

# Moral Dramas as a Sustainable Communication Genre: An Analysis of its (Dys)Functionalities

Journal of Macromarketing  
1-25  
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DOI: 10.1177/02761467251349995  
journals.sagepub.com/home/jmk



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## Abstract

Sustainable consumption should foster ethical deliberation among audiences to effectively address socio-environmental crises. However, studies on current sustainable communication approaches reveal their insufficiency in transforming marketing systems. In response, we conceptualize moral dramas as a novel sustainable communication genre with the potential to facilitate ethical deliberation. Moral dramas are narrative texts that expose environmental and social breaches, evoke strong emotional responses, and offer pathways for redemption and ethical transformation. Focusing on ethical online marketplaces—an emerging sustainable enterprise—we critically examine the conditions under which moral dramas can serve as a normatively appropriate genre for sustainable communication. Finally, we discuss the implications for scholarship on sustainable communication and transformative marketing.

## Keywords

responsible marketing, sustainable communication, narratives, ethical marketplaces, moralization

## Introduction

One of the goals of macromarketing is to study and address the conflict between marketing exchanges and their social and environmental costs (Shultz, 2017). Resolving these conflicts requires implementing sustainable marketing systems that coordinate exchanges to ensure they are “system-wide, mutually beneficial” in both the short and long term (Shultz, 2017, p. 330). Despite consensus on the problems, there is significant disagreement on how to implement such systems (Crane, 2000; Reppel, 2012). Some advocate for a reformist approach focused on transforming production and distribution systems to offer socio-ecological products (Crane, 2000; Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2021). This “developmental school” supports marketing’s role in reshaping market systems (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014). In contrast, the “critical school” promotes a reconstructionist approach, arguing that marketing cannot be a transformative force unless its foundational principles—consumption and growth—are replaced with radical new values such as ecocentrism (Crane, 2000; Kilbourne, 2004; Prothero & McDonagh, 2021). Both perspectives recognize the fundamental role of sustainable communication (Prothero et al., 1997) but differ in their normative stance. In reformist approaches, sustainable communication aims to influence consumers to choose socio-ecological products (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2021). In reconstructionist approaches, it should also enable ethical deliberation, potentially transforming the values that guide marketing systems (Kilbourne et al., 1997; McDonagh & Prothero, 2014).

However, few studies have examined whether sustainable communication can foster the ethical deliberation necessary to transform marketing systems. Research on sustainable

communication by mainstream brands (Heidenstrøm, 2025; Ourahmoune et al., 2014) shows that these messages reinforce mythical narratives about humans, nature, and technology. They primarily place the responsibility for solving socio-environmental crises on consumers and/or emphasize technological solutions while avoiding deeper discussions on the economic system’s role in creating these crises (Prothero & McDonagh, 2021). Moreover, these communications offer limited engagement with moral considerations of justice, the key ethical measure of socially responsible marketing (Laczniak & Shultz, 2021). Similar conclusions emerge from reviews of green advertising, commonly used by mainstream brands (Agarwal & Kumar, 2021; Rathee & Milfeld, 2024). These appeals are largely instrumental (Golob et al., 2023, p. 48), reinforcing the myth of consumers as *homo economicus*—driven primarily by self-interest (Friedland et al., 2023; Friedland & Cole, 2019). While green advertising can occasionally influence consumers to choose socio-ecological products, it fails to promote the ethical deliberation critical scholars advocate (Bentsen & Pedersen, 2023; Kennedy & Smith, 2022;

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Prothero et al., 1997; Williams & Murphy, 1990). Worse, the use of heuristics, gain frames, and nudging-based appeals may lead to consumption that is “increasingly reactive and less reflective,” ultimately undermining ethical deliberation in the long term (Friedland et al., 2023, p. 300). This research suggests that while sustainable communication can help legitimize organizational sustainability efforts and influence brand choice, its uncritical reproduction of neoliberal values renders it insufficient to address the socio-environmental crisis.

This conclusion is not surprising given the types of brands examined. Research on sustainability enterprises (Peterson, 2012), such as ethical fashion retailers and fair trade producers, shows a deeper engagement with morality beyond superficial references to an ethics of care (Bastos Rudolph et al., 2023; Golding, 2009). It is therefore plausible that their narratives differ significantly from those of mainstream brands. However, we cannot assume that the sustainable communication of these enterprises is inherently more effective in addressing the socio-environmental crisis. The construction of socio-ecological products is often shaped by conflicting moralities (Fuentes, 2014), partly because these enterprises, like conventional brands, must navigate the logic of “commerciality” to sustain their existence (Golding, 2009).

Extending emerging research on sustainable communication, we examine the genres used by a growing model of sustainable enterprise: ethical online marketplaces. These marketplaces are digital platforms that facilitate transactions between buyers and sellers while prioritizing ethical business practices across the entire value chain. They ensure that both parties engage in transactions that support responsible production, commercialization, and consumption. Studying narratives in ethical online marketplaces is particularly important because these platforms do more than facilitate exchanges—they actively shape and reinforce sustainable marketing systems (Shultz, 2017). Our aim is to conceptualize the communication genre these enterprises use to foster ethical deliberation in their effort to moralize markets.

We analyzed the communication of twenty ethical online marketplaces using literary analysis. This approach is well-suited to our research objective, as literary analysis seeks to identify, categorize, and examine “unexplored textual elements likely to reflect and affect audiences” (Stern, 1989, p. 323). Our analysis revealed that their communication follows a distinct genre, which we term *moral drama*. Drawing from research on moralization (Rhee et al., 2019) and narrative theory (McClure, 2009; Winston, 1999), we conceptualize this genre and distinguish it from other advertising dramas based on three key characteristics: (1) the use of narratives that imbue plots and characters with moral significance, (2) the elicitation of *moral batteries*—blends of negative and positive emotions, and (3) the assimilation of consumers into a character within the plot, compelling them to examine a phenomenon from a specific perspective.

Using this conceptual lens, we identify three types of moral dramas repeatedly employed by ethical online marketplaces—the *Redeemed Villain*, the *Saved Victim*, and the *Awoken*

*Hero*—and examine their potential (dys)functionalities. These moral dramas foster moral awareness and encourage consumer action, potentially motivating them to choose ethical offerings. However, they fall short of meeting reconstructionist ideals that envision deeper, systemic alternatives to neoliberal markets.

Our study contributes to two key macromarketing conversations. First, by extending normative research on sustainable communication, the concept of *moral dramas* offers a novel framework for understanding how sustainable communication can stimulate ethical deliberation among consumers. By identifying both the positive and negative performativities of these texts, we clarify the moral contours of this genre and provide guidelines for its application. Second, we engage in the ongoing debate on marketing’s potential to transform market systems, highlighting the challenges of driving systemic change from within. While acknowledging these limitations, we also argue for provisionally accepting sustainable enterprises as transitional steps toward genuinely sustainable marketing systems.

## Conceptual Framework

### *Ethical Online Marketplaces*

An online marketplace is a digital platform that facilitates transactions between buyers and sellers, typically acting as an intermediary by providing infrastructure, payment processing, and customer service for a fee (Li et al., 2021). Online marketplaces are the fastest-growing retail channel, projected to account for 59% of global e-commerce by 2027 (Skeldon, 2022). Given their rapid expansion, adopting this digital model could help businesses reach wider audiences, enhance consumer education on ethical products, and provide scalable solutions for responsible production and consumption.

However, the concept of an *ethical online marketplace* remains elusive. To establish a working definition, we take an integrative approach that combines the core characteristics of online marketplaces—facilitating transactions between buyers and sellers—with the ethical commitments of sustainable business models, which prioritize sustainability, social justice, and fair trade principles (Bentsen & Pedersen, 2023). This synthesis allows us to conceptualize ethical online marketplaces as digital platforms that not only enable commerce but also actively shape responsible business practices and consumer behaviors through ethical curation, transparency, and accountability. Examples include EarthHero and Rainbowlife.

Unlike conventional online marketplaces, ethical online marketplaces prioritize ethical business practices across the entire value chain. They ensure that both sellers and buyers engage in transactions that support responsible production, commercialization, and consumption. These marketplaces are particularly well-suited for expanding ethical consumption, as industries with high buyer and seller fragmentation and high search costs—such as sustainable markets—are especially conducive to online marketplace models (Dushnitsky & Klueter, 2017).

The role of an ethical online marketplace extends beyond facilitating transactions. These platforms seek to transform marketing systems by curating ethical offerings and promoting sustainable living. At the same time, they provide small and independent producers with access to markets that would otherwise be difficult to reach through traditional retail channels (Bastos Rudolph et al., 2023). For instance, DoneGood describes its mission as “empowering people to transform from consumers to changemakers by diverting their spending away from giant corporations that keep people locked in poverty and destroy the planet—and instead to amazing brands that are reducing poverty, fighting climate change, and doing good in so many other ways.” By fostering inclusion and supporting ethical business models, these platforms contribute to a more diverse and responsible commercial landscape.

To maintain credibility, ethical online marketplaces must rigorously review and verify sellers’ business practices and ethical claims. They outline the criteria used to assess suppliers and detail their auditing processes. Third-party certifications, such as *PETA Certified*, *Fair Trade Certified*, or *100% Vegan*, are typically displayed in product descriptions. Additionally, suppliers’ efforts to reduce their environmental footprint are highlighted through icons like *Recycled*, *Handmade*, or *Locally Made*. Some marketplaces further reinforce transparency by publishing impact reports, while others hold B-Corporation status or are registered as Public Benefit Corporations (e.g., DoneGood, Goodee, and EarthHero).

Yet, although these marketplaces self-adjudicate the label “ethical,” they do not adhere to a single morality. The ethical criteria for curating suppliers vary across marketplaces, depending on the moral framework they follow. Some align with a morality of care (Graham et al., 2018; Haidt & Graham, 2007), focusing on protecting small producers and supporting community projects with social or environmental impact (e.g., BLK + GRN or Goodee). Others ascribe to a morality of justice or fairness, ensuring fair prices for producers or making ethical alternatives accessible to all consumers (e.g., OurCommonplace). Finally, some follow a morality of purity, excluding harmful ingredients or materials from their products (e.g., Safe & Chic or YourSustainable Store). Some marketplaces strive to comply with all these moral principles (e.g., EarthHero, Rainbowlife, or SimpleSwitch), using different ethical filters to screen in or out sellers.

Compared to standard online marketplaces, ethical online marketplaces face unique operational and strategic challenges due to their commitment to ethical value creation, delivery, and capture (Agag, 2019; Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2018). In terms of value creation, these platforms navigate the complexity of auditing sellers and establishing objective, scalable methods for assessing business practices. Unlike conventional online marketplaces that prioritize mass product selection, ethical platforms carefully curate and vet offerings from small producers while ensuring their ethical integrity. A key challenge here is avoiding the perception of greenwashing, where sustainability claims are seen as deceptive or exaggerated (Pizzetti et al., 2021; Torelli et al., 2019). This is especially pronounced

given that the sellers on these platforms often lack the supply chain transparency and third-party certifications available to larger corporations (Hameed et al., 2021; Qayyum et al., 2022). Without solid data to support their claims, these marketplaces risk being dismissed as symbolic rather than substantive. In value delivery, balancing scale and sustainability presents inherent trade-offs. Unlike traditional online marketplace models, ethical online marketplaces aim to minimize environmental impact and overconsumption while maintaining financial viability. This tension is reflected in their communication, which must provide accurate information about product socio-environmental performance, entice consumers to purchase, and educate them on the ethical implications of their consumption. In value capture, ethical online marketplaces must ensure equitable profit distribution across their ecosystem, ensuring that sellers—typically artisans and small businesses—receive fair compensation while maintaining competitive pricing for consumers.

