

Research on the Factors that Influence on Sustainable Consumer Behavior

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Abstract- In the modern economic conditions of digitalization and the use of artificial intelligence, consumers do not buy the product, but the expected benefit of this product in the consumption process, or the properties that the product possesses, created in the production process and realized in the consumption process. In the process of making a purchase decision, consumer behavior is influenced by many factors that are inherently factors from the surrounding environment, and others are factors that are the result of the internal attitude of consumers. In order to build and implement a successful marketing strategy, marketing managers should reflect the influence of factors that differ in their characteristics and strength of influence, when the goal is to achieve sustainable consumer behavior of the consumers themselves. By its very nature, the study of the factors themselves represents a special kind of challenge, requiring depth and multi-facetedness from a scientific perspective. The ability to study these factors is a sure indicator for the preparation of a successful strategic marketing strategy that satisfies all stakeholders.

Keywords— *competitive advantages, consumer behavior, marketing strategy, sustainability factors*

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable consumer behavior, especially by individual consumers, is of fundamental and urgent importance for effectively improving the ecological quality of the earth and the living environment for future generations. It is essential to identify the factors that influence people's intentions to engage in sustainable consumption behavior.

Consumers make a number of choices every day, which are essentially the result of numerous preferences, tastes, desires and motives, which are predetermined by the individual characteristics of each individual.

Very often, this choice actually aims to satisfy the needs of consumers, but it depends on limited financial resources and in reality, the satisfaction of their expectations is carried out through the prism of quantity, quality, price and other characteristics of the product offered. A large part of consumer purchases are made rationally and emotionally, which also predetermines the inclusion of different types of factors in the final choice.

The aim of the article is to present the main factors that influence sustainable consumer behavior.

Consumers themselves do not buy the product, but the expected benefit of this product in the consumption process, or the properties that the product possesses, created in the production process and realized in the consumption process.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the process of making a purchase decision, consumer behavior is influenced by numerous factors that are inherently environmental factors, while others are factors that are the result of the internal attitude of consumers.

There are a number of classifications of factors in the specialized literature, and we will focus our attention on some of the classifications, because our main goal is to subsequently highlight the factors that influence specific sustainable consumer behavior.

Although consumers often intend to shop more sustainably, making a decision to shop for food is complex and involves a decision-making process that is shaped by factors that arise outside the moment of purchase.

Consumers are increasingly turning to information that aims to influence decision-making, but the

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mechanisms for changing such interventions are poorly understood.

The different views and concepts of sustainability and sustainable development have gained great importance in academic research, with the emphasis on problems related to the environment, its management policies, industrial production and agriculture. [12]

There is a connection between innovation, sustainability and environmental protection that managers must stimulate in order to ensure a comprehensive change in consumer behavior, which in turn will guarantee the achievement of sustainability. It is important to explain to consumers what standardized green rules are and to create a culture of nature protection, which will essentially be an extension of sustainable consumption. This will lead to lasting changes in consumer behavior.

It is clear to all consumers that the implementation of green rules is intended to be environmentally and sustainably oriented [16].

However, there are also consumers who consciously choose not to be sustainability oriented, even when shopping online [15].

The origin of the term sustainable consumption is usually traced to the Rio Summit in 1992, and since then it has become an increasingly important policy element in national sustainable development strategies. There is currently little consensus on the definition of sustainable consumption and it is widely acknowledged to be a contested concept [3] that encompasses “competing discourses” [5].

While some researchers have proposed definitions, others have drawn attention to the inherent difficulties in constructing such a definition. A number of definitions of sustainable consumption reflect the main definitions of sustainable development.

More simply, Dahl (2009) argues that sustainable consumption refers to the need to stay within the global sustainability of products [2].

At the same time, sustainable consumption has uncertain boundaries and it is not clear what the consequences of this type of consumption are.

Dolan (2002) argues that existing definitions of sustainable consumption are prescriptive, as they do not describe what consumption is, but what it should be, and Schaefer and Crane (2005) call for a revision of existing conceptualizations of sustainable consumption to include the social and cultural functions that consumption performs.[4]

Jackson [7] summarises different definitions, but notes that he takes different positions not only on the sufficiency of sustainable consumption and changes in consumer behaviour and lifestyles, but also from another perspective, namely more responsible and more efficient consumption.

