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**THE IMPORTANCE OF A GREEN MARKETING STRATEGY IN BRAND  
COMMUNICATION - M. COUTINHO MULTI-BRAND CAR DEALER CASE IN  
NORTHERN PORTUGAL**

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**Abstract**

Today's consumer is better informed, are very concerned to sustainability and has an enormous power to disseminate information and opinions. This brings to the brands the need of understanding the importance recognized by their customers regarding the adoption of sustainable marketing strategies thinking how to introduce and develop sustainable practices and actions in their marketing strategies. Sustainable Marketing emerges, in this context, as an innovative way to do marketing, creating an approach these new consumer demands. It involves long-term, sustainable strategies that truly add value to society, companies and the environment. This research seeks to understand how M. Coutinho (an important multi-brand car dealer in Northern Portugal) incorporates a sustainable brand communication strategy consistent with the sustainable products they offer. In order to respond to the objective of the research, it was defined as the focus of the investigation to describe the adoption of Green Marketing-Mix techniques and its impact on global marketing strategy for M. Coutinho case. This approach makes it possible to verify if the car dealer is following the sustainable brand concerns required by consumers and how they communicate it. The research developed was essentially exploratory and qualitative. Qualitative research encompasses a variety of methods that can be applied in a flexible way allowing individuals to respond to greater reflection and expression of their views, thus allowing a collection of feelings, experiences and behaviors in their own terms and context and allows the collection of concrete information based on the interviewees' perceptions. In order to obtain the answers to the proposed objectives, the qualitative research technique used the face-to-face semi-structured interview to the marketing director of the chosen company. The present investigation gave important contributes allowing to understand the types of environmental practices adopted, the car dealer sustainable intentions and opportunities such as visibility, proximity to consumers requirements and needs, financial sustainability and sustainable brand identity. It also presents some sustainability risks and the way the brand seeks the approximation to consumer's demands. Encouraging sustainable behavior and adopting a value sustainability in recruitment the company also encompasses an internal strategy of green marketing. All the marketing mix and brand communication includes a sustainable marketing language considering always its

benefits: notoriety, cost reduction, good citizenship, dealer's promotion and competitive advantage. This article brings a new contribute for literature review on the topic of Green Marketing and brand communication strategy. The scarcity of resources, the pollution and serious health problems caused by overexploitation of natural resources lead to reflection on the concept of sustainable consumption. Green marketing is becoming more and more in fashion and it becomes, therefore, a new paradigm to be considered. Several factors have contributed to the emergence and growth of this concern: global warming, climate change, deforestation, overpopulation and perhaps the most important one, pollution. There is an increasing interest in establishing relationships between marketing and sustainability: it is one of the main trends that shape contemporary marketing. In addition, there are also a greater number of companies committed to the issue of sustainability and the development of a sustainable marketing communication and this article brings an important contribute to this development.

*Keywords:* Brand, Green Marketing, Strategy, Sustainability.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The scarcity of resources, the pollution and serious health problems caused by overexploitation of natural resources lead to reflection on the concept of sustainable consumption. Green marketing is becoming more and more in fashion and it becomes, therefore, a new paradigm to be considered. Several factors have contributed to the emergence and growth of this concern: global warming, climate change, deforestation, overpopulation and perhaps the most important one, pollution. Many authors have been studying environmental issues since the 1970's (Martins, 2017) and since then the world took conscience that environmental destruction never stopped.

The last decades established also an important change in marketing focus: the change from marketing orientation to relationship orientation and sustainability orientation (Martins, 2017). Firms focus changed from short-term, transactional and operational issues to customer's retention and loyalty and long-term relationships (Theron & Terblanche, 2010). Firms are increasingly attempting to build strong relationships with their customers on a better way and, for this, the relationship marketing and green marketing strategy based on a different brand communication contribute where both firms and customers try to achieve some kind of mutual benefit became a priority. Organizations seek ways to develop brand equity using, for this objective, various marketing strategies (Chang and Tseng, 2005).

There is an increasing interest in establishing relationships between marketing and sustainability and authors who point to sustainability as one of the main trends that shape contemporary marketing. In addition, there are also a greater number of companies committed

to the issue of sustainability and the development of a sustainable marketing mix of products and services (Jones et al. 2008).

This led to a growing concern with the need of protection of the environment, especially in recent years and it has attracted the attention of companies seeking to profit from sustainable marketing practices. That is why in the 70s, a new concept appeared the sustainable development. Martins (2017:15) refers that sustainable development “is the form of development which aims at sustainable consumption and sustainable economic growth while tries to protect the environment. In other words, this is a type of development that satisfies the needs of the present without compromising future generations to satisfy theirs”.

