

The Need for More and Better Implementation of Sustainability in the Marketing Curriculum

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Abstract: The reset of the economy worldwide after the Corona pandemic, now in 2022, is the perfect opportunity to invest in industries and business models based on the principles of sustainability and circularity. In the transition towards a sustainable society and a circular economy model, the marketing educators will have a critical role by implementing environmental and social criteria in the marketing curriculum. At the same time marketing students understand that the world is a system in which their actions, as well as the actions of nations, have consequences across the globe and they require to learn more about sustainability during their university study. The author focuses on (i) analyzing why modern mainstream marketing as it has evolved is being challenged by emerging concerns about sustainability (ii) presenting why students are getting serious about sustainability (iii) describing curriculum and presenting key learning objectives in the area of sustainable marketing.

Keywords: Education, Higher education institutions, Sustainable development, Sustainable marketing, Students

JEL Classification codes: M31

INTRODUCTION

Marketers have a significant role to play when it comes to promoting and driving sustainability. No longer can the marketing professions ignore their impact on the environment. In an age of growing authenticity and consumer demands for more transparency, it is more important than ever for brands to communicate their responsible and sustainable practices.

Increasing numbers of marketing professionals are seeking to embrace a profits-with-purpose approach to their marketing strategy whilst still naturally keen to ensure that their companies continue to grow. Following the period of coronavirus the 2020s will be the age in which boardrooms around the globe wake up to the reality of running a business focused on making profits with purpose, with an authentic desire to take a more sustainable approach.

The transformation of our societies and economies from the unsustainable thinking, practices, and technologies of the twentieth century to something much more sustainable is well underway. Sustainability has never been more important, but sustainability in a business sense is no easy task.

By shifting the mainstream of teaching and learning about marketing towards sustainability we can contribute something to this all-important transformation.

According to Fonseca et al. (2018) academia should focus on the dissemination and creation of knowledge in Sustainable Development and the Circular Economy.

The aim of the article is to analyze the evolution of modern mainstream marketing to sustainability marketing, to present students interest to sustainability and to describe curriculum of sustainable marketing.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of education for sustainable development was born from the need for education to address the growing environmental challenges facing the planet.

Since the concept of sustainable development was presented in the Brundtland report 'Our Common Future' (WCED, 1987), education has increasingly been called upon to integrate issues of sustainability, and to contribute to a sustainability transition process in society.

One definition of Education for Sustainable Development is an "interdisciplinary learning methodology covering the integrated social, economic, and environmental aspects of formal and informal curriculum" (UNESCO, 2014).

Nowadays UNESCO declares environmental education must be a core curriculum component by 2025. Over 80 ministers and vice ministers and 2,800 education and environment stakeholders committed to taking concrete steps to transform learning for the survival of our planet. According to Director UNESCO Audrey Azoulay (2021) education can be a powerful tool for transforming our relationship with nature. We must invest in this field in order to preserve the planet.

According to Fabius (2021) fight against climate change begins at schools and universities. Paris Agreement called for increased efforts to improve teacher training on Education for Sustainable Development and increase financing. 2021 is the year in which we will overcome the pandemic and embark on a sustainable development model for the future that must include Education for Sustainable Development. If we miss this occasion, we will lose decades. This is a race against the clock.

