

## SUSTAINABLE MARKETING – PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES UNDER PRESENT ECONOMY

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### ABSTRACT

The article reflects on the attitude, understanding and knowledge on sustainable marketing, as well as the essence of sustainable marketing, the strategy of its practical use and the concept of development. As a result of research, definitions of sustainable development and sustainable marketing and a model of concept of motivation of its use at a company were developed and the strategy of practical use of a sustainable marketing and the motivation of use at Latvian companies was ascertained, confirming the initially advanced hypotheses. In order to fulfil the purpose and objectives, the authors used the following quantitative and qualitative methods of economic research: polls, comparisons, grouping. The study is based on scientific papers published by Latvian and foreign scholars, general and special literature, periodicals. The authors performed an assessment, market research, comparative analysis, arranged an expert examination and used the computer software MS Excel for the analysis and processing of data. The article is based on the results of the author's research in 2013. The authors used examination and monitoring in their research.

KEYWORDS: *sustainability, sustainable development, sustainable marketing.*

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### Introduction

Recently there has been much discussion publicly, in the literature, press etc. about the problem of social responsibility, ecology, “green” policy and sustainability. It has become important for the society to solve the problem pertaining not only to the satisfaction of basic needs, but also to the preservation and improvement of natural resources with less harm to the environment and one's own health to enable the next generation to satisfy their needs likewise with the existing natural resources and ecological products preserved.

Hence it follows that solutions of the problem of sustainable development depend not only on the process whereby an ecological product is created, but also on investments in the future to improve the existing situation. A sustainable marketing implies not merely changes in the process of product manufacturing and delivery of a particular company, but changes in economy, thinking and action of the whole society.

The purpose of the article is to assess the strategy of practical use of sustainable marketing in the Latvian market. The authors studied the motivation of use of sustainable marketing, with Latvian companies selected as objects. In order to serve the purpose, the following tasks were performed:

- to study the essence of sustainable marketing;
- to draw up a questionnaire of expert examination;
- to perform an expert examination on the strategy of use of the concept of development of a sustainable marketing at Latvian companies;

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- to compare and assess the results;
- to analyze and rate the attitude, understanding and knowledge of companies regarding a sustainable marketing with the help of common quantitative and qualitative methods of economic research – polls, comparisons, grouping. The study is based on scientific papers published by Latvian and foreign scholars, general and special literature, periodicals. The authors performed an assessment, market research, comparative analysis, arranged an expert examination and used the computer software MS Excel for the analysis and processing of data.

## 1. Essence of Sustainable Marketing

The issue of sustainability has become topical for the society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the rapid population growth, technological changes and unprecedented economic growth of the twentieth century all combined to pose a number of challenges for the new century, including the following: *population, poverty, health, urbanisation, peak oil, ecosystem damage, food, water, climate change* (Martin, Schouten, 2012: 8–9).

Scientists long ago cautioned us that, if the economic growth continues at the same rate, the limited environmental resources will be depleted within the next 100 years and the population and industrial capacity may rapidly fall (Weitt, 2013). In the Report of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development “Our Common Future” of 1987, sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN World Commission on Environment and Development “Our Common Future”, 1987). The authors agree with the opinions that equality is needed both among generations and within each generation since the economic growth has not aided the equality between the poor and the rich. Thus, the persistent increase in production output in order to eliminate poverty did not justify itself (Dimante, 2010: 364). Hence it follows that sustainability depends not only on the process where an ecological product is made, but also on contributions to the future by improving the present situation.

This is suggested by Latvia’s Strategy of Sustainable Development „Latvia 2030” drafted by the Ministry of Regional Development and Local Governments of Latvia, the purpose of which is to mark the main guidelines of state development and the spatial perspective for the period till 2030.

Figure 1 presents a scheme of the sustainability process among three dimensions of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – to enable the creation of competitive advantage for the state, regions, industries, companies.