These tensions are not exclusive to ethical online marketplaces; they have also been identified in other sustainability enterprises, such as fair trade (Golding, 2009) and public markets (Visconti et al., 2014). Moreover, these enterprises face fundamental tensions as they attempt to transform marketing systems from within. While striving to improve the overall well-being of marketing systems, they are constrained by the logic of commerciality and financial viability (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014).

### Moral Dramas

Marketing narratives are a key structuring factor in consumer culture and, by extension, consumer behavior (Heidenstrøm, 2025). Narratives are not morally neutral; they are created with a persuasive intent and set a framework for debating and acting on an issue (Heidenstrøm, 2025). Even when narratives are defended as a privileged genre for enabling moral awareness and reflection (Jasper et al., 2018; Koehn, 2024; Rhee et al., 2019; Winston, 1999), they have been largely neglected in sustainable communication.

Among narrative formats, dramas have been widely used in advertising to convince individuals of an object’s value (Deighton et al., 1989). Dramas differ from other narrative structures in their plot and the archetypal characters populating the story (Deighton et al., 1989). In dramas, plots depict a causal, linear chronology where events are causally linked (Stern, 1994). The plot typically unfolds in four acts (Letwin et al., 2008; Turner, 1980). First, a breach is introduced, which in the second act triggers a crisis among the antagonists. In the third act, a redressive action is applied to resolve the crisis. In the final act, either the breach is resolved (resolution) or the conflict persists, sometimes amplified (schism). Throughout these acts, characters are revealed. Dramatic characters are archetypal representations, such as good heroes and bad villains (Letwin et al., 2008; Turner, 1980).

We propose moral dramas as a narrative genre particularly suited for enabling ethical deliberation among consumers

(Winston, 1999). Moral dramas differ from other dramatic formats in three key respects. First, the plot represents a negotiation of the moral order governing consumption or markets. This negotiation is achieved by invoking various moral foundations in the description of events and characters, such as the morality of harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, and purity/sanctity (Graham et al., 2018; Haidt & Graham, 2007). Using these moral foundations, the breach problematizes an existing practice as immoral or as violating what is good or appropriate, while the redress offers a new moral principle that, if adopted, resolves the moral breach. For example, moral dramas might draw from the moral foundation of harm/care by depicting an act of cruelty or aggression that harms undeserving victims, which is then redressed through caring actions that restore what was harmed. Alternatively, they can invoke fairness/equality by narrating a violation of justice norms, which is redressed by restoring justice to the victims. Studies in moral psychology have shown that consumers effectively draw from these moral foundations to judge their own actions (Chowdhury, 2019).

Not only are the plots imbued with moral content, but the characters in the plot are also differentiated in moral terms. Consistent with Moral Typecasting Theory (Gray & Wegner, 2009), characters are categorized into two roles: moral agents (those who perform actions) and moral patients (those who experience the consequences). Heroes and villains are agentic actors who either provide help or create harm, respectively. The patients of villains' actions are victims, while the beneficiaries of heroes' actions are those who receive help.

A second characteristic of moral dramas is that the plot and characters mobilize moral emotions (Haidt, 2003). This emotional activation is crucial for ethical deliberation for two reasons. First, emotions are key to moralizing issues: by eliciting moral emotions toward a previously neutral entity, that entity acquires moral significance (Rhee et al., 2019). Second, moral emotions energize individuals for moral action (Haidt 2003; Jasper, 2011). Moral dramas activate moral batteries or blends of moral emotions that push audiences away from the bad characters and draw them toward the good ones (Bergstrand & Jasper, 2018; Jasper, 2011). In his study of ethical consumption markets, Gopaldas (2014) established links between three characters and three emotions: contempt for villains, concern for victims, and celebration of heroes. However, moral dramas may also mobilize other moral emotions, such as fear toward villains, compassion toward victims, gratitude toward heroes, or relief when the breach is resolved.

A final characteristic of moral dramas concerns the role of consumers. While in other dramatic formats, consumers are treated as passive viewers, moral dramas assign consumers an active role in the plot: they can be assimilated to heroes, villains, victims, or beneficiaries—the four main actors in moral dilemmas (Gray & Wegner, 2011). This assimilation also facilitates the activation of emotions. For example, if consumers are assimilated to villains, guilt may be elicited, as they perceive themselves responsible for the moral transgression explained

in the plot. In contrast, if they are assimilated to heroes, pride is activated, as consumers see themselves as rescuers. Similarly, if consumers are assimilated to victims, they may experience fear or anger in response to the harm inflicted upon them.

Moral dramas can facilitate ethical deliberation by fostering identification (Deighton et al., 1989). They immerse consumers in the story (Green & Brock, 2000), engaging their emotions, generating mental imagery, and focusing their attention. This process has been shown to facilitate story-consistent changes in recipients (Shen & Edwards, 2023; Van Laer et al., 2014). The narrative enables consumers to witness the consequences of their ruptured ideal self (Friedland & Cole, 2019). The breach offers audiences the chance to become aware of the negative impact of consumption choices by dramatizing the consequences of morally questionable purchases. Since audiences are not required to follow an argument but are instead immersed in a narrative, this provocation is less likely to be rejected or questioned (Van Laer et al., 2014). This may increase moral awareness, the first step in moral processing (Schwartz, 2016). The narrated transgression alerts audiences that a morally significant norm has been violated, thereby clearly linking consumption to its consequences (Kilbourne et al., 1997; Prothero et al., 1997). The redress transports consumers into a realm of moral possibilities to renew or re-establish their ideal self. Because the redress is presented as an action that restores the moral order, audiences are reassured of their moral capacity to address the crisis. In turn, the elicited emotions energize individuals to act. Moral capacity and moral emotions are key components of moral decision-making (Schwartz, 2016). Negative emotions reinforce moral awareness, signaling that something is fundamentally wrong with the current system (Haidt 2003). Positive emotions make the proposed new moral regime appealing and energize consumers to pursue its realization, counteracting reactance or resignation (Jasper, 2011). As the plot swiftly transforms negative emotions into positive ones, audiences are less likely to become entrenched in aversive states that could fuel reactance or helplessness (Friedland et al., 2023).

Moreover, moral dramas create the conditions for consumers to engage in an experimentation of moral identities (Keen, 2006). The plot and characters of moral dramas can stimulate consumers' moral imagination, allowing them to figuratively try out new moral identities. They can anticipate the emotions of guilt or anger if they assume the villain or victim role, or the pride and hope that would accompany embracing the heroic role. While such a transformation may take months or even years in real life, the elasticity of dramatic time (Winston, 1999) accelerates this imagined conversion. This experimentation with moral identities may help consumers internalize the ideal self of the hero (Gopaldas, 2014) and consider living by this ideal self (Winston, 1999).

However, the experimentation with moral identities can also be temporary and superficial: consumers may briefly adopt the hero role by purchasing a vegan lipstick, for instance, without fundamentally transforming their consumerist lifestyles. Worse, the sense of pride and satisfaction gained

from these minor actions may act as a barrier to engaging in more impactful behaviors (Barkemeyer et al., 2023). Since narratives are accepted with fewer counterarguments or critical thoughts (Shen & Edwards, 2023; Van Laer et al., 2014), they may be processed superficially. In this case, moral dramas would fail to encourage the moral reflexivity necessary for addressing socioenvironmental crises. Moral dramas could reinforce the belief that consumption (even if more ethical) can transform capitalism, that consumers alone bear responsibility for addressing socioenvironmental crises, or that growth can occur within planetary boundaries (Carrington et al., 2016; McDonagh, 1998; Prothero et al., 2010). Additionally, the uncritical processing of moral dramas may inadvertently reinforce the dominant social paradigm under the guise of ethical consumerism (Kilbourne, 2004; Kilbourne et al., 1997; Mittelstaedt et al., 2014). In this case, moral dramas would merely serve as another green advertising genre that insufficiently transforms marketing systems and could even become a form of greenwashing if the moral claims lack supporting evidence (Kilbourne, 2004; Prothero et al., 1997).

Moral dramas can serve as a communication genre that moralizes consumption by facilitating ethical deliberation among consumers and presenting moral role models that consumers are willing to embody. However, depending on their content and persuasive intent, they may also become a genre that promotes a consumption of morality with limited impact on the socioenvironmental problems they aim to address (Prothero & McDonagh, 2021; Wilk, 2001). An examination of how moral dramas are utilized in the sustainable communication of ethical online marketplaces will help identify the conditions under which moral dramas can be a normatively appropriate genre for sustainable communications.

## Method

As previously explained, our analysis centers on the communication texts produced by ethical online marketplaces. To ensure a diverse representation of ethical e-marketplaces from various countries, we developed a sampling strategy that captures a broad spectrum of platforms. The initial sampling criteria are outlined in Table 1.

Following these criteria, the sampling process was conducted in three stages. First, an online search was conducted for sustainable, eco-friendly, green, or ethical e-marketplaces using search engines, blogs, news articles, and cover stories listing these marketplaces (e.g., The Good Trade, Sustainably-chic.com, or Our Good Brands). This search resulted in 43 marketplaces. Of these, seventeen were excluded because they were exclusively fashion-focused. Only marketplaces selling a wide assortment of products were selected to capture a representative sample of diverse offerings. Additionally, six marketplaces were excluded because they had suspended activity and their website content was no longer available. The remaining 20 were classified as suitable for the study. Given that our aim is not exhaustiveness but conceptual grounding, the final sample is adequate: the analyzed

ethical online marketplaces provide a comprehensive exploration of discourses not confined to a specific sector or country. The details of the selected 20 ethical online marketplaces are presented in Table 2.

In terms of location, 13 are from the United States, 5 from Europe, 1 from Canada, and 1 from Singapore, with founding dates between 2008 and 2021. Remarkably, 85% of the sample was established after 2015, illustrating the recent emergence of this type of sustainability enterprise.

The websites of these marketplaces served as our primary data source. Our analysis focused on key sections, extracting valuable information from three main components: the home page, the “About Us” or “Our Values” section, and the product descriptions. Since these marketplaces collectively feature thousands of products, we selected a product from each category and from different vendors to assemble a theoretically representative sample (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The texts describing the marketplaces’ visions and the product descriptions were compiled into a document totaling 480 pages.

An initial analysis of their texts identified moral dramas as a recurring genre in these marketplaces. We then applied literary analysis (Stern, 1989; 1996) to understand the structure and content of these moral dramas. Literary analysis provides an in-depth understanding of how discourses are organized for persuasive purposes by identifying and interpreting their key elements (Stern, 1996). We applied the first step of literary analysis, which involves identifying textual elements (plot, characters, and language), by coding the sequence of events: breach, redress, and resolution. For instance, this excerpt from BLK + GRN was coded as a three-part plot:

*There are currently over 1,500 harmful chemicals banned—or highly restricted—by the European Union (EU). Yet, in the U.S., the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) has only banned 11 toxins in our personal care products and cosmetics. We’ve compiled a list of the most harmful offenders backed up by most leading regulating agencies and the Environmental Working Group. You will never find the following ingredients in any products on BLK + GRN.*

First, the breach is captured in the first two sentences, which highlight the use of harmful chemical components that are not yet banned in the US. Next, the redress action is presented: the marketplace has compiled a list of offenders to screen them out of the platform. Finally, the resolution is depicted: consumers will not find any trace of these harmful ingredients.

Similarly, DoneGood portrays a similar narrative structure, though arranged in a different order.

