

Sustainability in Business Models: The Case of MUD Jeans

Gabriela-Nicoleta Andrisan

Andra Modreanu

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

gandrisan31@gmail.com

andramodreanu@yahoo.com

Abstract

There has been a growing interest in society and among researchers regarding the significance of establishing sustainable business models. As organisations strive to adapt their business models to incorporate sustainability or establish new enterprises to tackle sustainability challenges, it becomes evident that there is no universally applicable model for sustainable business. As a result, companies frequently have difficulties in recognising and executing sustainable business models that are suitable for their needs. This article seeks to highlight the importance of incorporating sustainability into a business plan. Furthermore, it attempts to clarify techniques employed to accomplish this objective. The article is organised in multiple sections, such as a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, highlighting the most significant contributions to this matter. The following section discusses the methodology employed in the investigation. The fourth portion substantiates the study's results by presenting a case study, while the final section provides a summary of the findings.

Key words: business model, sustainability, value creation, value proposition, stakeholders

J.E.L. classification: M1, M9

1. Introduction

In recent decades, significant resources have been dedicated to discovering novel approaches for creating innovations, such as technologies, products, and services, that can help mitigate climate change and enhance societal well-being. The demand for global sustainability has grown in the era of globalization (Toma, 2005) and is seen in public sentiment, civil society, governments, and scholars (Marinescu *et al*, 2010). However, it is commonly acknowledged that corporations play a significant role in causing environmental degradation and, in some instances, contributing to social injustice. The United Nations has issued a worldwide appeal for a more sustainable, equitable, and inclusive way of living by releasing the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Companies are engaged in this revolutionary process. There has been a recent surge of interest in society and among researchers regarding the significance of cultivating sustainable business strategies. As companies strive to make their business models more sustainable or establish novel companies to tackle sustainability challenges, it becomes evident that there is no universally applicable paradigm for sustainable business models. As a result, companies frequently face challenges in identifying, developing, and implementing sustainable business models that are suitable for their needs. More and more businesses are incorporating sustainability into their management processes (Bocken *et al*, 2021; Kabongo, 2019).

These companies prioritize sustainability at a strategic level, meaning that they are focused on conducting business in a sustainable manner (Toma, 2006) and achieving corporate citizenship (Toma, 2008a). These projects are created by entrepreneurs that are driven to tackle the significant difficulties of sustainable development and strive for more than just simple sustainability, but for 'thrivability' (Moggi *et al*, 2022) through business practices and models (Toma *et al*, 2019) that aim to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (Agrawal *et al*, 2022).

This study aims to answer the following questions based on previously provided information:

- What constitutes a sustainable business model?
- What techniques should a company use to accomplish this?

This research paper aims to emphasize the significance of sustainability within the larger framework of a business strategy. Additionally, it aims to clarify which methods are used to achieve this goal. The article is constructed in the following way: the first chapter provides a literature review that emphasizes the most notable contributions to this issue. The next section explains the study's methodology. The fourth section confirms the study's conclusions through illustrating a case study, while the final section summarizes the findings.

2. Literature review

Businesses develop value by collecting, merging, and trading the resources of stakeholders in order to build something that the market would find valuable (Toma, 2013; Marinescu *et al*, 2015). They next capture that value by minimising production costs and maximising the prices they receive. Finally, they transfer the value to those who contributed the resources (Cornescu *et al*, 2004). Business models delineate the organisational frameworks that will execute these tasks. In general, they consist of a value proposition to consumers, a strategy for generating value, and a plan for allocating profits to the organisations that generate that value (Schaltegger *et al*, 2016). Therefore, a business model can be seen as a distinct unit of study, apart from the firm and network that systematically portrays the methodology of conducting business (Zott *et al*, 2011). A framework consisting of three key components can be suggested: value proposition, which refers to the offering provided to target consumers and the fundamental approach to gaining a competitive advantage; value creation and delivery, which encompass assets, skills, enterprise organisation, and value network, thereby indicating the origins of competitive advantage; and value capture, which illustrates how the company generates income and profits (Richardson, 2008).

A significant collection of literature explores the issue of whether and to what degree business models should be altered to ensure corporate social responsibility for businesses. Corporate social responsibility sometimes lacks integration with firms' value-creating endeavours and the surrounding institutions, environments, and communities in which they operate (Kim, 2022). On the other hand, the "creating shared value" approach suggests that it is important to redefine the methods of value creation (Toma *et al*, 2018a). This involves collaboratively reducing bottlenecks and resource consumption throughout a value chain, with the goal of increasing profitability for different groups of stakeholders (Porter *et al*, 2011).

