

## SMART AND RESPONSIBLE MARKETING COMMUNICATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE FOUNDATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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### Abstract

Creating a culture of responsible marketing communication is vital to the long-term survival of any organization or product. Clarity and accuracy in the presentation of a business will improve customer relations and improve the company's reputation. The aim of this study is to explore the theoretical discourses of marketing communication through a broad analysis of the on-going scholarly work focused on integration of sustainability goals into consumer behaviour frameworks. The authors have conducted a narrative literature review highlighting the latest theoretical foundations, challenges and future directions of marketing communication by using articles from high-ranking marketing journals through co-citation analysis and qualitative thematic analysis. The authors' extensive literature studies lead to the conclusion that the development of marketing communications is closely linked to new vectors of consumer behaviours, perceptions, and sustainable consumerism which motivates enterprises to proactively adapt their marketing strategies in alignment with sustainability goals. In essence, this study provides a valuable synthesis of the latest trends and theoretical advancements in marketing theory, which could support marketing researchers and business professionals in further development of their conceptual frameworks around sustainability issues and consumer expectations.

**Keywords:** sustainable marketing, enviropreneurial marketing, corporate responsibility, consumer behaviour.

### Introduction

In a time of increased digital transformation, consumer awareness, and sustainability goals, marketing communication is experiencing a significant transformation.

When building competitive advantage through sustainable marketing, it is essential to evaluate how it may affect a company's reputation and consumers' willingness to purchase (Puma-Flores & Rosa-Diaz, 2024).

All sectors of economy, with agrarian economics playing a central role among them due to its direct interaction with natural resources and ecosystems, need smart and responsible marketing communication that connects marketing innovation, sustainability, policy coherence and consumer trust. In order to support sustainable growth, the literature review can serve as a baseline for developing new strategies. Still, despite the increasing significance of sustainable and digital marketing, there is a lack of integrated concepts that combine smart and responsible marketing communication.

'Green,' 'environmentally conscious', and 'active' consumption has been the subject of debate in Western Europe and North America since the 1980s. Battery companies, beverage companies, automobile companies, cleaning product companies, detergent makers and food entrepreneurs share a common interest in the environment as a competitive factor. In response, eco-marketing developed, addressing the aim audience of 'green' consumers willing to pay more for environmentally-friendly products (Bianchi et al., 2023). Today a number of studies give evidence that consumers' interest in environmentally friendly products and services is growing. For example, already in 2020, a study conducted by NielsenIQ found that 78% of US consumers say that a sustainable lifestyle is important to them (Frey et al., 2023). Whereas Simon-Kucher latest Global Sustainability Study (2024), which is not limited solely to the US market

but is a multinational study, covering 17 countries across the Americas, Europe, and Asia, shows that 71% of consumers say they have made at least some sustainable purchases over the past year, and 66% say they are willing to pay more for sustainable products. Therefore, the authors conclude that consumers' expectations for brands and businesses to engage in sustainable marketing practices are evolving globally (Simon-Kucher, 2024). As a method to prevent the harmful impacts of recent patterns of living on social inequalities, biodiversity loss, and climate change, sustainable consumption is currently being positioned as a fundamental priority within far-reaching policies around the world; this emphasis can be successfully used as one of the marketing components if the goods or services produced by the company are in line with sustainable consumption. In this context, sustainable marketing refers to a marketing approach that promotes sustainable development or considers sustainability issues in a particular frame of reference anchored on developing long-lasting relationships with customers. As a result, sustainable solutions provide superior value to customers as a result of the analysis of their needs and wishes. They must also be communicated and distributed effectively to the selected target groups, taking into account social and ecological factors throughout the entire process (Peattie & Belz, 2010; Zeverte-Rivza, 2016). In fact, businesses must implement four 'S' into their marketing activity: customer satisfaction, good or service safety, social acceptability, and sustainability (Altinbasak-Farina & Burnaz, 2019). Consequently, only those businesses who control their damaging impacts on civilization and the environment will have the ability to endure nowadays and henceforth (Daub & Ergenzinger, 2005). This study explores the role of smart and responsible marketing communication in enhancing the ability of enterprises to compete within a sustainable development framework.

