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## Sustainable Marketing and Corporate Social Responsibility: A Systematic Literature Review on Their Synergy for Long-Term Competitive Advantage

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**Abstrak:** Artikel ini menganalisis secara komprehensif keterkaitan antara pemasaran berkelanjutan (sustainable marketing) dan tanggung jawab sosial perusahaan (CSR) sebagai pilar strategi bisnis modern. Di tengah meningkatnya kesadaran konsumen dan tekanan regulasi, perusahaan dituntut untuk mengintegrasikan aspek ekonomi, lingkungan, dan sosial dalam operasinya. Pemasaran berkelanjutan berfokus pada pengembangan dan promosi produk/layanan yang ramah lingkungan dan sosial sepanjang siklus hidupnya, sementara CSR mencakup inisiatif etis dan filantropi yang meningkatkan dampak positif perusahaan pada masyarakat. Penelitian ini mengadopsi metode studi literatur sistematis dengan menganalisis data sekunder dari jurnal ilmiah bereputasi dan laporan keberlanjutan. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa kedua konsep ini saling melengkapi: pemasaran berkelanjutan efektif dalam mengkomunikasikan nilai-nilai CSR kepada pemangku kepentingan, sedangkan CSR menyediakan fondasi otentik untuk klaim keberlanjutan. Manfaat yang teridentifikasi meliputi peningkatan reputasi merek, loyalitas konsumen, diferensiasi kompetitif, dan efisiensi operasional. Meskipun terdapat tantangan seperti biaya awal dan kompleksitas pengukuran, integrasi strategis keduanya esensial untuk menciptakan nilai bersama (shared value) dan mencapai keunggulan kompetitif jangka panjang. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemasaran berkelanjutan dan CSR bukan lagi pilihan, melainkan keharusan strategis bagi kesuksesan bisnis di masa depan. Studi ini menganalisis 40 artikel yang dipilih dari 150 artikel awal melalui proses seleksi sistematis.

**Kata kunci:** : Pemasaran Berkelanjutan, Tanggung Jawab Sosial Perusahaan (CSR), Keunggulan Kompetitif, Strategi Bisnis.

**Abstract:** This article comprehensively analyzes the relationship between sustainable marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) as pillars of modern business strategy. Amidst increasing consumer awareness and regulatory pressures, companies are required to integrate economic, environmental, and social aspects in their operations. Sustainable marketing focuses on the development and promotion of environmentally and socially friendly products/services throughout their life cycle, while CSR encompasses ethical and philanthropic initiatives that enhance a company's positive impact on society. This study adopts a systematic literature review method by analyzing secondary data from reputable scientific journals and sustainability reports. The results show that these two concepts are complementary: sustainable marketing is effective in communicating CSR values to stakeholders, while CSR provides an authentic foundation for sustainability claims. Identified benefits include enhanced brand reputation, consumer loyalty, competitive differentiation, and operational efficiency. Despite challenges such as initial costs and measurement complexity, strategic integration of the two is essential for creating shared value and achieving long-term competitive advantage. This article concludes that sustainable marketing and CSR are no longer optional, but rather strategic imperatives for future business success. This study analyzes 40 articles selected from an initial 150 articles through a systematic selection process.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Marketing, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Competitive Advantage, Business Strategy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) have become crucial pillars in the modern business landscape, representing a paradigm shift from a sole focus on profit toward a balance between economic gains, environmental preservation, and social well-being. The convergence of these two concepts reflects the growing recognition that business practices cannot be separated from their impact on society and the planet (Elkington, 1997). In the face of global challenges such as climate change, resource scarcity, and social inequality, companies are increasingly required to embed sustainability values into their core strategies, going beyond mere regulatory compliance.

The transition toward sustainable marketing requires firms to take into account the full life cycle of their products and services—from raw material sourcing to end-of-life disposal—along with their implications for consumers, communities, and ecosystems (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This approach is not limited to minimizing negative impacts but also emphasizes the creation of positive value through environmentally friendly product innovation, ethical production practices, and transparent communication (Halik et al., 2023; Halik & Halik, 2024). Companies adopting sustainable marketing strive to build long-term stakeholder relationships based on trust and shared values, rather than short-term transactional exchanges.

