

# Sustainability in the Activity of the Retailers in Romania

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**Abstract:** *In this paper, “Sustainability in the Activity of the Retailers in Romania”, we aim to study the measures and actions taken by three retailers in order to have a sustainable activity, that is, all the processes that have led to a sustainable company and implicitly, to a sustainable society and environment. Moreover, we bring into discussion the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the Agenda 2030, which is the perfect context for both retailers and this study, as well as the connection between communication and digital media in this situation. In this study, we want to analyse the GRI reports published on the websites of Profi, Lidl and Kaufland. The reports are made in accordance with the GRI and we want to identify the common points used by the three retailers in order to make a relevant quantitative research based on the sustainable elements identified in the reports, such as the measures taken by the retailers in order to fight pollution, to reduce the use of plastic or food waste and so on. In order to do a relevant research, we administered an online questionnaire to all the possible clients (both women and men) of these retailers. The questionnaire has 15 main questions and its purpose is to find out the level of awareness when it comes to the measures that concern the concept of sustainability, as seen in the supermarkets by the clients.*

**Keywords:** sustainability, GRI reports, website, digital media, communication

## 1. Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to evidence the importance of sustainability nowadays, when we face changes in nature due to climate change and also a lot of negative effects caused by pollution and the use of plastic in a global world. Globalization is a good thing because we, as a society, need to develop, but in order to achieve our goals we also need a balance - the balance between nature and our actions. We use natural resources in order to evolve but these resources are not going to be here forever. In this context, we chose the retail area for this research because they use a lot of resources through their activities, but they can also reach a lot of people, irrespective of age or social status. They can provide sustainability and they can teach sustainability by using digital media in order to communicate with their clients. They can provide the key to a sustainable country or even to a sustainable world in the context of Web 2.0.

## 2. Research method

**Comparative analysis:** the object of this research involves three retailers (Profi, Lidl and Kaufland). These retailers have something in common, the GRI reports for sustainability. We performed a comparative analysis on the three reports in order to identify the measures taken by the companies in order to improve their impact on the environment and to see which are the practices used in the supermarkets that can be also observed by their clients. In order to identify the common points, we took the following aspects into account:

- the use of the Internet to communicate with the community;
- the actions taken to improve or to reduce the energy used in their activity;
- the presence of recycling programs;
- the use of plastic;

- the actions taken to prevent food waste;
- the approached communication style through the Internet and the social media;
- the products that come from a sustainable source;
- the approached GRI standards;
- the measures taken concerning local supplies;
- the presentation of the report.

In light of the above, we performed a comparative analysis of the retailers' sustainability reports, in order to identify the most important elements, the common points, and also those points that differentiate them, in order to find out what can still be done and to highlight what the companies report and what can be seen by clients in the supermarkets.

We took into consideration only the common points found in the reports, so that we could do further research.

According to the website of the European Union, "sustainable development aims to meet the needs of present generations without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It provides a comprehensive approach bringing together economic, social and environmental considerations in ways that mutually reinforce each other."([https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-approach-sustainable-development\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/international-strategies/sustainable-development-goals/eu-approach-sustainable-development_en) accessed on 08.06.2020).

**Quantitative analysis:** Here we use the questionnaire as an investigative tool. We created a questionnaire with 15 questions, which was administered to around 60 people through the online platform Isondaje. The first questions in the questionnaire are more general, in order to find out whether the clients know the concepts of sustainability and CSR, while the following questions are more direct and specific, so that the clients may respond and choose from several given examples. The aim of this analysis is to find out what the clients notice about the sustainable measures in the supermarkets in contrast to what the retailers report in the GRI reports.

### 3. Results

After the analysis of the reports, it can be concluded that all the three retailers (Profi, Lidl and Kaufland) have somehow the same orientations and objectives when it comes to the measures and actions concerning the sustainability process. In fact, even though they share the same objectives and somehow the same actions, such as reducing the plastic used in product packaging, installing a LED lighting system in order to reduce the energy used or even better, using digital media to communicate in a very sustainable manner with the clients, some retailers have still have to do more in this area of action. There is a very good connection between what they promote and inform online and the actions seen in the supermarkets. For example, Lidl has built a huge online community with more than 2 million people on Facebook (<https://www.lidl.ro/ro/cataloage/raport-de-sustenabilitate-2019/view/flyer/page/72>).

The answers to the questionnaire have led to the conclusion that, while most of the clients are familiar with the concepts of sustainability and CSR, their knowledge of these two concepts is rather vague.

When the respondents were asked how important it is if the products in the supermarket come from a sustainable source, on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means – very important and 5 means – totally unimportant, the opinions were split; however, most of the clients do not really find it important (Fig 1.). This means that there is still room for more actions that have to be taken.

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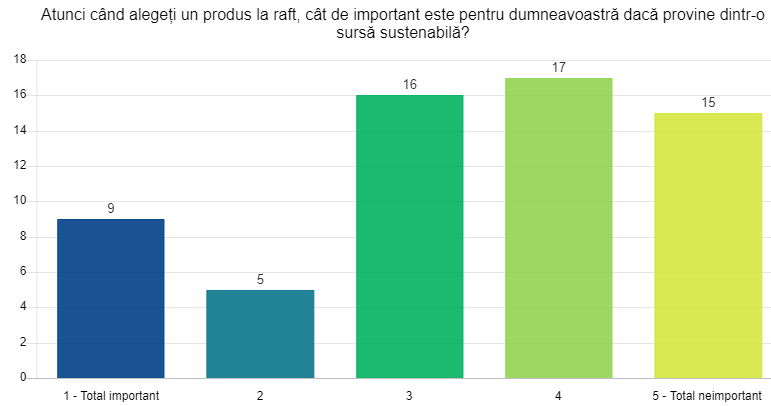


Fig. 1

In what concerns the question about the importance of an annual report done by the retailers, 37 respondents think it is very important, whereas 15, important (Fig.2). The same result was received when the clients were asked if they thought that the retailers could change the actual status in the context of global warming by taking serious measures. Most of the respondents think that it is very important.

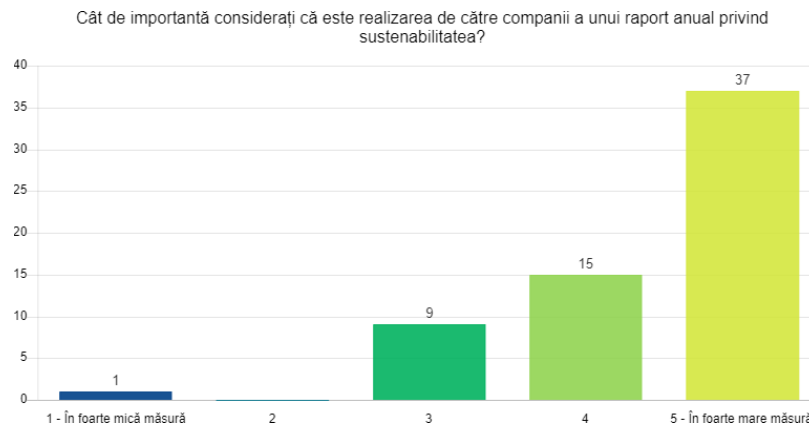


Fig. 2

To conclude, we definitely think that the concept of sustainability and the GRI reports are very important to the activity of the retailers and we also believe that at the same time, the retailers can make a change and that this change can be made through education and communication. Digital media and communication are of utmost importance, because we need to step forward towards a world where everything can be done without harming the environment.

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