Peattie & Charter (2013) report that the reactions of marketers to this concern for green marketing is sometimes proactive and, at other times, reactive. Reactive towards strict compliance with legislation and response to consumer pressure on socio-environmental improvements. Proactive strategies tend to place emphasis on communicating with stakeholders beyond legislation and seeking improvements on the part of the client, with participation in debates on social and environmental issues.

Marketeers face a new challenge: how can companies fulfil the needs and expectations of consumers about sustainability. Green marketing policies emerge helping in this task and can become a mean for sustainable development as it incorporates people, profit and the planet all together (Martins, 2017). In fact, the product of green marketing is this: environmental protection (eco-friendly) for the present and the future generations (Choudhary and Gokarn, 2013).

To Lewandowska (2017) it is worth continuing the discussion and research, in order to arrive at the optimal content for marketing communication based on LCA (Life Cycle Assessment) research. It is also important the development of further investigation on LCA results, and which method of presenting the results, would strike the consumer most effectively.

With this research, we seek to highlight how M. Coutinho (an important multi-brand car dealer in Northern Portugal) incorporates a sustainable brand communication strategy consistent with the sustainable products they offer. The investigation is focused on the comprehension and description of the adoption of Green Marketing-Mix techniques and its impact on the global marketing strategy of the company. This approach makes it possible to verify how the dealer is following sustainable brand concerns required by consumers.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introducing Green Marketing: Concept, Evolution and Its Importance

There is no unique definition for the term “green marketing”, sometimes also referred as ecological, environmental or sustainable marketing (Polonsky, 1994). According to Neagu (2012) in the literature different terms are employed like “green marketing”, “ecological marketing” or “sustainable marketing” all to refer to environmental marketing.

Green marketing emerged between 1970s and the late 1980s (Kapelianis and Strachan, 1996; Peattie and Crane, 2005). In the 1970s, action began and the 1980s brought the responsibility of the emergence of movements for environmental preservation. However, it was only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the concept of green marketing began to be generalized (Afonso, 2017). In fact, green marketing came, in a stronger way, into literature in late 1980’s and early 1990’s but it was discussed earlier in 1975 in AMA (American Marketing Association) at its first workshop related to “Ecological Marketing”.

Ribeiro (2017) states that green marketing can be viewed as both a type of marketing and/or a marketing philosophy. As a type of marketing because it is concerned with marketing to green products and positioning them as green brands. As a philosophy because satisfying customers is not enough and at the same time marketers should take into account ecological interests of the society as a whole.

Polonski (1994) argues that green marketing is the set of activities developed to generate and facilitate exchanges with the intention of satisfying the desires and needs of consumers with the least possible environmental impact.

Peattie & Charter (2013) define green marketing as an holistic management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying the needs of customers and society in a profitable and sustainable way.

Literature refers that sustainable business models incorporate three dimensions: environmental, economic and socio-political, commonly referred to as “the triple bottom line” approach (Elkington, 1994). According to the "triple bottom line" model (Elkington, 2018), companies must consider three economic, environmental and social variables in their business decisions, which opens the genesis of the 3 P's: People, Planet and Profit. The triple bottom line was created to measure the financial, social and environmental performance of the corporation over a period.

In the environmental sphere (planet), the use of natural resources should not harm future generations, reducing the environmental impacts from the action of companies (Martins, 2017). In the economic perspective (profit), it is necessary to preserve the company's profitability. In the socio-political sphere (people), the relevance is centered in social justice, it matters to know how socially responsible an organization has been throughout its operations (op.cit).

Several investigators developed connections between green marketing and other constructs such as Life Cycle Assessment (Lewandowska, 2017; Ottman, 2011).

Peattie (2013) refers to three phases in the evolution of the green marketing. The first phase was known as the ecological phase, where all the marketing activities were carried out to face the increasing environmental problems and to offer solutions for these problems. The second phase was called the environmental and refers to the implementation of cleaner technologies. This phase also led to the discovery or the invention of products that would improve the environment or at least not increase the already existing problems. The last one is the sustainable phase of green marketing, which is still prevailing. According to Peattie (2013), this phase appeared in the late 90's, early 2000s and has incorporated a broad range of activities, including changes on products, production processes, packaging and advertising.

The true is that there is an increasing number of companies that mention sustainability based on green marketing issues in their communication, in their strategic plans and in their annual reports. Companies use green marketing because (Polonsky, 1994) environment marketing can be an opportunity to companies objectives, companies have a moral obligation to be socially responsible, governments are forcing companies to be more responsible, competitor's environment activities pressure firms to different marketing activities and because there are cost related to waste or reduction in material usage that lead firms to change their behavior.

