Marketing and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Review and Research Agenda

Yasmin Anwar and Noha El-Bassiouny

1 Introduction

Businesses are facing major challenges concerning sustainable development and growth (Hunt 2011). They need to comply with increasing environmental and social legislation and regulation, adapt to growing concern about finiteness of natural resources, consider shareholders' opinions about socially responsible business practices and match the evolution of social attitudes and values in capitalist societies (Jones et al. 2008). Due to these trends and the realization that companies have social obligations, companies have begun to implement sustainability measures as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Borin and Metcalf 2010).

At the same time, academics are encouraging businesses to be more involved in societal issues (Margolis and Walsh 2003) and are backing the idea of creating "shared value" between business and sustainability goals (Porter and Kramer 2006). It is proposed that shared value can be realized by aligning business functions with stakeholder feedback (El-Bassiouny et al. 2018). To this end, the United Nations significantly relies on businesses to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Jones et al. 2018; Charter et al. 2002).

However, critics of the shared value approach argue that sustainable development cannot be aligned with the current model of capitalism and its economic growth paradigm (Jones et al. 2018). One such critic is Kilbourne (2004: 202), who argues that "as long as continuous economic growth is the desired goal and growth in mate-

Y. Anwar (✉) · N. El-Bassiouny
Marketing Department, Faculty of Management Technology, The German University in Cairo (GUC), Main Entrance Tagamoa al Khames, New Cairo City 11835, Egypt
e-mail: yasmin.hosam-eldin@alumni2012.guc.edu.eg; yasminhabdou@hotmail.com

N. El-Bassiouny
e-mail: noha.elbassiouny@guc.edu.eg; Elbassiouny.noha@gmail.com
URL: http://www.guc.edu.eg

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rial wealth is coterminous with progress, sustainability will remain illusive". There is an ongoing debate about whether sustainability and the SDGs can be aligned with the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) or an entirely different paradigm must be developed (Kilbourne 2004). Rakic and Rakic (2015) argue that the dominant economic system based on infinite growth and unlimited resources needs to be reformed.

Furthermore, marketing attempts at social involvement are often met with cynicism and suspicion. It is claimed that marketing has harmed society in several ways (Jahdi and Acikdilli 2009) including increasing demand and consumption in an unsustainable manner (Kotler 2011; Charter et al. 2002; Peattie and Crane 2005; Gordon et al. 2011). Marketing has also affected consumption patterns through "planned obsolence" which happens when companies intentionally manufacture products and services that break down in a short time span, so that consumers are forced to purchase new products (Skowron and Szymoniuk 2014).

Yet marketing can still be implemented in ways to achieve sustainability (Gordon et al. 2011). Some firms have already developed successful ways to design sustainable products and services, to disseminate environmental information, to track the sustainability of their supply chains and to communicate to consumers about the impact of their product choices on sustainability (Peattie and Belz 2010).

It is crucial to note that companies nowadays must set in place a process of evaluating the social impact of their business decisions, otherwise they risk their future survival as competing firms race ahead of them in establishing sustainable growth strategies (Porter and Kramer 2006).

This conceptual paper aims to propose an agenda for businesses to help them achieve the SDGs. The paper begins by revising the literature review on how marketing and sustainable development are defined, which is then followed by a revision of research on the relationship between both concepts. Next, the paper covers the case against The Dominant Social Paradigm and how marketing is currently being used to tackle the sustainability issue. Afterwards, an overview of the SDGs is presented and finally, research streams in tandem with the SDGs are proposed for further exploration.

2 Marketing Defined

Since 1935 and up until 2013, the definition of marketing underwent several transformations. In its earlier years, the definition was centered around short-term transactions that facilitated the distribution of goods and services. Beginning in 2007 however, the definition began to encompass the relationship between marketing, society and all stakeholders affected by business (Sanclemente-Téllez 2017).

In 2013, The American Marketing Association defined marketing as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large" (Sanclemente-Téllez 2017: 6). This definition resonates with the concept of "sustainability marketing" which focuses on providing an organization's stakeholders with higher sustainable value by developing and delivering sustainable solutions (Charter et al. 2002). By creating social and environmental value through sustainability, marketing inherently increases customer value (Belz and Schmidt-Riediger 2010).

3 The Evolution of Marketing Schools of Thought

The evolution of marketing over the years can be analyzed using several constructs. Within the scope of this paper, we will refer to the marketing schools of thought stated in academia and to the main concepts which have defined marketing activities over time.

The first marketing school of thought noted in academia is the managerial school which was dominant between the years 1950 and 1960. This school's focus was on the seller/manufacturer in the marketing process while it ignored the role of dealers, suppliers or other types of businesses. Moving onwards, during the period between 1970 and 1980, the activist school gained prominence and its focuses was solely on the consumer's market perspective without taking into consideration an institutional or macro-viewpoint. At the same time, during 1970, a competing school of thought emerged, the school of macromarketing, which continues to be the leading school of thought to this day. The macromarketing school focuses on the symbiotic relationship between organizations and the society and all stakeholders within the organization's environment (Sanclemente-Téllez 2017).

