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Jones, Peter ORCID logoORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9566-9393, Comfort, Daphne and Hillier, David (2018) Common Ground: The Sustainable Development Goals and the Marketing and Advertising Industry. Journal of Public Affairs, 18 (2). e1619. doi:10.1002/pa.1619

Official URL: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pa.1619/full
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/pa.1619
EPrint URI: https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/3833

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COMMON GROUND: THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE MARKETING AND ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

Peter Jones, Daphne Comfort and David Hillier

Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed at a United Nations General Assembly in 2015 embrace an ambitious and wide ranging set of global environmental, social and economic issues designed to effect a transition to a more sustainable future. The United Nations called on all governments to pursue these ambitious goals but also acknowledged the important role of the business community in addressing the SDGs. The high profile launch in June 2016 of the *'Common Ground'* initiative to support the Sustainable Development Goals by Ban Ki-moon, United Nations General Secretary and six of the world's leading marketing and advertising companies, namely Dentsu, Havas, IPG, Omnicom group, Publicis Group and WPP might be seen to herald a new era in the transition to a more sustainable future. This paper outlines the SDGs and business engagement with them, reviews the sustainably strategies and achievements currently being publicly reported by the six leading advertising and marketing companies and offers some reflections on a number of the challenges these companies will face in contributing to the SDGs.

Introduction

While Mont and Power (2010) recognised that *'current advertising and marketing encourages high levels of material consumption'* they also argued that *'the marketing and advertising strategies currently used to promote non-sustainable consumption patterns could just as easily be used to promote environmentally sound products and more sustainable lifestyles.'* Three years later Henderson (CSRwire 2013) argued that although the *'global advertising industry has encountered increasing criticism for promoting unsustainable consumerism'* there was evidence that *'a new ethic is afoot in the industry'* which was spearheading *'advertising's transition to sustainability'* and was being led by *'a new wave of creative agencies and practitioners.'* More generally *The Guardian* (2014) suggested that it was the small advertising companies that were most active in pursuing sustainability agendas but they *'tended to lack the consumer understanding, brand expertise and the creative fire power of the big ad agencies'* and *'they often lack the right client relationships.'* However the high profile launch in June 2016 of the *'Common Ground'* initiative to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) by Ban Ki-moon, United Nations General Secretary and six of the world's leading marketing and advertising companies, namely Dentsu, Havas, IPG, Omnicom group, Publicis Group and WPP, would seem to herald a new era. One which could see the marketing and advertising industry take a much more active and prominent role promoting the transition to a more sustainable future. With this in mind this commentary paper outlines the SDGs and business engagement with them, reviews the sustainably strategies and achievements currently being publicly reported by the six leading advertising and marketing companies and offers

some reflections on some of the challenges these companies will face in contributing to the SDGs.

The Sustainable Development Goals and Business Engagement

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed at a United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, were described as *'a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity'* (United Nations 2015a). These goals are extremely ambitious and embrace a wide range of environmental, social and economic issues including climate change, energy, water stewardship, marine conservation, biodiversity, poverty, food security, sustainable production and consumption, gender equality and economic growth. The SDGs have been described as demonstrating *'the scale and ambition'* of the United Nations *'2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'* which is *'* designed to *'shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path'* (United Nations 2015a). There are 17 SDGs, and 169 associated targets, in *'a genuinely comprehensive vision of the future'* in which *'little is left unaddressed'* from '*the wellbeing of every individual to the health of the planet, from infrastructure to institutions, from governance to green energy, peaceful societies to productive employment'* (Institute of Human Rights and Business 2015). The ratification of the SDGs is the latest in the line of global sustainable development initiatives which can be traced back to the declaration designed *'to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment'* (United Nations Environment Programme 1972) following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1971. More recently the SDGs are seen to build on the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established in 2001. The MDGs were described as having *'produced the most successful anti-poverty movement in history'* (United Nations 2015b) other assessments of the achievements of the MDGs have been more balanced. While Fehling et. al. (2013), for example, acknowledged that *'remarkable progress has been made'* they argued that *'progress across all MDGs has been limited and uneven across countries.'* At the same time the involvement of the business community in the MDGs was limited with PricewaterhouseCoopers (2015) poignantly noting *'business, for the most part, didn't focus on the MDGs because they were aimed at developing countries.'*

