
Guest editorial: Paving the way for the SDGs implementations: new consumption and marketing models in post-pandemic context

Guest editorial

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, gripping the world in its fourth year, has become a source of deep and enduring concerns across the globe, impacting nearly every sector (Allanjawi *et al.*, 2024; NiewczasDobrowolska *et al.*, 2024; Tudoran *et al.*, 2024; Wolf and Schmitz, 2024). Exacerbating existing inequalities, the pandemic has led to significant income losses and a wide economic recovery gap between wealthy and developing nations, alongside a substantial rise in extreme poverty (Plizáková & Smeral, 2024; World Bank, 2024). These challenges are compounded by a “great divergence” in employment recovery and productivity (ILO, 2021), worsening climate change impacts, and threats to food and water security (Ranjbari *et al.*, 2021). This convergence of crises threatens to derail progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and even reverse advancements already made on specific goals (The SDG Report 2020; Galleli *et al.*, 2021; UN Statistics Division report, 2021; Leal Filho *et al.*, 2023).

However, some scholars see a silver lining amidst the multifaceted challenges posed by the pandemic. Høiberg Olsen *et al.* (2021, p. 2) propose a different perspective, arguing that “systemic shocks can serve as a momentum-breaking factor that can help bring about big and potentially long-lasting changes”. For instance, it is suggested that the pandemic led to a reconsideration of the nature of social responsibility and emphasised the significance of care, empathy and psychological well-being (Qin and Men, 2023). Indeed, the pandemic has engendered a groundbreaking context that coerced organisations to quickly adapt. As such, the exceptional responses implemented to mitigate the negative effects of pandemic present a unique opportunity for decision makers e.g., organisations, institutions, and other stakeholders, to accelerate progress on the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and build resilience against future crises.

At the organisational level, evidence suggests a profound impact of the pandemic on achieving the SDGs. Many businesses, facing their greatest challenges in decades, have seen their long-term strategic plans rendered irrelevant (Bailey and Breslin, 2021). Indeed, the health crisis forced companies to make *ad hoc* decisions, often without sufficient information (Turhan *et al.*, 2022). This has led many to prioritise short-term survival, a sort of “firefighting mode,” at the expense of their sustainability frameworks – the triple bottom line of profit, people, and planet (Elkington, 1997). For some, this has meant sacrificing environmental and social goals to focus solely on immediate profit generation (Zhao

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et al., 2022). Despite these challenges, some authors see the pandemic as an opportunity to accelerate progress on sustainability and respond to rising consumer demand for safer, cleaner products and a healthier planet (Jaca *et al.*, 2018; Skandrani *et al.*, 2020; Turhan *et al.*, 2022) argue that the crisis can be a catalyst for long-term transformation, prompting organisations to re-evaluate their value propositions and align their operations with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). For instance, companies such as 3M, Microsoft, Banco Santander, Unilever and Shell, are demonstrating their potential for a more resilient response (Brydges and Hanlon, 2020; World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2022) by redesigning marketing strategies, work processes and operations.

Alongside this trend, consumers are increasingly using multiple digital platforms that have become an inseparable part of life for most consumers around the world (Kapoor *et al.*, 2021; Toduran *et al.*, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic engendered changes in consumer preferences (Sim *et al.*, 2022), online shopping behaviour (Ramadan *et al.*, 2023) and consumer brand relationship (Sashittal *et al.*, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reshaped consumption and business models, prompting a critical need to understand these evolving practices and their impact on achieving the SDGs in a post-crisis recovery context. This necessitates a deeper exploration of how public, private organisations, civil society and citizens/consumers are engaging with these new models.

This special issue, titled “Paving the Way for SDG Implementation: New Consumption and Marketing Models in a Post-Pandemic Context,” was meticulously developed by Dr Kaouther Kooli (Associate Professor of Marketing, Bournemouth University, UK), Professor Hamida Skandrani (Chair of the LIGUE Laboratory, ISCAE, Tunisia), Dr Ediz Akcay (Bournemouth University, UK) and Dr Malek Sghaier (Tunis Campus Université Paris Dauphine-PSL, Tunisia). Following *Qualitative Market Research* guidelines and editorial guidance throughout 2023, the editors curated a selection of six insightful articles that address the critical relationship between new consumption and business models and the implementation of the SDGs in a post-crisis world.