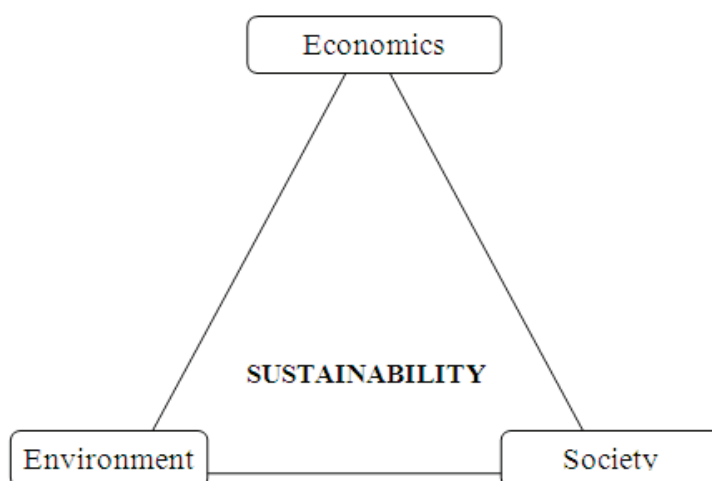


Figure 1. Main criteria of sustainability

Source: created by the authors according information of Martin, Schouten, 2012: 19

Hence it follows that sustainability depend on the environment and economics as much as on the public contribution to the overall development. This implies that a key prerequisite of sustainability is society, its action and thinking. The authors disagree with the view that “Sustainable development is a way of using resources with a view to meet the needs of people, at the same time preserving the environment so that not only the current, but also further generations were able to meet such needs” (Andersone, Gaile, Aramina, 2010: 1). as they believe that the said definition lacks an emphasis on the integration of social, environmental and economic development. The authors propose the following definition: Sustainable development is an integrated and balanced development of public wealth, environment and economics meeting the physiological, social and other needs of people and ensuring the preservation of environment and ecological diversity without jeopardizing the possibilities of meeting the needs of future generations.

The implementation of sustainability is possible at numerous levels, for instance, at the level of state, region, industry or company. From a company’s point of view, the conclusion is that all operations of the company should be aimed towards to sustainable development with an equal regard to management, finance, sales and marketing (see Figure 2).

