

# Globalization and Academic Research: The Case of Sustainability Marketing

**Keyoor Purani**  
**Sunil Sahadev**  
**Deepak S. Kumar**

## Abstract

The impact of globalization on academic research is undeniable. This impact is more pertinent and strongly felt in the academic field of marketing. The pattern of this impact can be easily discerned from the trends in academic publishing in marketing such as more globalized representation of university affiliation of authors or the type of topics that dominate academic publishing in the field of marketing. In this article, through systematic analysis, one such trend is observed. The subjects covered by articles published in the 10 important marketing journals are analyzed in order to measure the extent to which these journals cover sustainability and related issues. Minimal representation of sustainability-based issues in the academic papers published in the most important marketing journals is argued to be closer to the idea of 'Academic Capitalism' in light of globalization. Considering the argument that sustainability and related issues often pose difficult questions to the mainstream schools of thought in the field of marketing, the minimal coverage given to sustainability-based issues should be perceived as reflecting the general lack of interest in conducting research in sustainability. The article discusses implications as well as pathways for future research.

## Keywords

Sustainability marketing, meta-analysis, academic capitalism, globalization

## Introduction

Academic thought has always been heavily influenced by waves of globalization in societies. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) in their seminal work introduced the concept of 'Academic Capitalism' to refer to the changes that globalization can bring about in academic thinking and discourse. According to this framework, the globalization process invariably induces new values to academic thought, values which are more in tune with for-profit sector. These values leave an enduring impact on the nature and scope of academic discourse and in turn get reflected in the topics that academicians choose to focus in their research efforts. As a test case, an important area of discourse where the effect

of academic capitalism could find strong traction is the academic discipline of marketing.

Like most other academic disciplines that embrace 'mainstream' management theory as well as find legitimacy through a close association with academic programmes like 'Master of Business Administration' and 'Bachelor of Business Administration', the academic discipline of marketing is heavily oriented towards the for-profit sector. In fact, the notion of 'profitability' is central to the idea of marketing itself. Accordingly, most of the global marketing academic associations like the American Marketing Association (AMA), the Chartered Institution of Marketing (CIM) and the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) use the words 'profit', 'profitably', 'value',

---

**Keyoor Purani** is an Associate Professor in marketing at the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode, India.

E-mail: kpurani@iimk.ac.in

**Sunil Sahadev** is a Professor of Marketing at the Salford Business School, University of Salford, UK. E-mail: s.sahadev@salford.ac.uk

**Deepak S. Kumar** is a doctoral programme participant in marketing at the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode, India.

E-mail: deepak01fpm@iimk.ac.in

etc. while providing definition of what 'marketing' stands for. In a seminal study carried out by Polonsky and Mankelov (2000) which looked at the areas of research interest of marketing academicians through a global study, only 16 per cent of the marketing academicians were interested in the social aspect of marketing. An overwhelming number of academicians (more than 60 per cent) were, in fact, interested in conducting research in the fields of strategy, consumer behaviour and international marketing.

It is widely accepted that academic research in the field of what is recognized as 'marketing' embraces issues and problems that fall within the purview of more established academic disciplines like consumer psychology, applied economics, social psychology, human geography, organizational psychology and industrial economics. All these academic fields have a strong tradition in considering research issues that pertain to social and environmental well-being. It would, therefore, be interesting to look at the importance attached to social and environmental issues within the field of marketing while considering the broader topic of globalization in higher education. In this endeavour, we apply the theoretical framework of academic capitalism developed by Slaughter and Leslie (1997).

We discuss this issue by analyzing the number of articles published in top marketing journals in the subject of sustainability marketing.

### *Social and Environmental Issues in the Field of Marketing*

Sustainability marketing is the label given to the broad stream of marketing that looks at issues like social marketing, marketing ethics, environmental marketing and socially responsible marketing. The growing awareness about environmental issues and need for conservation has led to a transformational change in the process of doing business towards more environmental friendly ways. Marketers and policy makers have identified this as the need of the hour and are now looking for marketing their offers with lesser impacts on the environment or in a more sustainable manner. Different firms across the globe have embraced sustainable manner of development. For instance, Walmart says 'environmental sustainability has become an essential ingredient to doing business responsibly and successfully'.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Ariel's Turn to 30 campaign, asking consumers to reduce washing temperature, save energy and carbon emissions can be seen as another

instance for promoting sustainability.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, numerous examples can be cited in practice.

On the academic front, however, a few academic disciplines have integrated sustainability into their literature. This is especially true of marketing. Just the way the concept of marketing has changed over the years; marketing scholars have started looking for sustainability and green aspects with greater attention. Yet, despite the progress made in the study of sustainability, there is a paucity of research on the topic in premier marketing journals. Studies have noted that the theoretical development of research on sustainability is in its infancy; while scholars have begun to explore it, much of it remains largely unexplored (Connelly, Ketchen & Slater, 2011).