Prior to 1969, marketing models were founded on the occurrence of financial transactions, where marketing was merely viewed as a tool that aids in facilitating these transactions. Consequently, marketing theory mainly sought to describe and analyze how goods and services were priced, promoted and distributed in commercial markets only. However, starting in 1969, the "broadening movement", which viewed limiting the scope of marketing to a commercial context restrictive, introduced the concept that marketing could be applied on a larger scale than just commercial activities (Kotler 2005).

Similarly, in terms of marketing activities, five main concepts have replaced each other over time. First in line was the production concept which dealt with satisfying unmet demand by producing larger quantities at a lower cost. Then came the product concept which focused on improving quality and adding innovative features to meet consumer preferences. That was followed by the selling concept which relied on aggressive selling and promotions to increase consumer demand for goods. In the mid-twentieth century, there was a significant shift to a consumer-centric approach, which had the primary goal of delivering superior value to targeted customers. Afterwards, the societal marketing concept arose with an emphasis on performing marketing activities with social and ethical considerations (Kumar et al. 2012).

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development stressed that businesses are expected to help in achieving sustainable development (Kinoti 2011) and this set the stage for sustainability marketing. Currently, the focus is on including sustainability in marketing activities as a major factor to achieve a competitive advantage. The main differentiator of sustainability marketing is that it does not only cater to intra-personal and inter-personal needs, but it aims to fulfill to the needs of future generations. To fit under the umbrella of sustainability marketing, organizations must implement a marketing strategy that fulfills customer needs after sustaining profitability, public interest and ecology (Kumar et al. 2012).

4 Sustainable Development and Sustainability

According to The Brundtland report issued by The World Commission on Environment and Development, sustainable development is defined as development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Van Dam and Apeldoorn 1996). Moreover, The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development defined sustainability as "the consumption of goods and services that meet basic needs and quality of life without jeopardizing the needs of future generations" (Gordon et al. 2011).

At the same time, sustainability has become a catchword word among individuals and businesses who use it to portray a sense of caring about the environment and sometimes refer to it as being "green" or "environmentally friendly" (Minton et al. 2012). Jones et al. (2008) state that myriad definitions exist for sustainability and not all of them are synonymous. While some scholars use it to refer to ecological concerns only, other scholars argue that it encompasses economic, social and environmental issues. Carroll (2008) affirms that at the outset, sustainability's definition was limited to the natural environment, yet it later extended to the wider social and stakeholder environment. Porter and Kramer (2006) state that sustainability in its essence is about "environmental and community stewardship". In other words, sustainability is about achieving "economic prosperity", "environmental quality" and "social equity" which comprise the "triple bottom line" (Hunt 2011; Borin and Metcalf 2010; Charter et al. 2002).

5 Sustainable Development and Marketing

Another concrete definition of sustainability clarifies the relationship between marketing and sustainability by showing that both concepts share a common variable which is "values" (Skowron and Szymoniuk 2014). Whereas the goal of marketing is to create value for stakeholders (Sanclemente-Téllez 2017), the formula of sustainable development includes value as one of the four factors influencing sustainability (Skowron and Szymoniuk 2014).

According to Skowron and Szymoniuk (2014: 40) the formula stipulates that

$$S = D \times T \times V \times G$$

where:

S (sustainability) refers to environmental balance,
D (demography) refers to human potential, subject to demographic phenomena (population structure, migration phenomena, etc.)
T (technology) refers to the development of technology through the supply of product, process and organizational innovations,
V (values) refers to a system of values shared and respected in social and market activity by organizations, authorities, consumers, employees, etc.
G (government) refers to the policy of central and local authorities toward the economy and society.

However, Peattie and Belz (2010) argue that conventional marketing falls short of including social and ecological issues into its paradigm by viewing the world mainly from the customer's perspective. Within this conventional paradigm, social and ecological problems are treated as constraints to economic growth. Kilbourne (2004) claims that this view of marketing stems from the dominant social paradigm which is based on the tenets of economic and political liberalism. A dominant social paradigm is defined as "the collection of norms, beliefs, values, habits, and so on that form the world view most commonly held within a culture" (2004: 194). The author asserts that this paradigm appears to clash with sustainable development in that it encourages increased consumption.

Furthermore, the lack of consensus on how to deal with climate change while maintaining economic growth is an indicator that actions to combat environmental problems are viewed as opposing to the economic growth theory which is the foundation of capitalist economics and consumerism (Gordon et al. 2011). This view seems to be so ingrained to the extent that Margolis et al. (2009) assert that anyone challenging the fact that the main purpose of a firm goes beyond increasing shareholder value must accept the existence of the dominant social paradigm.

Making matters more serious, the view that the single purpose of a business is to increase shareholder value has become entrenched into future managers' thinking via the curricula of business schools. Advocates of this paradigm think it is irrational to improve the performance of more than one variable because calculating opportunity costs and deciding on courses of action becomes impossible with the presence of more than one variable (Margolis and Walsh 2003). Within the scope of this paradigm, marketing is focused on achieving short-term economic gain without examining the long-term ecological effects that lead to environmental problems (Mitchell et al. 2010).

