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Abstract

Sustainable innovation is essential for businesses to address sustainability challenges and maintain competitiveness. However, many sustainable innovations fail to reach the goals and objectives. Strategic niche management (SNM), a means for diffusing sustainable innovation, is a process that facilitates the adoption of new sustainable technologies and innovations. In sectors where SNM has been applied, including renewable energy, transportation, and sustainable agriculture, maintaining market presence has proven to be a common obstacle. To address this gap, first, we examine the potential of business-to-business (B2B) marketing as a strategy for SNM in the sustainable products market. Then, to explore this strategy further, we examine the roles of individuals and organizations at the micro and macro levels, respectively, in B2B marketing. The study also highlights the impact of individuals as stakeholders on decision-making and setting environmental policies at the micro level as well as supporting niche market development. The findings of this research not only contribute to an understanding of the relationship between B2B marketing and SNM but also provide valuable insights on how businesses can utilize B2B marketing to drive sustainable innovation. Future research could explore case studies as a method for examining how to implement B2B marketing strategies for SNM in different industries and contexts.

Keywords: Sustainable innovation, Strategic niche management, B2B marketing, Micro level, Macro level

Introduction

The growing importance of environmental responsibility and shifting customers' expectations are forcing companies to seek novel strategies for growth and differentiation. However, convincing business-to-business (B2B) customers to adopt changes can be challenging. In many cases, new innovations may seem more expensive, and there are also various costs and obstacles that make switching difficult. Several research studies (Gong et al., 2019; Musova et al., 2021; Ramli et al., 2020; Wijaya & Paramita, 2021) have shown the role of customer awareness and willingness to pay higher prices for environmentally compliant products. These results are particularly valuable in the context of marketing, as they highlight the need for businesses to consider marketing strategies targeting environmentally conscious customers. For instance, the renewable energy company Sullivan Solar Power produces and sells solar panels and utilizes branding to reach its target market, emphasizing its brand identity for B2B marketing purposes (Mudambi, 2002). It has become recognized as one of the most trusted solar power companies with certification from the North

American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners and the only solar power company in Southern California (*Solar Panels, Batteries, and Installations Sullivan Solar Power*, 2023). This example shows how crucial it has become for companies to simultaneously adopt sustainability and marketing strategies to promote and sell sustainable products and services (Du et al., 2022; Horn & Brem, 2013; Ricciardi, 2013).

This research attempts to delve deeper into this issue by investigating one aspect of sustainable innovation, strategic niche management (SNM) - a process that facilitates the adoption of new technologies and innovations (Stiles, 2020). However, the SNM process includes radical innovations that pose challenges within the existing market and encounter market resistance (McDermott & O'Connor, 2002). These products confront challenges to develop markets for selling sustainable innovation products (Schraven et al., 2023), hence, this research looks at B2B marketing at the micro- and macro-levels to overcome these market challenges.

In the context of B2B marketing, the terms "micro" and "macro" refer to different areas of analysis, which help decision-makers understand and evaluate the B2B marketing phenomenon from different perspectives (Kwarso, 2017). Studying B2B marketing at the micro level means focusing on the impact individuals in different roles have on strategies, the magnitude of that impact, and understanding and responding to the needs of individual decision makers within the target organization (Karimi, 2013; Keränen et al., 2023). Pernu et al. (2015) explored the role of individuals as company sense-makers and found individuals use a variety of sources to interpret and make sense of customer information. Additionally, their study highlighted that these roles are shaped by the individual's personal experiences, knowledge, and biases as well as the specific organizational environment in which they are situated. Both Husted & Allen (2008) and Ivanova-Gongne et al. (2022) focused their research on the role of managers at the micro level and found that managers need to be aware of the different cultural perspectives at play to effectively manage cross-cultural business relationships and make decisions. Koporcic et al., (2020) emphasize the role of decision makers, arguing for awareness of the impact of negative emotions on dynamic decision-making processes and using appropriate strategies, including identifying emotions affecting decision-making, understanding their impact on thinking and behavior, and effectively managing emotions, to cope with them. Considering these different roles played by individuals, they can be deemed as stakeholders at the micro level, since stakeholders are individuals with an interest in or affected by a company's activities, operations, and performance (Ferenc et al., 2017).

