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# POPULARIZATION OF AN ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION USING SENSORY MARKETING

Marcin Gębarowski<sup>1✉</sup>, Agnieszka Cholewa-Wójcik<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Politechnika Rzeszowska

<sup>1</sup>Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie

**Abstract.** This publication presents an essence of sustainable consumption and sustainable marketing laying special emphasis on an ecological dimension of those phenomena. There has been also explored the essence of sensory marketing as an innovative concept that constitutes an answer to the demand of experience economy. In the part of this work which relates to market realities, examples of propagating disseminating attitudes were referred to. The primary goal of this article is to point out the possibilities of popularizing an ecological dimension of sustainable consumption through promotional activities taken by business entities. Whereas the secondary goal is to determine the factors conditioning the effective performance of marketing activities involving people's senses and drawing the society's attention to proecological behaviours. Among the main determinants the following activities have been identified: coherent appeal to all senses of consumers, the connection of promotional actions with local societies, the formation of an "ecological" community around a brand, the use of an aspect of surprise, the organisation of campaigns which respect the rules of environmental protection.

**Key words:** sustainable consumption, sustainable marketing, ecology, sensory marketing

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the previous decades, marketing was based on an approach according to which all the efforts of companies were focused mainly on increasing the sales of their products by encouraging greater and greater consumption, which consequently allowed for earning higher and higher income. However, social changes (for example, such as the increase of consumers' sense of autonomy and the beginning of prosumer era) and ecology-related consequences (for instance, like increasing environmental pollution and the fact that natural resources were running out) led to the criticism of the approach that had been prevailing until that time. Many consumers started to feel the need to carry out marketing activities based on the concept of sustainable development, as well as sustainable consumption. In that respect, it became of key importance to notice natural environment problems which stemmed from the economic human activity.

As a result of such approach, more and more business entities is attempting to create an image that is based on ecological aspects. Results of analyses confirm the fact that consumers' personal convictions concerning the companies' care of natural environment influence the marketing area around enterprises, as well as contribute to the increase of sales of their products (Niedzielska,

✉ dr Marcin Gębarowski, Katedra Marketingu, Politechnika Rzeszowska, al. Powstańców Warszawy 8, 35-959 Rzeszów, Poland, e-mail: marcing@prz.edu.pl

2014). Companies more and more frequently put an emphasis on natural environment in their marketing activities, and such behaviour can be observed all around the world including Poland. Therefore, the fundamental goal of this work is to indicate the possibilities of popularising an ecological dimension of sustainable consumption being a part of business entities' promotional activity, with special consideration of sensory marketing instruments. Furthermore, the authors aim to specify the factors which determine effective performance of marketing activities involving all the senses of consumers and drawing their attention to proecological behaviour of enterprises.

## ECOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Sustainable consumption is a derivative of sustainable development. The literature on the subject offers numerous definitions of that concept, including, among other things, an attitude which implies that sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Strange and Bayley, 2008). Some authors argue that sustainable development depends on interactions between three systems: the biological (and other natural resources), the economic, and the social (Mikolajuk and Gar-On Yeh, 2000; Elliott, 2012). With regard to that context, one can assume that the concept of sustainable development in its assumptions pays attention to many areas of human activity, including, to a great extent, people's behaviour connected with natural environment protection, which is desired from the whole society's point of view. The fact that preserving the laws of nature prevails in the concept of sustainable development is reflected, among other things, in referring that concept to a synonymous term – *ecodevelopment* (Skowroński, 2006).

Sustainable consumption, in relation to the definition of sustainable development, can be specified as the use of products and services which are meant to fulfill the basic needs and provide a better quality life along with minimum utilization of natural resources, unwanted or undesired supplies and discharge of various wastes and pollutants over the life cycle without harming the requirements of upcoming generations (Kothari and Dwar, 2014).

Sustainable consumption, as a goal and condition of ecodevelopment, is and should be enriched with knowledge on its various aspects. From a scientific point of view, both the definition and individual components of that concept still do not seem to be complete. Sustainable consumption touches several areas of knowledge – representing both natural and social sciences (Kramer, 2011). The aspect in which one should carry out analyses is also an activity that is based on the concept of sustainable marketing.

## CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE MARKETING

The present increase of global social and ecological threats caused an intensification of the actions aimed at transforming consumption societies into sustainable societies which are based on sustainable consumption and production. Marketing, and particularly integrated promotion which constitutes its essential part, can play a special role in the above-mentioned transformation. Using proecological and prosocial media, forms and contents, that promotion should encourage purchasers, on consumer and institutional markets, to exhibit the behaviour which conforms to the principles of sustainable development (Pabian, 2013).

The increase of interest in the idea of sustainable consumption has been reflected in the concept of sustainable marketing. That notion represents an evolution of marketing that blends the mainstream economic and technical perspectives with the emerging concepts of relationship marketing and the social, ethical, environmental and intergenerational perspectives of the sustainable development agenda. It is not exactly a “new” marketing, but it is an “improved” marketing in drawing insights and strengths from these different perspectives (Belz and Peattie, 2012). The concept of sustainable marketing does not stray from the main assumption of the marketing philosophy, which entails gaining a competitive advantage by enterprises on the basis of the results achieved throughout the process of satisfying the customers' target needs. However, compared with earlier concepts, the major difference involves the change from the method how economic goals are attained to the method which takes into account both environmental capital (any resources generated by the nature) and social capital (all the resources that come from people, including their work, talent and creativity) (Brzustewicz, 2014). Underlying the concept of sustainable marketing

is an assumption that nowadays marketing must be understood in a broader sense – not only as the activity which results in satisfying customers and fulfilling their needs while achieving economic goals at the same time, but also as the activity whose effects will have a positive impact on future generations (Rudawska, 2013).

Sustainable marketing is ecologically oriented, taking account of the ecological limits of the planet and seeking to satisfy human needs without compromising the health of ecosystems and their ability to continue delivering ecosystem services (Belz and Peattie, 2012). In that context, the literature refers also to the concept of green marketing, which is defined as the study of all efforts to consume, produce, distribute, promote, package, and reclaim products in a manner that is sensitive or responsive to ecological concerns (Dahlstrom, 2011). The enterprises which decide to adopt an ecologically-oriented approach should take advantage of this fact and create an “ecological” image, simultaneously, popularising the concept of sustainable consumption. Such image can be effectively created when one appropriately comprehends the essence of sensory marketing and properly uses the instruments that help appeal to all consumers’ senses.

### **SENSORY MARKETING IN PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT BY BUSINESS ENTITIES**

For more than a decade, economic literature has been pointing out the dynamic development of experience economy era (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), in which creating unique, strong and diversified experiences serves as the basis for attracting the attention of marketing activity recipients. That is a mandatory condition, not only in order to become unique in comparison to competitive messages, but also to successfully build a brand image in a long-term perspective – as well as an image which will be associated with natural environment protection.

Some researchers claim that entering the era in which the basic goal entails appealing to the consumers’ senses means a breakthrough which lets people believe that a new paradigm in the field of marketing has occurred, which is sensory marketing (Shabgou and Daryani, 2014). Unlike mass and relationship marketing theories, sensory marketing focuses on the accomplishment of the supreme sensory experience. The classical “4P” model in a consumer goods marketing context

(McCarthy, 1960) and the well-known “30R” model in a relationship marketing context (Gummesson, 1997) ignore the significance of the human senses and the supreme sensory experience of the individual (Hultén et al., 2009).

The literature provides different definitions of sensory marketing. Krishna (2012) tackles this phenomenon in a general way and perceives it as marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgment and behaviour. Sensory marketing is an application of the understanding of sensation and perception to the field of marketing – to consumer perception, cognition, emotion, learning, preference, choice, or evaluation. Filser (2003), on the other hand, believes that sensory marketing can be defined as a group of key levers which are controlled by the producer and/or by the distributor to create a specific multi-sensory atmosphere around the product or the service either by focusing on sale outlet environment or product environment, and the communication or characteristics of the product itself. In sensory marketing, the main emphasis is laid on the experiences which consumers have any time they are in contact with a particular brand.