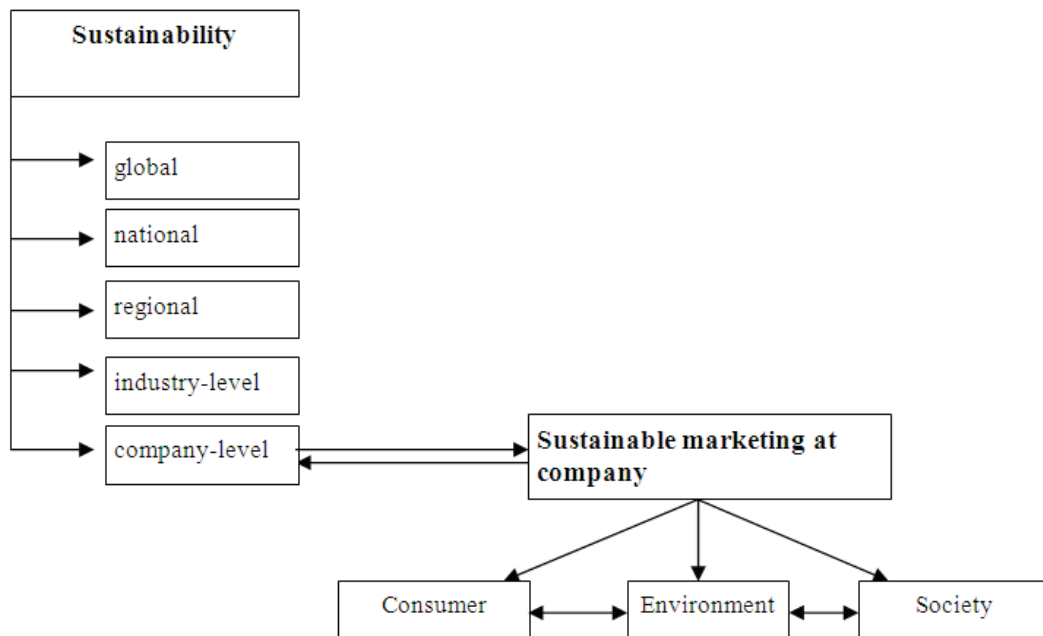


Figure 2. Main conditions for sustainable marketing

Source: created by the authors

There exists a view that: “Social marketing is an umbrella, a term used to sign the various ways how marketing may stimulate a positive social behaviour and including criticising marketing and green or sustainable marketing” (Andersone, Gaile, Aramina, 2010: 11). However, by no means can sustainable marketing be equaled to green marketing. In the authors’ view, a green marketing, a corporate socially responsible marketing, is merely a tool to implement a sustainable marketing.

The authors find the development of social marketing to be at the core of a concept of sustainable marketing. Supplementing the social marketing concept with the main criteria of sustainability yields the concept of sustainable marketing shown in Figure 3.

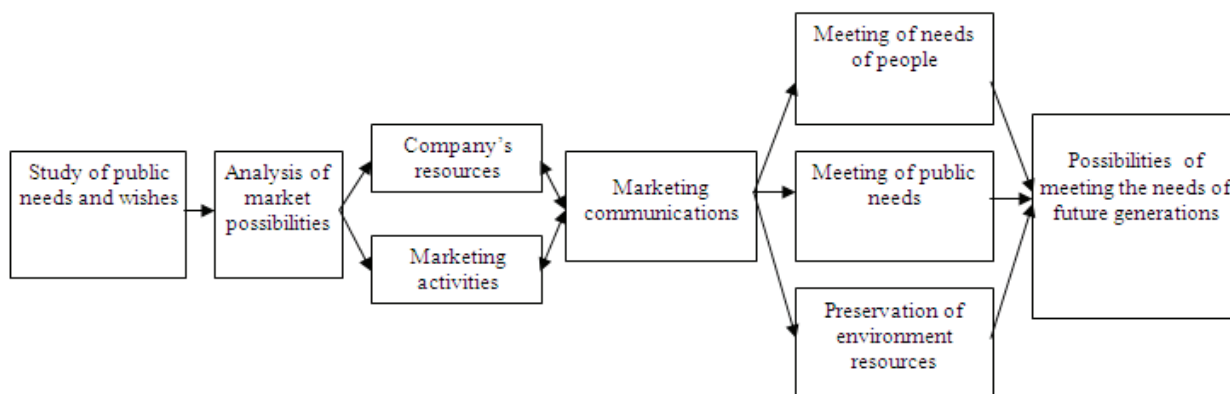


Figure 3. Concept of sustainable marketing

Source: created by the authors according to the information of Praude, 2011: 41; Armstrong, Kotler, 2009: 401

Figure 3 reflects that meeting the current needs of consumers is based on market possibilities, the company's resources, marketing activities, communication with consumers, and also envisaging the preservation of environmental resources and development to meet the needs of future generations. The authors suggest the following definition: sustainable marketing is the process of the creation, communication and delivery of consumption values to the consumer with a view to meet their needs and observe the requirements of environment preservation without jeopardising the possibilities of meeting the needs of future generations.

## 2. Motivation of Use of Sustainable Marketing at Latvian Companies

In their research of the motivation of use of sustainable marketing and hence the possibilities of its implementation at Latvian companies, the authors ground on the following theoretical statements:

1. Sustainable development is an integrated and balanced development of public wealth, environment and economics meeting the physiological, social and other needs of people and ensuring the preservation of environment and ecological diversity without jeopardising the possibilities of meeting the needs of future generations.
2. Sustainable marketing is the process of creation, communication and delivery of consumption values to the consumer with a view to meet their needs and observe the requirements of environment preservation without jeopardising the possibilities of meeting the needs of future generations.
3. Sustainable marketing of a company must be beneficial if the elements of marketing mix serving for people, planet and profit are used (see Figure 5). The concept of sustainable marketing does not require increased costs in the company's marketing budget, but rather a well-thought approach – the creation, promotion and sale of sustainable products/services (packaging, pricing, delivery, transportation etc.).
4. The implementation of a strategy of sustainable marketing in Latvia requires state support. The state institutions need to not only develop legislation and normative acts, but also grant tax relief to companies with sustainable marketing.