*Our mission is to help people transform from consumers to changemakers by diverting their spending away from Mega-Multinationals that keep people locked in poverty and destroy the planet, and instead to amazing mission-driven brands that are paying good wages, investing in communities, fighting climate change with sustainable practices, and doing good in many other ways (...) Together we’ve all diverted over \$2 million of consumer spending away from systems that keep people locked in poverty and*

**Table 1.** Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Ethical Online Marketplace Selection.

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Presence of the marketplace	Online-only marketplaces	Marketplaces with physical stores
Sustainability positioning	Marketplaces that explicitly define themselves as ethical or sustainable	Marketplaces without explicit sustainability focus
Product shipping	Actively involved in the shipment of products, functioning as complete marketplaces	Websites that are mere product showcases
Language	Marketplaces available in English	Marketplaces available in any other language

*destroy the planet, and instead to brands that reduce poverty, fight climate change and build a better world in many other ways. This is a great start. But pretty soon, with your support, there will be millions of us. And that's when the "Big Guys" will really start to sweat...*

This text presents a breach ("Mega-Multinationals that are responsible for an unjust and unsustainable system"), a redress ("mission-driven brands that are doing business differently"), and a resolution ("Mega-Multinationals will see their sales threatened and will be forced to change").

Then, we turned our attention to the characters invoked in this sequence of events (Foss, 2017). We realized that, although the archetypal characters were consistent across plots (e.g., villains were systematically depicted as agents of breaches and victims as their patients), the specific nature of the characters varied across stories. We focused particularly on the characters assigned to consumers. For instance, the BLK + GRN plot portrays consumers first as victims (harmed by villains) and then as beneficiaries of the redress. In this story, the marketplace serves as the hero that resolves the breach. In contrast, Done Good assigns an active role to consumers: they are portrayed as heroes who, alongside the marketplace, will resolve the breach and confront the villains.

We then coded the role of consumers in the plot, which served as the basis for differentiating between the dramatic plots employed. Through iterative discussions, we eventually identified three moral dramas, labeled as *The Redeemed Villain*, *The Saved Victim*, and *The Awoken Hero*. This coding was complemented in a second step by identifying the moral foundations and the emotions elicited by the plot and characters.

In a final step, we applied the deconstruction of meaning (Stern, 1989, 1996) to expose the hidden assumptions of persuasive texts that could lead to positive or negative performativities. To structure this analysis, we drew from the Mertonian distinction between manifest and latent functionalities, as employed by Kilbourne (2004) in his normative model of

sustainable consumption. In our case, deconstruction involves studying the latent negative functionalities that could undermine the potential of moral dramas as a sustainable consumption genre. Specifically, we assessed the negative manifest functionalities using two criteria: whether the texts could constitute greenwashing (if the claimed socioenvironmental impact was not supported by evidence) or whether the benefits were framed as individual (e.g., "good for your health") or systemic (e.g., "a more just economic system"). To assess the latent negative functionalities, we considered whether the texts reinforced the dominant social paradigm by portraying an uncritical representation of consumption or even promoting hyperconsumption, or by presenting consumers as the sole actors responsible for the crises and their solutions. These two criteria—reinforcement of consumerist capitalism and consumer responsabilization—are widely considered obstacles to veritable ethical deliberation that can transform marketing systems (Carrington et al., 2016; Kilbourne, 2004; McDonagh, 1998; Prothero & McDonagh, 2021). In contrast, we considered as positive manifest functionalities when texts enable moral awareness and moral capability, foregrounding system wellbeing as the objective; and as positive latent functionalities, texts that promote frugality and degrowth or advocate for collective action to address the crises.

## Findings

### The Structure of Moral Dramas

In this section, we first present the three moral dramas coined by the ethical online marketplaces: *The Redeemed Villain*, *The Saved Victim*, and *The Awoken Hero*. We illustrate the structural components of each drama with one example (supplementary evidence from other marketplaces is provided in Appendix 1). A summary of the structure of these moral dramas is presented in Figure 1.

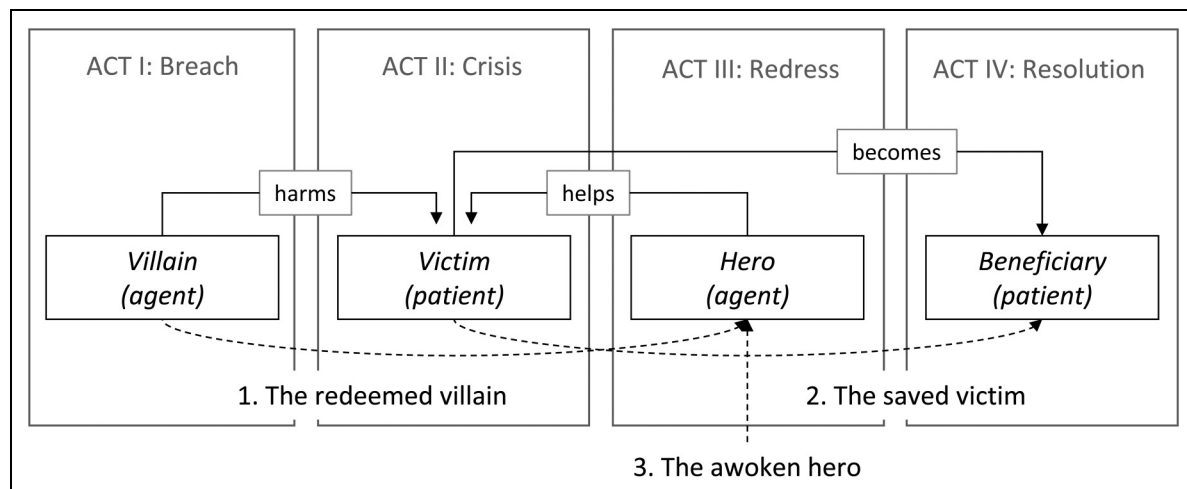
**The Redeemed Villain.** In this drama, the consumer is depicted as the villain, responsible for environmental degradation and social injustices due to their unsustainable purchases. Your Sustainable Store provides a good example of this drama. The narrative begins with the founder presenting the breach, which is the environmental decay caused by the consumer's damaging actions:

*Through my travels, I have witnessed how our lifestyles are affecting the environment. The glaciers in Iceland were breathtaking, but the ice that took centuries to form will vanish in years. The flowers in Japan were beautiful, but it is getting harder for them to bloom because of extreme weather. The drive along Great Ocean Road in Australia was extremely scenic, but the ocean may be filled with plastic soon enough at the rate we are ocean dumping. The sights in New Zealand were divine with its clear blue skies, crisp air, calm lakes, and roaming animals, but the sun was merciless to us all because of a depleting ozone layer.*

This vivid description of the contamination of natural spaces immerses consumers in the dramatic narrative. The text forces

**Table 2.** Description of the 20 Selected Ethical Online Marketplaces.

	Marketplace	Year founded	Country	Categories sold
1	BLK + GRN	2017	United States	Haircare, skincare, kitchenware and wellness
2	Done Good	2008	United States	Bodycare, kitchenware, textile
3	Earth Hero	2017	United States	Bodycare, kitchenware, textile
4	Goodee	2017	Canada	Furniture, design, kitchenware
5	Green Eco Dream	2020	United States	Skincare, homecare, gifts
6	Itemerie	NR	United States	Homecare, kitchen and table, beauty, apothecary, candles, soap, jewelry and handbags, cleaning
7	Kindhumans	2017	United States	Skincare, homecare, decoration, gifts
8	Leaf'd	2019	United States	Homeware, kitchen, health, beauty, accessories, foods, kids, pets
9	Made Trade	2018	United States	Bodycare, furniture, textile
10	OurCommonplace	2020	United States	Bodycare, skincare, decoration, fashion
11	Rainbow Life	2020	United Kingdom	Textile, homeware, gifts, kids
12	Reuzi	2018	Ireland	Kitchenware, office, health, kids, food, bags
13	Reve En Vert	2014	United Kingdom	Textile, bodycare, decoration
14	Safe & Chic	2015	United States	Bodycare, textile
15	Shades of Green	2021	United States	Textile, decoration, gifts, housecare
16	Verishop	2018	United States	Textile, homeware, beauty
17	Simple Switch	2018	United States	Textile and accessories, homeware, food and drink, lifestyle, baby and kids
18	Staiy.	2019	Germany	Textile, bodycare, decoration
19	Versegoodstore	2016	Netherlands	Textile, shoes, accessories, home, wellness
20	Your Sustainable Store	2018	Singapore	Bath, kids, oils, beauty, kitchenware



**Figure 1.** Summary of the structure of moral dramas.

consumers to take on the role of the villain, as they are presented as responsible (“our lifestyles”) for environmental degradation. Nature is, in turn, portrayed as the victim of this drama. Mobilizing the moral language of purity (Haidt & Graham, 2007), this portrayal aims to activate guilt among readers for their role in the irremediable loss of these once-pristine landscapes.

The redress is driven by the marketplace, which portrays itself as the hero in the drama. The text explicitly conveys the

hero’s mission: “This beauty is what I am motivated to protect.” To protect nature, the marketplace must convert the eco-villain consumer into a sustainable one. Consumers are then invited by the e-marketplace to step out of their villainous role and seek out ethical products that won’t harm nature. In doing so, they will become co-heroes with the store.

Consistent with this intention, the e-marketplace frames its offer as an opportunity for redemption and moral cleansing:

"We hope that by offering practical yet stylish alternatives, we can inspire more to lead an environmentally aware lifestyle." Moreover, the narrative distances itself from moral reproach, which may alienate consumers, by portraying the store as a sympathetic and understanding hero, aware of the conditions surrounding consumer transgressions.

*When you're navigating rush hour on the subway—with or without a stroller—it's way too easy to choose the convenience of a disposable cup over doing what's right for the planet.*

This text mitigates the potential guilt of readers by acknowledging the difficulty of making sustainable choices in daily life. The quote suggests that these choices are not the result of an intrinsically evil character but rather a consequence of our fast-paced lifestyles. In this way, responsibility for harm is displaced from consumers to an amorphous and unidentified villain. This non-condemnatory language makes the hero more likable. The text continues: "Let us protect our beautiful home together." With this, the marketplace presents itself as a mentor that will facilitate eco-villain consumers' transition into hero ranks: "Never again would someone have to choose between doing what's easy and doing what's important."

In the resolution of this drama, the beneficiary is the Earth, as the proposed redress will lead to happier and healthier citizens. In "we are committed to designing earth-conscious products that bring more to life than what they take away," the marketplace presents a final scenario where, by purchasing earth-conscious products, consumers not only minimize harm to the environment but also enhance the quality of life for communities.

This drama then proposes a new moral order by amplifying the moral relevance of purity and presenting consumers with a set of morally appropriate care products to uphold this moral principle. By narrating the consumer journey from villain to hero, it mobilizes an emotional battery that accompanies the consumer—from the guilt of being held responsible for nature damage to self-forgiveness, and the pride experienced upon their redemption and transformation into a hero.

**The Saved Victim.** In this drama, the consumer is assigned the role of the victim of unsustainable products. Safe & Chic exemplifies this drama. The narrative begins with the mission of Safe & Chic: "We are on a mission to transform the beauty landscape and prove that luxurious beauty and personal care products don't need harmful chemicals to be effective." This text moralizes the industry of care products, portraying existing products as violators of the norm of care because of their harmful chemicals. Consumers are then placed as the primary victims, suffering the consequences of these villainous products that jeopardize their health and the health of the planet. The redress is immediately offered:

*Welcome to Safe & Chic, where your quest for non-toxic, clean, and ethical beauty products ends. (...) We believe you should never have to compromise between beauty, health, and sustainability.*

This quote presents the marketplace's products as heroes that can rescue consumers from their tormenting villains. Safe & Chic presents itself as a safe haven, governed by the moral principles of purity and care. The moralization of the products is emphasized with texts that highlight its mission of care and protection.

