**Sustainable marketing: An exploratory study**

**of a sustain-centric, versus profit-centric, approach**

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**ABSTRACT**

As the need for business to address pressing social and ecological issues intensifies, so does the importance of enhancing the development of sustainable marketing. The current dominant approach to sustainable marketing is based on a Triple Bottom Line (TBL) profit-centric worldview, which suggests that firms can simultaneously improve their financial well-being as they reduce negative social and ecological externalities. However, whereas the scope of TBL marketing is limited to sustainability initiatives that enhance profits, there is growing need for—and interest in— developing a sustain-centric approach to marketing that relaxes the need to *maximize* financial well-being in order to optimize social and ecological well-being. Even so, because of the dominance of the profit-centric worldview, hallmarks of sustain-centric marketing practices remain under-developed, and may even lend themselves to becoming inauthentically mimicked on a piecemeal basis by greenwashing profit-centric firms. We provide an exploratory empirical study of marketing practices evident in two sustain-centric firms, and draw implications to advance theory for both sustain-centric and profit-centric marketing.

**Keywords**: Marketing 4 Ps, Cases, Profit-centric, Sustainability, Sustain-centric

**INTRODUCTION**

Business theory and practice are in transition. For many years it was taken for granted that the purpose of business revolved around maximizing profits and/or shareholder wealth (e.g., Friedman, 1970; Smith, 1776)—a view deeply embedded in the ethos of business theory and practice (Ferraro, Pfeffer & Sutton, 2005; Waddock, 2011)—and that it was up to other stakeholders to care for social and ecological concerns (e.g., government). However, in the 1990s researchers began finding increasing evidence that this approach was unsustainable because it was associated with all manner of environmental and social crises.

The shortcomings of the Friedmanian profit-centric view prompted business scholars and practitioners to develop revised theory and practice, which showed that negative social and ecological externalities could be reduced in ways that simultaneously enhance profits, and thus safeguard the profit-centric worldview. Much of this more-sustainable profit-centric approach can be placed under the broad umbrella of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach—which argues that businesses can improve their profits by addressing people and planet (e.g., Elkington, 1997; see also Gelles & Yaffe-Bellany, 2019; Hart, 1995; Porter & Kramer, 2011)—and has been adopted by the vast majority of the world’s largest corporations (e.g., by 2018, 86% of S&P 500 firms published sustainability reports, Makower et al., 2020). Despite this, profit-centric TBL business practices continue to create significant negative externalities. For example, the negative ecological externalities of the world’s 1,200 largest corporations were estimated to be $5 trillion in 2018, an increase of 50 percent from 5 years earlier and an amount greater than their total profits (Makower et al., 2020). Moreover, even if they were to meet their aspirational carbon targets this would represent only 25 percent of what is required of them to meet Paris Agreement goals (Makower et al., 2020).

In response to persistent shortcomings of variations of profit-first business, there is now a small but growing chorus of business practitioners and scholars who are challenging the TBL profit-centric view of business, and in its place are developing a sustain-centric view of business where profit plays a necessary but *subservient* role to social and ecological well-being (e.g., Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Freeman, 2017; Gladwin, Kennelly & Krause, 1995; Heikkurinen et al., 2016; Hernández & Muñoz, 2022; Milne & Gray, 2013; Purser, Park & Montuori, 1995). Adopting a sustain-centric worldview has far-reaching implications that affect theory and practice in each of the business functions (e.g., marketing, accounting, finance, supply chain, human resources, etc.). Of course, each of the functions of business are present in both profit-centric and sustain-centric firms, but how we understand their purpose and implementation can be expected to be very different from a profit-centric vs a sustain-centric worldview.

Our twofold goal in this paper is deceptively simple. We describe two exemplary sustain-centric firms—that is, firms that place people and planet ahead of maximizing profit—and examine their approach to marketing from both a profit-centric and a sustain-centric worldview. Such parallelism has proven to be an effective way to build theory (Lewis & Grimes, 1999; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989), and our study will help to both better understand the blind-spots of a profit-centric worldview, and to develop a richer empirically-grounded understanding of sustain-centric marketing.

The remainder of the paper will proceed as follows. We first review the literature on profit-centric marketing, sustain-centric marketing, and the 4 Ps of marketing (product, price, place, and promotion), which taken together inform the research question guiding our study. We then present our analysis of the 4 Ps of marketing in two sustain-centric firms, and conclude with a discussion on the implications of our findings for sustain-centric and profit-centric marketing.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Profit-centric business activity has played a considerable role not only in the unprecedented material success of the global economy, but also in contributing to the ecological and social crises facing humankind. In particular, as a result of creating societies where consumption is paramount, we are faced with rapidly depleting natural resources, environmental degradation due to extractive manufacturing processes, and emissions and waste due to logistics and distribution related to consumption and post-consumption activities (Achrol & Kotler, 2012). As a commentary on the ecological crisis, the 2021 International Panel on Climate Change report indicates that climate change is now widespread, rapid, and intensifying, and cautions that if humankind fails to mitigate the current trend there will be considerable and wide-ranging adverse environmental and societal impacts (<https://www.ipcc.ch>). Evidence of the social crisis includes the widening wealth gap between the rich and the poor both within and among countries as well as organizations (Tsui, Enderle & Jiang, 2018) which is hastened by the emphasis on shareholder wealth maximization (Bapuji, Ertug & Shaw, 2020). Overall, this has resulted in lowering the quality of life for both rich and poor (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

The TBL approach has slowed the deterioration, but is limited in its scope to those social and ecological sustainability initiatives for which there is a business case. Moreover, while it may appear that the TBL approach has an equal emphasis on each of its three bottom lines—financial, social, and ecological—in actual practice the financial bottom line has typically been treated as the “first among equals” (e.g., Dyck & Silvestre 2019, p. 1594; Worley & Lawler, 2010, p. 20). In a TBL approach the onus is on managers to create competitive advantage via addressing negative social and ecological externalities (e.g., Elkington, 1994, p. 99). Thus, negative externalities are likely to remain inadequately addressed by TBL marketers unless there is a business case for doing so (Kaplan, 2020; Kemper, Hall & Ballantine, 2019). In sum, because of its reliance on profit-first utilitarian ethics and a business-case logic, TBL business theory and practice seem incapable of *adequately* addressing or reversing negative social and ecological externalities associated with business (Kaplan, 2020; Werner & Stoner, 2018).

