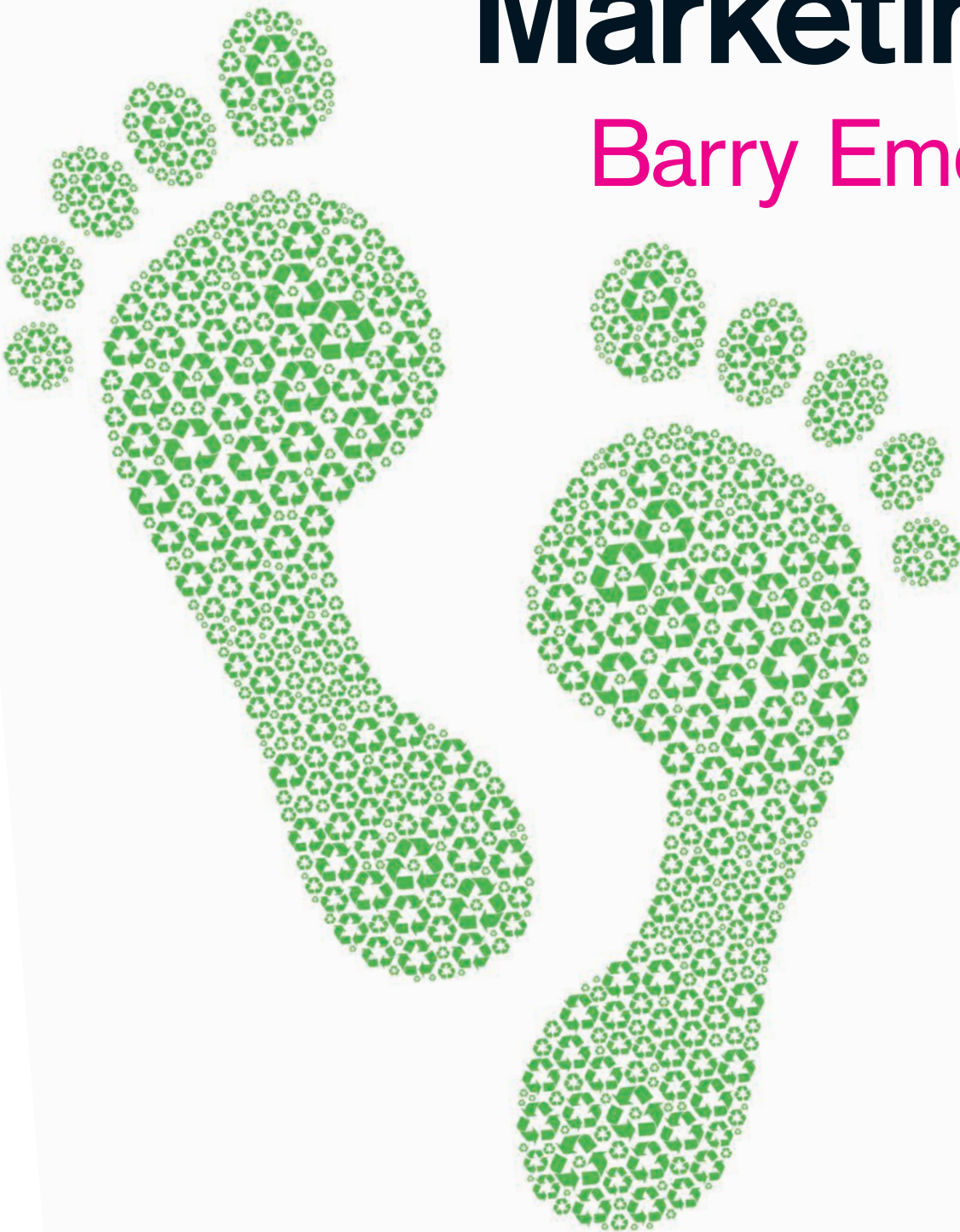


# Sustainable Marketing

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## Sustainable Marketing

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- Multiple choice questions to test your understanding
- Weblinks to relevant, specific internet resources to facilitate in-depth independent research
- Links to video material of key Sustainable Marketing campaigns.
- Additional examples and case studies

**Table 3.4** Favourable attitudes to sustainability

Favourable attitudes	Characteristics
Guilty	The guilty are aware of sustainability issues and engage in sustainable consumption from time to time but will not do this consistently. They may consume sustainably for some specific matters with an obvious gain, such as saving money by reducing energy consumption. Drifting in and out of sustainable practice and ignoring those issues that require too much sacrifice, they feel guilty, but not guilty enough to become more sustainable
Practising	The practising have more knowledge and understanding than the previous group, and consume sustainably when they can. They know they have more to learn and are open to more ways to adopt a sustainable lifestyle, recognising that they could improve their performance
Sustainable	The sustainable are those who have embraced sustainability completely and enthusiastically. They are likely to be aware of all three sustainability concerns – environmental, social and economic – and feel they are doing as much as they can to be sustainable

Table 3.4 shows a range of more favourable attitudes towards sustainability that exist among the general public.