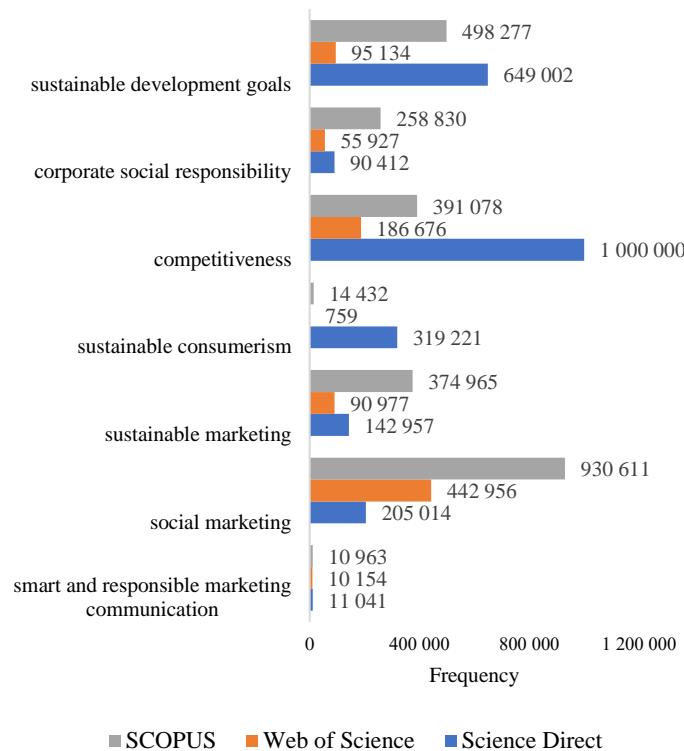
## Materials and Methods

The aim of the study was: to reveal the foundations, challenges, and future directions of the marketing domain. Based on a narrative literature review the specific research tasks were posed as follows: 1) to characterize the evolution of marketing communication in line with factors that influence consumer behaviour; 2) to identify new impactful vectors that influence the adaptability of enterprises' marketing communication to reach sustainable development goals; 3) to summarize recent marketing discourses that promote a balance between consumer behaviour and sustainability. This study consists of a narrative literature review to explore theoretical frameworks behind smart and responsible marketing communication. By a narrative literature review authors provide a wider perspective on the importance and relevance of the topic with sustainability trends, to capture a wide scope of perspectives and theories. The data was collected from various academic databases and literature sources, including Science Direct, Web

of Science, Google Scholar, and Taylor & Francis eBooks. These repositories were chosen because they offer a comprehensive collection of representation of quality - reviewed academic research publications in marketing and sustainability. For instance, Web of Science and Scopus provide comprehensive access to globally accredited journals, whilst Google Scholar offers large search that includes relevant policy documents and new approaches to sustainable marketing. Taylor & Francis, and Science Direct were selected due to their strong collections in the social sciences and eco-friendly focused marketing. The following key words and combinations of key words were used in the most relevant literature search: smart and responsible marketing communication, social marketing, sustainable marketing, sustainable consumerism, competitiveness, corporate social responsibility, sustainable development goals. The frequency of use of these keywords in Science Direct, Web of Science, and SCOPUS is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Keyword frequency of use in Science Direct, Web of Science, and SCOPUS in total*



As Figure 2 shows, corporate social responsibility as a keyword has a steady growth in such academic databases as SCOPUS, Web of Science, and Science Direct. This pattern represents the importance of corporate social responsibility.

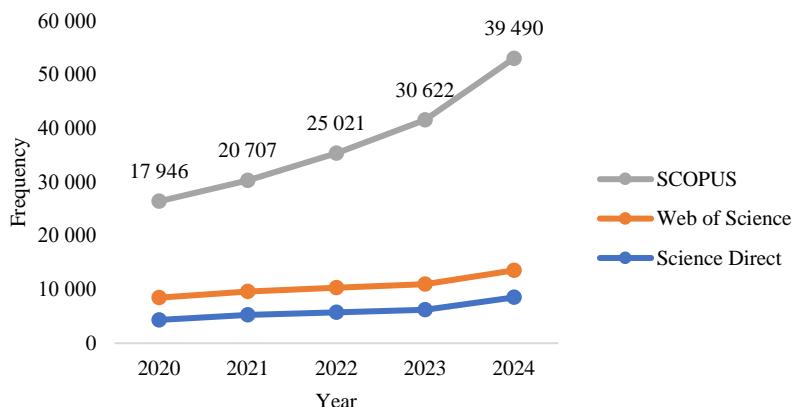
Similarly to Figure 2, Figure 3 shows the increasing frequency of the use of sustainable marketing in all

three academic databases as an important keyword and dimension to study.