*We are committed to bringing you high-quality, pure skincare made with organic ingredients with a sustainable and conscious approach, because we know those values are just as important to us as they are to you.*

*Every item on our site is packed with beneficial, naturally derived ingredients that nourish, protect, and enhance your natural beauty. We meticulously curate a selection of the finest natural, non-toxic, and cruelty-free products, taking the guesswork out of clean beauty shopping.*

These texts underline the marketplace's crusade to protect consumers from aggression through actions that repair the damage caused by these pernicious products. The meticulous curation of products is portrayed as the means to help consumers transform from victims to beneficiaries of this new moral order. The sourcing process is key to enabling this transformation; for instance, they state, "We forge relationships with farmers and tirelessly audit our sources to maintain our standards of purity and sustainability." Words like "forge" and "tirelessly" reinforce the company's dedication to this crusade to uphold the morality of purity and care.

The heroic role of the products is often portrayed through detailed ingredient lists. For example, AnnMarie Skin Care products are shown as heroes because they offer natural, beneficial ingredients that protect and enhance the consumer's skin.

As mentioned, the ultimate beneficiary in this drama is the consumer. The resolution will not only improve consumer health but also positively impact the environment in which they live. In the quote, "Together, we're making a positive impact on the world, one product at a time," Safe & Chic extends the benefits of the proposed moral order to all global inhabitants.

The Saved Victim drama establishes a new moral order of care and purity. By narrating the journey from villain to beneficiary, this drama evokes a moral battery that takes the consumer from fear and anxiety about health risks to feelings of hope and relief when they encounter the heroic product that saves them from the negative consequences of using harmful goods, and can even create a better world.

**The Awoken Hero.** This moral drama elevates the consumer to the role of the hero in a quest to create more just markets. Rainbow Life exemplifies this dramatic structure. It begins by highlighting the moral breach and casting exploitative big corporations as the villain:

*Unlike huge corporations, we do not see the need to drive down prices incessantly, robbing people everywhere of a decent, fair, livable wage and concentrating inordinate wealth in the bank account of one man or his wealthy shareholders.*



This text exemplifies how the marketplace draws from a morality of fairness and care as it describes how large corporations violate fairness norms (“robbing”) that harm the victims (“people everywhere”). The mobilization of justice language is also seen in other texts, such as: “Producers must receive fair payment and work in safe conditions, thus enabling economic and sustainable development.” This excerpt clarifies the breach as a violation of fairness and presents “producers”—which may refer to artisans, manufacturers, or employees—as victims of unfair corporations.

The text continues to emphasize the need for redress and calls consumers to join a crusade to moralize the market and make it more just:

*If you are looking out for people’s health, why not well-being? If at a school, why not an office or a home office, or even just a home? If we want to support people in the UK, why not people worldwide? If looking out for people why not the planet?*

This quote sets the start of the journey for the hero’s mission. It appeals to the consumer’s sense of responsibility, positioning them as a key actor compelled by the health and well-being of others. Similarly, the texts “At Rainbow Life, we want you to feel connected, to know the stories, and see the power of your purchase to make a real difference” or “It must be good for the people who buy it, good for the people who make it, and good for the planet” aim to awaken the consumer and instill a sense of duty to make choices that will redress market unfairness and promote the well-being of the whole system. Other texts further cement the role of consumers as heroes in the moral order proposed:

*One common belief that all ethical shoppers share is that it is possible to effect change by voting for your values with your pounds. They are right. As ethical shoppers, we have the power to effect real change; by making informed choices for ethically and sustainably sourced products, we place a demand on companies to be transparent and uphold higher standards in terms of procurement and supply chains.*

With this text, consumers are reassured that their heroic acts will likely lead to a resolution: using their purchasing power, they can redress the moral breach, defeat villains, and moralize production chains governed by fairness and equality. Similarly, product descriptions provide a glimpse into the new moral order that will be enacted if the consumer embraces the role of the hero: “When you purchase a Lanka Kade product, you directly support the educational foundation, which provides books and daily milk drinks to several rural schools in Sri Lanka.”

This new moral order is more cogently described in other texts. For instance, the description of the logo offers a vivid portrayal of the resolution. The marketplace is presented as “a symbol of hope, of something better to come, a celestial bridge between people, an emblem of love and harmony.” This text captures the happy ending of the drama: with purchases from this store, markets will become a terrain of

solidarity and social harmony, as the moral principles of justice and equality will reign.

The Awoken Hero drama proposes a new moral order where unjust market structures will be dismantled, thanks to consumers embracing the role of heroes and using their purchasing power to defeat wicked corporations. The dramatic journey is facilitated by a moral battery that instills in consumers feelings of moral outrage as they witness the harm created by unfair companies, elevation as they contemplate their virtuous role in markets, and pride when social justice is eventually restored.

### **The Content of Moral Dramas: Analysis of (Dys) Functionalities**

This section examines the functional and dysfunctional elements of manifest (explicit messages and claims) and latent (underlying ideological implications) dimensions within each drama (see Table 3). The analysis of the three moral dramas reveals that, while all aim to encourage ethical reflection among consumers, their texts may be subject to different (dys)functionalities depending on whether the dominant social paradigm is challenged or reinforced.

Among the positive functionalities of the dramas, four are especially relevant: raising awareness of the violation of moral principles, promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being, challenging hyperconsumerism, and framing sustainability as a collective effort. Their texts explicitly manifest their intention to raise awareness of the negative consequences of unsustainable consumption, typically presenting a *violation of a moral principle* (be it purity, care, or fairness). Earthero states, “While living abroad, our CEO, Ryan Lewis, became increasingly aware of the adverse effects of hyperconsumerism on the natural environment—landscapes seemingly transformed into seas of plastic,” directly linking consumer behavior to environmental degradation and the violation of the principle of care and purity. Their narratives often imply socio-environmental impacts without explicit statements. Kindhumans’ assertion, “It’s hard to know what to bring home. But it also matters more now than ever,” subtly prompts reflection on consumption habits.

Some of the texts also directly encourage *ethical reflection and systemic thinking*. Goodee declares: “We firmly believe in our mission of preserving traditional crafts, championing sustainable design, and using our business as a force for good,” positioning itself within a broader ethical ecosystem. Kindhumans envisions “a brighter future where being kind—to ourselves, to the Earth, and to each other—is a top priority for people and businesses everywhere,” also encouraging ethical responsibility among their audiences. Latent messaging similarly promotes ethical deliberation. OurCommonplace’s mission to “accelerate the conscious consumerism movement in an effort to accomplish the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals” implies a systemic, joint approach to sustainability, encouraging consumers to view their purchases as part of a global effort.

**Table 3.** Sustainability Narratives in Ethical Marketplaces, Functional and Dysfunctional Dimensions.

Dimension	Claims	Predominant drama
<b>Functional</b>	<b>Violating a moral principle:</b> Marketplaces explicitly or implicitly highlight the negative consequences of unsustainable consumption, such as environmental degradation or health risks.	<b>Predominant Dramas: Saved Victim and Awoken Hero</b> The <b>Saved Victim</b> drama uses this claim to emphasize protecting vulnerable entities from harm (e.g., Leaf'd warns about harmful chemicals in bedding). The <b>Awoken Hero</b> drama uses it to awaken consumers to their environmental responsibilities (e.g., Verishop critiques e-commerce's environmental damage).
	<b>Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> Marketplaces encourage consumers to reflect on ethical practices and promote sustainability as part of a broader system.	<b>Predominant Dramas: Redeemed Villain and Awoken Hero</b> The <b>Redeemed Villain</b> drama uses this claim to showcase transformation into a force for systemic good (e.g., OurCommonplace wants us to move to a more fair economy). The <b>Awoken Hero</b> drama promotes ethical action as part of a collective awakening (e.g., Kindhumans fosters kindness and transparency).
	<b>Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> Claim Description: Marketplaces criticize excessive consumption and advocate for reduced or mindful consumption practices.	<b>Predominant Drama: Redeemed Villain</b> The <b>Redeemed Villain</b> drama most frequently challenges overconsumption, aligning with its narrative of transforming from a harmful past to a sustainable present (e.g., Green Eco-Dream's pod replaces 2,000 plastic bottles).
	<b>Framing sustainability as a collective effort:</b> Marketplaces emphasize sustainability as a shared responsibility, encouraging communal action over individual efforts.	<b>Predominant Dramas: Saved Victim and Awoken Hero:</b> The <b>Saved Victim</b> drama frames collective effort as essential to protect vulnerable entities (e.g., Goodee builds a community of conscious enthusiasts). The <b>Awoken Hero</b> drama calls for joining a broader movement (e.g., Reuzi's "we can all make a difference").
<b>Dysfunctional</b>	<b>Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> Marketplaces overstate the environmental or social impact of their products or practices, simplifying complex sustainability challenges.	<b>Predominant Dramas: Saved Victim and Awoken Hero</b> The <b>Saved Victim</b> drama exaggerates to highlight protection (e.g., Leaf'd's "no more plastic in the kitchen"). The <b>Awoken Hero</b> drama uses exaggeration to inspire action (e.g., Verishop's "turning the world green").
	<b>Prioritizing consumer's individual benefit:</b> Marketplaces prioritize personal benefits (e.g., health or comfort) over systemic sustainability improvements.	<b>Predominant Dramas: Saved Victim</b> The <b>Saved Victim</b> drama focuses on protecting individual health or safety (e.g., Simple Switch warns of toxic chemicals).
	<b>Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> Marketplaces fail to challenge excessive consumption, often promoting continued consumption as sustainable.	<b>Predominant Drama: Awoken Hero</b> The <b>Awoken Hero</b> drama frames sustainability as compatible with ongoing consumption (e.g., Kindhumans offers "so many options").
	<b>Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> Marketplaces place the burden of sustainability on individual consumer choices rather than systemic solutions.	<b>Predominant Drama: Redeemed Villain</b> The <b>Redeemed Villain</b> drama emphasizes personal action and responsibility (e.g., Goodee's "everything we do has an impact on the planet").

In terms of *challenging hyperconsumerism*, manifest critiques of excessive consumption are evident but rare. Green Eco-Dream asserts: "One pod will last you 6 months... this will save the planet from 2,000 single-use plastic water bottles," explicitly promoting reduced consumption. Simple Switch emphasizes product durability: "Our brushes help reduce reliance on plastic brushes and reduce plastic waste." These messages suggest a departure from disposable culture, advocating for more mindful consumption. Latent narratives also challenge hyperconsumerism. Goodee's statement, "In a world where the things we consume have begun to consume us," subtly critiques overconsumption, suggesting the need to rethink consumption patterns.

Finally, some marketplaces frame sustainability as a collective effort and explicitly call for collective action. Reuzi asserts: "There's not one magic formula to fix our planet's issues, but one thing we know for sure: we can all make a difference," emphasizing shared responsibility. Latent community-oriented language also implies collective effort. Earthero's description of its founder—"Ryan imagined a marketplace that championed

responsible consumerism by only offering sustainable goods"—suggests a collective shift in consumption patterns that can initiate a broader market movement.

However, the functional potential of these moral dramas is often weakened by the dysfunctional dimensions these narratives encompass. These include using a commercial framing that reduces sustainability to a transactional choice, incorporating exaggerated sustainability claims about the potential of products to solve complex sustainability-related problems, reinforcing consumerist ideologies, framing sustainability as an individual consumption choice issue, and portraying the obtained value as an individual benefit or lifestyle enhancement.

