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Market Intelligence Precursors for the Entrepreneurial Resilience Approach: The Case of the Romanian Eco-Label Product Retailers

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Abstract: The entrepreneurial resilience of eco-label product retailers emphasises their adaptive capability for renewal after the economic crisis. This paper explores the resilience of the market intelligence techniques adopted by the eco-label product retailers in order to contribute to sustainable development of this market in Romania. The research, conducted on a sample of Romanian retailers of eco-label products, analyses the main sources for gathering data about their competitors, the reasons for monitoring the strategic options of their competitors and the specific market intelligence techniques employed within the entrepreneurial resilience approach, aiming to overcome the negative crisis effects. The research outlines, from an entrepreneurial resilience perspective, several positioning opportunities of the eco-label product retailers after the crisis, which have affected the Romanian economy in the period 2008–2009 and have implicitly affected the eco-label market.

Keywords: entrepreneurial resilience; market intelligence; eco-label; economic crisis; sustainable economy

1. Introduction

The European Union eco-label is an effective instrument for market intelligence campaigns [1], leading resilient entrepreneurs toward a sustainable economy in Europe. The eco-brand retailers have revealed that in many instances they have taken advantage of the full marketing potential of the eco-label products, as these are likely to play an important role in transforming markets towards higher levels of sustainability [2]. Essentially, an eco-label related to an organic food product is simply a means of communicating information, but it can be integrated into a market intelligence campaign, influencing the positioning strategies, on the basis of price premium orientation; the predictability of future revenues; or eco-minded consumers' access to information.

The use of credible labels allows the retailers delivering eco-label products to signal the quality or presence of specific desirable attributes and in so doing, creates the potential for premium brands [3,4]. The eco-label product market has emerged in Romania after its adhesion to the European Union in 2007, but it has been affected by the economic crisis in the period 2008–2009. Despite the efforts invested in overcoming the crisis effects through entrepreneurial resilience strategies, the market share of eco-label products is still low, partly because these have been addressed mainly to "green" consumers. Eco-brand producers and retailers' behaviour, on the one hand, and the purchasing behaviour of eco-minded consumers, on the other hand, have been strongly influenced by the crisis. For instance, in a recession, the economic issues are so important for the retailers of eco-label products that other issues, such as altering the consumer purchasing behaviour, are placed in the second position [5]. Ecological science

states that viable ecological economic systems are resilient systems that can withstand shocks and recoup easily [6]. Thus, the leading eco-label product retailers have changed their business model in the post-crisis period, switching the cost-cutting strategy with a customer-driven market strategy.

This research aims at emphasising the necessity of an entrepreneurial resilience approach to the eco-label market intelligence strategy, which is influenced by a variety of factors, including an eco-friendly technology push, market pull, and other specific aspects of a green economy [7]. The consumers' education concerning the opportunities provided by eco-label products for a healthier life is essential for the retailers' approach regarding entrepreneurial resilience, as they need to create a more favorable mindset towards eco-friendly products in the context of post-crisis changing perspectives. The communication initiatives that highlight various environmental support campaigns and eco-label product strategies are some of the ways to encourage the purchasing behaviour.

Although eco-label products purposefully address environmental issues, it is important to know which factors related to market intelligence influence to achieve greater market performance [8]. To enhance the knowledge of eco-label products' responsiveness to market intelligence techniques, in the context of an entrepreneurial resilience approach, more research is needed [9]. This research aims to address the gaps in eco-label product positioning through tailored market intelligence techniques, considering the drivers of market resilience.

Emphasising the entrepreneurial resilience variables that influence the performances in the eco-label product market is highly relevant for understanding the opportunities to boost sales on this Romanian market after the economic crisis. In this paper, the main goal is to provide relevant answers to the following research questions: (1) How do the relevant sources of market intelligence information influence the level of entrepreneurial resilience decisions? (2) How does the entrepreneurial resilience strategy act as a facilitator for better positioning on the basis of the eco-label product market? (3) What are the implications of the resilience strategy driven by market intelligence techniques for growth in the Romanian eco-label product market after the crisis?

We approach these questions through quantitative research on a sample of Romanian retailers of eco-label products that have experienced periods of growth after the economic crisis. This makes it an interesting case from the perspective of entrepreneurial resilience.

2. Entrepreneurial Resilience and Market Intelligence

The resilience concept was first introduced in ecology and environment by Holling (1973, p 17): "resilience determines the persistence of relationships within a system and is a measure of the ability of these systems to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters, and still persist" [10].

