



Sustainable marketing: Cojoint of ethical production and consumption

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Abstract

The study xtrayed the attainment of sustainable marketing as a combination of ethical production and consumption. It argues that ethical production and consumption are the two sides of attaining sustainable marketing and that one without the other is a misfit. The study was conducted in Enugu metropolis among the marketing academics and practicing marketers. A sample of 300 was selected from all the tertiary institutions in the metropolis that offer marketing and all registered firms that has marketing as a department. Data was collected with questionnaire designed in likert five-point scale, analysis was with descriptive statistics. Results revealed that sustainable marketing is attainable when firms adhere to ethical production practices with a positive variation of 0.6913. Also, ethical consumption practices contribution to sustainable marketing had a positive variance of 0.4174. the researcher therefore concluded that ethical production and ethical consumption are the two factors that can guarantee sustainable marketing. The researcher recommended the inclusion of sustainability marketing ideals in the curriculum of study in secondary and tertiary educational levels to inculcate ethical ideals on the students.

Keywords: Sustainable marketing, ethical production, ethical consumption

Introduction

The quest to achieve sustainability for marketing operations has attracted national and international discourse. The devastating effects of climate change and global warning have necessitated efforts to be channelled to finding means of addressing the challenges. It is apparent to note that the environmental issues plaguing our society are a fallout of mans domestic and industrial activities. The production and consumption activities of man are contributing to the unsustainability of marketing and the environment. With increasing demand for goods and services necessitated by growing world population, increasing per capital income and improve standard of living of most households the volume of production has escalated (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015) ^[1]. The growth in production activities to equate population growth has led to increase in carbon emission, pollution and soil degradation (Nwankwo, 2018) ^[2].

The global carbon emission rose by 490 million tonnes in 2022 which was (1.3%), in 2023 carbon emission from economic activities rose by 1.1% increasing with 410 million tonnes (www.iea.org). (international energy agency, 2023) ^[3] www.iea.org.

The data indicated an increasing rate of industrial production and house hold consumption activities resulting to an increase in massive technological involvement in production, generation of massive bio-non-degradable waste environmental pollution, increasing carbon emission (foot print), soil degradation and climate change.

An accumulation of forces from industries, government regulations, transformation charters and environmental reporting has put pressure on business owners and operators to understand the perception, expectation and attitude of the society regarding the role of business in the broader society and in environmental protection (Tustin and deJongh, 2008). Consequently consumers unethical consumption practices

have been indicated as contributing to unsustainability of marketing (Hughner, Mc Donagh, Prothero, Schultz & Stanton 2007, Bray, John & Kilburn 2010, Eckhardt, Belk & Devinney 2010) ^[5, 6, 7, 12], Several researchers Oko & Osuagwu 2013 ^[21], Mohammad Ahmed & Eric 2013, Justin & deJongh 2008, Duan, Xinze & Renate 2008) have conducted studies on sustainable marketing but their study focused on ethical consumption non investigated ethical production as a co player in achieving sustainability in marketing.

In the light of the above, it becomes imperative that sustainability can only be achieve when new concepts of production (ethical production) and consumption (ethical consumption) are imbibed (Duan, L, & Renate, 2008), Nkamnebe 2013) ^[24]. Ethical production is giving attention to labour laws, animal rights, human right and environmental protection/preservation by manufacturing firms (Christophe, 2015). Ethical consumption, consumerism or ethical purchase behaviour means the consumer using their purchase power to force manufacturers to imbibe ethical conducts. It entails consumers buying only ethically produced products: those made from organic substance, do not have negative externality cost are safe for use and disposing the residue properly (Bello, Suleiman & Danjuma, 2012) ^[26].

Statement of the Problem

In developed economics, companys reputation is not limited to companys net worth, quality of brand or dividend shared but also on commitment to ethical behaviours and practices (Tustin and deJongh, 2008). A company's reputation that is built on environmental protection. Labour law, human rights preservation and consumer protection is recommendable. Unethical practices evident in the production marketing and consumption of goods (such as unhealthy working

condition, employee exploitation and environmental insensitivity) have contributed to numerous, environmental challenges such as flooding; growing impoverishment of workers, water air and soil pollution and toxicity. Consumers practices in the purchases, use and disposal of product residues also contribute to degrading the environment. These unethical practices have negated the attainment of sustainable marketing. To achieve the goals of sustainable marketing therefore efforts should be directed to integrating ethical production and consumption practices.