One can suppose that an approach which focuses on a holistic appeal to all consumers’ senses will be a dominant form of a promotional activity in the near future. This will be caused by the fact that the effectiveness of traditional forms of communication, which are based only on two basic senses – sight and hearing, is decreasing. At the moment, an important feature of the market communication process is that it engages all customers’ senses simultaneously – so that a brand can be permanently remembered and strongly associated with desired attributes (including also the care of natural environment).

### **EXAMPLES OF USING SENSORY MARKETING TO POPULARIZE PROECOLOGICAL ATTITUDE**

Analysing the undertakings related to sustainable marketing, which were carried out in Poland in recent years, one can point out interesting ecological actions using a wide range of the forms of appeal to the senses of marketing activity recipients. Some of the promotional campaigns had a cyclical dimension, whereas the other ones were performed as single events.

An example of a cyclical, long-term proecological action is an undertaking known under the name of “Side of Nature”, which was carried out by the Żywiec Zdrój brand. The programme, which began in 2009 (first two editions were organised under the name “My Strong Tree”), involved planting trees and announcing grant contests which were addressed to children and youth educational facilities and which supported local ecological initiatives. Moreover, throughout other editions, organized once a year, additional undertakings were carried out – for example, in 2011, a children’s fine art competition was announced, and in 2014, 300 km of routes for tourists were modernised in the Beskids. There were also open-air events, held on the initiative of the Żywiec Zdrój brand in the largest Polish cities, which included non-standard marketing activities perceived as ambient media. For example, in 2011–2012, people disguised as trees (fir, beech, maple, sycamore, pine, larch) were walking the main streets of several cities (Warsaw, Gdańsk, Cracow, Żywiec, Wrocław and Poznań) and asked passers-by questions about the role of trees in human life and encouraged them to take care of natural environment. In 2013, in one of city squares of Warsaw there was set up a large, interactive LED display, on which passers-by could see their own pictures with a slogan promoting support for the programme. There were also used, as a part of the “Side of Nature” action, original activities based on electronic media – eg. an application for iPhone users was developed, which enabled them to recognize different tree species on the basis of pictures of leaves, and Internet users could install an application made available via Facebook profile of the Żywiec Zdrój brand, which let them “plant” virtual trees to demonstrate their support for the programme. The campaign was accompanied by traditional advertising activities (such elements like, among other things, TV spots and POS materials in shops were used), as well as activities connected with public relations (performed eg. via social networking sites and blogs). Programme partners were “Our Earth” Foundation and The Regional Directorate of State Forests in Katowice, whereas from 2014, it has been Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society. Singers – Halina Młynkova and Sebastian Karpiel-Bulecka, and an actor – Łukasz Nowicki were selected as campaign ambassadors. The action produced desired effects. Throughout six programme editions, there were planted 5 million trees on the 900 ha area of the Żywiec Beskids. Moreover,

financial resources from 100 ecological grants (in the amount of around PLN 100,000 funded every year) were allocated and above 500 non-governmental organisations and educational facilities were involved in the initiatives for natural environment (Raport..., 2012). Furthermore, owing to the diversified and cohesive marketing activities, carried out for many years, it was possible to create a desired image of the action and establish a strong connection between the proecological undertaking and the Żywiec Zdrój brand.