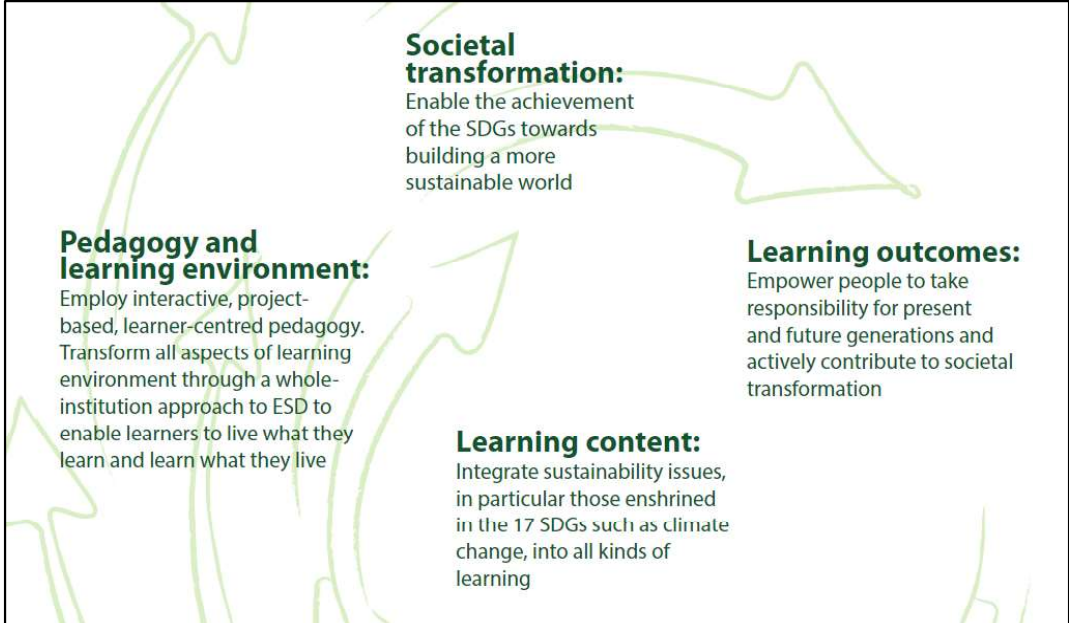
Evidently, increasing sustainability challenges have resulted in difficulties to action global goals in Higher education for sustainable development most of which call for a complete overhaul of the university system. In doing so, lots of researches (Milutinović & Nikolić, 2014, Fonseca et al. ,2018 and Franco et al. ,2018) suggest closer attention to essential factors: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment in line with the global indicator.

Besides a systematic analysis of education sector plans and national curriculum frameworks, finding creative ways to include environmental issues and concerns within diverse subjects, while challenging, conveys to teachers and students alike that multiple sources of knowledge and action are needed to address ecological crises as opposed to relying only on scientific or technical solutions (Hornsey et al., 2016).

All teachers and school leaders should be versed in Education for Sustainable Development, including in relation to environmental education, climate change and biodiversity. They should be prepared to realize their expertise in this area using transformative learning approaches.

Education for sustainable development for 2030 will promote the integration of sustainable development and the Sustainable development goals into education and learning, as well as ensuring the integration of education and learning into all activities that promote sustainable development (Figure 1).

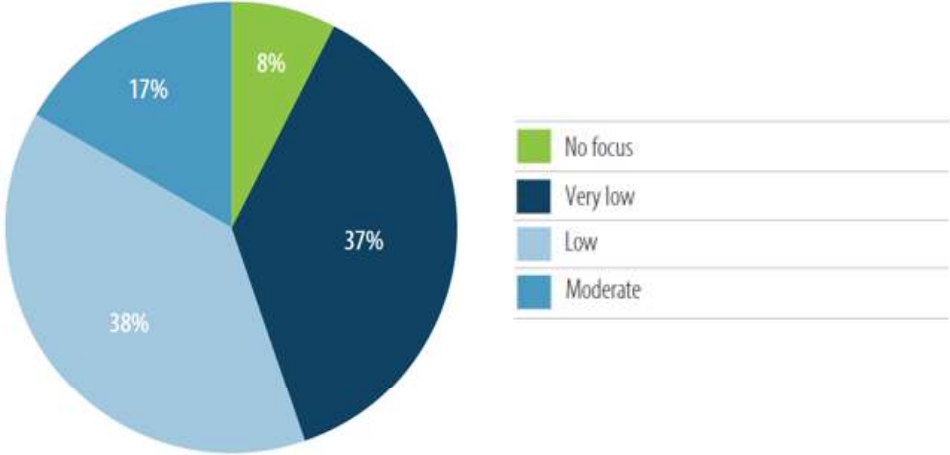
Fig. 1 Education for sustainable development is recognized as a key enabler of all SDGs and achieves its purpose by transforming society.



Source: UNESCO, 2021, p. 14

UNESCO analyzed educational plans and curricula frameworks in close to 50 countries informed the discussions. UNESCO found that more than half make no reference to climate change.

Fig. 2 Percentage of documents, by levels of focus on environmental themes



Source: UNESCO, 2021, p. 24

72 of the 78 documents studied made at least one explicit mention of environmental issues. However, the depth of focus given to environmental themes on each document varies substantially (Figure 2).

Learners in all walks of life across the world have opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for promoting sustainable development and achieving the 17 SDGs and to experience sustainable development in action through a whole-institution approach to Education for Sustainable Development.