6 The Case Against the Dominant Social Paradigm

What the dominant social paradigm fails to contemplate is that economic growth is based on the state of the planet as we know it today and without ecological and social sustainability, the earth's features will change in a way that will make economic growth unattainable (Charter et al. 2002).

6.1 The New Corporate Philosophy

As previously mentioned, when the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development announced that businesses are expected to help in achieving sustainable development in 1992, a new paradigm was introduced (Kinoti 2011). Shortly after, Smith (1994) published an article titled "The New Corporate Philosophy" which claimed that "the new paradigm encourages corporations to play a leadership role in social problem solving by funding long-term initiatives". In addition to this, Smith coined the term "corporate citizens", which he defined as corporates whose goal was to accomplish self-interest while simultaneously and intuitively searching for ways align self-interest with the wellbeing of society. AT&T is cited as the first company to embrace the new paradigm by which it intended to reform the company and the society at the same time.

As a result of this new paradigm, companies were encouraged, based on empirical research, to pursue corporate social responsibility to achieve benefits including: increased sales and market share, strengthened brand positioning, improved corporate image, increased ability to attract, motivate and retain employees, decreased operating costs and increased appeal to investors and financial analysts (Lee and Kotler 2009). Additionally, during the 1990s, multinationals such as IBM began to implement corporate social responsibility outside of their home countries and to use it as a competitive advantage when entering new developing markets (Smith 1994). By the mid-1990s, companies were attempting to do well and do good simultaneously (Lee and Kotler 2009). To verify the claim that firms could profit while carrying out corporate social activities, more than 190 studies were conducted over thirty-five years to explore the effect of corporate social responsibility on corporate financial performance (Margolis et al. 2009).

Moving into the first decade of the 2000s, corporate social responsibility began to fully assimilate with strategic management and corporate governance (Carroll 2008). Hess et al. (2002) claim that this shift in corporate social involvement can be attributed to three main factors. The first is the competitive advantage factor which drives companies to implement corporate social initiatives to set themselves apart from competitors. The second is the new moral marketplace factor which refers to the moral expectations of stakeholders which pressure the company to adhere to certain moral standards. The third is the comparative advantage of private firms which asserts that private companies have developed capabilities and resources which equip them to handle social problems in a better way than governments and non-profit organizations. In support of this notion, Kotler and Lee (2005) contend that there is no conflict of interests between doing good and gaining a competitive advantage by stating that, on the contrary, "when there's a social and marketing advantage to be gained by engaging an issue, a company would be irresponsible not to pursue it" (2005: 103).

6.2 The Shift Towards Inclusive Capitalism

Moreover, during this decade, Prahalad and Hart (2002) asserted that it was time for multinational companies to start viewing globalization strategies as a way to implement "inclusive capitalism". They supported their argument by stating that countries who still do not have a fully developed infrastructure or goods that meet rudimentary human needs are the perfect environment to test sustainable strategies from the get-go. The authors encouraged multinationals to avoid re-creating the unsustainable consumption patterns which were already deep-seated in the developed countries. In addition to that, Hess et al. (2002) affirm that corporate social involvement is a must for multinationals expanding in developing countries, on the basis that these communities expect to get a share of the rewards the companies are gaining by operating in their countries. In a way, this puts a liability on the firm to live up to these expectations.

According to Prahalad and Hart (2002), for multinationals to succeed in the 21st century, they must play a part in sustainable development by working to narrow the gap between rich and poor, fostering local markets and cultures, leveraging local solutions and creating wealth at the lowest levels of The World Economic Pyramid. Under this view, when multinationals hire from the workforce at the bottom of the economic pyramid, this increases these individuals' income, standard of living and consequently their buying power, which is an opportunity for companies "to do well and do good". Furthermore, the authors claimed that by developing sustainable product innovations for the bottom of the pyramid, the benefit will be twofold. This is because not only will Tier 4 individuals have more choices, but Tier 4's lifestyles could also be re-shaped by the availability of sustainable innovations. More recently, Leke and Desvaux (2018) encourage corporations to invest in Africa by taking on a sustainable approach to do well by doing good.

6.3 Challenges Facing CSR Activities

The benefits of carrying out corporate social activities seem to be numerous, yet these initiatives are still attacked by investors who claim they are a waste of money and by consumers and interest groups who think companies are not living up to their social responsibility expectations (Blomqvist and Posner 2004). Porter and Kramer (2006) argue that the failure of corporate social responsibility to live up to its expectations is due to the absence of a specific framework that integrates the firm's corporate social initiatives with its strategies and operations. Likewise, Blomqvist and Posner (2004) state that based on their experience, the failure of corporate social initiatives is predominantly the result of not integrating these initiatives with brand strategies. Furthermore, through the research they conducted, Becker-Olsen et al. (2006) discovered that a low fit between corporate social initiatives and the brand had a negative effect on consumers' attitudes toward the firm and initiatives that seemed mainly profit-driven had the same effect. In tandem, Öberseder, Schlegelmilch and Gruber (2011) state that for CSR activities to have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention, there must be a good fit between the company's CSR activities and its business.

