



Obstacles to Implementation of the SDGs: Feelings Over Facts

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the human emotional and cultural barriers, primarily from the American perspective, to achieving the United Nations list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs]. The data from select recent studies in the areas of education, sustainability, consumer rational, diversity, and consumer segmentation were evaluated to understand how these areas block us from moving forward in sustainability conversations. This paper argues that we can attack these barriers by re-examining the role and responsibility of higher education institutions. Institutions have not taken the necessary steps to prioritize making sure that the needs of society are balanced against the constraints of the world. This is evident through the way that we think of learning but can be addressed by bridging the gap between education and the workplace, encouraging diversity, and attacking elitism.

Keywords: Sustainability, Barriers, Higher Education, Elitism, Culture, Diversity, Segmentation

Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations published a list of 17 goals, representing a comprehensive collection of issues that, in their mind, must be addressed if the planet will be able to reach an equilibrium state, balancing the needs of its human inhabitants with and/or against the constraints naturally imposed by the planet itself. The list of goals is perceived as being comprehensive, including physical considerations, such as air and water, as well as behavioral issues that have developed as a result of centuries of human evolution, creating largely unbalanced living circumstances, with extreme and inequitable conditions demonstrated in areas such as wealth, health, education, and civil and human rights. The list of goals is broadly perceived as highly logical and reasonable, and with those attributes, is expected to be well received, embraced by broad sectors of its target audience, and ultimately, sufficiently adopted in time to avoid the catastrophic end predicted by current conditions and trends. This article will address two issues first: barriers to the achievement of the SDGs, created by human emotional behavior, which represents a significant element of danger not addressed by the logical and rational expectations presented by the arguments contained in the components of the SDG listing; and secondly: potential remedies, championed by institutions of higher education. The perspective will reflect an American paradigm but will have global/universal application, and use international examples as appropriate.

An Under-Educated Audience

Based on an article in The Global Citizen - K. Watson (2016), millions of children and adults around the world lack access to education for various reasons some live in conflict zones, others are not allowed to attend school because they're girls, or they don't attend because their families need them to work and bring in income to support the family. But because education promotes an understanding of social justice, interdependence, and identity, it is key to eradicating global poverty

by 2030. The article presents nine pertinent facts about global education, all of which support the inclusion of quality education on the list of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1. Around the world, 59 million children of primary school age are being denied an education, and almost 65 million adolescents are without access to a secondary school.
2. Conflict and natural disasters have disrupted the education of 75 million children.
3. In one of three countries, less than three-quarters of teachers are trained to national standards, resulting in 130 million children enrolled in school who are not even learning the basics.
4. A child whose mother can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past the age of 5.
5. Nearly 15 million girls of primary school age will never have the opportunity to learn to read and write in primary school, compared to about 10 million boys.
6. In 2012, there were 168 million child labor workers aged 5 to 17. This is one reason many children cannot attend school.
7. Over 40 years, equitable access to quality education can help a country raise its gross domestic product per capita by 23 percent.
8. If all women had a primary education, there would be 1.7 million fewer malnourished children.
9. Susan Kruger (2016) suggests some reasons why education, in the United States especially, is experiencing challenges, and producing less than fully capable graduates. While we hold to our position that ignorance of human development is THE core problem with education in the United States, within this context, there are three specific areas on which to focus:

1-The Motivation Crisis

Our country suffers from a severe lack of motivation and engagement. Across every gender, racial, geographic, and socioeconomic boundary, students simply do not care. Even students who get "As" are not usually motivated to *learn*; they are only motivated to please people with good grades. If students don't care, they don't learn.



2-The Lack of Relevance

Technology is *not* to blame for the Motivation Crisis; it is the sheer lack of relevance within the existing curriculum. Students are always asking themselves, "Why do I need to know this in real life?" Until a 10th-grader in Houston, Texas can understand how English Literature will impact his future, he won't be naturally inclined to engage with this subject. Students don't see a connection between the classroom and the real world. As a result, school becomes only a game for getting grades.