This indicates the increasing importance of research in this area, driven by a growing interest from businesses and researchers in understanding the influences on consumer attitudes and perceptions, and their interrelationships.

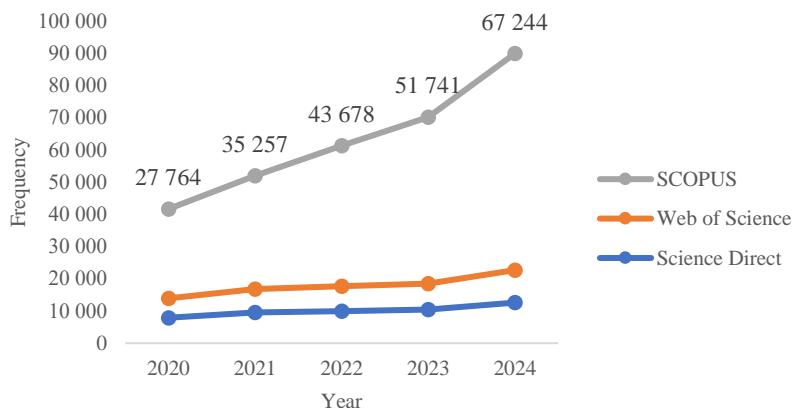
**Figure 2**

*Corporate social responsibility as a keyword frequency of use in Science Direct, Web of Science, and SCOPUS 2020-2024*



**Figure 3**

*Sustainable marketing as a keyword frequency of use in Science Direct, Web of Science, and SCOPUS 2020-2024*



In this study, multiple data sources were used to enhance validity and reliability.

## Results and Discussion

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is able to give many benefits to companies - customer loyalty, corporate reputation, and profitability. To achieve business objectives, it is essential to understand how stakeholders perceive these activities. As a result, most CSR definitions emphasize stakeholders' needs. For example, the European Commission says that CSR refers to corporations incorporating societal and environmental issues into their everyday business practices and interactions with major stakeholders (Mubushar et al., 2021). By embedding social, environmental, ethical, human rights, and consumer concerns within their businesses and key strategies in close participation with stakeholders, enterprises can achieve full CSR compliance (Tamvada, 2020). To meet this aim, CSR is defined as 'the responsibility of companies for their influence on society' (Mubushar et al., 2021). Many authors have connected the concepts of CSR with the concepts of sustainability and circular economy, regarding CSR as a corporate management

philosophy that is more inclusive of sustainability. Through these CSR definitions, the Sustainable development goals (SDGs) and sustainable behaviour in general are achieved for citizens, institutions and organizations (Dahlsrud, 2008).

Social marketing can help to achieve SDGs while improving the regulatory framework and awareness campaigns which are traditionally the most widespread environmental strategies.

Currently, climate change and its implications are one of humanity's major problems. This is where consumption behaviour plays a crucial part (Escario, 2020). Research indicates that high-intensity environmental awareness campaigns are effective in increasing supportive attitudes. For instance, social marketing simplifies complicated messages and presents them in a way that they are easily understood by certain audiences (Sewak et al., 2021) as well as providing society with specific steps and tips to help resolve challenging issues (Schultz, 2014). There are many in-depth analyses of the influencing factors (such as beliefs, values, moral obligation, social norms, self-efficacy, problem awareness) on the adoption of pro-environmental behaviours provided by

social marketing. This type of analysis helps understand possible barriers and examine opportunities to overcome them. As part of social marketing, analysis is also conducted to determine who or what influences the target audience's behaviour, particularly in competitive environments (Andreasen, 2002). The competition analysis can be carried out in a variety of ways, including through comparable schemes or promotions, other behaviours, goods and services, reports. Implemented analysis of competition is important as it provides social marketing specialists with wider view on the strengths and weaknesses of analysed programmes or campaigns in comparison to their competitors. Consequently, marketers are able to improve strategies, messages, identify opportunities to reach and engage with the target audience.