Conversely, the macro level in B2B marketing refers to actions taking place at the organizational level. Macro-level activity may focus on strategic planning, market analysis, target audience segmentation, and developing high-level marketing strategies to achieve long-term business

objectives (Martech Zone, 2023). The core difference between the micro and macro levels in B2B marketing is the area of focus: individuals taking part in activities versus goals and outcomes at the organizational level. Despite this, the interplay between micro and macro levels in B2B marketing is crucial. The reason for this is that micro-level decisions and strategies should align with and be responsive to macro-level factors. Micro-level insights gained from buyer-seller relationships and market research can provide valuable feedback to the macro-level analysis (Viswanathan, Jung, et al., 2014; Viswanathan, Shultz, et al., 2014). By analyzing individual needs and preferences, companies can identify broader patterns and trends, which contribute to their understanding of the macro-level market dynamics. Hence, the ability to harmonize these two levels and utilize their interdependencies can promote business goals like sustainable innovation.

Sustainable innovations include new processes, practices, systems, and products that minimize environmental impact (Leal-Millán et al., 2018), and businesses that claim to be environmentally friendly need to come up with innovative ideas that are useful for the environment and society. This helps them create value and stay ahead of the competition (Hansen et al., 2009). Three perspectives for sustainable innovation have been presented in the extant literature (Cillo et al., 2019): internal managerial, external relations, and performance evaluation. The role of strategies and practices in managing social, environmental, and economic elements of businesses to innovate has been called internal managerial. SNM is part of the internal managerial perspective (Cillo et al., 2019), which supports sustainable innovative technologies through social experimentation. This management style is based on the economics of evolutionary innovation and emphasizes that successful radical innovations emerge from socio-technical experiments in which a variety of stakeholders, including individuals and organizations, collaborate and exchange knowledge (Caniëls & Romijn, 2008; Sopjani et al., 2017).

SNM is subject to risks and uncertainties and need to achieve successful market adoption and target niche markets (Boon et al., 2022). A niche market comprises market segments within a larger market that has similar demographic, purchasing and/or lifestyle characteristics (Thilmany, 2012). In SNM, a niche market is where micro- and macro-level B2B marketing strategies, influenced by individuals as stakeholders, can be applied. Fig. 1 shows how B2B marketing is an intermediary in a business's process of achieving sustainable innovation. Based on Fig. 1, businesses use SNM as part of an internal managerial perspective and as a means to diffuse sustainable innovation. SNM utilizes B2B marketing as a strategy to develop a niche market for radical innovation. The ultimate objective of this process is to meet business goals.

