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# FROM LINEAR EXCHANGE TO CIRCULAR COORDINATION: A THEORETICAL INTEGRATION OF REVERSE LOGISTICS INTO SUSTAINABLE MARKETING

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## **Abstract**

Sustainable marketing theory has traditionally emphasized forward flows of value, focusing on production, consumption, and co-creation, while largely neglecting post-consumption processes and material recovery. Simultaneously, reverse logistics and closed-loop supply chain research have provided operational insights into returns, recycling, and remanufacturing, but these studies rarely integrate marketing's strategic role in coordinating circular flows. Sustainable marketing scholarship has focused primarily on communication, green positioning, and consumer behavior, under-theorizing system-level coordination for sustainability. Addressing this gap, the paper introduces Circular Coordination - a conceptual framework positioning marketing as the orchestrator of both forward and reverse flows across stakeholders. The framework comprises four dimensions: reverse-flow strategic integration, recovery-oriented demand shaping, end-of-life relationship management, and circular stakeholder alignment. Based on this construct, five propositions are developed linking Circular Coordination to enhanced sustainability performance, stakeholder legitimacy, and long-term value resilience. The paper advances sustainable marketing theory by extending its scope beyond linear exchange, bridging marketing and operations scholarship, and embedding marketing activity within stakeholder and institutional contexts. Managerial implications are discussed, highlighting how firms can operationalize Circular Coordination to achieve systemic sustainability while creating competitive advantage. This framework provides a platform for future conceptual and empirical research in marketing and circular economy contexts.

## **Keywords:**

Sustainable Marketing Theory, Linear Exchange, Circular Coordination, Reverse Logistics.

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainability challenges are increasingly reshaping the institutional environments within which firms operate. Intensifying resource constraints, regulatory pressures, and heightened stakeholder expectations are compelling organizations to reconsider how value is created and sustained over time. Institutional theory suggests that firms adapt their structures and practices in response to evolving normative, regulatory, and cognitive pressures (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Scott 2001). Simultaneously, stakeholder theory emphasizes that firms must generate value not only for shareholders but for a broader constellation of stakeholders whose interests increasingly encompass environmental and social concerns (Freeman 1984). Together, these perspectives imply that sustainability is no longer peripheral to market activity but is becoming a structural condition shaping competitive legitimacy.

In parallel, the circular economy has emerged as a dominant paradigm advocating the regeneration, recirculation, and recovery of materials within economic systems rather than their linear progression toward disposal (Geissdoerfer et al. 2017; Kirchherr et al. 2017). Circular models seek to decouple value creation from resource depletion through mechanisms such as reuse, remanufacturing, and recycling (Bocken et al. 2016). Within operations and supply chain research, reverse logistics and closed-loop systems have been extensively examined as operational enablers of circularity (Rogers & Tibben-Lembke 1999; Guide & Van Wassenhove 2009). However, while these streams provide important insights into material recovery and system efficiency, their integration into core marketing theory remains limited.

Marketing scholarship has historically been grounded in an exchange paradigm privileging forward flows of value from production to consumption and repurchase (Bagozzi 1975; Hunt 1983). Even contemporary developments such as service-dominant logic, which reconceptualize value as co-created among actors within service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch 2004, 2008), largely retain a forward-oriented logic in which value realization culminates in use rather than recovery. End-of-life processes, material recapture, and reverse flows remain conceptually peripheral within mainstream marketing frameworks. As a result, sustainable marketing research has predominantly emphasized communication strategies, green positioning, and consumer responses to environmental claims (Peattie & Crane 2005; Belz & Peattie 2009), while under-theorizing the structural coordination necessary to sustain circular market systems.

This theoretical separation is consequential. Reverse logistics systems depend not only on operational efficiency but also on customer participation, incentive design, inter-organizational coordination, and the alignment of stakeholder expectations domains traditionally associated with marketing. Yet by conceptualizing reverse logistics primarily as an operational function, existing scholarship obscures marketing's potential role in orchestrating both forward and reverse value flows within market systems. From a stakeholder perspective, sustainable value creation requires coordinated engagement across actors throughout the product lifecycle, including post-consumption stages. From an institutional perspective, firms that fail to align market practices with emerging sustainability norms risk eroding legitimacy.