Aligned with sustainable marketing, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is manifested in various forms, including philanthropic initiatives, fair labor practices, and community engagement (Carroll, 1991). CSR can be defined as the ongoing commitment of businesses to act ethically and contribute to economic development while enhancing the quality of life of their workforce, their families, local communities, and society at large. Although CSR has often been treated as a separate activity, in reality, CSR and sustainable marketing complement and reinforce one another, providing the foundation for a responsible and competitive business strategy.



Source: <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2018>

**Figure 1.** Sustainability Model in Business according to Nielsen (2018)

The synergy between sustainable marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly urgent in an era when consumers are more conscious of social and environmental issues. Millennials and Generation Z, in particular, demonstrate strong preferences for brands that embody a commitment to sustainability and ethical values (Nielsen, 2015). This implies that firms must not only “do the right thing” but also effectively communicate their efforts to strengthen brand reputation and foster customer loyalty. Failure to integrate these dimensions may result in reputational damage and the loss of market share.

Growing pressures from regulators, investors, and civil society also drive companies to adopt more sustainable and responsible practices. Investors are progressively considering environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria in their decision-making, recognizing the positive correlation between strong ESG performance and long-term financial outcomes (Goyal, 2017). Similarly, governments across various countries have introduced policies and incentives aimed at encouraging corporations to operate with greater responsibility toward both the environment and society.

Nevertheless, the implementation of sustainable marketing and CSR is not without challenges. Companies often encounter trade-offs between short-term profitability and long-term investments in sustainability practices. Moreover, there is the risk of *greenwashing*—misleading or exaggerated claims about a company’s environmental commitment—which, if exposed, can significantly undermine consumer trust (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). It is therefore

imperative that firms ensure their sustainability strategies are grounded in concrete, measurable actions rather than rhetoric.

At its core, sustainable marketing seeks to integrate sustainability principles into every aspect of marketing strategy, including product development, pricing, distribution, and promotion (Peattie & Crane, 2005). This entails creating products designed for durability, recyclability, or reliance on renewable resources; setting prices that reflect social and environmental costs; developing ethical and efficient supply chains; and communicating sustainability benefits to consumers with honesty and transparency.

CSR, meanwhile, goes beyond legal compliance by encompassing voluntary initiatives aimed at enhancing a company's positive impact on society. Such initiatives may include education programs, support for local communities, environmental conservation efforts, or the adoption of fair supply chain practices (Carroll, 2016). The effectiveness of CSR depends largely on how well these initiatives align with a firm's core values and how deeply they are integrated into daily operations, rather than being treated as add-ons.

Previous research has extensively examined sustainable marketing and CSR, often addressing them in isolation or within narrower contexts. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these concepts interact, mutually reinforce one another, and collectively contribute to sustainable business performance (Husted et al., 2015). This study seeks to address that gap by exploring the symbiotic relationship between sustainable marketing and CSR in a broader context, highlighting their strategic implications for organizations.

The academic significance of this research lies in its contribution to the growing body of literature on business sustainability. By analyzing the interconnections between sustainable marketing and CSR, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive and enriched conceptual framework. Such a framework can support future scholarly work on responsible business practices and identify new areas for theoretical exploration.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a valuable guide for managers and business practitioners. A deeper understanding of how to effectively integrate sustainable marketing and CSR will enable firms to develop strategies that not only enhance brand image and customer loyalty but

also generate long-term financial benefits (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Additionally, this integration may help firms identify opportunities for innovation while reducing reputational risks.

Accordingly, this article will examine in depth the definitions, principles, and implementation of sustainable marketing and CSR. It will analyze how these two concepts complement and reinforce one another in shaping holistic and responsible business strategies. Moreover, it will explore the benefits and challenges associated with their adoption and present relevant literature to support the arguments advanced.

Ultimately, the aim of this article is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the importance of sustainable marketing and CSR as integral elements of business success in the twenty-first century. It is hoped that this exploration will encourage more companies to embrace sustainability as an intrinsic part of their identity and operations, thereby contributing to a more sustainable future for all.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Relevant Theoretical Review

Sustainable marketing represents a strategic approach aimed at creating long-term value not only for firms but also for consumers and the broader environment. According to Belz and Peattie (2017), sustainable marketing integrates social, environmental, and economic objectives into the marketing process, emphasizing responsible product life cycles and long-term stakeholder relationships. Within this context, the operational definition of sustainable marketing encompasses marketing activities that support ecological sustainability, social equity, and economic viability ([Martinez et al., 2020](#)).

