

DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIES BASED ON CONSUMERS' SUSTAINABILITY PERSPECTIVES IN THE PERFUME INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Companies should include consumers' concerns about sustainability in their strategies, a reason why it is essential to understand the consumer's decision-making process. Sustainability is a topic of interest and is increasingly considered by consumers. Actions are taken to raise the level of environmental and social sustainability in the growing industry of cosmetics. To this end, this extensive research presents market research. The questionnaire aims to outline the consumer's attitude toward sustainability in the perfume industry. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to determine what sustainability principles must be considered by companies in the development of strategies in the perfume industry. The objective of the research is to find out how sustainability impacts consumer choices, whether demographics influence purchase decisions, and perception of circular reuse and refilling models. The results indicate that the decision to purchase from the consumer is positively influenced by sustainability, mainly through the means of ecological and economic dimensions. Regarding demographics, age influences the economic dimension while gender influences the overall perception on sustainability. Therefore, marketing strategies must be tailored according to the gender and age of the target consumer. Finally, a significant interest for the refill model was identified.

KEYWORDS: *circular economy, consumer perspective, perfume industry, sustainability.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the consumer's decision-making process is fundamental in creating successful strategies. Additionally, it helps businesses to provide products and services according to the needs and desires of the client (Stankevich, 2017). These are constantly evolving and are influenced by current factors. Therefore, companies must consider in their strategies the current state of affairs to establish competitive advantages (Payne et al., 1991). The decision-making process consists of a rational and subjective process. Before deciding on a course of action, the consumer makes a choice based on certain facts and information. This is the rational process. At the same time, a process that contains subjective matters begins in the mind of the consumer. These refer to values, beliefs, and creeds (Bell & Morse, 2010). Recognizing the decision-making process is necessary to trust the consumer to behave more sustainable (Trudel, 2018).

Over the past few years, the topic of sustainability has been put under the spotlight due to the problems and obstacles encountered environmentally, socially, and ecologically (Giovannoni & Fabietti, 2013). Sustainability is considered a major concern in the existing situation of climate

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change, poverty, and disparity between civilizations (van Engelen & Daily, 2005). Consequently, the topic may have an impact on the decision-making process of the consumer, as part of the subjective process (Hoppe, 2002).

Perfumery is part of a growing economic sector, the cosmetic industry. Therefore, actions are taken to raise the level of environmental and social sustainability in this industry (Foll, 2007). The increasing number of sustainability reports spreads the word on sustainability burdens. Therefore, consumer decisions are influenced, in addition to personal preferences, more and more by environmental and social aspects (Liobikienė & Bernatoniene, 2017; Ardelean, 2021).

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to determine what sustainability principles should be considered in the development of strategies in the perfume industry. The study is based on the consumer's preoccupation with sustainability when deciding to purchase a perfume. Three research questions were established to better measure the sustainability perspectives in the perfumery field in Romania. Inspired by the three pillars of sustainability, this study aims to measure sustainability perspectives by evaluating the performance of social, environmental, and economic principles from the point of view of consumers. Consequently, the first research question is: How does the environmental, social, and economic dimension impact consumer choices? The second research question aims to go deeper and analyse the relationship between the dimensions and the purchase decision: What demographic characteristics influence the environmental, social, and economic principles? Finally, this study incorporated the circular economy and intends to discover the consumer's point of view on the circular reuse and refill model. Accordingly, the third research question is: What is the consumer's opinion on the circular reuse and refill model?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Looking at the three dimensions of sustainability, namely economic, social, and environmental, the main topic discussed until now in the cosmetic industry has been the environmental one, while little emphasis has been placed on the other two (Taucean et al., 2019; Bom et al., 2019).

Furthermore, sustainability is connected with ethics. To consider ethical company behavior, it must keep in mind all three dimensions of sustainability. Despite this, ethnic aspects are often ignored (Becker, 2012; Sarfraz et al., 2021). The most worrying ethical aspect of the cosmetic industry refers to animal testing. Millennials and younger generations especially pay attention to this and opt for products advertising as 'cruelty-free.' Furthermore, regardless of generation, more and more consumers are looking at the product label, ingredient list, and certifications (Farrell, 2021).

Companies in the perfume industry have begun to participate more in the development of more sustainable products. One of the leading competitors in perfume manufacturing, Firmenich, has responded to the demand for more sustainable cosmetic products by developing EcoScent CompassTM, a holistic tool that analyzes the production process through environmental, social, and biological impact (Robvieux et al., 2022). The 12 principles of green chemistry have been the foundational framework for developing a more sustainable product (Anastas & Warner, 1998).