6.4 Comprehensive CSR Frameworks

To tackle this issue, several attempts at devising frameworks that align a company's CSR activities with its business have been made. These include a framework that charts social opportunities that fit with business activities along the value chain by Porter and Kramer (2006), and a model developed by Maignan and Ferrell (2004) that focuses on addressing stakeholders' needs through CSR activities.

6.4.1 Mapping Social Opportunities

Porter and Kramer (2006) devised a framework which reflects the interdependencies between a firm and society, aiming to help companies make better decisions about corporate social initiatives they pursue. The framework is founded on the assumption that an organization affects society through its operations and this form of interdependency is termed "inside-out linkages". Podnar and Golob (2007) support this perspective by emphasizing that it is a must for corporate marketers to include social considerations into all levels of their firm's activities and daily operations. The second assumption in the Porter and Kramer (2006) framework is that an organization is affected by the social environment surrounding it and this relationship is termed "outside-in linkages".

Using this framework, organizations can assess strategic points of intersection with social issues which is the starting point to setting integrating corporate strategy with corporate social activities. The key to guiding decisions about which activities to pursue should not be about which social issues are most worthy, but which will create the highest shared value that is useful for both society and the organization. The next step is to create a corporate social agenda which is not only based on community expectations but on mutual benefits that can be achieved socially and economically. Here the authors differentiate between "responsive corporate social" and "strategic corporate social responsibility" in that while the former's purpose is to alleviate negative effects from business activities, the latter focuses on supporting social activities that are highly connected to the company's business. Applying this strategy approach is claimed to increase the prospects of mutual benefit for society and the business by leveraging the firm's existing resources and capabilities. Lee and Kotler (2009) outline a similar approach for corporate social marketing which stipulates that for the society and the firm to benefit from corporate social initiatives, the business must create a positive change in consumer behavior, and this will only happen if the cause chosen by the firm fits with its core, markets, goods and services.

6.4.2 Stakeholder Involvement

It can be observed that with the onset of the 2000s, the range of stakeholders involved in corporate social responsibility issues expanded in comparison to the previous decades (Carroll 2008). Maignan and Ferrell (2004) proposed that marketers can improve the success rates of their corporate social activities by considering stakeholders' perspectives. In addition to this, Maignan, Ferrell and Ferrell (2005) responded to this novel interest in stakeholders by introducing a model to help companies implement corporate social activities through addressing stakeholders' needs. The authors define stakeholders as "the individuals or groups that can directly or indirectly affect, or be affected by, a firm's activities" (2005: 959). The proposed model consists of eight steps. As a start, organizations must define their norms and values clearly then identify and classify stakeholders based on the degree to which they affect or are affected by the firm's activities. Next, firms need to identify the issues stakeholders are facing. The following step requires that the firm defines corporate social responsibility in a way that fits its values and interests. The definition formulated at this stage is then used to evaluate the organization's current corporate social responsibility practices and to select specific corporate social activities to undertake. After implementing and promoting the social initiatives, the model stipulates that the last step should be to gain stakeholder feedback about these activities using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This feedback should then be used as input to reassess the initial steps in the process.

7 How Marketing Is Tackling the Sustainability Agenda

Gradually, as the effect of businesses on the different stakeholders got more attention, new forms of marketing emerged that accentuate the effect of marketing on environmental and social issues. These include the three main categories of ecological marketing, greener marketing and sustainable marketing among other related strategies (Charter et al. 2002; Kinoti 2011).

7.1 Ecological Versus Green Marketing

Ecological marketing was centered on dealing with factors that affect ecology and pollution in a proactive way. In line with this concept, corporate marketing was given the responsibility of educating and directing consumers to make ecologically-wise purchase decisions (Kumar et al. 2012; Van Dam and Apeldoorn 1996). This form of marketing was mainly concerned with how the product and its production process could become ecologically friendly (Charter et al. 2002).

On the other hand, with the green marketing approach, companies are expected to implement a holistic approach to sustainability by applying it from production to after-sales service, with the aim of profiting while protecting the environment (Gordon et al. 2011; Charter et al. 2002; Jay Polonsky 2008). Green marketing assumes a less proactive role than ecological marketing in that it relies on pressures from legislation and stakeholder influence to implement environmentally friendly initiatives (Kumar et al. 2012; Van Dam and Apeldoorn 1996).

Both approaches have been criticized on different grounds. Ecological marketing is viewed by critics to overestimate the willingness of companies to engage in environmentally-friendly production without external pressure (Van Dam and Apeldoorn 1996), while green marketing is thought to overestimate consumers' demand for environmentally friendly goods (Van Dam and Apeldoorn 1996; Kinoti 2011; Ginsberg and Bloom 2004). Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) argue that most consumers will not forgo their wants just for the sake of going green. Consumers had appeared to be excited about going green in the early 1990s but a few years later this phenomenon diminished (Grant 2008; Ginsberg and Bloom 2004; Peattie and Crane 2005).

7.2 Problems Facing Green Marketing

According to Peattie and Crane (2005), there are five main problems derailing green marketing from succeeding. The first of these problems is "green spinning" which mainly occurs in controversial industries such as oil, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and automotive. This phenomenon involves the use of public relations tactics to react to society's criticism about the company's actions that reflect negatively on the environment. This reactive and superficial approach to dealing with environmental issues always fails to pacify stakeholders' concerns.