Meanwhile, corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to a company's commitment to ethical conduct, contributions to economic development, and the enhancement of quality of life for employees, communities, and society at large (Carroll & Shabana, 2018). CSR is no longer perceived as an optional activity or merely a philanthropic initiative but rather as an integral part of corporate strategy. One contemporary approach to CSR is *strategic CSR*, which involves embedding social value directly into the firm's value proposition ([Lins, Servaes, & Tamayo, 2017](#)).

The importance of the relationship between sustainable marketing and CSR is further reinforced by the Creating Shared Value (CSV) framework introduced by Porter and Kramer (2011). This perspective posits that companies are expected to generate shared value through innovations addressing social and environmental issues. The theory highlights that socially responsible business practices should not be viewed as cost burdens but as sources of differentiation and long-term competitive advantage (Roreng et al., 2024).

### Previous Research

A growing body of research has demonstrated the positive relationship between sustainable marketing practices and consumer perceptions of brands. For instance, Goyal and Kumar (2021) found that firms combining sustainability-oriented marketing messages with genuine CSR initiatives tend to achieve higher levels of customer loyalty. Similarly, Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, and George (2020) showed that CSR consistently communicated through marketing strategies can enhance stakeholder trust while reducing consumer skepticism.

Martínez et al. (2020) further highlighted that CSR exerts a direct impact on brand value and customer purchase intentions, particularly in the retail and fast-food industries. Conversely, Ali, Frynas, and Mahmood (2017) emphasized the importance of clarity and consistency in sustainability communication, noting that the risk of greenwashing can seriously damage brand reputation when practices fail to align with corporate claims.

Although most studies conclude that integrating CSR and sustainable marketing provides strategic benefits, a notable research gap remains in understanding how these two concepts can be synergistically applied across different industries and within developing-country contexts. Moreover, there is a pressing need for longitudinal research capable of tracing the long-term effects of such integration on business performance and consumer behavior.

### METHODS

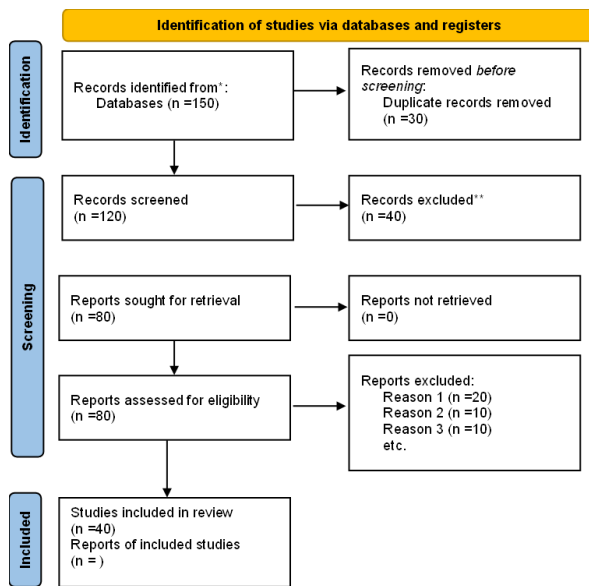
This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to explore the interrelationship between sustainable marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR), as well

as their implications for long-term business strategy and performance. The SLR approach was deemed the most appropriate method to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of this emerging topic, particularly by utilizing credible and relevant secondary data sources.

The primary data sources of this study consist of secondary data obtained from reputable academic and practical publications. These include peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science, corporate sustainability reports, reports from international organizations such as the United Nations Global Compact and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), along with industry articles and reliable media reports. The selection of sources was guided by considerations of validity, publisher reputation, and direct relevance to the topic under investigation.

The initial search yielded approximately 150 articles from academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. After removing duplicates, 120 articles remained. These were then screened based on titles and abstracts, resulting in 80 articles considered relevant. Of these, 40 articles met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed in depth for this study.

