

THE SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING CANVAS: CREATING ORDER FROM DISORDER

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Description: The Sustainability Marketing Canvas (SMC) is a tool that was tested and refined at Hilti AG where it brought more coherence to sustainability marketing strategies, more comparability in competitor sustainability benchmarking and therefore, the possibility of new value propositions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question 1: Can the Sustainability Marketing Canvas create more coherent sustainability marketing strategies and competitive sustainability benchmarking at large firms?

Research Question 2: Using Hilti AG as a case, what would be a more exact taxonomy of the rubrics within the Sustainability Marketing Canvas?

Research Question 3: Using Hilti AG as a case, how can the Sustainability Marketing Canvas move from being a descriptive tool to one that includes a quantitative perspective?

Method and Data: A qualitative research approach is taken using Hilti AG as a case study. The Hilti 2021 Sustainability Report and their key competitor's 2021 sustainability report were examined using content analysis coding. About 300 statements per company were coded. Using axial coding, specific categories were identified as a taxonomy to the Sustainability Marketing Canvas. These coding categories were tallied in absolute numbers and in percentages to assess each company's presence or lack of presence in a sustainability category.

Summary of Findings: Marketing as a discipline is uniquely poised in offering sustainability answers because of its broad disciplinary reach. One way to offer new value propositions, help regenerate environmental and social systems is to marry notions of sustainability marketing with “normal” marketing in a decision-making tool. The Sustainability Marketing Canvas is introduced where the 7P’s are fused with the Planet and People aspects of the Triple Bottom Line to create order in this conceptual disorder. Hilti AG, a multinational construction solution company with 31,000 employees was used as a case to evolve the SMC. The SMC did help Hilti see their sustainability strategy with a more holistic perspective. It was especially helpful in competitive benchmarking because the variables being compared could be placed in the same categories, in a sense, being able to compare apples to apples. Having coded about 600 statements from Hilti and their competitor, we could create a more precise taxonomy for each rubric in the SMC. This helps companies have a common understanding of sustainability and as a result, a common comparability. This exactness enables a quantitative component that lends itself to more precise sustainability strategy assessments within firms and with their competitors.

Statement of Key Contributions: Marketing has made questionable impact upon environmental, social and economic sustainability due to a conceptual and level-of-analysis fragmentation. Not only is this a barrier to theoretical development but perhaps, most importantly, for coherent, sustainable action. Marketing is suited to make an impact on sustainability issues because its domain of influence is so broad. Presently, there is a fragmentation between “normal” marketing strategy and specialty disciplines like green, social, and sustainability marketing. The Sustainability Marketing Canvas is introduced as a tool for marketing practitioners who need a simple, yet comprehensive structure to generate coherent sustainability marketing strategies. The key contributions of this paper are: challenging the generally accepted notion of siloizing sustainability marketing from “normal” marketing, dismantling this theoretical and tactical siloization through the Sustainability Marketing Canvas, enabling adoption by using two well-adopted

frameworks – the 7P's and the 2 P's of the Triple Bottom Line, and finally, providing a universal structure regardless of industry or firm size. It supports a management line-of-questioning which helps set strategic and operative plans and measurements. Additionally, the SMC can give a comprehensive and comparable view of competitors' sustainability efforts. It helps to synchronize actions across different disciplines and helps marketers to concisely communicate their actions to stakeholders.

References are available upon request