

THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS AMPLIFIED BY THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS ARE POSITIVELY IMPACTING THE TRANSITION TO GREEN ECONOMY? CASE STUDY OF ENTITIES LISTED AT BSE

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Rezumat. Pentru a putea să își desfășoare activitatea și să respecte în același timp măsurile de restricție impuse de guvernele lumii cu scopul de a limita răspândirea noului coronavirus, entitățile economice și-au testat capacitatea de reziliență și au fost nevoite să se adapteze și să utilizeze tot mai mult tehnologia digitală. Fie că erau pregătite sau nu în acest scop, se pare că pandemia cauzată de noul coronavirus a amplificat procesul de digitalizare. În acest context, scopul lucrării noastre este de a identifica dacă transformările digitale au impactat și durabilitatea și tranziția către o economie verde. Eșantionul nostru este format din entitățile listate la BVB ce au publicat rapoartele anuale în perioada 2019-2021. Astfel, cu ajutorul programului NVivo, am extras cuvintele cheie ce se regăsesc în European Green Deal. Apoi, cu ajutorul programului RapidMiner am putut analiza rapoartele anuale publicate în cei trei ani pentru a identifica, în baza cuvintelor cheie selectate, inițiativele verzi întreprinse de entitățile ce formează eșantionul nostru. Rezultatele reflectă faptul că, în timpuri pandemice, rapoartele anuale prezintă informația tot mai succint, iar rezultatele financiare mai slabe sunt cosmetizate prin focusarea pe aspectele pozitive întreprinse, precum eforturile demarate în sfera dezvoltării durabile.

Abstract. In order to be able to carry out their activity and at the same time comply with the restriction measures imposed by the governments of the world with the aim of limiting the spread of the novel coronavirus, economic entities tested their resilience and adaptability, using much more the digital technology. Whether they were prepared for this purpose or not, it seems that the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus has amplified the digitization process. In this context, the purpose of our study is to identify whether digital transformations have impacted sustainability and the transition to a green economy. Our sample consists of the entities listed at the Bucharest Stock Exchange (BSE) that published their annual reports in the period 2019-2021. Thus, with the help of the NVivo program, we extracted the keywords found in the European Green Deal. Then, with the help of the RapidMiner program, we were able to analyze the annual reports published in the three years to identify, based on the selected keywords, the green initiatives undertaken by the entities from our sample. The results reflect the fact that, in

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pandemic times, annual reports present information more and more succinctly, and weaker financial results are embellished by focusing on the positive aspects undertaken, such as the efforts started in the sphere of sustainable development.

Keywords: Digital transformations, Digitalization, Green economy, BSE.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.56082/annalsarscieng.2023.1.42>

1. Introduction

The non-financial reporting of entities tends to become a tool more and more importantly, financial information no longer being the only criterion in substantiating investment decisions. Thus, non-financial reporting reflects the social impact and transparency of companies, being at the same time a mean of promotion and communication with the external environment. However, in order for the sustainability report not to present only the positive elements, and the negative ones to be cosmeticized, the field of CSR was reformed by the Directive 95/2014/EU which imposed the reporting obligation and conditions.

However, it seems that it is quite difficult to transmit the weaker results in the public environment, especially in the context of a health crisis that has affected the economic environment to a very large extent. The pandemic caused by the „novel coronavirus" forced the entities to look for solutions to carry out their activity, while respecting, at the same time, the imposed restriction measures necessary to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Thus, the crisis accelerated processes that had been started for a long time, but which progressed at a slower pace, such as automation and digitization. The recent studies [1] undertaken highlighted the fact that the main impediments in the implementation of digital technologies to improve and facilitate the transition to a green economy were represented by the lack of knowledge and understanding of the processes but also by the culture organizational, reluctant to change. Extensive analyzes carried out [2] highlighted the fact that corporate digital transformation has a greater effect on innovation in the green economy sphere within large firms. However, in order to adapt to the new „normal", most companies, not just the big ones, were forced to reorient themselves and adopt solutions to work remotely, thus amplifying the digitization process. But this process was not an easy one, it involved substantial costs both in terms of logistics and in terms of training human resources. Practice has shown us, however, that in pandemic times, the elaborated reports tend to present the information more succinctly and in a more ambiguous tone [3] and the weaker results to be embellished by focusing on the positive aspects undertaken [4]. But is sustainability a topic of interest even in times of crisis, used in order to mask weaker financial results? Are companies able to facilitate, even in this context, the transition to a circular economy? Has the pandemic crisis and the acceleration of the digitization process had a positive impact in the sphere of sustainable development?
