



TEEMU KARHU

Effects of Using Sustainability In Marketing

Case Wernsing GmbH for Hedvi Markkinointi Oy

DEGREE PROGRAMME IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS
2024

ABSTRACT

Karhu, Teemu: Effects of Using Sustainability in Marketing
Case Wernsing GmbH for Hedvi Markkinointi Oy
Bachelor's thesis
International Business
December 2024
Number of pages: 34

In this thesis, the author explores the integration of sustainability into the marketing practices of Hedvi Markkinointi Oy for Wernsing GmbH products. The study examines potential benefits, including enhanced brand reputation, increased customer loyalty, competitive differentiation, and positive environmental and social impacts. Additionally, this thesis tries to identify key challenges, such as greenwashing and consumer skepticism, that may arise when implementing sustainable marketing strategies.

The findings seek to highlight that promoting eco-friendly production processes, ethical sourcing, and reduced environmental impact can attract environmentally conscious consumers and strengthen brand loyalty. The thesis also showcases challenges such as greenwashing where misleading claims may erode trust. The author wants to bring attention to the need for transparent and credible sustainability messaging, which includes, evidencebased claims, and transparent dialogue to build trust and credibility.

By effectively managing these opportunities and challenges, Hedvi Markkinointi Oy can align Wernsing GmbH's products with the sustainability values they represent in an effort to bring a competitive edge in the market. This thesis provides actionable insights and recommendations for businesses aiming to adopt sustainable marketing strategies while maintaining authenticity and trustworthiness.

Sustainability, Marketing, Green Marketing, Sustainable Marketing, Food industry.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Hedvi Markkinointi Oy.....	5
1.2 Wernsing Feinkost GmbH	6
2 PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
2.1 Purpose and Objectives of Thesis	7
2.2 Conceptual Framework and Research Questions.....	7
3 MARKETING AND SUSTAINABILITY	9
3.1 Sustainable Marketing Strategies	10
3.2 Creating Brand Reputation for Competitive Advantage Using Sustainable Marketing	11
4 SUSTAINABLE MARKETING COMMUNICATION AND GOOD AND BAD PRACTICES IN IT	12
4.1 Need for Sustainable Marketing in B2B Sales.....	13
4.2 Good and Bad Practices in Sustainable Marketing Communication ...	13
4.2.1 Good Practices	13
4.2.2 Bad Practices.....	14
5 METHODOLOGY	16
5.1 Research Design and Approach	16
5.2 Data Collection Methods and Analysis.....	16
5.3 Reliability, Validity, Ethical Considerations and Limitations	17
6 OVERVIEW OF WERNSING'S SECONDARY MATERIALS AND INTERVIEW WITH WERNSING'S SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER	18
6.1 Wernsing's Approach to Sustainability	19
6.1.1 Operative Initiatives	19
6.2 Interview.....	20
6.3 Implications for Wernsing GmbH	22
6.4 Challenges of Marketing Sustainability of Wernsing Products.....	22
6.4.1 Greenwashing.....	22
6.4.2 Consumer Skepticism.....	23
7 EFFECTS OF MARKETING SUSTAINABILITY	23
7.1 Potential Effect of Sustainability in the Food Industry	24
7.2 Finding a Balance Between Costs, Benefits, and Sustainable Impact	25
8 CONCLUSION.....	26
REFERENCES	28

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 30

1 INTRODUCTION

Consumers' increasing consciousness about their consumption habits has made sustainability a market standard, providing companies with a competitive edge. Despite the potential benefits it offers, many companies have not fully integrated sustainability into their marketing strategies. In the food industry context, this is very important, as “Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions”. (Crippa et al., 2022)

In this thesis, the author will go through how Hedvi Markkinointi Oy a marketing and wholesale company that focuses on the food industry. Could incorporate one of their providers Wernsing GmbH's sustainability achievements into a marketing strategy for their products in the domestic market. What benefits does this possibility offer and what are the challenges in marketing sustainability?

Author of this thesis used Chat GPT 4.0 for organizing data collected. Also, it was used for linguistic review. Grammarly was used for spell-checking and text revision.

1.1 Hedvi Markkinointi Oy

Hedvi Markkinointi Oy is a company founded in 2008 and located in Finland Proper, the company focuses on the wholesale of food products in a wide selection and represents and imports several brands. These products are then offered to distributors, restaurants, and other businesses alike.

Mr. Niko Sipilä took over the responsibilities as CEO of the company in the year 2021 after a generational change. Mr. Sipilä has seen that there is a need for change in the communication of marketing about sustainability. It seems that Mr. Sipilä has a clear understanding that as the whole industry is in transition and so are all companies within the industry. “No matter the size (of a

company), there is a need to utilize sustainability as a tool to connect with customers," says Mr. Sipilä.

Creating brand recognition and customer loyalty for labels is essential. Promoting social consciousness is simply not an act to try to positively affect market performance. For Hedvi Markkinointi Oy these values seem genuinely important.