We need radically different approaches to business, based on radically different worldviews. “Sustain-centric business” theory and practice represents a general radical approach that challenges the profit-centric assumptions of business-as-usual (e.g., Dyllick & Muff, 2016; Gladwin, Kennelly & Krause, 1995; Freeman, 2017; Heikkurinen et al., 2016; Hernández & Muñoz, 2022; Milne & Gray, 2013; Purser, Park & Montuori, 1995). A sustain-centric approach adopts a holistic orientation (as contrasted to the piecemeal, reductionist addition to business-as-usual practices associated with profit-centric approaches) as it seeks to enhance positive social and ecological externalities (versus merely reducing negative ones). A sustain-centric business prioritizes a flourishing community (as indicated by environmental and social indicators of well-being) ahead of firms’ and individuals’ financial well-being (Dyck & Manchanda, 2021). In general lay terms, a sustain-centric approach is evident in businesses that place people and planet ahead of maximizing profit.

Sustain-centric business theory and practice is sought after by the increasing number of: a) managers in social entrepreneurship and B Corps who have both a legal mandate and a moral responsibility to place people and planet ahead of profits (e.g., Steingard & Gilbert, 2016); b) consumers who say they are willing to pay higher financial prices for sustainable goods and services (as much as 80 percent of all consumers; Nielsen, 2019); and c) 33 percent of investors who willingly compromise opportunities to maximize their own financial returns so that they can enhance overall ecological and/or social returns (Morgan Stanley, 2019).

A sustain-centric approach is relevant for all functions of business—including strategy, finance, marketing, human resources, and supply chain. However, in this paper we will focus on a sustain-centric approach to marketing, drawing heavily from a description of the 4 Ps of sustain-centric marketing (vs. profit-centric marketing) as developed by Dyck and Manchanda (2021). As they note, in sustain-centric marketing the 4 Ps in the marketing-mix paradigm—product, price, place, and promotion—are expected to be managed qualitatively differently than in profit-first marketing. Although the 4 P framework has been fairly criticized (e.g., Constantinides, 2006; Miles & Nilsson, in Brown et al., 2018; O'Malley & Patterson, 1998), it remains, and has arguably been increasingly treated as, a dominant paradigm in marketing (Dyck & Manchanda 2021; Goi, 2009; also Gronroos, 1994, O'Malley & Patterson, 1998). For example, Miles and Nilsson (in Brown et al., 2018, p. 1339) describe it as “a thumbnail sketch, an encapsulation, a precis, nothing less than marketing in miniature, the subject in a nutshell.”

**Sustain-centric marketing**

In their review of the sustainable marketing literature, Kemper, Hall and Ballantine (2019) describe several different worldviews and paradigms that can serve as a basis for developing sustainable marketing theory and practice. They note that the vast majority of research is within an industrial worldview which assumes that the role of marketing theory and practice is to enhance business profits (e.g., profit-centric marketing), and that a small minority of research examines worldviews that challenge this premise and instead suggest that marketing theory and practice should enhance social and ecological well-being (e.g., sustain-centric marketing). They add that it can be very challenging for people within the dominant profit-centric worldview to “see” marketing via a sustain-centric worldview. Similarly, Davies et al. (2020, p. 34) contend that it is only by challenging existing systems that marketing can seek to truly address sustainability, calling it “the grand challenge of our time.”

Scholarly reactions to the emerging sustain-centric marketing literature are often characterized by paradox. On the one hand, scholars have been quick to welcome an approach to marketing theory and practice where the need to *maximize* profits is subservient to the goal of optimizing social and ecological well-being (e.g., Ferrell, 2021; Prothero & McDonagh, 2021). This is precisely what is needed to address the key social and ecological crises we are facing. On the other hand, they have also been quick to dismiss such an approach as unrealistic, which it certainly is within a profit-centric worldview. For example, Prothero and McDonagh (2021) argue that a sustain-centric approach to marketing theory and practice is “unrealistic” insofar as it challenges the firm’s focus on profit-making (page 3) and because “stimulating wants and desires is marketing’s raison d’être” (page 2). Along the same lines, Ferrell (2021, p. 1, 5) argues that a sustain-centric “framework is timely and addresses important problems but is not realistic.”

This paradoxical tension can be illustrated in Parkman and Krause’s (2018) study of “authentic green marketing,” a rare empirical study that we place under the umbrella of sustain-centric marketing. In 19 interviews conducted with architectural firms that practice authentic green marketing, Parkman and Krause (2018) contrasted (sustain-centric) authentic green marketing with (profit-centric) inauthentic green-washing, noting that 100% of their interviewees stated that their firms valued nonfinancial outcomes over commercial rewards:

“Authentic green marketing firms were consistently seen to participate in sustainability, not to obtain economic rewards, but because it is ‘the right thing to do.’ Conversely, our respondents described green-washing firms as ‘profit-seeking’, ‘commercial’, ‘opportunists’, or ‘moneyhungry’. In all 19 interviews, respondents viewed ‘commercialism’ as the antithesis of authenticity.” (Parkman & Krause, 2018, p. 96)

Despite this apparent aversion to profit-centrism by the firms in their study, Parkman and Krause (2018) seem to revert to a profit-centric lens when they present the four key elements of their diamond model of authentic green marketing. For example, rather than state that sustain-centric marketing places people and planet ahead of profits, they identify the first element of authentic green marketing as: “The ability to *appear* above commercial considerations” (emphasis added here), and they go on to describe how authentic green marketing can provide firms with a clear strategic competitive advantage and improved overall firm performance. Similarly, a profit-centric lens may be inferred in the second element of their model, namely: “The ability to frame production methods as craft,” which opens the door for profit-centric TBL firms with instrumental production methods to use marketing to “frame” them as a craft. Indeed, Parkman and Krause (2018, p. 110) acknowledge that the elements in their model as presented could be used by inauthentic or greenwashing firms to “mimic authenticity” (e.g., to appear to be sustain-centric).

**The four Ps of sustain-centric marketing**

The four key elements of Parkman and Krause’s (2018) diamond of (sustain-centric) authentic green marketing are noteworthy for our study because of their partial overlap with Dyck and Manchanda’s (2021) four Ps of (sustain-centric) Social and Ecological Thought marketing. These four Ps—which are summarized in Table 1—will serve as the overarching framework for analyzing the two firms in our study.

- - Insert Table 1 about here - -

*Product*. To start, the component of Parkman and Krause’s (2018) diamond related to product -- “The ability to frame production methods as craft” -- suggests that sustain-centric firms tend to emphasize products made in an “old school” or “honest” way. Dyck and Manchanda’s (2021) description adds that sustain-centric marketing is characterized by products that enhance positive externalities and a refusal to market unsustainable products that meet customers’ unrestrained or extraneous wants even when such products are profitable.

*Price*. Next, the element of Parkman and Krause’s (2018) diamond related to price -- “The ability to appear above commercial considerations” -- includes an emphasis on moving away from competing based on a narrow understanding of price (economic value) and towards including qualities related to sustainability. Dyck and Manchanda (2021) add that, from a sustain-centric marketing perspective, the financial price paid for a product should: ensure that all stakeholders associated with producing it are paid fairly, reflect a firm’s contribution to social justice and value creation, and incorporate non-financial information.