Though the argument of 'infancy' is true to an extent, it is also true that initial discourses in what eventually came to be called as sustainable marketing started appearing from the late 1980s in marketing journals (Van Dam & Apeldoorn, 1996). In fact, one of the first articles that concern this topic (Fisk, 1973) appeared in the *Journal of Marketing* in 1973. Hence as an idea that originated almost two decades ago, cannot entirely be considered as 'infant' and 'new'. Further, if we also consider how important streams of thought like 'marketing orientation', 'relationship marketing', 'service dominant logic', etc, which, too, started making an appearance in the early- to late-1980s has come to dominate academic journals in the last decade, the 'infancy' argument certainly looks quite equivocal.

According to Van Dam and Apeldoorn (1996, p. 46), sustainable marketing involves 'marketing within and supportive of sustainable economic development'. Though, sustainable marketing is different from related concepts like green marketing and ecological marketing, they are fundamentally linked in the sense that they have the potential to generate 'social dilemmas' (Van Dam & Apeldoorn, 1996). This is because; theory in marketing from the beginning is closely associated with conventional assumptions of classical economics. Even though, there have been several strong voices against these fundamental issues within the marketing fraternity, the reality is that contemporary marketing thinking and the most entrenched schools of thought within the larger domain of marketing theory, still identifies itself with classical economics that emphasizes wealth creation and profit maximization.

Sustainable marketing and the associated concepts, on the other hand, presents counter arguments and emphasize the fact that 'the combination of individual optimal choices could lead to collective suboptimal consequences'. This

lies at the heart of our enquiry into the significance of these topics within the mainstream marketing thinking. While there are specific journals that take special interest in sustainability related issues like *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *Journal of Macromarketing*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, etc, publishing research studies in these journals (with considerably less impact factor) could potentially lead to a researcher's work being neglected by the mainstream. In this enquiry, we look at what we call as 'important mainstream marketing journals', which are both highly reputed, very popular and accept articles from all the major streams in marketing.

Please bear in mind that there are specialized journals in all the different areas in marketing. For instance *Journal of International Marketing* and *International Marketing Review* cater specifically to researchers on international marketing related topics. The more general journals like *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, etc, have a more general readership and attract top quality research from all the different fields in marketing. We have also included two stream specific journals like *Journal of Advertising* and *Journal of Retailing* in this review since they are highly reputed and serious marketing researchers consider publishing in them to be a matter of prestige.

We focus on marketing-related journals and assess the intellectual structure of sustainability research in detail. This article discusses the concept of sustainability from a marketing perspective. Then it uncovers the major dimensions of sustainability and an attempt is made to illustrate the theoretical developments about sustainability in the last decade by conducting a meta-analysis of papers published in top 10 marketing journals as well as the results of the analysis. This article, therefore, attempts to take stock of the theoretical developments related to sustainability marketing and related topics through their presence in articles published during this time frame. We limit our analysis to mainstream journals in marketing that have a high impact factor. The endeavour is to bring out the extent of coverage given to sustainability issues within the discipline of marketing and how this has changed over time. We discuss the implications and conclude by developing research questions for future research.

## What is Sustainability?

The World Commission on Environment and Development Report (1987), also known as the Brundtland Report, defined sustainable development as development that

'meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. Studies have looked upon this concept from various perspectives. Sustainability works on 'Triple Bottom Line' approach that is, planet, people and profit (Charter et al., 2006), which can be translated into environmental quality, social equity and economic prosperity (Elkington, 1998). The environmental quality dimension focuses on firm's activities with lesser impact on the environment and the planet at large; social equity dimension considers the impact on society and the economic prosperity aspects focuses on the value creation and enhanced financial performance of a firm's activities. Drawing from this, sustainability can be viewed as a multi-dimensional construct, and so an attempt is made to identify the various dimensions through which researches have approached sustainability in marketing.

Based on the review of various studies related to sustainability in marketing, a few dimensions of sustainability which encompass the triple bottom line approach is identified. These include dimensions of green marketing, social marketing/societal marketing, consumption reduction, ecological marketing, demarketing, corporate social responsibility, environmental behaviour and ethics. Since some of these terms are not common in marketing literature, the definitions of them are provided. Green or environmental marketing consists of all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment (Polonsky, 1995).

Social or societal marketing includes those initiatives of corporates that have at least one non-economic objective related to social welfare and use the resources of the company and/or one of its partners (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002). Ecological marketing is the study of the positive and negative aspects of marketing activities on pollution, energy depletion and non-energy resources depletion (Apaiwongse, 1994), while demarketing is generally on a discouraging demand. Corporate social responsibility can be seen as the managerial obligation to take action to protect and improve both the welfare of society as a whole and the interest of organizations (Cochran & Wood, 1984), environmental behaviour considers the pro-environmental concerns of corporates and customers, while ethics covers the ethical issues and aspects in doing business.