3-The Use of Completely Irrational and Ineffective Models for Learning

Our approach to education is completely ignorant of:

- How the human brain learns,
- Human development and age-appropriate learning, and
- The fact that emotions supersede everything related to learning.
- Current data demonstrates that children are choosing entertainment over education-32 hours per week watching television, compared with 2 hours per week reading.
- Educational attainment levels in the United States are as follows:
 - 29% of Americans aged 25 years and older have a high school diploma
 - 22% have a Bachelor's degree
 - 21% of American adults read below a fifth-grade level

An Uninformed Target Audience

Recent research demonstrates that people are more confused than knowledgeable about sustainability. While the word is well known, its definition is widely perceived to be elusive.

A 2015 survey found that 62% of consumers believe in climate change but only 54% feel the word "sustainable" conveys something important. Only 59% claim to understand it at all and 76% consider it "expensive." In the absence of clear definitions, words risk losing meaning altogether or taking on negative associations. Consumers are often confused when they see and hear corporate sustainability communications that are generic and un compelling, or misleading and incomplete.

J Kho (2014) presented the following evidence of consumer confusion on the meaning of sustainability: The debate about the word "sustainability" continues. "We use it openly and freely, and it's not a consumer word," said Carol Fitzgerald, while presenting new research from a not-yet completed study on perceptions about sustainability. One surprise is how few US respondents said they hear the word sustainability regularly: only 16% said they see it "very often", with 56% reportedly seeing it "occasionally". In several different activities meant to help researchers understand consumers' views of sustainability, US respondents chose environmental words such as "environmentally friendly", "natural", "organic," "green", "recycle" and "renewable" as most similar to "sustainability".

Meanwhile, words such as "ethical," "trust", "trustworthy", "collaboration", "community" and "transparency" ranked low in their perceived relationship to sustainability. Different generations also had different definitions Among baby boomers, there is some

confusion about what it is. They were more likely to choose words such as "health" and "life", but selected fewer words that reflect the idea of preserving for the future than Gen X or Gen Y respondents. The results signal the need to build more awareness about non-environmental aspects of sustainability.

Consumers as Rational Beings

Classic consumer behavior theory has shown that consumers make purchasing decisions based on their beliefs about a product and that these beliefs are formed in a very calculating way:

- Beliefs represent the knowledge and inferences that a consumer has about objects, their attributes, and their provided benefits.
- Objects are the products, people, companies, and things about which people hold beliefs and attitudes.
- Benefits are the positive outcomes that attributes provide to the consumer. According to the Fishbein model, attitude towards a product is a function of the importance given to the product's attributes and the evaluation of the product concerning those attributes.

In addition, traditional marketing wisdom suggests that consumers are very systematic in making their consumption choices.

Consumer Decision-Making Process:

1. Define the problem.
2. Identify the decision criteria.
3. Allocate weights to the criteria.
4. Develop the alternatives.
5. Evaluate the alternatives.
6. Select the best alternative.

Depending on a consumer's experience and knowledge, as well as the attributes (cost, importance, risk, etc.) of the product being considered some consumers may be able to make quick purchase decisions and other consumers may need to get information and be more involved in the decision process before making a purchase. The *level of involvement* reflects how personally important or interested you are in consuming a product and how much information you need to make a decision. The level of involvement in buying decisions may be considered a continuum from fairly routine decisions (consumers are not very involved) to decisions that require extensive thought and a high level of involvement. Whether a decision is low, high, or limited, involvement varies by consumer, and historically not by product, although some products, such as purchasing a house, typically require high-involvement decisions among all consumers. Consumers with no experience when purchasing a product may have more involvement than someone who is replacing a product. Low-involvement decisions, however, typically relate to products that are relatively inexpensive and pose a low risk to the buyer who makes a mistake by purchasing them.

By contrast, high-involvement decisions carry a higher risk to buyers if they fail, are complex, and/or have high price tags. A car, a house, and an insurance policy are examples. These items are not purchased often but are relevant and important to the buyer. Buyers don't engage in routine response behavior



when purchasing high-involvement products. Instead, consumers engage in what's called extended problem solving, where they spend a lot of time comparing different aspects such as the features of the products, prices, and warranties.

High-involvement decisions can cause buyers a great deal of post-purchase dissonance (anxiety) if they are unsure about their purchases or if they have a difficult time deciding between two alternatives. Companies that sell high-involvement products are aware that post-purchase dissonance can be a problem. Frequently, they try to offer consumers a lot of information about their products, including why they are superior to competing brands and how they won't let the consumer down. Salespeople may be utilized to answer questions and do a lot of customer "hand-holding."