For many years, the Energa brand has been performing intensive image-related activities, connected with ecology. One of the main motives of the brand’s marketing activity included the protection of the white stork – a bird that evokes positive associations, especially in Poland. Energa was engaged in the popularization of the knowledge about storks and their protection through Internet websites – [www.dbajobociany.pl](http://www.dbajobociany.pl) and [www.bocianopedia.pl](http://www.bocianopedia.pl). Since 2013, the brand has been a partner of [www.bociany.pl](http://www.bociany.pl) – a project entailing the observation of storks, their nests and feeding grounds, as well as involving the actions required to preserve the birds in Poland. Many initiatives were executed for the project, including, among other things, photo and literary competitions dedicated to storks and an action that involved searching birds which did not fly away to Africa during winter and notifying about such cases. Both websites, [www.dbajobociany.pl](http://www.dbajobociany.pl) and [www.bociany.pl](http://www.bociany.pl), have their own Facebook fan pages. In 2013, owing to the Energa brand’s support, there was created an 801 BOCIAN information hotline at „pro Natura” Polish Society Of Wildlife Friends (with the following telephone number: 801-26-24-26). The objective of that hotline is to support the people who want to join in the care of storks. Another initiative of the brand is a “Fund for Nature”, in connection to which a grant contest is organized once a year – projects related to ecological activity are awarded during it. In 2013, a fourth contest edition was run and it concerned the protection of the stork – 8 projects were financed with above PLN 30,000. Apart from informative and educational actions aimed at various groups in the environment, also the Energa Group itself got involved in the protection of storks. In recent years, the representatives of the Group have installed above 9,000 platforms under birds’ nests (during summer, those nests are occupied by at least 18,000 animals and their offspring, i.e. around 18% of the stork population coming to Poland). In the years 2009–2012, there was

performed an innovative undertaking which involved stork ringing by Energa power engineers. That action was unique, because these were not ornithologists who attached rings to birds, but trained employees of the Group. That unusual project made it possible to provide 5,000 stork nestlings with rings, which currently enables scientists to monitor the birds (Nasza..., 2014). All the above-mentioned undertakings are cohesive and attract a lot of people's attention to the brand, and what is worth mentioning – these are the people who are not indifferent to the lot of white storks flying to Poland. Pro-ecological threads can be found also in other activities conducted under the patronage of the Energa brand – including, among other things, an educational programme for children organised on a large scale, called “Energa Planet”, which teaches how to safely use electrical appliances and effectively save electric power.

Examples of promotional actions based on sensory marketing – which were performed not by a company, but a governmental organisation – include two campaigns run in 2013 and 2014 by the Regional Directorate of State Forests in Poznań. Both campaigns took place in the capital city of the Wielkopolska Voivodeship and were entitled: “Forest. A stop in everyday life” and “Forest. Closer than you think”. The aim of the undertakings was to encourage the citizens of Poznań and neighbouring areas to visit the forests located in the vicinity of the city and to care of green areas. As a result of the first action, carried out in May 2013, three municipal transport stops were decorated with forest bushes and potted flowers, and pavements were covered with grass. Moreover, the shelters of those stops were ornamented with wallpapers presenting a deer with trees in the background. For instance, during rush hours, people who worked for the organizer of that action were wearing forester uniforms and were distributing to passers-by and tram passengers stickers presenting the following slogans: “Lovelasy”, “I love las”, “Byłem w lesie”. There were also some activities connected with public relations, supporting the campaign “Forest. A stop in everyday life”, which involved sending “grass” parcels (the boxes contained real grass, a tram ticket and an invitation to visit forests) to the journalists working for local media. Furthermore, a contest via Facebook fan page “City of Poznań” was organised. It is assumed that every day about 30,000 passengers who were using the municipal transport services in Poznań came into contact with the campaign. Another promotional action

was performed between June and August 2014 as one of the events accompanying the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of State Forests. In the heart of Poznań (in front of “Zamek” Culture Centre), there was erected a green, “living” billboard. Next to that advertisement, a structure supporting a background for pictures was set up – it was a place where couples could take pictures of themselves in a plant arrangement with a slogan “Lovelasy”. 16 species of plants growing in the ground cover (such as bugle, common ivy, lesser periwinkle) and decorative plants (like lavender, heuchera, lobelia) were placed on the billboard. In the cases of both the billboard and the background for pictures, the plants were put in special felt pockets equipped with water supplying tubes. The two campaigns organized in Poznań for the Regional Directorate of State Forests were managed by professional advertising agencies.

## SUMMARY

The exploration of the above-mentioned examples demonstrated that an ecological dimension of sustainable consumption has been already reflected in marketing activities carried out by Polish business entities. The popularization of that dimension was performed as a part of the process related to creating an image of the brands which were believed to have strong associations with natural environment care.