*Place*. In a third component, Parkman and Krause’s (2018) diamond suggests that practices related to place may be the most important and difficult for profit-first marketers to mimic: “An organization’s social network of stakeholders” describes firms finding their place in a community of like-minded sustain-centric suppliers, clients, and cooperative rivals. With regard to place, Dyck and Manchanda (2021) add that sustain-centric marketing typically: prefers place-based marketing channels that enhance local economies’ ecological and social well-being; emphasizes making decisions attuned to the interconnectedness of everything in time and space; and “has a bias toward small-scale enterprises that operate in marketplaces where stakeholders have ongoing and embedded relationships.”

*Promotion*. Finally, the part of Parkman and Krause’s (2018) diamond related to promotion -- “The appropriate use of Corporate Visual Identity” -- foreshadows ideas related to transparency in promotion found in Dyck and Manchanda (2021), who describe how sustain-centric marketing: “promotes, describes, and offers (counter-cultural) alternatives that address negative socio-ecological externalities associated with the status quo” even when doing so does not enhance profits, and creates opportunities for stakeholders to exchange ideas that promote sustainability.

Taken together, our discussion leads us to our research question:

**Research question**

*How does the approach to the 4 Ps of marketing evident in the practices of sustain-centric firms compare with the key characteristics found in the literature on sustain-centric marketing (versus TBL profit-centric marketing)?*

Answering this research question will facilitate further theory-building in sustain-centric marketing, especially as it relates to the hallmarks of sustain-centric marketing described in studies like Dyck and Manchanda (2021) and Parkman and Krause (2018). In addition, it is expected to inform further research in TBL profit-centric marketing.

**THE 4 Ps OF MARKETING IN TWO SUSTAIN-CENTRIC FIRMS**

To begin, we note that ours is an exploratory qualitative study, as is appropriate for the emerging phenomenon of sustain-centric marketing, and we examine research sites where the phenomena we are interested in are most likely to be transparently observable (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt, Graebner & Sonenshein, 2016). We examine the marketing practices related to the 4 P framework evident in two sustain-centric businesses: a local bakery that sells directly to consumers, and a manufacturer that distributes its goods via a series of retailers across the country. These firms are part of a larger 2021 academic study of Canadian companies that place people and planet ahead of maximizing profits, and were chosen because they were quite different in size and industry. Ours is not designed to be the definitive study of sustain-centric marketing, nor do we claim that our results are generalizable to all sustain-centric firms. Rather, our goal is to provide a rich description of sustain-centric marketing in practice, to use this to further develop theory in sustain-centric marketing, and to theorize about a special class of greenwashing that may tempt TBL profit-centric marketers.

The first firm in our study, Eadha Bakery—whose Celtic name means “endurance” or “from the Earth”—sells its baked goods directly to customers and is located in one of the poorest urban neighborhoods in the country. It uses organic ingredients, sources its inputs locally, and deliberately provides a welcoming place for, and promotes the interests of, marginalized communities. The second firm, Oneka—whose name is derived from the traditional Mohawk word meaning *water—*manufactures and sells bio-degradable personal care products made from organic plant extracts grown on its regenerative permaculture farm. To further reduce waste, Oneka’s products are packaged in refillable containers, and consumers can refill their product bottles at one of hundreds of locations across the country to minimize environmental waste. As will become evident in our analysis, both firms in our study place people and planet ahead of maximizing profit, and both exhibit marketing practices that are consistent with sustain-centric marketing and inconsistent with TBL profit-centric marketing.

Our data include interviews with the founding owners of both firms, articles in the local press, analysis of social media and, in the case of Eadha Bakery, being a regular customer. Eadha’s marketing is handled primarily by the owner whereas Oneka (a somewhat larger firm) has dedicated staff in charge of its marketing. Our primary analysis focused on the interview data, with the other data being used to corroborate interview data (we did not find any instances where there were disagreements among data sources). We analyzed the data looking for evidence of sustain-centric marketing practice (vs TBL profit-centric practices) vis a vis the 4 Ps of marketing. This was a multi-step, iterative process. For each case the author who had performed the interview and gathered the secondary data took the lead. They examined the interview, social media, and other data for descriptions of each of the four Ps of marketing consistent with sustain-centric (vs profit-centric) practices. All the authors of the paper examined, discussed and queried this evidence, which included comparing secondary data and looking for instances of triangulation. This process included several iterations and analyses, re-reading the data numerous times to ensure consistency and completeness, all of which helped to clarify and fine-tune the initial analyses of the authors who had performed the interviews. In the end, there was unanimous agreement by all the authors that the findings presented here fairly represent the sustain-centric 4 Ps practiced in each firm based on our data.

Table 1 provides an overview of how we used the 4 Ps of marketing as a conceptual framework/lens to examine whether and how the hallmarks of sustain-centric marketing described in the literature were evident at Eadha and Oneka. These hallmarks in Table 1 were drawn from the recent literature relevant to sustain-centric marketing by Dyck and Manchanda (2021, who develop hallmarks of each of the 4 Ps of sustain-centric marketing) and Parkman and Krause (2018, who develop the diamond of authentic green marketing). By way of overview of our findings, as shown in Table 1 we found evidence of 13 of the 15 hallmarks associated with sustain-centric marketing, plus evidence of one new hallmark that had previously been described but not highlighted in the literature (Product hallmark #4). This overwhelming empirical support for the sustain-centric literature is no small contribution, given ongoing skepticism that views sustain-centric marketing as unrealistic (e.g., Ferrell, 2021; Prothero & McDonagh, 2021). We will now describe the key characteristics of each P of marketing for each firm in turn, starting with Eadha and then following-up with Oneka.

**Product**

From a mainstream profit-centric perspective, a *product* is a good or service which a firm offers to satisfy a want or need. The goal is to develop products that enable firms to optimize profits. In terms of generic strategies, this could be via a special product that people are willing to pay extra for (differentiation strategy) or a standard product that can be provided at lower cost than competitors (low-cost strategy) (Porter, 1980, 1985). In these terms, Eadha clearly has a differentiation strategy, because all of its products are artisanal, made from sourdough, and have sought-after taste and texture (e.g., Eadha’s website describes it as “a hand-powered sourdough bakery” <https://www.eadhabread.com/about>**)**. In contrast, most contemporary bakeries use yeast, which reduces the time, effort, and cost, of baking bread.