The methodology of research was as follows:

At first, the authors developed a model of sustainable marketing at a company (see Figure 4) and advanced the following hypotheses of further research:

H1 – Latvian companies differ in terms of knowledge, understanding and information on sustainable marketing depending on their size and location;

H2 – Latvian companies lack motivation of using the approach of sustainable marketing. Where the approach of sustainable marketing is used, there are differences between the companies' internal incentives of its use and the influence of external environment;

H3 – Latvian companies using a sustainable marketing do not implement a balanced approach with all elements of the marketing mix engaged.

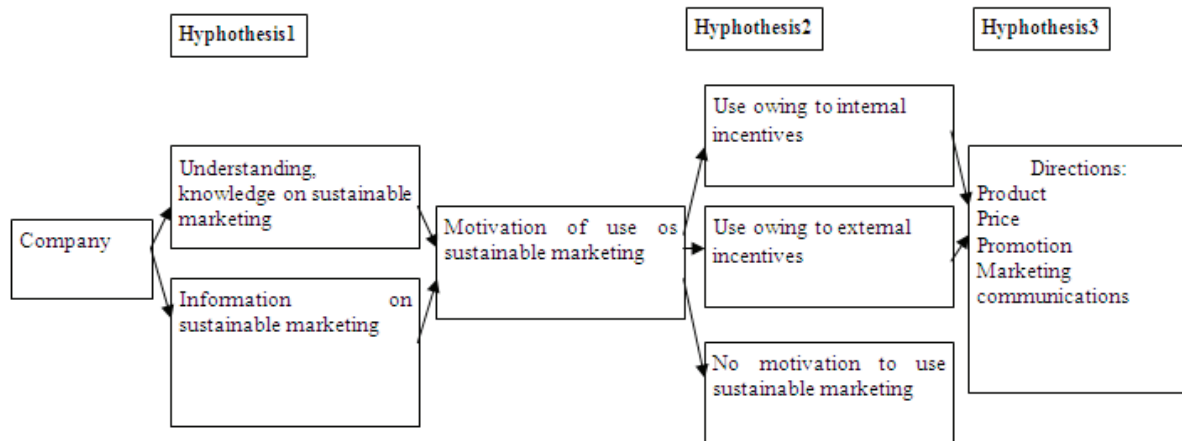


Figure 4. Model of motivation of use of sustainable marketing at a company

Source: created by the authors

Secondly, the authors believe that extensive polling of companies should take place in all the regions of Latvia, using unpublished materials of the Latvian Association of Small and Medium Manufacturing Enterprises, the Ministry of Finance and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, but requires a prior verification of the grounds of hypothesis (Unpublished materials of the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Latvia, 2013; Latvian Association of Small and Medium Manufacturing Enterprises, 2013; Latvian Direct Selling Association, 2013). For that purpose, the authors conducted an expert examination and commenced a broad study. A questionnaire of expert poll was drawn up, and the expert examination took place in April 2013. Representatives of various industries were carefully and advisedly selected to form a group of 10 people, including entrepreneurs of different sectors with more than ten years of experience in trading, services, marketing, officers of financial institutions, professors of the University of Latvia. The experts were asked ten questions, providing them beforehand with handout materials concerning the development of Latvian economy (Ministry of Economics Republic of Latvia, 2012; Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2013; Latvian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2013).

Thirdly, the computer software MS Excel was used to calculate the total expert ratings, compare the information they had provided and reveal the general trends in each question.

Table 1 presents the experts' view on the source of information regarding sustainable marketing for companies.

