Review of Management and Economic Engineering
Vol. 21, No. 4(86), December 2022, p. 333 - 343, ISSN (print): 1583-624X, ISSN (online): 2360-2155

GREEN MARKETING PERCEPTIONS IN ROMANIA: AN EXPLICATIVE MODEL

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Abstract: Green marketing strategies focuses on attaining organizational goals in ways that lessen or eliminate negative environmental impacts. Literature so far demonstrated that consumers' subjective opinions of green business practices have a significantly impact on the green marketing effectiveness. Therefore, this research aimes at identifying and explaining the predictors of consumers' favorable perceptions of organisations that use green marketing methods and strategies, as well as to incorporate those predictors into an explanatory model using the structural equation paradigm. The proposed model proved to be statistically significant, as the perceived community contribution of green organization, organizational transparency, and the individual ability to differentiate green products predicts consumers' positive perception towards green organizations.

Keywords: green marketing, consumers, sustainability, social corporate responsibility.

1 INTRODUCTION

International concerns about environmental sustainability and climate change are prompting businesses to tackle current environmental issues into their strategic business strategy (Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami). This integration, however, necessitates modifications in the majority of the company's functional areas, including R&D, design, manufacturing, and marketing. The development of ecologically sustainable products or services is critical for decreasing human and industrial environmental effect and promoting cleaner manufacturing. Marketing is a critical component of this process because its inputs are critical in developing the product concept and design. Furthermore, if ecological products and services do not proliferate in the market, they would be ineffective in achieving the intended sustainable development (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2017).

Therefore, marketing possesses a crucial role in developing the green market by increasing consumer awareness of environmental sustainability and the advantages of green products. However, one factor that significantly affects the marketing process is consumers' subjective opinions of these green business practices and of organizations in general (Szilagyi et al., 2022).

In light of these observations, the research goal of this is paper is to identify and explain the the predictors of consumers' favorable perceptions of organization's that use green marketing methods and strategies, as well as to incorporate those predictors into an explanatory model using the structural equation paradigm.

This goal must be understood in the context of previously published scientific literature, which notes that consumer perception of green marketing is a complicated variable frequently accompanied by contradictory empirical evidence. Consumers frequently won't pay more for an environmentally better product (Orsato, 2006), and even being environmentally conscious isn't always highly correlated with making green purchases (Ramayah, Lee & Mohamad, 2010). The presence of confounding factors, which were not included in previous research designs, or the presence of intermediary variables, which by their very nature can mediate or lessen the intensity of the correlations between the analyzed variables, can both account for this contradictory data.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Green Marketing strategies

A green marketing strategy, in general, refers to the use of proactive and reactive corporate strategies that support environmental protection and social responsibility (Zhang et al., 2011). It involves marketing strategies that are in line with and address societal and consumer concerns about the environment while pursuing the goal of increasing the revenue (Leonidou, Katsikeas & Morgan, 2012).

To implement a green strategy, the entire marketing process must usually be redesigned, because green marketing necessitates a holistic systems approach as well as organizational commitment (Zhang et al., 2011). Such a strategy necessitates long-term organizational commitment and hence constitutes a significant shift in culture and market orientation (Cronin et al., 2010). As a result, green marketing encompasses a systemic examination of operations throughout the value chain as well as the reorganization of connections that do not align with the new environmentally focused features.

Change must be firmly embedded in all aspects of the firm's operations and should occur as a strategic flow from top to bottom, ensuring efficient resource allocation (Afnani & Gustvasson, 2022).

To be consistent, the green strategy should consist of a fully integrated plan that establishes the company direction and framework for the green strategic orientation and should be executed in all business activities. (Albino et al., 2009, Dangelico & Pujari, 2010).

The literature discusses three primary green strategies: green innovation,"greening" the processes, and green partnerships" (Chahal al., 2014).

Green innovation reffers to the act of incorporating environmental features into the design of a product process that focuses on three essential elements: materials, energy and pollution.

The next strategy, greening the processes, represents a firm's efforts to focus on environmental aspects while carrying out its business operations (Adawiyah, 2017). In other words, firms place a strong emphasis on minimizing waste during their production process to avoid further damage to the environment (Riccio, 2001).