Hedvi Markkinointi Oy has had the representation of Wernsing GmbH's products in Finland since the start of the company. In the year 2022, the year which was heavily affected by COVID-19 restrictions, Hedvi Markkinointi Oy managed to sell around 340 metric tons of Wernsing products. In the year 2023 growth is expected to be around 30%. (Sipilä, 2023)

1.2 Wernsing Feinkost GmbH

Wernsing Feinkost GmbH is a German food manufacturer founded in 1962, located in Addrup-Essen in Lower Saxony. The company produces different types of semi-finished potato products, such as frozen french fries, croquettes, and gourmet salads, mayonnaises, dressings, and other condiments and desserts.

Wernsing GmbH has nine other production sites in Germany and several others in Europe, residing in Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Spain. Altogether there are more than four thousand employees in the corporate group and from these, more than 1200 work in the AddrupEssen production site.

Wernsing has been involved in sustainable initiatives for several years. The company has used sustainability as part of its marketing strategies such as marketing its products as climate-neutral. (Wernsing, nd)

2 PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Purpose and Objectives of Thesis

The goal of this thesis is to evaluate and promote the integration of sustainable practices into marketing strategies for Wernsing GmbH products for Hedvi Markkinointi Oy's marketing strategies. The aim is to explore the potential of sustainable marketing by informing customers about reducing the environmental impact of Wernsing GmbH's products. With this thesis, the author seeks to promote social responsibility and long-term sustainability in the food industry.

The thesis seeks to identify the benefits and challenges associated with incorporating sustainability in marketing in the food industry in general and for Wernsing GmbH's products in Hedvi Markkinointi Oy's repertoire especially. The author also seeks to propose effective strategies for incorporating sustainability into marketing activities. It also strives to highlight the positive impacts, while acknowledging the challenges that marketing of sustainability might bring.

2.2 Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

The author will explore key research questions which are as follows. What challenges does Hedvi Markkinointi Oy face when integrating sustainability into its marketing strategies for Wernsing GmbH products? And how can these challenges, such as greenwashing, be addressed? How can Hedvi Markkinointi Oy leverage Wernsing GmbH's sustainability initiatives to enhance brand reputation and foster consumer loyalty? What role does effective communication play in reducing consumer skepticism toward sustainability claims made by Hedvi Markkinointi Oy for Wernsing GmbH

products? How can sustainability be effectively integrated into marketing strategies and leveraged for positive outcomes.

The first question addresses the challenges Hedvi Markkinointi Oy faces when integrating sustainability into its marketing strategies for Wernsing GmbH products. How these challenges, such as greenwashing, can be overcome. This involves identifying obstacles in sustainable marketing and proposing strategies to address them in communication.

The second question examines how Hedvi Markkinointi Oy can utilize Wernsing GmbH's sustainability initiatives to enhance brand reputation and foster consumer loyalty. Highlighting the potential benefits of sustainability-focused marketing.

The third question explores the role of effective communication in reducing consumer skepticism towards sustainability claims made by Hedvi Markkinointi Oy for Wernsing GmbH products, emphasizing the need for transparency and authenticity in building trust and credibility.

To illustrate the potential impact of addressing these questions, the author uses the framework presented below.

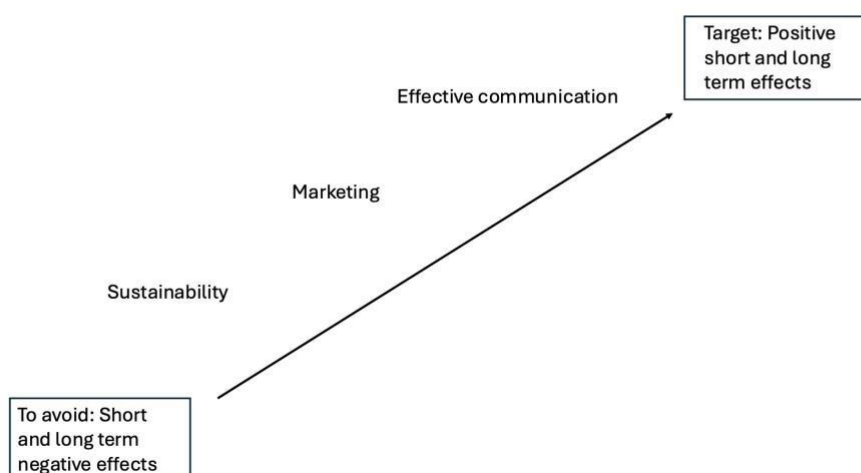


Figure 1. Framework for sustainable marketing strategy's possible benefits and challenges for Hedvi Markkinointi Oy

Ultimately, in this sustainable marketing framework, the author aims to align sustainability practices, marketing efforts, and effective communication to achieve both immediate and long-term positive outcomes.

By integrating genuine sustainable practices with strategic marketing and clear, transparent communication, companies could have a possibility to strengthen their brand reputation and consumer trust, leading to successful results. Conversely, poor marketing practices that lack a genuine connection to sustainability could result in negative outcomes. Thus, the goal should be to strategically leverage sustainability to ensure that all aspects of the marketing mix contribute to lasting positive impacts.

3 MARKETING AND SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainable marketing plays a transformative role in shaping consumer behavior and driving societal change. Martin and Schouten (2014 pp.54-58) explain that businesses should develop marketing strategies by considering social, cultural, economic, and environmental trends.

