

IMPACT OF GREEN MARKETING PRACTICES ON NATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. *In recent decades, the need to protect the natural environment became a repetitive focus of attention of public opinion worldwide. Consumers are increasingly realizing the importance of protecting the environment through product choice while companies are increasingly considering the impact of their activities to the environment. At the same time, the global economic crisis resulted in increased national and international competition, stimulating the use of green marketing practices as a source of strategic competitive advantage, and contributing to an increase in national competitiveness of countries that employed these practices.*

The paper begins with a summary of scholarly literature in the field of green marketing, then offers clarifications on the concepts of organizational and national competitiveness, and defines a set of indicators to assess the results of applying green marketing principles and practices at a national economy level. On this basis, the authors propose an original methodology for calculating the Index of Green Marketing at a country level.

Later, based on the assumption that the degree of implementation of green marketing principles and practices positively influences competitiveness, the authors correlated the Green Marketing Index values calculated for European Union countries with the Global Competitiveness Index values calculated by the World Economic Forum for these countries.

Keywords: *green marketing, national competitiveness, Green Marketing Index, Global Competitiveness Index, European Union*

JEL Classification: M31, Q55.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the need to protect the natural environment became a repetitive focus of attention of public opinion worldwide. The current ecological challenges require managers to formulate strategies that control pollution and preserve the natural resources. Although it is done on a voluntary basis, more and more companies are taking this initiative that became a main strategic approach.

Hence, many industries are adopting green business strategies to ensure sustainable growth by including green principles and practices in their business operation, as they aim for enhanced competitiveness in the markets where they operate.

Thus, the hotel and tourism industries are involved in changing their business towards green hotel and eco-tourism (Graci and Dodds, 2008; Chan, 2013). The agriculture industries respond by producing foods without harming the environment and consumers' health (Pellegrini and Farinello, 2009). The retail outlet is also promoting a green image (Yusof, Musa and Rahman, 2012).

In addition, the concept of purchasing green products became popular as the number of consumers that are willing to purchase goods that are environmentally friendly is significantly increasing. Today, consumers feel the responsibility of the state of the environment more than ever before. Many of these consumers not only pressure companies, but they also have taken personal steps to reduce their personal impact on the environment via activities such as recycling and reusing their household items (Prakash, 2002).

2. The Green Marketing concept

In 1975, the American Marketing Association introduced the term green marketing via a workshop on "Ecological Marketing". Green marketing has also been called environmental marketing, enviropreneurial marketing, ecological marketing, social marketing and

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sustainability marketing. Since then, green marketing has been well recognized as a broader concept by the scientific community and defined in various ways all over the world.

Polonsky (1994) stated that green marketing is a broad concept with three key components: 1) it is a subset of marketing; 2) it evaluates both positive and negative activities; and 3) it examines a range of environmental issues through product modification, changes to the production method and process, packaging and modifying advertising. Sarkar (2012) also agreed that green marketing encompasses a broad range of activities, including product modification, changes to the production process, packaging changes, remodelling and styling, as well as modifying advertising.

The term has also been described as an organization's efforts at designing, promoting, pricing and distributing products that will not harm the environment (Fuller, 1999). Fuller also states that green marketing is the process of planning, implementing and monitoring price developments, promotion and distribution of the product while simultaneously fulfilling all the criteria of satisfying the needs of the customer, achieving company goals and ensuring compatibility of the whole process with the ecosystem. Essentially, it refers to the markets of products that are less toxic than normal, are more durable, contain reusable materials or are made of recyclable materials (Ottman, 1992).

According to Dalhstrom, green marketing is the study of all efforts to consume, produce, distribute, promote, package, and reclaim products in a manner that is sensitive or responsive to ecological concerns. (Nadanyiova, 2014). Grant's definition of green marketing emphasizes its basic attributes which, according to him, are: intuitiveness, integrity, innovation, initiative and awareness (Kim and Pradeep, 2012), although not every activity that meets these attributes is an activity of green marketing.

Chamorro and Bañegil (2006) stated that the objective of green marketing is to lessen the impact on the natural environment during the process of planning and implementations of products or services, price, placing and promotion. Gogolova and Majerova (2014) emphasized that the aim of green marketing is to build long-term oriented relationships with customers that are based on trust. This is achieved by following three main principles: quality, integrity, and honesty.

