



THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY: INFLUENCE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND PREFERENCES

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Abstract

The concept of sustainability and its promotion is increasingly prominent through marketing strategies that promote the importance of social and environmental awareness. Sustainable principles and socially responsible business are the focus of business practices and positive impacts on the community in which they operate. Marketing, on the other hand, in promoting the sustainability of products and services, changing behaviour, plays a key role in shaping the attitudes and preferences of consumers, thus influencing their behaviour and ultimately the choice of products and services. The goal of marketing campaigns is to make consumers aware of the impact of their purchases on society and the environment. Sustainable options in consumer choice encourage companies to innovate and improve products and services, creating new values for sustainable business and behaviour and creating a sustainable future. Education, information, awareness and emphasizing the advantages and benefits of environmentally friendly products and practices about the importance of sustainability should encourage positive changes and responsible behaviour. The paper presents the results of research on the impact of marketing campaigns and business practices on raising awareness of sustainability, the impact on consumer preferences and choices in meeting their needs, and factors that are key in choosing sustainable products and services.

Key words: *Sustainability, consumer behaviour, value, marketing strategies.*

Introduction

The concept of sustainability is an indispensable element of today's business practices. Marketing strategies are aimed at promoting environmental awareness, socially responsible business and responsible consumer behaviour. The concept itself seeks to establish a balance between economic, social and environmental aspects that will not have a long-term negative impact on society and the community. According to Osmanagić (2010), the goal of sustainable development should be based on economic

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efficiency, social progress and environmental responsibility [1]. The focus is on the use of renewable energy sources, efficient use of resources and reduction of waste. The goal of socially responsible business is to have a positive impact on society, that is, the community in which it operates, and not just profit. Sustainable development implies a comprehensive approach that connects three pillars of sustainability: social sustainability, economic sustainability and environmental sustainability [2]. Sustainable development is aimed at the balance between all three aspects and requires a holistic approach and integration in decision-making and the creation of sustainable policies and strategies in order to enable the realization of the well-being of today's and especially future generations. The most common definition of sustainable development is that it is development that responds to the needs of today, without reducing the ability of future generations to respond to their own needs [3]. In order to achieve the goals of sustainable development until 2030, which are defined by the Agenda, and to achieve greater engagement of EU member states, companies and civil society, sustainability reports were also introduced in order to be able to monitor progress and achieve the defined goals [4].

Marketing strategies play a key role in promoting sustainable practices and sustainable products, thereby strengthening the brand's market position. Different approaches include educating consumers about the importance of sustainable practices, using labels and certifications in product labelling, connecting with consumers through green branding, engaging consumers in social impact campaigns, and more. Sustainable marketing not only contributes to environmental protection, but also builds a stronger connection between brands and consumers, thus ensuring long-term stability and success. Marketing is a powerful tool for promoting sustainability and one of the key roles in shaping consumer behaviour towards ecological and socially responsible practices.

The aim of this paper was to investigate the impact of marketing campaigns and business practices on raising awareness of sustainability and their impact on consumer preferences and choices in meeting their needs.

Sustainable marketing campaigns - influence on consumer preferences

One of the key roles in developing awareness of environmental issues and sustainability is played by marketing, which through its sustainable marketing campaigns indicates the usefulness of changing behaviour and the possible choice of products. According to Sinčić Ćorić (2021), sustainable marketing assumes marketing practices that respect:

1. environmental responsibility (balance of business operations with the natural environment);
2. social responsibility (business that takes care of all stakeholders);
3. economic progress (based on the principles of sustainability)[5].