The second trap green marketing falls into is "green selling"; also referred to as "green puffery" (Gordon et al. 2011) or "green washing" (Grant 2008). This happens when companies falsely claim that their products have environmentally-friendly features to jump on the environmental consumer trend without changing anything about their existing products (Jay Polonsky 2008; Peattie and Crane 2005). Another problem green marketing is suffering from is "green harvesting". This is when companies place a premium price on their products to exploit consumers, despite cost savings garnered from environmental practices in the product process (Peattie and Crane 2005).

In addition to this, some companies attempt "Enviropreneur marketing" by launching a brand line or portfolio that is environmentally friendly even though the rest of their product lines are not which appears hypocritical (Peattie and Crane 2005; Grant 2008). The final problem Peattie and Crane (2005) outline is "compliance marketing" where companies view complying to environmental legislation as an opportunity to market themselves as environmentally friendly.

7.3 *Comprehensive Frameworks to Tackle Sustainability*

As companies attempt to integrate sustainability into their corporate strategies (Jones et al. 2008), several frameworks have emerged. The proposed frameworks incorporate sustainability in all aspects of the product lifecycle, including research and development, product development to consumption (Kotler 2011; Jones et al. 2008; Charter et al. 2002). According to Charter et al. (2002) companies can transition between several stages in applying sustainability practices.

7.3.1 Updating the Marketing Mix

Kotler (2011) and Charter et al. (2002) explain that marketers will need to update the marketing mix's traditional 4P approach to integrate sustainability practices. Accordingly, the scope of product decisions will not only include environmental issues related to the production process but also how the products will be disposed of post-use. This approach is also referred to as "cradle to grave" (Gordon et al. 2011). Similarly, Peattie and Crane (2005) argue that a redefinition of the "product" is needed to include production activities and not just the tangible product.

When setting pricing strategies, marketers will need to consider customers' willingness to pay for products based on their degree of environmentally friendliness (Peattie and Crane 2005). Belz and Schmidt-Riediger (2010) argue that while companies competing on price are less motivated to adopt sustainability marketing strategies, there are companies that manage to keep their prices low and implement sustainability marketing. Examples of these companies are Aldi which manufactures organic food and H&M which produces organic cotton, both simultaneously competing on price. Furthermore, Mitchell et al. (2010) support this view by claiming that even in a highly competitive market, companies that follow socially, economically and environmentally sustainable marketing practices will perform better than their peers over the long run.

Place choices will assess the feasibility of sustainable product distribution channels and production locations (Kotler 2011). As for promotion, marketers will need to evaluate advertising mediums based on their level of sustainability; for example, increasing the percentage of digital advertising versus print to conserve resources such as ink and paper. In addition to that, product labels will need to list more specific information pertaining to sustainability such as the ingredients and carbon foot print. In other words, the main aim of communication should be to clearly inform rather than just influence. (Kotler 2011; Charter et al. 2002; Peattie and Crane 2005).

7.3.2 Changing the Marketing Mix

On the other hand, Peattie and Belz (2010) argue that the marketing mix needs to be reconfigured entirely to address stakeholders other than the consumer. Accordingly, they propose replacing the traditional 4 Ps with a new “4 Cs marketing mix”, comprised of “customer solutions”, “customer cost”, “convenience” and “communication”.

In brief, “customer solutions” is about providing products and services that serve consumers’ needs while concurrently addressing socio-ecological problems (Peattie and Belz 2010). This necessitates that companies look for different ways to improve the competitiveness of their environmentally-friendly products versus traditional unsustainable products (Skowron and Szymoniuk 2014).

“Customer cost” includes in addition to the financial price, the non-financial costs of time and effort it takes to find products (purchase costs), to use the products sustainably (use costs) and to dispose of them (post-use costs). This is defined as the “total customer cost” or “overall costs of ownership” which accounts for all costs incurred throughout the consumption process (Peattie and Belz 2010; Peattie and Crane 2005).

Within the 4 Cs model, “Convenience” replaces “place”. The main difference between both is that whereas place considers only how convenient it is a for a consumer to purchase a product, “convenience” considers the post-purchase process including ease of use and disposal. Finally, “communication” emphasizes that marketers should be open to communicate with all stakeholders including critics instead of attempting to promote selective news about the company’s sustainability practices As a checklist for achieving sustainability marketing, companies need to ensure that their marketing strategy is ecologically orientated, viable in terms of technical feasibility and competitiveness, ethical by promoting greater social justice and equity and is relationship-based (Peattie and Belz 2010).

7.3.3 Other Proposed Ways to Achieve Sustainability

While some believe that sustainability marketing will lead to more efficient and sustainable growth, others argue that the current modes of consumption and production are unsustainable regardless of the marketing techniques pursued (Jones et al. 2008; Peattie and Peattie 2009).

To counter this argument, researchers are encouraging the use of the 4 Ps in a reverse way to reduce consumption, a phenomenon referred to as “demarketing”. Even though traditionally the role of marketing has been to increase demand, there are circumstances and resources which will require marketing to reduce demand and consumption (Kotler 2011; Charter et al. 2002; Peattie and Crane 2005; Gordon et al. 2011), such as the issues of overfishing, energy waste and overeating (Kotler 2011).