Papadas et al (2017) refer the need of more integrated and holistic analysis in green marketing as they state that there isn't a generally accepted Green Marketing framework and the literature shows na absence of a rigorous operationalization of the construct.

## **2.2. Green Marketing Strategy and Brand Communication**

Fuentes (2015) refers the need of more studies based on how green marketing is actually carried in practice and they conducted an ethnographic study of the Nordic Nature Shop and its marketing work and the specific example of green marketing concluding that green marketing practices are used mainly in window dressing, decorating, and trail making. These practices

were shown to be complex and heterogeneous, encompassing both discursive and material elements. In fact, companies that implement holistic environmental strategies send a strong message to their stakeholders, recognizing the risks and the importance of the environmental challenges that exist, demonstrating care for society and the ecosystem. The integration of sustainability-oriented marketing can be an internal and external opportunity that allows companies to achieve low costs, additional profits and competitive advantage through differentiation and business development (Papadas et al. 2017). Simão & Lisboa (2017) argue that, from a sustainable point of view, it is desirable that companies promote efficient consumption and a replacement of natural resources, waste management is necessary. The authors mention that companies can adopt more efficient practices, such as recycling and reusing materials, waste management (reducing and treating), managing soil, water and air pollution (preventing and treating), choosing for efficient energy policies and ecological products and processes (less environmental impact) and to spread green, internal and external practices. A sustainable business posture can contribute to improving the image, increasing the reputation and a greater knowledge of consumers about the company. Improving the sustainable strategy can lead to a competitive advantage for the company. The companies' commitment to sustainability, greater or lesser, can be assessed through three stages: (1) Reactive. The company's leaders consider the environmental issue as unnecessary expenses for the company, they consider a naive business trend; (2) Preventive. Companies try to avoid environmental problems. It is preferable to change the processes in order to avoid pollution because it is more expensive to treat pollution problems than to avoid them; (3) Proactive. Sustainable concern is part of the company's strategic management. It is a requirement of the future; it generates innovation and allows reaching new markets (Jabbour, 2010).

Developing green marketing strategies may imply increasing production costs for companies (because of sustainable materials complying with legislation and clean technology). However, savings in energy inputs, reducing packaging and cutting waste, can counterbalance this.

According to Ottman (1993) there are 5 rules to be considered in a green marketing strategy: customer involvement in the process (product development and communication), transparency (for consumers to believe in the legitimacy of advertised attributes), ecological guarantee (is an added value for the products), consider the price (the company must make sure that the consumer is willing to pay more for the ecological attributes of the products).

Companies that implement holistic environmental strategies show their stakeholders that they recognize the business risks and importance of today's environmental challenges, demonstrate care for society and the ecosystem, but also understand green marketing as an internal and external opportunity (Papadas et al, 2017) to achieve competitive advantage and also a differentiation factor.

Elkington (2018) proposes a strategic recall to the concept of triple bottom line for the 25th anniversary of the concept. Now sustainability must be measured thinking about the well-being of billions of people and the health of our planet.

Peattie & Charter (2013) also talk about the need of rethinking the Marketing Mix strategy if we want to proceed with a "green strategy". That's why we start talking about not "product" but "green product" referring to the products that include attributes connected to social and environmental impacts.

Taking into account the idea of green marketing as a management and marketing strategy, it appears in the literature the concept of green brand. Grant (2008:25) defines a green brand as "the one that offers a significant eco-advantage over the incumbents and which hence appeals to those who are willing to making green a high priority". Strong green brands can target both B2C and B2B customers. A successful green brand is based in alternative technology and in companies that run on green principles (Grant, 2008). "A green brand identity is defined by a specific set of brand attributes and benefits related to the reduced environmental impact of the brand and its perception as being environmentally sound." (Hartmann et al., 2005: 10). Green brand can be defined as a brand environmentally friendly, which takes action towards the sustainability and commit itself with the preservation and nature preservation.

The use of alternative technologies and/or ecologically conscious business practices usually characterize successful green brands (Grant, 2008). Green brands can base their actions in ecological and sustainable business practices such as: energy savings (or renewable energy); reducing or avoiding CO2 emissions and other polluting substances emissions; reducing and avoiding waste; protecting and conserving natural resources and natural habitats; using alternative energy sources; training employees regarding environmental protection and sustainability; informing consumers on measures regarding how the emission of greenhouse gases can be reduced with the help of their respective products and publishing information proving the environmental commitment of the company as part of their corporate mission.

