

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OR LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINT?

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Abstract: *This article presents the issue of protecting and preserving the natural environment as a fundamental element in sustainable economic development, given that the entire economic, social and human activity takes place in the natural environment. The article also raises the question of reconsidering the environment as an important factor that influences economic activity. Is this action of protecting the environment considered a social responsibility of companies, of public power, of society, or is it the result of legal constraints of environmental legislation implementation? The article tries to answer this question using marketing research findings. These marketing research studies had as a theme the study application of ecologic marketing by managers in their businesses, environmental compliance and their view on social responsibility in terms of protecting the environment.*

Key words: *environmental protection, ecology, renewable resources, pollution, social responsibility.*

1. Introduction

Ecology, environmental protection, pollution, renewable resources are concepts frequently used by children, adults, older people and by governmental or non-governmental organizations. All use these terms in different conversations, conferences or formal speeches, presenting themselves as environmentalists or pretending to be protectors of the environment. But do they know what exactly environmental protection means?

Protecting the environment is extremely important today for both our generation and for future generations. Irresponsible behaviour towards nature endangers our lives on this planet. [8]

Excessive consumption of natural

resources and the increase in the world population have led to a drastic reduction of natural resources or even to their total disappearance, but also contributed to the production of large amounts of waste that cannot be removed easily.

By reducing consumption of natural resources, reducing waste, reusing and recycling current use objects and complying with environmental standards, the entire population of the planet has the opportunity to help create a beautiful and safe planet for all who live here.

But environmental protection does not only refer to reducing the consumption of natural resources, but also to reducing air, water and soil pollution and protecting animals and plants etc.

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2. The natural environment

Great discoveries and transformations of humanity in the 20th century have produced major effects on life.

Due to the unprecedented growth of world population and the development of all industries, raw materials and energy resources used to produce goods fell significantly.

Following "wild" and indiscriminate use of natural resources, a clear environmental imbalance has ensued.

This environmental imbalance has also been triggered by high energy consumption due to the development of science and technology. [15]

All this has led to the increase in the amount of waste that affects the environment.

To protect the environment, elements should be considered such as the rational use of natural resources and protection of natural factors, the global use of clean production technology and the incorporation of devices in means of transport, in polluting facilities and equipment that eliminate the harmful effects on the environment. [16]

To ensure survival and social progress, society has to completely eliminate the negative effects of human activities that harm the environment.

Human actions, such as pollution and excessive consumption of renewable resources, have contributed to the destruction of the planetary ecosystem. Finally, these drew the attention of policy-makers worldwide, so that environmental protection has become a major global issue. [15]

Protecting the environment has become the main focus of activity of international organizations established on this occasion. These organizations try to find and adopt solutions to address pollution and increase environmental quality.

In their work to protect the environment,

international environmental organizations seek to achieve an effective regulatory system for complying with the environmental legislation, for identifying financial resources necessary to eliminate pollution and protect the environment, and also for creating programs to protect the environment on the long term, to be applied both nationally and internationally. [18]

Big polluters are developed and developing countries. These countries are the major conflicts of the pollution problem.

Also environmental protection costs are very high and the funds used by countries for environmental protection vary depending on the level of development. [8]

A very important factor that harms the environment and pollutes it alongside the other factors mentioned above is individual behaviour. Individual daily activities or tourism activities pollute and destroy the natural environment.

Finally, we conclude that the development of human activity has produced a more or less severe damage on environmental components.

3. Social responsibility or legal coercion

If we mean business, we think about the social responsibility of a company. Does this organization care about the environment, are business objectives green?

Social responsibility of companies, among others, aims to raise awareness of the current situation, to adopt clean technologies and establish actions that implement these technologies. Companies must be attentive to all the activities they do. [22]

If we consider the population, we refer to education on environmental protection, but also to the way that it preserves and protects natural resources and the environment.

Social responsibility is aimed at both people and organizations that must work together and be proactive for the good of all beneficiaries.

A firm that adopts responsible environmental behaviour ensures its long-term success. In the fierce competition, consumers can choose the products of environmental responsible companies because they are involved in achieving long-term social welfare.

For a company it is not easy to be socially responsible. It should set out the obligations, liabilities, relationships between business and society, to find out the demands of society and forecast long-term effects of their decisions.

Companies have varying degrees of social responsibility, according to the strategy chosen, by firm size, its objectives etc. But first, and unfortunately, social responsibility is considered at a minimum by some companies and this because of mandatory environmental legislation. [21]

Generally, Romanian firms do not fully realize the importance of social responsibility and that is why they do not assume it. Usually, they deny responsibility when an environmental problem occurs, but try to minimize its negative impact.