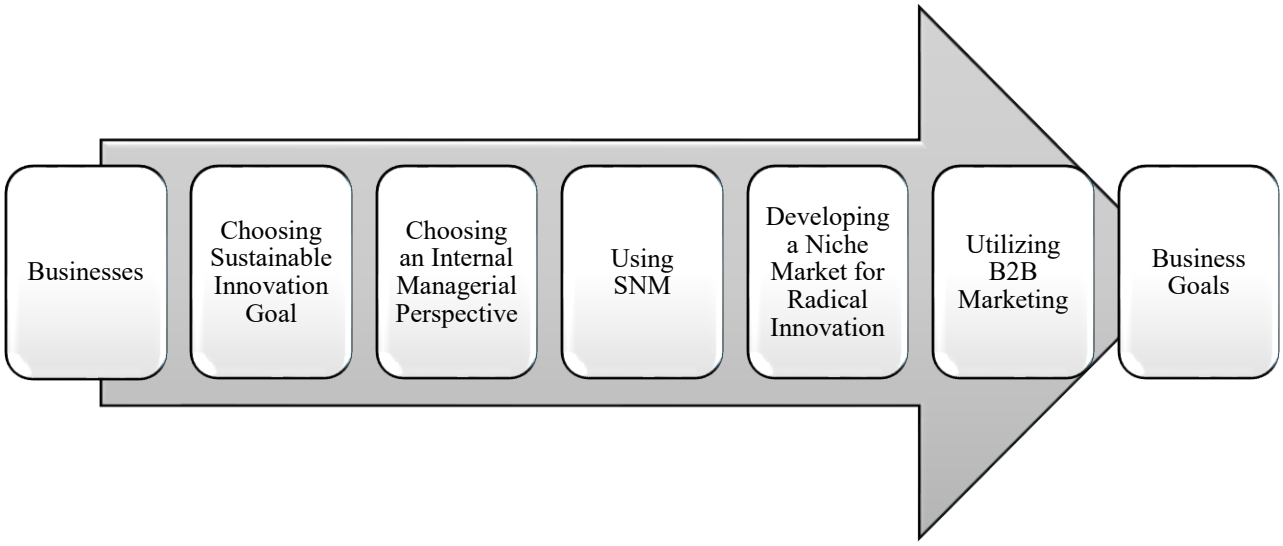

Fig. 1 - Intermediation of B2B marketing for achieving sustainable innovation goals

This research explores sustainable innovation through SNM in B2B marketing, focusing on the interplay between micro and macro levels. By understanding the relationships and tensions involved, we can provide valuable insights for navigating this dynamic landscape to achieve effective sustainable innovation. B2B marketing is a powerful tool for promoting sustainability, allowing businesses to influence their industry by targeting the right audience to promote sustainable behaviors (Helmold, 2022). Individuals as stakeholders influence marketing strategies, brand perceptions, and environmental policies at both micro and macro levels (Seebacher, 2021; Wikström, 2010). This research looks at the impact of micro- and macro- level interactions in B2B marketing on sustainable innovation and its results will contribute to the broader goal of building a more sustainable and responsible B2B marketplace to directly addresses social and environmental challenges.

Following the introduction, the remaining sections of this book chapter are as follows. First, we will describe the interplay of micro- and macro-level in B2B marketing and provide a conceptual design for individual roles. Then, we will outline radical innovation and niche markets, two key concepts of strategic niche management, and present a conceptual design for utilizing B2B marketing in SNM. In that regard, we will discuss sustainability-oriented dynamic capabilities, customer involvement, big data, and sustainability training. These strategies are all suitable to achieving sustainable innovation goals and individuals play a crucial role in making decisions about whether or not to apply these strategies. Finally, we will mention the government's role in supporting SNM and, consequently, B2B marketing strategies.

Micro and Macro level in B2B Marketing

B2B marketing and sustainability focus on the macro level as they pertain to businesses and organizations (Seebacher, 2021; Wikström, 2010). However, at the micro level, stakeholders can have an impact on both B2B marketing and sustainability (Wikström, 2010). Regarding the former, businesses can influence marketing strategies and tactics (Frooman, 1999; Rivera-Camino, 2007), shape brand perception (Voyer et al., 2017), and set expectations for business practices. With regards to the latter, individuals play a critical role in identifying environmental policies (Journeault et al., 2021; Le Van et al., 2019).

Researchers have examined the interplay between the micro and macro levels of B2B marketing dynamics. Vallaster et al. (2023) found that decision makers strongly identify with their company and view themselves as representatives of their organization during interactions with suppliers. This emphasizes the significant role individuals play in shaping micro-level B2B marketing dynamics when they evaluate supplier propositions and consider shared purpose and mutual respect. Pedersen et al. (2020) also looked at individual impact on macro level operations, highlighting the valuable insights individuals provide to interorganizational practices in B2B marketing, which, in turn, aid in understanding and managing relationships. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2021) found that macro-level strategic planning was informed by analyzing micro-level data from social media platforms to gain insight into customer behavior and preferences. Johnston & Mora Cortez (2018) explored the implications of unit pricing in B2B marketing, emphasizing the importance of customization options and flexibility for customer purchasing requirements. The interplay between the micro and macro levels in B2B marketing can be called sense-making, which Mattsson et al. (2015) defines as a process in which individuals and organizations at the micro and macro level interpret and understand their environment and develop shared understandings to guide their actions. They also highlight that sense-making is a dynamic process that is particularly important because of the complicated and interdependent nature of relationships between buyers, sellers, and other stakeholders.