From the perspective of corporate social responsibility, green marketing is understood as a full orientation of all business processes that have possible negative environmental aspects to a flow of corporate social responsibility. Principles of green marketing allow changing attitudes and values of companies while meeting the customers' requirements and being environmentally friendly (Lee, 2007; Ottman, 2011).

From a managerial perspective, green marketing is the holistic management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying the needs of customers and society in a profitable and sustainable way (Peattie and Crane, 2005). In the managerially oriented studies that dominate the field of green marketing, the focus is on understanding how to accomplish the marketing of green products in an efficient and profitable manner (see also Dahlstrom, Macquet and Richter, 2009; Merilainen, Moisander and Pesonen, 2000).

3. National Competitiveness

Competitiveness-related issues emerged along with transforming buyers' markets into sellers' markets, amid saturation on developed markets, prompting organizations to find ways and formulate strategies that enable them to attract customers and meet their requirements better than the competition.

Expanding economic relations worldwide and creating an international business environment generated a substantial increase of competition manifested among the main actors on the international scene and turned competitiveness into the "*sole true aim - sold, propagated and defended – of the dominant economy in the Northern areas of the planet ... It*

became the priority objective not only for organizations, but also for the state and society as a whole"(Badruş and Rădăceanu, 1999, p. 64).

In particular, **the international competitiveness of an organization** "lies in its ability to increase revenues as a result of increased sales and / or profit margins in markets in which they compete in order to gain better positions or defend the positions they hold "(Bradley, 1995, p. 299).

National organizations gain competitive advantage in the international market when internal buyers are the most sophisticated and most demanding customers in the world for the respective product or service. Local buyers can help national businesses to obtain benefits, if their needs anticipate or even embody those of other nations, in other words, whether their needs are continuous "warning indicators" of global trends of the market (Purcărea and Ioan-Franc, 2001, p. 196).

The competitiveness of a country is the degree to which it can produce goods and services that pass the test of international markets, in line with the real incomes of its citizens. It is the country's ability to stay ahead in terms of technology and trade on those product markets that are expected to have in the future a larger share of consumption and added value in the world (Bradley, 2001, p. 196). Competitiveness is associated with rising living standards, wealth, expanding employment opportunities and the ability of a country to meet its international obligations.

If, in the past, high quality and quality service were key factors in winning the competitive battle, today high quality and good services are deemed self-evident. Companies must learn to compete in more modern ways, including the ability to develop and deliver goods faster, the ability to win through better product design, name, branding, the capacity to improve the offer by proposing more benefits and the ability to build long-term, mutually profitable relationships with customers (Kotler, 2005, p. 49). Thus, more and more companies are using green marketing as means to create a competitive advantage (Han Hsu and Sheu, 2010).

4. Green marketing as a source of competitive advantage

During the 1990s, the argument that greening can act as a source of competitive advantage emerged, from authors such as Elkington, Azzone and Bertele, and Porter and van der Linde (Peattie and Charter, 1992). Obvious examples come from companies such as The Body Shop, who competes on the basis of strong ecoperformance and by tapping into customer demand for greener products.

Taylor, Chuang and Yang (2013) found evidence that various types of companies switch to adopt green philosophies, such as traditional manufacturing companies, and become more profitable after transforming to green manufacturing system. Porter and van der Linde also support the idea that green business is good business. Their argument is that the search for environmentally superior solutions leads to innovation and the creation of more efficient and effective technologies. Their logic is that, even tough environmental legislation (often vigorously opposed by companies) sets new challenges for companies, this legislation also prompts them to be innovative and secure improvements in competitive, as well as environmental, performance.

Chen (2008) highlights the benefits of a green business. Thus, companies focusing on the natural ecological balance in their entire operation are more environmentally friendly while maximizing profits; they reduce environmental pollution, conserve natural resources and protect the environment. They gain a unique competitive advantage and develop new markets as they improve their corporate image, their reputation and their product image from the consumer perspective.

Companies with good records in terms of environmental protection are seen as well managed and visionary. Successful marketing of green goods and services both reduces the consequences of

environmentally non-sustainable business practices and improves organizational performance (Hart & Milstein, 1999; Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004). Therefore, incorporating green marketing principles into business systems creates an enormous potential to obtain sustainable competitive advantage (Nadanyiova, Kicova and Rypakova, 2015, p. 226).

