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Balancing Technocentric and Ecocentric Approaches: Integrating Ethnocultural Perspectives in Environmental Policies of Finland and Bhutan

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Abstract: This study delves into the intricate relationship between technology, ecology, and culture and its significant implications for environmental policies and marketing strategies on a global scale. By focusing on Finland and Bhutan as comparative case studies, the research explores the dynamics of ecocentrism, technocentrism, and ethnocentrism and their influence on sustainable development efforts and business practices. Through a comprehensive analysis, the study integrates marketing concepts such as sustainable marketing, green marketing strategies, and corporate social responsibility to gain a deeper understanding of how environmental and cultural perspectives intersect with and impact business practices. It uncovers the complex dynamics of technological reliance, ecological conservation, and cultural biases, shedding light on the formulation of more inclusive and effective environmental policies and marketing strategies.

The research highlights the need for a nuanced perspective that considers the interplay between environmental, technological, and socio-cultural factors. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of these factors in order to develop holistic solutions to pressing environmental concerns. By integrating cultural perspectives, the study aims to enhance business and marketing strategies and contribute to sustainable development practices.

Keywords: *Technology, Environmental degradation, Ecocentrism, Technocentrism, Ethnocentrism, Marketing Strategies*

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Introduction

The complex interplay between technology, ecology, and culture has significant implications for environmental policies and marketing strategies across the globe. This study delves into the nuanced dynamics of ecocentrism, technocentrism, and ethnocentrism, and how they shape sustainable development efforts and business practices. By conducting a comparative analysis of Finland and Bhutan, two nations with vastly different cultural contexts and environmental approaches, this paper offers unique insights into integrating marketing concepts such as sustainable marketing, green strategies, and corporate social responsibility within diverse ideological frameworks.

The comparative case study methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of how technological reliance, ecological conservation, and cultural biases converge to influence environmental policies and marketing practices. This comprehensive approach not only enhances our understanding of global environmental challenges, but also uncovers the potential of integrating cultural perspectives to develop more inclusive and effective business strategies. Through this comparative lens, the study aims to provide a nuanced perspective on the complex interplay between environmental, technological, and socio-cultural factors, ultimately informing the formulation of holistic solutions to pressing environmental concerns.

This study explores into the intersecting realms of ecocentrism, technocentrism, and ethnocentrism, examining their influence on environmental strategies and marketing within the contexts of Finland and Bhutan. By comparing these two nations, the paper illuminates the nuanced interplay between technological reliance, ecological conservation, and cultural biases in shaping environmental policies and marketing practices. It integrates marketing principles, such as sustainable and green marketing strategies, alongside corporate social responsibility, to evaluate their application in diverse environmental ideologies. This comprehensive approach not only offers a deeper understanding of global environmental challenges but also explores the potential of cultural perspectives in enhancing business and marketing strategies.

Literature Review

Factors and Health Consequences of Environmental Degradation

The drivers of global environmental degradation are deeply rooted in the profit-oriented, growth-driven, and consumption-driven nature of modern economies. Resource depletion and environmental contamination, though often sensed locally, have far-reaching global consequences. This destructive path has been primarily driven by the forces of global capitalism. A key factor underlying environmental damage is the disconnect between consumption and production. Consumers in one part of the world may be unaware of the human and environmental violations involved in the production processes taking place elsewhere. For instance, individuals purchasing inexpensive electronics or clothing in Barcelona may be oblivious to the issues in the production facilities in Bangkok.

The unchecked release of industrial chemicals into the environment is another major contributor to environmental degradation. According to Hodgson (2017), more than eighty-five thousand new industrial chemicals have been introduced with minimal government oversight or testing. Even with the awareness of their dangerous environmental and health consequences, these chemicals are only regulated in high-income countries, while still being exported for use in production in lower and middle-income countries with lax regulations. Toxic waste, a byproduct of industrial production, is a significant factor in environmental contamination. Moreover, the testing, production, and storage of conventional and nuclear weapons have released toxic chemicals that are linked to increasing rates of cancer and decreasing life expectancy in populations living near munitions factories and military bases in the United States and Russia.

The proliferation of electronic waste, or "e-waste," from mobile phones, computers, and household appliances, has also led to air and soil contamination with mercury, lead, and other hazardous metals. Similarly, the massive use of pesticides in agriculture and unsustainable irrigation practices have resulted in groundwater and soil contamination, as well as adverse health impacts on farmers due to inadequate protection. The mining industry, one of the world's most profitable yet destructive sectors, is another significant contributor to environmental degradation. Mining operations often involve deforestation, the leakage of heavy metals and acids into water and soil, and the release of greenhouse gases. Lastly, the energy sector, the oil extraction process is fraught with risks of collision-related fires, leaks, spills, carbon dioxide emissions, and methane, all of which have been linked to chronic health issues such as bronchitis, cancer, blood disorders, and asthma

(Hodgson, 2017). Later, Salman & Nagy, (2019) state that Finland's carbon emissions reduction is mainly due to producing goods in other countries.