In addition to being artisanal, Eadha’s products have important differentiating features in terms of their sustainability. For example, Eadha uses locally-sourced and organic ingredients (which minimizes its ecological footprint, including transportation costs), reduces plastic waste by using paper bags instead of plastic, and minimizes overall waste by selling day-old bread at discounted rates rather than discarding it. Also, compared to yeast breads, sourdough baked goods aid digestion and the absorption of nutrients. From a TBL profit-centric perspective, all these characteristics should be featured prominently in Eadha’s marketing. Thus, it is quite striking that *none* of them are mentioned on Eadha’s website (see also *Promotion* below). Curiously, even though Eadha is deliberate about and aware of its sustainable practices, it does not see them as central to its marketing message. From a TBL profit-centric perspective this may represent a glaring oversight, but from a sustain-centric perspective such sustainable practices may be “taken-for-granted” and thus not necessary to mention. As Eadha’s founder Cora Wiens notes: “Environmental considerations are always sort of underlying everything that I do.” Alternatively, perhaps these are not mentioned on the website to prevent inadvertently virtue signalling that Eadha is (merely) pursuing a TBL profit-centric approach (Gray et al., 2020; Wallace, Buil & De Chernatony, 2020; Westra, 2021).

While it fails to mention any of these sustainable characteristics, Eadha’s website does describe how relationships to suppliers and bakers are embedded in each of its products. This is consistent with how a sustain-centric marketing approach “sees each product as a bundle of relationships (both social and ecological) and aims to be aware of and celebrate the people who made it” (e.g., a sustain-centric approach links the *goods* created for a community to the *practices and individuals* who created these goods) (Dyck & Manchanda, 2021, p. 122; see also Garcia-Ruiz & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2014; Reinecke & Ansari, 2015). In Eadha’s case, the relationships and connections embedded in its product (baked goods) includes its bakers, its suppliers, and even the land itself.

“Eadha is a place for connection. Connection with each other, our selves, our food, and the places and people it all comes from. Food - at its best a slow, personal, lavish yet simple life-giving ritual – has come to be expected on demand, uniform, and cheap. We strive to step outside of that world, and to consistently push the boundaries on how and who we include in that process.” (<https://www.eadhabread.com/about>**)**

Moreover, in a real sense the “product” that Eadha provides goes even beyond its physical baked goods and the bakers and suppliers who contribute to those baked goods. For Eadha, product also includes the “service” its retail location provides as a safe and welcoming place for marginalized people. For example, when asked about Eadha’s mission and vision, Cora Wiens responded that its main focus is to: “support and collaborate with folks who are using the queer, anti-racist, decolonial lens.” Eadha’s broad understanding of product clearly goes far beyond profit-centric approaches, which would focus on the physical product being sold (i.e., artisanal bread) and some of its physical externalities (organic flour).

Turning to Oneka, our second case, we note that its personal care products are also artisanal and old-school in nature, being formulated using high quality organic ingredients grown on its farm. Oneka’s products are sustainable in many ways that *reduce negative externalities*—such as being bio-degradable and carbon neutral (the company imposes a significant “environmental tax” on itself to offset the company’s CO2 emissions and plastic production)—and Oneka is proud of the fact that, for every refillable unit of product it sells, three bottles of plastic are prevented from entering the ocean. In addition, Oneka exhibits hallmarks of sustain-centric marketing insofar as its products *create positive* externalities for the community and the planet. In particular, Oneka’s products are sourced from its organic farm which sequesters carbon from the atmosphere, thereby increasing the quality of both the soil and the air. Moreover, its farm seeks to work in harmony with its natural ecosystem; a priority for the Oneka team is “re-wilding” its land, creating a healthy landscape that will be sustainable for future generations. Because such positive externalities are *implicitly* embedded in Oneka’s product, they may be overlooked by profit-first marketers.

Also built into Oneka’s products is care for consumers’ overall well-being. Oneka’s co-founder and CEO, Phillipe Choinière, believes that the company’s naturally fragranced products “offer well-being and a moment to connect with self.” Along the same lines, Oneka also seeks to enhance its employees’ overall well-being, including giving employees Friday afternoons off to “take care of themselves” and spend quality time at the farm.

Finally, using ideas and language that would not be found in profit-centric marketing, Choinière goes on at some length to describe how Oneka’s products also have “benevolence” built into them (for more on this, see *Promotion* below). The products themselves are an embodiment of benevolence and the wholesome efforts of the company to create a better future for all stakeholders.

**Price**

Eadha and Oneka both transcend the primacy of money and financial considerations that are implicit in a profit-centric understanding of price. For example, Eadha’s founder Cora Wiens states: “Money is not our motivation in any way.” This is not to suggest that money, and price, are not important. Rather, it is to suggest that sustain-centric marketing treats price differently than profit-centric approaches. In particular, sustain-centric firms have a holistic approach to price, which can mean that their sticker price is often higher than profit-centric competitors. For example, whereas the price of a loaf of bread at Eadha is comparable to other artisanal bakeries, Wiens unapologetically recognizes that it is higher than that of bread sold in typical grocery stores: “Our products are, I would say, expensive compared to what a lot of people are used to paying for bread.”

A sustain-centric approach emphasizes that a firm’s prices should be set in a way that ensures fair and just treatment for primary stakeholders (e.g., affordable for customers, living wage for employees, fair price for suppliers) and for secondary stakeholders (e.g., larger ecosystem, marginalized groups). For example, in addition to paying employees a fair wage (first-order), Eadha also hires and provides a safe/welcome place for marginalized people (second-order). Similarly, Eadha pays local farmer’s a fair price (first-order), but at a second-order level Eadha additionally ensures that the farmer’s soil is being treated fairly via organic agricultural practices. As Wiens notes: “all of our flour and grains we get locally, so I know some of the farmers. Some of the farmers deliver right to our door for flour and grain. … I like to know the *people*, I like to know their *practices,* and be able to talk about it.”

Perhaps Eadha’s most noteworthy hallmark of sustain-centric marketing vis a vis price is its emphasis on providing a fair price for customers. At a first-order level this is evident in Eadha keeping its price comparable to that of other artisanal bakeries (some of whom may use less expensive inputs). But at a second-order level, at Eadha a fair price for customers means ensuring that its baked goods are affordable for even impoverished people (recall that Eadha is located in one of poorest neighborhoods in the country). How is this possible? Eadha offers a “pay-it-forward” voucher system, where customers who can afford it are invited to purchase a “voucher” that other customers can use to exchange for a baked good. Eadha’s voucher system enhances food security, and helps to deter theft within the community as well. It is also noteworthy that Eadha acknowledges non-paying individuals as “customers” (whereas profit-centric approaches likely would see similar activities as acts of philanthropy). Wiens makes this evident when she explains:

“So our customers with more money can pre-pay for products so that people who don’t have money can get our products … people who literally live on the street in our neighborhood are now able to come in and access the bread and the products, so that has expanded our customer base which is really, really good.”