These studies demonstrate the significance of individuals, data analyses, and tailored approaches in navigating B2B marketing dynamics at both micro and macro levels. Fig. 2 illustrates the interplay of micro and macro levels in B2B marketing, and how they all contribute to the achievement of business goals.

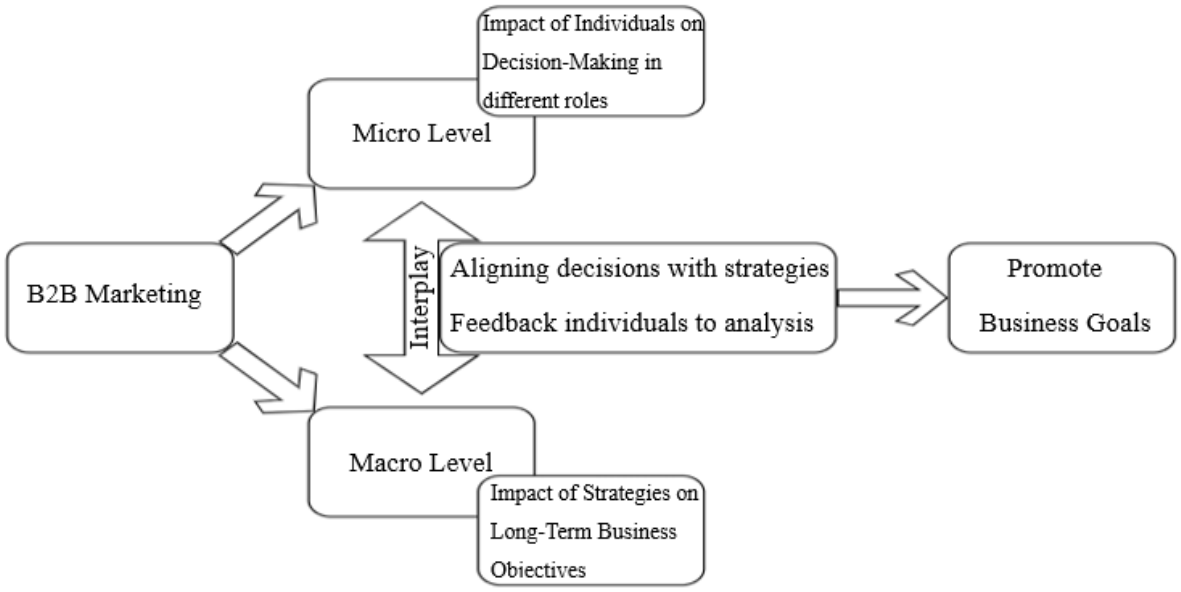

Fig 2 – The interplay of micro and macro levels to promote business goals

Radical innovation

Radical product innovation refers to the process of making significant changes to a product's design or performance to disrupt existing industries and provide better customer experiences (Miller et al., 2005; Pantano et al., 2022). This type of innovation is crucial for companies operating in dynamic environments (Tsou & Chen, 2020) as it allows them to differentiate themselves from competitors by offering innovative technologies and revolutionizing the use and experience of products to benefit customers (Menguc et al., 2014). The launch of the iPhone in 2007 is a prime example of a radical product innovation that combined a touch screen and internet connectivity (i.e., radical innovation) to transform the smartphone industry (Richardson, 2012).