Organizations can also employ a green alliance or partnership to boost their green orientation in order to realize the benefits of adopting a green organizational strategy. Alliances enable partners to enjoy the benefits of complementary resources for value creation, such as financial, technical, and human capital (Afanani& Gutavson, 2022, Destri & Dagnino, 2005).

2.2 Green marketing as a source of competitive advantage

Sustainable businesses, which can ensure their continuity over time, are not only dependent on the external economic environment but also on the social and environmental ones. If they destabilize, so will the business to some extent. Thus, the degradation of the environment that we are currently witnessing, limits economic growth and the horizon of business development (Lakatos et al., 2020, Păcurariu et al., 2021).

First, green manufacturing techniques frequently result in increased resource efficiency, which lowers cost structures and boosts the firm's ability to compete. When compared to traditional products, green products use less raw resources, produces less waste, and uses as little energy as possible. The potential to reduce the selling price is presented by decreasing production costs. In order to stand out from the competition, the customer will purchase a product at a low cost that has the advantage of being made in a way to safeguard the environment (De Bakker, 1999, Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001).

Second, green marketing enables the company to stand out from the competition by introducing novel items into untapped markets or by adding new features to existing products. This enables access to new customer segments and maintains the loyalty of current clients. A company can profit if it launches a cutting-edge ecological product on the market since consumers who purchase comparable products that are already available but are not environmentally friendly can constitute a significant category of potential buyers (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001). As evidence that a significant portion of consumers understand how their consumption habits contribute to the current environmental problem on a worldwide scale, green goods sales have been steadily increasing in the global consumer market (Chan, He & Wang 2016).

Finally, the market for green products provides a favorable environment for both process and product innovation. Companies that lead the way in the development of green and circular products will benefit from "first mover advantage," which will enable them to charge more for these products while also enhancing their reputation as a company (Chen, Lan & Lei, 2006).

3 METHDOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

In this study, a non-experimental cross-correlation type design was used. This type of design involves measuring variables at the same time for all variables in question. The main benefits of this design are the effectiveness with which all data are collected at once, as well as the fact that they can be collected anonymously, which can lower the social desirability of the participants, thus address the ethical concerns regarding the protection of the participant's identity. This type of research design also makes ease the process of administrating a questionnaire online as a measurement tool.

Redarding the variables included in the explicative model, this research aims at explaining the emergence of the positive perception of green organizations through the lens of the following quantitative indepedent variables:

- Community contribution: this variable refers to a company's obligation to the neighborhood and how customers view the business in the context of the economic and social benefits it provides (Obserder et al., 2013);
- Perceived organizational transparency: Transparency is one of the basic conditions in establishing positive relationships between consumers and

organizations, which is built through the communication of corporate social responsibility efforts (Reynolds & Yuthas 2008). Waddock (2004) suggests that transparency is in fact the only corporate value that has a direct impact on all three spheres (economic, social and environmental) of corporate behavior/

- Organizational credibility: A meta-analysis of organizational credibility in a business environment found that the notion includes reliability as well as a desire and intention to buy (Castaldo et al. 2010).
- Green confusion: This term refers to a consumer's inability to recognize the correct environmental characteristics of a product, which is an error that is their fault (Tarabieh, 2021).

Hence, following the literature review conducted in the previous chapter, the following hypotheses are put forth by this research:

- Hypothesis 1_a: The community contribution of green organizations predicts in a statistically significant, positive way the positive perception of green organizations
- Hypothesis 1_b The relationship between the community contribution and the positive perception towards green organizations is mediated by the individual ability to differentiate green products
- Hypothesis 2_a: Perceived organizational transparency positively, statistically significantly predicts positive perception of green organizations
- Hypothesis 2_b :The relationship between organizational transparency and positive perception of green companies is mediated by green confusion
- Hypothesis 3: Perceived organizational transparency positively and statistically significantly predicts the perceived credibility of green organizations

3.2 Instruments

For each instrument we used, the Alpha Cronbach internal consistency coefficient was calculated in the SPSS software. This is an essential step that informs us about the validation of the measurement process.

Internal consistency refers to the extent to which all items capture and measure the same construct, being particularly important when measuring latent variables that are difficult to quantify. The convention is that if the value of the coefficient exceeds 0.7, the instrument is considered to have satisfactory internal consistency.

