MEDIA HABITS AND COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *The link between media habits and the formation of an ideal view of sustainable development (SD) is poorly researched in scientific literature. Based on an empirical study among 229 Bulgarians, this report examines the role of different media channels in the formation of consumer expectations and assessments about the role of the four actors in achieving SD: the State, Business, Society, and the Individual. The results show that there exist relations between media habits and expectations' formation, whereas such links are not expressed in assessing achievements in terms of SD.*

Keywords*: sustainable development, media habits, actors of sustainable development, expectations, assessments*

1. INTRODUCTION

Just like every idea, from a marketing point of view, the concept of sustainable development can be seen as a product. As with any other product, the realization of this concept depends directly on the mix of incentives used to gain wider popularity, attract support, and ultimately bring together a sufficient number of people and institutions to make it true. Though for the realization of the sustainable development concept it is of utmost importance how it is communicated to target audiences and it is the effectiveness of this communication what may or may not transform it into a successful product.

In Marketing there are developed a number of methods, metrics, and techniques to measure the effectiveness of communications during campaign planning and execution. In contrast to market organizations, where the return on money invested in advertising and communications is explored in detail, when it comes to the market of ideas, this assessment is more difficult due to the lack of monetization from the implementation of the idea. At the same time, marketing budgets for ideas, and in particular those related to sustainable development, do not fall short of those of commercial products. For example, in Bulgaria the amount of 2,410,042.00 BGN, 85% of which provided by the European Regional Development Fund, was spent only for a year under the project "Activities related to the promotion of OPE in the implementation of the National Communication Strategy 2014-2020 during the period 2017 – 2018" [1]. This amount is equal to the annual budget for online advertising of beer, strong alcoholic beverages, food supplements, oral medications and chocolates taken together [2]. However, are the financial resources invested in the realization of sustainable development ideas effectively used?

Media is believed to shape public debate in terms of setting agendas and focusing public interest on particular subjects [3]. When it comes to fostering sustainable development it can be an

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effective instrument for environmental behavioural change [4, 5], sustainable and green buying behaviour [6, 7] for example. An important point, however, is to study media habits with regard to the communication channels that people use to inform about sustainable development ideas and issues. This report links the demographic profile of respondents with the media channels they commonly use. Another point of analysis are the links between existing expectations of solving environmental problems, social inequality and sustainable resource management on the one hand and on the other the communication channels used to gather information on these topics. The media habits of Bulgarian consumers are investigated. There is also analysed the impact of different media channels on the formation of opinions regarding the importance of different factors and roles for achieving sustainability and the assessment of respondents on the current state of sustainable development.

2. METHODOLOGY

The rationale behind this paper focuses on three main questions: 1) what are the media habits of respondents; 2) how are they aligned to their demographic and behavioural characteristics and 3) do they influence their perceptions of the role and the effectiveness of the main players for achieving sustainability. Media habits are examined regarding the preferred communication channels used by respondents to inform about ideas and problems of sustainable development. There are used five distinct categories: mass media, social media, social networks, institutions and NGO's. The mass media category comprises the traditional media channels such as television, radio and press. Social media stands for platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. where consumers generate content themselves and share it among their audiences. Social networks designate the network of personal and professional contacts (family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances) where information is constantly being transmitted. The institutions as a media channel, however, encompass all kind of communication channels used officially by governmental and local authorities to communicate their politics. The same applies to the NGO's category.

The range of demographic characteristics examined here comprises common categories such as age, gender, level of education, family status and residence. The behavioural characteristics of interest are the level of satisfaction with personal income which might be informative in terms of trigger for civil activism, the sensitivity to social problems as self-reported by the respondents and prior acts of active citizenship such as volunteering, participation in protests and donating to NGO's in the past 3 years.

Respondents' perceptions of the role and the effectiveness of the main players for achieving sustainability are measured using a dual scale that focuses on the importance and the effectiveness of the State, the Business and the Society and Individuals when it comes to their actions to foster sustainable economic growth, environmental protection and social equality. The scale is originally developed in [8] for measuring the gap between the ideal view of sustainable development and its perceived current state. The scale comprises 46 statements measuring the importance of the main players for sustainable development which are mirrored by another 46 statements reflecting their effectiveness. The statements are divided in groups to form the following three zones of sustainability: socio-economic equity, resources viability and bearable living conditions.

The research instrument used to address the research problems is a questionnaire distributed online among Bulgarian population. The total number of respondents is 229. The sample comprises people representing varied age groups (less than 18 to over 65), different educational

background and diverse behavioural characteristics with regard to sustainable practices (active to passive). The data obtained are analyzed through descriptive statistical methods, hypothesis testing and correlation analysis. There are tested the existing relationships between respondents' demographic and behavioural characteristics and their media habits as well as the link between preferred sources of information and perceptions of the role and effectiveness of the main players for sustainable development. This allows for the evaluation of the influence of different media channels to the formation of views and assessments regarding sustainable development.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first research task is to tests the existence of links between demographics (such as gender, age, place of residence, etc.) and behavioral characteristics (such as sensitivity to social problems, participation in protests and donations, etc.) and the usual communication channels used by the respondents to keep informed about social and / or environmental issues (Table 1). Links between demographic and behavioral characteristics and the use of media channels are tested by conducting a correlation analysis using Pearson's coefficient.