Table 1. Source of information on sustainable marketing for companies according to experts

No.	Information on Sustainable Marketing	Total expert rating
1.	Mass media	8
2.	Literature	2
3.	Friends, acquaintances	0
4.	Conferences, seminars	8
5.	Exhibition	8
6.	Industry, association	12
7.	Social networks	3

Source: created by the authors

Table 1 shows that the experts have selected exhibitions, conferences and mass media as most popular sources of information on sustainable marketing for companies. This mostly likely stems from the fact that not only Latvian companies visit and participate in international exhibitions, but also international companies take part in exhibitions, conferences seminars hosted in Latvia. The authors believe those to be among the main carriers of information regarding sustainable marketing. The mass media contain information not as much on a sustainable marketing as on a sustainable business in general.

Table 2. Connotations of sustainable marketing for Latvian companies according to experts

No.	Connotations of sustainable marketing	Total expert rating
1.	Ecological product	6
2.	Company’s social activity/responsibility	7
3.	Way of communication with consumers	8
4.	Product quality	2
5.	Investments in future	2
6.	No connotations	0
7.	Other variant	0

Source: created by authors

Table 2 indicates that companies primarily associate a sustainable marketing with the company’s social activity and its responsibility, the way of communication with consumers and an ecological product. As the authors have noted previously, a sustainable marketing indeed pertains to responsible social activity by companies, while the connotation of a sustainable marketing with communication with consumers is a popular answer because both consumers and companies have insufficient information on a sustainable marketing after all. There are companies, which both seek information and explore the possibilities and development of marketing nowadays, but those which don’t mostly rate a sustainable marketing as a possibility to communicate with consumers. Unfortunately, very few companies relate a sustainable marketing with investments in future.

A sustainable marketing at a company is related to all elements of the marketing mix or 4P – Product, Price, Place, Promotion, directed towards 3P – People, Planet, Profit.

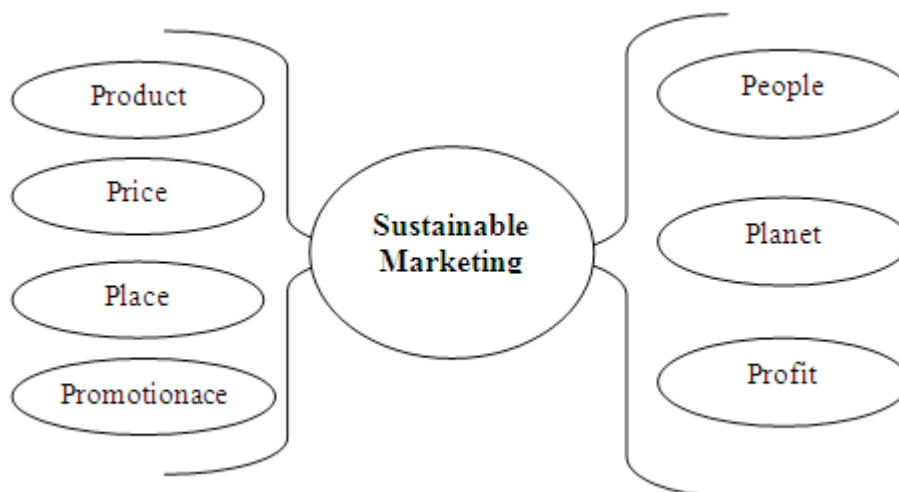


Figure 5. Sustainable marketing concept for a company

Source: created by the authors according information of Martin, Schouten, 2012: 19

Figure 5 schematically presents the concept of sustainable marketing in business by using the four elements of marketing mix in order to observe the public interest, preserve environmental resources and to do sustainable and successful business. Therefore, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, companies should adapt their assortment of goods and services to the changeable needs of consumers, overall public attitude and legislation. Companies are frequently able to negotiate with different stakeholders to alter the overall consumption of goods/services rather than merely change their corporate activity. Next, we will analyse the elements of marketing mix, which Latvian companies devote more attention to.

*Table 3.* Use of marketing mix elements at Latvian companies according to experts

No.	Elements of marketing mix	Total expert rating
1.	Quality of product/service	2
2.	Assortment of product/service	3
3.	Design/packaging of product/service	2
4.	Brand of product/service	6
5.	Price of product/service	5
6.	Distribution channel of product/service	1
7.	Promotion of product/service	7

*Source:* created by the authors

Table 3 reveals that companies pay attention to the development of such marketing mix elements as the promotion of goods and services, including advertisement, sponsorship, sales promotion, direct marketing and personal selling, as well as the branding of goods and services. A key role is also played by pricing. Rather few companies contribute to the development and improvement of distribution channels – production, sale and storage – and to the enhancement of assortment and quality. This implies that companies essentially do not relate product development and logistics to a sustainable marketing.