For marketers, sustainability can lead to the reduction of surplus supply of products, reduction of reverse supply, internal marketing, enhanced brand equity and

can lead to superior competitive advantage and financial performance.

## Methodology

The main objective of this research is to provide a snapshot of the importance given to research on sustainability-related areas in marketing in mainstream marketing journals. We believe that this will provide a basis for estimating the general importance of sustainability and socially relevant issues in the domain of marketing academics.

The idea of tackling a bibliographical analysis of this size is ambitious and had to be limited if the objectives we had set ourselves were not to be compromised by the amount and diversity of the literature available. For this reason, the first step was to choose a group of marketing journals, which are ranked as top 10 by different legitimate ranking bodies. Also, it was important from the perspective of this study as to understand how much of attention is being devoted to the topic of sustainability by the top ranking journals. The articles confining to these journals published between 2003 and 2013 are included in the study. To choose the 10 journals, the following procedure was adopted. Journal ranking provided in Academy of marketing science (<http://www.ams-web.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=10>), Google Scholar ranking for marketing journals ([http://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=top\\_venues&hl=en&vq=bus\\_marketing](http://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en&vq=bus_marketing)) and AMA website ([www.marketingpower.com](http://www.marketingpower.com)) are considered for developing the base pool of journal names. A master list of 20 is developed from each of the rankings. From this, based on comparing the journal ranking in these lists, the list of top 10 ranking journals in marketing are chosen for the analysis.

The journal list includes *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences*, *Marketing Science*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Psychology & Marketing*, *European Journal of Marketing* and *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*. The time period chosen for the analysis were between 2003 and 2013 (last 10 years). To generate the set of studies that presently constitute the crux of the literature in the field, the main electronic database like EBSCO, Proquest and Google scholars were searched between this time period based on key words related to social and sustainability marketing. The keywords used were: (i) sustainability, (ii) green marketing, (iii) sustainable consumption, (iv) social/

societal marketing, (v) corporate social responsibility, (vi) ethics and (vii) demarketing. The key words were identified based on a review of literature on sustainability and after considering the important themes in the research domain. The key words encompass the important issues and constructs currently considered in the field of social/societal/green/environmental marketing which together comprise of the field of sustainable marketing. A total of 56 articles were identified in the search.

## Research Results

Table 1 presents the snapshot of various articles published in different journals. As seen from the table, it can be inferred that journal editors of top ranking marketing journals like *Journal of Marketing Research* and *Marketing Science* did not see sustainability as a current topic. The search did not show any articles related to the keywords used. The analysis shows that *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science* has published maximum number of articles (23 per cent), followed by *European Journal of Marketing* (21 per cent) and *Journal of Marketing* (16 per cent).

A total of 29 per cent (16 articles) of the articles under analysis are exclusively theoretical in content, while 71 per cent (40 articles) are empirical research. Among the various dimensions studied by researchers, green marketing is seen to be the one topic discussed in many articles, followed by corporate social responsibility.

What needs to be understood is the relative number of articles on sustainability and related themes in comparison to the total number of articles. For instance, *Journal of Marketing Research* published about 320 articles during the time period of review, and significantly didn't publish even one article related to sustainability. Put together the 10 journals that we reviewed and published about 3,200 to 3,500 articles during the past one decade of which only about 56 articles were explicitly related to themes on sustainability marketing. This amount to less than 2 per cent of all the articles published. It is also important to note that the past decade saw unprecedented globalization which, like all other fields of academic enquiry had impacted the field of marketing thinking too.

## Conclusion

What is evident from the meta-analysis is the limited importance given to sustainability marketing in the top

**Table 1.** Sustainable Marketing Articles Published in Marketing Journals

No.	Journals	5-year Impact Factor in 2012	Articles on Sustainability Marketing	% Distribution Among the 10 Journals	Generic Models on Sustainability	Green Marketing	Sustainable Consumption	Social/ Societal Marketing	Corporate Social Responsibility	Ethics	Demarketing
1	<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	5.717	9	16	0	4	1	2	3	1	1
2	<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	3.527	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	<i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>	3.960	4	7	1	0	0	1	1	1	0
4	<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	3.795	13	23	3	4	1	0	2	2	0
5	<i>Marketing Science</i>	3.007	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
6	<i>Journal of Retailing</i>	3.110	2	3.5	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
7	<i>Journal of Advertising</i>	1.016*	7	12.5	0	6	0	1	1	0	0
8	<i>Psychology &amp; Marketing</i>	1.309*	3	5.5	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
9	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	1.575	12	21.5	1	1	0	3	6	3	1
10	<i>Marketing Intelligence &amp; Planning</i>	NA	6	11	0	5	0	0	0	0	1
	<b>Total</b>		<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>