There are some 17 SDGs (See Table 1) with each one having a number of associated targets. The targets for 2030 for Goal 1, namely to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, include to eradicate extreme poverty, measured as people living on $1.25 per day, to ensure that all men and women and particularly the poor and vulnerable have equal rights to economic resources, access to basic services and ownership and control over land and property; and to build the resilience of the poor and vulnerable to reduce their exposure to climate change related extreme events. For Goal 6, namely to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, the 2030 targets include achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all: protecting and restoring water related ecosystems; and improving water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimising the release of hazardous chemicals. Targets for Goal 12, namely to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns include achieving the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources by 2030; halving per capital global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reducing food losses along production and supply chains by 2030; and designing and utilising tools to monitor

sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.

In launching the SDGs the United Nations called on all governments to develop national strategies to pursue the SDGs but also acknowledged *'the role of the diverse private sector ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals'* in addressing these goals. In reviewing future business engagement with the SDGs PricewaterhousecCoopers (2015) argued that the SDGs *'will herald a major change for business'* and that *'business will need to assess its impact on the SDGs and review its strategy accordingly.'* That said the Institute for Human Rights and Business (2105) suggested that *'the SDGs seem to have quietly re-imagined a new model of business, relapsed as an agent of development, harnessed and channelled by governments and set to work on alleviating poverty and fostering sustainable economic growth for all.'* Further the Institute for Human Rights and Business (2015) argued that *'business is not an adjunct of aid'* and that *'economic activity cannot easily be directed to where the need is greatest'* but rather *'it prospers when provided with the right conditions and the right opportunities.*

In making the case for business engagement with the SDGs PricewaterhouseCoopers (2015) argued that *'increasingly companies from all sectors are having to confront and adapt to a range of disruptive forces including globalisation, increased urbanisation, intense competition for raw materials and natural resources and a revolution in technology that is challenging the business models of many sectors while forcing all companies to be more accountable to, and transparent with, all their stakeholders.'* More specifically (GRI/UNGC/wbcsd 2015) argued that sustainable development challenges are presenting market opportunities for companies to develop innovative energy efficient technologies, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and waste and to meet the needs of largely untapped markets for health care, education, finance and communication products and services in less developed economies. By enhancing the value of corporate sustainability, and more specifically by integrating sustainability across the value chain, it is argued that companies can protect and create value for themselves by increasing sales, developing new markets, strengthening their brands, improving operational efficiency, enhancing employee loyalty and reducing staff turnover. It is also argued that companies that work to advance the SDGs will improve trust amongst their stakeholders, reduce regulatory and legal risks and build resilience to future costs increases and regulatory and legislative requirements.

The Leading Marketing and Advertising Groups' Current Approaches to Sustainability

The companies, which describe themselves as *'the six biggest global communications companies'* (The Guardian 2016) in the Common Ground initiative are certainly major players in the industry. Dentsu, for example, originally founded in 1901 and based in Japan, employs some 50,000 people, owns over 700 subsidiary companies, including the Dentsu Aegis Network, the multinational media and digital marketing company headquartered in London. Dentsu describes itself as having *'the communications domain at its core'* and *'being engaged in a wide range of business activities'* spanning *'management and operating solutions to the implementation of marketing and communications strategies for advertisers as well as media and content companies…… in the global market.'* WPP claims to be *'the world leader in communications services'* and employs over 194,000 people, and operates

out of some 3,000 offices in 122 countries. WPP's activities include public relations and public affairs, advertising, branding and identity, healthcare communications, media investment management and relationship marketing. The Publicis Groupe is a French based multinational advertising and public relations company with some 78,000 employees worldwide. Havas is also a French based multinational advertising and marketing company and it has over 19,000 employees and operates in over 100 countries. The Omnicom Group, based in New York and founded in 1968, is a global marketing and corporate communications holding company and its portfolio includes global advertising agency networks, media services provision and brand management. IPG is an advertising company which consists of three major networks namely McCann Worldgroup, Lowe and Partners and FCB and employs some 50,000 people.