Interconnected Approach to Sustainability

The traditional model of sustainable development presents it as three interconnected sectors - the economy, environment, and society. This model represents these sectors as equal-sized rings, aiming to balance and reconcile any conflicts between them (Giddings, Hopwood, & O'Brien, 2002). However, this assumption of separate sectors is a major weakness, as it risks addressing sustainable development issues in a compartmentalized way.

This compartmentalization underestimates the deep connections between the environment, economy, and society. It often leads to trade-offs, where governments tend to prioritize the economic sector over the environmental and social dimensions. Technical fixes like greenhouse gas trading, taxation, and pollution control are encouraged, instead of addressing the root causes and connections. A more integrated approach views human well-being as entirely dependent on the environment - the environment can survive without humans, but humans cannot survive without a healthy environment. This shift encourages a win-win situation, where decisions that benefit the environment also enhance human well-being, such as the transition to renewable energy (Giddings et al., 2002).

The Ecocentric Perspective

The Ecocentric view holds that all natural resources have intrinsic value beyond their ability to satisfy human needs. As humans are part of nature, we have a moral duty to be stewards of the environment. Ecocentrism emphasizes the need to maintain the balance and equilibrium of entire ecosystems, recognizing that each ecological unit is essential. It calls for limiting human rights over natural resources to conserve and protect the environment. However, applying Ecocentric principles in practice can be challenging, particularly in developing countries facing issues like corruption, poverty, and unemployment (Emetumah, 2017).

The Technocentrism perspective

The technocentrism viewpoint posits that technology has significantly impacted our daily lives, rendering it more accessible and convenient. Similarly, environmental management has been profoundly influenced by technological advancements. Technology has not only provided solutions to environmental issues but has also played a crucial role in fostering

environmental awareness. This suggests that technology will likely continue to shape environmentalism in the 21st century. However, technocentrism is often criticized for its anthropocentric tendencies, earning it the label of "shallow ecology." The core belief of technocentrism is that science and technology possess the inherent capability to solve environmental problems, without necessitating a shift in ethical perspectives on environmental matters. In contrast, ecocentrism emphasizes that economic, political, and social modifications are more relevant for addressing environmental challenges. Ecocentrism, while not completely opposed to technology, supports the development of green technologies that are environmentally friendly and cause minimal or no pollution (Emetumah, 2017).

Environmental Ideologies in Marketing Strategies: An Evolutionary Perspective

As environmental consciousness grows, marketing strategies are increasingly incorporating eco-friendly approaches. The rise of green marketing, which emphasizes products with a lower environmental impact, is influencing both consumer preferences and corporate behavior (Vargas-Hernandez et al., 2024; Shah et al., 2023).

Sustainable marketing extends beyond green initiatives, focusing on long-term ecological balance and ethical consumer engagement (Erislan, 2024). Heightened consumer awareness of environmental impacts has driven a shift in preferences towards brands demonstrating eco-consciousness, enhancing brand loyalty and public perception (Pookulangara et al., 2024; Palakshappa et al., 2024). Marketing communication strategies now frequently include messages about sustainability and efficiency, driven by stricter regulations and global environmental agreements (Chinasa, 2023). Ethical consumerism, considering the environmental and social impacts of purchases, is reshaping marketing strategies. This has led to innovative practices like upcycling and circular economy models in product development (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Overall, the integration of environmental ideologies into marketing is transforming the industry, as companies adapt to changing consumer demands and regulatory pressures in pursuit of more sustainable business practices.

Ethnocentrism and Global Marketing, as ethnocentrism significantly influences global marketing strategies, affecting consumer preferences and decision-making. It shapes how brands navigate cultural differences, tailoring marketing campaigns to resonate with specific cultural norms and values. Ethnocentric attitudes in marketing can lead to biases in product design and advertising, potentially alienating global audiences (Li, et al., 2024). The adoption of a glocal approach, where global products are adapted to local

cultures, mitigates ethnocentric biases, enhancing brand reception (Hornikx, et al., 2023). Understanding cultural sensitivities is crucial for global marketing success, as missteps can result in negative consumer responses and brand damage. Ethnocentric consumer tendencies, favoring domestic products over foreign ones, challenge international marketers to localize their strategies effectively (Saaida, 2023). Social media's role in bridging cultural gaps offers opportunities for marketers to engage diverse audiences, creating a more inclusive global market space (Hafez, 2023).

