

THE ROLE OF MARKETING AUDIT IN EVALUATION SUSTAINABLE MARKETING PERFORMANCE IN ROMANIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Daniel Șerbănică^{1*}, Violeta Rădulescu² and Anca Francisca Cruceru³
^{1) 2) 3)} Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

Please cite this article as:

Serbănică, D., Radulescu, V. and Cruceru, A.F., 2015. The Role of Marketing Audit in Evaluation Sustainable Marketing Performance in Romanian Organizations. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 17(40), pp. 1011-1021

Abstract

In today's society, marked by profound changes in consumer attitudes towards the environment and social issues, organizations are forced to behave responsibly, to be oriented towards a sustainable marketing. However the efforts of the organization should be evaluated periodically to see the extent to which objectives are achieved and the extent to which resource consumption leads to results. From the marketing perspective, this can be achieved through marketing audit, which is a tool for evaluating and controlling a marketing organization's performance. This paper aims, through a documentary study in the first part and an exploratory quantitative research, in the second, to highlight the role and place of the audit of marketing in companies in Romania, to assess the effectiveness of marketing activity undertaken the principles of sustainability. The last part of the paper includes research findings and a series of theoretical and managerial recommendations on the use of marketing audit as a tool for assessing the sustainability of marketing companies in the target group, with the possibility of generalizing to all companies operating on the market in Romania.

Keywords: marketing audit, sustainable marketing, marketing performance, sustainability, Romanian companies

JEL Classification: M31, M42

Introduction

In the current society, achieving performance means not only providing quality products at competitive prices. A responsible involvement of the organization is necessary in order to promote sustainable development. Contribution of companies to a promising future, must be the result of increased positive impact on society, of which can be achieved only if the companies are sustainable. Thus, there are major changes in decision-making, because

* Corresponding author, Daniel Șerbănică - daniel.serbanica@ase.ro

managers make strategic and tactical decisions that integrate a variety of variables: economic, cultural, social and environmental protection. (Dinu, 2011).

Integrating the idea of sustainability in marketing decisions becomes increasingly necessary. From the marketing perspective, to be socially responsible means not only to become involved in the problems of society, but sustainable marketing decisions to minimize the resource consumption and to alter consumer behavior towards sustainable development. The concern of specialists and companies for adopting socially responsible marketing decisions is reflected in the sinuous evolution of the concept. In the 1970s they spoke rather of a marketing environmentally focused on the detection and remediation of the ambient environment. From this green marketing (marketing greener) has derived, considered as “a holistic and responsible management process that identifies, anticipates and fulfils stakeholders requirements for a reasonable reward, that does not adversely affect the welfare of people and nature” (Charter et al., 2002; Dabija and Pop, 2013). Recently specialists speak of sustainable marketing seen as a new vision geared towards a resource efficient, able to provide the best value to consumers and other stakeholders, taking into account long-term interests of society, individuals and the environment (Cătoiu, Vrânceanu and Filip, 2010; Dabija and Băbuț, 2014).

Organizations led by the principles of sustainable development should aim to achieve performance targets in promoting sustainability through the following steps (Charter, et al., 2002):

- implementation of a policy of sustainability;
- realization of social and environmental audits;
- establishment of clear and realistic objectives, and concrete programs of action;
- allocation of adequate resources for information and education,
- monitoring the progress and effectiveness of programs implemented;
- development of indicators to measure sustainability;
- integration of environmental and social information in management information systems.

Applying a sustainable marketing can be a new challenge for marketers because it involves on the one hand, the development of specific activities such as researching the needs, wishes, and expectations of consumers, and the company's ability to meet these expectations better than the competition. On the other hand, decisions should be made based on new information about the attitude of stakeholders on sustainability in terms of supply, production, use products etc. When practiced well, environmental marketing can lead to competitive advantage and be a central part of a company's brand and value proposition (Leonidou and Leonidou, 2011).

The adoption of environmental friendly strategies or the creation of environmentally friendly initiatives should increase that firm's performance (Chan, Chan and Wang, 2012). It is important to note that sustainable marketing strategies are not always implemented to increase profitability. At least initially, these strategies may involve a compromise, but usually this leads to efficiency and long-term financial performance. However the company's performance may be contingent on support from management, program timing, and resources commitment (Richey et al., 2014).

The purpose of this research is to investigate the availability of decision makers in companies included in the target group to use marketing audit to measure marketing performance as a defining part of the implementation of sustainable marketing.