Objective of the Study

Generally, the objective of this study is to design a path to achieving sustainable marketing by integrating the practices of ethical production and ethical consumption.

Specifically, it intends to introduce ethical consciousness to both production and consumption activities of marketing players.

Review of Literature

Concept of Sustainable Marketing

Sustainable marketing is a concept that holds a wholistic view as it is concerned with the effect of marketing on whole systems such as institutions, value chain, industries etc and not on isolated personalized exchange transactions between partners (Betz and Peattie 2009).

Sustainable marketing stem from the sustainability concept which was first introduced by the Brundtland commission 1987 that defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising he interests rights and ability of the future generation to meet their own needs (WCED 1987). The term sustainability involves a broad view of social, environmental and economic concerns, it aims to maintain human and environmental health; encouraging the drift towards the use of renewable rather than finite raw materials, minimization and elimination of polluting effluent and toxic hazardous wastes (Charter, Peattie, Ottman and Polonsky, 2002).

Sustainable Marketing (SM) Arnould and Press (nd, p2) asserts is an approach to marketing that ideally aligns internal organizational process and organizes resources that create value for stake holders (owners' shareholders, employees, value chain partners) through which the external natural and social environments are enriched by the activities of the firm. It involves aligning organizational processes and goals with general principles of sustainable business practices. This applies when organizations present an outlook that they operate within a limited resource system and has a strong responsibility to its current and future stakeholders to make strategic decisions for the well being of the whole system in long term bases. This process commits a firm to make concerted effort towards improvement of goals of the social environment, restoration of the natural environment and striving to survive as an economic entity.

Sustainable Marketing framework include incorporating ecosystem costs into operation, reduction of the firm' s overall carbon footprint, incorporation of natural systems in new product development and operations and either change to or include technology that will enhance rather than diminish natural resources (Arnould and Press, n.d) A firm can devote to sustainable marketing by increasing her operational efficiency through developing stringent

manufacturing principles. This may include commitment to reducing use of virgin materials and promote use of recycled recaptured and re purposed materials, reduce the discharge of waste into the natural and social environment that are detrimental to health and or compromise future environmental, social or economic viability of the community. It also includes promoting the consumption of only ethically produced products and disposing the remnants properly. Operationally sustainable marketing can be defined as marketing orientation that results to the use of natural, degradable or renewable materials in product production and packaging, reduction in carbon emission, use of environmental protection and preservation techniques, maintenance of transparency in communication to the stakeholders and proper disposal of product wastes (Nwankwo: 2018) ^[2].

Concept of Ethical Production

Ethical production is relatively a new and vague concept, unlike 'fair trade and 'ethical trade' which are often used synonymously (Christophe, 2015). For better assimilation of the term 'ethical production' Lets first make a distinction between these terms

Fair trade is a movement that started in the Netherlands in the 1960s and still boost sales in Europe and North American markets. It seeks a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect and equity amongst economic players (Fine, 2001). Socially responsible trade covers all the principles of fair trade but differs slightly because it sets out to help specific under privileged group (Christophe, 2015).

Ethical trade is concerned with the working condition of producers, taking into consideration the human and environmental conditions of production (Christopher 2015) ^[25].

Ethical Production is giving attention to environmental protection, labour laws, human rights and animal rights by manufacturing firms in their course of producing products (Christopher 2015) ^[25]. Thus, ethical trade is synonymous to ethical production.

Ethical Production is meant to ensure that the production function and activities are not damaging to the consumer or the society. The jermy street design (jsd) prefers the term an ethical manufacturing. Ethical manufacturing is achieved when manufacturing process prioritizes good health for all parties involved including the environment, workers and consumers (jsd.co.uk). Like every other ethics, ethical production is rooted on rules that are meant to checkmate its adoption from the standpoint of the International Labour Organization (ILO), ethical production focuses on the conditions of production and the operations of companies. It aims to guarantee and assure customers that the products available for sale have been sourced from suppliers whose conditions of production respect the international labour standards set out by ILO and translated by the principles of the international codes of conduct such as the Global Compact (ILO, 2014).

The Global Compact is a pact proposed by the General Secretary of United Nations and launched in January, 2000 during the World Economic Forum. This international initiative requests agencies, civil societies and large companies to collaborate with the UN to support a set of principles in the area of environmental standards and human

rights towards achieving corporate responsibility (UN global concept.org). The Global Compact is a 'code of conduct' comprising 10 principles that firms undertook to observe. These include:

Principle 1: Business must make sure that they are not complicit in human right abuses.

