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Evolution of sustainability as marketing strategy: Beginning of new era

Vinod Kumar^{a*}, Zillur Rahman^b, A. A. Kazmi^c and Praveen Goyal^d

^{a,b,d}Department of Management Studies, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee - 247667, Uttarakhand, India

^cDepartment of Civil Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee - 247667, Uttarakhand, India

Abstract

Time has witnessed the different phases of marketing strategy. Out of which, sustainability is the key issue which has emerged in marketing strategy over the time. In earlier phase of 1970s, ecological issues have emerged as a new paradigm in marketing strategy. Then in next decade, social issues picked up the lime light and emerged along with ecology. Reassessment of the issues resulted in evolution of green or environmental issues in marketing strategy and now the sustainability in marketing strategy has become the focus of attention of the researchers. Therefore, the objectives of this paper are, first, to review and understand concepts of marketing strategy and sustainability, secondly, to discuss evolution of sustainability in marketing strategy and lastly, to discuss the future of sustainability marketing strategy.

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1. Introduction

The first marketing course, i.e., ‘The marketing of Products’, was established in ‘University of Pennsylvania’ in 1905 (Peattie and Belz, 2010). The concept undergone many changes with time after that and the field of marketing has experienced different changes. Talking specifically about marketing strategies, these have also undergone many changes and focus of marketing has also become consumer

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +91-9639300292; fax: +0-000-000-0000 .
E-mail address: vinodmehta8383@gmail.com

oriented as the customers' requirements and expectations have also changed. Different issues are raised in marketing strategy with the passage of the time and companies always tried to adopt different marketing strategies to gain competitive advantage in the market. Today, sustainability is that area which is being explored by companies for growth and development. Sustainability works on 'Triple Bottom Line' approach i.e., people, planet and profit (Charter et al., 2006). Brundtland Report, 1987, named "Our Common Future", coined the term sustainability. In this report, sustainable development is defined as "development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", revived the discussion on the role of business in society (WCED, 1987; p.24). Sustainability, on the other hand is defined as:

According to Veiderman, "*Sustainability is a vision of the future that provides us with a road map and helps us to focus our attention on a set of values and ethical and moral principles by which to guide our actions*" (cited in Munier, 2005).

It is clear from both the definitions that some steps have to be taken today to save future of coming generations. It also revealed that sustainability is a long term vision that deals with development of strategy based on ethical and moral principles. But, most of the time, the meaning of sustainability is understood as environmental sustainability, but it is limited not only to environmental issues, but also include the social and economic issues (Obermiller et al., 2008). Sustainability says that business practices should be assessed in terms of sustainability through economic, environmental and social dimensions. Therefore purpose of this paper is, first, to review and understand concepts of marketing strategy and sustainability, secondly, to discuss evolution of sustainability in marketing strategy and lastly, to discuss the future of sustainability marketing strategy.

2. Brief literature review

Sustainability in the field of marketing is studied through different perspectives. Some authors took environmental or green issues and other took social issues. But sustainability has got three dimensions as discussed earlier i.e., environmental, social and economic. The previous studies evaluated and analyzed the green or environmental marketing strategies (Polonsky, 1995; Aragon-Correa, 1998; Buysse and Verbeke, 2003; Camino 2007; Fraj- Andrés, 2008). Further, the marketing strategy has also been analyzed from the social aspect (Maignan et al., 2004, 2005; Soriano et al., 2010). But very few studies exists which developed the link between sustainability and marketing strategy. Therefore, there is need to design marketing strategy which can deal with problems related to achieve environmental, social and economic goals and objectives in integrated manner. But, it is very complex to design effective marketing strategy because each business objective requires different marketing strategy comprising of unique set of decisions (Slater and Olson, 2001). Therefore, analysis and evaluation of marketing strategy in terms of sustainability is also a unique objective and requires special attention. Therefore, this paper firstly, focuses on concept marketing strategy. Secondly, it discusses the evolution of sustainability in marketing along with the concepts of sustainability marketing and sustainability marketing strategy. Finally, it shares the issues and changes related to sustainability marketing strategy.

3. Marketing strategy

As far as the field of marketing strategy is concerned, it is very less explored by researchers. The prime role of marketing strategy is to achieve competitive advantage (Slater and Olson, 2001; Ansary, 2006). Therefore marketing strategy is important component of strategy which cannot be overlooked. The different authors define marketing strategy in different ways:

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