1. Marketing Audit, performance evaluation tool for marketing the organization

From the perspective of sustainable development organizations, and profit maximization by minimalizing consumption of resources, assessment of effort / effect can also be achieved through the evaluation and control of marketing efficiency and marketing productivity of the organization. The need to obtain competitive advantage forces companies to spend many resources to offer different products than their competitors and to satisfy consumer needs as well. In the context of recent years' orientation towards sustainable development, implementation of a sustainable marketing is imperative.

Marketing audit is thus designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the resources involved, not only in terms of obtaining profit but also in terms of improving and maintaining the organization's image. Marketing audit has become a new trend in managing the business because it can help the various types of companies to review their marketing structures and therefore it can contribute to the streamlining of the overall business and to improving not just marketing but also overall performance of the company (Lipnicki and Dado, 2013).

Marketing audit as a tool for performance evaluation and control of marketing, was introduced in literature in 1977 by Kotler, Gregor and Rogers, and was later followed by other authors with numerous and valuable personal contributions, Brownlie (1996), Parmerlee (2000), Wilson (2002), Baker (2008), who tried to include as well the concept, features, and content of marketing audit.

According to Kotler and Kelly (2009) marketing audit is a periodic, systematic, comprehensive, independent examination of company's marketing environment, objectives, strategies and activities with a view of determining problem areas and opportunities and recommending a plan of action to improve the company's marketing performance. David Parmerlee (2000) introduces the term marketing management audit, considering that it is different from primary sources and secondary research data, marketing audit serving to enhance efforts aimed at obtaining data organization's performance and future perspective through the past and present.

Wilson (2002) defines marketing audit as a self-administered method for identifying and achieving the use of marketing resources. In another approach, marketing audit is a comprehensive assessment of all operational activities of marketing in an organization. It means the systematic evaluation of plans, objectives, strategies, activities and organizational structure as well as marketing staff (Loya, 2011).

The marketing audit can be given the function of a central intelligence activity responsible for collection, synthesis, analysis, interpretation, and recommendation on all major marketing decisions. The system should use all existing information sources and would combine marketing audit procedures in order to set up a complete picture, which implicitly includes recommendations and anticipated results (Vana and Cerna, 2012).

Although the concept of marketing audit was approached in different works, we can not speak in terms of theory and general concept of development tools available for its

implementation in practice, there can be no general presentation on how concrete it can be deployed. There is no consensus regarding the conduct of marketing audit, auditors should appropriately develop their own specific methods, based on the circumstances or using the methods most accessible (Thaghian and Shaw, 2008).

In the marketing audit process, companies mostly use qualitative methods and only a few quantitative (Cheng, 2010). The marketing audit is, for many organizations, a business still relatively new and under-utilized. Beyond the real problems and difficulties in its implementation, some companies' usage of only some of its elements in an unsystematic way contributed to the lack of clarity regarding its wider application (Gama, 2011a).

In terms of content marketing audit, the authors reached a consensus, starting from the point of view of Kotler and Keller (2009), so that marketing audit covers the following components: organization's marketing environment, marketing strategy, organization of marketing, marketing systems, productivity of marketing, and marketing mix.

In organizations geared towards a sustainable marketing, marketing audit is to highlight the performance of actions undertaken, both in terms of profit organization, but especially by the image among consumers and stakeholders. After identifying opportunities and threats in the market, due to the influential factors in the microenvironment and macro-environment, a company will establish the general development strategy and marketing strategy. The starting point is represented by the mission and overall business goals or strategic business unit and marketing objectives. Sustainable marketing requires that both the organization's mission and business objectives reflect the orientation towards sustainable development principles.

Applying sustainable marketing defined as the process of creating, communicating and providing value to customers in a way that both human capital and the natural are subject to the principle of sustainable development (Martin and Schouten, 2012), involves rethinking the decision on the four components of the marketing mix (Charter et al., 2002):

- products and services will be modified, both in terms of raw materials, the possibility of reuse, packaging used, etc., to meet the new requirements of consumer-oriented sustainable development and respecting the legislative directives.

- pricing decisions have the ability to direct the consumer to responsible consumption. Its growth will probably allow lower consumption of certain materials or raw materials etc. The major challenge for the company is the consumer's belief that a higher price or premium is sustainable and resides precisely in the company's reorientation towards the principles of environmental sustainability and environmental preservation.

- the distribution strategies in the context of sustainable marketing is aimed primarily reduce waste streams resulting from the activity of the organization, creating and strengthening distribution channels reverse that take over and eliminate waste generated in all stages of the process through which the product, reducing storage space and storage etc. Therefore, it is necessary to design the distribution channels compatible with the environment.