Much has been written to discuss and debate the structure of these models, which explain how attributes are evaluated and integrated into overall product judgments. Historically, there has been a certain consensus that consumers process information in this fashion to facilitate their consumption choices. More recent literature has provided credence to a train of thought that supports a less analytical, and more emotional consumer, that makes purchase decisions based on a spectrum of characteristics that are not product-based. Examples include cultural/demographic characteristics of the customer, consumer self-identity, intersectionality (multiple coexisting and/or overlapping characteristics), and revised perspectives on product categorization. As regards high and low involvement purchases, product attributes and marketing messages for numerous products that have been traditionally considered high involvement (e.g. cars and computers), have transitioned from reasoned consumption (operational efficiency, low risk, and high value) to emotional consumption (color, fashion and.

Emotional vs Rational Consumer

There are two ways to persuade: rational persuasion and emotional persuasion. Rational persuasion employs logical arguments and believable evidence. Emotional persuasion relies on the ability of the message to resonate with the consumer's emotions, whether directly related to the product or not. The choice of method depends on the nature of the product and the type of relationship that consumers have with it. The recall of ad content tends to be better for "thinking" rather than "feeling" ads. However, if one prescribes to the tricomponent attitude model (cognitive, affective, and conative aspects), consumer decisions must be preceded not only by a positive rational judgment (cognitive) of the product but also by an emotional connection (affective), leading to the act of purchase (conative). Panda et al. (2013) argued that emotional advertising is more useful because it draws attention to and fosters an emotional bond with a brand. Specifically, the authors found that advertising that evokes positive emotions like cheerfulness, happiness, interest, and lack of irritation is associated with higher advertising and brand recognition. Gopinath, Thomas, and Krishnamurthi (2014) also revealed that emotional advertising has a stronger impact on sales than rational advertising, due to its

slower wear-out phenomenon compared with rational advertising.

Social Identity Theory

Each person has established their perspective (a self-concept) consisting of the beliefs held about his or her attributes and how he or she evaluates these qualities. Within that framework exists an ongoing and evolving social comparison, representing the process by which consumers evaluate themselves by comparing themselves with others (particularly comparisons with idealized images of people in advertising).

In Social Identity Theory, a person has not one "personal self", but rather several selves that correspond to widening circles of group membership. Different social contexts may trigger an individual to think, feel, and act based on his or her personal, family, or national "level of self" (Turner, 1987).

Apart from the "level of self", an individual has multiple "social identities". Social identity is the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in social groups (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002).

Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has increasingly influenced how the dynamics and sources of intergroup discrimination are viewed.

Although many forms of intergroup discrimination might profitably be understood solely in terms of in-group favoritism (or group-based nepotism), many other forms of intergroup discrimination seem difficult to understand as instances of in-group favoritism alone. Such forms include widespread interethnic violence, ethnic cleansing, police beatings, lynchings, slavery, colonial expeditions, ethnic war, and other forms of intergroup behavior that can be collectively referred to as group oppression or group subjugation. There is strong reason to believe that these more assertive, intrusive, and oppressive forms of group interaction are not simply manifestations of ingroup bias but also reflect a desire to actively dominate, humiliate, oppress, and subjugate out-groups. This desire has been given a central role within social dominance theory (SDT), a new and general theory of social hierarchy and group conflict (Sidanius, 1993).

However, SDT makes the further assumption that evaluations of and behaviors toward out-groups are also driven by one's level of social dominance orientation, which refers to the basic desire to have one's own primary in-group (however defined) be considered better than, superior to, and dominant over relevant out-groups (Sidanius, 1993). Within SDT, social dominance orientation not only affects in-group favoritism and outgroup discrimination but also a whole host of other behaviors toward out-groups and their members. These include negative stereotyping of out-groups, internal and negative attributions for out-group failures, and active discrimination and willingness to use violence against out-group members. These assorted behaviors are referred to in this article as differential intergroup social allocations (DISAs).

The greater the degree of in-group identification, the greater the degree to which subjects will engage in DISA.