Social marketing is capable of proposing an efficient approach to the design and implementation of environmental programs that can enhance how governments and public institutions frame and select public policies; additionally, it can build longer-lasting relationships with society and other stakeholders (Tkaczhynski, 2020).

Through smart and responsible marketing communication, companies can promote pro-environmental behaviour by informing, educating and persuading a target audience to reshape its behaviours, thereby influencing their values, perceptions, and societal stance.

In the study about shifting markets for Climate-smart growth exploring tips for effective marketing communication, the authors used Stimuli-organism-response (S-O-R) theory which provides those environmental stimuli (incentives) that influence such cognitive processes as attention, perception, and evaluation, which leads to such behavioural reactions as attitudes, beliefs, and actions (Shaik et al., 2024).

S-O-R theory proposes that connection between environmental stimuli and behaviour reactions is determined by internal factors such as motivation, behaviour and values. Individual interpretation and response to environmental stimuli can be influenced by these internal factors. Consequently, this approach recommends organizations to use marketing communication to affect the internal factors that determine environmental stimuli and behavioural reactions connection (Shaik et al., 2024). For instance, in smart and responsible marketing communication transparent and appropriate sustainability-related advertisements, CSR and legal framework have been identified as main stimuli impacting awareness and perceptions among consumers. Then consumers use internal psychological components such as values, attitudes, perceptions and social standards to reprocess these stimuli. For example, CSR reports and messages will be treated more favourably by consumers with environmentally conscious consumption and eco-

friendly life values. By these interconnected stages enterprises are able to achieve higher loyalty to the brand, consumers' intention to purchase environmentally friendly goods and services or support for sustainable actions that can be measured through customer feedback.

Marketing campaigns modelled after environmentally-conscious consumers' values and perceptions are considered part of an entrepreneurial marketing strategy. Through the influence of marketing communication, environmental marketing strategies and strategic plans are affected by perceptions of climate change. Environmental marketing refers to the practices of marketing by enterprises that are focused on environmentally friendly actions in response to their competitive advantages and their responsibility to serve people and the environment (Jaini, & Hussin, 2019). Socially responsible businesses by choosing an appropriate marketing communication, green marketing strategy, are able to achieve new business opportunities and competitive advantages, as well as making an important investment to protect environment and the world from environmental disasters. Consequently, those companies who choose green and smart marketing as a part of the socially responsible marketing communication by focusing on sustainability and consumer behaviour, are able to achieve the important benefits of it, for instance, a competitive advantage, increase of company's value, improved brand loyalty, as well as engage and attract new investors (Nadanyiova et al., 2020).

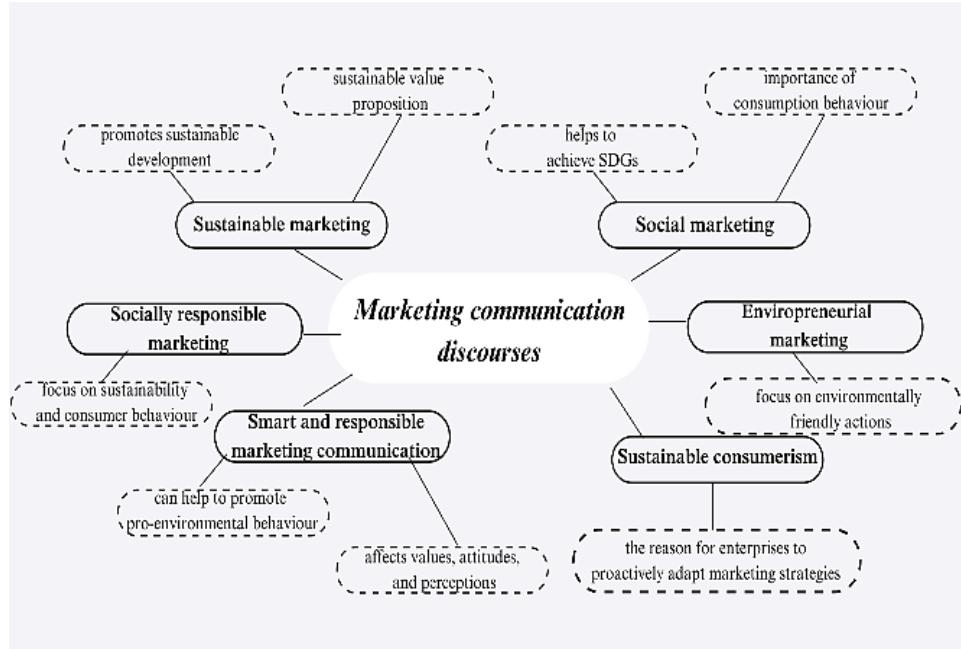
One of company's strategic approach called socially responsible marketing (SRM) increases inclusion of ethical, environmental, and socially conscious principles into their marketing practices (Ferrell & Ferrell, 2022). With this approach businesses can reach high level of clear communication between business and customers. Moreover, SRM helps implement diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within organizational settings (Trkulja et al., 2024).