Marketing not only responds to societal shifts but actively reinforces them through its influence on consumer values and behaviors (McCracken, 1986 p.71). Sustainability, as an emerging socio-cultural trend, is both shaped by and shapes marketing practices, creating a reinforcing cycle that promotes greater environmental and social responsibility.

This aligns with Cialdini's social influence theory (Cialdini 2001, p.101) where sustainable marketing strengthens the shift towards more eco-conscious behaviors in consumers and businesses. Over time, sustainable practices in marketing drive business paradigms toward continuous improvement. Grant

(2020 pp.15-20) describes this progression as moving from “not bad,” minimizing harm, to “net good,” to actively contributing more to society and the environment.

Companies adopting "net good" policies, like Wernsing GmbH, exemplify how marketing can catalyze positive systemic change, likened to forests enriching ecosystems. This cycle of improvement positions sustainable marketing as a key driver in achieving long-term corporate responsibility and societal impact.

3.1 Sustainable Marketing Strategies

Numerous studies have emphasized the role of product innovation in sustainable marketing strategies (Martin & Schouten, 2014, pp. 78–82; Grant, 2020, pp. 45–50). Eco-friendly product design, materials, and manufacturing processes could have a positive effect on the company's brand reputation and create a competitive advantage by meeting consumer demand for sustainable products.

Research has shown that adopting environmentally friendly production processes can positively influence brand reputation (Martin&Schouten, 2019 pp. 78–82). Companies that minimize their environmental impact through energy-efficient operations and waste reduction measures can gain a competitive edge by appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.

Responsible sourcing practices, such as using ethically and sustainably sourced raw materials, have been linked to improved brand reputation and customer loyalty (Martin&Schouten, 2019 pp. 83–85). By ensuring transparency in their communication and traceability in their supply chains.

Companies can build trust and differentiate themselves from competitors.

Engaging in social initiatives, such as community development programs or philanthropic activities, can contribute to brand reputation also and bring competitive advantage Studies seem to show that consumers increasingly

value companies that demonstrate a commitment to social and environmental causes. (Martin&Schouten, 2019 pp. 85–88)

3.2 Creating Brand Reputation for Competitive Advantage Using Sustainable Marketing

Consumer perception plays a vital role in shaping brand reputation. Research suggests that effectively communicating a company's sustainable practices and values can enhance brand reputation and consumer trust. Companies that are transparent and authentic in their sustainability claims are more likely to establish positive brand reputations.

Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives have been found to positively influence brand reputation and consumer perception (Martin&Schouten, 2019 pp. 85–88). Companies that have success in integrating sustainability into their core business strategies engage in responsible business practices. And communicate them properly to their customer base, can utilize the possibility of creating strong brand reputations with sustainability and gain a competitive advantage this way. This in theory leads to better business practices and has a possibility to change industry attitudes towards sustainability.

Sustainable marketing can provide a competitive advantage by differentiating a company's products or services from competitors' offerings (Grant, 2020 pp. 15–20). This requires companies that effectively communicate their sustainability initiatives and position themselves as environmentally friendly alternatives could attract environmentally conscious consumers.

Effective communication is the most essential for gaining a competitive advantage. Companies have their channels where they communicate with their customer base, and they should already know these. Finding the message about a company's sustainability that resonates with its customers can be harder. However, studies seem to show a clear trend of the importance of sustainable marketing.

This competitive advantage does not come without its price. Costs associated with sustainable product development, resource-efficient technologies, and eco-friendly packaging may deter smaller companies or those operating with tight budgets (Elkington, 1998 pp. 50–55).

Moreover, the Triple Bottom Line framework suggests that achieving environmental and social goals alongside financial profitability requires organizations to adopt a holistic perspective. This approach, while commendable, often necessitates additional financial and managerial resources, which might create tension between immediate operational needs and long-term sustainability objectives. This needs to be addressed with a cost-benefit analysis.

4 SUSTAINABLE MARKETING COMMUNICATION AND GOOD AND BAD PRACTICES IN IT

When thinking about how to incorporate sustainability into marketing communication and marketing strategies, one must think beyond normal marketing tools. Beyond the likes of marketing mix coined by Professor McCarthy in 1960. That includes the crucial four P's of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion) and trying to use marketing frameworks that take sustainability into consideration, without losing sight of the basics.

Such frameworks like the "triple bottom line" theory, which was coined by John Elkington in his 1997 book "Cannibals with Forks", where he brought the idea of the 3 P's that stands for People, Planet, and Profit. Which can be more easily understood in the context of social justice, environmental quality, and economic prosperity. While this was originally considered an accounting tool, it is a theory that can be used in the creation of a marketing strategy.

4.1 Need for Sustainable Marketing in B2B Sales

Sustainability is becoming a strategic priority in the B2B sector as businesses recognize its advantages in enhancing efficiency, reducing environmental impact, and fostering innovation. Martin and Schouten (2014, p. 114) highlight that "B2B market segments... are aligned with specific industries, materials, and processes, but the need for sustainability is universal." This universality drives companies to adopt greener practices, such as eliminating waste, reducing emissions, sourcing renewable materials, and creating safer workplaces.

In the B2B context, sustainability not only aligns with ethical practices but also serves as a competitive differentiator. Companies increasingly seek partnerships with businesses that demonstrate a commitment to sustainable operations, making sustainability a vital element of B2B marketing strategies. By addressing these industry-specific needs while maintaining a broader focus on environmental and social impact, B2B marketing can effectively integrate sustainability into its core messaging and practices.