In each of the analysed cases, the organizers of promotional actions decided to engage many senses of the recipients of their messages by providing diversified stimuli (activating sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch). The necessity for creating experiences in the above manner has been more and more frequently observed, which results from the fact that contemporary consumers have low sensitivity to promotional messages that are addressed to them. The sensitivity has been “dulled”, which is manifested in people's attitude towards advertisements, which are commonly ignored by them. The reason for that is, first of all, the problem of increasing information chaos in the media. Therefore, in order to effectively make consumers aware of the message that creates an “ecological” brand image, certain rules must be observed. In light of the above-mentioned examples, the following actions can be considered the determinants of the effectiveness of the activities which use sensory marketing and attract the society's attention to proecological attitudes:

- influencing, in the full scope (using all senses), the recipients of marketing actions while integrating – at the same time – the stimuli which create experiences;
- supporting actions by using diversified forms of reaching the recipients of marketing activities (such as: social networking services, TV commercials, instruments of public relations);
- relating marketing activities to local communities – so that the recipients of marketing activities can quicker perceive the influence of proecological actions on their everyday life;
- gathering, through marketing activities, a society around a brand – uniting all the people interested in environmental protection in one common activity (it creates in such people a sense of belonging to a larger activist group, as well as strong emotions, which have a positive impact on the brand image, are aroused);
- supporting actions by public people – opinion leaders, who are liked by the majority of the society and who are not controversial in respect of their approach to natural environment;
- using an element of surprise – performing activities perceived as ambient media, which firstly, capture considerable attention, and then, are widely commented – mainly on the Internet;
- using a slogan of an action and a device mark which both have unambiguous associations with ecology (as in the example of “Side of Nature” campaign run by the Żywiec Zdrój brand);
- organizing promotional actions during which environmental protection rules are observed (for instance, with respect to waste segregation, saving energy and water);
- in case of cyclical actions (which are sometimes carried out for many years), persistently implementing a cohesive promotional programme – so that a reference to the same motif which distinguishes an undertaking is being made (eg. the protection of specific species of plants or animals).

As a result of the dissertation made in this paper, there have been identified the key factors which condition the effectiveness of the activities based on the marketing oriented to stimulate senses in respect of the aspect of propagating an ecological dimension of sustainable consumption. The determinants indicated above should be taken into consideration in future promotional activities carried out in relation to natural environment

protection. It must be expected that with the development of concept of sustainable consumption (as well as sustainable marketing), the situation when company images have associations with ecology will occur more and more frequently. In that respect, it appears that the most effective form of influencing the recipients of marketing activities is sensory marketing – which enables to strongly draw people’s attention, as well as to create the experiences which will be remembered for a long time.

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## POPULARYZACJA EKOLOGICZNEGO WYMIARU ZRÓWNOWAŻONEJ KONSUMPCJI Z WYKORZYSTANIEM MARKETINGU SENSORYCZNEGO

**Streszczenie.** W publikacji przedstawiono rozumienie zrównoważonej konsumpcji oraz marketingu zrównoważonego, ze zwróceniem szczególnej uwagi na ekologiczny wymiar tych zjawisk. Przeanalizowano istotę marketingu sensorycznego jako nowatorskiej koncepcji, będącej odpowiedzią na wymagania gospodarki doświadczeń. W części opracowania odnoszącej się do realiów rynkowych przywołano przykłady rozpowszechniania postaw proekologicznych. Głównym celem pracy jest wskazanie możliwości popularyzowania ekologicznego wymiaru zrównoważonej konsumpcji przez działania promocyjne podmiotów rynkowych. Celem szczegółowym jest natomiast określenie czynników warunkujących skuteczne prowadzenie działań marketingowych, angażujących zmysły i zwracających uwagę społeczeństwa na zachowania proekologiczne. Wśród głównych determinant zidentyfikowano: spójne oddziaływanie na wszystkie zmysły konsumentów, powiązanie akcji promocyjnych ze społecznością lokalną, tworzenie „ekologicznej” wspólnoty wokół marki, wykorzystanie aspektu zaskoczenia, a także organizowanie kampanii z poszanowaniem zasad ochrony środowiska.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zrównoważona konsumpcja, zrównoważony marketing, ekologia, marketing sensoryczny

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