Eadha is also transparent with customers about its business costs (e.g., its price of doing business), and offers customers opportunity to make payments that go beyond traditional the “price” for a baked good. For example, on August 26, 2021, Eadha posted on Instagram that its walk-in cooler broke and it needed to spend exactly $3,248 to get it fixed. The post garnered over 900 ‘likes’ and a number of comments of support, with another small local business offering their empty cooler as a temporary replacement. Eadha’s post 5 days later thanked everyone and announced that all the money had been raised following a 5-hour “Let’s! Fix! That! Fridge!” event hosted by Eadha. Eadha’s financial transparency allows it to foster trust and create authentic connections with consumers that profit-centric firms may find more challenging to match. The importance of transparency is also evident in the broader literature that shows that consumers are more likely to respond favorably to price increases when a firm is transparent about the reason for the increase and communicates the reason for the increase (Carter & Curry, 2010; Di Domenico et al., 2022).

From a profit-centric perspective it is unlikely for firms to go beyond first-order externalities in their business models, and certainly unrealistic for firms to do so without then ensuring that increased second-order costs are reflected in their price. Moreover, from a profit-centric perspective it is unrealistic for firms to provide their premium goods and services to customers who cannot afford them. Finally, from a profit-centric perspective it would be unrealistic to tell customers the price of unexpected expenses and to invite them to help pay for those expenses. But, consistent with sustain-centric marketing, Eadha has found a way to do all these things in a way that enables all customers to participate in an economy where everyone is treated with dignity.

Similar observations about price can be made vis a vis Oneka where, echoing Eadha’s view about money, co-founder and CEO Philippe Choinière states: “We didn’t start a business to make money; we wanted to make an impact and we realized we needed to make money to make an impact.” Oneka strives to maintain the highest socio-ecological quality of products that is practical, and to set the financial price for those products in a way that is fair to primary stakeholders (affordable for customers, fair wages for employees, and supportive of suppliers and distributors—see *Place* below) and to secondary stakeholders (larger ecosystem, future generations). There have been instances where Oneka’s financial costs of production increased significantly as it sought to enhance socio-ecological well-being, but it deliberately chose not to increase the price of its products. For example, when Choinière realized there was an ingredient in its shampoo that was not consistent with Oneka’s water pollution policy, he knew it would be expensive to address but acted immediately: “We increased our costs but we knew we couldn’t cheap out, we needed the quality. Increasing your costs of the product is a big impact. And we didn’t touch the selling price.”

In choosing not to increase the product’s selling price as the costs to produce its shampoo increased, Oneka willingly accepted a lower profit margin in order to reduce water pollution and to keep its products affordable for consumers. Further, the reformulation of the shampoo was not advertised, and did not occur in an attempt to gain more customers. In contrast, profit-centric marketers may have taken the opportunity to advertise Oneka’s change in formulation to show consumers that it was reducing a negative ecological externality, which could result in increased sales from customer engagement, possibly making up for its loss in profit margin.

**Place**

Sustain-centric marketing has a broader understanding of place than (merely) referring to the distribution channels used by an organization to get its product into the hands of consumers (as place is typically understood from a profit-centric worldview). According to a sustain-centric marketing understanding of place, decision-making should be made with the awareness that all stakeholders are interconnected in time and space. This promotes the use of marketing channels that are place-based and support social and ecological well-being and local economies. The approach has a bias towards small-scale firms working in marketplaces characterised by deep and ongoing relationships among stakeholders.Eadha is intentionally small-scale and focuses on its immediate neighborhood in an effort to keep its ecological footprint small and to connect to the land(s) that it works on and draws from.

As we have seen in the example of the voucher system, Eadha is conscious of its place in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the country, and seeks to find ways to be welcoming and of service to the neighbours who may literally live on its street. More generally, Eadha is very conscious of being a welcoming and safe place that enhances community generally but especially for marginalized groups: this is as important to Eadha as serving baked goods. Wiens states: “We have people who come because they’re queer and they just want to be in a queer space, and those spaces are limited in this city.” This sentiment is further reflected on Eadha’s Instagram page which often posts pictures of a sign in its storefront which reads:

“This bakery is a safe(r) space. Be kind to yourself, the staff, and others. We are committed to resisting colonization, racism, ableism, homophobia, fat phobia, transphobia, misogyny, and classism. If it becomes clear that you aren’t committed to this work, we will ask you to LEAVE!”

Other Instagram posts also reflect Eadha’s connection and engagement with the general community (place) where it operates. For example, Eadha often posts about supporting other local businesses in its neighborhood. In addition to using local suppliers, Eadha also sells and promotes products in its bakery supplied by other small local companies, which helps to further enhance the local economy. The bakery is also committed to advocating for social justice issues within its local community. Several examples include Instagram posts about missing Indigenous women, about seeking justice for murdered Indigenous women, and about peaceful protests in support of Indigenous issues such as the “Every Child Matters” movement. Note that many of these are connections to second- and third-order dimensions of place. Finally, Eadha participates in and hosts community events that promote social well-being locally, and it creates positive externalities by enabling marginalized individuals to feel safe in its store and by explicitly advocating for social equality and justice in an effort to change political and social systems. It does these things not because there is a business case to do them, but because they are part of what it means for Eadha to be in its place.

Hallmarks of a sustain-centric marketing approach to place are also evident at Oneka. Again, whereas a profit-centric approach to place would seek to have low-cost operating facilities and distribution channels, Oneka is much more aware of the socio-ecological dimensions of its manufacturing facility, namely its family-run regenerative-agriculture farm in Frelighsburg, Quebec. This farm, this place, is of great importance to Oneka and its employees. Founding owner Philippe Choinière explains: “There’s gathering moments; every month we have an afternoon at the farm where we are working … It’s about being together.” Oneka’s sustainability coordinator Romy Zeitlinger refers to Oneka’s employees as “a big family,” and the Oneka farm is the place where the “big family” gathers for meditation, breathwork exercises, and connection – all intimate and special moments for its members. Oneka shares some of these experiences on social media to include customers in the intimate experience and show them the origin of its products with transparency and authenticity.

Consistent with a sustain-centric marketing perspective on place, Oneka is mindful in its planning and considers that everything is interconnected in time and space. For Choinière, Oneka is a “place” where benevolence reigns. When asked what he hopes Oneka inspires others to do, Choinière stated:

“Inspire people to live with more harmony, and more authenticity, and more wholesomeness, and more courage. And to allow love to be a part of business, because there is way too much fear. It brings collaboration. We’re in a world where there has to be a shift of many things, and I think that in our imperfect way we are trying to be examples of benevolence and love and action—I repeat—in our highly imperfect way.”

Looking at its distribution channel, Oneka sells its products through its website and via “refill” retailers primarily across Canada. In order to stimulate the regional economies, these retailers are purposefully chosen because they are small and local. From a profit-centric perspective, the focus of choosing where to sell products would be based primarily on customer convenience, efficiency, and cost. These are secondary at Oneka, which gathers extensive information via meeting with prospective retailers (and suppliers) prior to entering into relationships with them.