Therefore, companies that include environmental responsibility into daily business practice and decrease their negative impact on the environment will gain competitive advantage in near future. So, for modern companies, the importance of green marketing is indisputable. It is the only way to create the competitive advantage and social commitment. (Majerova, 2015, p. 554).

5. Research methodology

While a number of authors have argued the importance of green marketing as a source of competitive advantage for organizations, scholarly literature doesn't offer studies linking the spread of the principles and practices of green marketing in national organizations with the competitiveness of the national economy as a whole. This is the reason that led us to carry out the following research, assuming that:

H1 - *There is a positive correlation between the degree of implementation of green marketing practices in businesses in a given country and the national competitiveness of the respective country.*

To assess the national competitiveness of a country we used the Global Competitiveness Index (Schwab 2016, p. XIII), calculated by the World Economic Forum based on a complex methodology using data on a variety of factors supporting the competitiveness of a country: infrastructure, public institutions, local market size, level of development of financial markets, labour market efficiency, capacity for innovation and business sophistication.

We chose to conduct our study on the countries of the European Union because, on the one hand, these countries use common methodologies for assessing and reporting practices of green marketing, and on the other hand, all EU countries are included the Global Competitiveness report conducted annually by the World Economic Forum. Therefore we could have real, timely and comparable data.

To assess the implementation of green marketing practices by organizations from EU countries we have identified relevant key indicators, as follows:

- ↳ ***NPE - The number of green products and services*** (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/facts-and-figures.html>) is a relevant indicator because, according to opinion polls, 40% of consumers are demanding green options and are willing to pay a premium price (Young, et al., 2010). On the other hand, despite the great amount of awareness and knowledge on green marketing, the market share of green products is still significantly small, only 4% of consumers buying green products (Bartels and Hoogendam, 2011). So there is a gap between the stated intention of consumers to purchase green products and services and their actual purchase.
- ↳ ***NE – The number of eco-labels. Licensing through eco-labels*** is an indicator that shows the number of "EU Flower" licenses issued in EU countries, granted for products and services with low impact on the environment (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/facts-and-figures.html>). Consumer green marketing awareness is materialized when customers have confidence in eco-labels and eco-brands, which influences their green product purchase behavior (Norazah, 2013; Rahbar and Wahid, 2011).
- ↳ ***NCI – Number of ISO 14001 certificates***. *ISO 14000 certification* provides organizations with practical tools to identify and control their environmental impact, "from conception, design, through supply of raw materials and energy and continuing through the stages of production, distribution, use and post-use, stage in which reuse or return to nature must be ensured" (Dinu, Schileru and Atanase, 2012, p.9). Thus, ISO 14000 certified organizations

adapt their tools and marketing practices according to the requirements of protecting the natural environment (ISO 14000 Europe 2015 available at <http://www.iso.org/iso/survey>).

- ↪ **ER - Renewable energy as a percentage of total energy consumed.** The UN conference in Rio de Janeiro started a global true race to maximize the benefits of renewable energy motivated primarily by environmental degradation (global warming) and the anticipated increases in prices for resources such as coal, oil and gas, which are declining in quantity. In turn, the European Union has set a series of **targets for renewable energy**: 20% of energy from renewable sources by 2020, at least 27% of EU energy from renewable sources by 2030, which is why it is estimated that in the near future, the renewable energy industry will be the most important and powerful economic sector (https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/energy_ro).
- ↪ **RRD - The rate of recycling (including composting).** EU economy uses **16 tonnes of materials per capita annually**. Of these, 6 tonnes become waste, half of them reaching landfills. Many Member States still rely on landfills, even if they are not a sustainable solution. Faced with these challenges, the European Commission asked Member States to recycle 70% of municipal waste and 80% of packaging waste by 2030. It also banned storing recyclable waste in landfills starting from 2025 and set targets for reducing marine, as well as food litter. (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php/Waste_statistics/ro).
- ↪ **EII - Eco-Innovation Index.** According to Chen, Lai and Wen (2006), green innovation can be divided into green products and processes, including the innovation in technologies that are involved in the design of green products, energy saving, waste recycling, and technology to prevent pollution. The Eco-Innovation Index is a Resource Efficiency Indicator based on 16 indicators from eight contributors in five areas: eco-innovation inputs, eco-innovation activities, eco-innovation outputs, environmental outcomes and socio-economic outcomes. It has been chosen for the assessment of the progress towards the objectives and targets of the Europe 2020 flagship initiative on Resource Efficiency (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/DE/t2020_rt200_esmsip.htm).