Subjects with higher levels of social dominance orientation tended to display a greater desire for social distance from, and less willingness to cooperate with, minimally defined out-groups. The tendency to denigrate, distance oneself from, and be uncooperative with outgroups was associated with a tendency to accept group boundaries, a desire to dominate other groups, and a desire to experience a high sense of self-esteem.

This claim is based on the following theoretical assumptions. All societies are to some degree hierarchical. All societies have at least one hegemonic group and one subordinate group, with different behavioral expectations for each. Aggregated individual and institutional discrimination are normal societal features. These societal givens are maintained by individual and group identity processes, such as social identification (we adopt the identity of the group we have categorized ourselves as belonging to), social comparison (if our self-esteem is to be maintained, our group needs to compare favorably with other groups), and self-esteem maintenance, which in turn lead to the “social dominance orientation.” Social dominance orientation is a fundamental human desire to view one’s group as positive and occupying higher social statuses than other relevant groups.

Elitism & Lack of Diversity

Consistent with social identity theory as described above, Esplanade (2012) takes the position that there is a growing elitism in higher education structures and systems. Further, he suggests that those institutions and systems help maintain social inequity in America. Based on his research, there is a rising proportion of students enrolled in “selective” colleges and universities that come from the top two social-class categories: upper-middle and upper-class families. This supports the hypothesis that selective private higher education confers, concentrates, and consolidates privilege for students who have grown up in well-to-do circumstances. The “Varsity Blues” college admissions scandal reflects our national obsession with image over substance in higher education (Wilcox, 2019).

This belief system (Social Identity Theory) and the resulting behavior present a natural, albeit unintentional, barrier to the prospect of diversity, in all demographic forms gender, race/ethnicity, age, religion, etc., as well as in characteristics not tied to human features mentioned above, such as political and social thought, methods for processing information and problem-solving. Academia has lost its appetite for “academic discourse”.

From a demographic perspective, there exists a clear gap in administrative talking points and practices for student admission, as well as faculty hiring. Kofi Annan, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and former Secretary General of the United Nations, famously said: “Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family” and yet academia is failing to achieve this because of structural inequalities in the management regime. A recent analysis conducted by Green Park and Operation Black Vote revealed that 94% of vice-chancellors of the top 50 universities in the U.K. were white (Thompson 2017). “In the United States, colleges and universities lack the diversity needed among faculty to deliver a well-rounded education.”

(Heilig, et al, 2019). This study reports that students are least likely to find diversity among faculty at schools granting degrees up to the doctoral level where 4.05% of tenured faculty are black/African American and 4.6% are Hispanic/Latino. Ethno-racial diversity among tenured faculty continues to lag across institutional types. And, while the overall number of women in faculty positions is nearing that of men, only 32.63% of tenured faculty at doctoral-level institutions are women. A 2010 publication that outlines the benefits (and challenges) of diversity, produced by WISELI (Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison), includes a quote by Sylvia Hurtado: “It is time to renew the promise of American higher education in advancing social progress, end America’s discomfort with race and social difference, and deal directly with many of the issues of inequality present in everyday life.”

There is sufficient evidence that the sustainability movement has similar issues with elitism and diversity.

Historically, the poor were inadvertently the population that lived most sustainably. Out of financial necessity, they recycled and reused, when possible, lived in urban close quarters, and avoided spending money, and therefore resources, on utilities, food, transportation, consumer goods, technology, and the like. Since becoming fashionable, sustainability has acquired a new definition and demographic. Modern environmentalism is now characterized not by restricting intake but by the consumer effects of greenwashing, whereby shoppers purchase allegedly environmentally conscious products that cost more. In consequence, eco-friendliness has become a feel-good commodity that is uniquely accessible to those with ample means. In *Globalization*, economist Donald Boudreaux writes, “Environmental quality is very much like leisure time: as people become wealthier, they demand more of it, mostly because they can better afford it.” Statistics support the notion that environmentalism is predominately accessed and ordered by the rich: according to a new study by the Scarborough Research Center, consumers who engage in the highest amount of environmentally friendly activities are significantly more likely to earn above \$150K per year. Thus, the barrier to entry of environmentalism is not morals but price, so ethical shopping has come to resemble a status symbol (Beaton 2014).

