate philosophy (Lim, 2016). Rudwaska (2019) suggests that sustainability should be an integral part of the company's mission and help guide the marketing mix. Varadarajan (2017) found that incorporating sustainability into marketing activities increases the company's marketing innovation capabilities.

The framework thus identified the organizational values (necessary condition) along with the responsible marketer's role (sufficient condition) in order to establish responsible marketing that would be applicable for all the five stages of the marketing planning process: 1) developing the marketing objective; 2) managing the marketing environment; 3) preparing the strategy; 4) building the team; 5) creating the systems.

## 5. FINDINGS

The theme of the papers and cases presented in the International Conference on Responsible Marketing and their significance in the framework are discussed below (please see Appendix).

The fact that present-day consumers who have endless needs and wants (17)[1] and are possessed by a feeling of inferiority about not having a certain range of products/services (33), is leading to aspirational consumption (23) and consumerism (33), both of which are socially destructive (8).

On the other hand, using ethical attributes only if they satisfy selfish reasons (14), switching to cheaper brands (16 and 14), a limited number of successful green products (16) and restricted access to them (26) are some of the constraints in the purchase of green products.

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[1] The number in the parenthesis indicates the conference paper number.

Responsible marketing strategies within the framework should help change this behaviour to responsible consumption. As stated, the themes are classified as per the organizational values (necessary condition), as also the responsible marketer's role (sufficient condition) in order to achieve responsible marketing for each of the five stages of the marketing planning process.

*1) Developing the marketing objective*

Driven by values (30) and altruistic motivation (14), an organization should integrate sustainability as a core value (34) by being sensitive to sustainable development (44), protecting the climate, conserving resources, reducing greenhouse gases and promoting the use of alternate fuels (11).

Marketers should not assume that it is the responsibility of only the government to take care of environmental issues (14). Companies should build a social image (2) by focusing on appropriate cause types (43) for its CSR (42). In addition, keeping social purpose greater than profit (29), the responsible marketer should develop long term goals (44) with informed environmental choices (14) thereby creating a socio-cognitive aspect of value (37).

Responsible marketing should ideally focus on environment conservation (5) by building an appropriate emotional brand appeal (8) and a socio-emotional linkage to the social identity of the brand (42) befitting its corporate image (43) and a consumer brand social linkage (42).

*2) Managing the marketing environment*

Companies should not be impeded by the macro factors of resistance (39) or the notion that an increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) is counter-effective on environmental protection (38). On the contrary, organizations should maintain technological superiority (30) by developing efficient technology (6) which minimizes loss of biodiversity (17) thereby leaving the world better than they found it (30).

As consumers cannot determine the final cause (27) and individual needs dominate over environment needs (26), responsible marketers should not be driven by the survival of the fittest principle (9) but should strive to maintain a sustainable eco-system (1) by using existing environmental resources to fulfill their needs (26).

Responsible marketing should empower the consumer to make healthy decisions (32) by prevailing over the media noise created by conventional products (30). This would require the catalytic influence of (19) pro-environmental groups (16) to overcome media, political and social pressure (20), digital divide (25), and the promotional activities of brands which are key drivers for irresponsible consumption (38 and 26).

*3) Preparing the strategy*

Organisations should ensure that business practices are just a means to the end (29) as a result of which environmental goals (11) become a moral obligation (8) and profit becomes a byproduct (9 and 29) even if it comes at an extra cost to the company (6) or is found to be conflicting with business goals (6). The work ethos should reflect the essence of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* ("the world is one family") (9).

With an ability to use environmental resources to fulfill needs (26), responsible marketers should align strategies in tune with the environment (1), even if it implies a short term slowdown in growth or shrinkage in the market by managing an appropriate product-service mix (28 and 39).

Responsible marketing which focuses on fulfilling social responsibility (33) should encourage green consumption by purchasing environment-friendly products (5) to ensure ethical consumerism (13) where sustenance and well-being (1) and health care (11) benefit the greater part of society (2).

*4) Building the team*

Organizations would do well by building an environment-friendly workplace (2 and 36), overcoming common orthodoxies and incorrect assumptions (24), and eliminating the uneven power that makes corporates greedy (35), organizational cultural barriers (39) and unsafe production (17).

Responsible marketers should focus more on the aspect of being responsible than on that of marketing (30) by promoting individual ownership of sustainable development (7), by encouraging collective effort (30), mutual dependence, and sharing (39).

Responsible marketing should target the use of appropriate data (30), encouraging co-creation (28), innovation (4) including radical innovative offerings by churning out creative combinations (27), recycling and redesigning (20 and 40), and in building interpersonal trust (43) with end consumers. Over and above this, marketing should avoid toxic packaging (17) and the use of plastic material (20).

