



# Sustainability and sustainable development

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Editor



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## CONSUMPTION AS THE SUBJECT OF MARKET RESEARCH



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**Abstract:** One of the most important areas of market research is on consumer behaviour and attitudes regarding various aspects of sustainable consumption. Consumer behaviour is understood as activities related to the entire consumption cycle of products from various sectors, which allow the consumer to function and achieve personal goals. They, at the same time, also they allow to achieve satisfaction and well-being, taking short- and long-term effects as well as individual and social consequences into account (Antonides & van Raaij, 1999).

Within the context of the cited definition, a survey of household rubbish may be very interesting and useful. Such research is not of a declarative nature, but is based on products consumed actually. They can provide extensive information on consumption trends, including, for example, the amount and type of products consumed or food waste. Another example of market research in the context of sustainable consumption is research on products harmful to health, e.g. cigarettes.

The main goal of the chapter is to present 2 unusual examples of market research conducted by various entities: journalists and a research agency. Therefore, the structure of the chapter covers two examples:

1. Garbology as an example of market research in SD—how to learn more about consumers and consumption.
2. Cigarette consumption.

**Keywords:** cigarettes, garbology, market research, sustainable consumption.

## 2.1. Is it possible to conduct consumption research on the basis of garbage?

Garbage tells us a lot about consumption—about consumers, entire societies and even economies. It provides information on household size, age of its members, income, lifestyle, health condition, spending habits, inhabitants' behaviour (if garbage is clean, sorted, how carefully sorted, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

Tannin analysis, which originated in anthropological research, is not yet been a very popular method of conducting marketing research. As W. Pessel points out, in the USA, since the mid-1970s, garbology (from the science of garbage) has been included in archeology (*What does garbage say about us*, 2020), but it is also similar to sociology.

Rubbish (e.g. of celebrities, households) can be a “subject of research” not only for detectives or economists, but also journalists. An example is research conducted by 2 journalists from the French periodical “Paris Match”—Bruno Mouron and Pascal Rostain. They spent several decades rummaging in the garbage of famous French and Americans and displaying them “on elegant black velvet like expensive jewelry”, while, at the same time, making people who view these photos think about their own garbage for even just a moment.

In 2004, they even organised an exhibition in New York for the first time, entitled “Star Trash”, selling photos at it for 6,000 dollars apiece. These types of exhibitions are the peculiar result of research on the culture of consumption, enabling a better understanding of society—they show the waste of those whose lifestyle the average American, and not only him/her, wants to imitate. In addition to New York, the photos were shown, among others, in Paris, Moscow, Singapore, Geneva, Taiwan and Miami.

After “researching” celebrity rubbish, in the second phase, journalists began to photograph the garbage of anonymous inhabitants of the world, trying to find out what they want to hide from the world, and calling the project a “photographic studio of globalisation”. They carried out their research, i.e., in Qatar, Singapore, China, Russia, Switzerland, France, Malawi, Algeria, Fakarava in Polynesia, Marie-Galante in the Antilles, Japan and Mauritius. They reached out to “average” families and looked at their garbage throughout the week.

Journalists noticed, among others: huge differences in the area of garbage between the rich and the poor. In some countries, especially in poorer ones (e.g. Haiti), there was no paper, packaging or food leftovers in trash cans.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the publication: (Rostain & Mouron, 2021).

## Questions / tasks

1. How can marketing managers use household garbage analysis?
2. How can such methods as IDI, observation, be used in garbage research? Who could use the results of such research?
3. Is the research presented as a case study in the area of SD? What were the goals of companies commissioning such research?
4. What are the limitations/drawbacks of research carried out by Almares? What problems could this agency have had with the research? How else could this type of research be carried out?

### 2.2. Consumption of cigarettes as a subject of market research

There are product categories in sustainable consumption research that are controversial in themselves, such as cigarettes or alcohol. This controversy stems from the fact that the consumption of such products can cause enormous negative social effects—it can lead to many diseases, or even death. Cigarettes, in particular, regardless of the opinion of addicted smokers, are objectively a very controversial product and their production, sale and consumption certainly do not help to achieve goal No. 3 contained in the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals>), and that reads: “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”.