The aim of this special issue is to uncover, depict and analyse new consumption and marketing models in the realm of post covid crisis uncontrollable and unforeseen emergencies. It provides new practical and theoretical insights from different stakeholders’ perspectives, e.g. government, private and public organisations, distribution channels and consumers.

The six selected articles cover a wide range of issues and challenges related to new consumption and business models in post-pandemic context and focus particularly on the extent to which such models contribute to the UN SDGs implementation in various countries such as Canada, India, Tunisia and the UK.

Content

The first paper, titled “Corporate Social Responsibility Communication after COVID-19: What Values for Practical Implementation of the SDGs?” by Amal Ben Cheikh, Sana Tebessi and Mariem Dali, explores the alignment between corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and the values embedded within the UN SDGs. The study seeks to classify the values of socially responsible companies and connect these values to specific SDGs, thereby, enhancing the understanding of how businesses can integrate these goals into their practices effectively. The authors use a qualitative semiotic analysis of CSR communications from four companies involved in the Corporate Environmental Communication (COM-E) initiative. The findings uncover a nuanced relationship between corporate values and the UN SDGs, with companies showcasing notable efforts in ecological

sustainability, thus contributing to SDGs. The findings particularly shed the light on the utilitarian values central role in achieving SDGs 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 10 (Reduced Inequality), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 13, while existential values are important for achieving SDGs 8, 9, 10, 11 and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). This study provides valuable insight for companies to understand and improve their CSR communication strategies by aligning their corporate values with the SDGs. The classification of values helps companies to integrate sustainable practices into their corporate culture more coherently and address societal expectations effectively.

The second paper, titled “Navigating Brand Purpose in the Post-Pandemic Era: Insights from Marketing Agencies on Supporting SDGs through Strategic Delineation and Execution” by Alessandro Feri, Nicholas Ind and Nathalia Christiani Tjandra, explores the evolving role of brand purpose in a post-pandemic world. Specifically, it explores how marketing agencies help brands align their purpose with the UN SDGs through strategic development and implementation. The authors identify a gap in understanding the practical implications of brand purpose, particularly in aligning with SDGs while maintaining authenticity. The study employs a qualitative approach and draws insights from 35 semi-structured interviews with senior managers at UK-based marketing agencies. The findings reveal the multifaceted nature of brand purpose and its significance in stakeholder engagement. Also, the findings highlight the importance of authentic brand purpose. This means a brand’s purpose goes beyond profit and aligns with societal values, ultimately driving positive social impact. Marketing agencies play a crucial role in guiding brands to navigate the complexities of purpose-driven strategies, ensuring alignment with SDGs while maintaining authenticity and consistency in messaging and actions. The study highlights the need for authenticity, strategic alignment and consistent action to effectively engage stakeholders and contribute to societal well-being. Additionally, it contributes to the understanding of brand purpose as a transformative force, offering theoretical and managerial implications for effective brand management in the post-pandemic landscape. This study contributes to the special issue by exploring the evolving role of brand purpose in the post-pandemic era and aligns with “Consumers’ and organisations’ attitude and engagement towards the SDGs implementation” theme.

