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**Article**

## New trends in sustainable business and consumption

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# New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption

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Sustainable development is one of the central concepts of the contemporary global economy, being essential for balancing the economic, social and environmental needs of society. Globally, this has taken shape through the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which provide a roadmap for the transition to a more responsible economy. In this context, business and consumption models have undergone profound changes dictated by the increasingly stringent requirements to reduce environmental impact and support communities.

A key theoretical foundation for sustainable business practices is the concept of the triple bottom line, which broadens the purpose of business operations to include not only profit but also social and environmental performance. This framework highlights the importance of balancing social responsibility, environmental preservation, and economic growth. Over time, this perspective has redefined the understanding of business success, encouraging companies to adopt more ethical practices, engage with communities, and maintain transparency in reporting their social and environmental impacts.

The circular economy is a central concept that promotes changing the product life cycle by reducing waste, reusing materials, and recycling resources. Unlike the traditional linear approach of production and consumption, the circular economy aims to keep resources valuable for as long as possible. This approach contributes to reducing carbon emissions and protecting ecosystems. As sustainable businesses increasingly adopt this model, consumers are encouraged to follow responsible consumption practices.

In addition to the ecological dimension, sustainable businesses also integrate the principles of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Companies are expected to take an active role in the development of local communities, promoting equity and diversity and guaranteeing decent working conditions. Consumers, in turn, are becoming increasingly demanding of companies' transparency and accountability, supporting products and services that reflect these values.

In this issue of the journal we have 19 articles on different topics of interest, as follows:

The paper "*Shaping Europe's digital and sustainable future: analysis of the digital economy and society index in the pre- and post-pandemic period*" investigates the digital transformation of the European Union member states, highlighting the link between digitization, economic growth and sustainability initiatives. The study performs a comparative analysis between the period before and after the pandemic, using the DESI index to explore the correlations between digitization, GDP/ capita and human resources in science and technology.

The article "*Artificial intelligence and the future of work - A sustainable development perspective*" explores the impact of emerging artificial intelligence (AI) technologies on the

labor market, focusing on the interdependencies between AI and Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth. The study looks at how the use of AI can help or hinder the accomplishment of decent work, offering a nuanced perspective on the changes brought about by AI in EU member states.

The relationship between economic cycles and the use of renewable energy in EU member states is examined in the paper *"Analysing the effects of the business cycle on renewable energy consumption and sustainable development: evidence from EU countries"*. The research findings, which make use of a panel regression model, demonstrate how political stability, regulatory quality, GDP dynamics, and government efficiency all have a substantial impact on the use of renewable energy.

The study *"Human-Robot interaction: the hospitality experience of young people in hotels that use robots"* investigates how young visitors' views of hospitality are impacted by the usage of robots. By extending a well-established paradigm from the hotel sector, the study also examines how technology affects customer experience overall and looks at how robots affect it. The research offers a substantial addition by adding robot fear as a significant variable and illustrating how it influences the perception of hotels as welcome and comfortable through the use of structural equation modelling and an online survey.

The use of digital marketing tactics in the promotion of domestic tourism spots is vital in drawing a substantial influx of tourists. The article *"Applying digital marketing strategies for promoting tourist areas in Romania in the digital era"* focusses into the ways that digital marketing and contemporary technology may assist in the advancement of domestic tourism in this regard. The study suggests creative ways to draw tourists, enhancing cultural identity and promoting sustainable regional development through the use of social media and content marketing.

The study *"The role of the informal economy in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Europe"* examines into the ways in which the informal sector contributes to and hinders the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's sustainability objectives. In order to create a synthetic indicator that captures the effect of the informal economy on sustainable performance across 36 European nations, the paper employs PLS regression. Studies reveal that although the informal economy might help reduce poverty temporarily, it presents serious obstacles to long-term sustainability, especially when it comes to formal employment and environmental conservation.

The tourism sector has changed dramatically in the last few decades, going from being merely about seeing new locations to becoming a multifaceted experience that incorporates a variety of elements and activities. Culinary tourism is one of the areas of this tourist experience that has grown in significance. The impact of culinary nostalgia on travel selections is examined in the paper *"Does culinary nostalgia shape touristic behaviour?"* with a particular focus on how food experiences affect travel preferences. By using quantitative methodologies, the research sheds light on the psychological elements that influence the behaviour of tourists. The results highlight how the choice of culinary locations is strongly influenced by socialisation, destination attractiveness, and culinary nostalgia, all of which support sustainable tourism.

The study *"The trend towards sustainable train travel among the young generation Z: market analysis in Romania"* investigates young people's preferences for rail transport in light of sustainability. This research looks at how comfort, predictability, and sustainability affect travel choices using an integrative approach. The study offers suggestions for Romanian

governmental decision-makers and transportation operators, which significantly advances our understanding of this generation's pro-sustainable behaviour.