In order to achieve sustainable development, according to Raditya-Ležaić et al. (2018), it is necessary to change the way of thinking and acting in terms of quality education and learning at all levels and in all social contexts. Technological, political or regulatory solutions or financial instruments alone are not enough [6]. According to Buzov et al. (2020), in addition to changes at the local and global level in behaviour and way of life, there are, first of all, changes that necessarily precede them, namely those at the individual level [7]. According to UNESCO (2015), education for sustainable development refers to educational programs and experiences designed to enable the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values necessary to shape a sustainable future: environmental integrity, economic sustainability and a just world for current and future generations [8]. Carefully designed messages and strategies not only inform, but also inspire consumers to reconsider their habits and values, where emphasizing the ecological advantages of products and using emotional messages connects consumers with the issue of sustainability and motivates them to choose products that are more environmentally friendly. Campaigns emphasizing sustainability often influence consumers to rethink their habits and preferences for the products they buy. Such changes can be seen through the increased demand for ecological products, the reduction of consumption of single-use plastic products and generally more responsible behaviour. Consumers exposed to sustainable marketing messages become more sensitive to the prices of sustainable products and are willing to pay more for products that have a lower environmental impact. Marketing not only creates awareness, but also drives change in consumer practices. As awareness of sustainability increases, so do consumer habits, which can ultimately lead to significant changes in market trends and consumer behaviour. Sustainable marketing campaigns help consumers recognize the importance of environmental issues and become aware of their choices. Socially responsible business and the way of doing business in the direction of sustainable development also affects the behaviour of consumers and their involvement in changes. The results of the research on the example of dm-drogerie markt d.o.o. show that the socially responsible business of the company affects the sustainable development of the company [9]. Developing a brand identity that focuses on sustainability creates an emotional connection with consumers, and labels on products help consumers recognize and understand sustainable options. Educational content, stories with emotions, transparency of production processes, increasing awareness of environmental issues helps consumers to understand the impact of their decisions on the environment through responsible choices, changing trends and consumer habits. Consumers choose those products that match their values and expectations. In terms of sustainability, consumers shape their expectations towards transparency related to the method of production, materials used, but also business according to ethical principles, where social responsibility as well as available sustainable options are important to them. Marketing strategies include education and information through various communication channels to inform consumers about sustainability goals and progress, innovations in products that include, for example, recycled materials, connecting with the local community. According to Vukelić (2020), education for sustainable development is aimed at



developing competencies that empower individuals to reflect on their own behaviours, actions and reactions, taking into account current and future social, cultural, economic and environmental factors of influence from both a local and global perspective [10]. Consumer preferences regarding sustainability are shaping market trends and creating new opportunities. As consumers become increasingly aware of their environmental impact, brands that adapt to their expectations through transparency, innovation and social responsibility have the potential to not only satisfy their customers, but also build long-lasting relationships and trust. Labelling products with eco-labels is important for promoting sustainable production and consumption and reducing negative impacts and promoting a sustainable lifestyle [11]. Environmental awareness includes knowledge, emotions, willingness and ethics [12], and sustainable marketing includes all activities for the preservation of the natural environment and human well-being [13].

Research methodology

Research on the impact of marketing campaigns and business practices on raising awareness of sustainability and their impact on consumer preferences and choices was conducted through a survey questionnaire over a period of one month, in July 2024. The survey questionnaire was created based on the results of the literature review and previous research. It consisted of two parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, the questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents: gender, age, level of education, work status and monthly income. The second part of the questionnaire related to questions about marketing strategies and campaigns related to sustainable products, factors influencing the choice of sustainable products, frequency of their purchase and informing about sustainable products. Also, the questionnaire contained 11 statements with which, using a Likert scale, respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement in 5 degrees (1 – completely disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither agree nor disagree, 4 – I agree and 5 – I completely agree). The survey questionnaire was created in the form of a Google forms form and distributed through social networks and e-mails by sharing a link to the form. 94 respondents (N=94) participated in the research. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

Based on the theoretical literature review, the following research questions were posed:

IP1: To what extent are consumers aware of marketing campaigns that promote sustainability?

IP2: What forms of marketing strategies about sustainable products most attract consumers and influence their choices?

IP3: What factors are key in choosing sustainable products?

IP4: Do sustainability marketing campaigns influence consumer behaviour and change their habits?

The results of the conducted research were analysed with descriptive statistics and presented graphically and tabular, followed by an interpretation of the results and a



discussion. After the analysis of the results, the limitations of the research, recommendations for further research and the conclusion of the work were presented.

Results and analysis of the conducted research

In the research on the impact of marketing campaigns and business practices on raising awareness of sustainability and their impact on consumer preferences and choices in meeting their needs, 94 respondents participated, of which 55% were women and 45% were men. 15% of respondents aged 18 to 25 participated, 20% of respondents from 26 to 33 years of age participated, 24% of respondents from 34 to 41 years of age participated, 19% of respondents from 42 to 51 years of age participated, from 52 to 61 17% of respondents participated, 4% of those 62 and older participated. Regarding the level of education, the majority of respondents have a master's degree in profession or science, 30% of them, followed by respondents with secondary education (28%), followed by respondents with high school and higher vocational education (21%). 6% of respondents have completed a doctorate in science and 1% of respondents have completed elementary school. According to the structure of employment, 56% of respondents are employed, 11% are unemployed, 13% are pupils or students, 6% are retired, while 13% of respondents stated that they are occasionally employed. According to the monthly incomes, most of the respondents, or 28% of them, receive monthly incomes from 1,101.00 to 1,400.00 EUR, followed by respondents with incomes from 1,401.00 to 1,700.00 EUR. 24%, then 21% of respondents with incomes from 801.00 to 1,100.00 EUR. 13% of respondents have incomes below 800.00 EUR, and 14% of respondents earn incomes above 1,700.00 EUR. Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Sociodemographic characteristics	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Age		
18 – 25	14	15
26 – 33	16	20
34 – 41	23	24
42 – 51	18	19
52 – 61	19	17
62 and over	4	4
Sex		
male	42	45
female	52	55
Level of education		
Primary school	1	1
Secondary education	26	28
High school	20	21
Higher vocational education	28	30
Master of science and profession	13	14
Doctor of Science	6	6

