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Application of a Digital Communication Strategy in the Market Launch of Sustainable Product Innovations

Nadezhda Dimova

PhD, Associate Professor, New Bulgarian University

Abstract: ***The exceptionally rapid changes in marketing strategies, driven by digitalization and the accelerated adoption of AI, necessitate considerable changes in communication strategies, particularly in the introduction of sustainable product innovations. In the practice of sustainable product development, the focus is placed on environmental and economic aspects, while the social aspect remains in the background. Overcoming the challenges and barriers associated with the introduction of product innovations and communication with consumers is achieved through numerous and diverse approaches, which also involve environmental costs.***

Keywords: digitalization, sustainability, communication strategy, product innovation

The introduction of digitalization, with its accelerated pace and diverse specific characteristics across businesses, necessitates a number of changes in the retail sector, particularly in the introduction of product innovations. The challenges facing communication policy under these conditions are considerable and require precision and an accurate approach on the part of marketing managers. One of the main objectives is the achievement of sustainable development.

In theory and practice, in the field of sustainable development of products and services, the focus is placed on environmental and economic aspects, while insufficient attention is paid to the social aspect. For this reason, the study of communication policy with regard to the implementation of sustainable product innovations is important in order to integrate precisely the social significance into it, particularly under conditions of digitalization.

The aim of the article is to present the application of a digital communication strategy in the market launch of sustainable product innovations.

Commercial relationships are predominantly being transformed from physical into digital ones, while the coronavirus pandemic accelerated the adoption of electronic services.

Sustainable product innovations and the implementation of communication with consumers regarding them are of paramount importance for achieving sustainability through sustainable consumption. In the development of new products, it is important to pay attention to systematic sustainable innovation, which should encompass the entire product life cycle, as well as the monitoring and improvement of overall sustainability during the early stages of product development.

Many countries around the world achieve high scores in terms of environmental sustainability, which is closely linked to the use of natural resources and technologies that influence the preservation of the environment.

In the broadest context, the application of sustainability practices can stimulate innovation by encouraging companies to develop environmentally responsible products, adopt circular business models, and engage stakeholders in new forms of cooperation. In this way, competitive advantages are established that extend beyond immediate improvements in efficiency or cost reduction, position companies as leaders in emerging green markets, and help them mitigate environmental and social risks that threaten their long-term viability.

Of particular importance to both theorists and practitioners is the fact that there is a difference between the aspiration to engage in sustainable marketing and the ability to implement it effectively. Most companies formulate various sustainability commitments but experience difficulties in translating these commitments into competitive results. In reality, this difference stems from a limited understanding of sustainability-related trends, insufficient resources and capabilities to capitalize on sustainability opportunities, and rigid organizational structures that hinder the necessary implementation of sustainable transformation.

Product innovations aimed at achieving sustainability are directly related to environmental sustainability, without neglecting the other elements of sustainability.

Alternatively, sustainability can be achieved through the development of products that are more sustainable than existing products (Boks et al., 2009; Seuring et al., 2008).

From the perspective of product life cycle management, the product development phase determines the materials, suppliers, production method, costs, as well as the participants in the value chain during the production phase, while serving as an effective

phase for avoiding potential sustainability risks and reducing costs (Agudelo et al., 2017).

For sustainable innovations in products and services, the measurement of environmental and socio-economic performance constitutes an important indicator for decision-making, alongside eco-labelling, marketing, and others.

In turn, the overall assessment of sustainability performance is measured through a life cycle assessment methodology, including environmental life cycle assessment and social life cycle assessment (Kravchenko et al., 2019).

Another objective of sustainable development is to create value in order to best meet consumer needs while maintaining a balance between environmental, social, and economic perspectives. Challenges also exist with regard to product design, but they are addressed in a timely manner because, following the purchase, the relationship between sustainable production and sustainable market realization is established (Stahel, 2001; Lindhqvist, 2000; Goedkoop et al., 1999).

On a global scale, additional efforts are still required to ensure effective integration for the achievement of sustainable innovations and their implementation and establishment in order to achieve sustainable consumption.