Sustainability: Bhutan's Innovative Path to Sustainable Development

Bhutan's approach to sustainable development encompasses three key objectives: wealth creation measured by GDP, achieving carbon neutrality to combat greenhouse gases (GHG), and the renowned Gross National Happiness (GNH) index that encompasses socio-economic targets (Yangka et al., 2018). Bhutan emphasizes the importance of social, cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability, considering GNH as its distinctive version of sustainable development. Notably, Bhutan has undergone significant structural changes in its Gross Domestic Product composition. The contribution of the primary sector (agriculture, mining, and forestry) declined from 56% to 27% between 1980 and 2003, while the secondary sector (construction, energy, and manufacturing) increased from 11% to 41%. The tertiary sector remained constant at 33%, indicating a gradual shift from a traditional agrarian and forestry-based economy to a modern market-based one. Furthermore, the country's growth rate suggests that the GNH philosophy does not hinder economic development (Yangka et al., 2018).

Gross National Happiness: A Holistic Measure of Development

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) was first introduced and embraced by Bhutan's Fourth King in the 1970s. Rooted in Buddhist philosophy, GNH posits that the development of a beneficial human society occurs when spiritual and material well-being progress in harmony, reinforcing one another. Compared to the narrow focus on GDP, this holistic approach measures the quality of a country's development (Yangka et al., 2018). The GNH report includes variables based on international standards as well as Bhutanese values and standards. National-level GNH surveys conducted in 2010 and 2015 by the Centre for Bhutan Studies revealed an increase of 1.8% in the GNH index. While urban citizens were reported to be happier than rural citizens, the surveys suggest that differences in happiness levels exist among various groups, emphasizing the potential for overall happiness among all individuals (Yangka et al., 2018).

Bhutan has adopted a low-impact, high-value approach to control mass tourism and mitigate its negative environmental and cultural effects (Jeffree, 2013). Measures such as controlled pricing and limiting tourist numbers and access to specific locations aim to minimize adverse impacts. Additionally, Bhutan has developed an eco-tourism industry focused on protected areas, ensuring the preservation and conservation of captivating landscapes and biodiversity that attract eco-tourists (Jeffree, 2013). However, the conservation of biodiversity and protection of wildlife populations can sometimes lead to conflicts among communities living in protected areas. For example, yak-herding communities face significant losses due to snow leopards, which are predators of yaks. To address this, herd insurance programs and community-based compensation schemes funded by eco-tourism revenues have been established, leveraging the appeal of these predators to eco-tourists to benefit the affected communities and foster their tolerance towards these magnificent creatures (Jeffree, 2013).

Ethnocentric Influences in Bhutan's Marketing

Bhutan's marketing strategies reflect its unique cultural identity, influenced by ethnocentric preferences (Chetri, 2023; Kamei, et al., 2021). This approach preserves Bhutanese culture while also appealing to international markets. Bhutanese marketing emphasizes traditional values and practices, attracting tourists and consumers interested in authentic cultural experiences. This strategy not only helps promote Bhutan's cultural heritage but also supports sustainable tourism, aligning with the country's broader sustainable development objectives.

Bhutan's approach to sustainable development significantly influences its marketing strategies. Emphasizing green branding and ethical tourism, Bhutan markets its commitment to environmental and cultural sustainability (Dem, et al., 2024; Dorji, et al., 2023). This strategy appeals to a global audience that values eco-consciousness, creating a unique brand identity for Bhutan in international markets. Bhutan's marketing effectively communicates its sustainable development goals, positioning the country as a leader in eco-friendly practices and responsible tourism. These efforts not only support the nation's economic growth but also reinforce its commitment to preserving its natural environment and cultural heritage.

Sustainability: Finland's Innovative Path to Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the UN Member States in 2015. The main aim is to eradicate extreme poverty worldwide and to ensure wellbeing in an environmentally sustainable manner. There are seventeen sustainable development goals included in the 2030 Agenda that should be met by 2030. Finland is committed to achieving these goals both nationally and internationally (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, n.d.). The seventeen goals are poverty eradication, zero hunger, well-being and good health, gender equality, quality education, sanitation and clean water, clean and affordable energy, economic growth and decent work, infrastructure, industry and innovation, inequality reduction, sustainable communities and cities, responsible production and consumption, combat climate change, sustainable life below water, sustainable life on land, strong and justice institutions, global partnership for achieving goals (Lyytimäki & Lähteenoja, 2016).

