

Developing marketing students' social consciousness: Experience at Brighton Business School

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Introduction

In this paper, the authors share and discuss their experience of how the marketing subject group team of lecturers at Brighton Business School brings social concerns at the heart of their teaching, both at undergraduate and postgraduate level, in an attempt to develop students' social consciousness and train social and environmental leaders of the future with a big-picture vision of the systems they will have to work within. There is a need for marketers who can drive change at organisations by coming up with new product or service ideas supported by business models that also help to address societal needs (Doyle, 2008). Addressing grand societal challenges demands a new kind of innovation, changing existing social paradigms, innovations that must create new social networks and capacities that evolve into new social structures and systems (Benneworth & Cunha, 2015). This corresponds to a shift in society's expectations of business, forcing marketing educators to retool curriculum content (Borin & Metcalf, 2010). All the more since marketing has often been perceived as part of the problem rather than the solution to societal problems such as pollution, overconsumption, the depletion of natural resources, unhealthy lifestyles, and human rights abuses (Rowntree & Koernig, 2014). If developing learners' capacities for social innovation has become part of universities' objectives, and if particular courses have been designed in business schools to develop students as agents of change (Nicholls et al., 2013; Hesselbarth & Schaltegger, 2014), the biggest part of core marketing modules taught in business schools throughout America and Europe still consist nowadays of strategic marketing, principles of marketing, marketing research, and marketing communications (Küster & Vila, 2006). The field of nonprofit or social service marketing is more rarely included (Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011). How can marketing lecturers focus on the areas of "people" and "planet" that appear to be lacking in their subject as most commonly taught?

This communication is divided into several sections. First, the authors articulate their definition of social consciousness and draw upon literature on what aspects of social consciousness are of importance to marketing learners. The authors then report, as marketing faculty members at Brighton Business School, their own experience of how they tried and developed marketing students' social consciousness in their modules and courses. They present aspects of the Marketing Group at Brighton Business School's pedagogy that have been designed to develop the students' social consciousness and to foster applied social consciousness in their decisions and activities. Three viewpoints are presented. First and second author explain, as BSc business with marketing and MSc in marketing course leaders, how ethics, CSR, sustainability, social marketing and other social matters were integrated within their courses, both at postgraduate and undergraduate level. Third author describes how she, as marketing lecturer, embeds social matters into traditional modules of strategic marketing and international marketing at Masters' level. Finally, authors conclude on how best to foster social consciousness among marketing students.

What does social consciousness mean for marketers?

Dating back mid 19th century, with an earliest use found in *The North British Review*, the concept of social consciousness can be defined as “awareness of and concern for the problems and injustices that affect society” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>). The authors will use the term social consciousness in this paper to denote conscious awareness of being part of a larger whole, namely society (Cooley, 1907). It includes the level at which one is aware of how he or she is influenced by others, as well as how his or her actions may affect others (Schlitz et al., 2010). Ammentorp (2007) defined the development of social consciousness as a ‘process involving increasing awareness of social historical context, the ability to think abstractly about time and place, and beyond the immediate everyday conditions to understand individual experience as embedded in a broader system of social relations’ (p. 39). By giving our students in marketing tools for awakening the basic dimension of consciousness in themselves, we should enable them to more deeply appreciate, implement, and refine best practices so that they will create a better world as they continue to evolve personally. But what should they, as future marketing managers, be conscious of?

Leaders are being urged to apply their business acumen to the scramble of fast-paced changes in the world around them and, in particular, to come to grips with the social, moral, and environmental impact of their organizations (Mirvis, 2008). For most organizations, the three pillars of sustainability (social, economic, and environmental) are indeed now viewed as companywide necessities (Haugh & Talwar, 2010). In particular, consequent to a range of factors such as consumer pressure, new legislation, and social evolution, environmental sustainability has increasingly become an issue of central importance to firms (Audebrand, 2010). This is no exception to marketing managers.