Grant (2008) give as a matrix to understand some of the strategies inherent to green brands (Table 1):

**Table 1.** – Green Brands

	Passive	Active
Consumer	Green Brands	All doing our bit
Citizen	Setting New Standards	Networked Resource Systems

**Source:** Grant (2008), pp. 26.

Grant (2008) talks about green brands as those who want to put high priority in green issues. Setting New Standards is what people think about sustainability marketing. The point is to set an example and hence lead the rest of your industry in that direction. All doing our bit – when you apply this approach to green marketing the natural area to address is co-operating with customers to reduce the total impact. Networked resource systems is the big development of the last decades in business.

Customers do not expect green brands to be perfect but at least, authentic (Connolly, 2009). This type of brands should aim to communicate the key benefit to consumers: purchasing green brands is in the environment's best interest. The relationship between consumers and this type of brands can be even more intensive if some personal benefits are added, such as health advantages, the common good, saving opportunities or returns on investment in environmental technologies (Hartmann and Ibañez, 2006).

### **2.3. Green Marketing Mix**

The trend of going green can deliver significant benefits in product differentiation, positive publicity, stronger brands and increased sales (Bodger and Monks (2009). To Neagu (2012) there are two main actors involved in green marketing: the companies and the non-governmental organizations. Both are committed to plan and implement communication actions that try to build consumers more responsible for the future of the planet. Papadas et al (2017) refer to a tactical green marketing orientation that involves short-term actions and is normally integrated in marketing mix such as product, promotion and pricing policies. Polonsky (1994) and Bodger and Monks (2009) say that green marketing is a broader concept that incorporates activities connected to product modification (process, packaging) and advertising.



Peattie & Charter (2013) suggest that to the traditional 4 P's of marketing we should add the 4 S's: (i) satisfaction (consumer satisfaction); (ii) safety (product safety and production for consumers); (iii) social acceptance of products, production and activities of the company and (iv) sustainability of products.

### **2.3.1. Green Product**

Green and ecologically products are expected to be durable, non-toxic, made from recycled materials or minimally packaged (Ottman, 1993). Green product policies are related decisions to reduce environmental impact such as responsible packaging, recyclable materials and types of ingredients, redefinition of product life cycle, renewable energy, and new product development refocused to improve the environmental performance.

Sustainable products seek to incorporate the three dimensions of sustainability in their design: economic, social and environmental. It is intended that these products integrate social and environmental aspects along the value chain and that they are economically competitive and successful over a long period of time (Beltz & Karstens, 2010).

Green based product strategies involve either one or a combination of recycling, reduction of packaging materials, sustainable source of raw materials, reusable and repairable, making products and packaging's that are safe for disposal, compostable, and that are safer or more pleasant to use (Polonsky, 1994 and Ottman, 2011).

Prakash (2002) suggests six ways to make products more environmentally friendly: (1) Repair: extend the life of a product by repairing its parts; (2) Re-new: extend the life of a product for much longer; (3) Remake: the new product is based on old products; (4) Re-use: design a product to be used several times; (5) Recycle: products can be processed and converted into raw materials that can be used in the same or other products; (6) Reduce: product uses less raw materials and/or generates less disposable waste, offering benefits comparable to its previous version or to competing products. These products must also promote nature conservation and protection, energy efficiency in their production and distribution, avoid waste, prevent pollution and ensure consumer safety (Ribeiro, 2017). No product is capable of having a zero impact on the environment (Reutlinger, 2012). Pomeroy (2017) highlights that ecological products must be evaluated based on the impact of their production process (the evaluation of a product's life cycle is an instrument that assesses and measures these impacts) and the impact of its consumption. Charter et al. (2002) state that sustainable products must be developed to satisfy genuine consumer needs, they must not be harmful to human health and as "green" as possible

throughout the life cycle. These authors point out that what is desirable for an “era of sustainability” should include products based on the following aspects: Non-polluting; Reused and recycled; Easy repair; Energy efficiency (reduction of greenhouse gas emissions); Long term; Minimized packaging; Manufactured from renewable energies; Removal of hazardous materials; Manufactured from locally sourced materials to minimize transport costs; Not be tested on animals; Do not use child labor; Do not resort to forced labor to manufacture the product. The development of greener packaging is still one of the major challenges associated with marketing.

### **2.3.2. Green Pricing**

Green prices for green products will reflect product’s ecological ingredients. When we talk about price (monetary value paid by the customer) in green marketing mix, it seems that many consumers assume green products often with higher prices than conventional products (Peattie & Charter, 2013; Polonsky, 1994). In fact, green pricing is normally higher since takes into consideration the people, planet and profit in a way the health of employees and communities and the efficient productivity are ensured. This higher price often reflects environmental concerns in monetary terms that are intrinsic and transferable to the customer. Peattie & Charter (2013) refer that the consumer demand for green products may allow companies to add green prices premiums.