The third paper, authored by Maria Palazzo, Mandeep Kaur and Pantea Foroudi and titled “Circular supply chain management in post-pandemic context”, tackles a critical but under researched area. The study focuses on how knowledge, environmental initiatives and economic viability influence sustainability and uncover the barriers to implementing circular supply chain management (CSCM) in the food industry. The authors build on a lack of industry-specific analysis, limited focus on stakeholder perspectives and insufficient attention to practical implementation issues to uncover the major barriers for circular supply chain transition in the UK food supply chain. Using semi-structured interviews with 36 stakeholders from various stages of the food supply chain in the UK, the data analysis reveals several key barriers such as knowledge, perception towards environmental initiatives and economic viability. It also reveals that technical barrier, such as lack of circular economy specific technologies and order forecasting inaccuracy, hinder CSCM adoption. Additionally, the study reveals socio-cultural barriers to adoption, such as the lack of awareness and resistance to change, as well as structural and institutional barriers. The findings imply that a successful transition to CSCM in the UK food industry requires addressing these multifaceted barriers through strategies that encompass technological innovation, knowledge dissemination, policy support and shifts in consumer behaviour. The study contributes to this special issue by providing valuable insights into the barriers and

drivers of CSCM adoption and supports the special issue's goal of exploring sustainable business models in the post-pandemic context.

The fourth paper, authored by Suraksha Gupta, Mingxue Wei, Nektarios Tzempelikos and Matthew Shin and titled "Women Empowerment: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development Goals", explores how skill development programs can empower rural women in India by increasing their employability and inclusion in the labour market. It seeks to identify what matters most to these women for their empowerment and how they perceive skill development as a tool for achieving it. The authors identify a gap in the literature regarding the collaborative efforts needed from the government, education sector and corporate sector to make skill development programs for women a reality. While numerous studies have emphasised financial independence through employment, there is a lack of research on the combined role of different sectors in facilitating this empowerment. The study uses a qualitative research methodology, using in-depth semi-structured interviews with 28 rural women from various locales in India. The findings reveal that rural women view skill development as crucial for their empowerment, as it enhances their employability and enables them to take on leadership roles. Also, the findings uncover that rural women's financial independence is critical for boosting their self-esteem and overall well-being. Empowering women through skills development is crucial for fostering inclusive sustainability and socially responsible value creation in a post-pandemic world. This necessitates collaboration between governments, corporations and the education sector. By providing insights into the experiences and systemic challenges faced by rural women, this paper offers valuable empirical evidence for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). It emphasises the importance of inclusive approaches in sustainability efforts, especially amidst ongoing global crises.

The fifth paper titled, "The Retail Wellness Oasis: Conceptualizing Consumer Wellness in a Health Food Retailing Context" and authored by Deny Bélisle, Marie-Eve Chartrand, Gabrielle Patry-Beaudoin and Soumaya Cheikhrouhou, explores the dynamics of wellness in daily consumption, with a particular focus on the environment of health food stores. It traces the historical development of wellness from post-Second World War. While extant literature predominantly focuses on wellness in tourism contexts, leaving a gap in understanding its expression in routine marketplace engagements, this research aims to fill this gap. Employing interpretive qualitative methods, the study carried out in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 customers of six multi-branch health food retailers. The participants were recruited through targeted social media outreach. The findings highlight the emergence of a new concept, the "retail wellness oasis", revealing its role in promoting consumers' holistic wellness journey. Furthermore, the study goes beyond the usual focus on emotional well-being to include various dimensions of wellness, highlighting how the range of products available influences consumers' wellness experiences. The study suggests using the concept of the retail wellness oasis to distinguish stores and meet the preferences of wellness-oriented consumer preferences in various retail sectors. The paper contributes to this special issue by examining how health food retail environments can play a key role in promoting overall wellness among consumers. Retail settings can play an important role in post-crisis recovery and sustainable development through increasing consumer awareness and engagement with the UN SDGs. The paper offers insight on marketing approaches that capitalise on consumer interest in wellness. This aligns with the special issue's focus on new consumption models post-pandemic and how businesses can adapt to meet changing consumer expectations.

