

PLUS: A NEW PLAYBOOK FOR INCLUSIVE MARKETING STRATEGIES

QUARTERLY

MarketingNews

AMERICAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION AMA.ORG

WINTER 2025

— THE CMO SURVEY —

WHAT MARKETERS WOULD DO



WITH AN EXTRA \$1 MILLION



AMERICAN MARKETING
ASSOCIATION

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AMERICAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION

Mike Brady
Chairperson of the AMA Board 2024–2025
Bennie F. Johnson
AMA Chief Executive Officer
bjohnson@ama.org

EDITORIAL STAFF

Marilyn Stone, Director, Academic Communities and Journals; Editor in Chief
mstone@ama.org
Karin Horler, Senior Copy Editor, Academic Communities and Journals
khorler@ama.org
William Murphy, Designer
wmurphydesign.com

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES

Email sales@ama.org

Questions?

Adam Howard, Director of Sales Operations & Strategy
ahoward@ama.org

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Tel: (800) AMA-1150, (312) 542-9000

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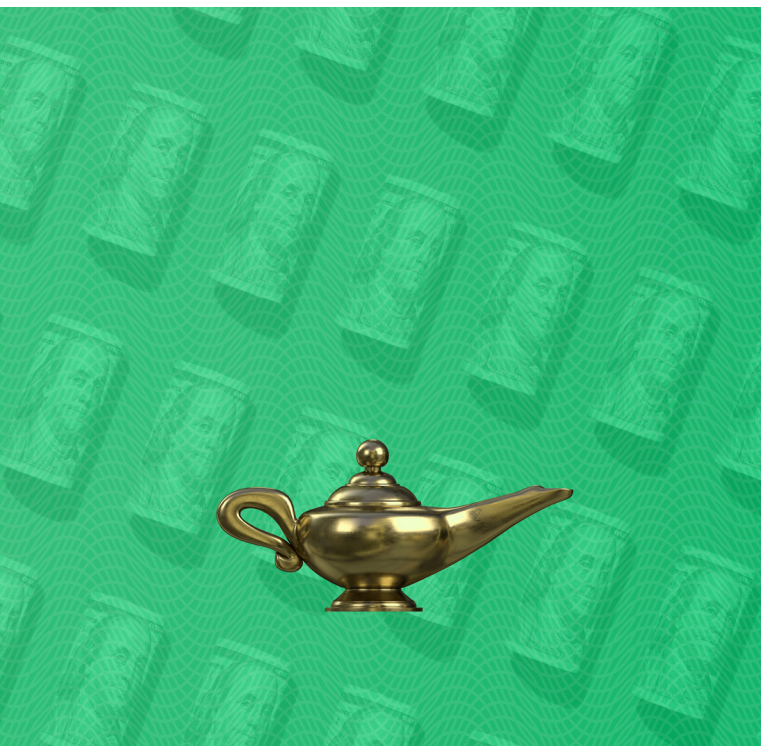
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What Marketers Would Do with an Extra \$1 Million

BY CHRISTINE MOORMAN, KENNEDY RALSTON,
AND JULIA REIFMAN

Every marketing organization would likely seize the opportunity to secure an additional \$1 million. According to the Spring 2024 edition of The CMO Survey, co-sponsored by the Fuqua School of Business, Deloitte, and the American Marketing Association, the largest proportion of marketing leaders indicated they would allocate these funds toward “hiring and developing talent.” This conclusion is drawn from a sample of 292 marketing leaders, 94% of whom hold VP-level positions or higher.

This finding resonates with a cross-industry survey conducted by BCG, which revealed that 72% of human resource leaders believe their companies lack the necessary talent. However, we were surprised by this emphasis on

talent development, particularly given the recent surge in artificial intelligence tools and marketing technology stacks. We had anticipated that marketing leaders might prioritize investments in digital tools and platforms to drive business growth.

We propose three key reasons why marketers have prioritized hiring and talent development, and we offer cautionary advice for those fortunate enough to receive a budget windfall.

1. Address Fundamental Issues Before Expanding Talent Pools

Resorting to hiring and talent development can serve as an easy escape for organizations grappling with significant operational challenges. However, addressing underlying issues is essential, as employing solely recruitment and training strategies may inadvertently sustain organizational inefficiencies. Simply put, organizations with flawed strategies cannot hire or train their way out of their problems.

Marketing leaders must first pinpoint the root causes of systemic problems before embarking on hiring or talent development initiatives. Are existing strategies outdated? Are the capabilities required to deploy talent lacking? Are training programs aligned with the right skill sets? Are suitable leaders in place? Such issues are typically more intricate than simply increasing hiring rates, yet they are often overlooked.

If fundamental issues are resolved and a talent gap persists, we recommend that marketing leaders consider two follow-up questions:

First, do the skills available within the organization align with the tasks at hand? Is there a discrepancy between employees’ current competencies and the new responsibilities expected of the marketing department? Identifying whether this gap stems from inadequate training or a lack of talent can be pivotal. Targeted training often proves to be more efficient, cost-effective, and impactful than large-scale hiring.

Second, is it possible to enhance the organization by refining existing processes, or is there a need to create entirely new approaches? Is there a demand for new expertise, or can innovative processes be developed internally? As with other business functions, marketers are increasingly leveraging automation and analytics to streamline operations and facilitate critical decision-making, which may enable them to reduce skill requirements for certain roles.

By addressing these pivotal questions, leaders can ascertain the most effective hiring strategies to overcome existing business challenges, thus optimizing the return on investment that marketing leaders seek.



2. Collaborate with HR to Enhance Employee Engagement and Retention

With the labor market for top talent remaining competitive, employees now possess greater autonomy, particularly in the context of remote work. Whether optimizing work-life balance, engaging in “quiet quitting,” exploring new job opportunities, or managing multiple roles, employees are reclaiming power from employers.

Marketers recognize that cultivating and sustaining an appealing workplace culture is vital for retaining talent and maintaining organizational momentum. Furthermore, platforms such as Indeed, Glassdoor, and Kununu offer prospective hires insights into various aspects of a company, including interview processes, salary ranges, and employee sentiments regarding leadership and professional development.

Consequently, marketers should regularly assess employee perceptions of their organizations. Are employees satisfied? Do they intend to remain with the company? What aspects of their professional development are most important to them?

Marketing leaders should collaborate closely with human resources (HR) to conduct these evaluations. According to the Spring 2023 edition of The CMO Survey, marketers rated their collaboration with HR below the average (3.5 on a seven-point scale), highlighting it as one of their weakest cross-functional relationships. This disconnect may limit valuable opportunities for gaining insights into employee acquisition, engagement, and retention. By working alongside HR, marketing leaders can identify employee challenges and develop resources and processes to enhance the overall work experience.