Marketing has been rightfully implicated as a culprit in the over-consumption of resources among residents of the Earth’s wealthiest countries, and in the spread of western-style insatiability for goods amongst the world’s developing and emerging nations. To the extent that it is part of the problem of unsustainable production and consumption, marketing can and must therefore be a major part of the solution (Martin & Schouten, 2014). Sustainable marketing means doing things differently to help bring about a society in which striving for environmental sustainability and social justice is the norm (Martin and Schouten, 2012). According to Gordon et al. (2011, p. 146) it can be achieved in three principal ways: “

- Green Marketing – Developing and marketing more sustainable products and services while introducing sustainability efforts at the core of the marketing and business process.
- Social Marketing – Using the power of upstream and downstream marketing interventions to encourage sustainable behaviour.
- Critical Marketing – Analysing marketing using a critical theory based approach to guide regulation and control and stimulate innovation in markets with a focus on sustainability, but moreover challenging some of the dominant institutions of the capitalist and marketing systems, to construct a more sustainable marketing discipline”.

If AACSB International advocates integration of sustainability in all business school disciplines, including marketing, it also advocates integration of ethics and corporate social responsibility (Nicholls et al., 2013). Many of the critical issues facing modern businesses, such as sustainability and social responsibility, can indeed be considered marketing ethics issues (Murphy, 2010). Ethics is embedded in almost every marketing decision. Marketing managers

must understand risks associated with misleading promotion such as deceptive advertising, bribery, price-fixing, defective products, as well as ethical issues and responsibilities in maintaining the integrity of the supply chain (Ferrell & Keig, 2013). Recent literature reviews confirm that issues of marketing ethics continue to grow in importance to the marketing profession. In the most comprehensive marketing ethics literature review to date, Schlegelmilch and Öberseder (2010) identified a wide range of topics encompassed by marketing ethics. Most of the identified topical areas have potential relevance to marketing ethics education. This includes ethical issues related to the functional areas of marketing (product, price, distribution, and promotion), the sales function, corporate decision-making, consumers (including vulnerable consumer groups), international marketing, marketing research, as well as ethics and compliance programs. Their findings also highlight the influence of more recent emerging aspects of marketing ethics, including green marketing, social marketing, and other ethical marketing practice implications related to the Internet (Ferrell & Keig, 2013).

Socially conscious marketing practices are no longer just a “perk” or selling point for PR purposes. Both from a business and profitability standpoint, and from a moral standpoint, being socially conscious should be a requirement. Marketing education has a role in helping students develop their consciousness of society. If as marketing educators, we fail to integrate those dimensions into our teaching, then we will fail to prepare students to be responsible members of the marketing community.

Students who will develop knowledge and understanding of environmental sustainability will be enabled to contribute to, and develop, sustainable and ethical marketing practices. How can we raise marketing students’ consciousness about those issues? How can we open their minds and hearts and stimulate reflection on the growing importance of environmental sustainability, on how they can engage one another and the world around them to contribute to better practices?

Developing marketing students’ social consciousness: our experience at BBS

The University of Brighton strategic plan for 2016-2021 speaks of four core values which guide planning within the university; inclusivity, sustainability, creativity and partnership. The University of Brighton has a 158-year history as an educational institution operating in the unique environment that is Brighton (Shields, 1990). From its earliest days as a tourist resort attracting visitors for the health cure of sea-bathing in the 19th century, Brighton has been a location which is open to new ideas, alternative lifestyles and progressive social thinking. Just two examples of many; in terms of “people and planet”, Brighton is a hotbed for the “living wage” campaign with 321 businesses (and the local council as well) which signed up to pay a minimum wage around 15% higher than the national minimum living wage. In terms of the natural environment, Brighton was the first city to have a Green Party-led city council (2011-2015) and since 2014 the Brighton and Lewes Downs Biosphere was recognised by UNESCO for its unique sustainable ecologic and socio-economic characteristics. These environment and values of University of Brighton play a key role in defining the relevant learning outcomes and objectives of the different courses and modules offered to students in the Business School. Three faculty members of the marketing subject group present their own experience of how they develop marketing students’ social consciousness in their modules and courses. Two are marketing course leaders and one is a senior lecturer of traditional marketing modules.