2. METHODOLOGY

Education for sustainability in higher education has gained strongly increasing attention. In this context, the paper aims to (i) analyze why modern mainstream marketing as it has evolved is being challenged by emerging concerns about sustainability (ii) present why students are getting serious about sustainability (iii) describe curriculum and key learning objectives in the area of sustainable marketing.

Theoretical background of the paper presents topics based on relevant literature sources. This article reviews the literature regarding: sustainability education, marketing and sustainability, Higher education institutions, sustainable development etc.

The article consists of three parts.

- (i) In the first part of the results section, we used the main methods include analysis, comparative method, synthesis and deduction. Data was gained from published sources, such as books and articles, as well as the internet. The primary search engines used in section 1 are Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). Additionally, the search engines of the scientific publishers Emerald, and Springer. Lastly, Google Scholar served as the final search engine to identify relevant literature.
- (ii) Second part of the results section, we used a technique of descriptive research-survey determining the opinions of a specified population.

The study was a census using an application MS Forms questionnaire to the 60 students the end of the semester in the 2021-2022 academic year in one of marketing course of master degree at Economic university in Slovakia.

55 responded resulting in a 92% response rate. Population size was small (N=55), this could provide the first step in measuring constructs that need to be replicated and further tested with larger sample sizes and more diverse groups of students.

The researchers used the questionnaire called "STUDENTS, SUSTAINABILITY AND EDUCATION". We do research on students and sustainability, that can leverage action to transform education and direct society to a more sustainable and fair future. The survey consisted of 26 questions but we used only following two for the purposes of this article.

(1) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- *Sustainable development is something which all universities/ colleges should actively incorporate and promote*
- *Sustainable development is something which I would like to learn more about*
- *Sustainable development is something which all courses should actively incorporate and promote*

It was used Likert scale with the answers: agree, no opinion one way or the other, disagree, i don't know.

(2) To what extent has sustainable development been covered by your courses?

It was used Likert scale with the answers: 5-extensively covered, 4, 3, 2, 1-not at all covered, i don't know.

- (iii) In the last part of the results section, we design the curriculum and key learning objectives in the area of new approach of marketing respecting ecological and social criteria, sustainable development, and sustainable development goals.

The method of deduction was used to logically justify the conclusions from the generally valid pragmatic experience abroad.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The author focuses on analyzing why modern mainstream marketing as it has evolved is being challenged by emerging concerns about sustainability (sub-chapter 3.1), presenting why students are getting serious about sustainability (sub-chapter 3.2), describing curriculum and presenting key learning objectives in the area of sustainable marketing (sub-chapter 3.3).

3.1 Evaluation of marketing towards sustainability

All this time, and through all these momentous changes, the way in which we teach marketing, and the books from which we teach it, have barely changed. They may have evolved to reflect the use of new technologies in marketing or to register that environmental and ethical concerns are one type of issue that may influence consumers' behavior or companies' strategies, but they have never sought to rethink marketing in light of the new realities.

Conventional marketing continues to exist within an economic hyperspace in which there are no physical limits on the availability of resources or on the number of holes into which waste can be poured. It also exists within the artificial bubble of the consumer society, in which the customer is king and no consideration is given to the consequences of consumption or the interests of the billions of people who cannot afford to join the consumer classes.

Conventional marketing thought and practice have struggled to adapt to a world that we now realize could be destroyed (or at least impaired to the impoverishment of us all) by unconstrained consumption as we strive to satisfy an ever-longer list of wants for an ever-growing global consumer class (Belz and Peattie, 2012).

Since the 1970s, several marketing concepts have emerged that consider marketing within its social and environmental context. Belz and Peattie (2012) list some of the previous marketing concepts that have been developed over the years: ecological marketing, green and greener marketing, environmental marketing, sustainable marketing and sustainability marketing. From these earlier approaches, sustainability marketing represents a logical evolution, and further extends and integrates them into one broad marketing approach.

The programs within social marketing are designed to influence the behavior of individuals or communities to improve their well-being or of the society. Ecological marketing however, emerged as a reaction to the worst examples of environmental damage, some pioneering companies at that time proactively embraced environmental and social values as central to their business (Belz and Peattie, 2012). Green marketing differs from ecological marketing since it is more characterized by a focus on environmental issues, and by an emphasis on reducing environmental damage.