Four of the six companies, namely Dentsu, Havas, the Publicis Groupe and WPP, publish dedicated sustainability reports while the other two companies publish some limited information on their approach to sustainability. That said there was some variation in the currency of the reporting process in that while Dentsu, the Publicis group and WPP had posted sustainability reports for 2105 on the Internet the most recent report published by Havas was for 2011 though the company had posted updates each year from 2012 to 2015. Two sets of themes, namely the issues on which the companies report and provide information on sustainability, and the nature of the reporting process, merit attention. Firstly the four companies that produced sustainability reports all stressed their growing strategic commitment to sustainability. WPP, for example, reported *'our work to improve our sustainability performance and integrate consistently high ethical, social and environmental standards is an intrinsic part of our strategy as it addresses business risks and creates new opportunities.'* In a similar vein Dentsu emphasised their commitment to *'the realization of a sustainable society'* while the Publicis Groupe reported that it was *'in the midst of strategic transformation'* it acknowledged that *'sustainable development challenges were at the heart of that* (transformation).' While the Omnicom Group did not formally produce a sustainability report, information posted on its corporate website claimed *'our commitment to sustainability starts at the very top'* and that in *'working towards sustainability'* the company claimed *'we aim to do business more efficiently and responsibly, reduce energy consumption, support important environmental initiatives in our operations and communities and create innovative new solutions that will improve our performance for years to come.'*

These corporate commitments to sustainability were evidenced across a range of themes including corporate governance and ethics; risk management; consumer and client issues; impacts on society and communities and on the environment; the working environment; and human rights; though there was variation in the precise nature and scale of coverage of these themes between the companies. In addressing corporate governance Dentsu, for example, reported its approach was centred on *'the development of a management structure that can respond swiftly to changes in the economic environment, a management control structure that covers our globally expanding scale of operations and control management functions that can employ those structures accordingly.'* The Publicis Groupe reported to be striving to *'improve, enrich and diversify our governance so that it best reflects the profile of the Groupe and its ecosystem'* and here the focus was seen to be on *'more independence, greater expertise and international culture.'* At the same time the

Publicis Groupe also outlined its approach to ethics and reported on revisions to its code of ethics, on the strengthening of its anti-corruption policy and on the working of its anti-fraud alert system. WPP reported that all its employees have to complete an ethics training programme which includes privacy, responsibility to stakeholders, avoiding misleading work, anti-bribery and corruption, hospitality and gifts, facilitation payments, the use of third party advisors and that this programme is reviewed bi-annually.

In addressing its *'client work'* WPP recognised that *'marketing is a powerful tool that can change people's view and behaviour'* but that this in turn *'creates opportunities for us to have a positive influence by helping our clients engage customers and citizens on sustainability'* which can , in turn, *'help our clients increase the market for sustainable products and services.'* More specifically WPP reports on its work in integrating sustainability into marketing campaigns, on engaging consumers on sustainability, on supporting women's empowerment, on promoting healthier behaviour and on social and cause related marketing. Under the banner headline *'Our clients, Our Raison D'etre'* the Publicis Groupe argued that *'the dramatic rise in adoption of social platforms and mobile technologies has empowered customers'* and that *'how best to communicate sustainability initiatives is a growing concern for our clients as they are an increasingly important factor in the decision making process for consumers.'* In looking to respond to this question and to advise clients when communicating on sustainability issues the Publicis Groupe argued that *'it all comes down to building brand trust'* and that *'trust in a brand's sustainability is demonstrated by making it a core component of their business strategy and actively communicating across relevant consumer touchpoints with honest, clear and accountable proof of progress.'*

A commitment to employees and the working environment is seen to be central to sustainability strategies. Dentsu, for example, argued that *'maximising all of our employees' capabilities and putting them into action is essential to realizing sustainable society.'* More specifically the company reports on how it looks to promote a work/life balance, on its employee health care systems, on respecting diversity and on its human resource development and training systems. The Publicis Groupe argued that its employees *'share a real thirst for creativity and innovation'* and claimed that it is the company's responsibility *'to cultivate their talents, their uniqueness, their diversity and their complementarity.'* In addressing social issues WPP suggested that *'charities, non-governmental organisations and voluntary groups do amazing work tackling challenging issues in areas such as health, education, human rights and the environment'* and such groups need *'the best communication services to help them raise awareness, generate funds and motivate awareness, but many have very limited resources to invest in such services.'* Here WPP argued that it could help to address this problem *'through our pro bono work, donations and by negotiating free media access for charity campaigns.'*