Embedding Social Consciousness in the BSc Business with Marketing degree

Brighton Business School attracts a mix of undergraduate students from many different backgrounds (both ethnic and socio-economic), i.e. from wealthy and poorer backgrounds. This mix of students makes it challenging to develop a curriculum, which is interesting and relevant to every student.

In year 1, all students in the BSc Business degrees (about 80 of them specialising in Marketing, the other 350 students following general management course or specialising in HR, Economics, Finance or Entrepreneurship) follow the same programme where they are introduced to Marketing, Human Resource Management, Finance, and Economics. An integrative module then allows students to apply their knowledge in the “Business Project” where they develop a business plan for a local firm. In terms of social consciousness, nearly all of the subject-specific modules include one or more case studies related to CSR and sustainability issues, as currently highly relevant matters in business thinking. In all of the core textbooks used in these first-year modules the student will find case studies around ethics, CSR and sustainability and often these will be subject of in-class discussions.

In year 2, the student gets several core modules (core for all Business degrees) including Law, Purchasing and Logistics, IT and Economics. Then the student has two options:

- One option is related to the pathway. Business with Marketing students are required to study “Marketing and Responsibility”. As the name indicates, this module aims to sensitise students to the role of ethics within marketing decision making. During our last validation, five years ago, we introduced this module as a way to infuse more ethics teaching into the core marketing curriculum. Students are very positive about this module and the in-class discussions are often very animated and instructive both to students and to the colleagues who teach the module. Often the best performing students in this second year module will go on to do a research project in their final year related to topics they first encountered during “Marketing and Responsibility” in year two. This module is also offered as an option for the general business students, and it was so popular in recent years that we had to cap the number of students allowed to take it as we could not resource teaching 200 students in one option. In the revalidation planned for next year, we are now looking at offering more options with similar content related to business and ethics/sustainability in all subjects, not just Marketing.

- The second option in Year 2 allows students to pick one of seven modules. Of these seven, several are related to social consciousness. “Environmental Sustainability” and “Working in the Voluntary and Not-for-profit Sector” are two modules very clearly aimed at Green Marketing and Marketing in the volunteering sector. Both modules are taught in co-operation with the Department of Social Sciences within the university and include opportunities for students to work with local charities. For Marketing students, the assignments on which these modules are graded can for instance be a Marketing Plan or a Business Plan focussing on the strategic benefits of sustainable business management. Other options include “Purchasing and Supply”, “Design and Innovation” and “Creativity in the Enterprise” which will include aspects of CSR and sustainability although not necessarily as the core of the module.

In year 3, the students have more options, we will here only focus on the options for Marketing students as the total list of electives contains around 40 modules. The two core modules in this final year are “HRM” and “Strategic Management”. Particularly in this last module, CSR and sustainability will play a role since many successful new business models are based on offering customers value related to sustainability, sharing, and capturing opportunities in the circular

economy. Looking at the Marketing electives, two stand out in particular.

- One is “Social Marketing”, where a colleague recognised the importance of social marketing around 12 years ago and focussed his research and teaching on this area (before social media confused students into thinking Social Marketing was all about Facebook and Twitter). This is a very popular research elective where students work together with a dedicated academic (the module has grown over the years and is now taught by a team of colleagues) to explore an issue in Social Marketing. Through our contacts with local government institutions and councils, we can offer students very interesting projects where they can apply their knowledge of social marketing to real cases, often to high praise of the commissioning organisation. Several students have found jobs after graduating with organisations that they first worked for during their research elective. From an academic perspective these types of modules are very interesting to supervise as it allows us direct contact with organisations and institutions implementing social marketing programs thus providing great case studies which can be used in-class (anonymised if needed) afterwards.