Undoubtedly, there has been a substantial growth in "green", "environmental", and "sustainable" marketing, much of which has been focused on promoting "green" products,

understanding market segments and consumer's preferences for environmentally friendly products, and the role of the environment in branding.

Sustainable marketing is the next natural step forward and is considered as a broader concept. It focuses on achieving the 'triple bottom line' through creating, producing, and delivering sustainable solutions with higher net sustainable value and at the same time continuously satisfying customers and other stakeholders (Charter et al. 2002).

Achrol and Kotler argued that in the third millennium, the super phenomena of marketing will be characterized by sustainable marketing. Sustainable marketing is broadly characterized by a number of elements including: the recognition of resource limits of growth, sustainable consumption, a transition from an anthropocentric to a biocentric paradigm, and the development of sustainable product life cycles (Kemper, 2019).

Curriculum in universities has been seen as occupying an anthropocentric and modernist-humanist position which has been claimed to inhibit the pursuit of strong sustainability. Consequently, while a 'top-down' (managerial) approach to sustainability appears to have limited possibilities in being effective, it has been argued that a 'bottom-up' (individual) approach, through faculty and students, has potential to implement change in curriculum and research (Giacalone, 2004).

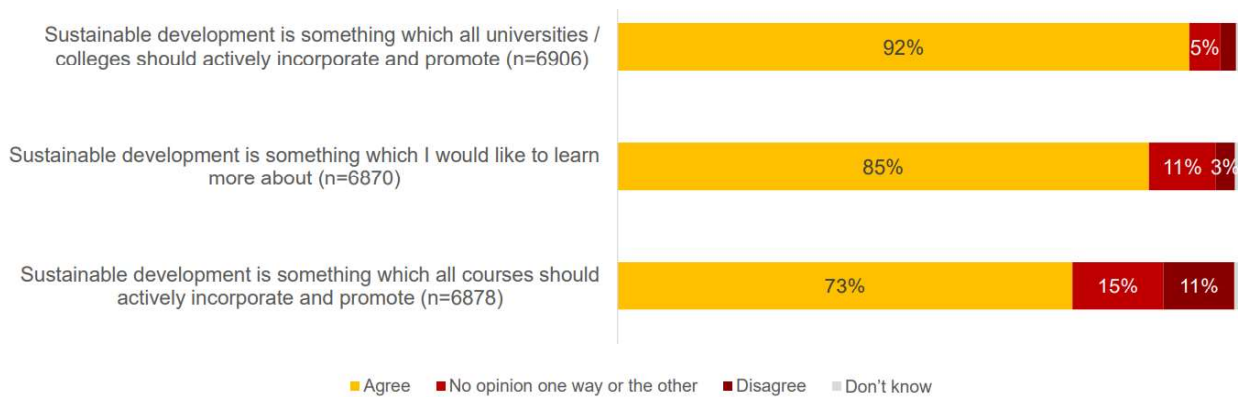
3.2 Students are getting serious about sustainability

By our opinion most of students are getting serious about sustainability. They want to understand how marketing and sustainability issues can and do come together. This will include marketing students who want to understand sustainability as a new marketing paradigm and a practical marketing challenge business students studying courses in general management, strategic management, innovation, business ethics or corporate social responsibility who want to understand the marketing implications of sustainability, and sustainability or environmental management students who wish to learn about the field of marketing and how it deals with environmental and social challenges.

Sustainable marketing is the most relevant to students studying at advanced bachelor's, master's or doctoral level.

Students care about sustainability and education but there is little research to support this that is recognized as representative enough. One of them one of them was made by the organization - Students organizing for sustainability international. Between April and October 2020, SOS International invited higher education institutions and student-facing organizations to send out a survey designed to gather insight into student experiences of sustainability and education. More than 100 organizations took part and we received just under 7000 responses from students in higher education around the world (Graph 1).