Price is a key element in green marketing. Many of the environmental and social costs - in the case of pollution generated in the production of a good - are considered externalities, they are not included in the final price of the product or in the accounting of companies' production costs. Due to legislative and stakeholder pressure, this situation begins to change gradually and many of the environmental and social costs are no longer considered externalities and are now charged. An incentive to purchase sustainable products would involve an increase in prices for non-sustainable products (Charter et al. 2002). Pomeroy (2017) reinforces the idea that externalities should be included in the final price of the product. Sustainable consumers realize that products and services have an added social and ecological value and are therefore willing to pay a higher price. Companies and producers can rethink their pricing strategy in order to demonstrate that sustainable products do not need to be necessarily more expensive than traditional ones. A company that can add ecological aspects to its products at a low price will achieve a competitive advantage over its competitors.

### **2.3.3. Green Place**

Place is where the product can be purchased and includes how the product is distributed to the purchase location. Green place is about managing logistics to cut down on transportation gas emissions, thus reducing the carbon footprint and the negative impact in the environment.

Companies will have to redesign the logistic activities because of the need of “reverse logistics” that allow the process of reusing containers and end-of-life products.

Based on Peattie (1995), in recent years, retailers have shown great interest in finding new ways to make their stores more sustainable. There is a concern to be more efficient and avoid waste, allowing greater financial profitability (Reutlinger, 2012). The distribution of sustainable products has direct and indirect environmental impacts, so it is necessary to take into account all impacts generated during the distribution process. Sustainable marketing, in addition to being concerned with delivering the product to the right place at the right time, also needs to focus its attention on reducing negative impacts on the distribution process. Careful and prudent management will allow companies to find solutions to reduce the negative impacts of distribution, which involves the circulation of the product inside and outside the company (Charter et al. 2002; Reutlinger, 2012). A successful sustainable distribution is only achievable through a direct and indirect multi-channel strategy, allowing it to spread beyond the market niche. Ribeiro (2017) highlights two alternatives for companies to reduce their negative impact on the environment. One of them is to attribute greater importance to local production, instead of selling imported products. This would avoid costs associated with transporting the products and consequently a reduction in the emission of greenhouse gases. The other solution would be to identify more environmentally friendly ways of supplying products to the market to meet consumer demands. Companies can look for stores that sell only ecological products or that respect the principles of sustainability.

### **2.3.4. Green Promotion**

Promotion includes decisions to minimize negative environmental impact of firm’s marketing communications. This requires communicate environmental sponsorships and tangible environmental actions, public dialogue about green products and services. Promotion includes all activities that involve communicating with the customer about the product and its benefits and features.

The green promotion strategies must consider that the promoted benefit have a real impact (reduced harmful emissions) by identifying the product’s specific benefit in terms of the product

attribute that contributes to improved environmental performance. Marketeers should also provide a context to allow consumers to make meaningful comparisons.

Creating green advertisements can be a way to reduce the gap on environmental information through promotion, but Ottman (2011) has suggested another green promotion strategies: educate consumers on the environmental problems that a green product solves; empower consumers with solutions by demonstrating to them how environmentally friendly products and services can help consumers protect health and preserve the environment for future generations; and provide performance reassurance of green-based products, as many consumers perceive them to be inferior to conventional ones. Eco-labels or green certifications are also excellent communication tools that can be used by companies.

The promotion of products and services includes all types of contact with consumers, from advertising, public relations, promotions and direct marketing. Innovation has provided the development of new, greener communication practices and tools, where electronic resources should always be privileged in sustainable promotion. The sending of physical letters must be replaced by sending via electronic mail, recyclable materials must be used and printing, whenever necessary, must be done using more ecological solutions (De Craecker & De Wulf, 2009). Companies must develop communication approaches that integrate specific environmental aspects of their products and their social responsibility posture. Communication must be based on solid information based on research and the information must be communicated consistently to consumers and stakeholders. Marketing managers must always assume a posture of true and transparent communication with consumers, otherwise there is a risk of attracting negative and harmful situations to the company's image, such as a negative perception of consumers towards the company and / or product (Charter et al. 2002). It is important that marketing managers know their consumers in order to provide them with relevant information. Performance is always a good product communication tool. The symbolism and social status associated with the product are also good communication tools, especially when used by prominent public figures in society, leading to an increased interest in sustainable products. Credibility is the fundamental element for the communication of a sustainable product (Reutlinger, 2012). Through promotion, companies must assume an educational role in order to encourage their stakeholders and consumers to take a sustainable stance. Such communication must always take into account the principles of sustainability and not resort to techniques that contradict sustainability. In addition, communication can promote greater transparency and relationship with consumers (De Craecker & De Wulf, 2009; Pomeroy,

2017). Some companies resort to misleading advertising and the use of fraudulent messages to try to convince consumers that their products have truly ecological attributes. This situation is known as “greenwashing” and is characterized by omission of information, lack of scientific evidence, use of vague expressions and content that is difficult to prove (100% natural, “non-toxic”, among others.), Attribution of benefits true but irrelevant and resort to lying. This will increase consumer distrust of environmental concerns (Almeida, 2013).