Top talent will expect a highly digital and automated work environment with access to the best tools for experimentation and innovation. A 2024 Guild survey found that approximately 81% of business executives are concerned about losing disengaged top performers. To mitigate this risk, marketing leaders should deploy engagement and pulse surveys alongside roundtables to solicit feedback regarding workplace conditions. They must also demonstrate progress in addressing concerns to sustain morale and retain valuable talent.

3. Strategize Recruitment in an Evolving Marketplace

Marketing organizations are competing fiercely to attract top professionals, recognizing that a skilled and talented

team can serve as a key differentiator. Marketing and HR should co-develop talent roadmaps that align with the overarching business strategy and update them frequently, given the rapid pace of changes in the marketplace and technology. By concentrating on core needs—such as insights, strategy, data science, and technology—marketing leaders can ensure that they allocate resources efficiently and refrain from inflating costs unnecessarily for skills that are not essential.

Moreover, top talent can serve as a powerful recruitment magnet; seasoned leaders and practitioners often draw in their talented peers, eager to collaborate and grow professionally.

However, there are critical cautions when engaging in the “buy versus build” mentality. Business strategies evolve continually, skill requirements shift rapidly, and economic downturns may strain available talent budgets. Therefore, marketers must be cautious about overpaying for talent or overhiring, as seen during the pandemic when organizations faced challenges in retaining newly acquired employees.

Hire and Develop Marketing Talent to Grow

Marketers today have access to an abundance of data and tools that can guide strategic development, facilitate key investments, and enhance customer connections. Nevertheless, some challenges persist and require attention.

Marketers should critically assess business challenges and address them directly, rather than masking systemic issues with hiring strategies. Collaborating with HR to cultivate a thriving workplace culture that not only attracts new talent but also retains existing employees is paramount. Furthermore, it is essential to avoid the pitfalls of overpaying or overhiring in response to potential changes in business requirements.

By thoughtfully considering growth imperatives alongside emerging opportunities, and evaluating them against business processes, skill requirements, and tools, marketers can allocate budgets effectively to address the right priorities. This approach may entail hiring and developing talent or investing in alternative strategic priorities that yield substantial returns. **MM**

Christine Moorman is the founder and managing director of The CMO Survey and the T. Austin Finch Sr. Professor of Business Administration, Fuqua School of Business, Duke University. Kennedy Ralston is a second-year MBA student at the Fuqua School of Business, Duke University. Julia Reifman is a second-year MBA student at the Fuqua School of Business, Duke University.

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A New Playbook

Engaging with Intersectionality to Guide Inclusive Marketing Strategies

BY ESTHER UDUEHI, JULIAN SAINT CLAIR, AND ROWENA CRABBE

The central narrative in the latest season of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) was the rivalry between the Indiana Fever's Caitlin Clark and the Chicago Sky's Angel Reese. Many have debated how young, talented women like Clark and Reese will help grow the WNBA, but it is still unknown how race and gender can impact the marketing around their teams and the league. In

other words, few scholars have explored intersectionality as a perspective to understand the dynamics of female sports.

In a new *Journal of Marketing* study, we offer a framework for how marketing research can better incorporate intersectional marketing practices. We provide a paradigm and step-by-step guidance for marketing to engage with intersectionality. By following our roadmap, the field of marketing will not only better understand situations like racial differences in the WNBA, and contrast it with the NBA, but also predict and thoughtfully navigate these occurrences.

As marketing tackles challenges such as emerging technology, political divergence, and data replicability, we argue intersectionality offers a critical perspective and can shift how we view marketing and consumption. Intersectionality highlights systems of privilege and oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) and turns theoretical social categories into interconnected consumer lived experiences.



Engaging with Intersectionality

Our project identifies three key components to engage with intersectionality: a definition, a framework, and a roadmap.

- Defining intersectionality includes considering overlapping identities simultaneously (e.g., race and gender) and examining how consumers living at these intersections uniquely experience advantage and disadvantage in the marketplace. Reese's rise to fame as a Black woman is not the same as the experience of a White woman like Clark, for example. Their experiences as women are tied to their race, and vice versa.
- Adopting an intersectional framework requires centering consumer experience of (dis)advantage as a critical factor in any situation. Marketplace interactions, shopping trips, or consumption situations are all informed by the societal context, both past and present. The conversation about Reese and Clark is deeply embedded in the history of gender disparity in sports. It is impossible to fully understand and navigate such situations without that context.
- The roadmap for engaging with intersectionality requires critical reflection at every stage of the process, whether it is marketing research, brand strategy, or policy making. What identities are we focusing on and whose experiences are being excluded? What role does power and advantage/disadvantage play for different groups of consumers in this context? How can we avoid over-generalizing across consumer groups?

Working through the prism of intersectionality has transformative implications for how managers operate and how consumers live. For instance, any brand involved in sports (e.g., Nike, Gatorade) needs to be intentionally conscious of the history of gender and race in sports. Fashion and beauty brands need to be conscious of beauty standards and cultural appropriation. Food brands need to be conscious of food justice. Technology brands need to be conscious of the digital divide.

Lessons for Chief Marketing Officers

Consider the following questions when crafting marketing strategies and tactics:

- How might similarities and differences across intersections in norms and access to resources/power

influence stakeholders' lived experiences (and thereby their behavior)?

- How might stakeholders with different overlapping identities (e.g., race, gender, class) be (dis)advantaged by specific policies and practices?
- Consider whether the strategic or tactical thesis behind a particular policy is based on data that are not representative of the affected stakeholders. Whose data are absent? Who is missing from the decision-making table?

The experience of advantage and disadvantage at different intersections of identity impacts the daily decisions of consumers. Denying this reality only alienates the very people who managers and policy makers are trying to serve. And given that the experience of disadvantage can come from so many different intersections of identities—age, gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and so on—it is actually the vast majority of people in the marketplace whose intersectional experiences go unseen. By engaging with intersectionality, marketing can better understand and serve understudied consumers.

To summarize, embracing intersectionality exposes the power structures within the marketplace and increases marketing's benefit to society and its ability to reflect and address the complexities of real-world behavior. Currently, measures are often developed and validated from a dominant perspective to explain broad contexts, ignoring the possibility that people at various identity intersections may experience the world differently.

Through our intersectional marketing paradigm and intersectional marketing research design roadmap, we offer directions and recommendations for all researchers as a path toward new questions that can be applied across research domains. For marketing to be at the forefront of inclusive and useful solutions, we must truly embrace the intersectional world the marketplace occupies. **MN**



READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Esther Uduéhi, Julian Saint Clair, and Rowena Crabbe, "Intersectionality in Marketing: A Paradigm for Understanding Understudied Consumers," *Journal of Marketing*.