So can cigarette consumption become more sustainable? Smoking cigarettes is a harmful, negatively perceived habit. Can we expect, however, that the tobacco industry will be liquidated for the sake of sustainable development, including health care? Due to the strong lobby of cigarette producers, the job positions they create, and huge tax revenues, this industry is still very strong. On the other hand, many governments have launched regulations obligated manufacturers to finance educational campaigns about the negative effects of smoking. Also, due to growing taxes on cigarettes—they have become more expensive to many users, and owing to that—less accessible. It is expected that both solutions decrease the level of consumption of that products. But since this business is an attractive area for criminal circles, e.g. in the form of cigarette smuggling or tax avoidance, which generates the existence of illegal businesses, often operating on an international scale, still, a huge part of the population smokes cigarettes.

As S. Smyczek (2016) points out, “(...) consumers systematically treat phenomena that were recently considered unfavorable or even pathological more and

more liberally”. It happens that consumers not only fall into excessive shopaholism, but still often buy and consume products that are counterfeit or products from illegal sources, e.g. smuggling or theft. They explain their behaviour, for example, by the fact that thanks to their purchases, someone can feed their family, they compare their “sinful” purchases with the even worse—in their opinion—behaviour of others, e.g. “I buy fake/pirated/stolen products, but big concerns/the state/government want to rob me”, indicating that they do it because “everyone does it”, or they perceive the company as an organisation large enough that no specific person will suffer from the actions of a single consumer (Fullerton & Neale, 2011; Vitell, 2003).

Research on cigarette consumption, including the pathological aspects related to them, but also consumer protection, is carried out by various entities. Two examples of research conducted by the Almares research agency commissioned by the National Association of the Tobacco Industry and tobacco concerns as well as by the Polish Consumer Federation are presented below.

### **Example No. 1<sup>2</sup>**

At the request of the National Association of the Tobacco Industry and tobacco concerns, the research company Instytut Doradztwa i Badań Rynku—Almares [Eng. Institute of Consulting and Market Research] conducted a study on the shadow economy regarding the tobacco product market.

The research methodology consisted of random collection from streets and public bins and city sample quotas proportional to the population. The research lasted 1 month, and was carried out by a total 70 cities (40 largest cities and 30 smaller towns), target main samples: 34,000 packs and cigarette waste.

The research allowed to show that in 2011, the shadow market for cigarettes in Poland accounted for 15.4% of the total tobacco product market (i.e. 8–9 billion cigarettes, 80% of which came from behind the eastern border, mainly Belarus, Ukraine, Russia). It should be added that most of these types of cigarettes (as much as 43%) are purchased by the inhabitants of eastern Poland (from the Warmian-Masurian, Podlasie and Lublin provinces). At the end of 2018, the shadow economy of illegal cigarettes in Poland accounted for 11.3%.

### **Example No. 2<sup>3</sup>**

The Consumer Federation conducted a survey on the use of e-cigarettes. The anonymous questionnaire was completed by 1,165 people, including 52.62% of smokers and 47.38% of non-smokers. The aim of the study was to create the basis for starting

<sup>2</sup> Based on (*Poland market survey...*, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Based on (*Raport z badania ankietowego...* [Eng. Report from a survey study], 2014).

a debate on the legislative regulation of issues related to e-cigarettes, as well as to prepare information and education activities aimed at consumers. Therefore, in the study, the following issues were addressed:

- 1) the role of e-cigarettes in reducing the negative effects of smoking;
- 2) the level of consumer knowledge about this type of product;
- 3) legal regulation of the rules on which e-cigarettes should operate, expected by consumers.

In the research conducted by the Polish Consumer Federation, it has been shown that consumers, among others:

- perceive e-cigarettes as a product similar to traditional tobacco products but, at the same time, such goods may, in the opinion of most of them, be an effective tool to combat addiction to conventional cigarettes;
- have a low level of knowledge about e-cigarettes, and the vast majority have not come across any results of clinical trials on this type of product;
- have doubts about the safety of e-cigarettes and their impact on the functioning of the human body;
- believe that the sale of e-cigarettes should be prohibited for people below the age of 18;
- rather support the possibility of extending the prohibitions related to the use of this type of product in public spaces.

## Questions / tasks

1. What are the limitations/drawbacks of the research carried out by the Almares research company? What problems could this agency have had with the research? How else could this type of research be carried out?
2. Evaluate the sample selection in the research conducted by the Polish Consumer Federation. Do you agree with the research results obtained in this area? How can these results be applied in the pursuit of sustainable consumption, including the achievement of Goal 3—“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”?
3. Could research on cigarette smoking be carried out among minors? What ethical aspects in conducting such research should then be taken into account? What specific issues could such research concern? Find examples of such research.
4. Discuss whether this theme of research is conducted for achieving SD goals?

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