Of particular importance is the circumstance that, in order for new products to be successfully introduced to the market, a successful communication strategy must necessarily be employed, or, in other words, communication plays a decisive role in every sustainability strategy. This applies to various types of businesses, including those in the tourism sector.

Numerous factors influence the possibility of applying a digital communication strategy in the market launch of sustainable product innovations, particularly in sectors such as tourism, for example.

In this regard, the concepts of sustainable tourism and positive tourism do not actually contradict one another. They complement each other, with the concept of positive tourism supplementing and expanding the general concept of sustainable tourism. To a greater extent, it is adapted to new and promising technologies in the management of tourism, transport, energy, construction, and environmental protection (Rizova, 2024).

The importance of algorithmization for the development of a tourist destination is also significant, both from the perspective of the preparation and implementation of the respective advertising and overall marketing campaigns. Thanks to algorithmization, these become considerably more extensive, generate stronger interest among potential consumers and, overall, address a significantly larger number of consumer categories, who have the opportunity to choose what they consider most suitable for themselves within the respective destination (Rizova, 2023).

In this regard, it is important to emphasize that, in general, mass advertising continues to be predominant in the marketing approaches of many companies, but its effectiveness is being superseded by personalized messages, various forms of consumer engagement through social networks, and other forms of direct contact that allow for dialogue – targeted or sponsored messages or applications that encourage participation in games, raffles, and other social causes. (Trendafilov 2017, Trendafilov 2023, Seligman 2018)

Equally important is the fact that, in order to establish overall sustainability, internal communication within an organization is necessary to build comprehensive sustainability both within the organization itself and with regard to the products it offers.

Successful external communication with customers, partners, and society as a whole is essential for implementing a sustainability strategy, because if it is insufficiently developed, the organization will face losses in terms of sales of goods and services, as it will fail to respond to the continuously growing global trend towards sustainability.

The reason why communication is fundamental to sustainable development can be explained by examining the nature of sustainability. Public discourse occupies an important place, as it is fundamental to ensuring legitimacy in sustainable development. (Newig et al. 2013) Secondly, achieving sustainability is extremely complex because specific problems relating to social communication must be overcome. (Newig et al. 2008)

By their very nature, sustainability-related problems are characterized by high levels of complexity and uncertainty, and communication plays a key role in providing information between individual agents.

In this regard, researchers Funtowicz and Ravetz propose a model that incorporates high levels of communication and dialogue, the inclusion of stakeholders in order to expand the information database, as well as the addition of more public values to the communication process. (Funtowicz et al. 1993)

Furthermore, sustainability objectives appear to be contradictory in terms of incorporating conflicts of interest and conflicts of values. Therefore, communication becomes essential for establishing a common understanding of public values related to sustainability and identifying specific objectives that need to be pursued.

Last but not least, the implementation of sustainable development measures is somewhat hindered because the capacity for sustainable development governance is not centralized, but is highly dispersed among different actors in society and involves multiple levels of decision-making. In other words, network-based coordination would be beneficial in enabling effective deliberation, negotiation, and social learning, which, in turn, contribute to the implementation of sustainable development strategies. (Newig et al. 2013)

In order to provide an in-depth presentation of how communication for achieving sustainability is realized, the processes through which information constitutes an exchange and discussion of interpretations regarding sustainability issues are examined and presented.

When communication is transformed and structured in a horizontal manner, it can take place at different levels, ranging from face-to-face interpersonal interaction to interaction through various mass media.

Communication for sustainability includes the perception of sustainability issues, as it performs important functions in formulating concerns and structuring facts, arguments and claims, the objectives to be achieved, and the measures to be implemented. In practice, these processes are not necessarily harmonious and inclusive, but can rather be regarded as contentious, structured fields of symbolic interaction in which different actors attempt to assert their own interpretation of the issues, their explanations, and the means of addressing them. (Neidhardt 1993)

In conclusion, the challenges facing the application of a digital communication strategy in the market launch of sustainable product innovations are multidirectional and diverse, but addressing them is essential for achieving sustainable development. They must be continuously monitored, and any problems that may arise from them must be addressed in a timely manner. The integration of new approaches to resolving these challenges, particularly under conditions of digitalization, will be of key importance.

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