Future 500 (self-described as a non-profit consultancy that builds trust between companies, advocates, investors, and philanthropists to advance business as a force for good) has produced a five-part series of essays, entitled “Green, but Mostly White...The Lack of Diversity in the Environmental Movement”. In Part 2, Marvin Smith (a former Future 500 Team Member, and an African American male) makes the following points:

1. The mainstream environmental movement is (albeit unintentionally) exclusive to middle, upper-middle-class, white, liberals.
2. It just seems that having groups comprised almost exclusively of wealthier people who are least affected by climate change



dictating policies and advocacy campaigns to the poorer people who are most affected by the issue is a bit...Kiplingesque

3. A recent study from the University of Minnesota showed that though minorities emit less carbon than whites, they breathe 38% more nitrogen dioxide than their white counterparts. The vivid images of a crowded Superdome post-Katrina serve as a reminder of exactly who is most affected by extreme weather events. Because they are most affected by climate change, it is these groups that most strongly believe in anthropogenic global warming according to a Pew Research Center study, and would therefore be the strongest allies in a move to enact changes in federal policy. Yet, they are absent from the broader conversation outside of the environmental justice community.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

There are many circumstances where beliefs and experiences are not consistent. This is frequently applied in purchasing decisions, where the outcome is not aligned with the expectations of the buyer, and often results in what is commonly referred to as "buyer's remorse", and formally presented as cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance theory is widely used in psychological accounts of identity, both explicitly and in rearticulated or parallel conceptions of identity crises, where conceptions of self are no longer validated during interaction with others. Identity theorists use cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) to argue that the motivation to change attitudes is based on the desire to relieve the tension one feels when (a) one holds cognitions that are inconsistent with each other or (b) one's cognitions and beliefs are inconsistent with one's acts (Sdorow 1990). As such, in instances where an individual's attitudes or schemata are highly salient, a conflicting cognition may itself be ignored or rationalized away to guarantee cognitive consistency. In the context of the current discussion, "elitist" and "prejudiced" are not considered flattering terms. Even though there is clear evidence of each of these behaviors, the typical position of an individual is to deny that characteristic and/or behavior rather than heed Dr. Hurtado's advice to confront the issues and advocate for a substantive and meaningful discussion that will lead to viable solutions to these social (and environmental) challenges.

Segmenting "Green" Consumers

Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) have divided green consumers into 5 categories based on environmentally friendly behavior, with only three being supportive of the notion of sustainability:

- True Blue Green-These green consumers have strong environmental values and an intensive desire to participate in activities and organizations supporting the environment. This group, which forms about 9% of green consumers, intensively refuses to buy products from manufacturers that are unresponsive to the environment.
- Green Back Greens-This sector of green consumers, which makes up about 6% of the total, is not as interested as true-blue green in joining organizations supporting the environment but does show an interest in buying green products.

- Sprouts-These consumers are only concerned about the environment, and in practice, they are less willing to pay the extra price for green products. These types of green consumers, who make up 31% of the total, can be encouraged by appropriate green marketing strategies to buy green products.

The remaining two groups are not supportive of sustainability and are described as:

- Grouser-The environmental knowledge level of grouser consumers is very low, so this group, which constitutes 19% of total green consumers, believes that green products are of low efficiency/quality and that manufacturers' claims about these products are only devices to increase sales.

- Basic Browns - This group of consumers is more involved with their daily problems and ignores environmental problems.

In terms of consumer resistance to the message of sustainability, it is suggested here that there are emotional and/or social characteristics that drive consumption behavior. For those consumers who do not relate to sustainability messages in general and the SDGs in particular, the following characteristics are suggested:

1. Self-interest-These individuals benefit from non-sustainable behavior. They include individuals who stand to benefit from corporate practices and/or legislation that are not aligned with sustainability perspectives.

2. Deniers-These individuals may also be parties that benefit from non-sustainable behavior, but also include individuals that are uninformed, misinformed, and those that find themselves incapable or unwilling to take the actions required to address sustainability-related concerns. They are slow to perceive the issues, as climate shifts are gradual, and many fluctuations can be attributed to less threatening factors. Their position is often influenced by those motivated by self-interest, who are generally adept at making convincing arguments to support their position.

