

**BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES**

**FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND TOURISM**

**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, CONSUMER SCIENCES AND QUALITY  
MANAGEMENT**

# **HABILITATION THESIS**

## **SUSTAINABILITY APPROACHES FROM THE BUSINESS AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR PERSPECTIVE**

**Field: Business Administration**

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## Abstract

Today, sustainability in business is a topic of utmost relevance and significance, reflecting significant changes in the economic, social and environmental landscape. Several aspects underscore the timeliness of this theme. In the context of increasing concerns related to climate change, environmental degradation, and social inequalities, organisations are becoming increasingly aware of the need to adopt sustainable practices to meet global expectations. Consumers are increasingly aware of the impact of their decisions on the environment and seek to support responsible businesses. Consequently, companies are motivated to adjust their practices to meet this demand. Government authorities and international organisations are implementing and revising regulations and standards regarding sustainability in business. Adherence to these standards becomes crucial for organisations to maintain compliance and avoid sanctions. Technological advancements provide new opportunities for sustainable innovations in business processes, resource management, and the development of products with a reduced carbon footprint. The pandemic has highlighted vulnerabilities in global systems and increased the need for resilient, sustainable, and socially responsible business practices. Companies are increasingly engaged in global communities and sustainable business networks, collaborating to address complex issues related to the environment and society.

The relevance of the sustainability theme in business reflects significant changes in societal perceptions and requirements, coupled with pressures from the global business environment and the need to build sustainable and responsible organisations. This theme aims to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of sustainability practices in the business environment on consumer behaviour and to identify potential barriers or incentives to adopt a more sustainable approach in both domains.

Thus, this enabling thesis, titled **Approaches to Sustainability from the Business and Consumer Behaviour Perspective**, presents research results related to identifying key sustainability-orientated business strategies. It also explores how the advancement of science and technology has influenced consumer behaviour in the context of socioeconomic, political, and environmental pressures to pursue sustainability.

The thesis structure includes, alongside the abstract, lists of tables and figures included in the work, the most significant scientific achievements in the field of the proposed topic, emphasising compliance with the minimum standards required for habilitation, the plan for academic career development, and the bibliographic references investigated to underpin one's scientific research.

The thematic content of *Section I*, reflecting contributions both in theoretical and practical applicative terms, is organised into two distinct domains, in accordance with the author's concerns throughout her academic career.

Within the first domain, **Business Strategies for Sustainable Development, a holistic approach to a sustainable supply chain** is presented. Understanding the processes of digital transformation in business in the context of complex global competition is essential for developing effective business models and decisions. The emergence of social networks has led to major changes in how retailers conduct their day-to-day profession, especially as they provide platforms for business development and brand improvement. In the article by *Vasiliu, C., Felea, M., Albastroiu Nastase, I., Bucur, M. and Istrate-Scradeanu, A., 2023. Exploring the Advantages of Using Social Media in the Romanian Retail Sector. Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research, 18(3), pp.1431–1445. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer18030072>*, aspects related to research on retailers' perceptions of social networks are presented. These perceptions are limited and fragmented, which justifies the increasing focus of researchers and practitioners on this subject. This study employed a quantitative research design to identify the advantages of social networks perceived by Romanian retailers.

Sustainable development is becoming increasingly important in shaping development policies. The economic sector, due to its involvement in business, is viewed as a tool capable of generating social welfare through the conservation of resources. Retail is part of this process, playing a crucial role due to the connection it provides between producers and consumers. In the article *Coca, V., Dobrea, M., Vasiliu, C., 2013. Towards a Sustainable Development of Retailing in Romania. Amfiteatru Economic, 15(Special no. 7), pp. 583-602* the status of retail in Romania is highlighted in relation to the expansion of the presence of major international groups and the manifestation of the global economic crisis. The objectives of this research refer to measuring the efficiency of the major players in the retail sector in our country, with the aim of identifying sustainable practices in retail companies in Romania.

A pioneering work in Romania is the following article: *Vasiliu, C., Dobrea, M., 2013. State of Implementation of Supply Chain Management in Companies in Romania. Amfiteatru*

*Economic*, 15(33), pp. 44-55. This scientific work succeeded in providing an insightful portrayal, based on in-depth research, of what modern commerce represents in Romania. The aim of this study was to assess the level of development of supply chain management in Romanian companies. The targeted results, in creating a supply chain that can transform into sources of competitive advantage, relate to cost, quality, speed, and flexibility, while the differentiation sources are based on agility, adaptability, and alignment. Common elements that support the creation of a supply chain and serve as determinants of its management include human resources, information technology, integration, and communication. The article highlighted the progress made with the introduction of supply chain management concepts in Romanian companies and the achieved development directions. In doing so, we presume that the practical importance of SCM is acknowledged in the business environment in Romania.

