

Review of the habilitation thesis

Author of the thesis: Ing. Tomasz Trojanowski, Ph.D.
Thesis name: Sustainable marketing mix of food industry companies operating on the Polish market
Opponent: doc. Ing. Radoslav Škapa, Ph.D.

Relevance of the topic and objectives of the thesis

The paper can be divided into three parts: the first concerns the characteristics of the food industry in Poland. The second part is the author's empirical research, and the third one gives recommendations for the transformation of the industry toward sustainability through the marketing mix lense. I consider this angle of looking at sustainability - i.e., through the marketing mix (product, price place, promotion) - with a focus on the food sector as beneficial and partly original.

The thesis is primarily oriented towards the situation in Poland; however, the research objectives may be relevant for audiences in other countries because of the possibility of international comparison or regarding the methodology applied. Of course, the relevance for foreign audiences is only valid if the research objectives are fulfilled in good quality.

The research approach, methodology and results

The text begins by introducing the context of the research problem, in particular (1) an analysis of the food production in Poland and (2) an excursion into the topic of sustainability and marketing mix. Both of these topics are very extensive: although they are relevant to the research, it was unnecessary to devote several dozen pages of text to them. Many papers have been written on sustainability and its historical development. The analysis of the Polish food production situation is more useful for this thesis; however, the primary feature of this text is just a description (based on official statistics). The actual analytical input is small. For this reason, I will concentrate the main attention in the review on the empirical research part.

Evaluation of the introductory/review parts (Chapters 1, 3, and 4)

The introductory research sections typically function not only as an introduction to the context but also define concepts, key relationships, the research problem, or open research questions. However, the chapters in this thesis do not perform such functions.

Masaryk University, Faculty of Economics and Administration

Lipová 507/41a, 602 00 Brno, Czech Republic

T: +420 549 49 1710, E: info@econ.muni.cz, www.econ.muni.cz

I would have expected a better definition of the central concept (sustainable marketing mix) and an explanation of why it is appropriate to do the analysis through a basic conceptualisation of the marketing mix (i.e. the 4Ps). The definition of the individual components of the sustainable mix is rather vague. For example, what is the difference between sustainable pricing vs pricing of sustainable products? Similarly, for promotion, is sustainable promotion determined by the topics that the company communicates, or is sustainable promotion determined by communication channels with less environmental impact (such as electronic media)? Or both? (This issue relates to my further comment on Research question 4).

The operationalisation of other concepts is also lacking. The author mentions terms such as *pro-environmental* and *pro-social food products* in the research questions. However, these terms were not mentioned in the text once. On the other hand, the research questions do not mention the term *sustainable marketing mix* but talk about the marketing mix and its components *in the context of sustainable food products*. Is this a translation error, or does it have a deeper meaning?

Chapter 4 elaborates on the individual components of the marketing mix and how they relate to sustainability. In the case of the product component, this is done well. In promotion, the chapter deals with the content of the message. Still, I did not find any mention of the sustainability of specific tools/media (these are things that the author evaluates in his research, so it is relevant).

Common to all literature review parts is that there is no knowledge synthesis/conclusion in the form of a framework, model, or hypotheses that the author would use in his research.

The author uses a somewhat narrower range of literature, and foreign literature could have been represented more. I find it surprising that the research completely omits the issue of emerging technologies with the food industry and sustainability. Yet information technology is one of the essential means contributing to sustainability.

Objectives and methodology of the empirical research

The author writes about the existence of a research problem but does not prove it with specific citations or his own analysis that would directly point to such a research gap. On page 25 (second paragraph), he mentions that he did not find research in his area of interest, but it is not clear how he searched the literature. Could it be that the label sustainable marketing mix has an alternative name (conceptualisation) for which studies exist? In addition, the author refers (page 25) to sources over 10 years old, as if nothing substantial has been produced on the topic recently (on the contrary, research interest in sustainability has been growing for a long time!).

It is unusual that the author first defines the research questions and then the research objectives. In the case of Objective 1 and Research Question 1, I find no substantive difference (it is a mechanical transcription).

There is no explanation of the questionnaire design in the methodology. Still, the reader can, after studying the items in the questionnaire, link the individual items back to the statements in Chapter 4. Thus, some link exists between theory and questionnaires (methodology).

Results

The fulfilment of the objectives is at a very general and simple level.

To illustrate it: Objective 4 ("Analysis of the media, forms of communication and message content used in the promotional activities of food companies in terms of sustainable development") the author narrowed it down with a research question on whether "the media, forms of communication and message content take into account the concept of sustainability?". This particular question was answered by 8 scaled questions (25 to 32).

I'm not sure that the author answered his question, e.g. when it comes to the media: - the author asked about media in questions 25, 26, and 27, which measure the intensity usage of leaflets, brochures and other printed material, radio, TV and the internet. The questions did not relate to sustainability anyhow. How can such data help in answering the research question? Does it mean companies preferring electronic media (with a smaller environmental footprint) over print media did better in sustainability assessment? Did more frequent use of print media (higher response on the scale to question 25) lead to lower overall scores? According to the text, this was not the case. Therefore, I am unsure what the calculated score presented on p. 118 actually says. (see also question 2 in the review).

From page 95 onwards, the author captures some correlations but does not indicate how they relate to the research questions. Why did he test these correlations and not other correlations? And what do these relationships imply? For example, what is the interpretation of the results in Table 17 (p.89)? Does the negative correlation mean that firms that do not try to reduce the environmental impact of their production are more likely to include environmental costs in their prices? What is the theoretical explanation?

Moreover, the presentation of correlation results is unnecessarily extensive: the correlation coefficient, the p-value and the number of observations are sufficient to characterise one correlation. The individual large tables do not show anything more than these three numbers.

Overall, the results section of the thesis describes the collected data in detail and at length. It is rather a description of contingency tables without further analysis. Based on these tables, the author confirms the hypotheses. However, the nature of the data used for hypothesis testing is not sufficient to obtain truly valuable answers.

Design part

The suggestion part is extensive but difficult to evaluate because the author does not indicate how he derived these suggestions, to what extent they are directly linked to his specific findings, and to what extent they are derived from more general knowledge. I also did not find information on whether the author validated his suggestions in any way.

The formal aspect of the thesis

No major issues.

Proposed questions for clarification during the defence

1. What do you see as the research limitations of your research?

2. How did you calculate the index of sustainable promotion (value of 0.65)? How did questions 25 to 27 enter into this calculation? These three questions did not ask about any aspect of sustainability, so how did you use it to answer research question 4?
3. Where do you see opportunities for applying new and emerging (information) technologies to form a sustainable marketing mix for companies operating in food production in Poland?

Relevance to the research and practice, author's contributions

The questionnaire is key to assessing this thesis's quality and its informational limits. In other words, based on the data that the author obtained through his questionnaire - which he designed for the purpose of the research - it is impossible to answer set research questions in sufficient scope and detail. In other words, through the questionnaire, it was impossible to generate adequate knowledge that would bring value to any stakeholders. The field research produced just a rough self-assessment of the "sustainable" marketing mix in food producers in Poland.

According to Czech legislation, the habilitation thesis must contain original scientific contributions. In this respect, I have to conclude the thesis does not meet the requirements set for habilitation theses because it does not contain enough original scientific findings created by the author.

I do not consider the work to be plagiarised.

I do not recommend the habilitation thesis for defence.

In Brno, 28.6.2024

doc. Ing. Radoslav Škapa, Ph.D.
Masaryk University
skapa@econ.muni.cz

<https://www.muni.cz/en/people/10072-radoslav-skapa>