4.2 Good and Bad Practices in Sustainable Marketing Communication

4.2.1 Good Practices

"We need to eradicate cynicism from marketing. And adopt sincerity. It's not what we do, or even the way that we do it, so much as why we do it. Sincerity means that we want to change – not just because the public is clamoring for it, but because it's the right thing to do. (Grant, 2020, p.25) This emphasizes the need for sincerity in marketing. Arguing that genuine intent, driven by fundamental human values rather than external pressure, is essential for meaningful change. He also highlights the importance of maintaining creativity and flexibility to inspire and engage audiences, making sustainability a shared goal. This perspective underscores the foundational principles of effective

sustainable marketing authenticity, ethical intent, and imaginative execution whether targeting consumers or businesses.

Sustainable marketing communication relies on authenticity, transparency, and accountability, allowing companies to build trust and credibility with consumers by clearly communicating their sustainability journey. Being authentic means that companies should honestly share their current progress in sustainable practices, rather than focusing solely on future goals, which can otherwise confuse or mislead audiences. Transparency, as Hart (1995, pp. 992–994) suggests, enhances a company's reputation and legitimacy, as open disclosure shows a commitment to responsible practices, even if it opens the door to some criticism.

Accountability involves taking responsibility for the social and environmental impacts of business activities, and demonstrating to stakeholders that the company is committed to ethical standards and long-term sustainability. Furthermore, credibility can be strengthened by obtaining third-party certifications, which validate the company's sustainability claims and address consumers' potential skepticism.

Clear and jargon-free language ensures that sustainability messages are easily understood, which helps companies resonate with their target audience. Involving consumers in sustainability initiatives, providing platforms for engagement, and consistently improving sustainability practices are all essential to fostering brand loyalty and conveying a brand's commitment to a more sustainable future.

4.2.2 Bad Practices

Barriers to sustainable marketing often stem from practices that compromise core business goals in the pursuit of sustainability. As Martin and Schouten (2014, pp. 89–92) note, a common mistake is prioritizing sustainability to the extent that traditional marketing objectives are neglected. While sustainability can enhance a brand's value, it should complement, rather than replace the primary functions of a product or service. If a company's focus on sustainability overshadows its main strengths, such as quality or price competitiveness, it risks losing its standing within its industry. Sustainability should be one element of a brand's story, not its entirety. Effective brands maintain clear identities while adapting to changing market forces.

Another challenge is misreading the target audience. Especially in the fragmented "green" market, where consumers vary in their understanding and priorities around sustainability. Effective sustainable marketing requires a nuanced approach to segmentation and communication, with a need to ensure that the sustainability message resonates with diverse consumer groups.

Greenwashing represents a significant "absolute bad practice" in sustainability marketing. This deceptive tactic involves exaggerating or falsifying a company's environmental credentials with the intent to mislead consumers, thereby undermining genuine sustainability efforts. Greenwashing can harm a brand's reputation and result in legal repercussions.

Terrachoice's 2010 report, "The Sins of Greenwashing" identifies key pitfalls in communicating sustainability efforts. Such as the "sin of the hidden tradeoff," where companies emphasize one eco-friendly attribute while ignoring others, and the "sin of no proof," where claims lack verifiable support. Other sins include "vagueness," which uses broad or poorly defined terms, and "irrelevance," promoting unnecessary claims. And "worshipping false labels," which involves fake endorsements. These missteps illustrate practices that should be entirely avoided, as they erode trust and credibility in sustainable marketing.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Design and Approach

The author of this thesis uses mixed methods research design. This combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to address the research objectives. In author's opinion mixed method was the best route to research this complicated matter in real real-life case study. So that this thesis could be positioned within the existing discussion as expressed by Creswell (2009, p. 69).

Qualitative research as Denzin and Lincoln explains it as researchers looking to interpretive and understand real world phenomena in their context by "focusing on understanding experiences, meanings, and human actions" (Denzin & Lincoln 2009, p3) This served as the foundation of how the author evaluated of subjective insights from an interview with Wernsing GmbH's Sustainability manager Mrs. Ecke.

Quantitative research was deployed in secondary data analysis as outlined by Byrne (2002, p. 59) focusing on Wernsing GmbH's sustainability report and other material with the intent to provide measurable findings. This approach tries to seek an understanding of the benefits and challenges of sustainable marketing strategies in the case company.

The research uses case study methodology, in an "attempt to probe deeper than information yielded by quantitative research methods" (Gagnon, p.13) focusing on Wernsing GmbH's sustainability practices and their implementation in the marketing strategies of Hedvi Markkinointi Oy.

5.2 Data Collection Methods and Analysis

Two primary methods were employed for data collection. The qualitative method (Bryman 2008, p. 366) involved an interview conducted with the Sustainability Manager of Wernsing GmbH Ms. Ecke. The interview included both open-ended and closed-ended questions designed to explore sustainability initiatives, marketing integration, and strategic challenges and can be found in Appendix 1.