Entrepreneurial resilience deals with the capability to mitigate the risks of turbulence and reorganise a business model while undergoing change so as to still keep essentially the same vision, structure and customer feedbacks [11]. From the sustainability perspective, resilience is a compelling framework for researchers and policymakers seeking to understand how business actors and socio-ecological systems adapt and transform their models to align with changes in the environment [12].

As resilience generally provides a better understanding of sustainability in changing environments, research conducted by Larsson et al. [13] suggests some necessary trade-offs between resilience and sustainability (trust, value-driven local identity and slowness related to the organisational structure), which turn the entrepreneurs into eco-friendly trendsetters.

The entrepreneurial resilience orientation towards sustainability stands for a compelling antecedent of market intelligence practices, which consolidate long-term collaborations and competitive advantages for all the stakeholders involved in a sustainable partnership, as also confirmed by previous studies ([14,15]).

The choice to adopt a more sustainable strategy, which leads to higher resilience and performance over the long term, depends on the entrepreneurs' decisions to exit from their comfort zones and to find out the most suitable market intelligence techniques for sustainability purposes [16].

Market intelligence outruns the role of linking to green customers and marketing mix, and it should expand to include other aspects of corporate demand management, such as foreseeing the demand for environmentally friendly products, positioning and demand stimulation for the products, generating demand for build-to-order products, and building competitive advantages from a focus on the environmental priorities ([17,18]).

The digital technologies integrated in a market intelligence system enable the collection and analysis of customer-driven data. These data may be aggregated in order to inform mass marketing activities, or they may be processed at a micro-level for supporting highly targeted marketing such as behavioural advertising and customised purchase incentives and to encourage consumer engagement in brand-based promotional activities [19,20]. Targeted marketing activities consider the consumer segmentation, as not all consumers desire the same relationship type or intensity or interaction with the company [21]. According to research coordinated by Pujari, the factors influencing the performance of eco-label products from the market intelligence perspective are the cross-functional coordination among the new product development professionals and environmental specialists, the supplier involvement, the market focus and the life-cycle analysis [8].

The new competitive pressures, which are derived from the entry into the eco-label market of numerous online retailers, as well as the consumers' increasing demand for eco-label products after the economic crisis, have led to the adoption of entrepreneurial resilience strategies in order to achieve or maintain a competitive advantage [22]. For the organic products and services in which the consumer choice can have a substantial impact on the environment, an effective implementation of the green marketing programs may be cost-effective and desirable. Properly executed and supported, these programs allow the customers to make choices that would clearly reflect their environmental preferences while simultaneously reaching the policy objectives [23]. The issues faced by resilience entrepreneurs dealing with eco-label products reflect the customer needs of identification and satisfaction within the context of consumer targeting, as well as the positioning of their products related to consumer segments and competing products [24].

In their quest to become sustainable suppliers in the global value chains, the eco-label product retailers seek paths to increased profits through market intelligence strategies within the existing sustainability space; they should also develop the sustainable competencies of the future through entrepreneurial resilience decisions, considering the sources of relevant data, such as sustainability reports and consumers' expectations [25].

Following the trends in eco-minded consumers' behaviour and launching new eco-label products in the distribution network allow eco-brand retailers to move markets towards a more sustainable trajectory and expand the overall pool of entrepreneurial opportunities in order to boost sales after the crisis [26].

The eco-brand retailers' value proposition upgrades involve market intelligence actions such as benchmarks between eco-label products, customer satisfaction assessments, customer perception audits and early warning alerts, in the resilience process of shifting consumers into purchasing green products [27].

3. Material and Methods

The conceptual framework research regarding the assessment of marketing intelligence capabilities related to the Romanian eco-label product retailers involves specific constructs, reflected through independent and dependent variables.

In order to test the correlations between these independent and dependent variables, three hypotheses have been formulated, as can be seen in Figure 1.