This article addresses this omission by integrating reverse logistics into the core of sustainable marketing theory. We argue that dominant marketing frameworks remain structurally linear and

propose a reconceptualization of marketing as a process of circular coordination. Circular coordination positions marketing as the orchestrator of value creation, recovery, and regeneration across interconnected stakeholders operating under evolving institutional pressures. By integrating insights from stakeholder theory, institutional theory, circular economy scholarship, and reverse logistics research, we extend sustainable marketing theory beyond communication-focused approaches and toward a systemic account of market sustainability.

Specifically, we make three contributions. First, we identify and explicate the linear bias embedded within dominant marketing conceptualizations of exchange. Second, we bridge reverse logistics and marketing theory, demonstrating how reverse-flow integration reshapes the scope of marketing activity. Third, we introduce the concept of circular coordination and develop a set of propositions linking reverse-flow integration to stakeholder alignment, institutional legitimacy, and long-term value resilience. In doing so, we reposition marketing as a central coordinating mechanism within circular market systems rather than merely a facilitator of forward exchange.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. We first examine the exchange foundations of marketing theory and identify their limitations under increasing sustainability pressures. We then review reverse logistics and circular economy scholarship to highlight their theoretical isolation from mainstream marketing frameworks. Building on these insights, we develop the concept of circular coordination and articulate propositions to guide future empirical research. We conclude by discussing implications for sustainable marketing theory and managerial practice.

## **THE LINEAR EXCHANGE FOUNDATIONS OF MARKETING THEORY**

Marketing theory has historically been organized around the concept of exchange as its foundational unit of analysis. Early formulations positioned exchange as the central phenomenon distinguishing marketing from other disciplines, emphasizing transactions through which value moves from producers to consumers (Bagozzi, 1975; Hunt, 1983). Within this paradigm, marketing activities are primarily oriented toward stimulating demand, facilitating transactions, and sustaining repeat purchase behavior, all processes that assume a forward movement of value.

Subsequent theoretical developments extended the conceptual boundaries of exchange without fundamentally altering its directional emphasis. Relationship marketing foregrounded long-term relational value rather than discrete transactions (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Service-dominant logic (SDL) reconceptualized value as co-created among actors within service ecosystems, shifting focus from goods to service and resource integration (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016). These perspectives significantly broadened marketing's theoretical scope. However, value realization in these models remains primarily associated with use and interaction rather than recovery or regeneration. Material flows are implicitly assumed to culminate at the point of consumption, with post-use processes remaining conceptually peripheral (Lusch & Vargo, 2014).

Recent scholarship continues to reinforce this forward orientation. Grönroos and Voima (2013) conceptualize value creation as emerging in use contexts, while Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2018) emphasize co-creation platforms that integrate actors in forward-moving ecosystems. Although these contributions deepen understanding of interactive value processes, they do not explicitly incorporate material recovery or reverse flows as integral components of marketing systems.

Within sustainable marketing research, attention has similarly concentrated on environmental positioning, corporate social responsibility communication, and consumer responses to sustainability initiatives (Leonidou et al., 2013; Peattie & Crane, 2005). While these studies offer important insights into market signaling and consumer engagement, they under-theorize the structural coordination required to support circular material systems. As a result, sustainability has often been conceptualized at the level of messaging and perception rather than system design.

This forward-oriented architecture reflects historical economic conditions characterized by relative resource abundance and institutional norms privileging growth and market expansion (Brodie et al., 2019; Lusch & Vargo, 2014). Under such conditions, marketing's central challenge was framed as demand generation and competitive differentiation. End-of-life processes, material recapture, and system-level resource continuity were treated as operational or regulatory concerns rather than core marketing responsibilities.