- A second research elective for the Marketing students is “Contemporary Issues in Marketing” which is similarly a research elective (students write a dissertation style report at the end, based on a literature review connected to primary data analysis). In this module we see many students choose topics related to CSR, ethics, privacy, sustainability and other socially relevant topics. In principle the student chooses a topic in the area of Marketing which is current and has a certain societal and managerial importance. It is not surprising that topics related to social consciousness are popular in this module; looking at the popular business press and the academic literature, social consciousness has certainly gained attention over the last 10 years. Some of the (several hundred) topics covered by students since we introduced this module 5 years ago are; consumer decision making in relation to child labour, the effect of promotional campaigns around body image, peer pressure around alcohol consumption by students, and the societal impact of “fast fashion”. Academics are often highly impressed by the work students deliver at the end of the year; once students are allowed to research a topic that really fits their interests (and Brighton Business School students perhaps more than others are interested in these social aspects of Marketing) they really run with it.

At the moment, we are working on the revalidation of the Business degrees, which will happen in 2018. Several new modules will be proposed, particularly in Year 2, where we are now discussing the possibility of using a Problem Based Learning approach, where we would invite a local organisation (possibly several looking at our student numbers) to outline a problem to the students where the students then get a limited time (likely a dedicated week) to develop a solution based on their knowledge from subject specific modules. This would provide one more opportunity for students to deal with an integrative project which is exactly what most Business students will be dealing with once they enter the workplace. Issues that require social consciousness are often found in these integrative contexts and as such we should prepare our students for complex situations where the “right” answer may not always be clear at first glance.

Embedding Ethics, CSR and Sustainability in the MSc marketing course

As a growing demand for social responsibility consciousness both from corporations and the society at a large, it is essential that these subjects are part of the curricula in higher education. It is important that Business Schools include Ethics, CSR and sustainability to provide students with the necessary skills to contribute to a better society (Scullion, 2017). As MSc in marketing course leader, we believe that a marketing manager who has as his/her sole aim to make profit is obsolete. We need professionals with strong knowledge of marketing techniques, capable of

taking the best decisions, but also with a social conscience. Social consciousness is thus embedded in the MSc Marketing and in its four pathways: Digital Marketing, Branding and Communications, Social Marketing and International Marketing.

Students enrolled in the MSc Marketing at Brighton Business School start their course with an Introduction to Marketing module. This module works as a refresher for students with marketing background, but also as an introduction to the subject for students who have no previous marketing knowledge. In this short introduction, students are presented to the concept of CSR, and the idea of marketing for good. In introducing CSR together with the basics of marketing theory, we want to present the discussion around ethics awareness as an element of the marketing mix. Our idea is that students, from the start of the course, will perceive social responsibility as an important part of marketing.

The ideas briefly introduced to the cohort are then further developed in term 1 during Critical Developments in Marketing module where the students are taught about CSR, Green Marketing and Social Marketing as some of the major recent developments within the subject. Students are also introduced to articles around these issues and seminars consist of academic discussion on theory, associated with good and not so good business practices. Students can even choose one of these concepts – among others – to be the focus of their assessment. In the same term, students also attend Marketing Planning and Strategy module, where corporate ethics and CSR are part of the module specification. The introduction of the core concepts of sustainability, ethics, CSR and Social Marketing earlier on in the course and as inherent part of marketing is important to highlight that social consciousness is part of the marketing world and it will be required from the future marketing managers. In this way we, as educators, are providing students with an important awareness for their success in the business world.

The MSc Marketing degree at BBS is unique as it offers a specialisation in Social Marketing. Students in this specific pathway have an opportunity to delve into behaviour changes strategy for good. Social marketing combines marketing techniques to influence positive behaviour for social good in a sustainable way (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971). All students can enroll in this module, not only those who chose this specific pathway of the MSc Marketing and will have to write their dissertation in this field. The module is even available as an elective. Students in this module have contacts with charities that are developing a social marketing campaign. Therefore, all the students in the MSc Marketing course have the opportunity to research and learn about the not-for-profit experiences and social marketing issues.