The Finnish government stress on the importance of mobilizing resources from technology, science, and innovation to support and reach these goals (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, n.d.). Furthermore, strengthening good governance and democracy, along with enhancing women rights are on top of Finland priorities. On the other hand, ecological footprint, climate change, and overconsumption are major issues in Finland that has resulted in biodiversity loss and unsustainable use of natural resources. Even though Finns are considered extremely environment-conscious, their natural resource and energy consumption are at highly unsustainable levels. However, the country has high potentials for exploring new solutions and implementing energy- conserving technology (Lyytimäki & Lähteenoja, 2016).

Ethnocentric Influences in Finland's Marketing

Finland's marketing strategies are deeply integrated with its sustainability efforts. Finnish companies utilize the nation's reputation for innovation and environmental awareness to market their products globally (Järlström, et al., 2023). This approach includes promoting green technologies and sustainable products, leveraging Finland's image as a leader in ecological responsibility. The emphasis on sustainability in marketing helps Finnish companies differentiate themselves in the global market, appealing to consumers who prioritize environmental friendliness in their purchasing decisions. Such strategies also align with Finland's national goals of sustainable development and environmental protection.

In Finland, marketing strategies are shaped by a combination of national pride and global competitiveness (Sorakunnas, et al., 2024; Ahonen, et al., 2024).

Finnish companies use marketing to highlight Finland's strengths in technology and sustainability, appealing to both domestic and international consumers. This balance between ethnocentrism and global appeal helps Finnish brands maintain a strong presence in the global market, showcasing their commitment to innovation and environmental responsibility.

Conclusion

Concluding that one country is superior to another in environmental strategies would be simplistic and overlook the unique challenges and contexts each face. This paper explored technocentrism and ecocentrism through the examples of Finland and Bhutan, illustrating diverse approaches to sustainable development. Bhutan's ecocentric approach demonstrates economic growth without environmental sacrifice, but it must be cautious about resource consumption levels. Finland, while technologically advanced, needs to deepen its environmental commitment beyond technological solutions. Bhutan's unique positioning leverages its commitment to maintaining a high level of forest cover, which aligns with Ecocentric values, distinguishing its marketing strategy from more technocentric approaches that emphasize technological solutions to environmental issues. This strategic choice not only enhances Bhutan's global image but also attracts a niche market of eco-conscious consumers and tourists, providing a clear example of how marketing strategies can be deeply intertwined with national environmental ideologies (Yangka, et al., 2018).

Similarly, Finland's marketing efforts to promote its clean technology and innovation sectors reflect a technocentric approach, showcasing how the country's advanced technological capabilities contribute to sustainable development and environmental protection (Järnlström, et al., 2023). These examples illustrate the nuanced ways in which countries can leverage their inherent strengths and ideological orientations within their marketing strategies to address environmental challenges. The conclusion also considers the impact of marketing and ethnocentrism on these environmental strategies. Marketing, especially in a global context, can significantly influence how environmental policies are perceived and implemented. Ethnocentrism, meanwhile, can shape national environmental policies and their international reception. Both countries, and indeed the global community, must navigate these complex interplays between technology, ecology, marketing, and cultural perspectives to address environmental challenges effectively.

Policies and Recommendations

In addressing climate change and environmental degradation, certain policies and recommendations are proposed, also considering the angles of marketing and ethnocentrism. An international organization could be established to assess the environmental safety and essentiality of new technologies, also considering their market viability and cultural sensitivity. Developed countries have a moral and ethical obligation to assist developing countries, not just in environmental protection but also in equitable market practices. This approach involves avoiding exploitation for lower-cost production, highlighted by the plight of laborers in industries like clothing manufacturing in countries like Bangladesh. It's crucial that richer nations refrain from imposing harmful environmental and labor conditions that wouldn't be accepted in their own countries.

The current emphasis on STEM subjects, while important, should be balanced with the recognition of arts and humanities. This balance is essential for holistic societal development and can be beneficial in creating marketing strategies that are culturally sensitive and ethically sound. Developing countries, in their pursuit of growth, should leverage the accumulated knowledge and experiences of other nations, avoiding past mistakes. They could look to Bhutan as a model for balancing development with environmental preservation. For example, Egypt has the potential to develop eco-tourism, provided it's regulated to prevent the pitfalls of mass tourism.

Moreover, integrating marketing strategies that emphasize ethical practices and consumer awareness into environmental policies can drive significant changes. Recognizing the power of consumers in influencing business practices underscores the need for businesses to adopt sustainable and ethical practices. This approach not only encourages responsible consumer behaviour but also ensures that economic activities are conducted in a manner that respects both the environment and cultural values. This holistic approach to policy-making, considering both environmental impact and ethnocentric influences, can lead to more sustainable and culturally respectful economic development.

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