As table 1 illustrates, all the instruments used passed the agreed threshold of 0.7, so we concluded that satisfactory consistency was obtained and proceeded the descriptive and inferential analyses.

3.3 Sample

The sample of this research is one of convenience, non-random, the respondents being recruited through the snowball method from among private organizations and higher education institutions. The questionnaire was administered online, respecting all regulations regarding the protection of personal data. The final sample consists of 112 volunteer participants. A number of 15 respondents were eliminated from the data base due to incomplete responses.

Table 1. Instruments used and their internal reliability

Variables	Scale Type	N of items	Alpha Cronbach
Positive perception towards green organizations	Likert: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly agree	6 items (Kang & Hustdvet, 2013) Examples: Green Organizations: "Can be considered models of good practice, "Demonstrate a high level of innovation","They have credible leaders".	0.873
Perceived organizational transparency	Likert: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly agree	5 items (Kang & Hustdvet, 2013) Examples: Green Organizations: "Label products clearly and easily to understand", Set fair prices for products".	0.804
Community Contribution	Likert: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly agree	6 items (Oberseder et al, 2014) Examples: Green Organizations: "Contribute to the economic development of the region I live in", "Contribute to the maintenance of jobs in the region where I live in"	0.901
Perceived organizational credibility	Likert: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly agree	4 items (Oberseder et al., 2014) Examples: "I trust the quality of green products", "Buying green products is a guarantee of quality"	0.869
Green confusion	Likert: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5= Strongly agree	5 items (Correa, Junior, DaSilva, 2017) Examples "There is so much similarity between the products that it is very difficult to know which ones are really eco-friendly"	0.843

Table 2. Sample characteristics

CRITERIA	CLASS	%
Gender	Feminine	65.18%
	Masculine	34.82%
Age	18−25 years	82.14%
	26−30 years	3.57%
	31−40 years	1.79%
	41−50 years	8.04%
	51−60 years	4.46%
	60+ ani	0%
Residency	Urban	58.04%
	Rural	41.96%
Occupational status	Employee	28.57%
	Entrepreneur	0.89%
	Student	66.07%
	Unemployed	0%
	Others	2.68%
Educational level	Gimnasium	0%
	Highschool	21.43%
	Bachelor degree	66.07%
	Master degree	7.14%
	Doctoral studies	5.36%
	Post-doctoral studies	0%
Monthly income	1000-2000 RON	58.04%
	2001-3000 RON	17.86%
	3001-4000 RON	8.04%
	4001-5000 RON	7.14%
	5001-6000 RON	9.4%
	6000+ RON	0%

4 RESULTS

4.1 Descriptive analysis

In the first phase, we analyzed the means and standard deviations of all variables using SPSS software. Standard deviations are an indicator of the dispersion of scores from the mean, being in fact an indicator of central tendency. Therefore, table 3 illustrates that the sample is characterized by a positive perception of the companies you see (M=3.79, SD=.82) and a relatively average ability to differentiate green products (M=2.95, SD= .91). Regarding the credibility given by consumers to green companies, we can see that the average is also high (M=4.04, SD= .86)

To verify the normality of the distributions of the studied variables, we also calculated the skewness and kurtosis index. Kurtosis indicates the degree of skewness of the distribution relative to a 0 normal distribution and the skewness index tells us the degree of asymmetry with respect to the two ends of the distribution. The accepted convention is that these values should fall within the range -2/+2 to be considered normally distributed. As can be seen in Table 3, these criteria are met, so we concluded that the variables are normally distributed.

Table 3. Descriptive indicators of the variables analysed

VARIABLE	M*	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	N
Organizational Transparency	2.51	.762	0.793	0.315	112
Community Contribution	3.39	.772	−0.983	1.562	112
Positive perception towards green organizations	3.79	.829	−0.194	−0.391	112
Green Confusion	2.95	.910	−0.058	0.261	112
Organizational credibility	4.04	.866	−0.408	−0.100	112

*Min=1, Max=5
*M= Average SD= Standard Deviation, N= Sample

4.2 Correlational analysis

This section deals with the correlation matrix of the variables included in this study, being an initial, indicative step that can further inform the process of validating the research hypotheses. The Pearson correlation coefficient has values between 0 and 1. The closer the value is to 1, the stronger the positive or negative association.