A number of environmental issues were addressed including climate change and greenhouse gas emissions, resource use and waste management, protecting and enhancing bio-diversity and more generally raising environmental awareness and reducing the environmental impact of business activities. In outlining its *'carbon strategy'* WPP, for example, reported that its major greenhouse gas emissions come from energy use in its offices and from business air travel and that it planned to achieve a reduction of almost 50% in these emissions by 2020 from a 2006 baseline. Here the focus is to be on improving the

energy efficiency of the company's office buildings and IT systems, on reducing non-essential flights by promoting videoconferencing and purchasing more renewable electricity. The Publicis Groupe suggested that although the nature of their business makes it difficult to measure its ability to act directly to protect bio-diversity, there is an emphasis on reducing the consumption of raw materials and on *'working with dedicated local partners and with suppliers engaged in the circular economy.'* Less positively the Publicis Group reported that energy and water consumption was rising in absolute terms but outlined how it was looking to increasingly switch to the use of renewable energy sources and to monitor water consumption more closely in an attempt to identify water saving measures. More generally Dentsu reported on a number of initiatives designed to raise environmental awareness amongst its employees.

Secondly there is a set of issues concerning the way the way the companies reported and presented information on their approach to sustainability. Each of the companies reported or provided information on sustainability in their own individual ways but the reports were clearly and logically structured. Within these structures there was usually a narrative on sustainability agendas and achievements, often illustrated with limited statistical information, images, basic graphs and diagrams. Cameo case studies were also occasionally used to illustrate general themes. Three of the companies, namely Dentsu, the Publicis Groupe and WPP provided data summaries covering a number of environmental, employment and social issues. The companies' idiosyncratic approach to reporting and providing information on sustainability makes it difficult to make any meaningful comparisons between companies or to attempt any evaluation of the contribution they are making towards the achievement of sustainability targets at the national or international level.

All four of the companies that produced dedicated sustainability reports made some reference to generic guidelines underpinning the reporting process. WPP and the Publicis Groupe, for example, made explicit reference to the current GRI G4 reporting guidelines. WPP asserted that *'the content of this report is prepared in accordance with the core GRI's G4 guidelines'* and the company also provided a full listing of where the standard GRI disclosures (sustainability issues) can be found within the report. The Publicis Groupe reported that it *'voluntarily followed'* the GRI G4 guidelines but that its sustainability report also made reference to a number of other generic guidelines including those produced by the United Nations Global Compact and the Carbon Disclosure Project. Dentsu and Havas made reference to the previous, and less demanding GRI G3 guidelines and the former company also asserted that the United Nations Global Compact was also a reference guideline for its reporting process.

Within the GRI G4 guidelines materiality and external assurance are seen to be of central importance. Materiality is concerned with identifying the sustainability issues that matter most to a company and its stakeholders while external assurance is a process used to provide confidence as to the degree of reliance that can be placed on the information contained in such reports. Both WPP and the Publicis Groupe, formally address materiality in developing their sustainability report but materiality is not explicitly introduced in the reports produced by Dentsu and Havas. The Publicis Groupe outlined how it employed Salter Baxter, a London based sustainability consultancy, to canvas a range of stakeholders

including employees, customers and investors, to help to identify the most important sustainability issues. These issues were then mapped onto a conventional materiality matrix and issues were grouped as low, medium or high priority. While creativity and technology; data protection and security; talent development; and employee retention and wellbeing were all rated as high priority issues for both the company and its stakeholders , the environment was rated as a lowest of all priorities by both groups. WPP reported a similar process of stakeholder engagement to address materiality and here the high priority issues included client work ethics; marketing compliance; and tax policy the lowest priorities were biodiversity; water use; and community relations.

Three of the companies, namely Dentsu, the Publicis Groupe and WPP, provided information on the external assurance of their sustainability reports. WPP, for example engaged Bureau Veritas UK to conduct limited assurance of greenhouse gas emissions and some of the reported data on employment and waste recycling. In undertaking this engagement Bureau Veritas undertook interviews with company personnel, a review of the company's information systems and sampling of source data form a number of the company's global operations. In conclusion Bureau Veritas concluded that the data presented in the report was *'a fair representation of the greenhouse gas emissions and employment data for WPP.'* Dentsu reported what it described as *'Independent Practitioner's Assurance'* by the Deloitte Tohmatsu evaluation and Certification Organisation Co. Ltd. However the assurer's statement included in the company sustainability report was badly reproduced and was effectively illegible.