When Inclusive Marketing Doesn't Resonate

How Brands Can Build Trust in Inclusivity-Focused Product Lines

BY JENNIFER K. D'ANGELO, LEA DUNN, AND FRANCESCA VALSESIA

To better represent consumers who have traditionally been underrepresented in the marketplace, an increasing number of brands are extending or launching product lines that are more inclusive of a diverse consumer base.


In a new *Journal of Marketing* study, we find that inclusivity initiatives may not be seen as equally positive by all consumers. Though these initiatives are generally met with positivity, consumers who feel underrepresented in the marketplace—the very consumers these initiatives intend to serve—may respond less favorably than represented consumers. Our research team examines how feeling underrepresented can increase consumers' skepticism about whether the products in these expanded lines will fit their needs.

Underrepresentation in the Marketplace

When consumers feel underrepresented in the marketplace, they are likely experiencing product and consumption situations in which their needs are either unconsidered, unheard, or misconstrued by companies. We find that consumers of all races feel underrepresented and, not surprisingly, feelings of representation are strongly correlated with race. In the 2020 United States Census, Black and Hispanic consumers accounted for 30.8% of the population, with the White population decreasing from 63.7% of the population to 57.8%. Despite this, White consumers have been the primary focus for skin tone related products—with many brands offering a truncated range of skin tones. As such, many consumers are left using products that do not fully meet their needs.

We suggest that consumers' past experiences create an expectation that new products, even in different product categories, may not meet their needs. This hesitancy creates a sense of product fit skepticism: doubting whether the product will actually match skin tone needs. In turn, this product fit skepticism limits the extent of positive brand attitudes.

Consumers want to know that these extensions are more than just a marketing tactic.



Across several studies we find that product line extensions aimed at inclusivity are met with more positive responses from represented consumers. Underrepresented consumers, however, have lower positive responses. We find that these lower responses span a wide range of parameters: attitude, click-through/engagement with marketing endeavors, interest in purchase, and sharing information about the product with others. This lower attitude is not because underrepresented consumers are more negative toward brand innovations overall. In fact, we find that this lower brand attitude only persists for product line extensions that are aimed at inclusivity versus general innovation. These consumers have a higher feeling that the product will not fit or match their needs.

What Can Companies Do?

How can companies better meet and articulate the needs of their consumers? We find that demonstrating respect for a consumer's needs can help boost reception of product line extensions. Specifically, underrepresented consumers are less likely to believe that their needs are taken into account during the product development stage. When a company can show that underrepresented consumers' specific needs have been taken into account and voices have been heard, underrepresented consumers may be less skeptical and more open to the product.

We find different avenues through which a company can demonstrate respect:

- **Customization**, which allows consumers to closely tailor their experiences, could reduce questions about whether the product can truly meet their needs.
- **Brand positioning**, a longer-term marketing tool, can demonstrate that the company cares about the needs of underrepresented consumers.

For example, Fenty Beauty's "Beauty for All" campaign chose representative celebrity spokespeople, utilized social media to reignite the conversation around diversity in the beauty industry, and involved beauty scientists of color

during product development. This likely converged to create a positioning of high respect of consumer needs.

In other words, companies need to show that their approach is not a one-off activation but part of the brand's strategic positioning prior to launch. They need to continually articulate their positions on representation and act upon their goals even after launching products targeted at underrepresented customers. Consumers want to know that these extensions are more than just a marketing tactic.

Companies should also note that certain consumer characteristics are often correlated with feelings of representation. For instance, we find that feelings of representation in skin tone products correlate with gender (i.e., female-identifying consumers feel more represented) and political orientation (i.e., the more conservative, the more one feels represented). The strongest correlation we find is with race (i.e., white consumers feel significantly more represented). Marketers may be able to use these more observable consumer characteristics as a proxy to identify consumers with lower feelings of representation and determine who might be more skeptical of their inclusivity initiatives.

Altogether, we show that while inclusivity-based product line extensions are generally viewed favorably in the marketplace, underrepresented consumers are still skeptical and show lower response and engagement with the brand. If companies truly want to serve the needs of a diverse consumer base, they must be willing to put in the work to demonstrate respect and ongoing care for their consumers—especially those who have not felt represented within the marketplace. **MN**



READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Jennifer K. D'Angelo, Lea Dunn, and Francesca Valsesia, "Is This for Me? Differential Responses to Skin Tone Inclusivity Initiatives by Underrepresented Consumers and Represented Consumers," *Journal of Marketing*.



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ANNOUNCING THE *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* SPECIAL ISSUE

Marketing to End War, Create Peace, and Enhance Sustainable Well-Being

Responsible marketing, policy, and consumer behavior are integral to ending wars, creating peace, and enhancing sustainable well-being. The January 2025 special issue of the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* brings together marketing research intended to prevent or alleviate negative consequences from war and violent conflict. It features 11 articles by globally dispersed researchers, motivated by keen awareness of the harmful effects of systemic violence—and by examples of policies, products, and services that have brought relief amid devastation and dispossession.

Their timely, compelling work shows how marketing scholarship and practice can advance well-being for populations suffering from systemic violence and related destruction, deprivation, and uncertainty. The articles address marketing and public policy–related topics such as:

- The Russia–Ukraine war
- Refugees, forced displacement, and migration
- Brand and marketing activism
- Marketing communications, corporate legitimacy, and responsibility
- Peace negotiations and reconciliation
- Colonization and neocolonization
- Community and nation resilience
- Recovery and rebirth

This special issue makes clear that constructive, coordinated policy and marketing innovations are vital to resolving conflict and creating and sustaining peace and prosperity.

AMA members have access to this special issue and all AMA journals. Log in at ama.org for member access, and find the special issue content at ama.marketing/peace.

See the Research Insights on page 24 for a closer look at some of these articles.

“Better understanding of marketing and policy and their influence on communities, families, and individuals in the specific contexts of violent conflict ... are requisite for a safer, fairer, healthier, and more peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.”

—FROM THE SPECIAL ISSUE CALL FOR PAPERS



The Ambassador Effect

Companies Can Increase Sustainable Behavior by Urging Consumers to Become Prosocial Ambassadors

BY CORINNE M.K. HASSLER, MARTIN MENDE,
MAURA L. SCOTT, AND LISA E. BOLTON

Recently, the apparel company Tentree introduced an ambassador program to seek out customers “committed to a greener future” to “join the collective” and inspire other consumers to protect the world. Similarly, the sustainability-focused nonprofit 5 Gyres Institute has a program where global ambassadors pledge to “live plastic-free by embodying and promoting a

reusable culture” and speaking up about “the long-lasting harms of plastic.”