3. Change adverse individuals, regardless of topic/issue. These generally take one of the three following positions listed, with the best response strategy for each:

a. I don't get it

- i. Lack of understanding
- ii. Make communications more relevant

b. I don't like it

- i. Fear of loss
- ii. Address the fear

c. I don't like you

- i. Wrong messenger
- ii. Choose a different delivery mechanism

4. Individual or group inertia-These people express support for the status quo, simply because it is what is in place, and what it represents. They are avoiding cognitive dissonance, resisting the notion that the new circumstances may be better.

5. Uniformed and/or misinformed-This group doesn't have or won't take the time to educate themselves on the issues and depends on others for their perception of the circumstances. They will tend to believe whatever perspectives provide the least short-term disruption in their lives. In the case of sustainability,



frequently adopted positions, based on erroneous information include:

- a. Sustainability is deceptive and is a tool to advance progressive politics and ideology.
 - b. Sustainability is coercive. Advocates assume no one can legitimately disagree with their message.
 - c. Sustainability shrinks freedom. Advocates don't like free markets or personal liberty.
6. Self-centered/selfish-These may be represented by populations that are late to the game of conspicuous consumption, but envy that lifestyle, and feel it is their turn at the trough. This group includes more prosperous individuals who have adopted the aspirational customer orientation and respond positively to marketing messages that encourage "having and accumulating".
7. Fatalistic Attitudes-These people adopt an attitude that if a disaster is unavoidable and imminent, they should focus on making the best of the time they have left. This position drives behavior in even more destructive directions and leads to a broad loss of social norms. There is significant research and literature on what has become known as Terror Management Theory or TMT.

Terror management theory (TMT) is a way to understand how human awareness of death affects materialism, conspicuous consumption, and consumer decisions. The pursuit of wealth and culturally desired commodities is hypothesized to reinforce those beliefs that function to protect people from existential anxieties.

A variety of ethnographic studies have pointed out that a driving force behind human social behavior is the pursuit of symbolic prestige to deny the corporal limitations of biological life. Although the frenetic pursuit of the superfluous is common to all humans, the propensity for consumer-oriented consumption during one's life has reached heretofore-unthinkable dimensions in contemporary Western, and especially, American society. In short, because awareness of death instigates efforts to augment self-esteem, concerns about mortality should often intensify materialistic desires in people for whom such pursuits are a salient barometer of self-worth. There is thus growing evidence that concerns about death can increase the appeal of money and products that imbue their owners with status.

The quest for sustainability has run up against the unwillingness of privileged consumers to relinquish the lifestyles to which they have become accustomed. The maintenance of personal identity has become linked to consumption. Indeed, environmental researcher Alan Durning argues that consumption has today become 'our primary means of self-definition. As a part of the broader effort to rethink established strategies for promoting environmentally friendly behaviors, proponents of sustainable consumption need to begin developing a more carefully theorized notion of consumption's identity value. As sociologist Anthony Giddens has argued everyday consumption choices in today's world are increasingly 'decisions not only about *how to act* but *who to be*' (Giddens, 1991).

Framing sustainable consumption about the problem of creating and expressing self-identity forces us to confront not only

the psycho-cultural factors that maintain and expand demand for material goods and services but also the contradictions faced by ordinary people as they try to understand and respond ethically to large-scale social and ecological problems within the ambit of an everyday environment that is highly commodified and individualized.

One of the problems with this model of the consumer is that it ignores how everyday consumption choices are enmeshed in a web of non-instrumental motivations, values, emotions, self-conceptions, and cultural associations that complicate the uptake of environmentally friendly 'behavior change'. In light of such factors, any effort to advance the sustainable consumption agenda requires deeper engagement with the social and cultural pressures that wed people to establish consumption patterns in ways that are not strictly rational. To be successful, sustainability and being sustainable must appeal, not only to the social identity of the individual consumer, but also to the policy profile of local, state, regional, and national government agencies, and the brand identity of corporations, large and small.