Another concern regarding the ongoing transformations that businesses undergo, whether due to technological innovation, sustainability practices, various crises (financial crisis, Covid-19), the war in Ukraine, accompanied by changes in country-specific regulations or those imposed by the pressures of climate change or globalisation, is encapsulated in the work by *Cohen-Tzedec, B., Bucur, M., Mairescu, I.G. and Bumbac, R., 2023. Factors Impacting SMES' Business Sustainability Post-COVID-19 in Bucharest, Romania, from the Perspective of Resilience. In: R. Pamfilie, V. Dinu, C. Vasiliu, D. Pleșea, L. Tăchiciu eds. 2023. 9th BASIQ International Conference on New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption. Constanța, Romania, 8-10 June 2023. Bucharest: ASE, pp. 480-486.* Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) regularly face various issues that require an up-to-date assessment of their business, especially when threats are unpredictable. The objective of the article is to identify the level of resilience reflected in the corporate sustainability of SMEs in Bucharest, aiming to consolidate the factors that bring organisational success.

The business administration theme in the commercial sector is approached both from a theoretical and practical perspective in the book: *Vasiliu, C., Dobrea, M., Managementul operațiunilor în comerț, ASE Publishing House, 2014, 281 p., ISBN 978-606-505-840-8.* Awarded in 2014 for its scientific impact with the second prize from the Association of Romanian Faculties of Economics (AFER), the work is structured into 8 chapters and provides an analysis of operations management within trading companies.

The rapid development of technologies shapes how companies approach and understand customers' needs, including the increasingly urgent call for sustainability. ***The role of social media in business development*** is highlighted by investigating the attitudes and practices of companies regarding the use of social networks and IoT wearable devices in

developing organisational marketing strategies in the article: *Maiorescu Irina, Bucur Mihaela, Georgescu Bogdan, Moise Daniel, Strat Vasile Alecsandru, Zgură Ion Daniel, 2020. Social Media and IOT Wearables in Developing Marketing Strategies. Do SMEs Differ From Large Enterprises?, Sustainability, 12(18), article no. 7292.* The research conclusions underscored that wearable IoT technologies have a very low level of engagement at the company level, as well as in informing marketing decisions and strategies. On the other hand, social media is perceived as a powerful tool that helps companies better understand their customers and market trends, which are vital aspects when constructing a marketing strategy.

The candidate's concerns regarding coaching, recognised as a major management tool and particularly as a knowledge management tool, are supported by articles and research in this field. Given that **coaching** is increasingly accepted as a means of individual development, allowing, on the one hand, the enhancement of managerial performance, and, on the other hand, increasing competitiveness between corporations, it is seen **as a pillar of business performance growth**. The article: *Dobrea, M. and Maiorescu, I., 2015. Entrepreneurial Outcomes and Organisational Performance Through Business Coaching. Amfiteatru Economic, 17(38), pp. 247-260,* aims to answer the question of whether organisational performance is directly or indirectly improved by business coaching. Through the systematic evaluation of the impact of business coaching on certain factors (the role of business coaches, focus during the coaching period, satisfaction and business coaching, business coaching outcomes), and the level of entrepreneurs' trust (two variables: locus of control, self-efficacy), the development of the organisation is demonstrated in terms of financial performance. Interest in this field was expressed by the candidate from the early stages of her academic career, participating as a postdoctoral researcher in the project *Excellence in Scientific, Interdisciplinary Doctoral and Postdoctoral Research in the Economic, Social, and Medical Fields - EXCELIS*, contributing to the research project titled *Research on modelling business coaching relationships in knowledge-based society*. In the book titled *Business Coaching, published by Noua Publishing House, 2015, p. 186, ISBN 978-606-596-124-1,* author Mihaela Dobrea addresses the theme of business coaching both theoretically and in a practical manner, supported by examples from the business environment.

The second area of interest of the author pertains to **sustainable consumer behaviour**. **The determinants in the development of sustainable behaviour** highlighted in research and published articles refer to social media and new technologies, arguing the continuous changes occurring in the business environment to which both consumers and entrepreneurs are subject. In the article: *Dinu, V.; Bucur, M; Enache, C; Fratiloiu, B; Cohen-*

Tzedec, B; Vasiliu, C., 2022. *European Consumer Trust as a Driving Force of Mobile Commerce*, *TRANSFORMATIONS IN BUSINESS & ECONOMICS*, 21(2A), pp.419-434, trust and the experience of European consumers are presented as encouraging elements for mobile commerce. Both technological development and the spread of SARS-CoV-2 have led to a disruption of traditional commerce, consequently resulting in a global increase in e-commerce, and thus mobile commerce, altering the nature of business. The continuous growth of mobile commerce in pandemic times has compelled companies to reconsider their potential in terms of sales and consumers.

