

I. Background

Sustain is a sustainable condom company in the United States, and the brainchild of the founder of Seventh Generation, an eco friendly cleaning product company, and his daughter (Adams, 2014). Its goals are two-fold, to create a condom that is sustainable and environmentally friendly, and to market themselves primarily to women, who—they argue—feel uncomfortable purchasing condoms (Shayon, 2013; Sustain, 2014b).

Their practices thus far are very positive, they work with a latex farm in India that is environmentally friendly and pays fair wages to their workers, they have no toxins in their condoms, and they invest 10% of their profits in a charity for women (Rugh, 2014; Sustain, 2014a). Despite all this, however, they've received mixed reviews in the media. Some articles are all in support of the idea, while others condemn them arguing that sustainability in condoms is not a large consumer concern (Adams, 2014; Davies, 2014; Richmond, 2014). One critique that became evident in a number of articles was the overall tone of the company as being condescending to women. 'Why are women the only ones who may care about sustainability in condoms?' they ask. 'Do women really need some kind of soft empathetic reason to buy condoms, because otherwise we won't be brave enough?' They also argue that not only are plenty of women are interested in their health but men would be equally interested in a sustainable condom if given the opportunity (Davies, 2014; Richmond, 2014). And furthermore, men have a whole host of issues surrounding condom purchases, like embarrassment, which size they pick, and what type to choose.

Taken together, these critiques indicate that the consumer experience is not adequately being taken into account and that the tone and overall outreach of the brand is not particularly successful. I argue that the brand would be more successful if they focus on consumer experience with the condom itself, increase their transparency and decrease the

serious tone of their campaign, and highlight both the sustainability, and the playful quality of their condoms to allow for a wider variety of customers. Sustain needs to make their brand of condoms appealing in ways other than being environmentally friendly to have competition with normal brands of condoms, and would further benefit from projecting an image that is relatable to their intended audience.

The recommendations are divided generally into three categories: Campaign, Product, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In the Campaign section I will argue that by moving towards a more playful, transparent and real tone, highlighting the simplicity of their product, Sustain will be more relatable to their audience, improve their relationship with the consumer and begin to change a negative repercussion of condom use. In the Product section, I will argue that Sustain should improve the difficult-to-open packaging and change the location of their condoms, reduce discomfort while choosing condoms by remaining simple, reduce their prices and offer an online subscription. And in the CSR section I will argue that offering a one-to-one scheme wherein each condom purchased means a condom offered to those in impoverished countries.

II. Memorandum

Dear Meika and Jeffrey Hollender,

I hope this letter finds you well. I must start out by saying that your vision to create sustainability in an industry that has previously suffered from almost a complete lack of development over the past 20 years is an excellent one. Indeed you've taken enormous steps by providing a condom that is environmentally friendly, toxin free and vegan certified. Because your mission is an important one, I'd like to make some suggestions, based soundly in theory from social psychology, to help your burgeoning business take off and continue to grow. While your business practices in regards to sustainability are very solid, there is some room for improvement in terms of consumer experience. I will split my recommendations into three categories based on the areas they pertain to: the product itself, your campaign, and extending your corporate social responsibility (CSR). Please find them below.

Product:

In this section I'd like to highlight a number of consumer experience issues, and their solutions. These are real world issues that people struggle with and would love to have resolved, and as such translate into reasons that people would choose to purchase your condoms over others. They act as an accompaniment to the environmental sustainability of your condom. Indeed, they are the legs that help support the success of your endeavors allowing you to promote social sustainability and improve user experience.

A few major issues that consumers come across while dealing with condoms are: the difficulty of opening the package during critical moments, the discomfort of the physical act

of buying and indeed choosing amongst the myriad of options, forgetting to buy them, and a sometimes prohibitive cost. The suggestions found below will address these issues.