However, intensifying ecological constraints challenge the sufficiency of this linear orientation. Institutional theory suggests that firms respond to evolving regulatory, normative, and cognitive pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2001). Stakeholder theory further posits that firms must generate value across a broad constellation of stakeholders whose interests increasingly encompass environmental sustainability (Freeman, 1984; Parmar et al., 2010). These developments expand the scope of accountability beyond the point of sale, requiring attention to the full product lifecycle. Yet dominant marketing frameworks offer limited conceptual tools for theorizing how reverse flows and value recovery integrate into market coordination processes.

The result is a structural asymmetry within marketing theory: forward value creation is extensively theorized, while reverse value recovery remains underdeveloped. This asymmetry does not invalidate existing frameworks; rather, it highlights an incomplete account of markets operating under conditions of material constraint. As sustainability pressures intensify, the assumption that value flows predominantly in one direction, from production to consumption, becomes increasingly untenable. Addressing this limitation requires reconceptualizing marketing not only as a facilitator of exchange but as a coordinator of circular value flows across stakeholders embedded in evolving institutional environments.

## **REVERSE LOGISTICS AND ITS THEORETICAL ISOLATION FROM MARKETING**

Reverse logistics encompasses the processes by which products, materials, and information flow backward from the point of consumption toward recovery, reuse, or disposal (Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999). These processes are essential for achieving operational efficiency, resource recirculation, and environmental sustainability. Research on closed-loop supply chains and reverse logistics has proliferated over the past two decades, with extensive studies on product returns, remanufacturing, recycling, and reverse-flow optimization (Guide & Van Wassenhove, 2009; Srivastava, 2008). Scholars have highlighted the strategic importance of reverse logistics for cost savings, environmental compliance, and supply chain resilience (Stock & Mulki, 2009; Govindan et al., 2015).

Despite the operational sophistication of reverse logistics scholarship, these insights have largely remained isolated from mainstream marketing theory. Marketing frameworks rarely integrate

reverse flows into models of value creation, customer engagement, or stakeholder coordination. Sustainable marketing research, for instance, has emphasized communication strategies, consumer perceptions of green products, and branding initiatives (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Leonidou et al., 2013), but has rarely theorized the structural role of reverse logistics in orchestrating post-consumption value. Even frameworks such as service-dominant logic, which emphasize resource integration and co-creation, primarily focus on forward-flow interactions and neglect the reverse dimension of value recovery (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Lusch & Vargo, 2014).

This theoretical separation has important implications. Reverse logistics processes are not purely operational; they depend on customer participation, incentive structures, and inter-organizational coordination, domains traditionally associated with marketing (Autry et al., 2001; Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999). For example, effective product returns require consumer engagement, clear communication, and perceived value in returning products, which are core marketing concerns. Similarly, coordination with retailers, remanufacturers, and recyclers requires strategic alignment and stakeholder management.

The resulting gap indicates that marketing theory has under-theorized a critical element of sustainable value creation: the reverse flow of goods and information. By conceptualizing marketing primarily as a forward-oriented exchange facilitator, existing frameworks fail to account for the structural and strategic coordination needed to sustain circular market systems (Hahn et al., 2015; York et al., 2016). Addressing this gap is essential for integrating sustainability into marketing theory in a way that reflects both operational realities and stakeholder expectations.

In response to this theoretical isolation, we propose that marketing's conceptual boundaries be expanded to encompass circular coordination, whereby marketers actively orchestrate both forward and reverse value flows across stakeholders, enhancing system-level resilience, legitimacy, and sustainability.

## **FROM LINEAR EXCHANGE TO CIRCULAR COORDINATION**

Building on the preceding analysis, we argue that marketing theory's traditional forward-oriented logic limits its ability to account for sustainability challenges. While marketing frameworks have advanced understanding of value creation, relationship management, and co-creation, they largely treat post-consumption processes as operational or peripheral (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Belz & Peattie, 2009). Simultaneously, reverse logistics scholarship has highlighted the operational mechanisms necessary for resource recovery and circularity but has rarely engaged with marketing's coordinating role (Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999; Guide & Van Wassenhove, 2009). To address this theoretical gap, we propose Circular Coordination as a core marketing construct for sustainable market systems.