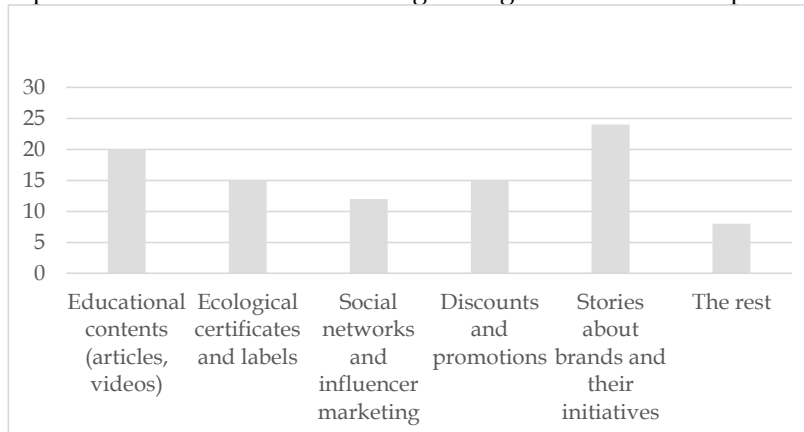


Sociodemographic characteristics	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Work status		
Pupil or student	12	13
Part time employee	19	13
Employed	47	56
A pensioner	6	6
Unemployed	10	11
Monthly income		
up to EUR 800.00	12	13
from 801 to 1100.00	20	21
1,101.00 to 1,400.00	26	28
1,401.00 to 1,700.00	23	24
1,700 and more EUR	13	14

Source: author's research

The next survey question related to the question of which marketing strategies attract respondents when it comes to sustainable products. The respondents are most interested in stories about brands and their initiatives (26%), which may mean that consumers value authenticity and transparency in communication, which consequently creates an emotional connection with the brand, encourages trust and brand loyalty. Educational contents (21%) occupy a significant place, emphasizing the need of consumers for information about sustainability and the benefits of sustainable products. These contents can play a key role in shaping awareness in encouraging responsible behaviour among consumers. Also, ecological certificates and labels (16%), as well as discounts and promotions (16%) play a significant role, which indicates trust and encouragement in the process of making purchase decisions. Consumers want to be sure that their choices are sustainable, but also that they are financially justified. Social networks and influencer marketing are represented by 13%, and other means of communication and strategies are represented by 9%. The structure of respondents' answers is shown in graph 1.

Graph 1. Attractiveness of marketing strategies on sustainable products

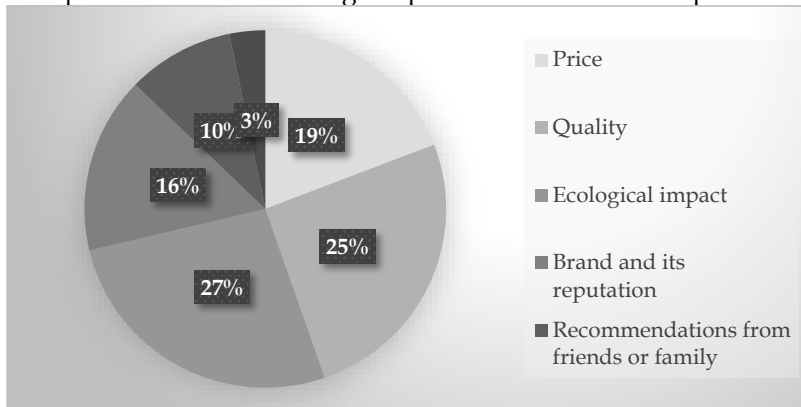


Source: author's research



Furthermore, respondents answered the question about factors influencing the purchase of sustainable products. One of the factors that is most important to the respondents is the environmental impact (27%), which indicates an increasing awareness of the importance of environmental protection among consumers. This is followed by product quality with 26%, because the respondents want the durability and efficiency of sustainable products. Price follows with 19% and consumers are willing to pay a bit more for sustainable products. The brand and its reputation are also important to respondents (16%), which indicates that consumers prefer brands that are oriented towards sustainability. Recommendations from friends or family with 10% influence the respondents during their purchase decision, while other influences comprise 3%. Price and brand reputation have a significant influence on decision-making and product selection, and the results show that consumers increasingly appreciate the environmental aspects and quality of products. The structure of respondents' answers is shown in graph 2.