Companies in the cosmetic industry place great emphasis on CSR, but sustainability dimensions do not figure in company CSR strategies or product life cycle design. Therefore, education to this extent is essential. Policies need to educate consumers and encourage innovation (Kolling et al., 2022). Furthermore, the implementation of policies ensures regulations and offers guidelines (Giroto, 2013).

Common belief describes the circular economy as a combination of reduce, reuse, and recycle activities, without highlighting the importance of a systemic shift. The combination of reducing excess materials from packaging or production, reusing, as in refilling packaging, and recycling have been the three main aspects when it comes to the circular model in the perfume industry (Bom et al., 2019). A model proposed by Bom et al. (2019; 2020) shows that the circular economy reuse loop can only be applied to design, sourcing, and post-consumer use. Top competitors in the

industry such as L'oreal Group and Guerlain Group have implemented packaging refill and reuse (Morea et al., 2021).

Corporate social responsibility and circular economy have greatly affected the cosmetics industry, creating a new paradigm where consumers give great importance to the impact that a company has on the environment, on society, and on economy (Fortunati et al., 2020). However, some argue that not enough CSR information is provided to the consumer. For this reason, customers do not consider these companies during the buying decision-making process (Zhao, 2012). From the companies' point of view, the main players in the industry, such as L'oreal Group, worry that the publication of CSR initiatives can be considered greenwashing by stakeholders (Pönkänen & Wedendal, 2018).

Resilience was determined to be crucial to building sustainability. To be more precise, a two-way relationship was identified between the two concepts. Each is an important factor in fulfilling the other (Winnard et al., 2014). The reason for the bidirectional relationship may be that, in essence, both concepts have the same purpose: business continuity and long-term vision. If a company seeks to achieve environmental, social, and economic performance, it has to implement sustainable and resilient strategies (Corrales-Estrada et al., 2021).

Perfumers in the industry are seeking value in more sustainable products, but it is always analyzed through the cost filter. Therefore, it is important to understand consumer perception about sustainable practices, to better fulfill demand while keeping costs as low as possible (Frolova, 2014). Strategies that consider sustainability dimensions develop competitive advantages, reduce risk, and build consumer loyalty (Trivedi et al., 2018). Business marketing campaigns must consider all the factors that influence the consumer's decision to target the market by creating attractive communication content (Rus et al., 2016; Paço et al., 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a survey that was conducted with people living in Romania. For this research, primary data was used. Consequently, a questionnaire was applied online through Google Form. The processing of the primary data obtained was performed by statistical software.

The questions of the questionnaire are based on the three objectives of the study. First, the perceptions of the respondents about sustainability and the three principles of economic, social and environmental were identified. They were asked to what extent these three aspects influence their decision to buy a perfume. Furthermore, the perception of performance and packaging was determined. Respondents expressed their opinion on longevity, projection, and silage, as well as on the form and design of the bottle and cap. The questionnaire then determines the consumer's point of view on the circular model of refilling the bottle. Finally, the survey includes questions regarding sociodemographic variables.

The first hypothesis of this research is that sustainability dimensions have a positive influence on consumer purchase decisions. Accordingly, the first research question is:

RQ1: How does the environmental, social, and economic dimension affect consumer choices?

The second hypothesis is that consumers have different buying patterns based on their demographic characteristics. So, the second research question is:

RQ2: What demographic characteristics influence the environmental, social, and economic principles?

This research seeks to identify whether circular models, such as reuse and refilling the perfume bottle, have a positive influence on the purchase decision. Therefore, the third research question is:

RQ3: What is the consumer's opinion on the circular reuse and refill model?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The questionnaire registered 232 responses. Most of the respondents identify themselves as perfume enthusiasts, in a percentage of 91.7% and the remaining 8.3% do not identify as being passionate about perfumes.

The first objective of the study is to establish the perspectives of consumers on sustainability, by investigating the three dimensions. When asked if the respondent appreciates whether a perfume brand is concerned with sustainability, almost 50% of the votes recorded an affirmative response, 35.3% did not present interest, and approximately 15% admitted that they are interested in the topic (**Table 1. Concerned with sustainability**). This result shows that companies can successfully implement sustainability practices to increase their competitive advantage.

Table 1. Concerned with sustainability

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	22	9.5	9.5
	2	13	5.6	15.1
	3	82	35.3	50.4
	4	80	34.5	84.9
	5	35	15.1	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	

Source: own development

Following, each dimension is treated individually to discover which of the principles is considered by consumers while purchasing a perfume in Romania.