Similarly, in the Communications and Branding module, one of the most popular within the course, students develop a communication project for a ‘real life’ client, which has been chosen to be a charity. Here students reflect on issues around marketing communication, ethics and CSR, such as high-pressure sales techniques directed to vulnerable groups, misleading advertising and green-washing techniques. As communication is one of the most recognisable marketing functions, it is important to prepare the future communicators and awaken their responsibilities as marketers.

Besides integrating CSR in the curriculum and offering a pathway on Social Marketing, the MSc marketing at Brighton Business School also offers an elective specifically devoted to Ethics and CSR. Students in this module learn about business ethics and CSR theories. The module also explores up to date case studies from companies with good examples as well as bad ones. As part of their assessment, students have to discuss a current ethical or CSR issue, apply the theories they learned about and suggest ways to improve companies’ behaviour and actions. From a pedagogic point of view, first students learn about the discipline and then apply their knowledge

to selected case study. Lastly, students demonstrate the skills they learned by suggesting alternative ways to deal with the situation.

As a result of the teaching team efforts to embed social consciousness in the MSc Marketing curriculum, an increasing number of our students decide to write their master dissertation on issues related to ethics, CSR, sustainability, Social Marketing and/or the not for profit sector. Students link these issues with advances in digital media, branding and communication as well as international marketing. For instance, one student investigated the influence of green labels on consumer behavior, while another one studied how CSR strategy differs across countries. Thus, at Brighton Business School we are offering a degree that still focuses on the more traditional aspects of marketing, but the course is shaping a new graduate who is also capable of reflecting on the future impact of its marketing actions.

Embedding social concerns into traditional marketing modules

More than designing specific modules to address main social concerns, individual faculty members should also use traditional marketing modules as places to raise awareness among future marketing managers about social issues. Indeed, the business world is increasingly recognizing that CSR, sustainability and sustainable development are global megatrends in the 21st century, with profound implications for their interactions with social and political institutions, and the natural environment (KPMG, 2012). Thus we could argue that, if specific modules are needed, that will rely on integrative frameworks that have some power for consolidating knowledge on areas such as CSR, ethics and sustainability, those concepts are important enough to be embedded in any marketing module offered. We give here concrete examples of how students' social consciousness can be enhanced also via two very traditional modules at Masters' level, namely *Marketing Planning and Strategy* and *International Marketing* modules.

- Discussions can be used to bring up challenging topics for marketers. One very interesting example is to bring about a discussion on the needs and wants of consumers by using mobile phones example. Mobile technology poses very serious environmental challenges, both because of the raw materials needed to produce the hardware and the pollution associated with disposal. Also, mobile phones may affect health. Breast cancer in young women who kept their cell phones in their bras are stunning indications of modern risks where we cannot afford to wait for broader public impacts before reining in exposures. Do students, as consumers, worry about electronic waste they generate when updating to the last most innovative mobile each year? If so, what do they do to limit it? With their short-lived devices and unnecessarily fast product cycles, the manufacturers are causing massive environmental damage and catastrophic working conditions. What can marketing managers do about it? Are they responsible for this situation? And concerns about health? As future marketing managers, how will students deal with this paradox of consumers wanting more and more innovations and this causing even more damage to society?

- Examples of for profit MNCs can be carefully selected and introduced to illustrate some traditional marketing concepts, demonstrating at the same time how companies address specific social issues. We use for example Coca Cola and Mc Donald's on how they address obesity within their marketing strategies in different countries. Companies can wait until they're attacked or they can develop a strategy to respond to these types of issues. Non-governmental organisations and activist organisations have become much more active and much more visible, and they can sometimes instigate consumer campaigns like boycotts. The 1990s Nike boycott, an exceedingly effective action against the brand accused of using child labor, hit Nike's profits significantly in the short-term. In the long-term however, impact came from the hit that the

company took to its brand. Since the 90s, Nike has worked hard not only to rehabilitate its reputation, but also to become a sustainability leader. Examples of not-for-profit organisations and/or charities can also be selected to illustrate how some traditional marketing concepts also apply in those contexts. Communication strategy lecture in the *Marketing Planning and Strategy* module thus develops examples of differentiation through extremely efficient marketing communications campaigns by UK charities or government agencies.