## **DEFINING CIRCULAR COORDINATION**

Circular Coordination refers to the strategic orchestration of both forward and reverse flows of value across stakeholders within market systems, aimed at sustaining long-term resource efficiency, ecological integrity, and stakeholder legitimacy. This construct positions marketing

not merely as a facilitator of demand or consumption but as a system-level coordinator of value creation, recovery, and regeneration (Hahn et al., 2015; York et al., 2016). In essence, Circular Coordination reframes marketing as a governance mechanism within circular market systems.

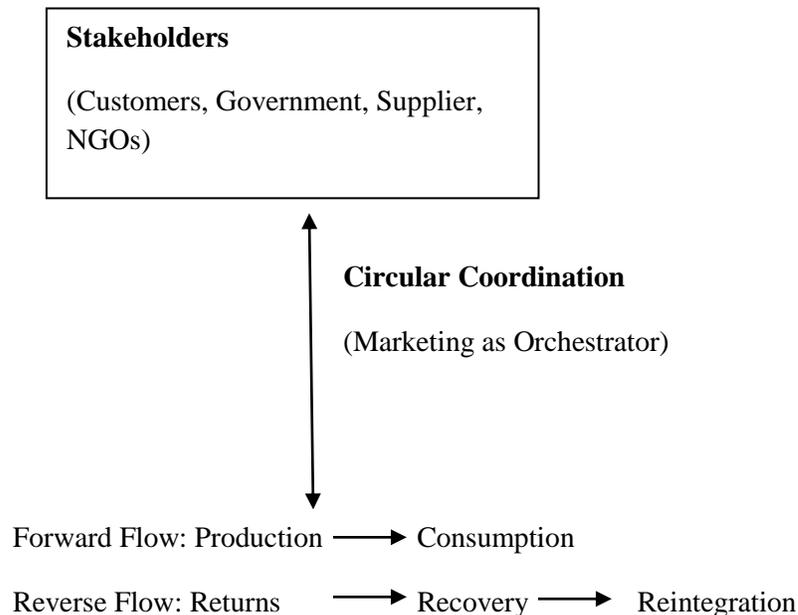
### KEY DIMENSIONS OF CIRCULAR COORDINATION

We identify four core dimensions that operationalize Circular Coordination:

- i. **Reverse-Flow Strategic Integration:** This is the degree to which marketing actively incorporates product returns, remanufacturing, and recycling processes into its strategy, aligning incentives and communications to facilitate recovery (Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999; Autry et al., 2001).
- ii. **Recovery-Oriented Demand Shaping:** Marketing's role in influencing consumer behaviour to support circular outcomes, including promoting product returns, incentivizing sustainable usage, and communicating environmental value (Leonidou et al., 2013; Peattie & Crane, 2005).
- iii. **End-of-Life Relationship Management:** Coordination with customers, distributors, and partners at the post-consumption stage to maintain engagement, trust, and participation in reverse flows (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Hahn et al., 2015).
- iv. **Circular Stakeholder Alignment:** The integration of multiple stakeholder interests, regulatory bodies, NGOs, suppliers, and customers, into a cohesive strategy that supports resource recovery, environmental compliance, and legitimacy (Freeman, 1984; Scott, 2001; Parmar et al., 2010).

Collectively, these dimensions position marketing as the linking mechanism between forward value creation and reverse value recovery, ensuring that both flows are coordinated to support sustainability and long-term market performance.

### CONCEPTUAL MODEL



We propose a conceptual model (Figure 1) in which:

- Forward flows of value (production → consumption) remain essential but are complemented by reverse flows (returns → recovery → reintegration).
- Circular Coordination acts as the central mechanism connecting these flows.
- Effective Circular Coordination enhances stakeholder alignment, institutional legitimacy, and long-term value resilience.

