

“voting rights”, “LGBTQIA+ rights”. Data were collected between May and November 2023 using the link prioritization and clicks behavior approach (Song et al., 2019).

Results and discussion

Findings reveal that universities act in the political sphere to generate both internal and external positive change. Specifically, university activism aims to engage cognitively, emotionally and from a behavioral perspective the individual to generate capacity, motivation, and opportunities for action (Stephan et al., 2016). Universities through specific centers such as DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), offer various workshops, lessons and seminars on sociopolitical issues aimed at generating awareness and skills on the topic. Additionally, through awareness campaigns, celebrations, memorial days, honors, and award programs, they seek to emotionally engage stakeholders and foster their motivation to act.

Lastly, in line with the main purpose of activism, universities offer a range of opportunities to push stakeholders toward the action. Specifically, they might be donations, volunteering programs, misconduct reporting measures and supporting social movements.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the emerging strand of university activism, a risky and understudied strategy in higher education. Universities appear to be beginning to play a political role in responding to growing stakeholder expectations that require engagement beyond mere philanthropic actions. Based on these early findings, it is necessary to understand the opportunities and risks that may be associated with this strategy from both an internal and external perspective.

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Combating modern slavery through four pillars of marketing power

Krzysztof Kubacki¹, Natalia Szablewska²

¹University of Plymouth, United Kingdom. ²The Open University, United Kingdom

Summary Statement

Modern slavery covers grievous forms of exploitation, ranging from forced labour to forced marriage. Marketing’s role in combating modern slavery remains a neglected topic in the marketing literature, but it remains a major topic across wider business literature. Our study disaggregates organisational actions into four main pillars of marketing power, namely individuals, materialities, institutions and discourses, and their impact on the creation of and/or mitigation of environments conducive to modern slavery.

Competitive Short Paper

Modern slavery (MS) covers grievous forms of exploitation, ranging from forced labour to forced marriage. Nearly 50 million people are trapped in MS worldwide, with the majority of those in forced labour in the private economy.

Marketing's role in combating MS remains a neglected topic in the marketing literature (e.g., Meshram et al., 2021), but it remains a major topic across wider business literature (Szablewska and Kubacki, 2023). Simultaneously, marketing practices play a pivotal role in shaping traditional business models, of which MS is an unintended yet not unanticipated consequence. As organisations are increasingly embracing social sustainability as one of their core objectives (Siemieniako et al., 2021), this study aims to ignite marketing's social spirit by systematising marketing's power to enhance the resilience of individuals vulnerable to MS.

MS is a significant challenge for organisations and the wider society, and it can be considered a negative externality of business practice. In this study, we draw from Barnett and Duvall (2005)'s approach to marketing power as a capacity to cause effects rather than its potential to realise specific business objectives. Extending Birchall (2021)'s work on corporate power over human rights, we distinguish four pillars of power: individuals, materialities, institutions and discourses.

Power over individuals and communities in supply/value chains is where the majority of business research into MS concentrates. However, efforts to minimise the risks of MS include two main forms, internal marketing/branding and employment practices. Social sustainability and MS values and objectives should be articulated internally in organisational hiring and employment relations policies, with clearly articulated expectations towards suppliers in lower tiers.

Power over materialities represents organisational ownership of and control over different forms of capital, such as natural resources, which positions workers as just another form of capital, i.e., human resources, that is managed to increase organisational resilience. Yet enhancing the resilience of individuals vulnerable to MS requires some materialities to be treated by organisations as social goods rather than commodities.

Power over institutions includes organisational influence over governance institutions such as states, inter- and non-governmental organisations. Businesses have a history of shaping market relations in their favour, through weakening regulatory frameworks and external forms of governance. However, inter-organisational partnerships involving business organisations and non-business stakeholders are needed to engage with MS at a systemic level.

Power over discourse includes the creation and distribution of information, discourses and norms. Corporate social responsibility and other forms of social purpose messages carry the risk of dominating the public discourse with a focus on business challenges rather than social justice. (Corporate) social marketing and social norming campaigns play an important role in informing the responsibilities and expectations towards organisations, governments and consumers.

Our study disaggregates organisational actions into four main pillars of marketing power and their impact on the creation of and/or mitigation of environments conducive to MS. Thus, all marketing strategies that are located within at least one of the four pillars need to be considered in terms of their potential impact on MS.