The data collection process followed a systematic procedure consisting of keyword identification, source searching, article screening, and content synthesis. The keywords employed included “*sustainable marketing*,” “*corporate social responsibility*,” “*green marketing*,” “*CSR impact*,” and “*ethical business practices*.” Searches were conducted across multiple academic databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest. Articles were included in the analysis if they met the following criteria: (1) published between 2011 and 2023, (2) peer-reviewed, (3) focused on the integration of CSR and sustainable marketing, and (4) available in full-text versions. Conversely, articles that were opinion-based, non-empirical, or lacked methodological clarity were excluded from the analysis. After the final selection process, 40 articles were deemed relevant and eligible for in-depth review.



**Figure 2.** PRISMA 2020 Diagram of the Identification, Screening, and Inclusion Process

The collected data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach through thematic analysis techniques. The initial step involved a coding process to identify recurring themes, such as the strategic benefits of CSR, the relationship between sustainable marketing and consumer loyalty, and the implementation challenges of sustainability practices. This was followed by theme development through open coding and axial coding to construct more specific thematic categories. Subsequently, a literature synthesis was conducted to identify similarities, differences, and potential gaps across previous studies. The primary objective of this approach was to develop a holistic conceptual framework that captures the synergistic role of CSR and sustainable marketing as integral components of responsible and competitive business strategies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This section presents a synthesis of the key findings derived from the systematic literature review on sustainable marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The analysis reveals that these two concepts are not only closely interrelated but also serve as major drivers of business success and sustainability in the contemporary era. The main findings can be grouped into several categories, including

conceptual definitions and evolution, benefits of implementation, implementation challenges, and their synergistic roles.

First, the literature confirms that sustainable marketing has evolved beyond the notion of “green marketing” into a holistic approach that integrates environmental, social, and economic considerations across the entire product and service life cycle (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Peattie & Crane, 2005). This includes eco-friendly product design, resource-efficient production practices, sustainable distribution, and transparent communication regarding sustainability attributes.

Second, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), as outlined by Carroll (1991, 2016), remains a dominant framework emphasizing four levels of responsibility: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. However, there has been a notable shift toward embedding CSR more strategically into the core operations of businesses, rather than treating it as an add-on or philanthropic activity (Porter & Kramer, 2011). This shift suggests that CSR is increasingly viewed as a strategic investment capable of creating shared value for both companies and society.

Third, studies indicate that the adoption of sustainable marketing and CSR is positively correlated with multiple corporate benefits. These include enhanced brand reputation, improved customer loyalty, competitive differentiation, attraction and retention of top talent, and operational efficiency through reduced waste and energy consumption (Shah & Khan, 2020). Consumers, particularly younger generations, are increasingly inclined to favor brands that demonstrate strong commitments to sustainability issues.

Fourth, despite the substantial benefits, the literature also highlights significant challenges in the implementation of these concepts. These challenges include high initial costs associated with transitioning toward sustainable practices, difficulties in measuring sustainability impact, the risk of greenwashing and consequent loss of consumer trust, and the need for deep organizational cultural change (Burbano et al., 2024). Overcoming these challenges requires long-term commitment from top management and sustained investment.

Finally, the key findings underscore a strong synergy between sustainable marketing and CSR. Sustainable marketing provides the

mechanism for communicating and promoting corporate CSR initiatives to external stakeholders, while CSR offers the ethical and operational foundation that strengthens sustainable marketing claims (Zatwarnicka-Madura et al., 2019). When implemented in an integrated manner, the two create a virtuous cycle in which responsible business practices not only enhance corporate image but also stimulate innovation and long-term financial performance.

## Discussion

The discussion elaborates on the findings presented above, analyzing their implications and linking them to relevant theoretical frameworks. The integration of sustainable marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) should not be viewed as a temporary trend but rather as a strategic necessity for firms seeking resilience and growth amid dynamic market conditions and rising societal expectations.

The evolving definitions of sustainable marketing and CSR highlight a paradigm shift from a compliance-driven orientation toward a value-driven approach. Sustainable marketing is no longer confined to meeting minimum environmental standards but increasingly emphasizes creating value through proactive product and process innovations that reduce ecological footprints and enhance social well-being. Similarly, CSR has evolved from philanthropic initiatives into an integral component of corporate strategy. This transformation resonates with Porter and Kramer's (2011) concept of *Creating Shared Value* (CSV), which argues that business success and social progress are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing. Firms are thus encouraged to identify and expand the intersections between societal advancement and corporate competitiveness, making sustainability a source of competitive advantage.