Principle 2: Business should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights.

Principle 3: Business should uphold the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour.

Principle 4: Business should uphold freedom of association and recognize the right to collective bargain.

Principle 5: Business should uphold the effective abolition of child labour.

Principle 6: Business should uphold the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation.

Principle 7: Business should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges.

Principle 8: Businesses should undertake initiatives to promote environmental responsibility.

Principle 9: Businesses should encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

To militate against key environmental challenges such as: Loss of biodiversity and long-term damages to ecosystems.

- Pollution of the atmosphere and the ramifications of climate change
- Damage to the aquatic ecosystems, soil degradation.
- The impact of chemical use and disposal
- Waste production and
- Depletion of non-renewable resources (Rio Declaration 1992, Brundtland Report 1987) ^[11].

Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all forms, including extortion and bribery.

Concept of Ethical Consumption

Ethical consumption, ethical purchase behaviour or ethical consumerism has been a notion which has evolved for over decades (Devinney, Auger & Eckhardt, 2010) ^[7, 12] and has formed the rationale for purchase decisions for ethical consumers. It involves consumers using their purchase power to pressurize manufacturers/marketers to imbibe ethical practices in their practices. It serves as watch dog on how firms adhere to the fundamental principles of labour/human right, child labour and environmental protection. Ethical consumption involves the purchase of products which have label certifying that the product was made under fair working conditions and or with higher environmental standards (Loureiro and Lotabe, 2005) ^[13].

Ethical consumerism is fast becoming the main determinant for modern day business transactions as business leaders are increasingly under pressure to understand the societal perception, attitude and expectation regarding business in the larger society including environmental issues (Tustin and deJongh, 2008). An increasing level of consumer awareness, consciousness to sustain the environment coupled with industry charters, agreements and conversions have made consumers to patronize mostly firms that are ethical in their operations Ethical production therefore attracts ethical purchase practice from ethical conscious consumers.

Ethical consumption (consumerism) is classified into four: Clean hand ethical consumption: consumerist action where one decides to avoid a particular product on the grounds that he does not want to be seen as encouraging the unethical production practice.

Expensive ethical consumerism; a consumerist action where one may choose to buy a certain product to show support for or disapproval of certain values, beliefs or practices.

Unmediated ethical consumption; a form of consumerist action where one chooses to buy a certain product or service because his use of the product will advance some moral, ecological and social agenda;

Social change ethical consumerism, a form of consumerist action aimed at encouraging social change. It involves one choosing one product among competing brands partly on the grounds, that doing so will create an economic incentive for the ethically compliant firm, invariably compelling other firms to act in a way that will advance some moral, social ecological or other non-economic agenda.

Thus, there are clear business implications, including opportunities and threats for the changing marketing dynamics resulting from increasing ethical behaviour. Ethical production and consumption behaviour therefore can be seen as a vehicle for social engineering.

Ethical Production & Consumption: two sides of the same coin.

Marketing aims at identifying and satisfying consumers' needs (Kotler, 2012) ^[14]. Satisfaction of identified needs involves product design, production, packaging, marketing and consumption.

Ethical practices exhibited in executing these activities translates to sustainability of marketing and the environment. Ethical production has been defined as giving attention to labour law, human right, animal right, environmental protection/preservation, use of renewable energy and recycleable materials in production of goods and services (Nwankwo, 2018) ^[2].

Ethical production promotes business/economic growth, preliminary survey reveals that 92 percent of customers are committed to shopping from an ethical company. Also, 93 percent of staff would stay with a company longer if it invested in their career. (jsd.co.uk). When an employee is happy his productivity increases by 13 percent more than an unhappy staff. In the study Exploring the Importance of Ethical manufacturing, (jsd.co.uk) asserts that ethical manufacturing is achieved when manufacturing process prioritize good health of all parties involved, including the environment, workers and consumers. Ethical manufacturing cares about the working and shopping environment to promote sustainability and positive well being, prioritize health and happiness of staff beyond standard requirements, safety and fair treatment of workers help to boost productivity and benefit the business it enhances and protects the future of business.

Mazier (2024) ^[15] in embracing sustainability in ethical production of content creation industry asserts that audiences are not just concerned with the end product, they are increasingly interested in the journey: - how – a-piece of content is produced, the environmental foot print it leaves behind and whether it adheres to ethical standards throughout its production process. Shift in consumer consciousness is pushing video production companies and

content creators to rethink their production and align with more sustainable and ethical production methodologies.