To pursue radical innovation, companies must simultaneously manage proactive and responsive customer orientation, technological orientation, and competitor orientation (Slater et al., 2014). For instance, Amazon is highly customer-focused, offering personalized product recommendations, convenient delivery options, and easy returns. At the same time, it is technologically oriented, which is evident in the company's investment in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data analytics (Al Halbusi, 2023). Pursuing radical innovation may entail risking the success of existing products, so companies must configure the necessary structure for radical product innovation, including product development and commercialization, performance improvement, and significant cost reduction (Carlefall et al., 2017; Francis & Bessant, 2005; Shakeel et al., 2020), to be able to benefit from its results. In other words, radical innovation requires market developed, and it can be done by exploring new niche markets or creating products tailored to specific niches. According to Kyriakopoulos et al. (2016), the role of marketing in radical innovation is

multifaceted and cannot be reduced to a single benefit or liability. Individuals in the role of managers and as stakeholders need to assess their company's marketing strength by considering multiple marketing strategies, including B2B marketing.

Dimensions of sustainability-oriented dynamic capabilities for integration

To develop new products, it is necessary to invest in innovation and apply marketing strategies to innovative products (Dangelico et al., 2017; E. Williams, 2015). Innovation geared towards achieving sustainability goals, referred to as radical innovation, can result in what we term sustainable innovation. To meet this demand on companies, the concept of sustainability-oriented dynamic capabilities (SODCs) serves as a theoretical framework for the effective implementation of environmental policies in developing competencies and allocating the resources necessary for innovation (Dangelico, 2016; Teece et al., 1997). By using SODCs, businesses can be more agile when facing social and environmental challenges (Castiaux, 2012). Similarly, marketing activities can give companies a competitive edge for dealing with economic challenges as they provide a way to convey information about the product design to customers (Luchs et al., 2016). When marketing strategies help foster a good relationship between a business and its customers, businesses have a greater chance of achieving sustainability (Ndubisi & Nataraajan, 2016). Therefore, integrating marketing into sustainability initiatives can result in economic benefits for companies with sustainable products and expansion into niche markets (Foerstl et al., 2015; Richards & Font, 2019). This macro-level interaction contributes to enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty, company reputation, and long-term profitability (Havardi-Burger et al., 2020). Prioritizing sustainability enables businesses to proactively prepare for future challenges and create long-term value for stakeholders includes individuals (Fasan, 2013).

Customer involvement for niche markets

Customer involvement is a company’s intensive, frequent, two-way collaboration with customers, initiated and encouraged by the company, for the purposes of gaining valuable customer knowledge and improving outcomes at various stages of innovation. This process enables firms to gain insight into their customers’ preferences, which leads to better management of expectations and increases in customer satisfaction. Companies can distinguish themselves from competitors by developing products and services that better satisfy the needs of their customers, which is critical for developing meaningful marketing strategies (Arrigo et al., 2021; Daniel, 2018).

Customer involvement can take three forms: information source, co-developer, and innovator (Cui & Wu, 2016). Customer testing and beta programs are examples of customer involvement in the innovation process, in which companies invite a select group of customers to test a new product or

service and get feedback before launching it (Desouza et al., 2008). The impact of customer involvement on product performance depends on the nature of customer knowledge, the firm's knowledge management strategy, and organizational support for knowledge management implementation. Furthermore, the effectiveness of customer involvement can vary across the different forms of involvement and is dependent on the firm's technological capability (Cui & Wu, 2016). Hence, businesses can use customer involvement and differentiation, which rely on customer knowledge, as a B2B marketing strategy for sustainable innovation (La Rocca et al., 2016; Lynch et al., 2016). Enhancing customer awareness means developing niche markets for radical innovative products. Individuals as decision-makers can adopt this strategy in B2B marketing and, while meeting the needs of stakeholders at the micro level, gain economic advantages at the macro one.

Big Data for radical innovation and niche markets

Big Data provides insights into customers that marketers use for a competitive advantage. The volume, velocity, and variety of data from customers has led to a revolution in understanding customer behavior and marketing strategies (Erevelles et al., 2016). Big Data enables firms to innovate incrementally and radically (Al-Khatib, 2022) by extracting tacit knowledge from large datasets and gaining a competitive edge through strategic interpretation (Mikalef et al., 2020) and the discovery of new insights about customer behavior (Mach-Król & Hadasik, 2021). Big Data can also be used to identify niche markets by providing insights into customer behavior and preferences to gain a competitive advantage (Masih, 2021; Nemati & Khajeheian, 2018).