These indicators have been taken from Eurostat documents for the years 2014-2015. To ensure comparability of primary data, indicator values were normalized using the min-max method, with the following formula:

$$\text{Normalized value} = (\text{Value} - \text{Minimum value}) / (\text{Maximum value} - \text{Minimum value}) \quad (1)$$

On the basis of the six indicators presented above, we calculated the Green Marketing Index for the 28 European Union countries (Table no. 1) using an original methodology and the following calculation:

$$\text{Green Marketing Index} = (\text{NPS} + \text{NEL} + \text{NIC} + \text{RE} + \text{RR} + \text{EII}) / 6 \quad (2)$$

(where, NPS – Number of green products ad services; NEL – Number of eco-labels; NIC – Number of ISO 14001 certificates; RE – Renewable energy as a percentage of total energy consumed; RR – The rate of recycling (including composting); EII – Eco-Innovation Index).

6. Analysis and interpretation of results

Data processing was done in Microsoft Excel using the Data Analysis module. In Table no. 1 we recorded the values of the Green Marketing Index and the normalized values of the Global Competitiveness Index for the 28 member countries of the European Union.

Table no. 1. Ranking of EU countries based on the values of the Green Marketing Index

| Country | Green Marketing Index | Global Competitiveness Index | Normalized Global Competitiveness Index |
|---------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Italy | 0,669000246 | 4,5 | 0,318471338 |
| France | 0,480544643 | 5,2 | 0,76433121 |
| Germany | 0,459851998 | 5,57 | 1 |

| | | | |
|----------------|-------------|------|-------------|
| Sweden | 0,444848791 | 5,53 | 0,974522293 |
| Austria | 0,420029804 | 5,22 | 0,777070064 |
| Denmark | 0,395614644 | 5,35 | 0,859872611 |
| Spain | 0,385760626 | 4,68 | 0,433121019 |
| United Kingdom | 0,378414283 | 5,49 | 0,949044586 |
| Finland | 0,372096285 | 5,44 | 0,917197452 |
| Netherlands | 0,255231147 | 5,57 | 1 |
| Ireland | 0,254195456 | 5,18 | 0,751592357 |
| Slovenia | 0,252285504 | 4,39 | 0,248407643 |
| Belgium | 0,250514127 | 5,25 | 0,796178344 |
| Portugal | 0,240783146 | 4,48 | 0,305732484 |
| Estonia | 0,226609361 | 4,78 | 0,496815287 |
| Luxembourg | 0,226216945 | 5,2 | 0,76433121 |
| Romania | 0,199496565 | 4,3 | 0,191082803 |
| Latvia | 0,196881159 | 4,45 | 0,286624204 |
| Czech Republic | 0,192098206 | 4,72 | 0,458598726 |
| Lithuania | 0,158282868 | 4,6 | 0,382165605 |
| Hungary | 0,152108943 | 4,2 | 0,127388535 |
| Croatia | 0,151865217 | 4,15 | 0,095541401 |
| Poland | 0,138887431 | 4,56 | 0,356687898 |
| Greece | 0,127043355 | 4 | 0 |
| Bulgaria | 0,125266283 | 4,44 | 0,280254777 |
| Slovakia | 0,106035059 | 4,28 | 0,178343949 |
| Cyprus | 0,084751562 | 4,04 | 0,025477707 |
| Malta | 0,053129441 | 4,52 | 0,331210191 |

We tested the hypothesis using the statistical correlation and regression methods. The statistical correlation result is shown in Table no. 2. The value of **0.591428** of the correlation, greater than 0.5, demonstrates that there is a positive correlation between the analysed factors.

Table no. 2. The results of the statistical correlation between the Green Marketing Index and the Global Competitiveness Index

| | Column 1 | Column 2 |
|----------|-----------------|----------|
| Column 1 | | 1 |
| Column 2 | 0.591428 | 1 |

Therefore, the H1 hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between the degree of implementation of green marketing practices in business activity in a country and that country's national competitiveness is validated through the statistical correlation method.