Companies focus on the price of goods and services rather than on the improvement of internal processes. Overall, the authors conclude that companies do not use the whole set of elements of the marketing mix – some of them are promoted less than others, although the development of marketing mix may yield a higher efficiency than the allocation of resources to just a few individual elements of the mix.

We will proceed with finding out which elements of the marketing mix by themselves are related to a sustainable marketing.

*Table 4.* Relation of marketing mix elements with sustainable marketing according to experts

No.	Elements of marketing mix	Total expert rating
1.	Quality of product/service	2
2.	Assortment of product/service	1
3.	Design/packaging of product/service	5
4.	Brand of product/service	4
5.	Price of product/service	2
6.	Distribution channel of product/service	2
7.	Promotion of product/service	10

*Source:* created by the authors

The data of Table 4 suggest that companies mostly associate a sustainable marketing with the promotion of goods or services (advertising, sponsorship, sales promotion, direct marketing, personal selling). Packaging, product and service quality, distribution channels and price have been rated as less prominent elements of the marketing mix. Presumably, companies do not assign a key role to these elements and do not associate



them with a sustainable marketing. In the authors' opinion, it is the production, sale and storage of goods that drives towards the main criteria of sustainable development – economy, environment, society.

Table 5 presents the experts' assessment of the criteria of marketing strategy at Latvian companies.

Table 5. Criteria of marketing strategy of Latvian companies by importance according to experts, in percentage

	Criteria of marketing strategy	Expert rating, %				
		Not relevant	Rather not relevant	Rather relevant	Relevant	Very relevant
1.	Quality of product	–	–	10	60	30
2.	Packaging/design of product	–	–	–	30	70
3.	Economy of product	–	–	50	40	10
4.	Harmlessness of product for user	–	10	40	50	–
5.	Options of product recycling or utilisation	10	40	50	–	–
6.	Quality of service	–	–	–	10	90
7.	Price of product	–	–	–	80	20
8.	Transportation of product	–	10	80	10	–
9.	Storage of product	–	70	10	20	–
10.	Different methods of payment – cash, debit cards and/or credit cards	30	70	–	–	–
11.	Marketing communications on the Internet	–	–	10	70	20
12.	Price rebates/competitions/lotteries/coupons/souvenirs	–	–	–	20	80
13.	Seller's advice	–	–	–	10	90
14.	Sponsorship	10	10	70	10	10
15.	Customer loyalty programme, customer card etc.	10	20	30	30	10
16.	Reputation of company	–	20	50	30	–
17.	Profit from product sales	–	–	–	10	90
18.	Location of shop	–	–	30	40	30
19.	Advertisement on mass media	10	40	30	20	–
20.	Profitability of use of sale/production resources	–	–	10	80	10
21.	Charity initiatives	10	80	10	–	–
22.	Corporate social responsibility	–	10	50	30	10

Source: created by the authors

As shown in Table 5, the experts have marked product quality as an important criterion of marketing strategy for companies nowadays. Although the preceding questions hinted at little attention to the improvement of product quality as an element of the marketing mix, companies care for the quality of their products. Also important in the marketing strategy is the role of product design, packaging, economy and harmlessness to the user. The authors have observed that there are plenty of variations marketed with regard to ecological packaging, promoted as environment-friendly. Equally significant is design where the current trends are "green policy", "handmade" etc. One has to admit that on many occasions it is merely a way of promoting a product on the market, while deeper in the marketing strategy there is less relation with product quality and sustainable facilities of storage or transportation. Perhaps companies have a desire to promote products in such a way, but lack the practical skills required to properly apply a concept of sustainable marketing.