This model provides a theoretical foundation for developing propositions that link marketing coordination to sustainable market outcomes.

## PROPOSITIONS

Building on the Circular Coordination construct and its four dimensions, we propose the following conceptual relationships:

### **P1: Reverse-Flow Strategic Integration**

The greater the integration of reverse-flow processes (returns, remanufacturing, recycling) into marketing strategy, the higher the firm's ability to sustain long-term market and environmental performance. Reverse-flow integration positions marketing as an orchestrator of post-consumption value, aligning incentives and communications across stakeholders (Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999; Autry et al., 2001). It bridges operational recovery and marketing coordination, ensuring that value recovery is recognized as part of overall value creation.

### **P2: Recovery-Oriented Demand Shaping**

Marketing activities aimed at shaping consumer behavior toward returns and sustainable usage positively influence the effectiveness of circular value flows. By incentivizing and educating consumers, marketing can enhance participation in reverse flows, ensuring products re-enter the system efficiently (Leonidou et al., 2013; Peattie & Crane, 2005). Recovery-oriented demand shaping strengthens the connection between consumption and resource regeneration.

### **P3: End-of-Life Relationship Management**

Active management of stakeholder relationships at the post-consumption stage enhances customer engagement and participation in circular initiatives. Marketing can maintain trust and participation with customers, distributors, and other partners even after product use, enabling more reliable returns and regeneration processes (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Hahn et al., 2015). Strong relationships at end-of-life stages are critical for sustaining reverse flow effectiveness.

### **P4: Circular Stakeholder Alignment**

Alignment of diverse stakeholder interests through coordinated marketing strategies increases institutional legitimacy and supports systemic sustainability outcomes. By integrating the expectations of customers, regulators, suppliers, and NGOs, marketing ensures that circular initiatives are both operationally feasible and socially recognized, enhancing legitimacy and compliance (Freeman, 1984; Scott, 2001; Parmar et al., 2010).

## P5: Overall Circular Coordination Impact

Firms that effectively implement Circular Coordination across all four dimensions achieve superior long-term value resilience, sustainability performance, and stakeholder legitimacy compared to firms employing forward-focused marketing alone. This proposition emphasizes the system-level benefit of integrating forward and reverse flows under a coordinated marketing approach, reinforcing the theoretical contribution of the construct.

### The Research Gap

Marketing theory has ignored or under-theorized the strategic role of reverse flows:

Domain	Status	Gap
Marketing Theory	Strong on forward flows (exchange, SDL, relationship)	Rarely incorporates reverse flows recovery, or circularity
Operations/Reverse largely ignored	Strong operational insights	Marketing coordination Logistics
Sustainable Marketing	Focus on communication, consumer behavior	System-level coordination for circularity under-theorized
Integration	None	Lacks a framework connecting marketing, reverse logistics, stakeholders, and institutions consumer behavior

Circular Coordination fills this gap by conceptualizing marketing as the orchestrator of both forward and reverse flows, integrating stakeholders, institutional pressures, and operational realities into a cohesive theoretical framework.

#### 1. Linear Forward-Focused Marketing Theory

- a. Marketing theory (exchange theory, relationship marketing, service-dominant logic) has primarily focused on forward flows of value: production → consumption → repurchase.
- b. Even contemporary frameworks like SDL emphasize co-creation but remain forward-oriented, largely neglecting post-consumption processes, product returns, or resource recovery (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016; Lusch & Vargo, 2014).

The study identified that marketing theory does not fully conceptualize reverse flows or the marketing role in recovery and circularity.

#### 2. Reverse Logistics Scholarship is Operationally Focused

- a. Reverse logistics and closed-loop supply chains are well-studied in operations and supply chain management (Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999; Guide & Van Wassenhove, 2009; Srivastava, 2008).
- b. These studies examine returns, recycling, remanufacturing, and cost optimization, but they treat marketing as external or peripheral.