Big data analytics enables radical innovation in a number of ways. First, it permits businesses to collect and analyze large amounts of data from a variety of sources, involving internal systems, customer interactions, and social media. This data can then be utilized to recognize new trends and patterns, which can lead to new ideas for products and services. Second, using big data analysis can help businesses test and confirm new ideas faster and better than was possible using traditional means. This is possible because it enables companies to try out different situations and receive immediate feedback from customers. Third, big data analytics can be used to personalize products and services for a segment of the market by allowing businesses to understand the individual needs and preferences of their customers.

Big Data not only enables radical innovation and identifies niche markets but is also used in B2B marketing. Big Data can be utilized by businesses to gain a deeper understanding of their customers, devise more precise and efficacious B2B marketing strategies, and develop novel products and services to satisfy their customers' demands (Wright et al., 2019). The strategic integration of Big Data in B2B marketing not only enhances the ability to understand and provide individuals' needs at

the micro level but also empowers businesses to innovate, identify niche markets, and stay competitive in the broader market landscape at the macro level.

Sustainability training for SNM

Sustainability is becoming increasingly important for businesses (Benn et al., 2014), and authorities are also accepting their role in and responsibility for contributing to sustainability more and more (Lozano, 2012). To achieve sustainable goals, businesses need to develop a comprehensive system that considers economic, environmental, and social aspects (Figge et al., 2002), implying that businesses must better understand the significance of various system characteristics in fostering sustainability. Challenges in selecting the best system for the sustainability include understanding a business's structure (McPhee, 2014), core competencies (Mochizuki & Fadeeva, 2010), and operational context along with ensuring the final composition creates system synergies so that the dimensions of sustainability and the corporate system are fully considered (Lozano, 2012). There is therefore an essential requirement for a framework to be able to integrate sustainability criteria into business systems includes of marketing (Wood et al., 2017).

Investigating indicators for tracing the integration of sustainability standards into corporate systems reveals that many organizations still do not have a plan for fulfilling the United Nation (UN)'s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) despite how vital they consider them. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and Support the Goals analyzed 206 companies' sustainability reports and website information for progress related to SDG adoption. They found that 83 percent of companies state that they support the SDGs, and 69 percent of companies articulate which goals are most relevant to their business, indicating a sense of urgency for their implementation. Despite the universal understanding that SDG adoption is crucial, the report states only 40 percent of companies set measurable commitments to achieve them, and just 20 percent include evidence for assessing their positive impacts (Warren, 2022). These statistics clearly show that not only have organizational systems not been considered, but that the necessary interrelationships with sustainability goals are also yet to be established (Lozano, 2012).

Sustainable implementation practices can be supported by sustainability training and increasing knowledge about sustainability implementation practices that, if continued and effective, improve the economic, social, and environmental performance of companies (Birou et al., 2019). Özgit & Öztüren (2021) researched the importance of sustainability training and niche markets for sustainable tourism development in North Cyprus. They concluded North Cyprus can reduce its reliance on mass tourism and create a more sustainable tourism sector by providing sustainability training to tourism stakeholders and developing niche tourism products. França et al. (2017) proposed using

sustainability training to connect business model innovation with sustainable development, emphasizing the need for a stronger business case for sustainability and collaborative competence. They also highlighted the potential of niche markets for innovative and sustainable solutions. Other researchers (Dwivedi et al., 2023; França et al., 2017; Ren & Jackson, 2020) explored the promotion of organizational sustainability through sustainability training and radical innovation and found sustainability training enhances awareness and skills for sustainable practices while radical innovation is critical for addressing environmental and social challenges.