With an emphasis on the educational advantages of virtual reality (VR), the study *"Virtual front and educational impact: virtual reality effects in war tourism"* looks at how the usage of VR in war tourism affects travellers' aspirations to adopt this technology. The research shows that social influence, effort and performance expectations, and enabling environments have a substantial impact on the intention to use virtual reality (VR), with educational benefits acting as a crucial mediator. This is done by using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology.

In the context of the increasing importance of renewable energy, Romanian tourism is starting to adopt sustainable practices to reduce the impact on the environment. The paper *"Sustainability implementation in Romanian tourism: from the Paris agreement to Electric Up"* analyses how the Electric Up program contributes to the transition to renewable energy sources in the tourism industry. The study correlates data on program beneficiaries, tourist arrivals and energy consumption, highlighting the positive impact of solar energy use on tourism attractiveness and the local economy.

Considering the significant role of the mass media in shaping public perceptions, the study *"The influence of mass media on tourist behavior of people living in a country bordering war"* examines the effect of news about the conflict in Ukraine on the travel decisions of Romanian tourists. Based on a survey of a sample of 1,036 people, the research investigates how media-induced panic influences conflict avoidance behaviour, showing that although tourists manage their panic, they choose safer destinations.

Europe's increasing regional inequalities are a key concern, especially in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The article *"Regional SDG performance in Bulgaria and Romania: poverty, education, and decent work"* focuses on three critical SDGs—poverty reduction, quality education, and decent work, offering a detailed comparison between the two countries. Using TOPSIS analysis, the study ranks NUTS2 regions, highlighting significant differences and providing recommendations for policymakers to address these gaps. The results show the need for targeted regional actions to reduce disparities in SDG outcomes between Bulgaria and Romania.

In the context of growing global concerns about the sustainability of food systems, the paper *"Bibliometric analysis of sustainable food systems"* provides a detailed look at the development of this research field. The study analyzes 708 publications from the Scopus database using bibliometric analysis and the VOSviewer tool, highlighting key themes and trends in sustainable food systems. It notes a significant increase in academic interest since 2008, focusing on the importance of food safety, consumer behavior, and technological advancements in promoting sustainable food practices.

The paper *"AI Chatbots: fast tracking sustainability report analysis for enhanced decision making"* explores the use of AI chatbots to accelerate the analysis of financial and sustainability reports as part of the digital transformation and AI integration in organizations. It details the development of a ChatGPT-based chatbot that quickly collects and analyzes relevant data from companies' sustainability reports to support financial decision-making. Research shows that this technology is effective in streamlining business processes and increasing productivity.

The study *"Size of government and economic growth: a convergence analysis of former Soviet Union countries from 1991 to 2018"* examines the effect of government size on economic growth in 14 post-Soviet countries. Using the club convergence method, the study identifies three groups of nations based on GDP per capita and two groups that converge in terms of government spending. The research provides insights into the institutional and economic changes in these countries, highlighting the importance of social justice, institutional stability, and economic efficiency for sustainable growth

*"Digital capabilities as mediators: fostering managerial and sustainable capabilities among digital users and providers"* is an article that focusses into how digital capabilities can help firms become more sustainable and managerially strong. The PLS-SEM model is used in the study, which examined 204 European companies as a sample, to show that only digital businesses that include sustainability into their business model can be considered "greener". At the same time, digital capabilities play an essential mediating role, facilitating the development of managerial and sustainable skills, especially for digital suppliers.

The paper *"Could assortment rationalization help reduce food waste in grocery stores?"* analyses the link between the size of the product assortment and the level of food waste in retail. To help reduce food waste, the authors emphasize the importance of streamlining product assortments, especially for perishable goods such as fruits and vegetables. This study fills a gap in the literature and contributes to our understanding of how food retail chains in developed countries can improve sustainability through better inventory management.

The study *"How do different product categories involve the retailer's assortment management strategies? The case of the U.S."* examines how product categories influence consumer reactions to the range of products offered by stores. Through an online experiment with a large sample of US consumers, the research shows that both the size and composition of the assortment must be tailored according to the specifics of each product category, thus providing important insights for retail strategies.

In the context of the vulnerability of tourist villages to external shocks, the paper *"Assessing the resilience of rural tourism in Indonesia during and after the COVID-19 pandemic using the MULTIMOORA method"* analyses the recovery capacity of 24 rural tourist destinations affected by the pandemic. Using the MULTIMOORA method, the study highlights the fact that, although the first effects of the pandemic were significant, most tourist villages demonstrated strong resilience and a quick recovery capacity, providing valuable information for the development of sustainable rural tourism.

This special issue offers an integrated perspective of these dimensions in a dynamic setting, making it a valuable resource for scholars, academics, business, and anyone else interested in these concepts. In conclusion, emerging trends in the sphere of sustainable business and consumption reflect a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive and green economy. Businesses that adopt sustainable practices not only contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, but also strengthen their position in ever-changing global markets, thus responding to a growing demand from conscious and responsible consumers.

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