In some cases, companies assume responsibility for their actions forced by legal consequences.

Hardly any Romanian companies fully assume responsibility for their actions and solve problems without being threatened by legal intervention. [20]

Social responsibility undertaken only at declarative level by Romanian companies, government and non-governmental organizations is a counterproductive and destructive activity for both the environment and the society.

Environmental legislation exists, there are controls on environmental legislation compliance, and there is a requirement that every company has to have an environmental responsible department depending on company size. [19]

However, environmental protection is achieved at minimum level, legal

obligations being adopted at the minimum level required by law.

4. Case Study

Research on attitudes, opinions and behaviour of managers of local companies as regards the application of green marketing in the business

At the end of a qualitative research study followed by a quantitative research one on the behaviour, attitudes and opinions of local companies as regards the application of green marketing by managers in their firms, several interesting conclusions were drawn on the perception and approach on environmental issues, the environmental protection through actions taken by companies (application of a green marketing mix, implementation of environmental legislation, social responsibility etc). [5]

The qualitative research was conducted by means of in-depth semi-directive interviews and was based on a survey with a representative sample of the studied population.

The qualitative research findings show that the majority of the sample said the social responsibility for environment and human health is a necessity, considering that preventive and proactive attitudes are the best, and agreeing that there is a need to respect and comply with legislation at least.

Most respondents consider adopting green marketing as a social responsibility.

The majority says that the reason in favour is that environmental marketing is a necessity and the reasons against are the represented by the costs involved and the lack of environmental education, both of managers and consumers.

From the strategic perspective, most subjects agree that green marketing involves long-term advantages and brings a positive image of the company.

Regarding the adoption of green marketing in terms of social responsibility,

the majority of respondents consider that it is a necessity.

Also, respondents believe that environmental protection is “*a social responsibility*” of each enterprise and the expression they use is “*compliance with the law*”. Very few aim to exceed standards. Everyone agrees that preventive action “*is needed*” and that by applying green marketing, environmental compliance and environmental advantages extend on the long term, but they also create “*additional costs*”.

However, respondents are dissatisfied with the environmental legislation they must comply with, which they consider burdensome, ambiguous, changing and not offering any solution to companies.

Regarding the adoption of green marketing in terms of social responsibility, the expression used by managers is that “*it is a necessity*”, and that “*multinational firms are thinking environmentally and socially responsible*”.

Quantitative research complements the data obtained during the qualitative research.

Thus, all subjects interviewed indicated that they have knowledge of environmental legislation and that, in most cases, this legislation applies, to a certain extent, large or small. Environmental legislation enforcement depends on the size of the firm and their activity.

When they were asked how important is to reduce environmental protection, resource consumption and the negative impact of business activities on the environment and human health, most responses fell in the category “*it is important*”.

A significant percentage of the respondents considered that the main reason for applying environmental legislation is “*legal constraints*” and the second category of responses is that the application of environmental legislation “*is a necessity*”.

Also, the reason why environmental law is not applied in firms is that it involves high costs, is burdensome, ambiguous, constantly changing, and companies are not interested in environmental protection; another reason is the lack of education of both consumers and managers.

Regarding measures, proposals and strategies chosen by firms to improve, streamline their business in order to protect the environment and human health are: to reduce consumption of natural resources (31.9%), to reduce the impact of business activity (33.5% of responses), to recycle of products and packaging (34.5%).

In conclusion, managers mostly know and apply the environmental law, which is considered important for the environment and human health, as well as social responsibility, but the compliance with regulations is due primarily legislative constraints. [5]

Whether social responsibility remains declarative or is practiced, there are many companies that have adopted it.

4. Conclusions

Many companies, generally large ones and multinational companies have adopted a new model of doing business and they consider social responsibility in relation with customers and the influence on environment.

Multinational companies are increasingly involved in social responsibility; many of them incorporate social responsibility in their long-term strategies.

Romanian companies usually engage in social and environmental projects on the short term, considering that a social responsibility strategy on the long-term would be too costly for the company.

The main reason that companies become more responsible is mounting pressure from customers and the public.

Also, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media are pressuring

companies to reduce environmental impact. Adopting social responsibility by companies creates a positive image.

Companies that adopt CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) are actively involved in social issues, the environment and have close cooperation with NGOs.

Also, consumers have a very important role in social responsibility because they can largely influence the development of the company. Most Romanian consumers do not perceive companies as socially responsible. And customer behaviour has nothing to do with social responsibility when they buy products. It can be said that for many Romanian companies, adopting CSR is only a short-term business tactics to bring high profit with minimal effort.

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