The environmental dimension is based on two questions, namely, the consumer's concern that the ingredients and the packaging of the perfume should not have a negative impact on the environment. Therefore, it has been identified that most of the respondents (31.9%) are neutral in the burden of the product on the environment. However, the cumulative percentage of respondents with a score above 3 is 44.4%, while the score below 3 is 23.3%. Therefore, there is a slight inclination towards the existence of interest in terms of environmental impact in the field of perfumery (**Table 2. Environmental interest**).

Table 2. Environmental interest

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.0	26	11.2	11.2
	2.0	28	12.1	23.3
	3.0	74	31.9	55.2
	4.0	70	30.2	85.4
	5.0	34	14.6	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	

Source: own development

Regarding the social dimension, it incorporated the consumer's concern in relation to whether the perfume brand is involved in social actions, such as charities. The numbers show a lack of interest, with 86.2% of the respondents not being interested or being indifferent in this aspect (**Table 3. Social interest**). Therefore, trying to incorporate a business strategy that involves giving to charity as a way of attracting new clients might not be ideal.

Table 3. Social interest

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	52	22.4	22.4
	2	46	19.8	42.2
	3	102	44.0	86.2
	4	27	11.6	97.8
	5	5	2.2	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	

Source: own development

Without a doubt, the economic dimension is currently the most considered by perfume consumers in Romania (**Table 4. Economic interest**). Only 14.2% of the respondents focus on all or very little on the economic aspect. On the contrary, 60.3% of the respondents showed great interest in the way that a product price affects their buying decision. Companies must launch products that fit the price range in which consumers are most comfortable.

Table 4. Economic interest

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	10	4.3	4.3
	2	23	9.9	14.2
	3	59	25.4	39.7
	4	108	46.6	86.2
	5	32	13.8	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	

Source: own development

Then a Pearson correlation analysis was performed between the three dimensions, namely social, economic and environmental (**Table 5. Correlation of the three sustainability principles**). The result indicates a significant finding between the social and environmental dimensions. This positive outcome suggests that people who are generally influenced by social factors are also influenced by environmental factors. The common ground between these two variables is the positive impact they have on society. Therefore, based on these results, if a company is involved in positive environmental practices, the business will also be of interest to people who are concerned about social factors.

Table 5. Correlation of the three sustainability principles

		Social	Economic	Environment
Social	Pearson Correlation	1	.080	.389**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.227	.000
	N	232	232	232
Economic	Pearson Correlation	.080	1	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.227		.273
	N	232	232	232
Environment	Pearson Correlation	.389**	.072	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.273	
	N	232	232	232

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own development

The next step in analysing the effect of sustainability principles on consumer choices considers the attributes of the product. Undoubtedly, beside the smell, performance and packaging are differentiating features while purchasing a perfume. Therefore, the relationship between these products attributes and the three sustainably principles was determined. The performance variable takes into consideration the product's longevity, projection and wake. Likewise, the packaging may be a competitive advantage. In our case, the variable refers to the form, cover and design of the bottle.

In terms of performance, we have discovered that there is a significant relationship between the economic dimension and the dependent variable performance using the linear regression model (**Table 6. Linear regression model of performance and sustainability perspectives**). The relationship is a positive one, which means that consumers have higher expectations in terms of product performance as they pay more for a perfume. We may suggest that if a company wishes to market a premium product with a high price tag, it should also consider launching a product with above average performance.

Table 6. Linear regression model of performance and sustainability perspectives

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.139	.257		12.233	.000
	ECONOMIC	.172	.056	.201	3.083	.002
	ECOLOGIC	-.030	.052	-.041	-.580	.563
	SOCIAL	5.180E-005	.058	.000	.001	.999

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

Source: own development

When examining packaging perception, a significant finding was identified through multiple linear regression analysis (**Table 7. Linear regression model of packaging and sustainability perspectives**). More precisely, significance is only related to the social variable ($p < 0.05$). The positive relation indicates that packaging perception is higher when the consumer considers social aspects when deciding to buy. We may assume that both the packaging and social aspects are tangible objective things. In addition, we may also consider the fact that consumers are concerned with the social factors included in labour standards when creating perfume packaging, which is a variable that is not considered when discussing economic and ecological factors.

Table 7. Linear regression model of packaging and sustainability perspectives

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.817	.241		7.548	.000
	ECONOMIC	.085	.052	.102	1.617	.107
	ECOLOGIC	.024	.049	.034	.494	.622
	SOCIAL	.220	.054	.276	4.044	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Packaging

Source: own development

The second objective of this study is to determine whether consumers demographic characteristics influence the importance of social, environmental, and economic principles. Certainly, demographics that may differentiate consumer preferences are age category and gender.