Thematic analysis as by the definition of Braun and Clarke (2006) is “defined as the method for identifying and analyzing different patterns in the data” which author used to interpret the interview data. With this process, the author tried to identify key patterns and elements in an effort to understand the integration of sustainability into marketing strategies and the challenges faced during their implementation.

Wernsing GmbH's sustainability reports and corporate websites were resources publicly available for gathering the secondary data used in the quantitative method. Additionally, internal documents provided by Hedvi Markkinointi Oy at the author’s discretion was used as secondary data.

Data included key metrics such as carbon footprint measurements, production efficiency rates, and sustainability key performance indicators (KPIs) (Martin & Schouten, 2014, pp. 65–70). Thematic methods were used to analyze this secondary data to summarize and interpret sustainability metrics like carbon neutrality achievements, resource optimization, and customer engagement figures.

5.3 Reliability, Validity, Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The author conducted the research per "Principles of ethical research" outlined by Shamoo and Resnik (2009, pp. 26-29) in an effort to ensure reliability, structured questions were utilized to maintain consistency. Integration of secondary data and cross-referencing it with documented sources was used to validate the collected findings. It is important to acknowledge the potential

biases in self-reported interview data and the limitations of the available secondary data were acknowledged.

Ethical research principles (Shamoo & Resnik, 2009 pp. 28-29) were adhered to, with informed consent obtained from the interview participant. Secondary data was used responsibly, ensuring compliance with copyright and data protection laws. Transparency was maintained throughout the research process to uphold the integrity of the findings.

The author acknowledges several limitations. The qualitative data relied on a single interview, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the inclusion of quantitative data aimed to provide a broader context in an effort to mitigate this limitation.

Secondary data relied on publicly available information, which most probably does not capture all dimensions of the company's sustainability efforts. Time and resource constraints restricted the scope of the research, necessitating a focus on key themes rather than in-depth analysis.

6 OVERVIEW OF WERNSING'S SECONDARY MATERIALS AND INTERVIEW WITH WERNSING'S SUSTAINABILITY MANAGER

Wernsing Feinkost GmbH has effectively demonstrated a comprehensive commitment to sustainability, as outlined in its sustainability report and website, which will be extensively used as material for these overviews. This commitment forms the foundation of the company's marketing strategies and operational practices, providing a robust case for examining how sustainability is integrated into its business and marketing frameworks.

The company's sustainability principles and achievements, such as achieving full carbon neutrality by 2020, align with the "Not Bad to Net Good" framework

(Grant, 2020). Which emphasizes going beyond compliance to create positive environmental and social impacts.

6.1 Wernsing's Approach to Sustainability

The sustainability report offers great insight into the company's sustainability principle, "Sustainable business – shaping the future," reflecting its commitment to combining value creation with environmental and social responsibility.

This focus aligns with the Triple Bottom Line theory (Elkington, 1998, pp. 50–55), which integrates environmental, social, and economic sustainability into corporate strategies. Wernsing's proactive measures, such as adopting the ZNU certification and investing in renewable energy, showcase its alignment with sustainability frameworks that prioritize continuous improvement.

Wernsing's investment in workforce education and social responsibility initiatives also mirrors Hart's (1995, pp. 990–994) emphasis on building organizational capability and fostering long-term stakeholder trust. By allocating 16,000 hours to employee training in 2019, the company reinforces its commitment to social sustainability. Its support of regional social projects aligns with ethical business practices emphasized in the sustainable marketing literature (Martin & Schouten, 2014, pp. 83–85).

6.1.1 Operative Initiatives

Wernsing's operational initiatives are well outlined in the company's sustainability report such as the construction of biogas plants, renewable energy usage, and innovative packaging solutions. Demonstrate Wernsing's ability to embed sustainability into its supply chain.

These measures resonate with Kotler and Keller's (2016, pp. 190–195) emphasis on leveraging sustainability as a competitive advantage. By implementing changes such as packaging designs that enhance shipping efficiency by 30%, Wernsing combines operational efficiency with environmental responsibility.

The company's active participation in the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) and its adherence to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) standards reflect its commitment to ethical sourcing, directly addressing the challenges of consumer skepticism highlighted by Terrachoice (2010, pp. 15–18). These initiatives not only support environmental stewardship but also build consumer trust through transparent, verifiable practices.

Wernsing's "Blooming Landscape" initiative, where 16 hectares of flowers were planted with contract farmers, and efforts such as installing nesting boxes for falcons. Align with broader efforts to engage stakeholders and demonstrate a commitment to biodiversity. These actions illustrate how sustainable practices can be effectively communicated to enhance brand reputation, as recommended in the literature.

6.2 Interview

Insights from the interview with Wernsing's sustainability manager Ms. Ecke, as well as the company's sustainability reports, provide a detailed understanding of how sustainability initiatives are operationalized within the organization. Questions for the interview, from which this chapter was constructed can be found in Appendix 1.

The sustainability manager described initiatives such as "SBTi" and "ZNU Goes Zero" as essential programs that the author sees aligning well with Martin and Schouten's (2014, pp. 92–95) view of sustainable marketing as deeply rooted in ethical and environmental values.

The sustainability manager emphasized that these programs leverage measurable outcomes, including the Corporate Carbon Footprint and Product Carbon Footprint, to “build credibility with stakeholders and ensure transparency in every aspect of our sustainability efforts” (Ecke, 2023). These measurable outcomes serve in the authors' opinion to mitigate the risks of greenwashing and provide tangible evidence of progress.