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

A descriptive and qualitative research was developed. Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or qualitative information) to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. It also encompasses a greater reflection and expression of views or behavior, thus allowing a collection of feelings, experiences and behaviors in their own terms and context (Malhotra & Birks, 2006).

Therefore, the qualitative approach corresponds to the expectations of this investigation because it allows the collection of concrete information based on the interviewees' perceptions about the topic under analysis. As a research on a very specific and complex sector of activity (the Portuguese automotive sector), in addition to a topic that is also very particular and little explored, it is essential to have a more direct contact with the interviewees in order to achieve the defined objectives.

Thus, in order to obtain the answers to the proposed objectives, the qualitative research technique used was the semi-structured interview, a technique that allows interviewees to share their experiences and cases, about the phenomenon observed by the interviewer. In the data collection process, face-to-face semi-structured interview was conducted. The data were collected between November and December 2019.

In terms of the population for this study, M. Coutinho car dealer (duly certified and authorized by the brands they represent) in Porto district (Northern Portugal) that sell BEV, PHEV and HEV passenger cars was considered. For interview was chosen the person responsible for the marketing department in order to collect information regarding the strategy and dealer's practices, the marketing mix and their point of view in relation to sustainability and marketing.

Therefore, the investigation focused on a non-probabilistic sample by judgment. Thus, and considering their size, relevance and representativeness, M. Coutinho car dealer is a

significant multi-brand dealer in Porto district (Northern Portugal) because it has an extensive dealer network of 18 automotive brands and 17 workshops. It is a national leader in the distribution of original parts, specialists in the distribution of independent parts and in the provision of collision services. The relevance of case study of M. Coutinho is connected to its economic impact in the Portuguese car sector: 48 points of sale, 67 authorized workshops, 8 points of sale for used vehicles, 9 collision centers, 2 logistics centers parts. The group also has 771 workers, billing 222 million last year, with 11.427 units (cars) sold. They assume the sustainability aspect as a priority in their business and that bet translates into 94% of their recycled or reused, which makes it a national reference in this area.

Green marketing research identifies three pillars central to the conceptualization of green marketing orientation: strategic green marketing, tactical green marketing and internal green marketing (Papadas et al, 2017) as shown in Table 2. This scale will be used to the case study considered (M. Coutinho car dealer) and the analysis will be conducted based in this scale items.

**Table 2.** – Green Marketing Scale (adapted from Papadas et al, 2017)

Dimension	Scale items
Strategic green marketing orientation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We invest in low-carbon technologies for our production processes.</li> <li>2. We use specific environmental policy for selecting our partners.</li> <li>3. We invest in R &amp; D programs in order to create environmentally friendly products/services.</li> <li>4. We make efforts to use renewable energy sources for our products/services.</li> <li>5. We have created a separate department/unit specializing in environmental issues for our organization.</li> <li>6. We participate in environmental business networks.</li> <li>7. We engage in dialogue with our stakeholders about environmental aspect of our organization.</li> <li>8. We implement market research to detect green needs in the marketplace.</li> <li>9. Among other target markets, we also target to environmentally conscious consumers.</li> </ol>
Tactical green marketing orientation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We encourage the use of e-commerce, because it is more eco-friendly.</li> <li>2. We prefer digital communication methods for promoting our products/services, because it is more eco-friendly.</li> <li>3. We apply a paperless policy in our procurement where possible.</li> <li>4. We use recycled or reusable materials in our products/services.</li> </ol>

	5. We absorb the extra cost of an environmental product/service
Internal green marketing orientation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exemplar environmental behavior is acknowledged and rewarded.</li> <li>2. Environmental activities by candidates are a bonus in our recruitment process.</li> <li>3. We have created internal environmental prize competitions that promote eco-friendly behavior.</li> <li>4. We form environmental committees for implementing internal audits of environmental performance.</li> <li>5. We organize presentations for our employees to inform them about our green marketing strategy.</li> <li>6. We encourage our employees to use eco-friendly products/services.</li> <li>7. Our employees believe in the environmental values of our organization.</li> </ol>

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

M. Coutinho's mission is to make the customer experience unique. The vision is to develop an organization open to innovation and capable of responding to new mobility paradigms. Ensuring a close and professional service offering anticipating market demands with the uncompromising ambition of exceeding customers' expectations; permanently challenge people, enhancing their development and overcoming, promoting talent. M. Coutinho's values are based on sustainability, creating value, humanism, being close, excellence, exceeding expectations, trust, promoting relationships. The company was founded in 1956 the year when Manuel Moreira Coutinho became a Ford dealer.