Graph 2. Factors influencing the purchase of sustainable products

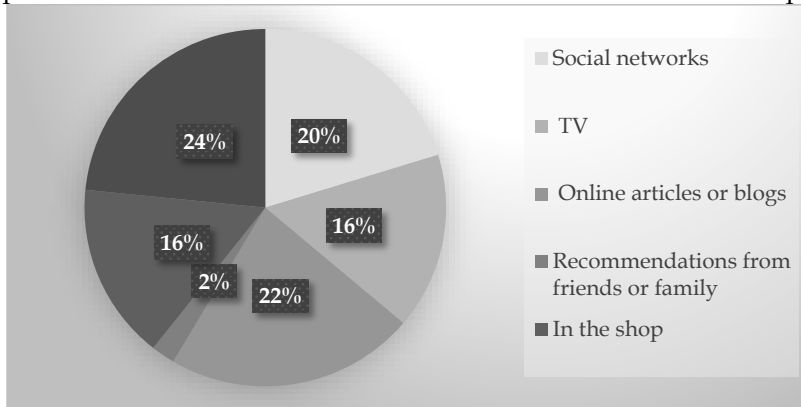


Source: author's research

Furthermore, the respondents gave an answer to the question through which communication channels they learn about sustainable options or get information. The most represented are educational marketing campaigns with 23%, because through them they get all the information that helps them understand the usefulness of using and the consequences of sustainable products. They are followed by online articles and blogs (22%), i.e. digital channels of communication as well as social networks with 20%. Television and stores are represented by 16% each, while recommendations from friends or family are represented by only 2%. Consumers are increasingly using digital and educational resources to inform themselves about sustainable products, while traditional sources and personal recommendations have less influence on their decisions, given that a third of respondents are younger. The structure of respondents' answers is shown in graph 3.



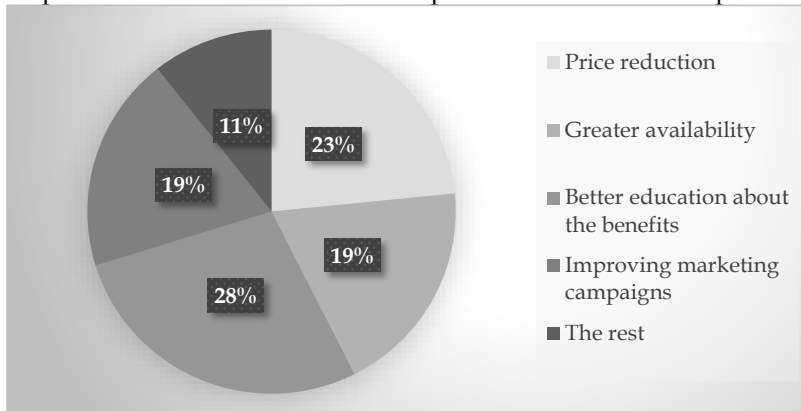
Graph 3. Communication channels of information about sustainable options



Source: author's research

When asked what would encourage respondents to buy sustainable products, the results of the survey show that they would be most encouraged by educational campaigns (28%) that would inform about the contribution of products to environmental protection. A reduction in prices (23%) would encourage consumers to buy sustainable product options as well as greater availability (19%) or easier access in stores. Also, more effective marketing campaigns with educational elements would attract more consumers (19%). The answer other was chosen by 11% of respondents. Education, price and availability play a key role in encouraging consumers to buy sustainable products. The structure of the responses is shown in graph 4.

Graph 4. Forms of incentives for the purchase of sustainable products



Source: author's research

Furthermore, the respondents expressed their agreement/disagreement with the stated statements, where 1 indicated that I completely disagree, 2 - I do not agree, 3 - I neither agree nor disagree, 4 - I agree and 5 - I completely agree. From the answers



of the respondents, it is evident that most of the respondents are aware of marketing campaigns on sustainability and that they influence their purchasing decisions. Also, the respondents value transparency, follow activities related to sustainability and participate in them, or change their habits and preferences. Respondents' answers also show that product labelling is important because respondents choose sustainable products, buy products in biodegradable packaging, separate waste, choose longer-lasting products, participate in campaigns and become more and more efficient in energy use. Table 1 shows the respondents' answers.