Sustainability training supports radical innovation by fostering creativity, exposing employees to new ideas, promoting experimentation, and encouraging collaboration. Additionally, all of the studies emphasized HR's role in facilitating both sustainability training and radical innovation for organizational sustainability. The process of training to enhance the knowledge of individuals associated with a company is essential for establishing an optimal system for sustainability and determining its correlation with marketing. Individuals as stakeholders can convince management to adopt this policy, anticipating its impact on the growth of a niche market and eventually applying the outcomes to SNM.

How does government support for SNM impact B2B marketing strategies?

Governments can reinforce the SNM process by providing funding, such as grants for research groups studying sustainable innovation, to businesses that focus on innovative technologies. In this regards, decision-makers need sufficient power to enforce decisions and strategies as well as implement rules to safeguard niches (Smith & Raven, 2012). Governments can also pass regulations, such as tax breaks or other incentives for businesses that focus on the niche market, to support sustainable innovation (Zindiye et al., 2012). The government's role in supporting niches is vast and can be described at the macro level as follows:

Enabling Policies: Governments establish policies such as regulations, tax incentives, and subsidies to reduce barriers and promote sustainable innovation (Hanna, 2018; Seebode, 2011). These policies facilitate access to capital, lower regulatory compliance costs, and promote market intelligence and networking for learning (J. Williams, 2006).

Research and Development (R&D) Support: Governments accelerate technology development by providing support for R&D. For example, the EU Biofuels Directive of 2003 focused on the use of renewable fuels for transport and set a target 5.75% of market biofuel's shares for Member Governments by 2010, which should increase to 10% by 2020. To achieve these goals, the EU Strategy for Biofuels supported research and development as one of seven policies needed (Hahn-

Hägerdal et al., 2008). Similarly, the UK and Scottish governments implemented R&D frameworks to foster high-value manufacturing and alternative material technologies (Ward, 2015).

Developing partnerships: Governments collaborate with industry, academia, and civil society to develop partnerships for fostering sustainable innovations (Florini & Pauli, 2018). These partnerships provide resources, knowledge sharing, and financial incentives. An example of a successful partnership is the Working Future initiative in Uganda, which empowers youth through collaborative efforts and achieved significant economic improvements (Albrectsen, 2017).

These strategies reinforce niche markets in which micro-level and macro-level B2B marketing policies can be used for strategic niche management. Government macro-level support for SNMs will, therefore, encourage individuals as stakeholders to utilize strategies in B2B marketing to work towards sustainable innovation goals.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, we have emphasized the significance of sustainable innovation for addressing sustainability challenges and maintaining competitiveness in the market. Researchers have introduced three perspectives for sustainable innovation: internal managerial, external relations, and performance evaluation (Cillo et al., 2019). Due to the breadth of these perspectives, we have chosen to focus on SNM as a subset of internal management. SNM combines technological progress with social transformation to achieve more sustainable development through experimentation in technological niches and niche markets (Caniëls & Romijn, 2008; Hegger et al., 2007). In this study, we mainly focus on radical innovation and niche markets because the SNM process ultimately results in a radical innovation product that enters the initial market and needs market development. Although SNM can be reinforced by government tax exemptions, research and development grants, or other mechanisms (Cannon, 2007; Falcone, 2018; Ulmanen et al., 2009), it faces the challenge of staying in the market and developing it (Elmustapha et al., 2018). To address these challenges, we proposed B2B marketing as an effective strategy for increasing the demand for sustainable products in SNM at the micro and macro levels. We then examined the elements that can strengthen the connection between B2B marketing and sustainable innovation.

Sustainability-oriented dynamic capabilities, customer involvement, Big Data, and sustainability training were studied in relation to the interaction between the micro and macro levels in B2B marketing. Although B2B marketing and sustainable innovation are macro-level concepts, our results showed that individuals as stakeholders can influence decision-making and set environmental policies at the micro level (Frooman, 1999; Journeault et al., 2021; Le Van et al., 2019; Rivera-Camino, 2007; Seebacher, 2021; Voyer et al., 2017; Wikström, 2010) as well as support niche market development.