Certain companies go beyond corporate social responsibility (Toma *et al*, 2011a; Toma *et al*, 2011b; Catană *et al*, 2021) and the creation of shared value by striving to make income while concurrently creating financial, social, and/or environmental benefits (Toma *et al*, 2011b; Toma *et al*, 2012b). As a result, companies adopt innovative and sustainable business models (Tohănean *et al*, 2018; Toma *et al*, 2018b). However, it is evident that there is no universally applicable model for sustainable business. Therefore, it is challenging to locate and cultivate a business strategy that is highly compatible with the current circumstances of the company (Reim *et al*, 2021). Moreover, it is plausible to infer that certain sustainable business models provide greater challenges for organisations to cultivate compared to others. Business sustainability is becoming crucial, although there is still a lack of understanding regarding these business models and the methods to accomplish them (Laukkanen *et al*, 2014). The identification and understanding of mechanisms for experimentation and boundary bridging among stakeholders that are involved in establishing sustainable business models are yet to be determined and comprehended (Schaltegger *et al*, 2016). In summary, companies require guidance and assistance in the process of reshaping their business models to adapt or in establishing entirely new sustainable business models, as well as in effectively executing these changes. This is why they need to design and implement sound corporate strategies (Toma *et al*, 2013a; Toma *et al*, 2016a) and creative business strategies (Toma *et al*, 2013b), to think in a strategic and entrepreneurially manner (Toma *et al*, 2016b; Catană *et al*, 2020; Zainea *et al*, 2020), and to utilise a plethora of managerial techniques, such as lean management (Naruo *et al*, 2007; Marinescu *et al*, 2008), balanced scorecard (Toma *et al*, 2010) or Six Sigma (Toma, 2008b), in their activities to face the multiple challenges raised by incessant changes (Toma *et al*, 2015).

The triple bottom line theory is an early effort to describe sustainability (Elkington, 1994). It breaks down sustainability into three aspects: economic, social, and environmental. These dimensions are represented by the components of profit, people, and planet. The triple bottom line theory is widely utilised by practitioners as well as scholars as an operational basis for sustainability due to its ease of application in the daily operations of any firm (Joyce *et al*, 2016). Subsequently, suggestions are made to modify or expand the current theory in order to offer further guidance. Certain academics substitute the term 'profit' with 'prosperity' to denote the economic advantages for the company and the overall socioeconomic welfare of employees and communities (Stahl *et al*, 2020). On the other hand, some scholars suggest the quadruple bottom line theory by incorporating values (Larner *et al*, 2017), prosperity (Hamidi *et al*, 2021), or technology (Arukala *et al*, 2020) as supplementary elements to the triple bottom line hypothesis. The Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals define sustainability in a more comprehensive manner, advocating for a diverse set of actions to foster sustainability across several, yet interconnected, aspects. The Sustainable Development Goals expand upon the Millennium Development Goals in a comprehensive manner, encompassing sustainable measures beyond just developing countries (Van Zanten *et al*, 2018). The 2030 Agenda enhances the discourse on the concept of sustainability by suggesting a comprehensive set of goals that encompass the economic, social, environmental, and political dimensions (Sullivan *et al*, 2018).

To effectively implement the Sustainable Development Goals on a daily basis, businesses need to comprehend how they might be applied in their operations. This requires them to continually evolve their business models (Ferlito *et al*, 2022) in response to the general demand of the 2030 Agenda for governments, people, organisations, and enterprises (Van der Waal *et al*, 2020). This study adopts the definition of a sustainable business model as "a streamlined depiction of the elements, their interaction, and the connections with stakeholders that an organisation employs to create, deliver, capture, and trade sustainable value for a wide range of stakeholders" (Geissdoerfer *et al*, 2016).

Based on the literature analysis mentioned above, the authors will investigate the business model of a business that prioritises sustainability. The company's ideals align with the concepts of a sustainable business model. In the upcoming sections, the paper's authors will outline the research methodology used and briefly analyse the findings of the case study.

3. Research methodology

The current study utilises qualitative research methodologies, gathering and assessing secondary material on the subject from previously published books, reports, and research articles. The writers begin by analysing the definitions of sustainability, and business models, and subsequently enumerate their fundamental components. Therefore, this approach utilised several relevant principles, including business model, sustainability, value creation, value proposition and stakeholders.

The investigation opened with an overview and discussion of the ideas, which were subsequently taken in and exemplified through the use of a case study, in order to fulfil the stated objective of this research. This paper's perspective is derived from extensive research conducted over the previous ten years by a group of distinguished scholars in the same academic discipline.

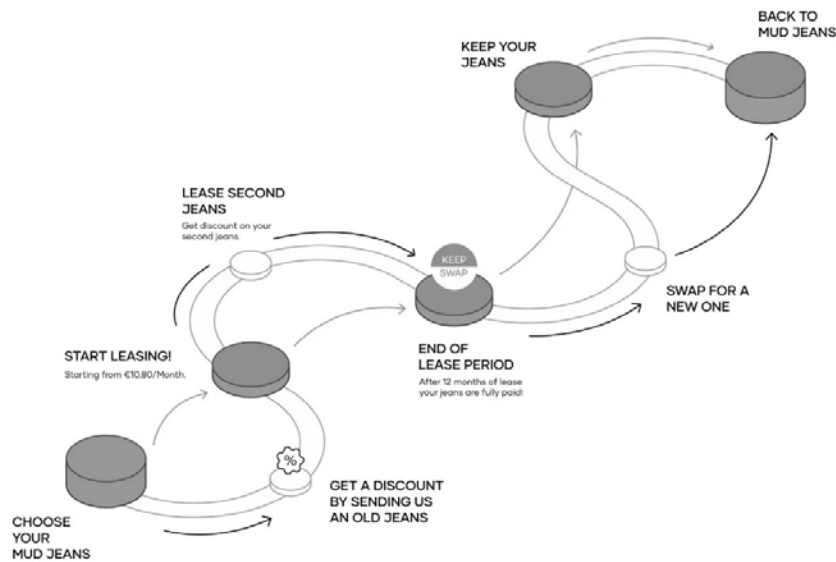
4. Case study and findings: MUD Jeans

The authors selected this company based on its distinctive business model that aligns with the sustainability requirements. MUD Jeans is a Dutch firm established in 2012 by Bert van Son (Dorkenwald, 2021).