Increasingly, companies are attempting ways to contribute toward a sustainable future, such as reducing the use of single-use plastic shopping bags. In a new *Journal of Marketing* study, we explore scenarios in which people take on an ambassador role to support a cause—that is, they (a) personally commit to a prosocial behavior (e.g., decide to use a reusable shopping bag) and (b) interpersonally promote that behavior (i.e., encourage another person to also use reusable shopping bags).

Our research focuses on two key questions:

- What is required of a consumer to become a prosocial ambassador?
- How does taking on a prosocial ambassador role impact that ambassador’s subsequent prosocial behavior?

An organization only needs to encourage the ambassador to involve one other person in the prosocial behavior. Importantly, firms do not need to provide a financial incentive to induce the ambassador role.

The Effect of a Promotional Role on a Promoter

We build on research on referrals and word of mouth (WOM) to examine individuals who are independent from a firm (unlike brand ambassadors) but who engage in interpersonal promotion of a firm's product. We also look at influencers, who are paid opinion leaders with a significant social following. Most research on referrals, influencers, and WOM examines promoters' influence on their audiences or promoters' impact on firm-related outcomes. Little research has examined how taking on a promotional role impacts the promoter's own behavior.

We conducted four experiments to examine the ambassador role and find that consumers are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviors after taking on a prosocial ambassador role. In particular, we observe that grocery customers who adopted the ambassador role are more likely to use a reusable shopping bag than those who only personally committed to the prosocial behavior. Overall, the ambassador effect represents a new intervention to further enrich corporate social responsibility and firm efforts to contribute to the triple bottom line paradigm (i.e., people, planet, and profit).

The three main insights from our studies are:

1. Combining personal commitment and interpersonal promotion increases prosocial behavior beyond personal commitment alone.
2. The ambassador effect elicits a systematic increase in consumers' collective identity—i.e., a sense of being a contributing member of a group, shifting them from “I” to a part of “we” that then drives prosocial behavior.
3. Inducing prosocial ambassadorship does not require firms to provide financial incentives nor does it require that the party to which the behavior is being interpersonally promoted receive financial or tangible incentives. This is an important distinction between prosocial ambassadorship and referral programs; the former can be executed via simply communicating with another person (e.g., texting).

Lessons for Chief Marketing Officers

Our study offers valuable lessons for marketers and other stakeholders:

Context

Organizations need to understand the contexts in which interventions work. Our research offers organizations a

framework for designing ambassadorship interventions across a variety of prosocial contexts. Small and large organizations and for-profit as well as not-for-profit/consumer advocacy organizations can draw on our work to encourage prosociality.

Costs

The investment required of organizations to induce the ambassador role seems rather reasonable in time and monetary expense, and simplistic in operation/procedure. An organization only needs to encourage the ambassador to involve one other person in the prosocial behavior. Importantly, firms do not need to provide a financial incentive to induce the ambassador role. In fact, it is conceivable that ambassadorship programs could create additional revenues if the focal products (e.g., reusable bags, reusable beverage containers) are offered for sale related to “buy-one, give-one for 50% off” or even as full-priced “ambassador bundles.”

Longevity

It is important for organizations to understand the longevity of the effects a focal intervention can elicit. Our work suggests that the ambassador effect is not merely situational or transient, but has the potential to impact consumers over extended periods. Organizations might use an ambassadorship program to re-engage consumers after certain time periods to remind them of their ambassador role and potentially even deepen/broaden the consumer-organization relationship. Relatedly, organizations might be able to leverage the “collective identity” of their ambassadors to facilitate consumer-organization bonding, further promoting consumer loyalty and brand reputation.

Overall, our research uncovers a novel approach to leverage marketing for good. Our findings suggest that consumers can increase their own prosocial behavior by serving as prosocial ambassadors. Marketing organizations can support this practice via various low-cost approaches (e.g., text messaging, modest product giveaways), making it a win-win-win for marketers, consumers, and creating a sustainable society. **MN**



READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Corinne M.K. Hassler, Martin Mende, Maura L. Scott, and Lisa E. Bolton, “The Prosocial Ambassador Effect: Adopting an Ambassador Role Increases Sustainable Behavior,” *Journal of Marketing*.



Do Self-Donations Work in Fundraising?

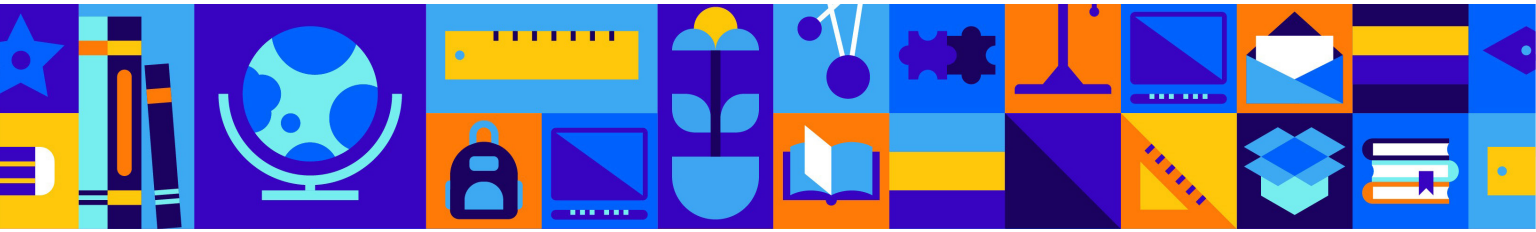
A New Study Finds That Creators Who Contribute Their Own Funds See Better Results

BY ZHUPING LIU, QIANG GAO, AND RAGHUNATH SINGH RAO

As per Giving USA, Americans contributed a record \$557.16 billion to education, religion, human services, public health, and many other causes in 2023.

Traditional charities have historically used celebrity events, galas, public service announcements, and advertisements to solicit contributions. More recently, online crowdfunding platforms like GoFundMe and DonorsChoose have taken another route: By providing a direct connection with potential donors, they have eliminated the need for expensive marketing investments.

In a new *Journal of Marketing* study, we find that project stewards who contribute to their own campaigns within online crowdfunding platforms are significantly more likely to achieve funding success. This practice of self-donation serves as a powerful signaling tool. It highlights the project's quality and importance, boosts the pace of donations, increases the total amount contributed, and enhances the overall likelihood of reaching funding goals. As nonprofits and educational causes increasingly rely on



crowdfunding platforms, our research reveals how self-donation can effectively support these efforts.

Our team analyzed millions of donations on DonorsChoose, a well-known platform where teachers seek funds for classroom supplies, educational projects, and other instructional needs. We discovered that when teachers make visible self-donations to their projects, it strongly signals the project's value and the teacher's commitment. Our findings underscore that the effectiveness of self-donation is not solely about the amount contributed but also about the timing and visibility of these donations.