The importance of transparent communication was a recurring theme in the interview. The sustainability manager noted, “Transparency isn't just a tool for accountability it's the foundation of trust with our stakeholders” (Ecke, 2023). This sentiment resonates with Hart's (1995, pp. 990–994) assertion that transparency drives corporate reputation and ensures authenticity in sustainability claims.

By addressing challenges such as balancing costs with sustainable impact, Wernsing demonstrates how sustainable marketing can be integrated into its business strategies without compromising authenticity or trust. This approach highlights the company's commitment to aligning financial goals with environmental and social responsibilities

Additionally, Wernsing's emphasis on customer engagement and supplier collaboration reflects Ajzen's (1991, pp. 185–188) Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggests that clear and consistent communication can influence positive behavioral intentions. By fostering open dialogue and building transparent relationships with both customers and suppliers, Wernsing not only strengthens its supply chain but also encourages sustainable practices throughout its network.

The sustainability manager highlighted that “engaging both customers and suppliers in our sustainability journey creates a shared responsibility, ensuring that sustainable practices are embedded throughout the supply chain” (Ecke, 2023). Initiatives like the annual sustainability week and the transition to 100% green power were described as “milestones that demonstrate our commitment to tangible, measurable achievements” (Ecke, 2023), fostering stakeholder

loyalty and advocacy and positioning Wernsing as a leader in sustainability efforts within its industry.

6.3 Implications for Wernsing GmbH

The findings underscore the strengths of Wernsing's sustainability initiatives, such as its transparent reporting and innovative product development. These efforts align with the literature's emphasis on sustainability as a competitive advantage, as discussed by Kotler and Keller (2016, pp. 190–195).

By continuing to prioritize transparency and collaboration, Wernsing can address challenges such as cost-benefit trade-offs and consumer skepticism. To maintain its leadership in sustainable marketing, Wernsing should leverage its achievements, such as carbon neutrality and sustainable packaging, to further differentiate its brand in competitive markets. Aligning these efforts with frameworks like the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1998, pp. 50–55) ensures that economic, social, and environmental goals are balanced effectively.

6.4 Challenges of Marketing Sustainability of Wernsing Products

In this chapter, the author will go through challenges that might arise when sustainability is marketed with bad marketing practices or is communicated in less than good ways. And offers insights on how to avoid these pitfalls.

6.4.1 Greenwashing

One of the challenges in sustainable marketing is the risk of greenwashing. Greenwashing refers to the practice of making misleading or exaggerated claims about the environmental benefits of a product or company's practices. Greenwashing can seriously undermine consumer trust and credibility and even result in legislative punishments. To address this challenge, companies like Hedvi Markkinointi Oy need to ensure that their sustainable marketing strategy is based on genuine and verifiable sustainability practices.

Companies like Hedvi Markkinointi Oy should communicate their sustainability initiatives and provide transparent evidence to support their claims. This transparency ensures that claims of sustainability can be verified, as even a simple mistake in marketing and communicating sustainability that is not done with malicious intent can cause public outcry and massive repercussions.

6.4.2 Consumer Skepticism

Another challenge is consumer skepticism toward sustainability claims. Some consumers may be skeptical about marketing sustainability and doubt the sincerity of companies' sustainability efforts.

Hedvi Markkinointi Oy needs to address this challenge by building trust with its target audience. This can be achieved by providing clear and consistent messaging, sharing relevant and credible information about their sustainable practices, and engaging in a transparent dialogue with consumers. Company should also show its own commitment as continuation of Wernsing's sustainability efforts.

7 EFFECTS OF MARKETING SUSTAINABILITY

As it is written out in Chapter 6, Wernsing Feinkost GmbH has met these strategic advantages rather well, but these advantages should be transferred to working sustainable marketing strategy of B2B sales. By using good marketing practices and informing those with good marketing communication to shareholders by Hedvi Markkinointi Oy.

7.1 Potential Effect of Sustainability in the Food Industry

The author of this thesis sees these concepts as transferable to sustainable marketing. Current good practices align with “not bad” actions, and with the influence of Cialdini's social influence theory and McCracken's views on marketing impact, there's potential for “not bad” to become standard and “net good” a competitive edge. As seen in the framework below.



Figure 2. Effects of Sustainable marketing in the Socio-economical paradigm

As these “net good” practices are adopted, they set a cyclical standard: once established, today’s “net good” will become tomorrow’s “not bad,” prompting continual improvement in sustainability. As seen in the framework below.

Figure 3. Effects of Sustainable Practices on Industries

Marketing of sustainability can be seen as a motivator for the companies' better practices. These better practices yield better sustainability results creating ultimately "net good" results.

7.2 Finding a Balance Between Costs, Benefits, and Sustainable Impact.

In the authors' opinion, one of the key challenges in sustainable marketing is balancing costs, benefits, and sustainable impact. While sustainable practices can deliver long-term environmental and business benefits, they often involve significant upfront costs and complexities, particularly for smaller companies. Investments in sustainable sourcing, product development, and



communication can strain budgets, as sustainable alternatives are often costlier than conventional options.