Marketing communication discourses seek to address and respond to evolving trends in environmental requirements, evolution and changing consumer behaviour. Marketing techniques that use honest and transparent communication to reach consumers are evolving as green thinking and sustainable values become more prevalent.

Based on their 2024 study, Braga et al. identified several key cornerstones for responsible sustainability communication in marketing: sustainability reporting and advertising, consumer responses and perceptions, promoting pro-sustainable behavior, integration across the value chain, strategies of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), internal communication of sustainability strategies, and effectiveness in behavioral change.

**Figure 4**

*Concise marketing communication discourses through lense of impact of changing values, attitudes, perceptions, and policies*



The main focus of these discussed themes are transparency and accountability of environmentally friendly actions made in line with institutional and stakeholder theories, possible approaches to impact perceptions and behaviors of consumers toward sustainability, underlining challenges in avoiding greenwashing. These cornerstones help to maintain strong connection with consumers and focus on how initiatives of sustainability and marketing communication integrated across the value chain can stimulate market shifts towards sustainable consumption (Braga et al., 2024; Popluga & Grinberga-Zalite, 2022).

In the field of the responsible marketing, there is another additional helpful tool to implement ethical approaches in marketing communications and that is the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Advertising and Marketing Communications Code used worldwide, including such countries as Switzerland, Poland, Finland, United Arab Emirates, Canada, Mexico, Portugal, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Italy, Spain, France and others. Founded in 1937, it has provided consumers with legal, honest, decent, and truthful advertising, promoting both advertising freedom and consumer protection (Chatterjee, 2024). This proves that a common worldwide shared agenda of smart and responsible marketing communication can build strong long-term relationships between enterprises and consumers. The EU commits to fair and ethical trade, which also means that the voluntary labelling of products can provide consumers with more information about their sustainability, increasing conscious sustainable consumerism. It is possible to promote more sustainable trade by implementing transparent schemes.

## Conclusions

1. Smart and responsible marketing communication involves a certain list of impactful factors which influence consumer perceptions and behaviours toward sustainability, environmentally friendly actions, and greenwashing.
2. A unified legal framework plays a crucial role in helping businesses achieve greater results towards sustainability development goals through their entrepreneurship, while encouraging both existing and potential consumers to make conscious, sustainable consumption choices.
3. Social, green, and responsible marketing is closely linked to the impact on consumer perceptions of possible everyday actions that can reduce human impact on the environment by minimizing unconsidered, unnecessary purchases.
4. Corporate social responsibility, social marketing, sustainable marketing and other keywords and their frequency of use in such academic databases as SCOPUS, Science Direct, and Web of Science show an upward trend of use in research, where responsible marketing communication becomes an increasingly important topic that has strong relation with environment, climate, and policy changes.
5. Enviropreneurial marketing strategies help businesses achieve new business opportunities and gain competitive advantages while they choose to invest into important environment protection practices, promotion pro-sustainable behavior, and upholding corporate social responsibility.
6. By analysing marketing communication discourses, it becomes clearer that sustainability is a common denominator that combines compliance to environmental

and social objectives (e.g. SDGs, environmentally-friendly actions, and conscious consumption).

7. The use of key components of successful smart and responsible marketing – such as transparency, accountability, and relevance to sustainability and climate changes – shapes consumers trust, enhances the credibility of marketing communication, and strengthens consumers engagement.

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