Table 1. Agreement/disagreement with the stated statements

Claims	1	2	3	4	5
I am aware of marketing campaigns that focus on sustainability	19	15	14	23	29
I buy sustainable products and am interested in them	17	21	23	15	23
Marketing campaigns influence my purchasing decisions	12	13	19	31	26
Brand transparency about their sustainable practices is important to me	17	15	23	21	23
I change my buying habits under the influence of marketing campaigns	9	13	17	29	33
When choosing products, I look at the usage labels and choose sustainable products	15	16	15	30	24
I don't waste energy I don't need and I take actions related to energy efficiency.	16	13	24	27	20
I reduce the consumption of disposable items (bags, packaging, etc.)	11	9	21	28	32
I buy products that are in biodegradable or recyclable packaging because this reduces the negative impact on nature and the environment.	18	17	21	24	19
I separate waste because I have a positive impact on the environment	16	11	24	22	27
I buy quality things - things that last longer and that I can repair because this saves me money in the long run.	13	15	21	28	23

Source: author's research

Discussion

The conducted research shows that the respondents value the authenticity and transparency of brands, which shows interest in stories about brands and their sustainability initiatives, which was shown by 26% of the respondents. Given that more than a third of respondents (35% in total) are oriented towards digital communication channels and tools, more than 20% of respondents are informed via social networks and digital platforms. Traditional sources of information such as television or in stores (16%) have less influence in informing about sustainable products. Younger generations are oriented towards digital channels of communication, while older generations are oriented towards traditional means of



information. 21% of the respondents are informed by educational content, which can be linked to the education of the respondents, considering that more than 50% of the respondents have a college or university degree, master's degree or doctorate in science. Educational marketing campaigns (23%) were highlighted by the majority of respondents, considering that through them, consumers' best understand the usefulness and justification of using sustainable products, i.e. the consequences if they are not careful with the consumption of different products that are offered to them as possible choices. Ecological certificates and labels (16%) and discounts and promotions (16%) are important to the respondents considering that 28% of the respondents have a monthly income of 1,101.00 to 1,400.00 EUR and the respondents are oriented towards financially justified choices. Environmental impact, quality as well as price are key factors influencing the purchase of sustainable products. Given that the majority of respondents have incomes, i.e. are employed, educated and cherish certain values, they are ready to pay more for sustainable products because of their contribution to the reduction of harmful effects on the environment and a better future for new generations. However, lower prices would make the products more accessible to respondents with lower incomes, where price plays a decisive role in the choice. Product availability and easier access as well as educational marketing campaigns would encourage greater consumer engagement. Marketing strategies should be focused on education and increasing the availability of sustainable products in order to meet the needs and expectations of consumers.

Research limitations

When interpreting the research, the limitations of the conducted research should be taken into account, given that the research included 94 respondents who filled out the survey questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used in the paper and the research was conducted once. In order for the research to be representative, it is necessary to increase the sample of respondents, and conduct the research in more and longer time series so that certain changes can be correlated and additionally examined and analysed using more complex statistical methods. This research can be the basis for future repeated research with the application of appropriate variables and appropriate statistical methods.

Conclusion

Consumers are increasingly aware of the importance of changing their consumption habits and are increasingly oriented towards sustainable initiatives and sustainable products. Socially responsible operations of business entities and brands also change their behaviour. The results of the conducted research show that consumers value authenticity and transparency and are informed through all forms and methods of communication, mostly through digital communication channels.

Based on the review of the literature and the conducted research, certain conclusions and recommendations were made:



- develop educational marketing campaigns with an emphasis on sustainability
- inform about the ecological benefits of sustainable products and the positive long-term impact on the community and the environment and future generations
- use digital channels of communication (social networks, blogs, etc.) with attractive educational content in the form of stories for a better understanding of the promoted content about sustainability
- make sustainable products more available in terms of different sales channels as well as the use of forms of sales promotion related to financial availability (it would encourage consumers with lower incomes to try the product)
- it is necessary to continuously collect feedback from consumers to understand the needs and expectations of consumers
- adapt marketing strategies to the needs and expectations of consumers for greater engagement of consumers themselves

Marketing strategies that increase awareness of sustainable products through education, engagement, availability can encourage positive changes in consumer behaviour for a sustainable future.

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