“We dance for a long time before we kiss. It’s easy to put a show on, but over time you see how they really are … The relationship is very important to us. We don’t work with people we don’t like, or we don’t feel good [about]. We believe business is about relationships, not transactions. When relationships are strong, transactions are just the consequence. We are deeply caring people so we want to be working with people who care also.” (Philippe Choinière)

Oneka values transparency and a relationship-based approach, and it systematically ensures that its retailers and suppliers treat their workers fairly, and that their retailers’ social and ecological values match those of Oneka.

**Promotion**

As with the first three Ps, a sustain-centric marketing understanding of promotion goes beyond a traditional profit-centric understanding of promotion as sending clear, consistent, and compelling messages using various media in order to persuade, create awareness, educate, motivate, reward, remind and connect with consumers (Dyck & Manchanda, 2021). Eadha may appear to follow a traditional approach because it regularly posts on several social media platforms and has a substantial following, both characteristics of an effective promotion strategy that prompts customers to think about Eadha several times a week. However, from a profit-centric lens, Eadha should place greater focus on its products; instead, many of the posts are related to the values of staff and their politics. Similarly, the “About” section of Eadha’s web-page has only four words describing itself as a bakery, but it has two paragraphs about how it promotes being a safe and welcoming place for marginalized people.

Eadha makes it clear to its customers that by supporting the bakery they are supporting marginalized groups. From a profit-centric perspective, this might be seen as a competitive advantage for Eadha’s target market. However, Eadha does not advocate for these issues in order to gain business or enhance its reputation to enhance profit. Rather, Eadha uses its business platform to advocate for issues that may otherwise go ignored. In regard to Eadha’s explicit political views Wiens notes: “Every now and then we lose a customer because we say something that they don’t like. But that’s how it goes.” Eadha advocates for systemic change even if it does not benefit its financial bottom line; this is an approach that does not fit with, or seem realistic from, a profit-centric marketing view. Whereas Greyston Bakery’s well-known motto is: “We don’t hire people to bake brownies, we bake brownies to hire people,” a variation at Eadha might be: “We don’t promote social and ecological well-being to sell bread, we sell bread to foster social and ecological well-being.”

A sustain-centric marketing perspective challenges unsustainable status quo practices, promotes alternatives that address negative socio-ecological externalities, and enables stakeholders to promote positive externalities among organizations. Consistent with this, Eadha explicitly challenges capitalist, racist, anti-queer and colonial systems that are embedded within our society, even if this means it loses some customers. Eadha facilitates discussing and addressing such issues in the workplace. In addition it promotes, hosts and participates in local community events that promote social and ecological well-being and encompass a variety of stakeholders, including Indigenous peoples. According to Wiens:

“We’re getting a bit of a reputation for supporting community and so we’re getting a lot of requests for support. So the mandate that we’re working with is what I said earlier, we’ll support and collaborate with folks who are using the queer, anti-racist, decolonial lens. That’s our main focus.”

Eadha’s acceptance of possible backlash when discussing controversial issues is perhaps one of its most defining traits. It is also noteworthy that its boldly and deliberately posts about such issues without needing to be encouraged to do so by other stakeholders. This directly contradicts profit-centric business strategy to remain neutral or not engage in controversial topics in order to appeal to the masses and thus maximize potential market share.

Overall Eadha is consistent with the brand activism literature which suggests that purpose-and value-driven brands often place social and environmental considerations above immediate economic interests (Bocken et al., 2014; Sarkar & Kotler, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Such brands often see their purpose as educators for a better society (i.e., by shifting consumer behavior), or see that having a significant and legitimate source of cultural power provides them the responsibility to incite societal change (Moorman, 2020). Furthermore, brands adopting a political mission lens often see social change as their firm’s raison d’être, with its products and services as tools for creating the change they would like to see in the world (Moorman, 2020).

Oneka’s approach to promotion also defies profit-centric marketing theory. For example, when specifically asked what Oneka promotes, founding owner Philippe Choinière did not point to the products it sells, but rather: “Organic farming”! More generally, Oneka seeks to promote a spirit of *benevolence* in relationships with nature and others, an emphasis that would be rare from a profit-first perspective:

“Oneka existsto *intend* to be benevolent with all of our stakeholders. And when I say *intend*, I mean we do it imperfectly. But our intention and our nature are to express benevolence on everything: our team, our community, our consumers that use our products, our clients. That’s how we are, and of course, we’re imperfect at that. But that is the reason for being. We could start talking about the farm, there is an intention of benevolence there—we are re-wilding the land, it’s a farm with permaculture principles—but it’s everywhere. We are imperfect everywhere, but we are benevolent everywhere. For me, it’s expressed in the way the products are made and the way we are reducing plastic. Again, it’s benevolence driving that. It’s hard to put Oneka in a box. Benevolence is like water, it’s everywhere and it’s something that we are thriving to live. The energy and the intention of benevolence, and it’s expressed through personal care products.”

Oneka’s promotion of benevolence is evident in the content on its Instagram, YouTube, and website, where products are often not the focus. For example, on Instagram, Oneka focuses primarily on sharing educational tips with followers: permaculture harvesting techniques, organic farming tips, plant identification skills, and much more. Oneka also promotes mind and body well-being. One of Oneka’s Instagram highlights is entitled “Break the ice,” which features employees taking turns plunging into ice-cold waters. The goal is to encourage followers to “get out of their comfort zones” while sharing the many health benefits of cold-water exposure. Here Oneka shares valuable information on mental and physical well-being without ever mentioning products, thereby underscoring that Oneka values the health of its consumers and wants to improve their well-being, rather than persuade them to purchase its products.

**DISCUSSION**

This paper looks at two exemplary firms that place people and planet ahead of maximizing profit, examining their approach to marketing vis a vis the literature on sustain-centric marketing and profit-centric TBL marketing. Overall our findings provide strong support for the hallmarks of sustain-centric marketing described in the literature. In particular, as shown in Table 1, our data provide support for 13 of the 15 hallmarks associated with sustain-centric marketing that have been previously identified (Dyck & Manchanda, 2021; Parkman & Krause, 2018). More specifically, all the hallmarks identified by Parkman and Krause (2018) were validated in our study, and all but 2 of the hallmarks identified by Dyck and Manchanda (2021) were evident. In addition, our analysis points to the addition of a new hallmark in Table 1 (Product hallmark #4). We will now discuss implications of these findings for theory-building and future research.