By investing their own money into their projects, teachers are more likely to attract additional support. This is particularly important for early-stage projects or for teachers who are new to the platform and have yet to build a reputation. A well-timed and visible self-donation at the start of a campaign can significantly increase the likelihood of reaching the funding goal. We also find that larger self-donations prove more effective in achieving fundraising goals. Further, projects involving a self-donation are more likely to send impact letters to donors to provide additional, yet indirect, evidence of the correlation between quality and self-donation.

Platforms should encourage project stewards to make visible self-donations as a means of improving the matching efficiency between donors and high-quality projects. This could involve highlighting self-donations on project landing pages or recommending projects based on the donor's behavior. Such strategies could boost overall campaign success rates, benefiting both teachers and the students they serve.

A Viable Fundraising Strategy

The implications of our study extend to the broader educational community. School administrators and district leaders should encourage teachers to use self-donation as a fundraising strategy. In an era of tight school budgets, empowering teachers with effective fundraising tools can significantly enhance the quality of education that students receive. From the perspective of crowdfunding platforms like DonorsChoose, supporting and facilitating self-donation could improve the overall effectiveness of their services.

Our findings extend beyond the educational sector. The principle of self-donation can be applied in various contexts, including political campaigns and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. For instance, political candidates often contribute their own funds to signal their dedication, and companies publicly donate a portion of

their profits to enhance their reputations. In each case, self-contribution acts as a powerful indicator of commitment and quality and tends to influence the behavior of others.

Platforms might develop features that make it easier for project stewards to make visible self-donations or to highlight these contributions to potential donors. Additionally, providing guidelines or best practices for teachers on strategically timing their self-donations could maximize impact.

Lessons for Chief Marketing Officers

- The visibility of self-donations is crucial for fundraising. Individuals and organizations should be aware of the risks of anonymous self-donations.
- The frequency, recency, and amount of self-donations should be carefully planned to maximize their impact on fundraising success. Ideally, a single self-donation at the project's outset can optimize its funding prospects.
- Platforms can highlight self-donations on the project landing page and encourage self-donations during the donation process to increase the project funding rate.

Our research offers valuable insights for teachers, crowdfunding platforms, and other stakeholders involved in online fundraising. By leveraging self-donation as a signaling mechanism, educators can increase their chances of successfully funding their projects, thus enhancing educational experiences for their students. Crowdfunding platforms can improve their services by supporting and promoting self-donation strategies. We encourage all stakeholders to incorporate these findings into their practices to create more successful and impactful fundraising campaigns.

The effects of self-donation may vary in more complex contexts where funds go directly to fundraisers and could raise moral concerns. We encourage scholars to extend our theory by examining the impact of self-donations in other contexts. Future research may also study the dynamic interactions among donors during the donation process. **MN**



READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Zhuping Liu, Qiang Gao, and Raghunath Singh Rao, "Self-Donations and Charitable Contributions in Online Crowdfunding: An Empirical Analysis," *Journal of Marketing*.



If You Won't Be Green, Then I Will!

When Do Consumers Compensate for Their Partners' Unsustainable Behavior?

BY CAROLINA CUERVO-ROBERT AND NAGENDRA S M,
IN CONVERSATION WITH AYLIN CAKANLAR, HRISTINA
NIKOLOVA, AND GERGANA Y. NENKOV

In the midst of a climate change crisis, it is urgent to encourage and normalize sustainable actions among individuals—especially because people fall into unsustainable behavior patterns so easily. Social influence and social norms play a huge role in fostering these unsustainable habits, as seeing others behave in unsustainable ways can justify and even fuel an individual's own unsustainable activity. And who influences us more than our relationship partner? Understanding how individuals in committed romantic relationships behave can be insightful for companies and policymakers, as it provides insights on how to best target couples to either promote sustainable consumption or encourage sustainable behavior in the household. In a recent *Journal of Marketing Research* article, Aylin Cakanlar, Hristina Nikolova, and Gergana Y. Nenkov explore how people respond to their partner's unsustainable behavior.

Across seven studies, including field and online studies, the researchers examine both hypothetical and real as well as public and private sustainable behaviors to show how one's partner influences their sustainable actions. The authors

find that when individuals are in a high power position in the relationship, they feel more responsible about their identity as a couple, which leads them to compensate for their partner's unsustainable choices. By doing so, they are able to maintain a sustainable couple identity. This only happens when the person is in a high power position in the relationship. They also find that the effect is attenuated when the person has a weak green identity, meaning they don't care as much about the environment and that protecting it is not as important for them.

The authors provide robustness to their findings by showing how they can apply to a variety of situations. They find that exposing people to their partners' unsustainable behaviors can increase intention to behave sustainably and interest in taking action to learn more about sustainable services, as well as donation giving and sustainable product selection.

How Can Marketers Use This Research?

Policymakers and marketers targeting couples to encourage sustainable behaviors or the purchase of sustainable products can act on this knowledge. As individuals with high relationship power tend to compensate for their partners' unsustainable behaviors when they care about maintaining a positive and sustainable couple identity, businesses and other entities can build specific discourses leveraging this to increase sustainable choices among households. Indeed, it could be possible to design campaigns highlighting a person's responsibility to build a sustainable couple identity, or highlighting how the selection of one sustainable product over another could reflect positively on the couple. It is also worth keeping in mind that high power is circumstantial: one person might hold more power over specific decisions in certain contexts than in others. As such, it could be possible to target high-power individuals by developing proxies. For example, the authors do this by targeting women in a wedding planning ad.

In our quest to learn more about this research project and gain additional insights, we had a chance to confer with the authors. These are the insights they shared with us:

Q Marketing research often looks at the effects of social influence on an individual's sustainable behavior. However, it is not often that we see articles focused on the influence of a relationship partner on sustainable behavior. What was the motivation behind such an idea?

A All three of us have observed our partners making unsustainable choices. We were all personally interested in understanding how our partners' unsustainable choices might affect our own choices.

Many studies in the sustainable behavior literature have examined how observing the (un)sustainable behaviors

of socially distant others, such as outgroup members and neighbors, affects consumers' own sustainable behavior. However there was no research examining how consumers' own sustainability-relevant behaviors are influenced by their romantic relationship partners' unsustainable behaviors. Given that a romantic partner likely exerts the greatest influence on one's behavior, we addressed this gap by examining how sustainable choices are influenced by romantic partners' unsustainable choices.

Q It can be challenging for researchers to dive into aspects of consumers' daily lives. In your article, you manage to dive into very personal areas of consumer behavior. Did you encounter any specific challenges in doing so?