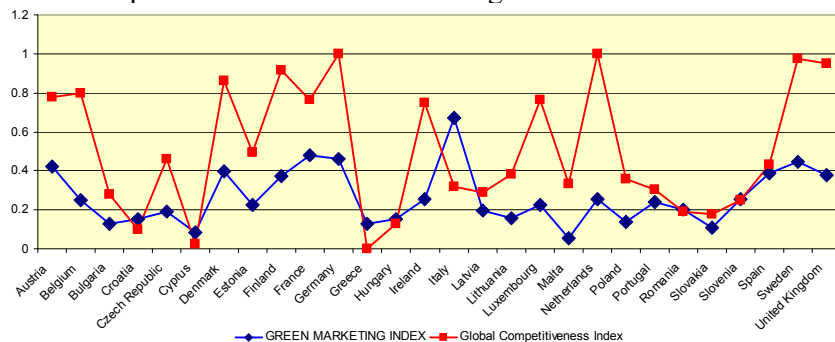


Figure no. 1 Correlogram between the Green Marketing Index and the Global Competitiveness Index
Applying the regression method required the development of a regression model, as follows:

$$NGCI_i = b_0 + b_1 \cdot GMI_i \quad (3)$$

(NGCI = Normalized Global Competitiveness Index; GMI = Green Marketing Index; i = EU states, from 1 to 28).

The results of the regression are shown in Table no. 3.

The multiple correlation coefficient of 0.57740 indicates a moderate link between the Normalized Global Competitiveness Index and the Green Marketing Index. The coefficient of determination - R-square - has a value of 0.33339 and expresses the fact that 33.3% of the Normalized Global Competitiveness Index variation can be explained by the application of green marketing practices in the examined countries. The adjusted correlation ratio shows that 0.30673 of the total variance is due to the regression line, taking into account the number of degrees of freedom. The F test shows the role of the independent variables in explaining the evolution of the dependent variable. The F test value (12.50325) and the materiality threshold (0.00161 <0.05) show that the regression model is valid and can be used to analyse the dependence between variables.

The free term of the regression equation is $b_0 = 0.15522$ and the point where all explanatory variables are 0. This coefficient has a standard error of 0.10885. The coefficient of the GMI variable is 1.30443, a positive value that indicates a direct link between GMI and NGCI, so that an increase of one unit of GMI increases the NGCI with 1.30443 points. Because the P-value = 0.00161 <0.05, the coefficient is significant.

Table no. 3 The results of the regression method

| <i>Regression Statistics</i> | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Multiple R | 0.57740 | | | | | | | |
| R Square | 0.33339 | | | | | | | |
| Adjusted R Square | 0.30673 | | | | | | | |
| Standard Error | 0.27290 | | | | | | | |
| Observations | 27 | | | | | | | |

| ANOVA | | | | | | | |
|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------------------|--|--|
| | <i>df</i> | <i>SS</i> | <i>MS</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Significance F</i> | | |
| Regression | 1 | 0.93115 | 0.93115 | 12.50325 | 0.00161 | | |
| Residual | 25 | 1.86181 | 0.07447 | | | | |
| Total | 26 | 2.79296 | | | | | |

| | <i>Coefficients</i> | <i>Standard Error</i> | <i>t Stat</i> | <i>P-value</i> | <i>Lower 95%</i> | <i>Upper 95%</i> | <i>Lower 95.0%</i> | <i>Upper 95.0%</i> |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Intercept | 0.15522 | 0.10885 | 1.42604 | 0.16623 | -0.06895 | 0.37939 | -0.06895 | 0.37939 |
| 0.4200298 | 1.30443 | 0.36890 | 3.53599 | 0.00161 | 0.54467 | 2.06420 | 0.54467 | 2.06420 |

7. Conclusions

The results of the research carried out for the EU member states show that, in the current economic, social and ecological conditions, organizations that integrate a concern for the natural environment in their current marketing practices can transform marketing activity into a source of strategic competitive advantage contributing to an increase of the overall competitiveness of the national economy in which they function.

In the future, the research could be extended across multiple states, to the extent that comparable data can be obtained. Also, the relevance of the Green Marketing Index could be considerably enhanced if its determinants would include several indicators, such as an index of green behavior of use and consumption or an indicator that assesses green practices in the advertising market.

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