- **Create packaging that is easy to open.** Condom wrappers have remained the same since their conception. Condoms are infamous for being impossible to open during that critical moment that matters most. If you can create a situation where the transition from one stage to the next is seamless and without stress, this would be a huge benefit for consumers, and be an excellent selling point to couple with the sustainability of your product.
- Highlight the simplicity of your product. The paradox of choice is that people feel overwhelmed by endless options and conversely feel less happy to have increased choice. Your product can stand alone as simply being a condom, easy to use and easy to open. Further, offer your product in alternative locations where people are already open, comfortable and talking about personal topics and health, like a gym, a waxing salon, a hair salon etc. Furthermore place it in different areas of the supermarket near things people already need so it's part of the natural shopping trip. Put it by the shaving creams and razors, and/or next to the tampons, highlighting its necessity rather than as a luxury commodity.
- To mitigate the likelihood that a consumer will forget to have condoms at an important moment, and to increase the ease of purchasing the product, offer an online subscription. Set up little packages with different amounts and types of condoms and send them out on a weekly or monthly basis. Make the packaging appealing, personalized and, of course, recycled and eco-friendly. Turn receiving condoms into a great experience that feels like a gift!

- Finally, assuming condoms cost 70 cents each (higher than average), you are currently selling them for \$1.70 each, which is a 60% profit margin. This places you as significantly higher than the average condom in the supermarket, and while some people might be willing to pay extra you will likely lose a large segment of the potential consumer population. Furthermore if you are trying to promote the use of condoms and highlight that people need to have safe sex, people may view it as paradoxical that you have a high price that could be prohibitive to users.

Campaign:

This next section pertains to how you present yourselves and your products to your intended audience. While above we explored the physical changes necessary, here I highlight ways in which you can make those changes clear to your customers and communicate in a more effective way. Thus far the tone you've chosen has focused on the sustainability of your product, your commitment to change, and an appeal towards women. These are all extremely important, however, because the majority of people do not primarily think about the sustainability of a condom while purchasing, this marketing will not be as effective as something that impacts a user's real interaction with the product. The sustainability, while important, may be second or third on someone's list of priorities, and you must provide them with—and make evident—alternative reasons to choose your product, as explored in the previous section.

Furthermore, while it is definitely beneficial to make a brand that women will feel comfortable purchasing, men suffer from embarrassment while buying condoms as well, and would be equally interested in sustainability as women would. Indeed some articles have suggested that the assumption that women will be more swayed by an empathetic message

about sustainability is unfair. Women want to identify as being strong, and equal to men, rather than needing help purchasing their condoms. Finally, young people enjoy transparency, and feeling that they are apart of a brand's journey, and you should reflect this in your campaign. As such I'd like to make the following suggestions:

- Change the dialogue from “women don’t feel comfortable buying condoms, so we’ve made a sustainable condom for them” to “condoms are something we all need, and we all find a little awkward. We’re here to make the experience as awesome as possible, from start to finish.” Excuse the pun.
- Change your overall tone to something more playful, transparent and real. Make everything, the good and the bad, known about what you are doing, so people feel that they’re getting the whole story. If you present yourselves a in a less corporate, and more “in the fray” kind of manner, people will be able to relate to you, get involved, and have more personal investment in your success.
- Launch a campaign about the necessity of condoms. One big issue hindering condom use is the idea that you don’t *need* to use one, and that if you do it’s because there isn’t any trust. Or indeed the idea that other people don’t use them, so why should I? Try to change that by highlighting the fact that everyone uses them, young, old and in-between.

CSR:

Your corporate awareness and environmental accountability is already extremely well developed and effective, and I’m sure you have plans in the future to develop it further. I have one suggestion however that aids not only a great cause, but also could have a more

direct impact and relatable nature for the consumers and would make them feel good about purchasing your product over others

- Adopt a one for one, or two to one scheme with your condoms. For every 1 (or 2) condom(s) purchased, another one is donated to someone who can't afford them. This would get condoms to the people who likely need them most, while allowing consumers to feel that they are having a very real and tangible effect when they purchase your condoms. People relate to and understand their impact far more if they know that for each condom they buy there is a direct positive outcome rather than an impalpable percentage of overall profits. This means that consumers can feel good while buying your product, which is good for everyone.