A - Strategic green marketing orientation	
1. We invest in low-carbon technologies for our production processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Try to use washing products with the least amount of chemical product, reagents; - The workshop gloves are thinner because with a smaller thickness of plastic they still guarantee a good operation by the mechanics and reduce the consumption of plastic;</li> <li>- At the level of the procurement department they use recycled paper, if not in its entirety, at least in large part;</li> <li>- In terms of waste management, they only work with an operator who guarantees that they treat everything legally, sustainably and that they have licenses, even if this entails more costs for the group. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Replacement of lamps for low consumption lamps</li> <li>- Waste control; separation of 20 categories of waste;</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only 3% of waste is sent to landfill.</li> <li>- Respect for environmental legislation.</li> </ul>
2. We use specific environmental policy for selecting our partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creation of strategic partnerships; - When negotiating certain contracts, they give preference to partners who have environmental sustainability concerns.</li> </ul>
3. We invest in R & D programs in order to create environmentally friendly products/services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They do not have an R&amp;D department internally but seek continuous improvement in this area;</li> <li>- They will make extra investment in the short term, to improve some conditions in terms of waste management, namely, investing in the placement of covers in larger containers abroad so that the waste is not damaged (for example, the papper if has a certain amount of humidity is reached, it is no longer recyclable);</li> <li>- The group is investing in the alteration of oil deposits (air deposits that will be visible and if there is a leak, it will be more easily identifiable and contamination can be avoided);</li> <li>- Investments also in the sense of workshops, in order to prevent oil spills, that is, we have invested in several retention basins to avoid spills to the soil and therefore we are doing that too and then we will invest now in reusable bottles to offer to employees, for example.</li> </ul>
4. We make efforts to use renewable energy sources for our products/services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bet on solar panels</li> <li>- Led lamps</li> <li>- Quality of the construction with which it is made, in the sense of being as energy efficient as possible</li> </ul>
5. We have created a separate department/unit specializing in environmental issues for our organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- M. Coutinho develops an annual sustainability report and has a responsible person allocated to this area.</li> <li>- It has its own project dedicated to its sustainability: the planet M. Coutinho</li> </ul>
6. We participate in environmental business networks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Within the network of brand retailers there are rules in the area of sustainability;</li> </ul>



	<p>- M. Continho develops actions that promote networking and promoting sustainability, such as reforestation day - Create internal and external environmental awareness actions (commemorative dates) such as:</p> <p>planting trees in areas affected by fires; celebration of the world biodiversity day, through a partnership with the municipal council of Vila Real, made an exhibition to raise awareness to safeguard biodiversity; world environment day - publication on what we can do in our day for more sustainable behavior; creation day - day for the protection of the oceans in partnership with the municipal chamber of Ílhavo; World Pollution Day - more sustainable driving.</p>
7. We engage in dialogue with our stakeholders about environmental aspect of our organization.	<p>- Environmental training and awareness - Briefings (summary of the waste that a given unit produced in a given period trying to alert to existing deviations and an eventual wrong separation of some waste - Approach to points to improve - Assessment of sustainable behaviors within the company. - Sensitize the public and local communities and partners, suppliers, brands.</p>
8. We implement market research to detect green needs in the marketplace.	<p>- Recycling, avoid waste - Encouraging the use of renewable sources and / or materials - Sustainability events</p>
9. Among other target markets, we also target to environmentally conscious consumers.	<p>- With everything they do they may not yet reach all consumers, but they believe that what was a niche is growing more and more and more people are more sensitive to these types of issues</p> <p>- In the group's social networks, it is possible to see that the publications associated with this environmental issue are those that have the most interactions - Increased perception that consumers really identify with environmental issues</p> <p>- Bet on green marketing and respective disclosure to customers, potential customers and general public (society)</p>