Latvian consumers frequently buy a discount, not a product, hence the experts have acknowledged the great importance of product price, discounts and other methods of sales promotion. Companies, for their part, focus more on sales, advertising and a profitable use of resources, with criteria as storage, transportation, quality improvement, charity events, which build one's reputation, image and attitude, left aside.



Table 6. Importance of observance of internal environment criteria at Latvian companies according to experts, in percentage

Operation criteria	Expert rating, %				
	Not important	Rather not important	Rather important	Important	Very important
Environment preservation	–	–	80	20	–
Consumer health	–	–	60	40	–
State economic development	–	–	80	20	–
Consumer education	–	40	50	10	–
Product ecologicality	–	20	40	20	–
Public attitude towards company	–	–	50	50	–
Green economy	–	20	60	20	–
Product recycling options	–	30	40	30	–
Innovation	–	–	10	60	20
Tax payments	–	20	40	30	10
Reputation of company	–	10	20	50	20

Source: created by the authors

Table 6 shows that all the presented criteria hold a prominent role in the implementation of a company's internal operations, with an emphasis on the public attitude towards the company, the innovative nature of products and services and the company's reputation. The public attitude towards the company and the company's reputation as criteria have earned the highest percentage, which is in line with the confirmed trend that a sustainable marketing and the strategy of its use are closely related to communication with consumers. Overall, the criteria of internal environment were rated lower in terms of their influence on the development of sustainable marketing.

Next, the experts were asked a similar question, but with respect to the influence of external environment upon a sustainable marketing.

Table 7. Importance of observance of external environment criteria at Latvian companies according to experts, in percentage

Operation criteria	Expert rating, %				
	Not important	Rather not important	Rather important	Important	Very important
Environment preservation	–	–	10	70	20
Consumer health	–	–	10	70	20
State economic development	–	–	–	70	30
Consumer education	–	–	10	60	30
Product ecologicality	–	–	–	80	20
Public attitude towards company	–	–	–	70	30
Green economy	–	–	30	70	–
Product recycling options	–	–	–	40	60
Innovation	–	–	–	10	90
Tax payments	–	–	–	20	80
Legislation	–	–	–	20	80
Decisions of state institutions	–	–	–	30	70
Regulations of local governments	–	–	–	30	70

Source: created by the authors

Table 7 reveals that companies particularly value the criteria of external environment. Product innovation, tax payments and legislation have been market as important factors of influence. This suggests that companies relate their operation strategy to the improvement of internal processes, still expecting the external environment to help them develop.

Table 8. Experts' response to a statement that the development of sustainable marketing in Latvia has a favourable influence of external environment

Total expert rating	Entirely agree	Agree	Hard to say	Disagree	Entirely disagree
	4	5	1	0	0

Source: created by the authors

Table 8 shows that the experts have assessed the external conditions as favourable for the development of sustainable marketing in Latvia. The likely reason is that the present society requires ecological products, advised and qualitative services. The society itself is on its way to a shift of action and thinking, cares more for the preservation of environment. As the authors have noticed, it has become a trend to purchase ecological products from local households and handmade things in spite of the substantial price difference. Once again the conclusion is that companies pay too much attention to factors of external environment in the development of sustainable marketing. The authors see this as evidence that sustainable marketing as a trend of marketing in the Latvian market is at the stage of development. Overall, companies seem to lack motivation to introduce tools of sustainable marketing in their operations.

Table 9. Dependence of sustainable marketing development in Latvia on company size, location and management according to experts

Characteristic	Rating	Entirely agree	Agree	Hard to say	Disagree	Entirely disagree
Company size	–	8	1	1	–	–
Company location	1	6	2	1	–	–
Company management	–	8	2	–	–	–

Source: created by the authors

The experts consider that the development of sustainable marketing depends on the company's size, location and management alike. The authors agree and note that a sustainable marketing begins from within the company, the reasoning of employees, a shift of action by placing certain processes forward and developing them so that the criteria of sustainability be met. It is one of the conditions to prove that a concept of sustainable marketing does not initially require substantial investments. In fact, its implementation should begin with management and only afterwards funds for the improvement of a marketing mix should be sought, planned, spent etc.