### *A conflict of interests*

The contradictions between pro-sustainable attitudes and non-sustainable behaviour have never been more efficiently expressed than by the 30:3 ratio – when it was found that while 30 percent of people expressed concern for sustainability issues only 3 percent actually modified aspects of their consumption behaviour.<sup>27</sup> These contradictions come from the natural antagonism between recognising collective responsibilities for sustainability, the need for change to provide collective solutions and the individuals' desire to protect their own self-interest. Thus, public concern in general terms for economic, social and environmental sustainability may be increasing but, at the same time, on an individual basis each single consumer demonstrates an aversion to specific remedies that require behavioural change on their part, especially those that entail personal impacts, effects and consequences for their lifestyle.<sup>28</sup>

Individuals therefore appear to protect what they regard as their personal rights and freedoms to consume in the way they want and the feeling of entitlement to enjoy choice and variety without interference from government or other stakeholders is strong enough to prevent the widespread adoption of sustainable behaviours. Essentially dependent on the level of compromise the individual wishes to engage in, the consumer weighs up the possible favourable outcomes of sustainable behaviour and trades them off against the sacrifices required as a result.

## Snapshot: Dumped

When the 11 contestants of the UK's Channel 4's programme 'Dumped', shown in 2007, were told they would participate in an ecological challenge for a share of £20,000, most of them assumed they were going abroad, certainly not thinking for one moment they would end up on a local rubbish tip.



Source: Pearson Education Ltd

However, both contestants and audience showed some reluctance to embrace the challenge. The final episode of the programme was watched by just 1.9 million people an 8 percent share, while BBC1's 'Traffic Cops' gained a 25 percent share with 5.5 million viewers.

One contestant left after just three days, saying the exercise had taught him nothing. This participant owned four cars, went regularly on long-haul flights and spent £50 a week on socks and underwear rather than washing them. He said he would not change his lifestyle, apart from donating his old underwear to the Third World and flew to Las Vegas for a holiday. Channel 4 head Julian Bellamy did not suggest it was the programme concept itself or its ecological theme that led to reduced viewing figures, but the lack of human narrative and that it was too similar to other reality TV shows.

**Table 3.5** Competing product attributes

Sustainable	Conventional
Ethical	Price
Socially responsible	Brand
Eco-performance/friendly	Availability
Cost-effectiveness	Superior performance
Recyclable/recycled	Quality
Pollution-free	Convenience of use
Healthy	Image
Safe/harmless	Style
Functional	Design
Long lasting/durable/reusable	Disposable

### *Trade-offs and self-interest*

Table 3.5 shows that there are both sustainable and conventional (although not necessarily both) attributes competing for salience when consumers are contemplating a purchase. The attributes and associated benefits of conventional products – cost, convenience and quality – compete for importance with sustainable benefits in the mind of the consumer. While acknowledged as key obstacles from the perspective of the consumer, issues regarding cost, convenience and quality have also been described as ‘prevalent myths’ in the public consciousness in studies on sustainable behaviour.<sup>29</sup>

It matters little whether the perception of particular sustainable products is myth or reality, it is the opinion of the consumer that counts. Early versions of some green products such as lighting and cleaning products performed badly and that perception has stayed with consumers. Many sustainable products have been priced higher than their conventional counterparts, in some cases reflecting the internalising of traditionally external socio-environmental costs and in others to establish and benefit from a premium priced niche market.<sup>30</sup> Whatever the case, once perceived as expensive alternatives, sustainable products will find it difficult to become mainstream.

Convenience attributes also remain a sticking point for many sustainable products and actions. Too much marketing on the sustainable benefits for humanity and not enough on persuading people to accept the sacrifice and inconvenience involved will slow or prevent the voluntary acceptance of many products – getting parents to give up disposable nappies for washable, reusable ones being a good example. For the consumer, a process of trade-off occurs while judging products on the two competing sets of attributes – sustainable attributes against conventional ones. Each consumer will develop his/her own



personal hierarchy of needs and motivations to be matched to a selection of pertinent attributes. Many mainstream consumers will be more influenced by concerns related to conventional attributes such as price and brand if they have issues of familiarity, trust and reliability with regard to their purchases.

Other consumers may be swayed by sustainable attributes without having any clear convictions towards sustainability. In this way the sustainable behaviour of some has been described as a 'by-product' of particular lifestyle choices focused more on health, safety and nutrition.<sup>31</sup> Recent research points to the way in which sustainability is naturally occurring among older generations, particularly in times of recession. These generations, who were brought up to live frugally and not waste resources of any kind whether energy, food or water, value thrift and economy even though they are not convinced by contemporary arguments regarding sustainability.<sup>32</sup>

However, it would appear that for many consumers the extent to which they engage with sustainability, or not, is dictated by the influence of their own self-interest. Therefore, contradictions naturally arise from the intervention of self-interest generated by the clash between sustainable sacrifice and non-sustainable self-interest. In research conducted among teenagers in 2008 by the National Centre for Research Methods, it was found that while most respondents thought they should be engaging in more sustainable behaviour, only a minority of teenagers were talking to their families about doing so. The most common reason for such inaction was a reluctance to change lifestyle patterns.<sup>33</sup>

### *Contradictions and lack of trust*

Cynicism and mistrust also play a role in the failure to change behaviour. The combination of a strong feeling of individual personal rights with a healthy mistrust of both business and government makes for a significant barrier to engagement with sustainability. It is sufficient for people to feel that they are being forced into doing something for them to rebel against it, for the simple reason that they feel very strongly that they have the right to continue as they are.