The benefits identified in this study—such as enhanced corporate reputation and increased customer loyalty—underscore the significance of perception and stakeholder relations (Galib et al., 2025). In the digital era, where information circulates rapidly and consumers have greater access to corporate practices, consistency between sustainability claims and authentic CSR initiatives becomes critical. Failure to align the two risks accusations of greenwashing, thereby eroding consumer trust, as illustrated by Delmas and Burbano (2011). This highlights the

importance of transparency and accountability in all sustainability initiatives.

The challenges observed, including high initial costs and the complexity of measurement, reflect the fact that transitioning to a more sustainable business model requires substantial investment and structural transformation. Nevertheless, such investments should be viewed as long-term commitments that yield cost savings, operational efficiency, and access to new markets. Equally crucial is the development of robust sustainability metrics and standardized measurement frameworks to validate corporate claims and demonstrate tangible impacts to stakeholders.

The most critical insight lies in the synergistic relationship between sustainable marketing and CSR. Sustainable marketing serves as an effective communication bridge between corporate CSR initiatives and the marketplace. Without effective sustainable marketing, even the most impactful CSR efforts may remain underrecognized by consumers. Conversely, without a strong and ethical CSR foundation, sustainability marketing risks being perceived as inauthentic. Thus, the integration of these two functions generates a coherent and credible brand narrative that appeals to socially and environmentally conscious consumers, while also attracting investors who prioritize ESG criteria.

In sum, this discussion underscores that sustainable marketing and CSR should not be regarded as separate initiatives but as two interdependent dimensions of modern business strategy. Firms that successfully integrate both dimensions not only meet the growing social and environmental expectations of their stakeholders but also unlock new opportunities for innovation, growth, and long-term competitive advantage. Ultimately, sustainability is not merely about “doing the right thing” but about “doing business better.”

## CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms that sustainable marketing and corporate social responsibility (CSR) represent two complementary strategic approaches that collectively foster long-term competitive advantage. Sustainable marketing is not merely a tool for promoting environmentally friendly products or services; rather, it functions as a crucial channel for communicating CSR values to broader stakeholders. Conversely, CSR provides the ethical, social, and operational

foundation upon which organizations can construct an authentic sustainability narrative. When effectively integrated, these two dimensions reinforce brand reputation, strengthen consumer loyalty, attract ESG-oriented investors, and create shared value for both corporations and society.

Nevertheless, the integration process is not without challenges. Firms often encounter high initial implementation costs, internal resistance to organizational change, and difficulties in quantifying sustainability outcomes, in addition to the persistent risk of greenwashing that can erode public trust. Addressing these barriers requires a holistic strategic approach grounded in strong top-management commitment, continuous innovation, and transparency in both execution and reporting. Within this framework, sustainability should no longer be regarded as an optional strategy but as a fundamental component embedded within a company's identity and operational systems. By strategically aligning CSR and sustainable marketing, firms are better positioned to survive and excel in dynamic business environments characterized by heightened social and environmental accountability.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that companies should not treat CSR and sustainable marketing as separate initiatives but rather integrate them into the core of corporate strategy. Sustainability values must be embedded across all organizational functions, ranging from research and development and production to external communication. To strengthen stakeholder trust, companies should also prioritize transparency and accountability in communicating sustainability claims, including the preparation of sustainability reports aligned with internationally recognized standards and subject to third-party verification.

Furthermore, continuous innovation should become a central element of corporate strategy. Product, process, and business model innovations that consider social and environmental dimensions can open new market opportunities and generate long-term efficiencies. Equally important is the establishment of clear and measurable sustainability performance indicators, supported by robust monitoring and evaluation

systems, to ensure that initiatives are assessed regularly and contribute to ongoing improvement.

The active engagement of both internal and external stakeholders is also essential. Employees, customers, local communities, and business partners should be meaningfully involved in the planning and implementation of sustainability strategies to foster a sense of ownership and strengthen social legitimacy. For future research, scholars are encouraged to conduct empirical investigations that quantitatively examine the relationship between CSR, sustainable marketing, and business performance. Comparative studies across industries or countries may also provide valuable insights into how social, cultural, and regulatory contexts influence the effectiveness of sustainability integration within corporate strategy.

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