Consequently, there will be stakeholder influence at the micro level, which will lead to improved business competitiveness at the macro level, until, eventually, the goal of sustainable innovation is achieved. Figure 3 presents a conceptual model of how to achieve sustainable innovation through strategic niche management and B2B marketing along with the tools that facilitate this process:

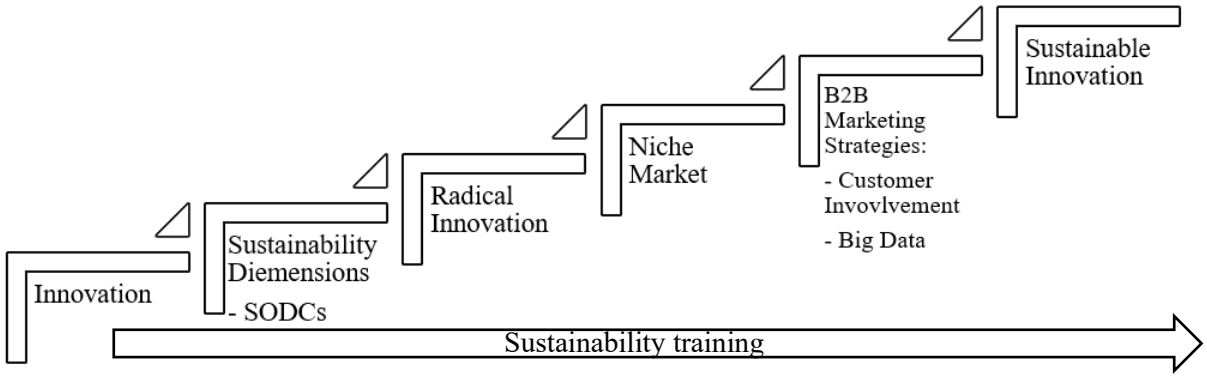

Fig 3 - The impact of strategic niche management and B2B marketing on sustainable innovation

Based on Fig. 3, strategic niche management (SNM) is a process for fostering sustainable innovation. It begins with the need for innovation, a key driving force in today's rapidly changing business landscape. However, innovation must transcend mere economic considerations to encompass social and environmental dimensions. These three dimensions are the pillars of sustainability. Given the importance of sustainability, businesses should plan for more than incremental advancements and actively pursue radical innovation. To achieve this, companies must secure a foothold in the market and foster its development. The initial step involves creating niche markets, however, overcoming current market resistance and ensuring market growth require effective marketing strategies, especially in B2B contexts. These strategies can be conceived and implemented by individuals as stakeholders at the micro level. They should align closely with sustainable innovation principles and lead to enhanced market competitiveness at the macro level. Ultimately, this comprehensive process concludes with sustainable innovation. In this chapter, we proposed sustainability-oriented dynamic capabilities to add dimensions of sustainability to innovation, customer involvement and Big Data as strategies for B2B marketing in the context of sustainability, and sustainability training for the SNM process.

Overall, B2B marketing is becoming more concerned with sustainability and innovation as businesses recognize the necessity of developing environmentally responsible products that meet the demands of their consumers (Varadarajan, 2017). To thrive in this competitive landscape, companies must create novel sustainable solutions by developing policies that support radical innovation and identify key areas where customers can be satisfied. Combining B2B marketing, sustainability, and innovation is essential for companies hoping to succeed in the changing landscape of the future.

This study has faced limitations that can be divided into two categories: a lack of primary data and knowledge gaps in the fields of B2B marketing and sustainable innovation. A lack of primary data refers to the impossibility of a valid and reliable data analysis, a lack of generalizability, and that previous studies have mainly examined issues related to green innovation or green products—only one aspect of sustainability. Moreover, the present study has identified significant knowledge gaps in the field of B2B and sustainable innovation, emphasizing the need for further research on these topics. These findings emphasize the importance of continuing research to integrate the mentioned fields and promote sustainable development.

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