Thus, we can make the following based on Table 4 positive perception of green organizations.

- Correlates positively, statistically significantly with perceived organizational transparency (r=.463, p<0.01);
- Correlates, positively, statistically significantly with the contribution at community level of green organizations (r=.280, p<0.01);
- Correlates, positively, statistically significantly with the credibility granted by consumers (r=.447, p<0.01).

Table 4. Correlation Matrix

VARIABILE		1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived organizational transparency	Pearson	1	.392**	.109	-.463**	.285
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.132	.000	.243
2. Community Contribution	Pearson	-.392**	1	.326**	.280**	.247**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.001
3. Green Confusion	Pearson	-.109	.326**	1	.398	.034
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.132	.000		.134	.634
4. Positive perception towards green products	Pearson	-.463**	.280**	.398	1	.447**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.134		.000
5. Perceived credibility	Pearson	.285	-247**	.034	.447**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.243	.001	.634	.000	

4.3 Inferential Analysis

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a method comparable to common quantitative approaches such as correlation, multiple regression, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). SEM is similar to these techniques in several ways. First, all four statistical procedures are general linear models. Second, they are all valid only if specific pre-defined assumptions are met. Third, none of these techniques imply causation. Although causal relationships are hypothesized, causality cannot be determined by the results of any of these techniques, but only by the soundness of the underlying theory and research design. However, the advantage of SEM is the particular ability to estimate and test relationships between constructs. Compared to other general linear models, where constructs can be represented by a single measure and measurement error is not modeled, SEM allows the use of multiple measures to represent constructs and addresses the issue of measure-specific error (Weston & Gore, 2006). The following indicators are commonly used can be used to evaluate model fit:

- Chi-square (χ2/df),
- ACGFI/GFI- (adjusted)Goodness of fit Index- the variance explained by the structured model,
- CFI- Comparative fit index- compares the tested model with another model,
- The Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), the mean square error of approximation
- RMSEA- the discrepancy between the population parameters and the model parameters taking into account the degrees of freedom
- SRMR- is calculated based on the difference matrix of the measured and predicted values
- Normative fit index (NFI) - results by comparing the structured model with a model that has all links set to 0 (null model).

Table 5 shows the indices obtained after testing this model in the AMOS Software, along with the thresholds agreed in the literature.

As can be seen, the fit indices fall within the required ranges, so we proceeded with the actual hypothesis testing. Figure 1 represents the model created and tested in AMOS. The values present on each arrow represent the estimated parameters for the respective relationships.

Table 5. Model fit assessment

Model fit index	Proposed model	Recommended value
CMIN/ DF	0.136	≤3
NFI	0.982	≥0.9
GFI	1.000	≥0.9
AGFI	0.927	≥0.9
CFI	1.000	≥0.9
TLI	1.032	≥0.9
RMSEA	0.000	≤0.08
SRMR	0.006	≤0.08

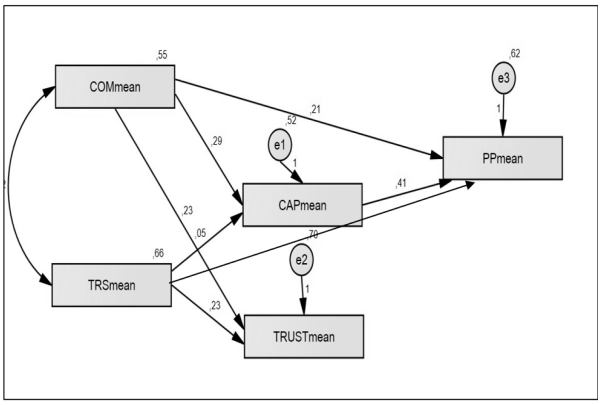

Figure 1. The model tested in AMOS with standardizes estimates

COMmean= Community contribution
TRSmean=Organizational Transparency, CAPmean=Green Confusion, Ppmean= Positive perception towards green products, TRUSTmean= Organizational Credibility

Thus, as we can see in table 6, the hypotheses at the level of this sample received empirical support, but we cannot extrapolate these results at the level of the population, since this sample does not have sufficient statistical power. Mediation relationships were also confirmed. The confirmed hypotheses of the study are summarized as it follows:

- The perceived community contribution of green organizations positively predicts consumers' positive perception of green companies (β = 0.175, SE = 0.046, p < 0.001),
- The relationship between the contribution at the community level and the positive perception of green companies is mediated by the individual ability to differentiate green products (green confusion) (β = 0.288, SE = 0.044, p < 0.001, (β = 0.349, SE = 0.046, p < 0.001),
- Perceived organizational transparency positively predicts, statistically significantly, the positive perception of green companies (β = 0.288, SE = 0.051, p < 0.001),
- The relationship between organizational transparency and the positive perception of green companies is mediated by the individual ability to differentiate green products (green confusion) (β = 0.55, SE = 0.04p, p < 0.001, β = 0.349, SE = 0.046, p < 0.001),
- Perceived organizational transparency positively, statistically significantly predicts organizational credibility (β = 0.216, SE = 0.047, p < 0.001).

5 DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

From a theoretical point of view, this study contributes to the scientific literature on consumer behavior applied in the field of sustainability. Specifically, it explains how within an attitudinal model the positive perception towards organizations engaged in green marketing practices is formed. These findings may also have practical significance, particularly in the context of designing and structuring marketing messages. In practice, businesses constantly struggle with the difficulty of finding unique and successful ways to reach their clients with green marketing (Chekima et al. 2016). As

consumer demand and consumption of green products is complex and inconsistent, various methodologies and perspectives have been implemented to understand them, showing varied results from qualitative and quantitative perspectives. As there is great diversity in the process of green consumption, therefore, it is imperative to understand; 1) what are the most important factors contributing to consumer adoption of green marketing and 2) how can they be framed within the broader context of industry and global sustainability efforts to inform practitioners and decision makers where they need to direct attention.

Table 6. Results regarding the tested hypothesis
(PPGO=positive perception towards green organizations)

Hypothesis	Variables	Standardized estimate	Standardized error	*p*-Value	Decision
H1a	Community contribution→ PPGO	0.175	0.043	**0.00**	Accepted
H1b mediation	Community contribution→ Green Confusion	0.288	0.044	**0.00**	Accepted
	Green confusion→PPGO	0.349	0.046	**0.00**	
H2a	Organizational transparency→ PPGO	0.288	0.051	**0.00**	Accepted
H2b mediation	Organizational Transaparency→Green confusion	0.55	0.040	**0.00**	Accepted
	Green Confusion→PPGO	0.349	0.046	**0.00**	
H3	Organizational Transaparency→ Organizational Credibility	0.216	0.047	**0.00**	Accepted

5.2 Research limits

Firstly, the correlational and cross-sectional nature of this study prevents us from drawing any conclusions regarding the causes of the variables that were examined. Although we can certainly support associational and predictive correlations, unlike in experimental or longitudinal designs, the conditions for causality are not met.

The research sample is another drawback. The selection of participants was not random, as can be easily seen from the analysis of socio-demographic data. On the other hand, the number of 112 respondents does not provide sufficient statistical power, allowing the escalation of the alpha-type error (although the effect exists among the population, it cannot be detected within the sample due to low statistical power).

Also, administering the questionnaire online, despite its advantages, does not allow any kind of control over the respondent's environment, which makes it difficult to communicate in case of concerns, requests for additional details or protection against certain disturbing factors.

6 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, every organization that aspires to follow the sustainable path should consider using enhanced green marketing strategies in order to prevent client skepticism brought on by the increasingly prevalent practice of "greenwashing." As a collective responsibility for the safety and future of the environment starts to evolve, the market demand for ecological goods manifests a growing tendency (Adawiyah, 2017). From an organizational standpoint, the shift to sustainability offers customers more value as a means of gaining a competitive advantage. As future research directions, the role of policy makers as external influences on consumers in the development of beliefs, and purchasing intentions should be considered. For example, regulatory authorities can play an important role in consumers' perceived effectiveness of their environmental actions. Regulators also set various environmental standards for consumers, such as recycling content and environmental performance measures, which can contribute to the building of stronger consumer perceptions of the eco-efficiency of products, leading to more frequent purchase intentions and behaviors (Groening, Sarkis & Zhu, 2018).

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