Other innovative ways could be pursued towards achieving sustainability. These include changing the way markets function by making material flows more circular than linear through product take-back and recycling (Peattie and Crane 2005) or through product sharing and “pay per use” pricing which can cover everything, from sharing vehicles to renting handbags (Grant 2008). This phenomenon would require marketers to emphasize the benefits consumers gain from product use instead of product ownership; leading to dematerialization within the economy while providing the same level of consumer benefits (Peattie and Crane 2005).

Seeing as how such changes require a change in consumers' behaviors, it is vital to examine corporate social marketing (Kotler 2011) which focuses on "changing behavior to increase the well-being of individuals and/or societies" (Peattie and Peattie 2009: 3).

7.3.4 Using Social Marketing to Achieve Sustainability

Social marketing increases the number of individuals who act in a beneficial way to society (Kotler and Lee 2005). This type of marketing can be used to persuade customers to transform their lifestyles and consumption patterns into more sustainable ones (Peattie and Peattie 2009). Moreover, social marketing fits well with sustainability because both require voluntary changes in behavior (Gordon et al. 2011; McKenzie-Mohr 2000). In support of this view, Lee and Kotler (2009) discuss how social marketing can be used in the fight against poverty around the world.

On another note, McKenzie-Mohr (2000) claim that while most initiatives encouraging sustainable behavior usually focus on enhancing individuals' knowledge about sustainability issues, these programs have not been successful in altering behavior. The author claims the reason behind this failure is the omission of psychological factors which affect individuals' behavior. Accordingly, designed strategies need to account for psychological factors involved in the decision-making process which can be done via community-based social marketing. Community-based social marketing comprises of four steps: "uncovering barriers to behaviors and then, based upon this information, selecting which behavior to promote; designing a program to overcome the barriers to the selected behavior; piloting the program; and then evaluating it once it is broadly implemented" (McKenzie-Mohr 2000: 546).

7.3.5 Combining Green Marketing, Social Marketing and Critical Marketing

In addition to the previous forms of marketing, another form relevant to the sustainability spectrum is "critical marketing". Critical marketing is defined as "critique of the schema of marketing systems, paradigms, methodologies, and even the existence of marketing itself—influenced by the critical school of thought" (Gordon et al. 2011: 154). Gordon et al. (2011) also argue that critical marketing can be used along with social and green marketing to achieve sustainable marketing. According to this framework, these three marketing concepts are complimentary and interdependent, cannot achieve results solely, and therefore need to be combined to achieve sustainable marketing.

8 An Overview on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sustainable marketing has been set in motion by public concern and pressure regarding problems facing the world today such as environmental deterioration, poverty, hunger, disease and lack of education (Kotler 2011; Jones et al. 2018; Charter et al. 2002). However, for marketing to be able to tackle such sustainable development challenges, marketers must have a practical and applicable definition of sustainable development.

One concrete way of defining sustainable development is in terms of the goals it seeks to accomplish, and the indicators used to measure it (Robert et al. 2005). Between the years 2000 and 2015, The United Nations established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight global goals that acted as a guide mainly on poverty reduction in developing countries (Jones et al. 2018; Sachs 2012; Le Blanc 2015). Even though the MDGs were described as "having produced the most successful anti-poverty movement in history" (Jones et al. 2018: 2), they failed to integrate several issues such as the environment (Sachs 2012) and unsustainable consumption and production (Le Blanc 2015). Furthermore, the involvement of corporates in the implementation of these goals was inadequate (Jones et al. 2018). By observing the drawbacks of the MDGs, the global community realized the importance of setting goals that cover the trip bottom line which aim to achieve economic development, environmental sustainability and social equity. This led to the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations in the following years, with a time-range reaching up to 2030 (Sachs 2012; Jones et al. 2018; Scheyvens et al. 2016). The SDGs constitute of 17 goals with 169 associated targets (Jones et al. 2018).

For companies, the motivation to take part in the SDGs plan lies in three main areas. First, the SDGs represent a move towards unlocking the "trapped value" in developing markets which hinders businesses from succeeding there. Second, with rising support for the SDGs, companies will want to position themselves as leaders on the sustainability issue, hence creating competitive pressure on other companies. And the third reason is that these goals cannot be achieved without the participation of the business community due to their financial strength compared to governments (Chakravorti 2015).

9 Research Streams in Tandem with the SDGs

According to Eccles and Karbassi (2018), companies' involvement with the SDGs has been increasing year on year. Furthermore, CSR has come to be considered a main pillar used in achieving sustainability.

Nevertheless, it seems that companies still have not grasped the essence of applying the SDGS in their strategies and that they mistakenly resort to philanthropy initiatives, confusing it with achieving the SDGS. To counter this trend, companies need to take on a holistic approach to applying the SDGs and integrating them with corporate strategy (Blackwell 2018). Hence, we can make the following propositions:

P1. Companies need to understand how the SDGs fit under the corporate sustainability umbrella, in order to understand that resorting to philanthropy will not always be the ideal way to tackle sustainability issues.