These suggestions come together to create a cohesive set of recommendations that will improve the consumer's experience and consequently cause you to stand out in the market, appeal more effectively to your audience and increase the scope of your sustainability goals. I hope you'll find them effective and helpful, and look forward to hearing your thoughts.

All my best,

Sophia Ben-Achour

I. Social Psychological Foundations

In this section the above letter and its contents will be reviewed and explored in light of the social psychological theories that support them. The letter was split into three sections, and this theoretical explanation will mirror that structure.

Before delving into each section however it is necessary to explore installation theory and how the structure of this paper falls within it. Installation theory argues that behavior is guided by the structures and allowances we come up against in our every life (Lahlou, 2015). These ‘installations’ exist in three realms, or layers: physical, psychological (or inner), and social (Lahlou, 2015). Practically what this means is that our behavior is constricted and determined by what our physical space allows us to do, the personal representations and skills we have available to us, and the institutions and social norms put in place by our cultures and societies. These scaffolds don’t cause the behavior itself, but rather guide and constrain it (Gibson, J. J., 1982). In terms of Sustain, we can not just change the physical structure of the condoms, or where they are available, but we must also change people’s social representations and the norms surrounding the product to ensure great change. This paper aims to make changes to all three of these with the physicality of the product, the discourse of the campaign, and the social norms reflected therein.

Social representations theory also lies at the heart of these recommendations. The basis of learning, narratives and behaviour are the representations we have of the world.

Through representations we are able to talk about and conceptualize objects that aren't present, and to have the tools we need to relate to the outside world (Jovchelovitch, 2006; Moscovici, 1984). However, representations are not something we innately "posses," but rather they come from social interactions (Jovchelovitch, 2006; Vygotsky S., 1978). We construct them through the toolboxes provided to us via society and the cultures we are embedded in (Bruner, 1990). As a result the decisions we make and the choices we follow are also based on society and social structures. This reflects the inner layer of the installation theory. By changing the negative representations people have of condoms, their use and their purchase we can facilitate healthy behavior (Lahlou, 2015). The way this translates practically will be explored in the sections below.

Product

This first, and potentially most important, section deals with the issues consumers come up against in their interactions with condoms. It focuses on consumer experiences and improving the likelihood that someone may pick up a condom and use it rather than endangering themselves and their sexual partner with STD's or accidental pregnancy. Underlying these recommendations is a combination of considerations of real people and their current user experience, and social psychological theories. Together they result in practical solutions steeped in theory.

The practical aspects of product packaging, and product placement reflect the physical layer of installation theory. By creating something that is easy to open, and less uncomfortable to gain access too, people's behavior may be scaffolded and guided into better choices. Furthermore, the theory of planned behavior argues that behavior is linked to our beliefs surrounding a product, specifically our behavioral attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 2011). In this case we're working specifically on

perceived behavioral control, and attitudes towards a product. People who are buying condoms normally know that they “should” use condoms; this is the subjective norm (although the caveats will be explored in the next section). So that leaves whether they like condoms—their behavioral attitudes—and if they feel they have high behavioral control over the situation: In this case, if they feel they will be able to purchase them without hindrance or embarrassment. Things that may keep someone from liking condoms is the ease of which they can open them in very important moments, and the stress from having to choose out of the many available. This discourse continues into their perceived ability to purchase the condoms. If going to the store, or indeed going to “that section” of the store is enough of a hindrance people may not purchase them at all. This is why both offering them in different sections of the shop, in less intimidating locations like a salon or gym, and online in a safe environment is very important to facilitating responsible behavior.