Discussion

The Common Ground initiative and the SDGs received virtually no attention in the company reports and information reviewed above though the SDGs were listed in the Publicis Groupe report. This is perhaps not surprising in that the SDGs were only formally agreed in 2015, when in reality all the company reports were virtually finalised and the Common Ground initiative was only announced in 2016 after the reports were published. That said the Publicis Groupe noted in its report that the company had started to think about the SDGs *'in order to determine our priorities and our most tangible and significant actions – whether they are underway, need to be promoted, strengthened or initiated, and whether we do it alone or with other partners.'* While there is no explicit treatment of the SDGs in the Dentsu report, on the Corporate Social Responsibility webpages of the Dentsu corporate website the SDGs and the Common Ground initiative are presented in outline along with a number of *'communication visuals'* relating to climate change, education, health, hunger, poverty, refugees and water. Looking to future the six leading advertising and marketing companies will face a number of major challenges if they are to deliver on their high profile commitment to the SDGs and more particularly to the Common Ground initiative and a number of issues merit reflection and discussion.

At a general level while the call for greater business engagement with the SDGs can be seen as a rallying cry it masks underlying complexities and tensions. The Institute for Human Rights and Business (2015), for example, argued that the inclusion of businesses in global sustainable development is complex in that *'it assumes companies of all different sizes and all different sectors will increasingly operate according to environmental, social*

and human rights standards…… it assumes business models will be reconfigured as necessary to ensure sustainability of products and services, sometimes at the expense of higher profits' and *'it assumes that the business community , in partnership with states and civil society, will channel a greater share of resources towards meeting SDG targets, through investment as well as philanthropy.'*

Such massive hurdles aside if the six major advertising and marketing companies are to develop a genuine sense of engagement with the SDGs they face major challenges in determining which of the 17 SDGs (and which of the 169 associated targets) they select and prioritise and how they integrate SDGs into their existing corporate sustainability strategies. As outlined earlier some, but not all, of the six companies currently look to elicit the views of some of their stakeholders to determine and prioritise the material issues which underpin and inform their sustainability strategies and their sustainability reporting process. If transparency is to be a key element in the SDG engagement then all six companies may need to formally incorporate materiality into their reporting methodology and processes. However within the materiality determination and prioritisation process there is a generic issue concerning the nature of the relationship between company interests and stakeholder interests. Where a company, and more specifically its executive management team, is principally, and sometimes exclusively, responsible for identifying and determining material issues, such issues seem more likely to reflect strategic corporate goals rather than the SDGs.

At the same time PricewaterhouseCoopers (2015) suggested that self-interest may drive SGD selection and businesses may be *'set to cherry pick the SDGs.'* In addressing the former PricewaterhouseCoopers (2015) argued that in the SDG selection process businesses will *'see their greatest impact and opportunity in areas that will help drive their own business growth.'* Further PricewaterhouseCoopers (2015) argued that *'when business profits from solving social problems, when it makes profit while benefitting society and business performance simultaneously, it creates solutions that are scalable'* and asks *'should we question the motives of business if their activity and ingenuity works in the benefit of society.'* In addressing cherry picking the SDGs PricewaterhouseCoopers (2015) argued that *'It's clear that business doesn't intend to assess its impact across all the SDGs, its plan is to look at those relevant to their business or a sub set of these. It's less about picking the easiest, most obvious or positive ones and more about picking the ones that are material to the business.'*

These suggestions certainly strike a chord with the concept of creating shared value developed by Porter and Kramer (2011) defined as *'policies and practices that enhance the competitiveness of a company while simultaneously addressing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates.'* Here again such an approach might be seen by some commentators to fall well short of the underlying ethos of the SDGs. At the same time WPP's identification of client work ethics, marketing compliance and acquisitions amongst its highest *'sustainability priorities'* and the Publicis Grouper's similar identification of creativity and technology and data protection and security and Dentsu's commitment to *'maximising all our employees' capabilities'* would also suggest that business continuity is also a major driver in the six companies' current approaches to sustainability. More generally Bannerjee (2008) argued that *'despite their emancipatory rhetoric, discourses of corporate citizenship, social responsibility and sustainability are defined by narrow business*

interests and serve to curtail the interests of external stakeholders. As such the successful progressive adoption of the SDG's may require a major shift in corporate culture but as Fernando (2003) argued *'capitalism has shown remarkably creativity and power by appropriating the languages and practices of sustainable development.'*