Table 10. Experts' forecasts on the development of sustainable marketing in Latvia in the next five years

Total expert rating	Positive	Rather positive	Hard to say	Rather negative	Definitely negative
	2	3	4	1	0

Source: created by the authors

The experts' responses lead to a conclusion that there tend to be favourable conditions for the development of sustainable marketing in Latvia. Its possible development over the next five years will facilitate the consumption of ecological products, the shift of processes in the operations of companies and more changes in the public thinking. The authors believe that the core value is knowledge on a substantial marketing, still, in order to increase the motivation of its use, the improvement of business with regard to the observance of a sustainable marketing concept is crucial.

Without doubt, every industry has its peculiarities in the sale of goods, the provision of services etc., but there are also common tendencies applicable to all industries, therefore the authors have begun a broad research to find out the opinion of marketing specialists of Latvian companies regarding a sustainable marketing and the motivation of its use, with the involvement of companies of different sectors and sizes from all regions of Latvia.

## Conclusions / Recommendations

Sustainable development is an integrated and balanced development of public wealth, environment and economics meeting the physiological, social and other needs of people and ensuring the preservation of environment and ecological diversity without jeopardising the possibilities of meeting the needs of future generations.

Sustainable marketing is the process of creation, communication and delivery of consumption values to the consumer with a view to meet their needs and observe the requirements of environment preservation without jeopardising the possibilities of meeting the needs of future generations.

The research confirmed the initial Hypothesis 1: Latvian companies differ in terms of knowledge, understanding and information on sustainable marketing depending on their size and location.

The research confirmed the initial Hypothesis 2: Latvian companies lack motivation of using the approach of sustainable marketing. Where the approach of sustainable marketing is used, there are differences between the companies' internal incentives of its use and the influence of external environment.

The research confirmed the initial Hypothesis 3: Latvian companies using a sustainable marketing do not implement a balanced approach with all elements of the marketing mix engaged.

Companies have to adapt their supply of goods and services to the changeable needs of consumers, the overall public attitude and the legislation.

Companies are frequently able to deal with different stakeholders to achieve changes in the overall consumption of goods/services instead of merely changing the corporate activity.

The implementation of a strategy of sustainable marketing in Latvia requires state support. The public authorities need to not only develop legislation and normative acts, but also grant proper tax relieves to companies actually applying a strategy of sustainable marketing.

The results of research essentially confirmed that there are favorable conditions for the development of sustainable marketing in Latvia in the next five years. In order to take advantage of it, the authors recommend for companies to conduct market research on the need and demand for sustainable products and to have regard of all elements of the marketing mix when developing their marketing strategy because a sustainable marketing of a company must be beneficial on condition that the marketing mix elements serving for People, Planet and Profit are in use. The concept of sustainable marketing does not require companies to increase expenses in their marketing budget, but a well-thought approach – the creation, promotion and selling (packaging, price, delivery, transportation etc.) of sustainable goods/services.

The authors propose a broader study of small, medium and large companies of Latvia in all the regions and in different spheres with the involvement of scientists and stakeholders.

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## **DARNIOJI RINKODARA – PERSPEKTYVOS IR ŠIUOLAIKINĒS EKONOMIKOS IŠŠŪKIAI**

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### Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas darnusis marketingas, aptariama šios sąvokos esmė ir strategija, kaip ją įgyvendinti. Pateikiami *darniojo marketingo* ir *darniojo vystymosi* apibrėžimai, koncepcinis darnaus marketingo taikymo Latvijos bendrovėse skatinimo modelis ir jo įgyvendinimo strategija. Tyrime taikomi apklausos, palyginimo ir grupavimo, mokslinės literatūros analizės metodai. Autoriai atliko vertinimą, rinkos tyrimą, lyginamąją analizę, ekspertinį vertinimą, duomenis apdorojo *MS Excel*. Straipsnis paremtas tyrimu, kurį autoriai atliko 2013 metais.

PAGRINDINIAI ŽODŽIAI: *darnumas, darnusis vystymasis, darnusis marketingas.*

JEL KLASIFIKACIJA: M310