He concluded that ethical production goes hand in hand with sustainability focusing on human aspect of content creation. It encompasses fair labour practices, equitable treatment to all, respect for the communities impacted by production activities. It ensures that workers are paid fairly, working conditions are safe and workers treated with dignity and respect.

Sustainability involves minimizing environmental impact of production activities. This may include reducing energy consumption, opting for digital over physical production and managing waste more effectively. But ethical production practices alone cannot guarantee sustainability of marketing/environment if consumption practices are not ethical (sustainable). Thus, for marketing to be sustainable or to have a sustainable environment that will support marketing, consumption practices must imbibe ethical virtues.

Ethical consumption, consumerism or purchase practice involves consumers' using their purchase power to compel firms to adhere to ethical production practices (Christopher, 2015) [25]. It also includes ensuring that product residues are disposed in the most hygienically accepted manner.

According to Nkamnebe (2013:3) [24] if sections of the human society are meeting their needs without considering the effect of their production and consumption on other sections, these sections and indeed the entire universe would deplete to a point that the ecosystem may barely sustain lives. This assertion points to the fact that sustainability depends on ethical production and consumption practices.

Theories and Model

Sustainability marketing is predicated on the cooperation of production and consumption ethics. Ethical production entails a firm deciding willingly or otherwise to abide by the tenets of the global compact, the legal regulatory frameworks, based on the firm's socio-psychological dispositions (Trudel & Cottee 2009) [19] and careful consideration of available information. Ethical consumption on the other hand involves one deciding through one's consumption practices to promote the sustainability of the environment by using one's power as a consumer to mandate producers to be ethical in their practices through patronizing only ethically oriented firms' products and disposing the residues in a way that promotes environmental sustainability. Several scholars have developed models and theories on how sustainability can be achieved in marketing operations. Some of these models and theories include the sustainable marketing model (Jamrozy, 2007), sustainability, marketing matrix (Pomering 2014) [17], Natural capitalism theory and four capital model (university of Melbourne, Austria 2011) [20], identity theory, general theory of marketing ethics (Hunt and Vitell, 1986) [31].

This researcher adopted and anchored this study on the moral theory of utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism is a normative theory of ethics that views right or wrong action from the stand point of cost benefit analysis to the society. It argues that all the good and bad consequences of one's action must be weighted before one decides whether an action is right or wrong (Gray, 2010) [32]. An action is said to be right as long as it satisfactorily causes good consequences compared to alternative action and vice versa. Utilitarianism therefore does not encourage egoism, as such, it is wrong to cheat/harm others to benefit oneself. Rather it promotes collective good/benefit of all (most) against a few. It is therefore imperative to behave in a rational way that would be rational for anyone.

Applying this to discourse, utilitarianism supports and encourages ethical production and consumption behaviours in so far as they promote healthy and sustainable environment, workers right, and consumers' right for the greater percentage of the populace.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted in Enugu metropolis; the population of this study comprises all marketing academics and professionals within the metropolis. Marketing academics and professionals were used because they were assumed to possess the indepth knowledge of the term sustainable marketing, 300 respondents formed the sample selected form two categorized groups: academic and professional marketers. The academic was from the tertiary institutions within the state that offers marketing as a course.

The professionals were from firms within the metropolis that have marketing department or section. The measuring instrument was duly completed and 115 questionnaires returned giving 38.33 percent of the sample. Because the study was to discover insight, exploratory research design was most appropriate.

Data were collected by the use of structured questionnaire designed in likert five-point scales. Face and contact methods were used to validate the research instrument while a test-re-test approach and Crombach's Alpha were used to check for reliability, a co efficiency value (r) of 0.756 proved that the instrument was reliable. To determine skewenees, mean deviation was used. Sample means were obtained by assigning values of 1 to strongly disagreed, 2 to disagreed, 3 to undecided 4 to agreed and 5 to strongly agreed. Thus $x = \frac{\sum x}{n} = \frac{15}{5} = 3$

Decision rule: Positive deviation is when $cd \text{ mean} > \text{sample mean}$

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Number of Respondents	Frequency 115	Percentage 100
Gender	Male	60	52.17
	Female	55	47.82
Educational Qualification	Ph. D	45	39.13
	M.Sc, MBA equivalent	33	28.69
	B. Sc/HND equivalent	37	32.17
Industrial Category	Academic	73	63.47
	Professional	42	36.52

Source: Field Study, 2025

Analysis of the demographic characteristic of the respondents revealed that 52.17% were male while 47.82% were female. An assessment of their educational qualification shows that greater percentage of the respondents

have master’s degree and above, only 32.17% of the respondents have B. Sc/HND equivalent. Analysis of the industries where the respondents came shows that 63.47% were from the academic while 36.52 were from the practicing firms.

