Chapter 6
Are Businesses Washing Consumerism With Green Ideology?
The Green Marketing Oxymoron

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the literature on green marketing from the sustainable marketing phase to the latest paradigm of green marketing based on the concept of consumer empowerment and customer-initiated innovation process. In particular, the authors delve into the evolution of green marketing in order to highlight critical contrasts including product-based vs. service-based green marketing approach; top-down (business-initiated) vs. bottom-up (customer-initiated) green-based innovation; physical vs. online distribution of green products/services; positioning and advertising vs. brand co-creation; passive vs. active/empowered role of consumers and focus on customers vs. focus on multiple stakeholders. This chapter illustrates, through a series of cases and consumer insights, the contradictions, and controversies of green marketing. The chapter shows how customer participation and value co-creation, have changed the way green products are consumed and developed, and have forced organizations to adopt completely new business models.

INTRODUCTION

Defined as the "the efforts by organizations to produce, promote, package, and reclaim products in a manner that is sensitive or responsive to ecological concerns" (American Marketing Association, 2018), the phenomenon of green marketing is relatively young and quite controversial. In fact, for many scholars

and environmentalists, green marketing is still an oxymoron because it "promotes consumption, albeit so-called responsible consumption" (Verma, 2015, p. 428).

Over the years, the approach to green marketing has proved to be very business-oriented and functionalist. Very often has green marketing been described as a business-driven approach that does not leave much room for consumers, e.g., as marketing practice that "must redirect customer needs toward ecologically safe products (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995, p. 19). Furthermore, green marketing has been conceptualized as an orientation of the firm towards meeting its comprehensive ethical and moral responsibilities, while adhering to the marketing concept's basic tenets (Polonsky & Mintu-Wimsatt, 1995; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014).

Based on the green marketing paradigm proposed by most scholars, it can be argued that consumers - whose needs and wants must be redirected towards ecologically beneficial products and services - play a passive and secondary role, as mere recipients of marketing guidelines and directions. Indicative of such a consideration is, for instance, the type of segmentation proposed by most businesses, which does not take into account consumer preferences and choices. Indeed, mainly demographic and socioeconomic variables are employed to segment green consumers. Such an approach to green marketing could be defined "paternalistic", i.e., green marketing as business education towards customers, or customer needs redirection. Thus, for some scholars, businesses employ green marketing strategies mainly because it is profitable and can allow firms to develop a competitive advantage by being greener and more sustainable than their competitors (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Wymer & Polonsky, 2015).

Recently, scholars have looked at the empowered role of consumers in the green marketing process: "Empowerment lies at the heart of green marketing" (Ottman, 2017, p. 110). Now more than ever consumers feel that they can make the difference by using products and services, thus getting actively and voluntarily engaged in the green marketing process.

As a result of this empowerment process, the introduction of innovations is no longer a prerogative of businesses, but is shared by the consumer in a mutually beneficial and bidirectional innovation generation process. Thus, consumer-introduced practices can lead to the development of new ideas for sustainable products or services, such as e-books. In this way, the focus shifts from technology-based to eco-innovation which involves the introduction of innovative business models reducing the environmental impact of products/services as well as costs (e.g., car-sharing services, textbook rentals, etc) (Ottman, 2017).

This chapter is organized as follows. First, we review the literature on green marketing from the sustainable marketing phase (Peattie, 2001) to the latest paradigm of green marketing based on the concept of consumer empowerment, service-dominant perspective (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), and customer-initiated innovation process. Second, we identify critical antinomies in the evolution of green marketing including:

- Product-based vs. service-based green marketing approach.
- Top-down (business-initiated) vs. bottom-up (customer-initiated) green-based innovation.
- Physical vs. online distribution of green products/services (Web and social networks).
- Positioning and advertising vs. brand co-creation.
- Passive vs. active/empowered role of consumers.
- Focus on customer vs. focus on multiple stakeholders.

Third, we provide a series of examples and consumer interviews to illustrate the contradictions and controversies of green marketing. In particular, we aim to show how, by enhancing customer participation and value co-creation, green marketing has changed the way green products are consumed and

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