- efforts of organizations adopting a sustainable marketing cannot be achieved without the development of an efficient communication system with the environment in which it operates, which would generate a favorable influence on consumers and other audiences involved. Communication should not be limited only to provide accurate, clear, credible

sources, but mainly from engaging in a dialogue on the principles of sustainability and their application within the organization, involving all stakeholders.

For effective implementation of a sustainable marketing organization must have information systems, capable of decision-making and effective control enabling it to obtain complete information, real and current on changes in the ambient environment or market, to enable the adoption of the best decisions in line with sustainable development. Any marketing audit aims to also highlight the effectiveness of the marketing, to determine the profitability of different products, markets, regions and distribution channels; the existence of excessive costs for certain marketing activities and the possibility of reducing them (Thaghian and Shaw, 2008).

2. Research methodology

In order to investigate the degree of implementation of sustainable marketing audit within companies in Romania, and to identify the extent to which managers, marketing specialists and sales within these organizations are willing to resort to such practices, exploratory qualitative empirical research was conducted. This technique was based on the investigation method and used the interview guide as its tool. The research was conducted between November 2014 and January 2015, taking into account the specifics of those approaches.

Due to technical, financial, and organizational restrictions there were tackled only 30 services companies (rail, mobile, banking, real estate, IT services or advertising). All have private shareholders, thus aiming at the implementation level marketing audit in environmental sustainability. Having regarded the exploratory nature of this initiative, and that literature reveals no similar research, companies based in the Romanian capital were chosen. Recourse to interviewing staff in the main office decision is justified because it is directly responsible for implementation of all sustainable development approaches and the overall strategy of the company according to these principles.

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, and the fact that general managers and directors of companies are extremely busy people who can hardly be interviewed, the authors conducted an interview guide relatively slim, consisting mainly of predetermined questions with open and closed answers. The sequence matters being investigated in the interview guide has followed the principles of art "funnel", gradually increasing question complexity. After reviewing the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, the interview guide was made with general questions about the company profile or practices and strategies used in the scope of sustainable marketing audit implemented in all processes undertaken.

Starting with the purpose of research on the role of marketing audit performance measurement sustainable marketing activity within Romanian companies the authors have set a number of objectives, namely:

- identify the degree of implementation of sustainable development principles in the general strategy of organizations;
- highlighting the extent to which marketing activities associated audit stalls on sustainable development;

- highlighting the importance of marketing audit in marketing performance measurement of the sustainable development perspective;
- identification of the indicators to be used to meet the objective of marketing audit
- employers perception of the degree to which marketing audit follows the principles of sustainability affairs

Based on the objectives were formulated four hypotheses.

H1. Companies analyzed implement marketing activities principles of sustainability (environmental analysis of market definition, evaluation and control actions undertaken, assessing productivity by strategies designed marketing activities, assess the implementation of sustainable orientation in the product portfolio, organizational performance analysis etc).

H2. Companies closely follow the marketing audit to be consistent with sustainable development. In this regard recourse is had to a series of specific indicators to monitor the market, strategic development, evaluation of competition, the company's processes, customer needs, etc.

H3. Companies correlate sustainable development strategy with marketing strategy. Evaluation of sustainability is achieved through a series of indicators specific marketing audit, such as the environmental performance, social and economic sustainability of the business conducted.

H4. The perception of the employers from the surveyed companies regarding specific practices of marketing audit is positive, realizing they need their proper implementation in order to improve organizational performance. Effective implementation of marketing audit takes place by means of external team of specialists who regularly make recommendations for improvement or improvement of processes and / or activities at the company.

3. Research results

The companies investigated perform activities both on the national and international markets. Thus, 33.33% of them are serving the global market, 40% the national, 6.67% the regional and 20% only the local one. 36.67% of companies have a turnover of less than 2 million lei, 26.67% between 2 and 10 million lei, 30% between 19 and 50 million lei and 6.67% above 50 million lei, a sign that the sample is composed of companies of different sizes.

A first aspect investigated concerns the identification of the existence of an organizational structure in companies capable of implementing various marketing activities, including those in the field of sustainable development. 73.33% of the analyzed companies have a specialized form of a department or a collective marketing. Its main responsibilities relate to the composition of the overall strategy of the company in accordance with the mission, objectives and guidelines of the company (95.45%), to define and implement marketing plan in order to translate practical strategies defined (86.36%) , market research and / or current conduct specific activities and processes within the department (81.81%), the decisions on promotion / marketing communications (72.72%) of all benefits and offers to companies. A less significant impact and significance plays testing of products or

packaging (31.81%), decisions on changing the product portfolio (36.36%), determining the level of benefits realized prices (50%), supplier relationship management (36.36%) and the intermediates (22.72%).