Marketplaces sometimes overstate their impact using manifest, *exaggerated sustainability claims*. For instance, Leaf'd asserts: "No more plastic in the kitchen when you use this bar to wash your dishes!"—which may overstate the systemic effects of a single consumption action on plastic reduction. Moreover, Verishop's slogan, "Together, we're turning the world green, one cheeky step at a time!" risks trivializing the

complexity of sustainability. Additionally, implied exaggerations could mislead consumers. Simple Switch's "Make your laundry simple; make it SILV" suggests sustainability is effortless, potentially leading consumers to overestimate the simplicity of addressing the crises.

Moreover, some narratives fail to position sustainability as a means of fostering collective well-being and often *prioritize the consumer's individual benefit* and lifestyle enhancement. Simple Switch warns, "Did you know that common brand name laundry detergents contain 10 to 14 + toxic chemicals & carcinogens? That's, like, really bad for your skin," centering the benefit on consumer health. More subtly, the Itemerie statement says, "Whether you're completing your outfit or creating a zen vibe, this pair will keep things in equilibrium. Not to mention, they look super-cool!" emphasizing style.

Furthermore, some moral dramas reveal tensions between promoting sustainability and *reinforcing consumerist ideologies*. Kindhumans manifests, "With so many options these days, it's hard to know what to bring home," acknowledging the abundance of choice without discouraging excess. Similarly, OurCommonplace subtly mentions they "Serve as a one-stop-shop for fashion-forward, ethical, and sustainable goods," which can imply that ongoing consumption is acceptable as long as it's sustainable, potentially reinforcing hyperconsumerism.

Finally, while some marketplaces advocate for collective responsibility, others *frame sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action*. Reuzi states, "Over 50% of the food waste volume happens at the consumption level... you and I buying too much, ordering too much," blaming individuals rather than acknowledging the entire supply chain responsible for much of the waste. Latent narratives also imply individual responsibility. Shades of Green's statement, "We needed to create a set of guidelines to help our customers make smarter decisions about what they are purchasing," suggests that sustainability is primarily about consumers becoming "smarter," framing the issue as an individual problem.

Overall, sustainability narratives in these marketplaces reflect both functionalities and dysfunctions in addressing socio-environmental crises. They successfully raise awareness of environmental and ethical concerns, yet they often reduce solutions to market transactions rather than advocating for systemic shifts. While some platforms promote frugality and collective responsibility, many reinforce consumerist logic, positioning sustainability as a moralized extension of traditional shopping behaviors rather than as a fundamental rethinking of consumption patterns.

## Discussion

This study introduces *moral dramas* as an innovative communication genre and examines their use in a sample of ethical online marketplaces, an emerging sustainable enterprise. Three distinct dramas emerge: *The Redeemed Villain*, *The Saved Victim*, and *The Awoken Hero*, each with a narrative structure that exposes moral breaches and proposes pathways

for redemption or transformation. The content of these dramas is critically scrutinized using the normative guidelines of the critical macromarketing school, examining their potential (dys)functionalities. This study contributes to two macromarketing conversations: sustainable communication and sustainable marketing.

First, this study extends the nascent empirical literature on sustainable communication. By examining a sustainable enterprise, we complement other studies focused on the sustainable communication of mainstream organizations. Our analysis reveals differences in the genres used by these enterprises: while mainstream organizations use mythical structures related to humans, nature, and technology (Ourahmoune et al., 2014), ethical online marketplaces employ moral dramas as their genre. This narrative structure is imbued with morality in several ways: the plot centers around the violation of a moral foundation, the characters are presented as moral actors or ideal moral types to imitate (or reject), and the plot and characters evoke moral emotions to drive moral action. These characteristics make moral dramas an effective genre for raising awareness of the moral implications of consumption, potentially fostering both moral decision-making and broader market moralization. This potential is supported by philosophy, which has long advocated for the use of moral dramas for moral reflection and education (Winston, 1999). From this perspective, this genre appears preferable to the instrumental appeals typically used in green advertising (Golob et al., 2023). For macromarketers, the generic structure and content of moral dramas offer a novel framework for understanding how sustainable communication can effectively moralize consumption and markets (Aboelenien & Arsel, 2024; Crane, 2000), and serves as an example of the holistic approaches to sustainable communication that other scholars have called for (Golob et al., 2023; Kennedy & Smith, 2022).

Yet, the analysis also reveals three dysfunctions in the actual deployment of moral dramas: the simplification of complex issues into transactional choices, the focus on enhanced individual well-being rather than systemic well-being, and the implicit invitation to maintain consumerist lifestyles. These issues raise doubts about whether moral dramas, as currently employed, can effectively address the market power relations they critique. Their limited engagement with hyperconsumption and the responsabilization of consumers for the transition to sustainability makes this genre similar to the sustainable communication used by mainstream brands (Heidenstrøm, 2025). The sustainable communication of these marketplaces encourages reformed consumption—such as calls to reduce the use of materials like plastic or pollutants—but falls short of addressing the reconstructionist ideals necessary to envision deeper, systemic alternatives to neoliberal markets (Kilbourne, 2004).

Worse, as used by many of the analyzed marketplaces, moral dramas may be interpreted as an invitation to consume morality (Wilk, 2001) rather than moralize one's consumption. Moralizing consumption requires a discussion of the limits of consumption and the capacity of markets to reform themselves (Kilbourne, 2004; Prothero & McDonagh, 2021). Ultimately,

moral dramas may promote a shallow ethical deliberation that reassures consumers that systemic moral transgressions can be addressed through selective purchases. This may create a dynamic of “moral commodity fetishism,” where consumers establish their moral credentials by buying products from these marketplaces without reducing their overall consumption or altering their consumerist values.

Second, our work contributes to the ongoing debates about the transformative potential of marketing. Normative models have established criteria for socially responsible marketing (e.g., Laczniaik & Shultz, 2020). Ethical online marketplaces appear to operate according to these criteria: their marketing policies, actions, and outcomes proactively and non-discretionarily align with corporate good citizenship, where business is seen as a force for creating the common good. They maintain a stakeholder orientation, aiming to protect the most vulnerable, particularly small and minority producers, and strive for social and environmental sustainability in all their actions. Furthermore, many of these marketplaces demonstrate a commitment to distributive justice, paying fair prices to sellers and offering affordable socioecological products to consumers.

Yet, from a reconstructionist perspective, these characteristics are insufficient to transform markets, as they reinforce central elements of the dominant social paradigm, such as consumerism and growth (Kilbourne et al., 1997). Given that sustainable enterprises have survival as their most urgent goal, it is unlikely that they can disengage from sales targets. In fact, six of the marketplaces studied have ceased operations since we began this research (i.e., GreenEcoDream, Kindhumans, LeafD, Made Trade, Staiy, and Verishop). From this perspective, transforming marketing systems from within seems implausible: truly transformative systemic changes require players to step outside the market or risk being co-opted and absorbed in the pursuit of growth. This supports the argument that, for effective transformation, a stronger role for regulation and policymaking is necessary, as sustainable enterprises and their customers lack the power to transform marketing systems (Prothero & McDonagh, 2021).

Even acknowledging the difficulties in changing market systems from within, we also highlight the dangers of entrenching moral radicalism that dismisses socially responsible marketing as inappropriate. This approach risks tainting macromarketing scholarship with a sense of powerlessness or the belief that it is impossible to use marketing thinking and tools to transform markets. Without renouncing reconstructionist ideals, we can provisionally accept these sustainable enterprises as long as they initiate a transformation of consumer culture, potentially paving the way for a more significant transformation.

Regarding managerial implications, moral dramas can be used as part of a socially responsible strategy to build consumer engagement with sustainable lifestyles (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2021). Managers can leverage these insights to design communication campaigns that not only promote sustainable products but also encourage consumers to reflect on

their consumption choices, ultimately leading to more ethical market transactions (Friedland et al., 2023). However, businesses may co-opt moral dramas to prioritize profit over genuine sustainability (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014). The Awoken Hero narrative, while inspiring, could be exploited to sell more products rather than reduce consumption. This tension suggests that moral dramas may serve business interests more than socio-environmental goals, necessitating greater transparency and accountability in their use. We recommend that ethical online marketplaces complement their moral drama-based communication strategies with credible, transparent data. Such data should not only reinforce trust and mitigate the risk of greenwashing but also serve an educational function—informing and empowering consumers to engage in more reflective and responsible consumption practices.

This study has some limitations that also offer new research avenues. Our examination of texts does not allow for assessing the persuasiveness of moral dramas or their macro consequences regarding the moralization of markets. Future work should explore whether moral dramas foster deep ethical deliberation or merely provide temporary moral satisfaction. Additionally, future research could investigate how moral dramas might influence the moralization of other firms, particularly mainstream retailers. Another valuable line of inquiry could compare the persuasiveness of moral dramas with that of instrumental appeals, such as emotional triggers or cognitive heuristics. An examination of the short- and long-term consequences of these different genres is necessary to assess the potential of sustainable communication in enabling ethical deliberation among its audiences.

## Associate Editor

Alexander Nill

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests


The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.


## Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Aristos Campus Mundus, (grant number ACM2023\_23).

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## Appendix I

**Table A.1.** Marketplaces Using the Redeemed Villain Moral Drama Narrative.

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
Earthero	<p>“While living abroad, our CEO, Ryan Lewis, became increasingly aware of the adverse effects of hyper-consumerism on the natural environment — landscapes seemingly transformed into seas of plastic.”</p> <p>“Did You Know? 900 million plastic jugs of laundry detergent are thrown away each year!”</p>	<p>“Wanting to make an impactful change in the way we consume, Ryan imagined a marketplace that championed responsible consumerism by only offering sustainable goods.”</p> <p>“EarthHero opened its virtual doors with just a few hundred products to offer sustainable choices for every type of consumer, making sustainable shopping approachable and easy for everyone.”</p> <p>“Say goodbye to those heavy, messy, single-use plastic bottles of laundry detergent and say hello to an easier, cleaner way to do your laundry.”</p>	<p>- <b>Violating a moral principle:</b> “While living abroad, our CEO, Ryan Lewis, became increasingly aware of the adverse effects of hyper-consumerism on the natural environment — landscapes seemingly transformed into seas of plastic.” (Identifies hyper-consumerism as a root cause of environmental damage)</p> <p>“900 million plastic jugs of laundry detergent are thrown away each year!”</p> <p>- <b>Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “Ryan imagined a marketplace that championed responsible consumerism by only offering sustainable goods.”</p> <p>“Making sustainable shopping approachable and easy for everyone.”</p> <p>- <b>Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “While living abroad, our CEO, Ryan Lewis, became increasingly aware of the adverse effects of hyper-consumerism on the natural environment” (Identifies hyper-consumerism as a root cause of environmental damage)</p> <p>- <b>Framing sustainability as a collective effort:</b> “Ryan imagined a marketplace that championed responsible consumerism by only offering sustainable goods.” (Positions Earthero as part of a broader movement toward responsible consumption.)</p>	<p>- <b>Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “Say goodbye to those heavy, messy, single-use plastic bottles of laundry detergent and say hello to an easier, cleaner way to do your laundry.” (Simplifies sustainability as an effortless switch without addressing deeper systemic issues).</p> <p>- <b>Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “Making sustainable shopping approachable and easy for everyone.” (Frames sustainability primarily as a personal convenience rather than a structural shift.)</p> <p>- <b>Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> “EarthHero opened its virtual doors with just a few hundred products to offer sustainable choices for every type of consumer.” (Although it addresses hyperconsumption, here it expands consumer options without challenging overall consumption patterns.)</p>
Goodee	<p>“Everything we do has an impact on the planet.”</p> <p>“In the wake of the waste produced by discarded plastic toys, ecoBirdy emerges with a solution that transforms forgotten playthings into cherished children’s products.”</p>	<p>“Welcome to a world of good people doing good things.”</p> <p>“We firmly believe in our mission of preserving traditional crafts, championing sustainable design, and using our business as a force for good. But of course, we couldn’t do it without you.”</p> <p>“Driven by an unrelenting desire to co-create a world that’s smarter, kinder, and more beautiful”</p>	<p>- <b>Violating a moral principle:</b> “Everything we do has an impact on the planet.”</p> <p>“In the wake of the waste produced by discarded plastic toys, ecoBirdy emerges with a solution that transforms forgotten playthings into cherished children’s products.” (Highlights waste as a systemic issue and presents upcycling as a direct solution.)</p> <p>- <b>Promoting ethical deliberation and</b></p>	<p>- <b>Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “We believe consumers are the new curators. That quality provides clarity. And ‘less, but better’ can only lead to a kinder, smarter, more beautiful world.” (Places the burden of sustainability on individual purchasing decisions rather than systemic change.)</p>