The Internet of Things (IoT) is a novel concept that designates a connected network of people, processes, data, and things that together are capable of achieving more relevant and valuable outcomes. In this context, IoT can bring significant improvements across all economic and social sectors, as well as at personal (consumers, households) and professional (companies and other organizations) levels. The development of theoretical models related to technology acceptance (TAM) allows for the efficient implementation of an information system, i.e., a technology for understanding user-consumer behaviour. The aim of the article: *Felea, M.A., Bucur, M., Negrutiu, C., Nitu, M. and Stoica, DA., 2021. Wearable Technology Adoption Among Romanian Students: A Structural Model Based on TAM (Technology Acceptance Model)*, *Amfiteatru Economic*, 23(57), pp.376-391. DOI10.24818/EA/2021/57/376, is to analyse the adoption of wearable technology among Romanian students. The article proposes a structural model based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), to which two additional variables have been added: perceived joy and visual attractiveness (in addition to perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, behavioural intention, and actual usage).

The use of multiple channels through which young people can make purchases of IT&C products was the starting point for identifying students' preferences for companies employing multichannel distribution strategies for this product category in the article: *Cristinel Vasiliu, Mihai Felea, Irina Albăstroiu, and Mihaela Dobrea, 2016. Exploring Multi-Channel Shopping Behavior Towards It & C Products, Based on Business Students Opinions*. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 18(41), pp.184-198. The study results indicate that the use of multiple channels leads to visiting traditional stores for actual purchases and reduces consumer loyalty to a specific retailer.

In the current context, the importance of sustainability is increasingly emphasised in all fields of activity. ***Education for sustainable behaviour*** provided by higher education is vital in the global strategy for the sustainable transformation of society, as education shapes social and professional behaviours, with a direct and long-term impact on society and the

environment. These aspects related to education for sustainable behaviour were addressed in the article: *Maiorescu, I., Sabou, G.C., Bucur, M., and Zota, R.D., 2020. Sustainability Barriers and Motivations in Higher Education – A Students' Perspective. Amfiteatru Economic, 22(54), pp. 362-375.* The research investigates how the barriers identified in the literature are perceived by students, as well as their attitudes and motivations for engaging in sustainable actions. Understanding these barriers, as well as the motivational characteristics of students, is an important part of planning the sustainable transformation of faculty. The information obtained is useful not only for improving the content of subjects in study programmes but also for initiating sustainable actions that have real chances of support and participation from students.

Another perspective on *sustainability education* focusses on the education of the Romanian consumer towards a sustainable diet and is addressed in the article: *Lelia Voinea, Dorin Vicențiu Popescu, Mihaela Bucur, Teodor Mihai Negrea, Răzvan Dina, Calcedonia Enache, Reshaping the Traditional Pattern of Food Consumption in Romania through the Integration of Sustainable Diet Principles. A Qualitative Study. Sustainability (Impact Factor 2,576), Volume 12(14), Special Special Issue Environment, Food and Public Health 1050; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12145826>, WOS:000555869700001.* Currently, sustainability has become a challenge not only for food producers but also for consumers. There is a clear need to reshape the Romanian cultural model of food consumption by integrating the principles of sustainable nutrition. The research team's initiative to redesign the traditional Romanian food consumption model was based on the healthy eating model promoted by the current Romanian Food Guidelines.

Among the greatest challenges facing the world today is access to food and distribution of already available food, along with ensuring sustainable food production in a world constantly changing with acute global issues. The article: *Magdalena Bobe, Roxana Procopie, Mihaela Bucur, 2019. Exploring the Role of Individual Food Security in the Assessment of Population's Food Safety, Amfiteatru economic, vol. 21, no. 51, pp. 347-360* highlight these shifts from the global to the individual level, from physical and economic access to basic foods to social access to diverse, nutritious and safe foods, to achieve individual food and nutritional security. Nutrition education and information programmes, as part of sustainability-orientated education, must promote healthy diets and lifestyles, creating opportunities for behavioural changes while considering individual preferences, lifestyles, and cultural values, ultimately leading to an improved standard of living.

**Section II** of the thesis encompasses *the plan for academic career development*, presenting relevant aspects related to professional activity (studies and stages in teaching),

*scientific contribution* (most relevant books, articles, scientific communications, and research projects), *professional prestige* (membership in professional organisations and associations), as well as *the main career development directions*.

**Section III** of the thesis includes numerous bibliographic sources covering the extensive issues of business administration from the sustainability perspective, being valuable for both educational activities and the theoretical foundation of specialised works (books, articles, scientific communications). Many of these sources are recent foreign publications, indicating the candidate's commitment to scientific novelty in this field.