**Implications for theory and future research**

As shown in Table 1, the two hallmarks associated with sustain-centric marketing in the literature that we were unable to find substantiation for were Product hallmark #1 (refusal to cater to unsustainable wants) and Price hallmark #3 (explicitly delineating financial costs associated with sustainability). This does not suggest that these hallmarks are not present, but rather that their presence was not explicit enough in our data to include them. An additional hallmark, namely Product hallmark #4, unique to this research was discovered: “product includes the relationships embedded in creating it.” We will discuss implications of each in turn.

First, with regard to Product hallmark #1, Dyck and Manchanda (2021) suggest that sustain-centric firms will refuse to bring to market “unsustainable products that meet consumer wants but not their needs, even if such products are profitable.” Our data support a core principle behind this statement, namely that both Eadha and Oneka products are much more sustainable than those of mainstream competitors. However, it could be argued that some of their products are more along the line of “wants” than of “needs”. For example, alongside offering breads, Eadha also offers tasty gourmet style sourdough cookies. Although Eadha’s cookies may have a smaller ecological footprint and be far more nutritious than Oreo cookies, it could also be argued that cookies by their nature contribute to obesity and other health issues. Similarly, Oneka’s beard soap may be more sustainable than other beard soaps on the market, but do we really *need* a special soap for beards?

Our finding has implications for building theory around what we will call “sustainable indulgences” that can be contrasted with “dysfunctional wants.” Rather than a simplistic distinction between wants and needs, the concept of sustainable indulgences provides a more nuanced perspective. We define sustainable indulgences as wants whose positive externalities outweigh their negative externalities. For example, whereas a cookie may be seen as a want rather than a need, it can be considered a sustainable indulgence because it may be healthy for one’s mental well-being to have the occasional feast (or cookie) to enjoy and celebrate life. The distinction between sustainable indulgences and dysfunctional wants provides conceptual categories that may be helpful for determining how many cookies you can consume (or sell) before you are supporting gluttony. Similarly, beard soap can be theorized to have positive effects on someone’s self-esteem, but at some point it may lead to the commodification of the body. To know where to draw the line may be different for firms, consumers, or public health policy makers. Further research within sustain-centric firms—and among its stakeholders—may provide valuable insights to the important questions about needs, sustainable indulgences, and dysfunctional wants that sustainable marketing must address with wisdom and nuance. These are questions for future research.

Second, with regard to Price hallmark #3, Dyck and Manchanda (2021) suggest that sustain-centric marketing “provides practical implications of how to incorporate socio-ecological factors in a price (e.g., non-sticker price information).” Again, the data could be said to lend support to the thrust of this statement, namely that both Eadha and Oneka’s prices have embedded within them social and ecological costs associated with the products. But it seems to us that Dyck and Manchanda (2021) expected these embedded costs to be more explicitly identified for consumers. However, we did not find any evidence of Eadha *explicitly* defending/explaining why its prices were higher than non-artisanal bread (e.g., Eadha does not publish the price it pays for local, organic flour). Similarly, Oneka does not break down the costs and externalities of its products for customers.

There are several possible explanations for our findings. One is that firms like Eadha and Oneka simply lack the information to explicitly explain/justify their prices to consumers. If this is the case, then this is an opportunity for scholars to develop tools and information that allow firms (and investors, and consumers) to measure the social and ecological externalities built into, say, a loaf of bread. For example, such research could point to the extra costs and benefits of choosing bread made from organically grown grain rather than conventionally grown grain (e.g., one study found that about 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions associated with a loaf of bread are attributable to inputting fertilizer onto the farm fields where they are grown; Goucher et al., 2017), or to purchase from a local bakery versus from a national grocery store chain (e.g., research suggests that for every dollar spent in a *local* retailer 79 cents remains in the local community, versus 30 cents for a *national* retailer; McCaffrey & Kurland, 2015). With this information in hand, firms could provide detailed information on the externalities they are reducing, and thus make their firm more attractive to sustainability-minded consumers (and investors).

Perhaps a more theoretically interesting reason for the unexpected finding vis a vis Price hallmark #3 is that the expected finding is based on profit-centric assumptions that do not apply in sustain-centric firms. It may be that price is simply not that important or salient for sustain-centric firms and consumers, and it does not need to be justified by an analysis of the prices a firm pays to suppliers and employees. Or, perhaps more accurately, perhaps some combination of Product and/or Place and/or Promotion trumps Price. For example, our findings give rise to the idea that sustain-centric marketing is a counter-cultural variation of Porter’s (1985) conventional differentiation strategy (where consumers willingly pay a premium price for a product). However, instead of “conventional differentiation” that serves as a generic strategy in order to maximize a firm’s profit/competitiveness, “sustain-centric differentiation” occurs when firms willingly choose not to maximize their profit in order to optimize the sense of community, collaboration, and flourishing among their stakeholders. Building on this, we theorize that perhaps “sustain-centric differentiation” is a special case of the “norm of reciprocity” (Gouldner, 1960): when sustain-centric firms place social and ecological well-being ahead of their own financial well-being, customers reciprocate by placing their larger community’s social and ecological well-being ahead of their own financial interests to pay the lowest price possible. In short, for sustain-centric marketers and customers, financial well-being is subservient to social and ecological well-being, and thus marketing that establishes the latter need not fixate on price. This awaits future research.

Finally, our unexpected findings related to Price hallmark #3 may serve as a basis to offer a theoretical contribution to a sustain-centric understanding of virtue signaling (Gray et al., 2020; Westra, 2021). Perhaps a reason sustain-centric firms do not try to explicitly embed costs of externalities in their products is the same as the reason that Eadha does not explicitly mention its use of local organic flour on its website. Perhaps greenwashing marketing by other (profit-centric) firms has “poisoned the waters” so that when authentic sustain-centric firms and consumers see such information their reaction is skepticism rather than attraction. For example, Gray et al. (2020) found that, akin to greenwashing, (profit-centric) firms can use virtue signalling in a sleight-of-hand way (i.e., via indirect responses to sustainability challenges) to increase their reputational ratings and social licence among consumers. This is also consistent with Wallace et al.’s (2020) Facebook study finding that conspicuous virtue signaling that seeks to impress other (e.g., is other-oriented, such as a bakery that trumpets its use of local organic flour) is negatively related to the virtue signaller’s off-line prosocial behavior intentions. In contrast, rather than promote their own sustainable practices to impress customers (as in greenwashing), Eadha and Oneka use their websites to promote social justice and well-being issues well beyond their specific products (which may be a sustain-centric variation of brand activism: Bocken et al., 2014; Moorman, 2020; Sarkar & Kotler, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). Wallace et al. (2020) found this second sort of virtue signaling (e.g., seeking to achieve intrinsic benefits) to be positively related to off-line prosocial behaviour intentions. Taken together, this suggests that there are two approaches to virtue signalling that we might call “authentic virtue expression” vs. “inauthentic virtual signaling.” Our data suggest that the former is more aligned with sustain-centric marketing, and the latter with profit-centric marketing. Again, this awaits future research.