(continued)



**Table A. I. (continued)**

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
Green Eco-Dream	<p>“Plastic is one of the most pressing environmental issues, that is quite obvious these days.”</p> <p>“It has found its way to the depths of our oceans, to remote forest paths, to the ice of the Arctic, and onto the island beaches where turtles nest.”</p> <p>“It is estimated that over 30 billion loads of laundry are done in North America each year!”</p>	<p>“We have a unique opportunity to reshape how we shop by promoting mindful purchases.”</p> <p>“We wake up every day challenged to understand and improve the world around us; and it's why we rest at night encouraged by the positive impacts we're making along the way.”</p> <p>“We believe consumers are the new curators. That quality provides clarity. And “less, but better” can only lead to a kinder, smarter, more beautiful world.”</p>	<p><b>system well-being:</b> “We firmly believe in our mission of preserving traditional crafts, championing sustainable design, and using our business as a force for good.”</p> <p>(Promotes a holistic sustainability vision that values craft preservation and ethical production.)</p> <p>“We have a unique opportunity to reshape how we shop by promoting mindful purchases.”</p> <p>“Welcome to a world of good people doing good things.”</p> <p>- <b>Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “Less, but better” can only lead to a kinder, smarter, more beautiful world.”</p> <p>(Encourages consumers to prioritize quality over quantity.)</p> <p>- <b>Framing sustainability as a collective effort:</b> “We wake up every day challenged to understand and improve the world around us.” (Frames sustainability as an ongoing, community-driven effort.)</p>	<p>- <b>Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “Believing that small actions can make big changes and putting progress over perfection is the starting point of everything they do at Tru Earth!”</p> <p>- <b>Prioritizing consumer's individual benefit:</b> “Helps reduce reliance on plastic brushes and reduces plastic waste.”</p> <p>“One pod will last you 6 months... this will save the planet from 2,000 single-use plastic water bottles while saving you money, too.”</p> <p>- <b>Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “Believing that small actions can make big changes and putting progress over perfection is the starting point of everything they do at Tru Earth!”</p>
		<p>“Realizing she was just ‘playing along’ with it, Snow knew it was time to change.”</p> <p>“Believing that small actions can make big changes and putting progress over perfection is the starting point of everything they do at Tru Earth!”</p> <p>“Helps reduce reliance on plastic brushes and reduces plastic waste.”</p> <p>“One pod will last you 6 months... this will save the planet from 2,000 single-use plastic water bottles while saving you money, too.”</p>	<p>- <b>Violating a moral principle:</b> “Plastic is one of the most pressing environmental issues, that is quite obvious these days.”</p> <p>“It has found its way to the depths of our oceans, to remote forest paths, to the ice of the Arctic, and onto the island beaches where turtles nest.” (Uses vivid imagery to illustrate the widespread reach of plastic pollution.)</p> <p>- <b>Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “One pod will last you 6 months... this will save the planet from 2,000 single-use plastic water bottles while saving you money, too.” (Links individual benefits to system wellbeing by reducing plastic waste.)</p> <p>- <b>Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “One pod will last you 6 months... this will save the planet from 2,000 single-use plastic water bottles”</p>	

(continued)

**Table A.1. (continued)**

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
OurCommonplace	<p>“The fashion industry is one of the most polluting and inhumane industries and changes need to be made in order for us to move toward a more circular and fair economy.”</p> <p>“It is our responsibility to create a space where consumers can feel confident about how they allocate their purchasing power.”</p>	<p>“We strive to make the world a better place for us and future generations to come.”</p> <p>“We want to make it easier for you to step into the world every morning in great style and with a clear conscience.”</p> <p>“we’re accelerating the conscious consumerism movement in an effort to accomplish the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.”</p> <p>“Serving as a one-stop-shop for fashion-forward, ethical, and sustainable goods, we strive to make shopping easier for consumers to access everyday products guilt-free.”</p> <p>“ReyRey is built upon the idea of minimizing your footprint on the environment by narrowing down your shoe wardrobe, making you buy less and buy smarter”</p>	<p><b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> “The fashion industry is one of the most polluting and inhumane industries and changes need to be made in order for us to move toward a more circular and fair economy.” (Identifies fashion as an industry requiring systemic change.)</p> <p><b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “We strive to make the world a better place for us and future generations to come.”</p> <p><b>- Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “ReyRey is built upon the idea of minimizing your footprint on the environment by narrowing down your shoe wardrobe, making you buy less and buy smarter.” (Encourages mindful consumption and reduced purchasing.)</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as a collective effort:</b> “We’re accelerating the conscious consumerism movement in an effort to accomplish the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.” (Frames sustainability as part of a larger global initiative.)</p> <p>“We want to make it easier for you to step into the world every morning in great style and with a clear conscience.” (Sustainability is responsibility of the market, and consumers should just shop easily and guiltily-free.)</p>	<p><b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “We want to make it easier for you to step into the world every morning in great style and with a clear conscience.” (Suggests that ethical consumption and a clear conscience are easily attainable without deeper systemic shifts.)</p> <p><b>- Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “It is our responsibility to create a space where consumers can feel confident about how they allocate their purchasing power.” (Links individual consumer wellbeing to broader economic and ethical impact.)</p> <p><b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> “Serving as a one-stop-shop for fashion-forward, ethical, and sustainable goods, we strive to make shopping easier for consumers to access everyday products guilt-free.” (Although it addresses hyper consumption, it also reinforces continuous consumption under the guise of sustainability.)</p>
Reuzi	<p>“After becoming a mom for the first time, I started to notice the amount of rubbish we were going through every day rising at an alarming rate – from plastic wraps and bottles, to random boxes and let’s not forget about the hundreds of nappies!”</p> <p>“Over 50% of the food waste volume happens at consumption level... you and I buying too much, ordering too much, forgetting to cook stuff that is in our fridges and cupboards... trusting that BBE and expiry dates have to be</p>	<p>“No more plastic in the kitchen when you use this bar to wash your dishes, clean up your countertops and stove and so many others!”</p> <p>“we concentrate of giving people plastic free options for their bathroom and household routine, including pet care.”</p> <p>“Say no to disposable straws, silverware and napkins on-the-go!”</p> <p>“The eco-friendliest way to keep your kitchen counter tidy”</p>	<p><b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> “After becoming a mom for the first time, I started to notice the amount of rubbish we were going through every day rising at an alarming rate – from plastic wraps and bottles, to random boxes and let’s not forget about the hundreds of nappies!” (Highlights personal realization of waste generation as an entry point to sustainability.)</p> <p><b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “With 1/3 of the food we buy ending up in landfill shows that we are not doing enough to tackle food waste.”</p>	<p><b>- Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “It can be difficult to avoid disposables when you are traveling or out and about if you aren’t prepared, right? This is why I have designed these beauties - small and light-weight, this is the perfect utensil wrap.”</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “With 1/3 of the food we buy ending up in landfill shows that we are not doing enough to tackle food waste.”</p>

(continued)

**Table A.1. (continued)**

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
Itemerie	<p>followed religiously when, quite frankly, these are more like guidelines than anything else... use your nose, folks!"</p> <p>"With 1/3 of the food we buy ending up in landfill shows that we are not doing enough to tackle food waste."</p>	<p>"It can be difficult to avoid disposables when you are traveling or out and about if you aren't prepared, right?"</p> <p>This is why I have designed these beauties - small and light-weight, this is the perfect utensil wrap."</p>	<p>waste." (Connects individual behaviors to larger systemic waste issues.)</p> <p><b>- Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b></p> <p>"Over 50% of the food waste volume happens at consumption level... you and I buying too much, ordering too much, forgetting to cook stuff that is in our fridges and cupboards."</p>	<p>"No more plastic in the kitchen when you use this bar to wash your dishes, clean up your countertops and stove and so many others!"</p> <p>"Say no to disposable straws, silverware and napkins on-the-go!"</p>
	<p>"All of a sudden the glamorous world of the beautiful things we were looking at all day and selling crumbled before me when I saw the path to creation. Of course there are many awesome things about working in fashion but what I saw was a problem creating more problems in terms of ethics and profit and not really a sustainable way to change fundamentally for the better."</p> <p>"Since only around 5% of all clothing produced get's recycled we view consumption as an issue that we like to create a value for."</p>	<p>"Whether you're completing your outfit or creating a zen vibe, this pair will keep things in equilibrium. Not to mention, they look super-cool!"</p> <p>"Each Sebago creation is a masterpiece, blending expert craftsmanship with a dash of coastal flair."</p> <p>Aside from being hand crafted the brand values inclusivity and diversity putting representation at the forefront of their narrative."</p>	<p><b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> "All of a sudden the glamorous world of the beautiful things we were looking at all day and selling crumbled before me when I saw the path to creation." (Highlights personal disillusionment with the fashion industry's ethical and environmental impact.)</p> <p><b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> "Since only around 5% of all clothing produced gets recycled, we view consumption as an issue that we like to create a value for."</p> <p>"Aside from being hand-crafted, the brand values inclusivity and diversity, putting representation at the forefront of their narrative."</p>	<p><b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> "Each Sebago creation is a masterpiece, blending expert craftsmanship with a dash of coastal flair." (Romanticizes sustainable production without addressing the systemic issues of overconsumption.)</p> <p><b>- Prioritizing consumer's individual benefit:</b> "Not to mention, they look super-cool!"</p> <p><b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> "Whether you're completing your outfit or creating a zen vibe, this pair will keep things in equilibrium. Not to mention, they look super-cool!" (Frames sustainability as an aesthetic choice rather than reducing overall consumption.)</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> "Whether you're completing your outfit or creating a zen vibe, this pair will keep things in equilibrium." (Places the burden of change on consumers rather than systemic reform.)</p>

Table A.2. Marketplaces Using the Saved Victim Moral Drama Narrative.