From literature review, marketing's strategic and coordinating role in reverse flows has not been theorized.

### 3. Sustainable Marketing Emphasizes Communication

- a. Sustainable marketing research (Peattie & Crane, 2005; Belz & Peattie, 2009; Leonidou et al., 2013) primarily focuses on:
  - b. Green positioning
  - c. CSR communication
  - d. Consumer perceptions
  - e. It rarely addresses structural, system-level coordination for circularity.

The study identified that marketing's contribution to material recirculation, stakeholder orchestration, and system sustainability is underdeveloped.

### 4. Integration Gap

There is no conceptual framework that combines:

- a. Marketing theory (forward value creation)
- b. Reverse logistics (operational recovery)
- c. Stakeholder & institutional theory (legitimacy, systemic pressures)

Without this integration, firms lack guidance for orchestrating forward and reverse flows simultaneously, which is critical under circular economy pressures (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017; Kirchherr et al., 2017). The field lacks a conceptual bridge showing how marketing can coordinate circular, sustainable market systems.

## **THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Traditional marketing frameworks have largely focused on forward flows of value, emphasizing consumption, relationship management, and value co-creation at the point of use (Bagozzi, 1975; Vargo & Lusch, 2016). By integrating reverse flows into marketing theory, Circular Coordination expands the scope of marketing beyond consumption toward system-level sustainability, encompassing post-consumption value recovery and regeneration. This extension addresses the structural asymmetry identified in Sections 2 and 3 and situates marketing as a core orchestrator of circular market systems (Hahn et al., 2015; York et al., 2016).

While reverse logistics and closed-loop supply chain research have been extensively studied (Guide & Van Wassenhove, 2009; Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999), these insights have largely remained operationally focused. By conceptualizing marketing as a coordinating mechanism for reverse flows, Circular Coordination bridges the marketing operations divide, highlighting the

interdependence between demand-side strategies and resource recovery processes. This integration provides a theoretical foundation for cross-disciplinary research linking stakeholder management, institutional pressures, and circular economy principles.

Circular Coordination embeds marketing activity within the broader institutional and stakeholder environment. It recognizes that value creation, recovery, and sustainability outcomes are shaped not only by firm actions but also by the expectations of regulators, customers, suppliers, and NGOs (Freeman, 1984; Scott, 2001; Parmar et al., 2010). By explicitly accounting for these actors, the framework aligns sustainable marketing theory with institutional and stakeholder perspectives, offering a more holistic understanding of market systems under ecological and normative constraints.

The introduction of Circular Coordination opens several avenues for theoretical advancement:

- i. Conceptualizing new marketing constructs associated with reverse-flow management and circularity.
- ii. Investigating system-level outcomes, such as long-term value resilience, sustainability performance, and legitimacy.
- iii. Exploring contingencies that influence the effectiveness of circular coordination, including industry context, regulatory pressures, and technological capabilities.

This positions Circular Coordination not merely as a descriptive framework but as a platform for ongoing theory building within sustainable marketing and macromarketing research.

In sum, Circular Coordination:

- Extends marketing theory to integrate forward and reverse value flows.
- Bridges marketing and operational insights, linking demand and recovery.
- Embeds marketing activity in stakeholder and institutional contexts, addressing legitimacy and normative pressures.
- Provides a theoretical platform for future conceptual and empirical research, enabling sustainable marketing to move beyond communication-focused perspectives.

By doing so, this article contributes to high-impact theoretical discourse, establishing marketing as a systemic coordinator in circular, sustainable market environments.

## **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Circular Coordination framework provides several actionable insights for managers seeking to implement sustainable marketing practices within circular market systems.

Managers should actively incorporate reverse-flow processes, returns, remanufacturing, and recycling, into marketing planning. Marketing cannot be limited to demand creation and brand positioning; it must also orchestrate post-consumption recovery. Strategic alignment of marketing campaigns, incentives, and communication channels can facilitate consumer participation in product returns and resource recovery, strengthening both environmental and business outcomes (Rogers & Tibben-Lembke, 1999; Autry et al., 2001).