*5) Creating the systems*

Organizations should ensure trustworthy business (30) which is not merely philanthropic (2) but employee-friendly (36) including the recognition/appreciation of systems and rewards (44) based on a sustainable balanced scorecard (6).

Responsible marketers should translate sentiment into dealings (41) by modifying assessment techniques (38) where CSR is an intrinsic part of appraisal (44) and marketing strategy encourages stakeholder and government participation (31).

Responsible marketing should ensure consumer believability (2) by avoiding false environment claims (5) and greenwashing (5 and 14) through labels that might intimidate (22) or improperly worded descriptor labels (10). Marketing should focus on a niche market (30) with proper eco-labeling (6) and by providing information on correct usage (45).

Finally, the success of responsible marketing depends on providing access to green products (18) and ensuring that "consumers come along" (30) as consumers may not be aware of long term environmental issues.

Figure 1 shows the resultant framework indicating the necessary condition (organisational values) and sufficient condition (responsible marketer's role) for responsible marketing for the different stages of the marketing planning process in order to ensure responsible consumer behaviour.
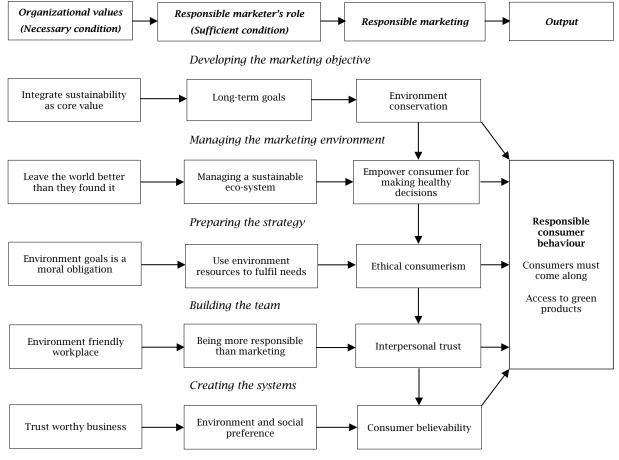
**Figure 1.** Framework for responsible (sustainable) marketing



*Source: Author.*

## 6. CONCLUSION

The existing literature demonstrates that responsible consumption is not a preferred option and marketing has not helped promote responsible consumption. Moreover, the use of tall environmental claims without any change in the "conventional product" has led to mistrust on the part of the consumer. It is in this context that the paper develops a framework for responsible marketing.

Literature has suggested a need for change at the organizational level as also the marketing level in order to accomplish/incorporate successful responsible marketing. For example, Peattie (1995) states that the philosophy of green marketing should be built into the entire organization. Galpin et al. (2015) also add that innovative sustainability solutions and long term competitive advantages can be developed if the top management builds a "culture of sustainability". Rok (2009) found that a firm's values determine the sustainability motivation of its employees.

Currently, the environment profit and loss, as well as the true value statements to evaluate corporate strategies and spending on sustainability, do not focus on responsible consumption. Using a theory-building methodology, a holistic framework to promote responsible (sustainable) marketing is developed.

The framework presents the organizational values (necessary condition) and the role of responsible marketers (sufficient condition) for responsible marketing for all five stages of the marketing planning process. The framework thus provides a holistic view to help companies build responsible marketing strategies.

The framework is not without limitations which provide areas to be considered for its applicability as well as for future research. Firstly, sustainability is a dynamic concept and hence the framework should be modified by the best understanding of the concept. Secondly, sustainability is context-specific and so the variables need to be adapted for different contexts. Finally, as Trudel (2019) mentioned, the issues could vary with reference to low impact and high impact products. Further research could focus on potential areas for a comprehensive and systematic introduction of responsible marketing.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 1.** Papers presented in the international conference on responsible marketing