In addition to theoretical contributions related to the two hallmarks of sustain-centric marketing identified in the literature that we did not find, our study also contributes to the literature by drawing attention to a “new” hallmark of sustain-centric marketing, namely that “product includes the relationships embedded in creating it” (Product hallmark #4, Table 1). Our findings provide a richness to this hallmark and underscore it being embedded in a multi-layered sense of community related to sustain-centric practices. Recall that Eadha and Oneka have a very holistic understanding of marketing that encompasses first- and second- and third-order relationships with people who supply the inputs for products, with the natural world, and for the larger common good (this finding is also evident in the importance of second- and third-order understanding of Price hallmark #1, and Product hallmark #2). A loaf of Eadha bread has embedded within it relationships not only to the bakers and suppliers, but also to the soil and to providing welcoming places for marginalized communities. Similarly, Oneka’s skincare products have embedded within them regenerative agriculture, benevolence, and support of mental health. This holistic orientation permeates all four Ps, and is particularly relevant for Parkman and Krause’s (2018) suggestion that promoting and belonging to the “right” (sustain-centric) community may lie at the heart of sustain-centric marketing, and be its key differentiation from profit-centric marketing. In short, the idea that “product includes the relationships embedded in creating it” seems central to this idea of community, and requires building the kinds of relationships that are outside the domain of profit-centric marketing. It involves allowing customers to truly understand and appreciate the nature of the inputs embedded in the goods and services they consume (note that transparency may also be related to sustain-centric pricing: Carter & Curry, 2010; Di Domenico et al., 2022). This sort of transparency is not a strength of the profit-first paradigm that is premised on exploiting stakeholders (e.g., Porter’s five competitive forces).

This brings us to our implications for profit-first marketing. Given the high demand for sustainable products (e.g., recall that up to 80 percent of consumers are willing to pay a premium; Nielsen, 2019), there is great incentive for profit-first firms to *appear* to be sustainable. Thus, we speculate, there is great incentive for profit-first firms to appear to emulate the hallmarks of marketing in Table 1 (at least on a piecemeal basis), and that *inauthentic* variations of these hallmarks may increasingly inform greenwashing in the future. This creates somewhat of a paradox for proponents of sustainability. On the one hand, the hallmarks in Table 1 seem to be inherently good, and thus having them emulated (even if in a compromised way) by profit-first firms could be seen as laudable steps in the right direction. On the other hand, if these hallmarks only *appear* to be implemented then: 1) the sustainability problems associated with profit-first business will persist and may even be buttressed, and 2) genuine sustain-centric firms will need to overcome increasing levels of consumer skepticism. Our findings suggest that a key antidote to skepticism, and a central hallmark of sustain-centrism, is the creation of a community of stakeholders around a firm who share an emphasis on enhancing social and ecological well-being and relax the emphasis on maximizing profits. We call for future research to examine how firms can do this.

**Final remarks**

Our study is not without its limitations. Our goal was to determine whether sustain-centric marketing is realistic and plausible. We did this by examining the marketing practices of two firms via the lens of hallmarks of sustain-centric marketing as described in the literature. That said, we are fully aware that we have examined only two firms, and that much more research is needed to develop the field of sustain-centric marketing. We welcome future research with larger sample sizes, from different countries and cultures, in firms with designated marketing professionals, and with greater data collection within the firm and among its stakeholder groups (customers, suppliers, competitors). In particular, we encourage research that examines how firms put the hallmarks into practice. Such future research will address shortcomings of this exploratory study, and promise to provide the richness to grow the field.

In sum, there is growing recognition that in order to address the social and ecological crises facing the planet, sustainable marketing practitioners and scholars should move from a profit-centric to a sustain-centric approach. This transition may seem threatening or unrealistic to those steeped in the profit-centric approach, which only adds to the reasons to commit to more fully-develop the sustain-centric approach. Our study shows that a sustain-centric approach is both realistic and has hallmarks consistent with those predicted in the literature. We encourage marketing scholars and practitioners who seek to address socio-ecological crises to learn from and build upon the insights and findings related to sustain-centric marketing research.

**TABLE 1: THE FOUR Ps OF SUSTAIN-CENTRIC MARKETING: THEORY AND PRACTICE**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Four Ps** | **Hallmarks of sustain-centric marketing** | **Eadha** | **Oneka** |
| **Product** | 1) “refuses to offer unsustainable products that meet consumer wants but not their needs, even if such products are profitable”\* | ?? | ?? |
| 2) “emphasis on enhancing positive [social and ecological] externalities”\* | yes | yes |
| 3) “emphasizing ‘hands-on’, ‘traditional’, ‘honest’, ‘old-school’ aspects of production”\*\* | yes | yes |
| *4) product includes relationships embedded in creating it* | *yes* | *yes* |
| **Price** | 1) “emphasizes that all (direct and indirect) stakeholders associated with producing a good or service are treated fairly”\* | yes | yes |
| 2) “emphasizes that price is more than a mere financial transaction, it is also infused with relationships and involves a firm’s contribution to social justice and value creation”\* | yes | yes |
| 3) “provides practical implications of how to incorporate socio-ecological factors in a price (e.g., non-sticker price information)”\* | ?? | ?? |
| 4) “Accentuate the noneconomic motivations of the firm and its offerings … to shift locus of competition away from economic value (price)”\*\* | yes | yes |
| **Place** | 1) “emphasizes making decisions with awareness that everything is interconnected in time and space”\* | yes | yes |
| 2) “has a bias toward small-scale enterprises that operate in marketplaces where stakeholders have ongoing and embedded relationships”\* | yes | yes |
| 3) “emphasizes place-based marketing channels that enhance socio-ecological well-being and local economies”\* | yes | yes |
| 4) “cultivating [and joining] the ‘right’ social network of external suppliers, partners, and clients”\*\* | yes | yes |
| **Promotion** | 1) “challenges unsustainable status quo practices, even if this does not optimize a firm’s (narrow) financial self-interests (courage)”\* | yes | yes |
| 2) “promotes, describes, and offers (counter-cultural) alternatives that address negative socio-ecological externalities associated with the status quo”\* | yes | yes |
| 3) “enables stakeholders to exchange ideas about enhancing opportunities to enact [sustain-centric]-oriented marketing principles and promote positive externalities among organizations”\* | yes | yes |
| 4) “create and reinforce [community-centric] differentiation without traditional [profit-centric] marketing communications”\*\* | yes | yes |

Notes:

\* Refers to hallmarks of Social and Ecological Thought marketing (Dyck & Manchanda, 2021: p. 121 [Table 2])

\*\* Refers to hallmarks from the diamond of authentic green marketing (Parkman & Krause, 2018: pp. 107-108 [Table 3])

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