

1. Summary

Theoretical and empirical research indicates that businesses are at a crossroad with difficulties in turning Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) a core driver for sustainability. The fact that corporations are held captive by an economic growth system they co-created and that is now larger and more powerful than the sum of the parts, demands a change in the business model of a huge magnitude that only a collective corporate-social-political effort could leverage. For that reason, most companies conduct CSR programs while running the business as usual, maintaining conventional marketing practices, narrowly focused on competitive selling and increasing consumption. The association between consumption issues and CSR have so far not gathered proper attention from marketers. Yet creating sustainable life-styles requires the commitment of the marketing discipline. Also in the academic field, unlike sustainability and CSR, marketing research for sustainability had a late entry.

We thus aimed at investigating the link between CSR and marketing through the lens of practitioners' opinions and communication based on a qualitative content analysis of 24 worldwide non-financial reports from sustainability leading corporations and a critical review of 12 relevant and recent international business and consumer surveys and. Based on these sources, we also analysed what practitioners describe as barriers for achieving a deeper CSR integration in the business strategy of their companies.

Our study indicated that while companies assume CSR at the heart of their business, the marketing function seems not CSR oriented, as marketing and sustainable consumption are topics with little reference in companies' CSR reports, as well as in the surveys. It was also found that top barriers for a higher level of sustainability oriented management are the difficulty in proving the business case for CSR, the economic growth imperative in conjunction with short-term profit maximization, as well as issues related to effective stakeholder communication. These results were in line with the literature review on these topics.

Drawing on these findings and on relevant literature review related to CSR and marketing, it is proposed that sustainability and stakeholder marketing, as a merged framework, could assume the missing link between CSR and marketing. Based on this framework, it is suggested that CSR could gain business strategic relevance and, consequently, could defuse the search for the business case for CSR. This outline proposition is left open and in need for further research. Finally, built on the body of literature and the results about communication barriers, we presented recommendations for the improvement of stakeholder engagement.