**Notes:** \*Impact factor of 2012, NA = Not Available.

marketing journals. It is quite possible that this phenomenon is a reflection of a larger academic trend that indicates a lack of interest among marketing academicians to seriously consider issues related to social and sustainability marketing. While there are specific journals like the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* as well as *Journal of Business Ethics* where topics related to sustainability marketing can be published, the lack of interest among mainstream marketing journals to publish research on sustainability marketing definitely indicate a pattern that point towards secondary importance to sustainability marketing topics.

What is really glaring is the lack of interest among important journals like *Journal of Marketing Research* and *Marketing Science* to publish articles related to sustainability marketing. Since the most prestigious journals in a discipline provide direction and focus to an academic discipline, they signal trends in the research interests of the academic community in an academic domain. Publishing in such journals provide legitimacy and exposure to an academicians's research efforts. Hence it is possible that the best academic brains in an academic field will take cue of the publishing preferences of a journal. This would therefore lead to greater acceptance and popularity of topics that are generally supported by these journals. If top academic journals do not support research on sustainability, that would surely prove to dampen the research interest of the larger academic community towards those fields. Lack of strong representation of these topics in top journals is therefore both a signal as well as a testimony to the importance of these topics in the academic domain. What needs to be understood is how this trend was impacted by globalization.

### Research Limitations and Future Research

The meta-analysis, however, is not devoid of limitations. First of all, while we have covered 10 important journals in marketing, including journals like *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Marketing Research*, they still represent only a small number of the important journals. To get a complete picture it would be important to cover all the journals listed in the domain of marketing. Further, though we have considered most of the important keywords generally associated with sustainability, it is necessary to have a more rigorous and parsimonious definition of sustainability-based constructs. Also, it is also possible

to have a more systematic method adopted for article identification within the list of articles.

The study also provides several avenues for future research. Future researchers could enlarge the list of journals as well have a more rigorous keyword selection. An important study that could be conducted as a continuation is comparing how sustainability marketing as a topic figured in the articles published in these journals with other emerging areas of research like 'relationship marketing', 'marketing orientation', 'service-dominant logic' and 'social media'. Such a comparison could bring out how other topics gained greater acceptance compared to sustainability marketing.

### Notes

1. <http://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/environmental-sustainability/environmental-sustainability>
2. [https://www.ariel.co.uk/AboutAriel/Ariel\\_Sustainable\\_Commitment.aspx](https://www.ariel.co.uk/AboutAriel/Ariel_Sustainable_Commitment.aspx)

### References

- A Ranking of Marketing Journals*, October 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.ams-web.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=10>
- Apaiwongse, T. S. (1994). The influence of green policies on a dual marketing center: An ecological marketing approach. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 9(2), 41–50.
- Charter, M., Peattie, K., Ottman, J. & Polonsky, M.J. (2006). *Marketing and sustainability*. Retrieved from [www.cfsd.org.uk/smart-know-net/links/smart-know-net.pdf](http://www.cfsd.org.uk/smart-know-net/links/smart-know-net.pdf)
- Connelly, B. L., Ketchen, D. J., Jr., & Slater, S. F. (2011). Toward a 'theoretical toolbox' for sustainability research in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39(1), 86–100.
- Cochran, P. L. & Wood, R. A. (1984). Corporate social responsibility and financial performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 27(1), 42–56.
- Elkington, J. (1998). Partnerships from cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st-century business. *Environmental Quality Management*, 8(1), 37–51.
- Fisk, G. (1973). Criteria for a theory of responsible consumption. *Journal of Marketing*, 37(2), 24–31.
- Hoeffler, S. & Keller, K. L. (2002). Building brand equity through corporate societal marketing. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 21(1), 78–89.
- Journal Rankings*. October 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.marketingpower.com/Community/ARC/Pages/Research/Journals/default.aspx>
- Polonsky, M. J. & Mankelov, G. (2000). Where are we going? Perceptions of U.S. marketing academics. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 16(7), 717–743.
- Polonsky, M. J. (1995). A stakeholder theory approach to designing environmental marketing strategy. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 10(3), 29–46.

Slaughter, S. & Leslie, G. (1997). *Academic capitalism*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

*Top publications – Marketing*, October 2013. Retrieved from [http://scholar.google.com/citations?view\\_op=top\\_venues&hl=en&vq=bus\\_marketing](http://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en&vq=bus_marketing)

Van Dam, Ynte K. & Apeldoorn, Paul A. C. (1996). Sustainable marketing. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 16(2), 45–56.