Table 1: Media Habits and Demography

Media habits / Demography	Common sources of information for social problems				
	Massmedia	Social Media	Social Networks	Institutions	NGO's
Gender	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s
Education	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s
Residence	n/s	n/s	n/s	.208*	n/s
Age group	n/s	.319**	n/s	n/s	n/s
Satisfaction with personal income	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s	.259**
Sensitivity to social problmes	n/s	n/s	n/s	.267*	.394*
Volunteering experience	n/s	n/s	n/s	.170*	.207*
Participation in protests	.159*	n/s	n/s	.144*	n/s
Donations to NGO's	n/s	n/s	n/s	n/s	.273*

*The r coefficient is significant at ,01
**The r coefficient is significant at ,05

No statistically significant links are found between the demographics and the social networks as a communication channel. Regarding mass media and social media, there are found two existing links. The first is between the prior experience in civil protests and the mass media. Within the specificity of the Bulgarian reality this dependence can be explained by the fact that protests against the actions of governmental and municipal authorities when they miss to defend public interests (regarding protected areas and biodiversity for example) are common and these always have an important place on the newspapers and electronic media. As can be seen from Table 1, however, this relationship is weak because the correlation coefficient has a value of only 0.159. The second link – between the age and the role of social media - has a correlation coefficient of 0.319, whose value is at the boundary between a weak and a moderate strength. This is also understandable because the use of social media in Bulgaria is more closely related to the profile of young people than to older people.

The other two channels - institutions and non-governmental organizations - draw a different picture. The number of existing links is significantly higher - four for the institutions and

another four for non-governmental organizations. However, these links are weak to moderate (the correlation coefficients range from 0.144 to 0.394), and they are only between the corresponding communication channel and some behavioral characteristics of the respondents.

On the basis of the analysis, two specifics of the examined situation for Bulgarian consumers can be identified. Firstly, the demographic and behavioral characteristics of respondents do not determine the preference of traditional media channels and social media as a source of information on social and environmental issues. On the other hand, the role of behavioral characteristics, albeit weak, can be considered as influential to the choice of institutions and non-governmental organizations as a source of information on these issues.

Table 2: Media Habits and the Gap between Importance of Sustainability Factors and Their Assessment

Zones of sustainability / Common information sources for social problems	Number of statistically significant relations found							
	Socio-economic equity		Resources viability		Bearable living conditions		Total	
	importance	assessment	importance	assessment	importance	assessment	importance	assessment
Massmedia	7	0	10	1	4	2	21	3
Social Media	0	3	1	0	0	6	1	9
Social Networks	0	2	2	2	0	0	2	4
Institutions	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
NGO's	1	3	1	2	0	5	2	10
Total	9	8	15	5	4	13	28	26

In the second part of the study, a total of 610 χ^2 tests are conducted to check whether there exist any links between the media habits of the respondents and their subjective perceptions about the gap between the importance of sustainability factors and the assessment of their current state in Bulgaria. As a result a total of 54 significant relations are found where the Phi and Cramer's V coefficients occupy values falling within the range from weak and moderate strength (Table 2). The greatest number of links is observed between the use of mass media as a channel for gathering information on social and environmental issues and the subjective judgments about the importance of different factors related to sustainable development - a total of 21. At the same time, however, it is remarkable that there are only three links between the use of this media channel and the assessment of the current state of these factors. There is reverse dependence on social media. Only one connection is found with the importance of these factors, while with their assessment the links are nine. A similar correlation is observed for the other three media channels, with the only exception being between institutions and sustainability assessments, where no link is found. As with the first group of analyzed variables, the correlation coefficient values here show the presence of a relationship that is on the border with the moderate. In interpreting these results, however, the following conclusion can be drawn: Traditional media is much more influential on people's perceptions of the importance of individual factors that influence sustainable development while people do not trust television, the radio and the press in shaping their assessments to what extent this sustainability has been achieved. At the same time, although they do not directly influence the formation of the perceived importance of sustainability factors, social media, social networks and non-governmental organizations have a much greater impact on people's assessments of the extent to which this sustainability has been achieved. This phenomenon can also be explained by the continuously declining confidence in traditional and social media globally. According to the 2018 Elderman Trust Barometer nearly 7 in 10 worry about false information or fake news being used as a weapon and 59% believe that media are preoccupied to support ideologies instead of informing the public [9].

On the basis of the analysis made, several recommendations can also be drawn regarding the realization of the concept of sustainable development, considered as an intangible product. When planning the communication mix with audiences similar to the Bulgarian (to its demographic and behavioral characteristics), it is advisable to use the traditional media channels such as radio, television and the press to promote the importance of social and environmental issues. Since the assessment of the extent to which goals related to sustainability are achieved is of great importance as well (with regard to motivation to participate in all processes of the realization of ideas), analyzes and assessments of the results achieved should be communicated not through mass media, but through media channels where people generate and disseminate information by themselves such as their social networks and through non-governmental organizations involved in these processes. Otherwise, the use of mass media would have a reverse effect and instead of attracting new people to the realization of sustainability ideas would push them back.

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