The sixth paper is authored by Pantea Foroudi, Dongmei Zha and Reza Marvi and titled: "Experience-Dominant Logic: Laying the Groundwork for an Experience-Dominant View of Firm Practices in the Marketplace". The study explores a new framework i.e. Experience-

Dominant Logic (Ex-D), to understand how firms create and manage customer experiences in the marketplace. It builds upon existing dominant logic models, such as Goods-Dominant (G-D) logic, Service-Dominant (S-D) logic and Customer-Dominant (C-D) logic. The authors identify a gap in existing dominant logic models, which tend to overlook the firm's perspective and the dynamic interplay between firm actions and customer perceptions. The research aims to address gaps in these models by incorporating insights from experiential marketing and focusing on the firm's perspective in shaping customer experiences. The study uses a qualitative approach, analysing eight product launch events and conducting 55 interviews with industry practitioners to identify key Ex-D logic practices. Key findings highlight four core Ex-D logic practices: mentalising customer needs, materialising customer journeys, moderating experiential values and modelling the firm's Ex-D logic. The study offers implications for both practitioners and academics, suggesting that firms should focus on understanding and shaping customer experiences actively. It also emphasises the need for further research to refine the Ex-D logic framework and explore its applications in diverse contexts. This study contributes to the special issue by introducing the concept of Experience-Dominant Logic as a new lens for understanding firm practices in creating and delivering customer experiences. It highlights the importance of experience-driven strategies in a post-pandemic era characterised by evolving consumer needs and behaviours.

Contributions

This special issue of *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal* provides several theoretical and practical contributions that further the understanding of business and consumption models to address the new challenges of the post pandemic context and its impact on the achievement of the UN SDGs. For instance, from an organisational perspective, four papers offer valuable insights for companies to understand and improve their CSR communication strategies by aligning their corporate values with the SDGs and by ensuring the fit between brands' purposes and societal values. Such fit is crucial for developing stakeholders' engagement. Contributions also highlight the necessity of designing strategies that secure a successful transition to circular supply chain management encompassing technological innovation, knowledge dissemination, policy support and shifts in consumer behaviour. It also provides insights into the critical role of fostering capacity building for social and economic actors to engage in resilience-building activities. In this line, empirical evidence supports the key role of empowering rural women skills and the need of assisting their businesses in the post pandemic context. This helps ensure sustainable outcomes, self-reliance, inclusivity and alleviates poverty.

From a consumer perspective, two papers shed light on consumer wellness and experience in the post-Covid context. They emphasise the requirement for organisations to tailor their marketing strategies to meet new consumers expectations and preferences. For instance, to enhance the consumers' wellness, the retailers have to co-create a "wellnesscape" with customers by offering appropriate product assortment, suitable store environment, and develop employees' competencies to deal with customer demand for wellness. In the same vein, drawing on experience driven strategy appears to be significantly important to address the evolving consumer needs and behaviours in the post-pandemic context.

The selected papers emphasised the need for designing new business and consumption models and implementing relevant marketing strategies to overcome the negative effect of the pandemic and achieve the UN SDGs. However, [Leal Filho et al. \(2023\)](#) suggest political and international conflicts threaten to derail the global commitment to achieving the goals by 2030. [Bin-Nashwan et al. \(2024\)](#), p. 3 add that peace and justice (SDG16) are "absolute prerequisite" to support other SDGs achievement. [Cojocararu et al. \(2022\)](#), p. 2 added that the

SDGs cannot be achieved separately and depend on the way “synergies are harnessed and trade-offs are addressed”. This calls for more studies to find out the suitable synergies and trade-offs particularly in countries that lack the necessary resources and infrastructures to implement the SDGs. This is important as it offers guidance for decision makers to cope with the challenges in fulfilling sustainability in post-crisis contexts.

We aspire that the articles included in this special issue will provide a stimulus for more insightful research on the topic.

We hope that you will enjoy reading the papers, and that you will gain insights there in!

Kaouther Kooli

Department of Marketing, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK

Hamida Skandrani

Department of Marketing, ISCAE, University of Manouba, Tunis, Tunisia

Ediz Edip Akcay

Department of Marketing, Business School, Bournemouth University, Poole, UK, and

Malek Sghaier

Department of Marketing, Tunis Campus, Université Dauphine Tunis, Tunis, Tunisia

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Further reading

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