Within this framework, it appears that marketers (of goods, services, ideas, and/or movements) must develop one or more of the following:

1. Mechanisms for identifying characteristics of the green consumer.
2. Methods to determine when that multi-faceted customer is defined by their affinity for sustainability.
3. Strategies and methods to drive consumer thinking towards that component of the self-identity that aligns with their pro-sustainability thinking and feelings.

Conclusions

- There is no understanding of consumption without understanding culture.
- Culture is driven by both emotion and thought.
- Society is trending towards decision-making that places greater weight on emotion, and as a result, consumer identity.
- Communications methods and messaging will have to be revised to reach the current "identity" driven consumer.
- American colleges of higher education have largely lost their way recognizing an achievement rate of 30% for undergraduate degrees, they remain elitist institutions, they lack diversity on many spectrums, and have failed to evolve their operating model to be more effective in a constantly evolving social environment. Perhaps worse than the existence of these characteristics, is the failure of the institutions to recognize/admit these conditions.
- Environmental organizations suffer from some of the same concerns and also appear to be elitist and lacking in diversity.

Recommendations

University Unshackled

Harvard University President Derek Bok, in his book "Universities and the Future of America" (1990), urges academic leaders, government agencies, and the corporate sector to help universities realign their priorities to aid the nation in addressing the most urgent social problems and its international competitive position. Stephens, et al (2008) present the notion of higher education institutions as change agents: They hold a unique



position in society and are critically important places of knowledge production, perpetuation, and dissemination. In a societal transition toward sustainability, the primary role of institutions of higher education can be viewed in two ways: universities can be perceived as an institution that needs to be changed or universities can be perceived as potential change agents. Many different perspectives and expectations on the role, value, and potential of the university in society translate into many different perceptions of opportunities for the university as a change agent in a transition toward sustainability. While these perceptions will vary in different cultures and contexts, there are four general categories of perceptions on how institutions of higher education might contribute to the societal transition toward sustainability:

1. Higher education can model sustainable practices for society.
2. Higher education teaches students the skills of integration, synthesis, and systems thinking and how to cope with complex problems that are required to confront sustainability challenges.
3. Higher education can conduct use-inspired, real-world problem-based research that is targeted at addressing the urgent sustainability challenges facing society.
4. Higher education can promote and enhance engagement between individuals and institutions both within and outside higher education to resituate universities as transdisciplinary agents, highly integrated with and interwoven into other societal institutions.

One of the most challenging characteristics of higher education institutions, which may mitigate their ability to fulfill the aspirations mentioned above, is their administrative and organizational structure, which tends to be hierarchical and siloed. This is a current challenge when attempting to make student-centered decisions. It also hinders external engagement. Examples of institutions that have resisted, overcome, and/or discarded this structure AND mindset include:

- Arizona State University – created a new school, the School of Sustainability, “to bring together multiple disciplines and leaders....to develop practical solutions to pressing challenges of sustainability”
- Clark University – created the Department of International Development, Community and Environment - three specific, individual but interrelated initiatives that are linked to the University’s strategic direction.
- The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology – a new institution committed to an interdisciplinary and potentially transdisciplinary approach.

Each of these examples demonstrates an understanding and commitment to the third leg of traditional faculty effort: service co-existing, partnering, and integrated with teaching and research.

Bridging the Gaps

As Willard Wirtz, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, once said, "There are not two worlds--education and work--there is one world--life."

There is a need to develop a new vision of the interconnectedness of work and learning. The nation needs to stop thinking of schools as buildings, of education as a system, and of the acquisition of knowledge and skills as preparation for life after school. Learning must be thought of as a natural act--as natural as breathing. Societies cannot live without learning. As long as humans live and breathe, they learn. In a parallel way, there is a need to stop thinking of workplaces as factories and offices, and of a job or career as a necessary means of supporting oneself after leaving school and before retirement. Work should be thought of as a natural act--as natural as breathing. As long as humans live and breathe, they work. Learning has been placed inside the system of education, and work inside the system of employment. In the process, they have been disconnected and have been robbed of much of their natural vitality. Though Americans have categorized and effectively separated them, work and learning in their natural states are interconnected. To work, we need to figure things out. We learn naturally in the course of working. To learn something, we need to try it out, to apply it, to see if it works. If we did not expend so much energy trying to organize things to keep work and learning apart, housing them in separate institutions, they could infuse each other with their purpose and energy.