Graph 1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Global



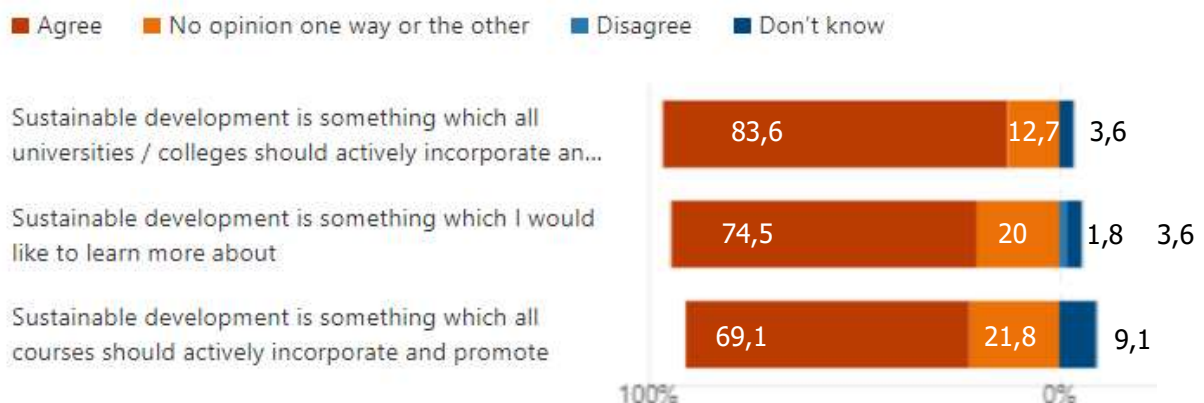
research)

Source: SOS International, 2020

We also do research on students and sustainability, and we used the same question to our questionnaire. Almost 84% students agree that sustainable development is something which all universities should actively incorporate and promote and almost 70% of all students agree with the statement that sustainable development is something which all courses should actively incorporate. Interestingly, no one said they disagreed with the statement (Graph 2).

Almost 75% agree and 2% disagree with the statement that sustainable development is something which I would like to learn more about.

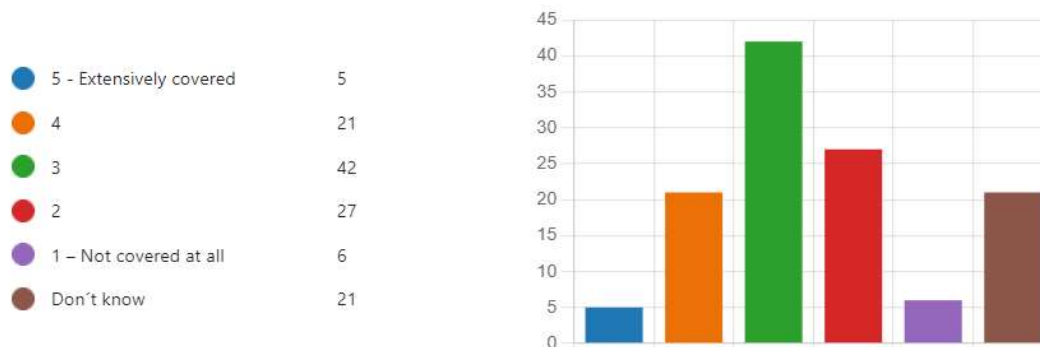
Graph 2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Research in Slovakia)



Source: author's own graph

Based on this "small" research we suppose Slovak's students understand that the world is a system in which their actions, as well as the actions of nations, have consequences across the globe and they require to learn more about sustainability during their university study. Of course, it was only first step in measuring constructs that need to be replicated and further tested with larger sample sizes and more diverse groups of students in Slovakia.

**Graph 3 To what extent has sustainable development been covered by your courses?
(Research in Slovakia)**



Source: author's own graph

Almost 21% agree with the statement that sustainable development been covered by their courses and 62% of the student think that the topic of sustainability covered by the course is average or insufficient.

3.3 Key learning objectives and curriculum of new marketing

Considering sustainability trends, the evolution of the marketing discipline, and the gap between sustainable development goals and students' knowledge about how to achieve them we suggest the new key learning objectives and new curriculum of new "basic" marketing.

The key learning objectives can be:

- understand the sustainability and 17 sustainable development goals, challenges for 21. century,
- understand sustainable customer behavior and how customers can be segmented based on sustainability,
- understand the various manufacturer and retailer strategies regarding sustainability,
- create a life cycle analysis,
- use a sustainable product/service development checklist or a sustainable design process to develop a new product or service concept,
- evaluate the pricing/ quality and labeling green versus nongreen product,
- development a promotional message that directs consumers to a sustainable product and
- create and manage an event sustainably.

The success in teaching and researching sustainability requires a change in universities' curriculum. Curriculum in universities has been seen as curriculum of sustainable marketing. In table 1 is comparison of curriculum conventional marketing and sustainable marketing.