P2. Companies need to understand the breadth of the SDGs to be able to tackle each goal using the right CSR tool or framework (social marketing versus donations versus green marketing, etc.).

It has been suggested that companies can implement one of three strategies to implement the SDGs. The first strategy is to support one of the SDGs that fits well with the businesses' core values and focus on it. The second strategy is to use the SDGs as a framework that guides all the company's actions towards sustainability by giving all the goals an equal weight and attempting to fulfill any goal whenever possible. Finally, the third strategy is to use the goals to collaborate with other entities to work on sustainability projects jointly (Three ways your business can use the sustainable development goals [APA], n.d.; Three ways for businesses to support the Sustainable Development Goals [APA], n.d.). Consequently, we make the following proposition:

P3: Companies do not have to work in isolation to achieve the SDGs. Forming partnerships with other entities can empower all involved entities by sharing distinct knowledge across specializations and industries.

On a similar note, Chakravorti (2017) discusses that during the study of 20 companies in 10 different industries over a one-year period, an important first step for these companies was figuring out where to begin in tackling the SDGs. The 20 companies studied did not try to include all the SDGs in their strategy but instead focused on some. Even though there is a view that focusing on some SDGS might lead others to be neglected, there is a counter view that by trying to achieve all the SDGs, resources are spread too thin and none of the SDGs get enough attention. Convinced by this view, Chakravorti (2017) recommends that firms apply three steps to figure out which SDGs to focus on. The first step is to segment the SDGs in a way that will help the company see clearly which ones are most relevant to it. This could be done for example, by diving the goals into main categories: people, planet, policy principles and the human condition. The second step is to identify the goals which have a good fit with the company's strategy and activities throughout its value chain. The last step is to establish a business case analyzing which of the SDGs selected in the previous step would add the most value to the firm from a commercial perspective. This framework offers businesses an interconnected view of the SDGs.

With this in mind, we can make the following propositions:

P4: Companies must set a business case to ensure that all employees in the organization understand the importance and benefit of working to achieve the SDGs.

P5: Companies need to categorize the SDGs in a way that aligns the goals with the firm's core values and competencies. This will make use of the firm's resources in the most efficient way to help achieve the SDGs.

On the other hand, focusing on specific SDGs might lead to "SDG washing" by having a positive effect on some SDGs while having a negative impact some of the other goals. For example, a company might contribute positively to Goal 7—affordable and clean energy—but at the same time displace communities and prevent them from access to a safe and clean-living environment. By designing a strategy that focuses on one goal while ignoring the rest, companies risk suffering from "tunnel vision" and "myopia". Therefore, companies need to devise a holistic way to work on the SDGs by taking full account of both positive and negative effects on the goals (Eccles and Karbassi 2018). In a report conducted by auditing firm KPMG, it was found that amongst companies that report on the SDGs, usually only positive outcomes are reported while negative outcomes are given less attention or none altogether (Consultancy.uk 2018). Hence, the following propositions are made:

P6: A framework needs to be developed that guides companies on how to have a positive impact on specific SDGs fitting with their corporate strategies, yet at the same time take into consideration all the other SDGs.

P7: Companies need to report on both positive and negative sustainability outcomes of their business activities.

To get corporates to take part in accomplishing the SDGs, the United Nations has set up the initiative "Global Compact", which they claim is the "world's largest corporate sustainability initiative" (Who we are, n.d.). However, reporting on sustainability still differs from company to company which makes it difficult to compare performance over time or across companies. For example, some companies refer to the "Global Compact" guidelines while others refer to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (Jones et al. 2018). This disparity in reporting standards indicates that the monitoring of the SDGs should 'include comprehensive systems evaluations, including procedural indicators' (Scheyvens et al. 2016). According to the report conducted by KPMG in 2018, only 40% of the world's largest 250 companies are reporting on the SDGs (Consultancy.uk 2018). Hence, the following propositions can be made:

P8: Companies need to report on sustainability on a continuous basis (specific time intervals need to be set).

P9: Companies need to have measurable guidelines tied to the SDGs that they can report on in detail.

Under the Global Impact initiative, an SDG matrix has been set up for each industry since each industry needs to tackle the SDGs in a different way (United Nations Global Compact 2015). Academic research has also been conducted into how a specific industry can achieve the SDGs such as IT (Ono et al. 2017), energy (Nilsson et al. 2013) and advertising (Jones et al. 2018). Considering this phenomenon, the following is proposed:

P10: The framework developed for achieving the SDGs should be industry-based. Such a framework should take advantage of each industry's strengths; aiming to have all industries complete each other.

On another note, while businesses claim they are attempting to achieve the triple bottom line, some argue that economic profit is still the main driver about decisions, with a focus on short-term gain rather than a long-term sustainability agenda (Scheyvens et al. 2016). However, as previously mentioned in the literature review, even in a highly competitive market, companies that follow socially, economically and environmentally sustainable marketing practices will perform better than their peers over the long run (Mitchell et al. 2010). Therefore, the following proposition is made:

P11: Firms need to assess their return on investment from applying the SDGs over the long-term and not in terms of short-term gains.