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
Goodee	"In a world where the things we consume have begun to consume us. And our lives are so filled with stuff that we've left little room for happiness. GOODEE is hope."	"Welcome to a world of good design, good people, good impact." "We are a community of socially-conscious design enthusiasts who put 'caring' for people, and the planet, at the center of everything we do." "Where the products we support, services we love, and ideas we champion reflect our unwavering pursuit of a happier and more sustainable future for all." "And while there is power in good design, we believe there is infinitely more in design for good." "Our curated collections aim to inspire people to slow down and consider how each item can bring value to their lives through its beauty and functionality."	<b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> "We are a community of socially-conscious design enthusiasts who put 'caring' for people, and the planet, at the center of everything we do." <b>- Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> "And while there is power in good design, we believe there is infinitely more in design for good." (emphasizes design's ethical potential beyond mere aesthetics.)	<b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> "Where the products we support, services we love, and ideas we champion reflect our unwavering pursuit of a happier and more sustainable future for all." (suggests that consumption itself can create systemic change.) <b>- Prioritizing consumer's individual benefit:</b> "In a world where the things we consume have begun to consume us. And our lives are so filled with stuff that we've left little room for happiness. GOODEE is hope." "Our curated collections aim to inspire people to slow down and consider how each item can bring value to their lives through its beauty and functionality." <b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> "And while there is power in good design, we believe there is infinitely more in design for good." (the marketplace promotes high-end, design-focused goods, rather than long-lasting.) <b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> "Welcome to a world of good design, good people, good impact." (ethical consumption as a personal lifestyle choice rather than a structural change.) <b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> "The impact on the environment in more conscious bedding choices is significant." (Implies that an individual consumer's choice has a major environmental impact without addressing systemic change.) <b>- Prioritizing consumer's individual benefit:</b> "These chemical toxins affect our bodies in a negative way, causing illnesses such as cancer and other autoimmune problems." <b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> "Organic and eco-friendly sheets create less discomfort and better sleep." (it does not challenge the underlying issue of overconsumption.) <b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> "Many users don't realize that beauty products have numerous toxic ingredients in them which are absorbed into the body through the skin." (Places the burden on individuals to research and avoid harmful products rather than holding industries accountable.) <b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> "When it comes to shopping sustainably, the materials matter!" (Simplifies sustainability to material choice without addressing broader systemic consumption issues.) "There's nothing uglier than unfairness, hidden practices or trickery." (Frames ethical consumption as an aesthetic choice rather than a necessity.) <b>- Prioritizing consumer's individual benefit:</b> "Their fragrances are ethically and sustainably sourced therapeutic-grade essential oils and natural botanicals cultivated from renewable sources." <b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> "We do not use polyurethane or other synthetic faux leather materials (and use alternatives like plant-based faux leathers, such as Pinatex or mushroom leather)." (focuses on switching to different materials rather than reducing consumption.) <b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> "These hand-crafted, functional pieces are created with both you and the planet in mind." <b>- Prioritizing consumer's individual benefit:</b> "A vital part of our mission is to offer customers smart choices and real value through honest and transparent details about the toxic chemicals we are exposed to in many widely-used, conventionally-made products." "Their mission is to provide safer, healthier sleep by eliminating harmful chemicals and using organic materials in their products."
Leaf d	"We all know what it feels like to sleep on rough, stiff bedding and wake up sweaty and uncomfortable." "Regular bedding with no sustainable features is processed by a combination of harmful chemicals which may produce mold, mildew, bacteria and an unhealthy planet for all. Skin irritation, allergies and more serious health related issues can be attributed to these harsh chemicals." "Many users don't realize that beauty products have numerous toxic ingredients in them which are absorbed into the body through the skin, which is our largest organ. These chemical toxins affect our bodies in a negative way, causing illnesses such as cancer and other autoimmune problems."	"Our goal is that Leafd be a valuable resource for everyone, regardless of economic position, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation... if it isn't, we're not doing our job." "Organic and eco-friendly sheets create less discomfort and better sleep. The impact on the environment in more conscious bedding choices is significant." "Sustainable beauty products generally do not include potentially toxic and harmful ingredients such as parabens, which research suggests may be carcinogenic and hormone disruptors, and formaldehyde, a known carcinogen."	<b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> "Regular bedding with no sustainable features is processed by a combination of harmful chemicals which may produce mold, mildew, bacteria and an unhealthy planet for all." "Many users don't realize that beauty products have numerous toxic ingredients in them which are absorbed into the body through the skin." <b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> "Our goal is that Leafd be a valuable resource for everyone, regardless of economic position, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation... if it isn't, we're not doing our job." (Promotes accessibility and inclusivity.)	
Made Trade	"The fashion industry is one of the leading causes of pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and cultivating a throwaway culture field by unsustainable low prices of garments that only last a season or, if you're lucky, a year before it begins to degrade and fall apart – often in the wash." "In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of this problem and a demand by consumers for more sustainable clothing options." "When it comes to shopping sustainably, the materials matter!" "There's nothing uglier than unfairness, hidden practices or trickery."	"On Made Trade, you can shop with confidence knowing every product we carry is rigorously assessed and verified for both sustainability and equity and adheres to at least two of Made Trade's eight core values." "We verify and vet every product we carry to ensure it meets our core values of equity, sustainability, and transparency." "We only curate vegan products from brands that use natural materials as sustainably as possible, do not use polyurethane or other synthetic faux leather materials (and use alternatives like plant-based faux leathers, such as Pinatex or mushroom leather)" "Their fragrances are ethically and sustainably sourced therapeutic-grade essential oils and natural botanicals cultivated from renewable sources."	<b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> "The fashion industry is one of the leading causes of pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and cultivating a throwaway culture." "In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of this problem and a demand by consumers for more sustainable clothing options." <b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> "We only curate vegan products from brands that use natural materials as sustainably as possible." <b>- Framing sustainability as a collective effort:</b> "We verify and vet every product we carry to ensure it meets our core values of equity, sustainability, and transparency." – (Emphasizes industry-wide accountability and standards rather than placing all responsibility on consumers.)	
Shades of Green	"As consumers, we all crave high-quality products for our homes and workplaces. There's a way to satisfy that need while not ignoring the impact product production has on the planet." "Naturapedic avoids the environmental devastation caused by the chlorine bleaching and toxic dyes frequently found in conventional fabrics."	"When it came to evaluating the health and green aspects of our products, we needed to create a set of guidelines to help our customers make smarter decisions about what they are purchasing." "Every sustainable product offered on Shades of Green is carefully assessed using a proprietary evaluation system based on real-world criteria." "A vital part of our mission is to offer customers smart choices and real value through honest and transparent details about the toxic chemicals we are exposed to in many	<b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> "Naturapedic avoids the environmental devastation caused by the chlorine bleaching and toxic dyes frequently found in conventional fabrics." "Every sustainable product offered on Shades of Green is carefully assessed using a proprietary evaluation system based on real-world criteria." (Implements systemic guidelines for sustainability.) <b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> "Shades of Green researches, identifies, and evaluates safer, healthier, higher-performing, and more environmentally responsible alternatives to common and conventionally formulated products."	

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**Table A.2. (continued)**

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
		<p>widely-used, conventionally-made products.”</p> <p>“Shades of Green researches, identifies, and evaluates safer, healthier higher performing, and more environmentally responsible alternatives to common and conventionally formulated products – bringing them to market at the best prices possible.”</p> <p>“Their mission is to provide safer, healthier sleep by eliminating harmful chemicals and using organic materials in their products.”</p> <p>“These hand-crafted, functional pieces are created with both you and the planet in mind.”</p>	<p><b>- Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “Shades of Green researches, identifies, and evaluates safer, healthier higher performing, and more environmentally responsible alternatives.” – Encourages quality, long-lasting purchases over disposable consumption.</p> <p>- <i>Solution requires collective action:</i> “Every sustainable product offered on Shades of Green is carefully assessed using a proprietary evaluation system based on real-world criteria.” – Suggests a structured approach to sustainability beyond individual choices.</p>	<p><b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> “As consumers, we all crave high-quality products for our homes and workplaces. There’s a way to satisfy that need while not ignoring the impact product production has on the planet.” (Encourages the same amount of consumption, switching to sustainable alternatives.)</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “When it came to evaluating the health and green aspects of our products, we needed to create a set of guidelines to help our customers make smarter decisions about what they are purchasing.” (Puts the focus on consumers to “choose wisely” rather than addressing systemic production issues.)</p>
Verishop	<p>“Most shampoos, conditioners and body washes are more than 70% water, made from petrochemicals and packed in single-use plastic.”</p>	<p>“Everist is hair and body care meets skincare. We took out the water, packed in the skincare ingredients and concentrated them down into luxe creams to make products that are better for the planet and amazing for your hair, skin and scalp.”</p> <p>“Long-term Everist users report less hair fall and more shine and body since adopting their Everist routine.”</p> <p>“Packaged in recyclable aluminum tins, carbon-neutral, certified Ocean Positive.”</p> <p>“Strengthens and visibly repairs hair with patented, all-natural bond repair technology.”</p>	<p><b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> “Most shampoos, conditioners, and body washes are more than 70% water, made from petrochemicals and packed in single-use plastic.”</p> <p><b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b></p> <p>“We took out the water, packed in the skincare ingredients and concentrated them down into luxe creams to make products that are better for the planet.”</p> <p>“Packaged in recyclable aluminum tins, carbon-neutral, certified Ocean Positive.”</p>	<p><b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “Everist is hair and body care meets skincare.” (Frames the brand as a revolutionary solution rather than addressing broader issues in the beauty industry.)</p> <p>“Long-term Everist users report less hair fall and more shine and body since adopting their Everist routine.” – Focuses on beauty outcomes rather than systemic sustainability impact.</p> <p><b>- Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “We took out the water, packed in the skincare ingredients and concentrated them down into luxe creams to make products that are better for the planet and amazing for your hair, skin, and scalp.”</p> <p>“Strengthens and visibly repairs hair with patented, all-natural bond repair technology.”</p> <p><b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> “Most shampoos, conditioners and body washes are more than 70% water, made from petrochemicals and packed in single-use plastic.” (Reinforces the importance of switching ingredients but not reducing consumption).</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “We took out the water, packed in the skincare ingredients and concentrated them down” (Focuses on individual decisions rather than collective change in production and industry standards)</p>
Simple Switch	<p>“Did you know that common brand name laundry detergents contain 10 to 14 + toxic chemicals &amp; carcinogens?”</p> <p>That’s, like, really bad for your skin...”</p>	<p>“No worries! We pride ourselves in developing smarter alternative options for your household. With just 5 clean plant based &amp; biodegradable ingredients, SILV Detergent Sheets are non-toxic &amp; plastic free. Make your laundry simple; make it SILV.”</p> <p>“EcoHny 100% bamboo toilet paper doesn’t sacrifice softness for sustainability or strength.”</p>	<p><b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b></p> <p>“EcoHny 100% bamboo toilet paper doesn’t sacrifice softness for sustainability or strength.”</p> <p>“With just 5 clean plant-based &amp; biodegradable ingredients, SILV Detergent Sheets are non-toxic &amp; plastic-free.”</p>	<p><b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “Make your laundry simple; make it SILV.” (Branding presents the switch as effortless, minimizing systemic complexities.)</p> <p><b>- Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “Did you know that common brand name laundry detergents contain 10 to 14 + toxic chemicals &amp; carcinogens? That’s, like, really bad for your skin...”</p> <p><b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> “No worries! We pride ourselves in developing smarter alternative options for your household.” (Consumption is normalized rather than questioned)</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “We pride ourselves in developing smarter alternative options for your household.” (Shifts responsibility to companies and consumer choices rather than encouraging systemic activism or consumer critical engagement.)</p>