| Paper No. | Authors | Title of conference paper |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | A. Balamurugan, Sanjay Patro | The demand and supply side representation of sustainability concept in marketing |
| 2. | Kaushik Mandal, Sujata Banerjee | Responsible marketing and its impact on performance: A longitudinal study |
| 3. | Nitesh Kuamr, Mayank Kumar, Raghu Ram Tata, | Challenges and opportunities for sustainable marketing |
| 4. | Narasimhan Rajkumar, Devang Moyal, | Does "sustainability" sell? An investigation of sustainability as a component of customer-based brand equity |
| 5. | R.V. Shabbir Husain, Sanjeev Varshney | Painting the world green, but not greenwashing |
| 6. | Suresh Bansal | Sustainable profitability: Link between sustainable practices and profitability |
| 7. | Uttam Kumar Datta | Marketing under socialism to save the earth and her humans |
| 8. | Anindo Bhattacharjee, Rimi Moitra, Sandeep Singh | Ethics and rationality of brand evaluations |
| 9. | Dinesh Kumar | Strengthening ethical principles of marketing through Bhagwat Gita |
| 10. | Etinder Pal Singh, Sanchita Sabharwal | Deceptive descriptor labels on food packaging |
| 11. | Jacob Chandy | Hoax Wagen – Das Case |
| 12. | Jai Inder Sharma, Sh. Akash Agarwal | Amalgamation of values and ethics -socially responsible marketing |
| 13. | Peter Matheis, Clare D'Souza, Michal Carrington | Shifting the intention-behavioural gap: The ethical consumption of 'self' transition to 'other' |
| 14. | Anne Renee Brouwer, Clare D'Souza | Greenwashing and its influences on consumer decision making – A supermarket perspective |
| 15. | James Di Martino, Marthin Nanere, Clare D'Souza, | An analysis of pro-environmental attitudes and labeling information on green purchasing decisions in Australia |
| 16. | Nirankush Dutt, Anil K. Bhat | Exploring consumers' willingness to pay premium for green products |
| 17. | Rajendrakh Hanagandi, Bhargav Revankar | Impact of eco-friendly strategies on consumer decision and satisfaction: An empirical study on selected companies |
| 18. | Ranjana Agarwal | Marketing of tribal products from Jamshedpur: Cause related marketing |
| 19. | Shivaji Banerjee, Shaunak Roy | Impact of ethical marketing practices on consumer purchase behaviour: A study of select consumer durables in India |
| 20. | Zartasha Khalid, Haris Javaid Marthin Nanere Mehrukh Javaid | Green purchase intention in developing markets: A pragmatic analysis in Pakistani market |
| 21. | Arvind Selvaraj | Acceptance and adoption of wearable technologies and its impact on self-care and public health: An exploratory study |
| 22. | Sanjeev Varshney, Bharti Varshney, Ashish Kumar Sharma | Impact of product packaging on buying behavior of bottom of the pyramid consumers: A case study of Jamshedpur |
| 23. | Shubha Johri, Reema Sharma, Ankita Garg, Bharat Jain | Study of the factors affecting buying and consumption behavior of rural consumers |
| 24. | A K Jaiswal, Suresh Malodia | Innovating for BOP markets |
| 25. | Anirban Chaudhuri, Jagdish Mitra | Saral way to bridge digital divide – Tech-based innovation for social inclusion |
| 26. | Swapnil | Sustainability will not face a real breakthrough in the long run. |
| 27. | Abhinav Chaturvedi, Sanjeev Varshney, Mukesh Chaturvedi | Responsible design thinking |
| 28. | Ankur Sarin, Sharad Sarin | Marketing in education: The responsible way |
| 29. | Chinmoy Bandyopadhyay, Subhasis Ray | Socially responsible marketing: Can social enterprises show the way? |
| 30. | Gautam Pingali | Drivers and challenges of responsible marketing: Entrepreneurial insights |
| 31. | Srividya Raghavan, Malini Reddy, V. Srinivas Chary | Greater Warangal municipal corporation: Delivering the sanitation promise |
| 32. | Sumit Mishra, Vinay Sharma, Rajat Agarwal | Revitalising traditional knowledge: A case of responsible marketing |
| 33. | Anupama Sharma, Aditi | Merging the pink and blue: Advertising segregation based on gender stereotypes |
| 34. | John J. Jacob, Clare D'Souza, T. Marjoribanks, S. Young | Institutional pressures on responsible supply chain procurement: An empirical study |
| 35. | Janakiraman Moorthy | Customer privacy in big data analytics and emergent digital technologies era |
| 36. | Madhuri Yeditha | We volunteer- impact of individual (employee) factors and organisational factors on voluntary environmental workplace behaviour |
| 37. | Rakesh K Singh, Gautam Srivastava | Revisiting the purpose of selling: Towards a model of responsible selling |
| 38. | Ritesh Ravi, Amit Gaurav | Financing for sustainable development |
| 39. | Sneh Bhardwaj | Sustainable manufacturing servitisation and product-service system (PSS) innovations in Asia |
| 40. | Vinod Varghese, Manjula Nagarajan | Green marketing imperatives across the service continuum |
| 41. | S. Gayathry | Customer relationship management model for banks |
| 42. | Suchita Jha | Perception of youth towards cause related marketing |
| 43. | Vinay Kanetkar, Kevin | Cause related marketing: An identification of relevant cause attributes |
| 44. | Anup Raj | Sustainability culture for strong corporate brand in Indian agribusiness |
| 45. | Shubhangi Salokhe | Responsible agricultural input marketing: A key to give proper return to the efforts of the Indian farmers |