### B - Tactical green marketing orientation

1. We encourage the use of e-commerce,	<p>- Yes</p> <p>- It brings competitive advantages and cost reduction as well as improving the company's image)</p>
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because it is more eco-friendly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brings financial benefits</li> <li>- Is valued by the consumer</li> </ul>
2. We prefer digital communication methods for promoting our products/services, because it is more eco-friendly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sustainable Marketing Actions - Bet on digital</li> </ul>
3. We apply a paperless policy in our procurement where possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They use stamps and digital signatures to avoid unnecessary printing.</li> <li>- The adoption of sustainable consumption of stationery materials is encouraged through reuse or reuse.</li> <li>- Whenever possible, when printing, reduce the font size and avoid color printing.</li> <li>- Do double-sided printing and reuse sheets for notepads. In the end, they recycle.</li> <li>- Before printing, check the print to avoid waste and print several pages on one sheet.</li> </ul>
4. We use recycled or reusable materials in our products/services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They use reusable mugs and bottles to drink water, thus avoiding disposable materials.</li> <li>- The adoption of sustainable consumption of stationery materials is encouraged through reuse or reuse.</li> <li>- Whenever possible, when printing, reduce the font size and avoid color printing.</li> <li>- Do double-sided printing and reuse sheets for notepads. In the end, they recycle.</li> </ul>
5. We absorb the extra cost of an environmental product/service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Just a part of it. The most part not</li> </ul>

**C - Internal green marketing orientation**

<p>1. Exemplar environmental behavior is acknowledged and rewarded.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Summer try to refresh the spaces by opening doors or windows. In winter, they encourage the use of comfortable jackets instead of air conditioning.</li> <li>- When the air conditioner is on, doors and windows are kept closed. The temperatures are adjusted to the season (Summer: 21º to 23º; Winter: 18º to 20º).</li> <li>- Monitors are always turned off during pauses and, in long pauses, turn off computers.</li> <li>- Artificial lights are kept off whenever there is natural light. Employees turn off lights, air conditioning and equipment whenever they leave the premises. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When not in use, remove the chargers from the sockets.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Close the tap when not in use and avoid unnecessary flushing of the toilet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They do carsharing and video conferences to avoid traveling by car.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>2. Environmental activities by candidates are a bonus in our recruitment process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We value people with a curriculum with links to environmental actions</li> </ul>
<p>3. We have created internal environmental prize competitions that promote eco-friendly behavior.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Awarding prizes to the three workshops that present the best environmental results (leisure time and promotion of socializing)</li> </ul>
<p>4. We form environmental committees for implementing internal audits of environmental performance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developed the Planeta MCoelho project: environmental sustainability and social responsibility. - Planeta MCoelho audits to all mechanics and collision workshops. (2x per year) (will also start auditing administrative services, to see what they do and whether they do it correctly in administrative services in order to improve the company's environmental sustainability issue)</li> </ul>
<p>5. We organize presentations for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training and awareness actions</li> <li>- Audits</li> </ul>

our employees to inform them about our green marketing strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concern with the working conditions of all employees: organization and cleanliness to ensure safety.</li> <li>- Awareness raising actions for the adoption of good practices for environmental sustainability (transformation of old habits into new sustainable habits) among its employees.</li> </ul>
6. We encourage our employees to use eco-friendly products/services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes. Promotion of the bottles, the action of the day of the environment (publication of a series of measures); - Training employees on how to use certain computer tools to reduce document printing. - Constant awareness-raising actions to reduce or use consumables or supplies in order to reduce environmental impact.</li> </ul>
7. Our employees believe in the environmental values of our organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Over the course of two weeks, employees participated in building a list of good practices for sustainable consumption. The countless participations, now give rise to initiatives such as: sharing good daily practices through briefings with the teams, promoting the discussion around daily care favorable to the environment and training actions for the development of sustainable consumption of resources.</li> <li>- This initiative reinforces the Group's concern regarding environmental issues, the proper use of the resources of Planet Earth and the reduction of its ecological footprint.</li> </ul>

## 5. CONCLUSION

The concept of green image or green corporate image has received little attention in the academic literature however; green corporate image involves the perceptions linked to environmental features, concerns and commitments. There is a growing interest in investment in environmental issues by companies because they want to show their customers that their decision makers take the green issues seriously. This is a way M. Coutinho uses to communicate its concern with environmental issues and get the consolidation of collaborative relationships with stakeholders and the creation of a positive green corporate image.

Green marketing can bring also some problems: sometimes firms environmentally responsible today may be found to be harmful in the future, it is impossible for a firm to be certain they have made the correct environmental decision and it's difficult to establish policies that will address all environmental issues. In order to green marketing to be effective it must be genuine (actual product promises), educate the consumer (showing that green products are the

reflection of the company's own culture), allow the consumer to participate in the process involving the various actions developed.

The tone of the environment is fashionable. More informed, more demanding and more environmentally conscious consumers demand increasing attention to these issues by companies. Including environmental concerns and respect for the natural environment within strategic business planning becomes obligatory for marketers. To ignore is not the solution and stay out of this issue much less.

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