In 77.27% of cases, the department or marketing team performs activities to measure the effectiveness of the company's marketing, including the one guided by the principles of sustainability. In 59% of organizations considering overall performance of sustainability activities implemented in the processing of market. Through the activities specific fundamental strategic orientation sustainable marketing, management of companies seeks to obtain a competitive position on the market / markets approached, respectively the consumers mind. 45.45% of managers believe that the difficulties in implementing sustainable strategies processing markets due to the fact that the activities undertaken are not sufficiently consistent and the assessment and control of their implementation is not always adequate. Based on these results, the authors consider that **hypothesis H1** can be partially accepted, companies still must rewind sufficient appropriate activities to implement the principles of sustainability into their processes.

A second aspect investigated referred to the importance of marketing audit in companies. 49% of managers believe particularly relevant this activity inside their companies, in fact all companies have a marketing department or collectively realizing its importance. According to interviewees, marketing audit should be focused on some specific activities, such as assessing the effectiveness of the organization, analyze its performance, conduct and control activities assessment of the implementation of the marketing strategy, the tracking measure specific aspects of sustainable development have been implemented in the company's activities.

43.33% of the companies investigated periodically review the business, 53.33% of them pursuing consistently evaluating and controlling the implementation of business strategies. 60% of companies engaged in evaluating the effectiveness of marketing activity, while 63.33% analyzes the performance of the organization in the market (s) in which it operates, only 6.66% not performing marketing activities associated audit. It can be observed the care of managers to implement effective audit marketing activities, and overall organizational performance in line with the strategies defined and the principles of sustainability. 76.66% of company managers appreciate that marketing audit is of major importance in their activities, which allows evaluation of organizational results, overall performance, market position, the company and the competitiveness of its benefits, employee efficiency etc. By monitoring these issues closely and effectively it allows for the improvement of the marketing and of course for the proper implementation of marketing strategies in agreement with the principles set.

The research reveals that organizations analyzed initiate a marketing plan audit focused on separate activities, using specific indicators centered on market monitoring, strategic development, evaluation of competition respectively the processes of the company and customer needs. These results allow us to fully accept the **hypothesis H2**.

Marketing audit in organizations investigated is based on a number of specific indicators of evaluation that defines the degree of benefits (products, services, trademarks, rights of use, information) offered to the market. 60% of respondents consider this as the most important companies in the marketing orientation towards development and promotion of competitive benefits, strongly differentiated from those competing. The consequence of such an

approach requires careful assessment and monitoring of the market, consumer cyclical situations, especially direct competition. These indicators allow evaluation of a coherent and effective marketing audit, the company able to provide him a suitable position among its competitors.

Marketing audit is important for 49% of the companies investigated, while the existence of a sustainable development strategy is relevant for 46.66% of the interviewees. How only when the 36.67% of the companies there is a correlation with the marketing strategy of sustainable development, we consider that the future requires a better symbiosis between them to the proper implementation of the strategic objectives of companies.

Companies analyzed attach less importance in implementing marketing audit monitoring indicators consistency in the application of the marketing mix in its own shares respectively to monitoring of best marketing practices sustainable (23.33%). This was mainly due to the fact that often, because of the costs involved and / or insecurity various resources, organizations running only a partial audit of marketing, lack of efficient tools to quantify these effects, and that the company's performance is not conditional considered elements etc.

Marketing audit is also performed by using the indicators of sustainability, 78.6% of the companies investigated by resorting to such action. Of course, the proportion indicators of environmental, social ones respectively the economic differs a lot. 42.8% of companies resort to determine ambient environmental indicators, 57.2% to social sustainability indicators (on organizational culture, employee rights, non-discrimination etc.) and 71.4% for indicators of economic sustainability (consumer value productivity and / or efficiency activities and / or processes can profit etc.). A sustainable marketing audit should include the opinion of 21.42% of the companies and a number of technological and competition monitoring indicators.

The degree of adoption of sustainable development in their strategies is lower, only 46.60% of the companies analyzed by applying the principle of sustainability within them. Moreover, in the case of 36.60% of the company's marketing strategy is linked to the sustainable development. Based on these results only partially accept the **H3 hypothesis** on the correlation between the sustainability strategy and marketing, this checking is only 46.66% of the surveyed companies.