The organisation has gained immense popularity as a result of their distinctive lease programme. Their mission is to promote circular production and conscientious consumption in the fashion industry. Their approach to jeans is characterised by innovation, as they take proactive measures, maintain transparency, and promote self-sufficiency. The organisation deems it imperative to be conscientious of both the environment and individuals. They envision a future where the fashion

industry develops methods of production and consumption that do not hinder the pleasure of the environment, both for the present and future generations. Their strategy is founded upon three fundamental principles: circular economy, equitable factories, and constructive activism. By utilising closed-loop post-consumer recycled denim, they rejuvenate their jeans, providing them with a renewed beginning and prolonging their lifespan. The decision to develop this programme specifically for jeans stems from its status as one of the most environmentally detrimental articles in the fashion industry, utilising around 7,000 litres of water and chemicals. The potential benefit of recycling jeans and utilising organic cotton might be substantial, considering the annual sale of approximately 1 billion jeans. Consequently, they have established the option to lease jeans for a duration of twelve months (Figure no. 1).

Figure no. 1. How does leasing work?



Source: (MUD Jeans, n.d.)

Although the buyer pays a monthly price for 12 months and derives enjoyment from wearing the jeans, the firm retains ownership of the raw materials. Upon the completion of 12 months, ownership of the jeans is transferred to the customers and the payments cease automatically. At this juncture, the consumer has the option to retain the jeans, exchange them for a new pair without any further charges, or return them for recycling. The business seeks to optimise the utilisation of their jeans through this leasing scheme, so preventing the materials from being disposed of in landfills and instead maintaining them within their closed-loop recycling system.

According to their most recent released report to the public, the company utilises 400 gallons of water to manufacture a single pair of MUD Jeans. According to their yearly Lifecycle Analysis, they assert that their jeans conserve 72% of water by utilising recycled cotton, recycled water, and water-saving production practices. Each production of a single pair of MUD Jeans results in the emission of 3.4 kilogrammes of carbon dioxide (CO₂). According to their yearly Lifecycle Analysis, they assert that their jeans save 41% of CO₂ emissions by utilising recycled cotton, renewable energy, and energy-saving production practices. The company implements a take-back plan to gather jeans that are composed of a minimum of 96% cotton. New denim textiles are created through collaboration with Recover and Tejidos Royo in Valencia, incorporating up to 40% of post-consumer recycled cotton. (MUD Jeans EN, n.d.)

The authors have also noted the company's 2025 objectives, which are in line with the triple bottom line theory as mentioned in the literature review above.

Regarding the product, which will generate the profit, the goal is to attain complete circularity:

- Include only denim products made from 100% recycled materials in their collection.
- Conduct a thorough examination and enhance the long-lasting quality of their denim trousers.
- Propose alternate materials to elastane for their stretch denim.

Regarding people:

- Enhance the diversity of their collection by expanding size options.
- Enhance the variety of their models throughout the website and social media platforms.
- Introduce a line of specially designed jeans tailored for individuals with disabilities who wear jeans.

Regarding the environment, which represents the planet dimension:

- Their objective is to support all of our supply chain partners in their shift towards utilising renewable energy sources.
- Utilise all second-choice clothing.
- Measure and decrease the production of all forms of waste within their network of supply chain collaborators.

Lastly, in regards to activism:

- They will attempt to broaden the reach of their monthly webinar to a more extensive audience
- Expand their Voices for Good platform globally.
- Utilise our Earth Day holiday to organise a collaborative volunteering event. (MUD Jeans EN, n.d.)

5. Conclusions

Overall, the objective of this research report was to highlight the need of incorporating sustainability into the broader context of a business plan. Furthermore, its objective was to explain what particular methods were employed to accomplish this objective. The authors have analysed the business model of Mud Jeans, a company that has utilised a distinctive business opportunity, as seen from the preceding section. By providing clients with the option to lease recyclable jeans, the company is actively contributing to environmental conservation by minimising water usage, lowering carbon emissions, and cutting down on production expenses. This company has exhibited a commitment to a sustainable business strategy by actively promoting preservation of the environment through education and utilising their influence and platform. Their dedication extends beyond mere monetary benefits.

Nevertheless, the study described before has specific constraints. An inherent disadvantage of this approach is its narrow focus on the business procedures of a single organisation, which serves as an almost flawless example of how this model is employed. Conducting further research would be beneficial in order to ascertain the potential outcomes that other companies could attain by employing these tactics.

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