Moreover, as outlined in the literature review, marketers need to emphasize the benefits consumers gain from product-use instead of product ownership as a means of dematerializing the economy while providing the same level of consumer benefits (Peattie and Crane 2005). This goes against the phenomenon of "planned obsolesce" where manufacturers shorten the life cycle of their products and services on purpose by designing them to break down prematurely after a few uses. This then forces customers to purchase new ones (Skowron and Szymoniuk 2014). Hence the following propositions are made:

P12: Companies need to stop planned obsolesce in production.

P13: Companies need to introduce alternative ways for product use that focus on sharing, pay per use or product take-back, depending on their applicability within each industry.

Another important point to consider is that companies need to revise general progress made on the SDGs which is made public through The Sustainable Development Goals Report on a yearly basis. This report identifies areas that still need more work. For example, in the Sustainable Development Goals Report (2018: 4), it was reported that "after a long decline, world hunger appears to be on the rise again" due to conflict and natural disasters.

P14: Companies need to revise their sustainability agenda based on global progress in achieving the SDGs.

Finally, on an academic level, it has been noted in the literature review that the design of business school curricula teaches future managers that the single purpose of a business is to increase shareholder value (Margolis and Walsh 2003) which counteracts with the sustainability paradigm. Borin and Metcalf (2010) argue that business schools are only just starting to include sustainability practices into business teachings. It is important that employees are onboard when it comes to sustainability issues because producing, selling or promoting sustainable products will only happen when the business culture is oriented towards sustainability (Skowron and Szymoniuk 2014). Accordingly, we make the following proposition:

P15: Companies need to provide training on sustainability to their employees.

10 Conclusion

With the rising public concern and pressure regarding problems facing the world today such as environmental deterioration, poverty, hunger, disease and lack of education (Kotler 2011; Jones et al. 2018; Charter et al. 2002), it is anticipated that sustainable marketing will become the norm just as the internet and ecommerce did before it (Grant 2008). However, in order to bring about this change willingly and gradually instead of by force, businesses need to make advancements on the sustainable marketing front as quickly as possible (Peattie and Crane 2005).

It has also become apparent that a new corporate philosophy has worked around the dominant social paradigm and emerged over the years (Kinoti 2011; Smith 1994; Lee and Kotler 2009; Dunfee 2002). Businesses are now expected to integrate corporate strategy with sustainability in order to be able to compete on the long-run (Öberseder et al. 2011; Blomqvist and Posner 2004; Porter and Kramer 2006; Becker-Olsen et al. 2006). It is acknowledged that businesses must work towards achieving the triple bottom line (Scheyvens et al. 2016; Hunt 2011; Borin and Metcalf 2010; Charter et al. 2002) and several frameworks have been developed to this end (Porter and Kramer 2006; Lee and Kotler 2009; Podnar and Golob 2007).

While changes will need to be made to the traditional marketing mix in order to achieve sustainability (Peattie and Belz 2010; Peattie and Crane 2005; Kotler 2011; Charter et al. 2002), marketing remains integral to achieving sustainability through the design of sustainable products and services and influencing consumers' product choices in favor of sustainability (Peattie and Belz 2010).

Even though several frameworks have been devised for sustainable marketing such as the one combining green marketing, social marketing and critical marketing (Gordon et al. 2011), a concrete practical framework towards achieving the SDGs is still missing (Blackwell 2018; Chakravorti 2017; Eccles and Karbassi 2018).

The SDGs established by the United Nations act as a guide for companies seeking to implement sustainability practices (Sachs 2012; Jones et al. 2018; Scheyvens et al. 2016), yet the business community still needs to figure out how to tackle the SDGs in the most efficient way (Consultancy.uk 2018; Chakravorti 2017; Jones et al. 2018).

To conclude this paper, several propositions have been put forth, which aim to open the door to further research and exploration into how firms can help in achieving the SDGs. The propositions made are mainly about: the relationship between CSR and the SDGs, how business goals can be aligned with the SDGs, finding a way for businesses to focus on certain SDGs without having a negative impact on the other SDGs, how firms should report on business outcomes in terms of their impact on sustainability, developing innovative ways to counter unsustainable consumption patterns, getting employees onboard the sustainability agenda and being flexible and nimble in adapting to changes in sustainability's constantly evolving facts and figures.

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Yasmin Anwar is a Ph.D. candidate at the Marketing Department, Faculty of Management Technology, at the German University in Cairo, Egypt.

Noha El-Bassiouny is Professor and Head of Marketing at the Faculty of Management Technology, the German University in Cairo (GUC), Egypt. She also acts as the academic coordinator of the Business and Society research group which aims at bridging the interface between business and society in the modern world in terms of research, teaching, and community outreach. Her research interests lie in the domains of consumer psychology, Islamic marketing, ethical marketing, social responsibility, and sustainability. She has wide international exposure and has published her works in reputable journals including the *Journal of Business Research*, the *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, the *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, the *Social Responsibility Journal*, the *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, the *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, the *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Marketing*, *Journal of Cleaner Production* as well as *Young Consumers*. She is currently the Associate Editor of *the Journal of Islamic Marketing*. She has also received many international awards including Emerald Outstanding Reviewer Awards and several Highly Commended Paper awards.