1 - Bridging Gaps Within Education

When policymakers speak of creating partnerships between education and work, they sometimes speak as if education was a single entity, and it certainly is not. The American secondary school system consists of a series of quite unrelated disciplines taught as separate school subjects. Though there has been much effort in recent years to integrate vocational and academic education, it is a difficult process for many reasons, not the least of which is that there is no unified, organized operational infrastructure, resulting in academic curricula addressing a wide spectrum of issues, some more self-serving than outcome and benefit-focused. Thus, vocational educators need to reach out and build individual connections with mathematics, science, English, and social studies faculty, who themselves have not built connections among their separate disciplines. The current debate of liberal arts education vs. vocational education is misguided. The graduates of today, the workers of tomorrow, must be able to both think and do. The pace of development requires educators and students today to address the need to solve future problems that have not yet even been thought of, much less conceptualized.

2 - Bridging Gaps Within the Workplace

When educators speak of creating partnerships between education and work, they sometimes speak as if the workplace were a single entity, and it certainly is not. In the United States, there is a huge number and enormous variety of employers and, due to the constant flux of the marketplace, a different mix of employers each year. Of these employers, less than one percent employ more than 500 persons. Nearly 90 percent employ fewer than twenty persons. There are enormous differences between



the needs, interests, and resources of the smallest employers and the largest.

3 - Bridging Gaps Between Education and the Workplace

To engage the participation of employers, both large and small and both public and private, as well as organized labor, representatives of the workplace need to be included in all stages of planning, implementing, and evaluating programs that connect learning and work to prepare persons for the workforce. This full involvement of workplace partners in educational programs that connect learning and work needs to begin at the earliest design phase. Workplace representatives need to help establish learner outcomes and standards that form the basis of the school curriculum.

A Fourth Pillar? – Cultural Sustainability

Considering the perspectives presented here regarding the importance of culture in understanding consumer behavior, it is reasonable to examine the role of culture in, first, understanding sustainability, and following that, promoting sustainable behavior and educating the target audience about sustainable messaging. Scammon (2012), before the release of the SDGs, advocates for ‘cultural’ to be added to the framework of the “Triple Bottom Line” of social, economic, and environmental considerations for sustainable living. She references the work of Tom Wessels (“The Myth of Progress: Toward a Sustainable Future”), which states that “there are three laws of sustainability: the law of limits to growth, the second law of thermodynamics, and the law of self-organization in complex systems”. He explains that these laws contribute to linear reductionist thinking that does not take into account how all the parts of a complex system interact with each other, interactions that cannot be predicted exactly. Wessels notes that “What is lost in this paradigmatic view of the world is that the whole may be much more than the sum of its parts”. Sammons continues “This is an important argument for the inclusion of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainability.

The topic of adding culture to the already widely accepted three pillars of sustainability social, environmental, and economic is an important idea for society to address because the

addition of a fourth pillar to represent culture creates a holistic approach to sustainability.”

In 2017 The Committee on Culture of the World Association of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) produced a report recognizing that culture is not a significant component of the SDGs, but is represented significantly within the Targets included in and tied to each SDG:

“Although none of the 17 SDGs focuses exclusively on culture, the resulting Agenda includes several explicit references to cultural aspects. The following elements are particularly worth noting:

Target 4.7 refers to the aim to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for global citizenship and the appreciation of cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to sustainable development.

Target 8.3 addresses the promotion of development-oriented policies that support productive activities as well as, among others, creativity and innovation.

Targets 8.9 and 12. b refer to the need to devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism, including through local culture and products, and to the need to develop suitable monitoring tools in this area.

Target 11.4 highlights the need to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage.”

It must be understood that much of the target audience, who are largely unaware of the SDGs, are unlikely to explore the detailed levels of the targets and their associated indicators. Scammon later states, “*This is a message (the inclusion of culture) that needs to be expressed through mass communications as well as through education.* Cultural sustainability involves efforts to preserve the tangible and intangible cultural elements of society in ways that promote environmental, economic, and social sustainability.” This position, in the context of the challenge of developing relatable, convincing, and motivating messages for current (emotional) consumers, is fully supported here, as a strategy for overcoming obstacles to the SDGs.

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