These suggestions also reflect the importance of sensory marketing. One is not only selling the product itself and its physical qualities, ie that it’s free trade, non toxic, etc, but also the consumer experience surrounding the product (Schmitt, 2011). By improving a consumer’s experience of purchasing and indeed using a condom, they will be more likely to not only use them, but also have loyalty to Sustain’s brand, and thus sustainability.

Campaign

This section focused primarily on the presentation of Sustain as a brand, and was designed to bring to the forefront of their company a narrative that is relatable, useful and even less offensive to consumers. Furthermore it hoped to begin changing consumer’s representations of condoms as something unwieldy, inconvenient and not necessary, to something that everyone uses, and that can be simple and seamlessly incorporated into a user’s experience.

The recommendation to make a marketing campaign highlighting the necessity of using condoms, and the ubiquitous use thereof by consumers is based in the goal of mitigating the problem between partners of mistrust. If everyone believes that condoms are just something we do without thinking, like putting clothes on in the morning, there will be no uncomfortable situations or arguments. This is a part of both the social, and inner layer in installation theory (Lahlou, 2015). Our social representations of condoms need to switch from a non-essential commodity, to something everyone uses and purchases. Furthermore, it makes a small nudge and takes advantage of a descriptive social norm, i.e. what is normally done in a situation (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). Humans are very social creatures, and therefore like to do what others are doing. If they know that others use condoms, then they may be more likely in the heat of the moment to do the same. By offering a convenient online ordering system and potentially a subscription that arrives in a beautifully packaged and recyclable container some negative associations with condom purchase could further be mitigated.

This leads right into the dialogue and tone surrounding the brand. Currently the image projected is not entirely relatable to their intended audience, and indeed seems to be ostracizing a female segment of the population who resent being condescended to, or having assumptions made about them and their interests (Davies, 2014; Richmond, 2014). Furthermore it neglects the idea that men too may be equally or more interested in the sustainability of a product, or their user experience.

People view products as an extension of their self, and indeed identity is performative by nature (Belk, 1988; Goffman, 1990). What this means is that when choosing out a product, consumers will be very careful about the image associated with it, and if they want to include their sense of self. I would argue that consumers will be more interested in a

tone that is transparent and playful with the information available for those who want to learn more, than one who's main platform is the sustainability of the product. If the narrative of sustain is one that people relate and indeed admire they may want to emulate their dialogue, and purchase their brand. By presenting something youthful, imperfect and on the same level as users rather than an image that is corporate and falsely perfected their targeted demographic will be more likely to see sustain as the condom they'd like to support and use. Moreover this paper argues that Sustain should not only market towards women, but also make a gender-neutral product that all parties can relate to.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The recommendation in this section sought to extend the already comprehensive CSR program created by sustain, and to improve it in terms of user experience, representations and extension of self. By offering a one to one, or two to one system of donations, Sustain can further alter the representations users have of condoms. A one to one scheme is something very tangible, someone can easily picture in their mind a person receiving a condom for every one that they buy, far more so than 10% of the profits. Furthermore someone's happiness to improve another person's life may outweigh or mitigate other negative feelings they have surrounding condoms. They might feel some sense of shame or embarrassment, but can anchor their sense of self in another representation, like pride for helping others.

Conclusion

The goal of these recommendations were not only to sell Sustain's condoms, but to make more appealing a brand that is already doing important things in the realm of sustainability and eco-friendliness in the latex industry. Sustainability in the rubber and latex industry is extremely important. Indeed, in Thailand the palm oil and rubber plantations have decreased biodiversity by 60%, and in Cambodia, Indonesia, Liberia and the Philippines child labor is used (Rugh, 2014). Furthermore, increased condom use needs to be encouraged, as the USA has the highest rates of STDs in the world, and among women in their 20s, 70% of pregnancies are unintended (CDC, 2013; Guttmacher Institute, 2015). This means that the problems keeping people from using condoms need to be identified and mitigated. The suggestions found above attempt to add to the consumer experience surrounding condoms in general, and promote the use of sustainable condoms through social psychological theories.

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