A Studying dyadic decision making is inherently difficult, but studying sequential sustainability-related decisions made by partners in a couple is even more complicated. One of the main challenges was conducting a field study. Given that recruiting romantic partners is highly expensive and time consuming, conducting a field study in which we allowed one partner to make a choice and had the other observe it required a lot of time, effort, and creativity. We had to enlist a small army of research assistants who worked tirelessly on the Boston College campus to recruit employees and carry out our complicated procedure. For our online studies, we always recruited married participants, and for one study, we recruited both spouses from Amazon Mechanical Turk, which was highly challenging. Participating couples had to complete a long and complicated procedure in which they took a photo of one of each spouse's hands with their MTurk ID number written on a piece of paper. In these studies, we gave a lot of thought to ensure that participants could observe their partners' choices and that the study would run smoothly for all participants.

Q In your Facebook study, you focus on the wedding planning context as, traditionally, women hold higher power in the decision making. Did you encounter any specific campaigns aiming to increase couples' sustainable behaviors? If not, in which other contexts could your findings be applied?

A While we did not find any existing campaigns to encourage couples to engage in sustainable behaviors, there are campaigns in other domains, such as charitable giving (e.g., volunteering as a couple). Our findings can be relevant to the many sustainable products for couples, such as sustainable honeymoons and conflict-free diamond rings. For instance, as demonstrated by our Facebook study, relationship power dynamics may change depending on the context (e.g., one partner

being responsible for grocery shopping). Marketers can capture consumers' purchasing habits and demographic information through loyalty programs, allowing them to use other socioeconomic variables (e.g., gender, income) as proxies of relationship power to target high-relationship power consumers with advertisements that highlight their partners' unsustainable behaviors.

Q Beyond the uniqueness of the romantic partner behavior influence in sustainable choices, you argue that the effects observed in your paper are unique to sustainable behaviors (and not other healthy or moral behaviors). Why do you think this is the case?

A Yes, we found no evidence that power dynamics have influence in the context of healthy consumption (e.g., whether seeing one's partner eat something unhealthy influences one's own healthy choices), but it is possible that power dynamics influence other behaviors that have implications for not only the self but also others. Given that individuals with high relationship power feel responsible for reconstructing the couple's identity after being exposed to their partner's socially undesirable behaviors—unsustainable behavior in our context—such individuals may try to compensate for their partners' behavior in other domains where negative partner behaviors might hurt the couple's identity (e.g., prosocial behavior).

Q As sustainability is becoming a critical issue for consumers and companies, firms will look for insights to help them promote their sustainable practices. How can managers build on your research findings to mainstream sustainable behavior among couples?

A First, our results show that highlighting a partner's unsustainable behavior can increase engagement in sustainable behavior among high-relationship power individuals and does not reduce the sustainable behavior of those with low relationship power. This suggests that highlighting a partner's unsustainable behavior in advertisements can be an effective strategy when targeting consumers in romantic relationships. Second, our research identifies two important factors that can increase the sustainable behavior of married consumers: perceived responsibility for constructing the couple's sustainable identity and a desire to signal a positive couple identity. Marketers can develop advertisements that encourage partners to take responsibility for their couple's identity (e.g., "it is your responsibility to make your household sustainable") to prompt those with low relationship power to increase their engagement in sustainable behaviors.



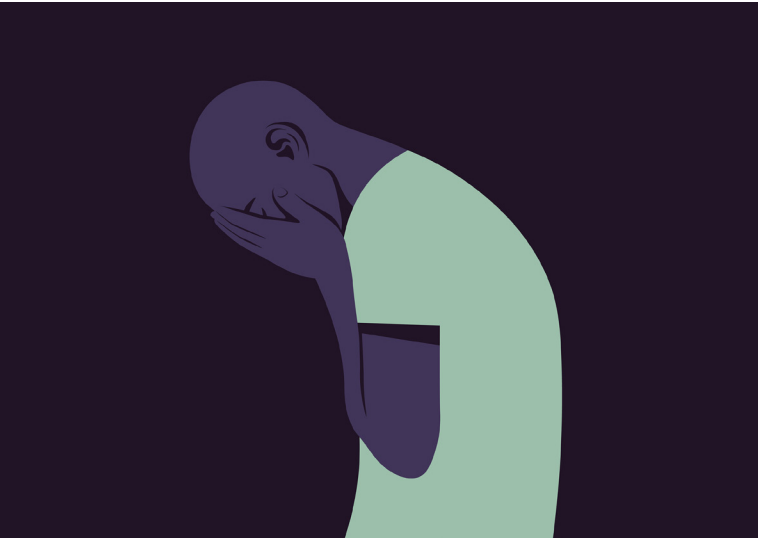
Q We constantly see policies being implemented worldwide to promote sustainable behaviors among individuals. Yet targeting households could lead to improved results. How could policymakers build on your findings to promote long-term sustainability among couples?

A One implication of our research is that policymakers should tailor their sustainability communications according to individuals' marital status. For instance, highlighting one's negative behaviors (e.g., unsustainable behavior) directly may backfire when trying to increase an individual's sustainable behaviors. Our results show that highlighting a romantic partner's unsustainable behavior can be effective. Moreover, as mentioned, perceived responsibility for constructing the couple's sustainable identity and the desire to signal a positive couple identity are important factors in a couple's engagement in sustainable behavior. Therefore, it is important for policymakers to consider consumers' social relationships when promoting long-term sustainability among couples. For example, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency shares information and pictures on social media such as Instagram that aim to increase household recycling rates. Our research demonstrates that such government agencies should consider appeals that enhance one's perceived responsibility for constructing a sustainable identity as a couple. For example, to promote long-term sustainability, policymakers can regularly expose couples to advertisements that encourage each of them to take responsibility for the couple's sustainable identity. **MN**



READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Aylin Cakanlar, Hristina Nikolova, and Gergana Y. Nenkov, "I Will Be Green for Us: When Consumers Compensate for Their Partners' Unsustainable Behavior," *Journal of Marketing Research*.



When It Feels Wrong to Feel Good

Consumers Don't Want "Corrective" Content After Exposure to Human Suffering

BY GASPARD JOLIVET AND CHRISTIAN ARROYO MERA
WITH STEPHANIE C. LIN, TALY REICH, AND
TAMAR A. KREPS

Human suffering is an inherent aspect of the human condition, and we encounter instances of it in various forms on a daily basis. Through news reports on global tragedies, viral content depicting suffering, or even empathizing with fictional characters' hardships in different media, we are constantly exposed to the pain of others. Hedonic principles of emotion regulation suggest that people innately look for pleasurable experiences to repair negative emotions in an attempt to feel good. This would mean that consumers turn to more lighthearted choices as a means of "emotional repair" after being exposed to human suffering—but is this the case?

