

EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO REFRAME 'SUSTAINABILITY' IN THE MARKETING CURRICULUM

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Sustainable and responsible marketing are regarded as important issues to embed into the marketing curriculum. Several scholars see these areas combining to create 'sustainable marketing' - marketing which goes beyond a commercial focus and considers wider societal views (Peattie & Belz, 2010; Gordon *et al.*, 2011). It is evident that current levels of consumption cannot continue (Lim, 2017) and yet arguably most UG marketing curricula focus on encouraging consumption, with evidence in practice even more apparent. This was demonstrated by Comfort *et al.*, (2009), who found that in food retailers alone, marketing messages focused on encouraging consumption rather than restraining from it. Peattie and Collins (2009) argue that sustainable consumption has been criticised as being an oxymoron; in order to consume something, you have to use it up, which is therefore not sustainable, with Peattie and Peattie (2009) highlighting the tension between commercial marketing techniques and achieving social objectives. However, Millar *et al* (2012) argue that greater consideration is needed in how academic and practitioner bodies can move the sustainability agenda forward in business. Arguably it is now educators' responsibility to do this, particularly as universities can be seen as central players in the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, as if graduates recognise the importance of a more sustainable society, it is more likely to happen (Chang & Lien, 2020).

Kotler and Lee (2008) maintain the recognition of societal marketing as being an effective way of changing behaviour which highlights a need to focus on sustainable and responsible marketing into universities' curricula. Delivering a level 6 module 'Contemporary Issue in Advertising and PR' provided an opportunity to embed these issues, working with credible and authentic industry partners and focusing on Education for Sustainability, rather than Education about Sustainability (Sterling, 2004; Scott & Gough, 2006). With the support from a Communications Agency, who in 2021 signed up to the Advertising Association's Ad-Net-Zero initiative (Advertising Association, 2020) and guest lectures from a leading UK retailer, the module provided UG students with academic, client and agency perspectives and helped to embed an active learning approach to these issues. Students were tasked with writing a thought leadership blog post around contemporary issues in sustainability, brand purpose, ethics and diversity. To support the students' assessment, learning was structured with asynchronous tutor and guest lectures, with live seminars to challenge thinking around brand performance on 'green washing', sustainability, the cyclical economy, equality and diversity. Students felt these were critical areas of importance for their blog, with the ultimate reward being the inclusion of their blog on the agency website. Therefore, through the inclusion of a 'contemporary' issue that resonated with students, this gave them an opportunity to develop practical content marketing skills (blog writing), engagement with real industry practice and

positioned sustainability and responsible marketing as a priority on this module. More widely, students were given the opportunity to make an impact on their future careers and consider future change and priorities for the sector.

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