	Strongly Disagree & Disagree		Undecided	Agreed & Strongly agreed		Sample mean	
	Freq.	%	Freq	%	Freq		%
Sustainable marketing promotes healthy environment	35	30.43	5	4.35	75	65.22	3.5217
Sustainable marketing in attainable when firms adhere to ethical production practices	27	23.48	8	6.96	80	69.57	3.6913
Consumption practices of consumers can promote sustainable marketing if ethical	38	33.04	7	6.87	70	60.89	3.4174
Ethical production and consumption practices guarantee sustainable marketing	25	21.74	5	4.35	85	73.91	3.7826

Source: Field survey, 2025

Analysis of the table above reveals that 65.22 percent agreed that sustainable marketing promotes a healthy environment while 30.43 percent were of a contrary view and 4.35 percent undecided with a calculated mean of .5217. Also, 69.57 percent agreed that sustainable market is attainable if firms are ethical in their production practices, 23.48 percent disagreed to this ascertain while 6.96 percent were undecided. The calculated mean was 3.6913. On consumption practices 60.87 percent agreed that a healthy environment can be achieved if consumers promote ethical consumption practices, 33.04 percent were of a contrary opinion while 6.87 were undecided with recorded mean of 3.4174.

On whether ethical production and consumption practices can guarantee sustainable marketing 73.91 percent agree to the assertion while 21.74 percents were of the contrary view and 4.35 percent undecided, calculated mean was 3.7826.

Analysis and Discussion of Result

Further examination of the results shows that the assertion that sustainable marketing promotes healthy environment recorded a positive variance of 0.5217. This indicated that healthy environment is only possible where sustainable marketing ideals are practiced. This supported the assertion of (Anould & Press; n.d) that sustainable marketing inculcates a system that enriches natural and social environment by reducing the firms overall carbon foot print, incorporate new operations and technology that enhances rather than diminish natural resources, reduces use of virgin materials, promotes recycling, reuse materials and controls waste disposal.

The survey also reveals that sustainable marketing is attainable when firms adhere to ethical production practices with a positive variance of 0.6913. This finding supports the conclusion of (Mazier, 2024) [15]. That sustainability goes hand-in-hand with ethical production.

Consumption practices promoting sustainable marketing reveals a positive variance of 0.4174. This finding supported (Louriero & Lotabe, 2005) that ethical consumerism serves as a watch dog on how firms adhere to the fundamental principles of sustainability marketing.

The assertion that ethical production and consumption practices guarantee sustainable marketing yielded the highest positive variance of 0.7826. This finding agreed with (Nkamnebe, 2013) [24] postulation: that if sections of

the human society are meeting their needs without considering the effect of their production and consumption activities on other sections, these sections and indeed then entire universe would deplete. This assertion concludes the argument that both production and consumption activities impact on the attainment of sustainable marketing.

Conclusion

Sustainability is the key concept of current researches and reforms in the present-day marketing discourse. This very important discourse has often been approached from the standpoint of consumption (ethical consumerism), with little or no attention to production activities. It is imperative to note that if production activities are unethical, sustainability marketing will not be achieved. For sustainability to be achieved in marketing operations both the production activities and consumption activities ought to be based on standard ethical best practices. One without the other is a mismatch.

Recommendations

1. Manufacturing firms should abide by the ethical standards enshrined in the global compact
2. Government agencies should intermitantly assess the compliance rate of firms to standard best practices
3. Sustainability Education should be added to the curriculum of study to instill sustainability mantra in the psyches of the populace.

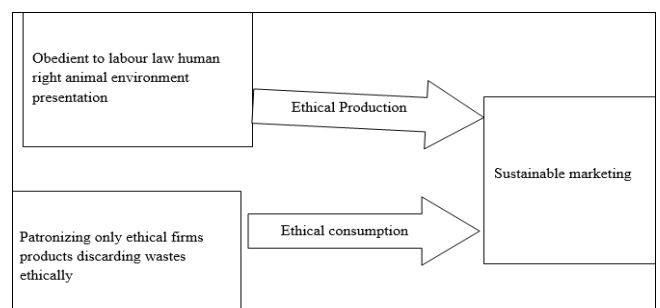


Fig 1: Sustainable Marketing Dynamics

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