Marketing teams play a central role in influencing customer behavior toward circular practices. Recovery-oriented messaging, product-as-a-service models, and incentive schemes can encourage consumers to return used products or adopt sustainable usage practices. By shaping demand for recovery, managers can ensure that reverse flows are efficient, reliable, and value-generating, bridging the gap between operations and customer engagement (Leonidou et al., 2013; Peattie & Crane, 2005).

Managers should extend relationship management beyond the point of sale, engaging customers, distributors, and partners in end-of-life processes. Post-consumption engagement maintains trust, ensures cooperation in product returns, and fosters loyalty by highlighting shared environmental responsibility. Effective end-of-life relationship management transforms traditionally transactional touchpoints into opportunities for sustainable value creation (Belz & Peattie, 2009; Hahn et al., 2015).

Circular Coordination requires managers to align diverse stakeholders—including suppliers, regulators, NGOs, and customers—around sustainability objectives. This coordination ensures compliance with institutional norms, enhances legitimacy, and mitigates operational friction in circular processes. Structured stakeholder engagement programs, transparent reporting, and cross-functional teams can facilitate the integration of diverse perspectives into cohesive marketing strategies (Freeman, 1984; Scott, 2001; Parmar et al., 2010).

#### Key Insights:

- Circularity is a system-level responsibility; marketing must orchestrate both forward and reverse flows.
- Managers should focus on structural integration rather than isolated initiatives, ensuring that recovery and sustainability are embedded into core marketing strategy.
- Implementing Circular Coordination can create competitive advantage, improve customer engagement, and enhance environmental performance simultaneously.
- Even firms in traditionally linear markets can benefit by reconceptualizing marketing as a coordinating function, rather than a purely demand-generation tool.

These managerial implications reinforce the theoretical contributions of the Circular Coordination framework. They provide a roadmap for firms seeking to operationalize sustainability in a way that integrates marketing, operations, and stakeholder coordination, positioning organizations to thrive in increasingly resource-constrained and institutionally demanding environments.

## CONCLUSION

This article develops a conceptual framework - Circular Coordination - to extend sustainable marketing theory beyond traditional forward-oriented exchange. By integrating insights from stakeholder theory, institutional theory, circular economy scholarship, and reverse logistics research, we address a critical gap in marketing literature: the under-theorization of reverse flows and post-consumption value recovery.

The Circular Coordination framework positions marketing as a central orchestrator of both forward and reverse flows of value across stakeholders, emphasizing strategic integration,

recovery-oriented demand shaping, end-of-life relationship management, and circular stakeholder alignment. Through this construct, marketing is reconceptualized as a systemic coordinator in circular market systems, capable of generating long-term value resilience, sustainability performance, and institutional legitimacy.

We advance sustainable marketing theory in three key ways:

- i. Extending the theoretical boundaries of marketing to include reverse flows, resource regeneration, and circularity.
- ii. Bridging marketing and operations scholarship, demonstrating how marketing coordination complements reverse logistics processes.
- iii. Embedding marketing in stakeholder and institutional contexts, offering a more holistic account of market systems under sustainability pressures.

From a managerial perspective, Circular Coordination provides actionable guidance for firms seeking to implement circular practices, including strategic integration of reverse flows, shaping consumer behavior, managing post-consumption relationships, and aligning diverse stakeholders. These practices enable organizations to transform sustainability challenges into opportunities for competitive advantage and stakeholder legitimacy.

By highlighting the systemic role of marketing in circularity, this paper lays a foundation for future conceptual and empirical research. Scholars can test the propositions presented here, examine contingencies affecting circular coordination, and explore additional mechanisms linking marketing, sustainability, and operational recovery. Ultimately, Circular Coordination contributes to the ongoing evolution of marketing theory, positioning the discipline to address the complex environmental and societal challenges of the Anthropocene.

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