Tab. 1 Conventional marketing versus sustainable marketing

CONVENTIONAL MARKETING	"NEW CONVENTIONAL MARKETING" SUSTAINABLE MARKETING
1. What is marketing? Creating and Capturing Customer Value	An introduction to the subject Sustainable marketing. Understanding sustainability and marketing.
2. Company and Marketing Strategy. Partnering to Build Customer Value and Relationships.	Marketing in the Twenty-First Century. Challenges for the Twenty-First Century. Sustainable development. 17 Sustainable development goals
3. Sustainable Marketing. Social Responsibility and Ethics	Framing sustainable marketing. Elements of sustainable marketing. Corporate social responsibility. Ethical context. Socio-political context. Global context.
4. Analyzing the Marketing Environment	Socio-ecological problems. Socio-ecological problems on a macro level and socio-ecological impact of products on a micro level.
5. Understanding Consumer and Business Buyer Behavior	Understanding sustainable consumer behavior. Sustainability and consumption. Factors influencing sustainable consumer behavior
6. Managing Marketing Information to Gain Customer Insights Customer-Driven	Managing Marketing Information to Gain Customer Insights Customer-Driven
7. Marketing Strategy. Creating Value for Target Customers	Sustainability marketing values and objectives. Integrating sustainability into strategic plan, develop sustainable marketing strategy, market segmentation using environmental and social awareness
8. Products, Services, and Brands. Building Customer Value. New Product Development and Product Life-Cycle Strategies	Sustainable marketing mix: customer solutions. Developing a sustainable products and services. Eco and social innovations. Redesigning products for sustainability. Ecodesign. Life cycle management. Sustainable labeling. Sustainable branding
9. Engaging Customers and Communicating Customer Value. Personal Selling and Sales Promotion. Personal Direct, Online, Social Media, and Mobile Marketing	Sustainable marketing mix: communications. Communication mix. Cause-related marketing. Greenwashing, Social marketing, Digital marketing
10. Pricing. Understanding and Capturing Customer Value	Sustainable marketing mix: customer cost. Total customer cost. Price- setting approaches. Price strategies
11. Marketing Channels. Delivering Customer Value. Retailing and Wholesaling The Global Marketplace	Sustainable marketing mix: convenience. Distribution strategies. Reverse logistics, Sustainable packaging. Develop sustainable channel operations
12. Future of marketing	Future of sustainable marketing. Market, corporate and marketing transformations

Source: author's own table

Sustainable marketing with focus on the importance of integrating of transdisciplinary approaches, critical thinking and integration of theory and practice, cognitive skills, social and emotional learning, collaboration skills, problem solving, resilience-building.

CONCLUSION

Higher education does not fully understand the true nature of the challenge and that sustainable development is still considered as an innovative idea in most universities, and has not yet permeated all disciplines, scholars, and university leaders. Although Higher education for sustainable development is being widely debated, issues on how to move from rhetoric to policy, curriculum and practice and in alignment with the global sustainability agenda remain under-investigated (Milutinović and Nikolić, 2014).

Conventional marketing thought and practice have struggled to adapt to a world that we now realize could be destroyed (or at least impaired to the impoverishment of us all) by unconstrained consumption as we strive to satisfy an ever-longer list of wants for an ever-growing global consumer class (Belz and Peattie, 2012). Sustainable marketing is the next natural step forward and is considered as a broader concept.

Almost 84% Slovak students (92% international students) agree that sustainable development is something which all universities should actively incorporate and promote and almost 70% (85% international students) of all student agree with the statement that sustainable development is something which all courses should actively incorporate. Interestingly, no one said they disagreed with the statement

The key learning objectives of “new conventional” marketing should focus on sustainability, 17 sustainable development goals, social-ecological problems, sustainable consumer behavior, sustainable values, objectives, and strategies, eco and social innovations, ecodesign, sustainable labeling and branding, sustainable communication mix, greenwashing, total customer cost, reverse logistic, sustainable channel operation, ecological and social criteria in supply chain, sustainable packaging etc.

Further research could be oriented toward surveys in other higher education institutions, and other study programs and curriculums. Other recommendations for further research are linking the results with specific learning and assessment oriented toward the acquisition of sustainability competences and linking the results between higher education institutions and efforts to integrate these competences in hiring strategies of companies.

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