

Abstract

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Channelling Sustainability – Green Private Brand Strategies in Grocery Retailing

Growing environmental pressures on companies during the 1990s made organisations in different industry sectors define ambitions aiming for a sustainable development. However, as these ambitions were to be turned into actions many companies faced major difficulties. This situation suggested a need for deeper analyses of what happens as companies need to reconsider their businesses and integrate sustainable concerns into their practices.

Company efforts to introduce sustainable practices are regarded as a learning process in a changing environment. Focus of the study is on sustainable strategies in the grocery retailing sector. Efforts of retailer chains to introduce products meeting the growing concerns for ecological and social issues are studied to provide a better understanding of problems and opportunities in the change process towards sustainability.

The study presents learning on two major dimensions: knowledge about what sustainability is and knowledge about how sustainability can be implemented. The theoretical discussion conceptualise the development of the private brands as an institutionalisation process, where the retailing companies are translating abstract ecological and social demands into concrete products. Sustainable product strategies aim to balance ecological, social and economical concerns. Tradeoffs between contradicting demands and ideologies are being highlighted and analysed. Many different actors bring their preferences and knowledge into this process, thus influencing the product development process. The products are then results of the “valuation dialogues” taking place during this negotiation process. The private brand strategies have had structural effects on the production and consumption of everyday consumer goods in Sweden, exemplifying product development and product mix vitalisation in a conventional industry sector.

Key words: sustainability, grocery retailing, private brand strategy, green product development, process, institutional theory, sensemaking, learning

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