At the same time, the potential benefits are substantial. Consumers increasingly support sustainable brands, making sustainability a powerful tool for enhancing reputation, differentiation, and customer loyalty. To achieve this balance, companies must set realistic sustainability goals aligned with their business strategies, conduct cost-benefit analyses to make informed decisions, and leverage partnerships to share resources and drive change.

Innovation and technology, such as eco-friendly packaging and digital marketing channels, can also reduce costs while maintaining sustainability standards. Regular evaluation and adaptation of marketing strategies, alongside employee training in sustainable practices, ensure continuous improvement and alignment with goals. By addressing these challenges strategically, companies can achieve meaningful sustainability integration while maintaining a competitive advantage.

8 CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the integration of sustainability into the marketing practices of Hedvi Markkinointi Oy for Wernsing GmbH products. Emphasizing the benefits, challenges, and strategic approaches required to achieve impactful outcomes. The findings underscore the potential of sustainable marketing to enhance brand reputation. In an effort to foster customer loyalty and provide a competitive advantage. Particularly through initiatives like sustainable sourcing, eco-friendly product development, and transparent communication.

However, challenges were identified. Such as balancing costs with benefits, mitigating greenwashing risks, and addressing consumer skepticism remain significant challenges. Effective strategies include maintaining transparency and ensuring alignment between sustainability objectives and financial considerations. The thesis pointed out that by adopting innovation, collaboration, and employee education, businesses can reduce the complexities of integrating sustainability into marketing.

The author provides actionable insights for companies seeking to navigate the complexities of sustainable marketing and tries to highlight the importance of ongoing evaluation and adaptation to maintain credibility and impact.

Ultimately, sustainable marketing is not only a tool for business success but also a means to contribute to broader environmental and social goals. For Hedvi Markkinointi Oy, embracing sustainability authentically and strategically positions the company to meet evolving consumer demands while advancing industry standards for responsible practices.

REFERENCES

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Borden, N. H. (1964). The concept of the marketing mix. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 4(2), 2–7.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brundtland, G. (1987). Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. United Nations General Assembly Document A/42/427.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Byrne, D. (2002). *Interpreting quantitative data*. Sage Publications.
- Cialdini, R. B. (2007). *Influence: The psychology of persuasion*. Harper Collins.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Crippa, M., Solazzo, E., Guizzardi, D., et al. (2021). Food systems are responsible for a third of global anthropogenic GHG emissions. *Nature Food*, 2, 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00225-9>
- Doran, G. T. (1981). There's a SMART way to write management's goals and objectives. *Journal of Management Review*, 70, 35–36.
- Elkington, J. (1998). *Cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century business*. Gabriola Island, BC; Stony Creek, New Society Publishers.
- European Union. (n.d.). Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices. Retrieved June 6, 2023, from https://food.ec.europa.eu/horizontal-topics/farm-forkstrategy/sustainable-food-processing/code-conduct_en
- Gagnon, Y.-C. (2009). *The Case Study as Research Method*. Presses de l'Université du Québec.

Grant, J. (2020). *Greener marketing*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated. Hart, S. L. (1995). A natural-resource-based view of the firm. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(4), 986–1015.

Hedvi Markkinointi Oy. (n.d.). Introduction to Wernsing products. Retrieved May 31, 2023, from <http://hedvi.fi/tuotteet/wernsing>

Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2016). *Principles of marketing*. Pearson.

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing management*. Pearson.

Martin, D., & Schouten, J. (2014). *Sustainable marketing*. Pearson. McCarthy,

E. J. (1960). *Basic marketing: A managerial approach*. McGraw-Hill.

Shamoo, A. E., & Resnik, D. B. (2009). *Responsible Conduct of Research* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Sipilä, N. (2023, June). Interviews about Hedvi Markkinointi Oy conducted on the premises of Hedvi Markkinointi.

Slaper, T. F., & Hall, T. J. (2011). The triple bottom line: What is it and how does it work? *Indiana Business Review*, 86(1), 4–8.

Terrachoice. (2010). A report on environmental claims made in the North American consumer market. Retrieved June 9, 2023, from

https://www.twosides.info/wpcontent/uploads/2018/05/Terrachoice_The_Sins_of_Greenwashing_-_Home_and_Family_Edition_2010.pdf

Valio. (2023). Valio Aimo – Maailmanlaajuiset kuluttajien ruokatrendit ja ravintolamaailman ilmiöt. Retrieved June 13, 2023,

from https://valiowebresources.blob.core.windows.net/marketingpictures/Valio%20Aimo/Dokumentit/Valio_Aimo_ruokatrendit_ja_ravintolamaailman_ilmiot_2023.pdf

Wernsing Feinkost GmbH. (n.d.). Sustainability. Retrieved May 31, 2023, from <https://www.wernsing.de/en/sustainability>

Wernsing Feinkost GmbH. (n.d.). Sustainability report 2018–2019. Retrieved May 31, 2023, from https://www.wernsing.de/fileadmin/navigation/Nachhaltigkeit/NHB_eng/AD_Wernsing_NHB_EN.pdf

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please provide your role and responsibilities within Wernsing GmbH.
2. How long have you been involved in sustainability initiatives within the company?
3. Are there any specific sustainability related projects or programs you have been involved in?
4. How would you describe Wernsing GmbH's current sustainability initiatives in its marketing strategies?

