



Universitatea
Transilvania
din Braşov

HABILITATION THESIS

SUMMARY

Title: Innovation and sustainability from a marketing approach

Domain: Marketing

Author: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Marius BĂLĂŞESCU

Transilvania University of Braşov

BRAŞOV, 2025

The habilitation thesis is structured around two main directions: the first focuses on the most relevant research findings achieved over time, while the second outlines a plan for future career development.

The first part of the thesis highlights key scientific and professional achievements since obtaining the title of Associate Professor up to the present. It is divided into two chapters: the first explores innovation marketing and the impact of new technologies on consumers and businesses, while the second analyzes the concept of sustainability from a marketing perspective, considering its role in various socio-economic contexts.

Chapter 1 examines the impact of innovation marketing and new technologies on consumer behavior, as well as the strategies companies adopt in response. This analysis is structured around four key areas: the impact of influencer marketing on Romanian consumers' perceptions and behavior; the differences between online and offline shopping experiences in mall-based retail; the impact of innovation and new technologies on the shopping experience; and the role of artificial intelligence in marketing, with an emphasis on companies' adaptation based on their level of digital maturity.

To analyze the impact of influencer marketing on Romanian consumers (*Chapter 1.1*), a quantitative study was conducted with 618 respondents, using data collected through an online questionnaire. The findings revealed that 92% of respondents had made at least one purchase based on an influencer's recommendation, with Instagram emerging as the most influential platform for such campaigns. The study highlighted that campaign success depends on selecting the right influencers, ensuring alignment between influencers and the promoted products, understanding audience characteristics, and maintaining transparency in promotion. These research conclusions provide valuable insights for companies aiming to develop effective digital marketing strategies through influencer partnerships.

To identify the differences between online shopping experiences and traditional mall-based retail (*Chapter 1.2*), a quantitative study was conducted on a sample of 1,030 respondents. The findings indicate that online and offline commerce are evolving simultaneously, shaped by both technological advancements and experiential factors. While online shopping is preferred for its convenience, mall retail is favored for social interaction and product testing. The conclusions provide insights for optimizing sales strategies and enhancing the shopping experience.

To assess the impact of technological innovations on retail, a case study was conducted on Amazon Go (*Chapter 1.3*), a store model that leverages artificial intelligence and sensor systems to enable a checkout-free shopping experience.

The study results highlight the crucial role of new technologies in streamlining the purchasing process and enhancing the consumer experience. Key advantages include process automation, contactless payments, and personalized offers. The study emphasizes the importance of investing in innovative technological solutions to boost retailers' competitiveness and align them with modern consumer expectations.

To analyze how companies adopt artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing (*Chapter 1.4*), a qualitative research study was carried out, using the inductive method to identify five distinct categories of companies with varying levels of digital maturity.

Based on the study's findings, an interval scale was developed to illustrate companies' ability to adopt AI-based solutions and integrate them into their marketing strategies. The conclusions offer practical recommendations, guiding companies through the challenges of digital transformation and helping them implement effective solutions aligned with their level of maturity.

Chapter 2 explores sustainability from a marketing perspective, examining how marketing strategies can influence and support sustainable development across various socio-economic sectors. The research focuses on three key areas: the evolution and dynamics of organic agricultural areas in Europe and their impact on sustainable development, the role of sustainable marketing in smart cities, and the influence of corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior in the textile industry.

To evaluate the evolution of organic agricultural areas in Europe and their impact on sustainable development (*Chapter 2.1*), a multivariate statistical study was conducted, analyzing data from 2000 to 2014. The study aimed to identify the main factors driving the expansion of organic farmland across EU member states and the variations among them. The analysis revealed that the primary influences on organic area growth in 2014 were European funding for agriculture and rural development, as well as migration trends. Using two advanced statistical methods – principal component analysis and multiple regression – the study evaluated the impact of these factors on organic agricultural expansion. The results suggest that the future growth of organic farming is closely tied to the economic capacity of EU countries, highlighting significant potential for development in certain regions.

To analyze the impact of sustainable marketing on urban development, two studies were conducted on the implementation of Smart City initiatives in Romania (*Chapter 2.2*). The first study consisted of a comparative analysis of the major Smart City projects in four key Romanian cities, compared to London, a European benchmark model. The second study employed quantitative research to assess Romanians' perceptions and attitudes toward sustainability in smart cities. The results show that over half of the respondents are familiar with the Smart City concept, with 41.9% prioritizing health for technological investments. The study underscores the importance of integrating urban marketing strategies alongside technological solutions to support sustainable cities. Additionally, it proposes a classification of cities based on their level of smart development, offering strategic recommendations for public policies and sustainable urban initiatives.

To assess the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the textile industry in Romania (*Chapter 2.3*), a quantitative marketing study was carried out, focusing on consumers' opinions and attitudes toward sustainable initiatives undertaken by companies in this sector.

The study analyzed consumer perceptions of CSR requirements and their practical implementation. The results highlighted the significance of transparency and social commitment, underlining that CSR measures can influence purchasing behavior and consumer loyalty. These findings are relevant not only for companies in the textile industry but also for any organization aiming to enhance service quality and strengthen its market position through social responsibility strategies.

The second part of the thesis outlines the plan for the evolution and development of the professional career. This section provides an overview of the professional experience gained through teaching and scientific research, as well as a strategy for future academic career development. The strategy is structured around proposed directions for both teaching and research activities.