In a recent *Journal of Marketing Research* article, researchers Stephanie C. Lin, Taly Reich, and Tamar A. Kreps offer a fresh perspective on this notion: They argue that after experiencing human suffering, consumers

do not prefer hedonic choices. Across five studies, the authors show that, following encounters with human suffering, individuals may perceive seeking mood-enhancing consumption to be morally wrong. Because human suffering has a moral component that prompts us to empathize and care for others' well-being, individuals may feel compelled to prolong negative emotions instead. In fact, people may feel guilty about engaging in hedonism when others are suffering. The findings held for different samples and for different types of visual content (documentaries, films, and short videos).

The results of this study highlight the strategic importance of timing when it comes to presenting hedonic content. The findings are stronger for individuals in which morality is an important part of their identity. The results can be mitigated when the hedonic content presented after experiencing suffering is morally relevant. One example of this would be a hedonic experience that benefits those who suffered.

Relevance for Marketing Managers

When consumers experience human suffering, they feel it is immoral to immediately feel better, which subsequently leads them to avoid consumption that provides pleasure. These findings hold significant relevance for managers. This project provides insights into how to target ads and content, particularly in the digital media landscape. Brands must design their advertising campaigns in a way that considers the other content consumers may encounter. If consumers engage with content associated with suffering, they'll be less likely to then choose to view more hedonic content. Therefore, brands should target their ads to align with consumers' interests and habitual consumption patterns.

Moreover, companies should consider sequencing the choices that they present to consumers. For instance, media companies should prioritize the display of non-suffering-related content before displaying hedonic content. Conversely, it may be opportune to present consumption experiences that evoke a sense of morality immediately after exposure to content depicting suffering.

Given the project's relevance in understanding consumer decision making, we reached out to the authors to learn more about this study:

Q Regarding practical recommendations, we could extend the analysis by using a mix that generates a set of negative emotions in the context of moral well-being. For example, could this be used in charity campaigns?

A Yes, our research suggests that after viewing human suffering, people would rather see things like charitable appeals rather than fun frivolous content. We have some other work (in progress) on how sequences on social media are upsetting when they are about human suffering followed by frivolous content relative to human suffering followed by morally relevant positive content (similar to our choice studies, but in a social media sequencing context).

Q In terms of consequential outcomes, you provide many interesting findings regarding participants choosing what content to watch or what activities to engage in after experiencing human suffering. Would your results hold even when participants pay for the subsequent experiences? For instance, what if they see the content and then have to order food? Would they choose more food that retains their emotions or more food that provides them with pleasure, such as unhealthy food?

A We are currently thinking about our results in the context of purchase behavior. We have a large dataset that suggests that, in a real context, people spend less money following a human tragedy. Follow-up correlational data suggest that people avoid spending specifically on hedonic (versus utilitarian) products. We are designing experiments to test these findings.

Q What were the most surprising or unexpected findings of this project?

A I do not think any of the findings were particularly “surprising” per se, as we theorized strongly about the studies ahead of time. I guess one finding that we did not hypothesize and found intriguing was the fact that people didn’t feel the need to keep feeling negatively about purity violations. This is quite a peripheral finding with regard to the rest of the paper, so we do not pay much attention to it in the text, but I think that there are some interesting implications for that finding regarding morality and emotions. In the future, I will be interested in further examining that effect.

Q How much theoretical knowledge did you decide to provide respondents with? For example, with the passage on the genocide in Rwanda, how did you determine the degree of precision that would guarantee homogeneous anchoring among respondents with heterogeneous prior knowledge of the subject?

A Although it is possible that our effect would be moderated by prior familiarity with a topic, we reasoned that we should expect our effect to occur even for those who know relatively little about it. Thus, we were not concerned about heterogeneous prior knowledge, as we thought the effect should occur across the population generally (perhaps weaker among those who have less familiarity).

Q How long do you expect these effects to last? Will people likely choose to sustain their emotions for immediate subsequent choices only, or will these effects affect decisions beyond the immediate ones? How would the products influence the decision-making process when there are many simultaneous decisions at play? Is one decision that shows “moral appropriateness” enough for consumers?

A We discuss this in the General Discussion [of the full study]. First, consumers do not find hedonic consumption to be inappropriate following content about human suffering if the hedonic content is morally relevant (rather than frivolous; Study 4a). Second, consumers who saw themselves as more moral felt especially strongly that hedonic consumption would be inappropriate and thus showed a stronger preference to avoid hedonic consumption (Study 4b). Together, these mediation and moderation results provide strong evidence that consumers avoid hedonic consumption following content about human suffering, specifically because of what they see as their moral duties in this situation.

Q What about the voluntary consumption of the macabre or even pain to reconnect with the saturated self (Scott et al. 2017)? Respondents, especially those who claim to be more moral (Study 4), seem saturated, rather than repairing their emotions with hedonistic consumption. Can we anticipate self-punishment or catharsis?

A Broadly, we do not think about our effect as one of self-punishment but rather as one of other-focused emotions. That is, they feel that others deserve empathy and respect. **MN**



READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Stephanie C. Lin, Taly Reich, and Tamar A. Kreps, “Feeling Good or Feeling Right: Sustaining Negative Emotion After Exposure to Human Suffering,” *Journal of Marketing Research*.



For more insights from the special issue on Marketing to End War, Create Peace, and Enhance Sustainable Well-Being, visit ama.marketing/peace.

Research Insights: Marketing to Enhance Sustainable Well-Being

Quick Takes from AMA Journals Research

BY T.J. ANDERSON

Corporate Response to the War in Ukraine and Its Impact on Consumer Mindset

When geopolitical conflicts arise, how do firms' decisions to withdraw from (or stay in) a market affect consumer perceptions? This study finds that consumers tended to react positively when firms withdrew from the Russian market in response

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to the war in Ukraine, challenging prior studies that suggested negative outcomes from corporate sociopolitical activism.

Firms with strong environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reputations see a more positive response than other firms. Thus, a strong ESG reputation bolsters a firm's standing in crisis situations and differentiates it from competitors.

Timing and manner of withdrawal also matter: Aligning with early

actions by industry peers can reduce backlash and foster understanding. Strategic communications should frame the decision as aligned with the firm's core values and with industry peers. Managers also need to consider broader effects such as long-term financial impacts. Firms should balance short-term gains in consumer mindset against long-term business sustainability and ethical alignment.

Marketers and managers can leverage these insights to navigate geopolitical conflicts by making informed withdrawal or staying decisions that not only align with their company's ESG stance but also positively influence consumer perceptions.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Withdrawing from (or staying in) a market during geopolitical conflict affects consumers' brand perceptions, consideration set inclusion, and purchase intent.
- Firms with strong ESG reputations should align their sociopolitical actions with their established ESG commitments to reinforce their ethical stance and enhance consumer perceptions.
- Firms with weak ESG reputations must communicate their decisions carefully to avoid perceptions of insincerity or opportunism.
- Firms should carefully monitor the actions of industry peers to avoid potential backlash against such decisions.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Shankar Ganesan and Girish Mallapragada (2025), "Navigating Geopolitical Turmoil: Corporate Responses to the War in Ukraine and Its Impact on Consumer Mindset," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 44 (1), 122-39. doi:10.1177/07439156241244738.