While two of the six companies claim that their sustainability reports were prepared in accordance with GRI G4 guidelines these reports follow some but certainly not all of these guidelines. Thus the approach to independent external assurance, for example, is partial rather than comprehensive. While this is currently not a problem *per se* as sustainability reports are themselves voluntary and accompanying assurance statements are not subject to statutory regulation, the lack of comprehensive independent assurance can be seen to undermine the credibility and integrity of the sustainability reporting process. However capturing and aggregating data on a wide range of environmental, social and economic issues, across a wide range of business activities throughout the supply chain and in a variety of geographical locations and then providing access to allow external assurance is a challenging and potentially very costly venture and it is one which many companies currently choose not to pursue. In looking to the future if companies are to publicly demonstrate and measure their commitment and contribution to the SDGs and to the Common Ground initiative then the independent external assurance of all achievement data included in sustainability reports would seem to be essential not least if such reports come under political, media and external stakeholder scrutiny.

More generally there are fundamental concerns around the underlying tensions between sustainability and economic growth and more pointedly about whether continuing economic growth is compatible with sustainable development. Some critics would suggest that continuing economic growth and consumption, dependent as it is, on the seemingly ever increasing depletion of the earth's natural resources is fundamentally incompatible with sustainability. Higgins (2013, webpage), for example argued *'the economic growth we know today is diametrically opposed to the sustainability of our planet.'* However a commitment to continuing growth is one of the underlying features of the sustainability reports and information published by the six companies. WPP, for example, argued that *'by 2030, a predicted 4.9 billion strong global middle class will drive demand for consumer goods and services'* while Dentsu reported on its commitment *'to achieve mid to long term growth'.* More generally in outlining its agenda for the SDGs the United Nations (2015a) argued *'sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth is essential for prosperity'* but failed to define the term sustainable economic growth or to explicitly recognise the environmental impacts and consequences of continuing economic growth. In an arguably more measured approach the *'SDG Compass'* (GRI/UNGC/wbcsd 2015) argued that *'companies will discover new growth opportunities'* whilst ensuring that *'the global economy operates safely within the capacity of the planet to supply essential resources such as water, fertile soil, metals and minerals thereby sustaining the natural resources that companies depend on for production'* but offered no commentary on if, and how, these tensions might be resolved.

More specifically in relation to continuing economic growth, the concept of sustainable consumption, which is a major element of one of the SDGs, provides a daunting challenge for the leading advertising and marketing companies. While many within the

industry assert that advertising and marketing are vital in informing consumer choice and in giving consumers access to information on the availability and price of products and services others (e.g. Mont and Power (2010) cited earlier) would argue that advertising and marketing promotes not only products and services that stimulate unsustainable production and consumption and that are opposed to human and environmental wellbeing.
Cohen (2005), for example, has described sustainable consumption as *'the most obdurate challenge for the sustainable development agenda'* while the European Environment Agency (2012) labelled *'unsustainable consumption'* as *'the mother of all environmental issues.'* In addressing goal 12 namely to *'ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns'* the United Nations Development Programme (2016) stressed the need to *'urgently reduce our ecological footprint by changing the way we produce goods and services.'* That said within many developed economies there is little consumer appetite for sustainable consumption. Here the European Commission's (2012) recognition that *'sustainable consumption is seen by some as a reversal of progress towards greater quality of life'* in that *'it would involve a sacrifice of our current, tangible needs and desires in the name of an uncertain future'* resonates. This view is supported by Reisch et. al. (2008) who argued that although moving towards sustainable consumption is a major policy agenda, *'growth of income and material throughput by means of industrialization and mass consumerism remains the basic aim of western democracy.'*

Conclusion

The SDGs potentially offer an ambitious and wide ranging global vision for a sustainable future. While the transition to such a future demands commitments from governments and all sections of society as well as universal changes in mind-sets and behaviours, the United Nations has called on businesses to play a central role in achieving the SDGs. The launch of the Common Ground initiative by six of the leading global advertising and marketing companies heralds a bold contribution to the achievement of the SDGs. That said the six companies will face daunting challenges if they are to make a genuine contribution to the SDGs and the industry as a whole will want to maintain a watching brief on the progress they are making

TABLE 1 THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: United Nations (2015a)

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