First, the relationship between the genders of the respondents and the three dimensions of sustainability was evaluated (table 8). The genders selected in the analysis were male and female since the other category had only one entry. Therefore, the test that has been chosen for this analysis has been one-way ANOVA. We can see a significant result for both the economic and ecological dimensions, the p-value in these cases being below 0.05. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference in the mean of the two variables and the two genders. This analysis does not indicate whether the relationship between gender and economic and ecological dimension is positive or negative. Therefore, more research is required in this direction because the results will help companies better understand the consumer and tailor new marketing strategies for each individual gender.

Table 8. One way ANOVA test - gender and sustainability perspectives

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ECONOMIC	Between Groups	6.627	2	3.313	3.439	.034
	Within Groups	220.645	229	.964		
	Total	227.272	231			
ECOLOGIC	Between Groups	14.065	2	7.033	5.531	.005
	Within Groups	291.155	229	1.271		
	Total	305.220	231			
SOCIAL	Between Groups	2.306	2	1.153	1.084	.340
	Within Groups	243.655	229	1.064		
	Total	245.961	231			

Source: own development

Subsequently, the correlation between the age category of the respondents and the perception of social, economic, and environmental was investigated (table 9).

Table 9. Correlation Age category and sustainability perspectives

			Economic	Social	Environment	Age category
Spearman's	Economic	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.070	.041	-.193**
		Sig.(2-tailed)	.	.288	.530	.003
		N	232	232	232	232
	Social	Correlation Coefficient	.070	1.000	.366**	-.022
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.288	.	.000	.736
		N	232	232	232	232
	Environment	Correlation Coefficient	.041	.366**	1.000	.096
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.530	.000	.	.145
		N	232	232	232	232
	Age category	Correlation Coefficient	-.193**	-.022	.096	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.736	.145	.
		N	232	232	232	232

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own development

Because age is an ordinal variable, the most appropriate test for the identification of relationships is the Spearman correlation test. This analysis shows that there is a significant negative relationship between the age category of the respondents and the economic aspect considered when purchasing. In other words, the younger the consumer, the more important the price of the product is in the purchase of a perfume. With age, people start to have a higher and more stable income. This is in line with the results obtained, the elderly willing to offer higher amounts on the desired perfumes. As the third objective, this study incorporated the circular economy and intends to discover the consumer's point of view on the circular reuse and refill model (**Table 10. Refill model perception**). Accordingly, the third research question is: What is the consumers opinion on the circular model of reuse and refill? The result indicated that more than 82% of the respondents consider the proposed circular model of interest or at least indifferent. More than 52% of the results show us that consumers are very interested in a refill model. The refill model in this case refers to the possibility to refill the initial bottler in favour of buying a new bottle. The advantage of this model is of course less production of new bottles, which means less usage of raw material and energy saver. In addition, the refill model would create economic benefits for the consumer. The price of the product would be lower because the consumer would only pay for the content of the bottle. We may assume that the refill and other circular models are practices that can be implemented within a company in order to attract new customers and maintain the old ones, while also being involved in sustainable practices.

Table 10. Refill model perception

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	7	3.0	3.0	3.0
	2	33	14.2	14.2	17.2
	3	71	30.6	30.6	47.8
	4	68	29.3	29.3	77.2
	5	53	22.8	22.8	100.0
	Total	232	100.0	100.0	

Source: own development

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship of the consumer with sustainability while deciding to purchase a perfume, to help companies better understand consumer behaviour and develop new strategies to fulfil their needs.

When a new product or a new marketing strategy is required, companies are suggested to consider the economic, social, and environmental impact of sustainability dimensions.

We discovered that consumers purchase decision is positively influenced by sustainability, mainly through the means of ecologic and economic dimensions. The social dimension has not shown a significant correlation between the given hypotheses. Also, people who pay attention to the economic factor wish that their products have above average performance. Companies that wish to launch new products at a premium price should consider launching formulations that have good technical performance.

Another significant finding has been in the relationship between the social dimension and the packaging. We recommend that companies have a good understanding of how their packaging is produced in the case of outsourcing because the workforce involved in the production of packaging is often subject to unethical labour practices. Therefore, companies can promote a competitive advantage through an ethical packaging production.

Looking at other findings, there has been a significant correlation between gender and the economic and ecological dimensions of sustainability. Therefore, it is important to analyse what males and females find important through the lenses of sustainability, to create tailored marketing strategies to meet with their demands. From an age group point of view, there has been a negative correlation between respondent age and price. The analysis has shown that younger audiences tend to offer less for a product than the more mature ones. In other words, companies should develop price strategies according to the age group that they want to target.

Finally, we have identified an interest for the refill model as part of a marketing strategy that a company can adopt. Companies should adopt packaging refill practices, which can be applied in the areas of product design, sourcing, and post-consumer use.

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