- Students also have the option, in the *Marketing Planning and Strategy* module, to select for the design of a marketing plan their assigned corporation's ethical behaviour as their new overall strategy, to differentiate from competitors. They also have the option, in the *International Marketing* module, to choose their case study assignment and to write on companies developing social initiatives and innovations. More students each year choose this option with case studies for example on Tesla Motors or Uber. Students also write case studies on how completely different cultural values may make it harder for one company to maintain a core of ethical and social values when entering a foreign market.

- The use of specifically chosen interesting case studies can also help develop students' social consciousness within traditional marketing modules. Autolib (Paris's innovative electrical car sharing program) case study is for example used to illustrate the challenges and opportunities of public marketing, i.e. the application of marketing concepts and tools to public administration, also discussing the links between public administration and politics, and the difficulties of sustainable development projects. Renova (toilet paper) case study is used to illustrate how companies can really have an impact and differentiate with innovation. Although toilet paper manufacturers have educated consumers to expect 100% virgin pulp, it does not make sense because toilet paper cannot be recycled. It would be much better from an environmental perspective to produce toilet paper from recycled paper, which is also cheaper. There may be some technological challenges to make such toilet paper meet the softness and strength requirements of today's consumers, but it could be done and Renova created eco-friendly toilet paper under Renova Green brand name.

- Writing marketing planning case studies dealing with new brands that are offering innovative answers to social concerns is another alternative. One of the authors developed recently two such case studies with new brands and uses them as part of class teaching. Wikicells case study deals with the launching of a new revolutionary packaging you can eat, a packaging that is 100% natural, edible, protected and delicious. After launching WikiPearls in the US, and test marketing the product in four Whole Food Markets in Massachusetts, in partnership with Stonyfield, a US subsidiary of Danone specialised in yoghurts and organic milk products, WikiPearls are now distributed in 40 Whole Food Markets located between Boston and Philadelphia. Wikifoods' aim is to end the use of plastic, cardboard and glass by offering products without any waste, and hence, reconciling consumption and responsibility, pleasure and environment. France is the next country foreseen to develop the company and students have to suggest a marketing plan for the launching of this innovative product. La Gentle Factory is a case study on developing a marketing plan to grow the recent French men fashion brand created by HappyChic group (Jules, Brice and Bizzbee brands), that positions itself as environmentally responsible fashion. Clothes are produced locally, from recycled or organic fibres, and offer men a way to act on sustainability. A free collaborative platform of services, The Gentle Dressing, offers a second life to customers' old clothes by fostering barter, resale or the loan of clothes between consumers.

Conclusion

No one would deny it is imperative that Business Schools include CSR, ethics and sustainability in their curricula. Raising awareness and addressing issues on sustainability and related topics such as marketing ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR) should be perceived as a fundamental component of training of any future marketing manager. Otherwise, universities are robbing students the opportunity to develop their social consciousness and to make a positive impact in the market place. If some critiques in the early 2010s have emphasised the particular failings of business schools in relation to developing an awareness and capacity among managers to appropriately engage with ethical, environmental and social issues, it is quite reassuring to note that “engagement with sustainability is currently implicit rather than explicit in most schools, but there are strong signs of vibrant and active engagement with sustainability within pedagogic activities, and in particular within undergraduate programmes” as pointed out in the study by Brammer et al. (2012), covering 80 UK business schools. The benchmark study by Nicholls et al. (2013) found ethics to be incorporated into more than 50% of the marketing courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in the USA. CSR was incorporated into about a third of undergraduate and half of graduate marketing courses. Sustainability was included in more than 40% of both undergraduate and graduate marketing courses. Thus, marketing students increasingly seem to be exposed to, and hopefully have a better understanding of, all three topics. Our experience at BBS is a testimony that this should start as early as first year of undergraduate level, can be reinforced all throughout the curriculum, can become a specialization at Master’s level and should happen not only within specific modules but be embedded everywhere, even in traditional modules.

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