Mistrust of business is difficult to counteract, particularly due to the world-wide discrediting of the banking system since 2008. Typically, marketing communications aimed at regaining consumer trust are often not believed, particularly when those communications highlight contradictory actions. For example, while Lloyds TSB was running its *most trusted* bank campaign in the UK at the beginning of 2009, the media was commenting on the bank's record \$350 million fine from the US government for illegal financial dealing. Public scepticism of the sustainable credentials of business seems to continue at the same pace as businesses attempt to communicate with their consumers on environmental claims. The Advertising Standards Authority has registered record numbers of complaints in recent years regarding misleading green claims<sup>34</sup> and the term 'greenwash' – to over-claim or give misleading green credentials – has already entered the marketer's and the public's vocabulary.

Despite mistrust, the public still look to both business and government for information, guidance and sustainable solutions, although both of these parties have much progress to make before they succeed in convincing consumers. Fiscal intervention in the form of green taxes is hardly likely to be popular with the general population and such proposals by government in the UK have been branded as *stealth taxes* by the opposition. This has made it more difficult for government to change consumer behaviour through raising taxes, although reducing tax on more sustainable options such as cars that pollute less can be perceived positively and acted upon by the public. Nevertheless, the role of government in moving towards sustainability will be fraught with difficulty. In the UK alone more than one-third of the electorate thinks that neither of the two main parties can be trusted to deal with the issue of climate change effectively.<sup>35</sup>

Both obstacles to change and agents of change, the lack of public trust in businesses and governments will remain for as long as they fail to provide consistency, honesty and sincerity between message and actions. For example, the UK government's Act on CO<sub>2</sub> campaign runs alongside its support for the expansion of airports, with the consequent increase in air traffic pollution. At the same time Northern Ireland's environment minister actually tried to ban the Act on CO<sub>2</sub> television campaign in 2009, branding it as 'insidious propaganda' and 'patent nonsense', leaving the public perplexed and political parties and pro-environmental groups calling for his resignation.<sup>36</sup>

It is clear that positive attitudes towards sustainability are fraught with contradictions and consumers can appear to be ambivalent in their opinions and practice. Certainly the marketer must recognise that the pro-sustainable attitudes and behaviour of the general public are quite fragile, easily influenced and swayed by any number of factors, and that they need to be nurtured if sustainable consumption is going to enter the mainstream.

## The risk of sustainability

From the consumers' perspective many of their purchases involve risk. The risk may be financial 'Is it worth the money and can I afford it?' or the risk may be related to performance 'Will this product give me the same results as the previous one I bought?' If consumers have perceived different types of risk related to their purchase up till now, then the added consideration of sustainability issues can only increase their awareness of risk. Research into risk has revealed six types which may affect the consumer and the purchase decision-making process<sup>37, 38, 39</sup> which are presented in Table 3.6 and applied to the context of sustainable purchase.

The type and level of perceived risk will vary from consumer to consumer depending on a series of conditions such as level of experience of the purchaser, the amount of research required prior to purchase or the amount of time available to make the decision. However, what is clear is that the perception of

**Table 3.6** Perceived risks of sustainable purchase

Type of perceived risk	Perception of risk from sustainability issues
Financial	Will the extra cost incurred from purchasing sustainable products represent value for money or save me money over time? Will others benefit from me paying a higher price? e.g. Fairtrade products, loft insulation products
Performance	Will the sustainable product still provide the same quality and benefits as the non-sustainable alternative? e.g. environmentally friendly household cleaning products
Physical	Will the sustainable alternative be just as safe for me to use as the non-sustainable alternative? e.g. the mercury level in a compact fluorescent lamp
Social	Will those people who are important to me be impressed by my purchasing sustainable products? e.g. solar panels
Ego	Will I feel better about myself by making sustainable purchases? e.g. ethically produced clothing
Time	Will I find the sustainable option convenient? Will it take me more time than I expect to use it or to receive the benefits? e.g. recycling household rubbish, composting vegetable leftovers for use in the garden

risk will not necessarily diminish after purchase in the context of sustainability. It is precisely because many sustainably motivated purchases depend on credence or because certain benefits take a considerable amount of time to become apparent (such as a reduction in energy bills over a year after insulation) that the perceived level of risk may last long after purchase and extend cognitive dissonance and the post-purchase evaluation period considerably.

The challenge for the marketer will be to guide the consumer through the whole of the purchase decision-making process alleviating at each stage the different types of perceived risk by providing the right information and support at each of the crucial times and maintaining contact with the consumer deep into the post-purchase period.

### **Apply it: Reducing risk**

1. Find examples of how marketers are managing the six different types of risks to prospective consumers in order to dispel their potential misgiving about making sustainable purchases.