83.33% of the managers who responded to the audit considers that marketing research is an activity beneficial for improving organizational performance, considering half of them effective method to control their activities. 43.33% of people in leadership positions believe that the marketing audit should be conducted annually, 3% every six months, 20% after every marketing action, 26.67% in case of irregularities in the business, and 6.66% for the company's products sales decline.

53.33% of managers believe that marketing audit should be conducted by a team of specialists from outside the company, especially because of its greater objectivity, while 46.67% of managers would choose corporate internal specialists, we I know and are familiar with their work. Marketing audit activity is considered beneficial in improving organizational performance by 83.33% of respondents and a method of control enabling its work half of the people participating in research.

Marketing audit is considered by 47% of managers beneficial and important activity for improving the overall performance of the business, while 32% of them believe that auditing is an effective method to control its own activity. On the other hand 18% of managers appreciate the marketing audit as an enabling tool for managing their employees, while only 3% see marketing audit activity can prevent the development of other activities.

Based on these results we can confirm the **hypothesis H4**, the perception of employers towards marketing audit is generally positive, acknowledging the need to managers to improve organizational performance. The positive image appearance is probably due investigated and efforts makers from marketing companies investigated in implementing a sustainable and adequate measuring marketing efforts through auditing.

Conclusions and recommendations

As results from exploratory research conducted, most companies have a functional organizational structure for marketing, assuming various responsibilities and acting complex of market research, the formulation of marketing strategies, the implementation of promotional campaigns, partner relationship management, suppliers etc. Marketing audit is considered an important tool of evaluation and control of company activity, even if it is comprehensive, covering business analysis, marketing strategy, effectiveness of marketing and organization processes within the company.

Correlated with the these components, marketing audit may concern within companies and competition analysis, market impact of the benefits offered adequate assessment of pricing and / or promotion, respectively orientation towards the sustainable marketing. A strategy for sustainable development was mentioned by less than half of the interviewed specialists, as adoption requires lengthy time and effort. However, emphasis in evaluating the sustainability of the organization is placed on the number of specific indicators, the most important being the economic (value for the consumer, business efficiency), and the less relevant the ambient environmental protection (by providing organic products and adopting distribution and promotion decisions do not affect the environment). These issues require, however, correlated with the size of the organization, its turnover and the market which is acting.

Based on the research results, we also consider necessary to formulate recommendations for increasing the role of marketing audit in Romanian companies, as an important tool for measuring and assessing the performance of marketing organizations. Recourse to such a tool lies in the increased competition in the reference markets and due to changes in the behavior of consumers and society in general, which is increasingly oriented towards sustainable development. This requires of organizations to adopt a sustainable marketing.

The first recommendation concerns the adoption by the Romanian companies, a strategy of sustainable development synergistic implemented across all functions of the organization. Thus it is necessary assumption of sustainable marketing decisions fit to allow specific activities, with focus on research needs, preferences, attitudes and desires of consumers and the development of those skills that will enable them to provide differential benefits to competitors. Such decisions on sustainability marketing actions involving the effective management of all the resources of the organization to limit their consumption and the application of tactics capable of generating a change in consumer behavior toward adoption of sustainable development principles.

A second recommendation concerns the use of an effective tool for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of an organization's marketing efforts through marketing audit.

Adopting a sustainable marketing requires considerable effort from the organization, which should lead to improved company image among target segments, becoming and / or sustainable should become a partner of the customer. The current competitive environment requires the effective use of marketing techniques to achieve objectives. As a result of market segmentation, and to increase consumer demand, reducing profits despite increased investment, the company sees itself in the situation of achieving with greater human, material, financial etc. efforts a greater range of benefits, the distribution of which the market must use a variety of marketing tools (Gama, 2011b).

A third recommendation requires adequate correlation actions, programs, marketing tactics and procedures defined in the strategy followed by the organization principles and its sustainable development strategy. Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2000) believes that to enhance the organization's marketing performance, their managers must consider three main components: adaptability (organization's ability to respond to changes in the competitive environment), effectiveness (extent they are met organizational goals and objectives), efficiency (optimization of the ratio between results and efforts).

The research conducted has, however, some limitations due mainly to the sample size and sampling modality, but given the exploratory research, based on the results will be sketching / develop future studies, able to open a window to the detailed analysis of relations direct of the sustainable development strategy and marketing, and to highlight the role of marketing in the audit market sustainability strategy.

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