Jackson further argues that sustainable consumption is dominant and should be achieved primarily by improving the efficiency with which resources are converted into economic goods. More generally, a distinction can be made between “weak sustainable consumption” and “strong sustainable consumption”.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Weak sustainable consumption represents “the choice of products and services that are either less resource-intensive, or less environmentally damaging, or less destructive to the people who actually produce them”, while strong consumer behaviour involves “increases in consumption efficiency (often through more efficient production models or efficiency-friendly design) and fundamental changes in consumption patterns and reductions in consumption levels in industrialised countries.

The transformation towards sustainable food consumption will require the engagement of a wide range of actors along the food supply chain. However, changing consumer demand for food remains instrumental in achieving food system transformation, thereby underscoring that consumption patterns need to become more sustainable. It is well established that behaviour is the result of a dual decision-making process; which combines ‘fast thinking’, which is automatic, rapid and unconscious, and ‘slow thinking’, which is conscious, reflective and deliberate [1] [9]

Consumers do not necessarily have the intention to change their shopping behaviour towards more sustainable consumption. For example, research shows that over two-thirds of people want to buy food with a low climate impact; however, a much smaller number of consumers actually buy such products [13]

In reality, realizing a transformation towards sustainable consumption will rely on expecting consumers to make the right choices, by choosing the more sustainable option when available, and on implementing a range of actions by retailers and marketers to make this happen.

Efforts to influence consumer behavior have been developed to raise consumer awareness through information and education [10][19]. Information and education are most effective when combined with other strategies [19][8], for example, where nudges, marketing, and information embedded in smartphone apps are combined together and shared with consumers.

As with all actions to address climate change, there is unfortunately a gap between sustainable food shopping behavior at the individual level and the impact of that behavior. Positive impacts are often so far in the future and geographically unrelated to where consumption occurs that they may not even be felt within the consumer's lifetime.

In order to develop interventions that can induce long-term behavioral change towards more environmentally sustainable consumption patterns, an understanding of the mechanisms involved in the

behavior and what factors influence these mechanisms, both over time and space, is needed [18] and further research is needed to examine the relationship between current behavior, future intentions, and the underlying psychological factors of such behavior [18]

In general, we assume that sustainable consumption is an operational measure to measure how well major food retailers offer sustainable consumption in their stores. The dynamics of green consumer change are always multifaceted and different, and in reality, there is an increase in the consumption of more and more environmentally friendly products.[17]

It is an indisputable fact that consumers who consume more environmentally friendly products are younger, better educated, and more informed than other consumers.

Not only in the retail sector, but also in many other companies, the correct attraction of sustainable consumers undoubtedly has a significant impact on KPIs /Key Performance Indicators/ or key performance indicators.

In practice, each business defines its own individual set of KPIs, and then regularly measures them after a certain period of time in order to track the achievement of specific goals. In reality, these goals can be related to consumer sales, service, products.

In accordance with the purpose of the study and the defined tasks, we will highlight and identify the key factors that influence consumers' ability, opportunities and motivation to make more environmentally sustainable choices when shopping for food and the role and importance of the information available to consumers in making this choice.

The **COM-B (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation)** model will be used to determine how the ability, opportunity and motivation to participate in sustainable shopping are influenced and how consumers use information when shopping for food. The key factors motivating choice were found to be quality, health, locally produced food, animal welfare and convenience. The main constraints to consumers' ability and opportunity to engage in sustainable grocery shopping are price and time.

In fact, information can be a powerful technique for changing behavior if it is fully tailored to the individual stages of consumers' shopping journey, including planning, execution and reflection of their shopping actions.[14]

At the heart of changing sustainable consumer behavior for fast-moving food products is information and access to it.

The overall view of the study is subordinated to the information that consumers have, and three guiding questions are included, namely:

- Ability: Are consumers aware of the connection between their food shopping behavior and the impact on the environment?
- Opportunity: Do consumers have the opportunity to engage in sustainable behavior?
- Motivation: Are consumers motivated to engage in sustainable behavior?