Promoting Economic Recovery After War: A Critical Look at Vietnam's 1976–1986 Propaganda Posters

After the Vietnam War, the Vietnamese government used propaganda posters to rally public support for national reconstruction and economic recovery. This study examines Vietnam's failed postwar economic policies through a look at its 1976–1986 propaganda posters.

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State-employed artists created posters using visual storytelling and slogans to promote a country unified under Communist Party leadership. The posters featured idealized characters working in factories, fields, and production sites. Familiar images such as farming tools, livestock, and landscapes were displayed alongside symbols of modernity like power lines and multistory buildings to promote visions of a new Vietnam.

Missing from the state propaganda posters were efforts to promote reconciliation between the North and the South. The propaganda posters might have failed at changing negative stereotypes and helping former adversaries see one another as worthy members of society—a fundamental condition for reconciliation.

While recovery is the utmost goal after conflict and war, careful

examination of the context is necessary. Propaganda posters can serve as a powerful communication tool, but poorly aligned campaigns can be counterproductive.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Propaganda posters combine visual communication and slogans to mobilize action by a target audience.
- Posters must be created with a clear understanding of the audience.
- Posters may be ineffective or even counterproductive when the policies they promote are flawed.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Hieu P. Nguyen (2025), "Conflict Recovery in Socialist Utopia: A Critical Analysis of Vietnam's Postwar Reconstruction Policies Through a Visual Interpretation of 1976–1986 Propaganda Posters," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 44 (1), 160–78. doi:10.1177/07439156241246243.

How Should Companies Communicate with Stakeholders When Operating in War Zones?

In times of war, some companies pull out of politically unstable regions; others continue to operate in these environments for various reasons. Either way, firms must communicate their decisions to stakeholders and the public. This study of corporate messages gauged the effectiveness of possible communication strategies. U.S. firms continuing to operate in Russia generally reported only operational risks in one-way communications, whereas companies that exited the Russian market actively interacted with multiple stakeholder groups about their stance on the war and their relief initiatives.

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While financial priorities may be the most immediate pragmatic concern, firms also need to consider their moral approach in order to sustain corporate legitimacy. To do so, they can create an interactive, two-way dialogue with stakeholders through active communication strategies. Relying on unidirectional reporting of operational risks may contribute only to shareholder support, while engaging in two-way communications can be beneficial for legitimizing corporate activities, and, by extension, for socially responsible marketing.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Firms that disregard public concern about operations in ethically charged environments may quickly lose legitimacy if problematic activity is exposed in the media.
- Two-way communications can help promote and sustain moral legitimacy, which is key for socially responsible marketing.
- Businesses that choose one-way communications may eventually be outrun by competitors that regularly interact with the public about their socially responsible initiatives.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Andriy Kovalenko (2025), "Seeking Corporate Legitimacy in Times of War," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, 44 (1), 81–99. doi:10.1177/07439156241246729.

Consumers Can't Tackle Climate Change Alone: Why the Energy Sector Needs to Take Responsibility

Energy market actors such as utility companies, policymakers, and NGOs attempt to tackle climate change by framing consumers as "net-zero heroes" who are responsible for achieving net-zero emissions, despite the significant



climate effects of industrial activities and the energy sector itself. This strategy reflects a trend known as “consumer responsabilization,” where companies and organizations encourage consumers to bear the burden of addressing environmental issues. The authors of this study find that the concept of the “net-zero hero” creates a paradox in which consumers are encouraged to take on heroic roles in combating climate change, but without adequate support from the broader energy market, these efforts are often insufficient to drive meaningful systemic change. The research suggests that assigning responsibility in this way can discourage consumers, making them feel overwhelmed and disillusioned. For instance, BP’s “carbon footprint calculator” is a real-world example of how companies may encourage individuals to track and reduce their personal emissions while downplaying BP’s own contributions to global carbon output. This framing not only shifts blame but also creates unrealistic expectations for consumers, who often lack the resources or influence to make substantial environmental impacts alone. The authors recommend that for consumer responsabilization to be effective, it must be accompanied by supportive actions from companies and policymakers such as investing in renewable energy, creating more sustainable products, and enacting policies that facilitate consumer choices aligned with sustainability goals.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Solely assigning climate responsibility to consumers (the “net-zero hero” narrative) is insufficient—systemic support from companies is necessary for impactful change.
- Sustainability initiatives that integrate consumer engagement with authentic corporate actions are a more comprehensive approach to emission reductions.
- Corporations can support consumers’ climate efforts by providing practical resources and clear commitments of their own, enhancing trust and long-term participation in sustainability initiatives.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Tom van Laer and Morgan E. Smith, “Responsibilizing the Net-Zero Hero? Creation and Implications of a Tragic Subject Position,” *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*. doi:10.1177/07439156241300997.



Does Listening to the News vs. Reading It Change What We Remember?

One of the major shifts in media consumption in recent years has been the rise in popularity of streaming audio platforms (e.g., podcasts) as a source for news and information. So while streaming channels have greatly changed how people consume news, could they also be altering how listeners interpret it? This *Journal*

of Marketing Research study shows that when people listen to (vs. read) a news story, they are more likely to walk away with a more superficial understanding of it that privileges the more emotionally arousing parts of the story. For example, when people hear (vs. read) a story describing both the risks and benefits of a health product, those who listen to the story are more likely to recall its dangers, whereas those who read it tend to have a more balanced recall of its risks and benefits. Moreover, the authors find that this bias amplifies when listeners are distracted—as is often the case in natural settings where we listen to the news while driving or cooking. The findings suggest that audio technologies may be altering consumer knowledge about news and other information compared to print media.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Listening to (vs. reading) news can systematically alter what we learn from it and can lead to biases.
- Because the pace of incoming information is harder to regulate when listening to (vs. reading) a news story, listeners tend to process it more selectively by paying more attention to the sensationalist elements—which are often the more negative details.
- When producing longer-form news and communications for aural (vs. print) platforms, managers and media outlets should place greater emphasis on the less arousing elements in the story to provide balance.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

Shiri Melumad and Robert J. Meyer, “How Listening Versus Reading Alters Consumers’ Interpretations of News,” *Journal of Marketing Research*. doi:10.1177/00222437241280068. **MN**

T.J. Anderson is Manager, Academic Content, at the American Marketing Association.