**Table A.3.** Marketplaces Using the Awoken Hero Moral Drama Narrative.

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
Kindhumans	<p>“Consumption = Activism”</p> <p>“As consumers, we cast ‘votes’ for our values through everyday purchases. If we value a kinder world, we must vote for products that put the health of people and the planet first.”</p> <p>“We created the Kindhumans marketplace to make it easier for everyone to be a conscious consumer—someone who carefully chooses products that are good for us humans and the world we live in.”</p> <p>“With so many options these days, it’s hard to know what to bring home. But it also matters more now than ever.”</p> <p>“It takes time and knowledge to evaluate all the options.”</p>	<p>“Together we can spread more love across the planet.”</p> <p>“We envision a brighter future where being kind—to ourselves, to the Earth and to each other—is a top priority for people and businesses everywhere. This kindness will manifest as happier, healthier communities, greater sustainability, ethical treatment of everyone, and a cleaner planet to call home.”</p> <p>“We want to help streamline the efforts for conscious consumers to more easily identify, find and purchase quality products that are good for people and good for the planet.”</p> <p>“We know, your little eco-warriors can get rowdy.”</p> <p>“This purchase gives back 3% to the cause of your choice.”</p>	<p><b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> “As consumers, we cast ‘votes’ for our values through everyday purchases.”</p> <p>“We created the Kindhumans marketplace to make it easier for everyone to be a conscious consumer—someone who carefully chooses products that are good for us humans and the world we live in.”</p> <p><b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “We envision a brighter future where being kind—to ourselves, to the Earth, and to each other—is a top priority for people and businesses everywhere. This kindness will manifest as happier, healthier communities, greater sustainability, ethical treatment of everyone, and a cleaner planet to call home.”</p> <p><b>- Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “This purchase gives back 3% to the cause of your choice.”</p> <p>“Together we can spread more love across the planet.”</p> <p>“We aim to make sustainable choices more accessible and impactful.”</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as a collective effort:</b> “We believe that every small action can add up to significant change when done together.”</p> <p>“By choosing Kindhumans, you’re supporting businesses that care about people and the planet.”</p>	<p><b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “Consumption = Activism.”</p> <p>“If we value a kinder world, we must vote for products that put the health of people and the planet first.”</p> <p><b>- Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “We want to help streamline the efforts for conscious consumers to more easily identify, find, and purchase quality products that are good for people and good for the planet.”</p> <p>“With so many options these days, it’s hard to know what to bring home. But it also matters more now than ever.”</p> <p><b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> “With so many options these days, it’s hard to know what to bring home.”</p> <p>“It takes time and knowledge to evaluate all the options.”</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “We want to help streamline the efforts for conscious consumers to more easily identify, find, and purchase quality products that are good for people and good for the planet.”</p>
Reuzi	<p>“We believe in integrity - we feel all businesses have a duty to treat their staff, customers and our suppliers in a fair, respectful and compassionate manner.”</p> <p>“Pollination has a positive impact on the environment in general, helping to maintain biodiversity and the vibrant ecosystems upon which agriculture and humanity depend. Today bees, pollinators, and</p>	<p>“Our aim is to raise awareness on the environmental problems posed by single-use materials while making the solutions accessible, and empowering people like you &amp; I to be part of the change.”</p> <p>“We want to help everyone take one extra step toward sustainable living.”</p> <p>“There’s not one magic formula to fix our planet’s issues but one thing we know for sure: we can all</p>	<p><b>- Violating a moral principle:</b> “Our aim is to raise awareness on the environmental problems posed by single-use materials while making the solutions accessible, and empowering people like you &amp; I to be part of the change.”</p> <p>“We believe in integrity - we feel all businesses have a duty to treat their staff, customers and our suppliers in a fair, respectful and compassionate manner.”</p> <p><b>- Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “If we can reduce</p>	<p><b>- Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “Pollination has a positive impact on the environment in general, helping to maintain biodiversity and the vibrant ecosystems upon which agriculture and humanity depend.”</p> <p><b>- Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “We want to help everyone take one extra step toward sustainable living.”</p> <p><b>- Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b></p>

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**Table A.3. (continued)**

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
	many other insects are declining in abundance.”	<p>make a difference.”</p> <p>“We believe in the #ThePowerofOne - we can all contribute to our planet, no matter how big or small of a contribution that is.”</p> <p>“Break the stigma around sustainability. Sustainability is not exclusive to scientists or the ‘all-or-nothing’ folk.”</p> <p>“If we can reduce plastic waste, save water, lower emissions and clean the people, we have succeeded”</p>	<p>plastic waste, save water, lower emissions, and clean the people, we have succeeded.”</p> <p>- <b>Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “Break the stigma around sustainability. Sustainability is not exclusive to scientists or the ‘all-or-nothing’ folk.”</p> <p>“We believe in the #ThePowerofOne - we can all contribute to our planet, no matter how big or small of a contribution that is.”</p> <p>- <b>Framing sustainability as a collective effort:</b> “There’s not one magic formula to fix our planet’s issues but one thing we know for sure: we can all make a difference.”</p>	<p>“we can all contribute to our planet, no matter how big or small of a contribution that is.”</p> <p>- <b>Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “We believe in the #ThePowerofOne.”</p> <p>“We want to help everyone take one extra step toward sustainable living.”</p>
Reve en Vert	<p>“There are still millions of people in forced, low paid and horrible labor and that has no place within the Rêve En Vert curation.”</p> <p>“Witnessing heartbreaking working conditions first hand, they knew that producing in the US did not necessarily ensure ethical working conditions would be a given.”</p> <p>“Conventional cotton is linked to soil degradation and pollution.”</p>	<p>“Running Rêve En Vert has been one of the greatest privileges of my life – it has given me passion and purpose at a time when often it’s easy to feel disenchanted with the world.”</p> <p>“Sharing this platform with such a wonderful and engaged community fills me with hope every day.”</p> <p>“In a world where we already have so much, we believe that reusing materials and resources is one of the biggest opportunities we have in creating more sustainable production.”</p>	<p>- <b>Violating a moral principle:</b> “There are still millions of people in forced, low paid and horrible labor and that has no place within the Rêve En Vert curation.”</p> <p>“Conventional cotton is linked to soil degradation and pollution.”</p> <p>- <b>Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “Witnessing heartbreaking working conditions first hand, they knew that producing in the US did not necessarily ensure ethical working conditions would be a given.”</p> <p>- <b>Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “In a world where we already have so much, we believe that reusing materials and resources is one of the biggest opportunities we have in creating more sustainable production.”</p> <p>- <b>Framing sustainability as a collective effort:</b> “Sharing this platform with such a wonderful and engaged community fills me with hope every day.”</p>	<p>- <b>Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “Running Rêve En Vert has been one of the greatest privileges of my life – it has given me passion and purpose at a time when often it’s easy to feel disenchanted with the world.”</p> <p>- <b>Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> The emphasis on curation and individual purchasing decisions suggests that ethical shopping is a primary solution rather than advocating for broader industry-wide changes.</p>
Shades of Green	“Normally, local tree service companies would get rid of, chip up or make firewood out of decaying logs and that’s where we come in”	“Most eco-conscious consumers genuinely want to buy responsibly, but don’t have the time to research and verify the true sustainability of a company and its products. When it came to evaluating the health and green aspects of	<p>- <b>Violating a moral principle:</b> “Normally, local tree service companies would get rid of, chip up or make firewood out of decaying logs and that’s where we come in.”</p> <p>- <b>Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “Normally, local tree service</p>	<p>- <b>Prioritizing consumer’s individual benefit:</b> “Most eco-conscious consumers genuinely want to buy responsibly, but don’t have the time to research and verify the true sustainability of a company and its products.”</p> <p>- <b>Reinforcing consumerist</b></p>

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**Table A.3. (continued)**

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
		our products, we needed to create a set of guidelines to help our customers make smarter decisions about what they are purchasing.”	<i>companies would get rid of, chip up or make firewood out of decaying logs and that’s where we come in.” (Advocating for waste reduction and material reuse.)</i>	<b>ideologies:</b> Despite promoting sustainable products, the marketplace still operates within a consumption-driven model. - <b>Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “We needed to create a set of guidelines to help our customers make smarter decisions about what they are purchasing.” (They shift responsibility to the consumer to navigate sustainable choices.)
Verishop	“We believe this is actually part of the problem. Online retail spending in the USA is projected to \$1 TRILLION Dollars this year for the first time, and unfortunately lots of that money directly funds environmental damage and mistreatment of workers.”	“By using their products, you’re doing your small part in creating a better future. “Be the change you want to see in the world, but with a sense of humor.” “They’re on a mission to build a sustainable planet and they want you to join the fun!” “Together, we’re turning the world green, one cheeky step at a time!”	- <b>Violating a moral principle:</b> “We believe this is actually part of the problem. Online retail spending in the USA is projected to \$1 TRILLION Dollars this year for the first time, and unfortunately, lots of that money directly funds environmental damage and mistreatment of workers.” (positions Verishop as an ethical alternative.) - <b>Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “They’re on a mission to build a sustainable planet and they want you to join the fun!” (fosters a sense of collective action.) - <b>Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “By using their products, you’re doing your small part in creating a better future.”	- <b>Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “Together, we’re turning the world green, one cheeky step at a time!” “Be the change you want to see in the world, but with a sense of humor.” (sustainability is framed as fun and effortless, which may downplay the complexity of systemic change.) - <b>Reinforcing consumerist ideologies:</b> While highlighting ethical shopping, Verishop still promotes continuous consumer engagement. - <b>Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> The emphasis on “your small part” shifts the burden onto consumers instead of addressing larger industry-wide practices. “Be the change you want to see in the world, but with a sense of humor.”
Staiy	“It all started in Berlin, with a group of friends, a fascination for sustainable lifestyle, and the urge for creation. They quickly noticed that sustainable fashion was not accessible.”	“Staiy was born to empower everyday consumers to discover and embrace a more sustainable lifestyle easily and transparently.” “Here, you will have a place to discover over 20 local and international designer brands, as well as a welcoming location where	- <b>Violating a moral principle:</b> “They quickly noticed that sustainable fashion was not accessible.” (highlights a barrier to ethical consumption.) - <b>Promoting ethical deliberation and system well-being:</b> “Through the products we feature, the brands we partner with, the projects we	- <b>Exaggerating sustainability claims:</b> “Staiy was born to empower everyday consumers to discover and embrace a more sustainable lifestyle easily and transparently.” (implies sustainability is effortlessly achievable.) - <b>Prioritizing consumer’s</b>

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**Table A.3. (continued)**

Marketplace	Bridge and crisis	Redress and resolution	Manifest and latent functionalities	Manifest and latent dysfunctionalities
		<p>to experience events around sustainability or aperitivo gatherings.”</p> <p>“Through the products we feature, the brands we partner with, the projects we invest in and the values we support, we aim at revolutionizing the fashion ecosystem for a better future.”</p> <p>“By choosing the archaic form of the term ESSERE → ESSENDO → SENDO we affirm the continuous search for ancient values, closer to the nature and well-being of the person.”</p>	<p><i>invest in and the values we support, we aim at revolutionizing the fashion ecosystem for a better future.”</i></p> <p><b>- Challenging hyperconsumerism:</b> “<i>Staiy is the marketplace I’ve always looked for. Sustainability is the core of what they do and every brand meets high quality standards, both in terms of materials and aesthetics.</i>” (suggests a shift toward quality over quantity.)</p>	<p><b>individual benefit:</b> “By choosing the archaic form of the term ESSERE → ESSENDO → SENDO we affirm the continuous search for ancient values, closer to the nature and well-being of the person.” (ties sustainability to personal identity and wellbeing rather than systemic shifts.)</p> <p><b>- Framing sustainability as an individual consumption approach to ethical action:</b> “As consumers we need to make more sustainable choices and <i>Staiy</i> makes the experience seamless.”</p>
Itemerie	<p>“A far cry from the machine-cut, hands-off production of many cheap cutting boards made from plantation trees that are grown using destructive practices.”</p>	<p>“Items are made with sustainable materials and genuine care for the planet.”</p> <p>“Nature gave us many gorgeous materials to work with. Why not use them!”</p> <p>“By shopping with us, you help support small businesses and independent makers.”</p> <p>“Sustainable and ethically-made products that look good and feel good.”</p> <p>“Our items are lovingly crafted by skilled artisans.”</p> <p>“Enjoy long-lasting, artisan products that elevate the style of your home and celebrate the bounty of our planet.”</p> <p>“No funny business, just high-quality products that have been sustainably and ethically made.”</p> <p>“Stop wondering if a product meets your personal standards when making buying decisions.”</p>		