The survey includes questions that will be linked to the main components of the COM – B model - ability, opportunity and motivation to engage in this behavior. Ability is defined as the physical and psychological capacity of an individual to engage in the relevant activity and can be, for example, knowledge and skills. Opportunity includes all factors that are external to the individual that make the behavior possible or encourage it, such as physical access and social norms. Motivation is understood as a thought process that energizes and directs behavior, not only goals and conscious decision-making, but also beliefs about consequences, values and emotions. [11]

TABLE 1 IDENTIFIED KEY CATEGORIES AND FACTORS IMPORTANT FOR CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

Group of factors	Examples of factors in the group
Socio-demographic and physiological factors	age, level of education, gender, household composition
Socio-psychological factors	attitudes and beliefs, awareness, behavioral control, health concern and environment, brand sensitivity, expectations, experience, habits
Context of eating and buying	acceptance and support from loved ones, accessibility and type of retail outlet, choice of type of retail outlet, discounts and offers
Characteristics of sustainable food	brand, certificates, convenience, country of origin, credibility, ingredients
Social factors	infrastructure, region or country
Information and communication	advertising and marketing, education, food and nutrition information, media
Geographic and spatial factors	infrastructure, region or country
Institutional, political, economic factors	diet compliance, food shortages, food policies of individual companies, management of food production

Adapted from: Hoek, A.C., Malekpour, S., Raven, R., Court, E., Byrne, E. (2021) Towards environmentally sustainable food systems: decision-making factors in sustainable food production and consumption. *Sust.Prod.Consum.* 26 (April), 610-626 [6]

The survey participants strongly agree that /ordered by importance and percentage of the most respondents/:

- People's well-being depends on the state of the environment;
- Companies must necessarily implement sustainable practices;
- Online consumers should be informed about the extent to which the online store uses sustainable practices;

- Online stores should provide certificates of sustainability of food products;
- I will become a more sustainable consumer in the future;
- Sustainable consumer behavior is influenced by the company's brand;
- The inclusion of sustainable products increases consumer loyalty to the brand.

In fact, respondents are of the opinion that not all online retailers should offer alternative sustainable food products, that is, they are not obliged to do so, and they do not agree categorically that consumer satisfaction increases as a result of the company's increasing sustainable practices.

Regarding the COM-B model, respondents approve first of all the opportunity, namely having the opportunity to exhibit sustainable behavior, which raises doubts regarding the fact that they may have the desire but not the ability to realize this sustainable consumer behavior. Second, 56.3% of respondents believe that they should have the ability, and lastly, the motivation, that is, consumers first look for the opportunity, then look for the connection between their food shopping behavior and the impact on the environment, and finally assess how motivated they are to perform sustainable behavior.

334 respondents participated in the online survey, which varied in terms of age, gender, monthly income, number of household members, and education.

The results show that 73.1% of the respondents are women, and the remaining 26.9% are men, which clearly shows that the problems related to sustainable consumer behavior of fast-moving food products in retail are mainly of concern to women.

Regarding the hypothesis that states: "Sustainable consumer behavior of food products in retail in Bulgaria depends on a number of factors", the following conclusions were made. First, based on the results, we find that there is no difference in sustainable consumer behavior between the two genders. Second, the amount of income does not matter.

According to the data from the sample - sustainable behavior does not depend on various factors and tends to be the same in the groups considered - gender, age, level of education, income.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The influence of factors on sustainable consumer behavior is of key importance in the preparation of the strategic marketing strategy in the retail sector and in the sale of fast-moving products. The specificity and dynamics of these factors must be constantly monitored and innovations must be updated and introduced to respond to changes in consumer behavior.

The main conclusions that can be drawn and have theoretical and practical application are the following:

- The factors themselves are very diverse and difficult to study and apply.

- There is a connection between innovation, sustainability and environmental protection that managers must stimulate in order to ensure a comprehensive change in consumer behavior, which in turn will guarantee the achievement of sustainability. It is important to explain to consumers what the standardized green rules are and to create a culture of nature protection, which in its essence will be a continuation of sustainable consumption. This will bring about lasting changes in consumer behavior.
- Consumer behavior itself changes extremely dynamically and for this reason its relationship with the factors that modify it must be constantly studied and reflected.

Timely study of these factors and their influence on consumer behavior will contribute to the creation and implementation of an appropriate sustainable marketing strategy.

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