Practices

5. Which sustainable sourcing practices does Wernsing GmbH employ for its raw materials?
6. How does Wernsing GmbH integrate sustainability considerations into its product development and packaging processes?
7. How does Wernsing GmbH engage with suppliers to ensure sustainable sourcing practices?
8. What strategies does Wernsing GmbH use to involve customers in sustainability initiatives and communicate its sustainability efforts?
9. What are the main challenges faced by Wernsing GmbH in developing and implementing sustainable marketing strategies?
10. In your opinion, what are the key success factors that have contributed to the effectiveness of Wernsing GmbH's sustainable marketing practices?
11. Are there any best practices or lessons learned from past sustainability initiatives that you would like to highlight?

12. How does Wernsing GmbH track and measure the effectiveness of its sustainable marketing initiatives?
13. Which key performance indicators (KPIs) are used to evaluate the impact of sustainability efforts?
14. How frequently does Wernsing GmbH report on its sustainability progress, both internally and externally?
15. What are the future sustainability goals or targets for Wernsing GmbH's marketing strategies?
16. Are there any plans to expand or improve current sustainability practices in the marketing department?
17. What strategies or innovations are being considered to enhance sustainable marketing practices in the future?
18. How would you describe Wernsing GmbH's commitment to sustainability within its marketing strategies?
19. Are there specific sustainability goals or targets set by Wernsing GmbH for its marketing department?
20. Which sustainable sourcing practices does Wernsing GmbH currently implement in its marketing activities? (e.g., organic ingredients, fair trade partnerships, local sourcing)
21. How does Wernsing GmbH ensure responsible and sustainable production processes in its marketing strategies?
22. What steps does Wernsing GmbH take to minimize environmental impact in its packaging materials and designs for marketing purposes?
23. How does Wernsing GmbH communicate its sustainability efforts and initiatives to consumers through its marketing channels? (e.g., product labeling, advertising campaigns)
24. Are there any specific campaigns or initiatives that Wernsing GmbH has implemented to promote sustainable consumption or behavior among its customers?
25. How does Wernsing GmbH involve its employees in sustainability practices within the marketing department? Are there any training programs or internal initiatives to promote sustainability awareness?

26. Does Wernsing GmbH collaborate with external organizations, industry associations, or NGOs in its marketing strategies to enhance sustainability efforts? If yes, please provide examples.
27. In your opinion, what are the main benefits of integrating sustainability into Wernsing GmbH's marketing strategies?
28. How do you believe sustainability initiatives in marketing contribute to enhancing Wernsing GmbH's brand reputation and image?
29. Have you observed any positive changes in consumer perception or customer loyalty as a result of incorporating sustainability into Wernsing GmbH's marketing strategies? If yes, please provide examples or anecdotes.
30. Do you believe that sustainability-focused marketing strategies have a positive impact on sales and market performance for Wernsing GmbH? Please elaborate.
31. How does incorporating sustainability into marketing strategies align with the values and goals of Wernsing GmbH as an organization?
32. Are there any challenges or obstacles that Wernsing GmbH faces in integrating sustainability into its marketing strategies?
- Yes/No
33. Does Wernsing GmbH have a dedicated sustainability department or team?
34. Has Wernsing GmbH conducted a sustainability assessment or audit within the past year?
35. Is Wernsing GmbH currently implementing any renewable energy initiatives in its operations?
36. Has Wernsing GmbH received any sustainability certifications or awards?
37. Does Wernsing GmbH have a formal sustainability policy or strategy in place?
38. Has Wernsing GmbH set specific targets for reducing its environmental impact?
39. Does Wernsing GmbH actively seek customer feedback on its sustainability efforts?
40. Has Wernsing GmbH experienced an increase in demand for sustainable products in recent years?

41. Does Wernsing GmbH collaborate with competitors on joint sustainability initiatives?
42. Does Wernsing GmbH offer incentives or rewards to employees for engaging in sustainability initiatives?
43. Has Wernsing GmbH conducted a life cycle assessment of its products to identify environmental impacts?
44. Does Wernsing GmbH prioritize the use of recyclable or compostable materials in its packaging?

Ratio Scaled questions.

45. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the level of integration of sustainability considerations into Wernsing GmbH's product development and packaging processes?
46. On a scale of 1 to 10, how effective do you believe Wernsing GmbH's current sustainability initiatives are in its marketing strategies?
47. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate Wernsing GmbH's commitment to sustainability within its marketing strategies?
48. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important do you think sustainability is as a factor in customers' purchasing decisions within the food industry?
49. On a scale of 1 to 10, how successful do you believe Wernsing GmbH's sustainable marketing practices have been in enhancing its brand reputation and image?
50. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you believe sustainability-focused marketing strategies contribute to customer loyalty and retention for Wernsing GmbH?
51. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do you think Wernsing GmbH's sustainable marketing strategies differentiate it from competitors in the food industry?
52. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important do you believe stakeholder collaboration and engagement are in the development and implementation of sustainable marketing strategies within the B2B food industry?
53. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well does Wernsing GmbH's communication and transparency about its sustainability efforts contribute to the success of its marketing initiatives in the B2B food industry?