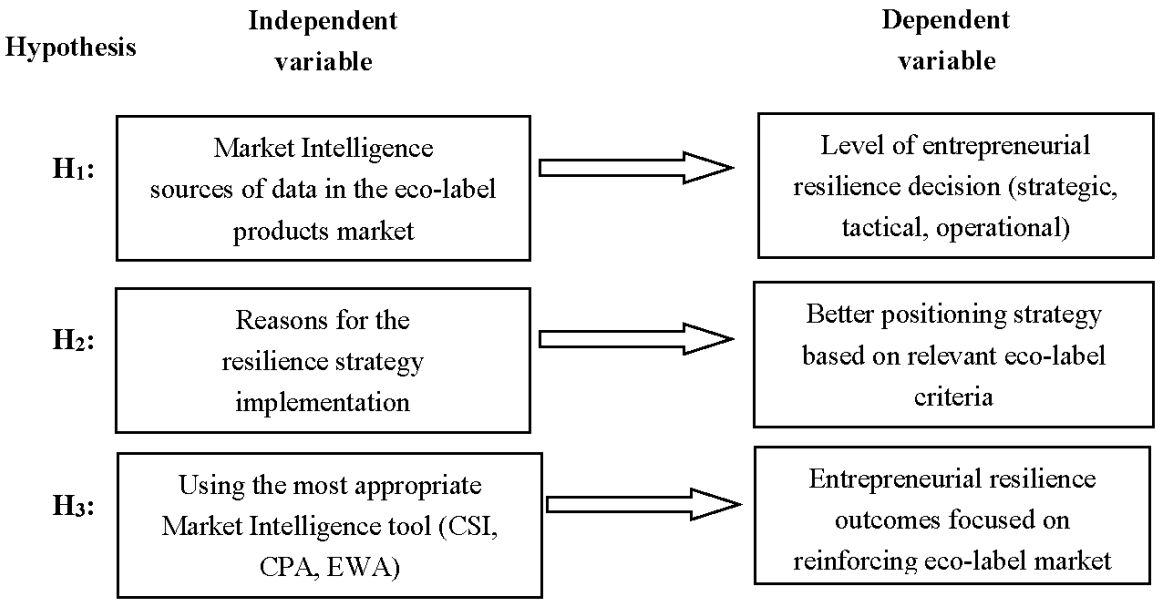

Figure 1. Conceptual model for the Romanian eco-label retailers' assessment of market intelligence capabilities in the context of entrepreneurial resilience approach.

The independent variables emphasise the sources of collecting market intelligence information in the eco-label product market, the reasons for the resilience strategy implementation and the use of marketing intelligence-specific tools—the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), Customer Perceptions Audits (CPA), and Early Warning Alerts (EWA)—while the dependent variables address specific issues regarding the level of entrepreneurial resilience decisions, the possibility to improve the positioning strategy on the basis of relevant eco-label criteria and the entrepreneurial resilience outcomes focused on eco-label products.

This paper is based on descriptive research. Therefore, a questionnaire was designed and sent to 175 managers of retailers of eco-label products who are selling these products in Romania, in order to collect primary data. Data were collected by means of an online questionnaire, available in the period April 5–May 11 2017. Regarding the convenience sample sizes, a satisfactory level was reached once 120 answers were validated. We proceeded to a balanced distribution of the retailers included in the sample within the eight development regions from Romania. The questions were based upon the constructs emphasised in the conceptual model (Appendix A).

The structure of the sample, on the basis of the category of eco-label products sold, was the following: personal care (15%), cleaning-up (9.17%), clothes and textiles (8.33%), food and drinks (31.67%), electronic equipment (8.33%), furniture (4.17%), gardening (7.50%), household appliances (10%), lubricants (2.50%) and paper products (3.33%).

The statistical tool used was Pearson's chi-square test, and the analysis was facilitated by the functions provided by SPSS software. The chi-square test was applied in order to determine whether there was a significant difference between the expected frequencies and the observed frequencies in one or more categories. The use of the chi-square test involved the design of two hypotheses: the null hypothesis stated that there was no significant difference between the expected and observed frequencies, while the alternative hypothesis stated they were different and that there was a positive influence between them. The main advantage of SPSS use in the case of the chi-square method application consists of the opportunity to build contingency tables by gathering data from the research database.

The level of research model's internal consistency was determined by performing a reliability test with SPSS on the six items included in the conceptual model (Table 1).

Table 1. Reliability statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	Number of Items
0.742	0.753	6

The correlation between a particular item and the sum of the rest of the items outlines that the best item appears to be the third, with an item-total correlation of $r = 0.603$. The item with the lowest item-total correlation is the first ($r = 0.441$). Analysing the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted" column, we observe that none of the values is greater than the current alpha value of the whole scale: 0.742. This means that there is no need to remove any item from the research model (Table 2).

Table 2. Item-total statistics.

Item	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Market intelligence sources of data in the eco-label product market	15.83	6.388	0.441	0.201	0.731
Reasons for the resilience strategy implementation	15.43	6.501	0.464	0.212	0.721
Using the most appropriate Market intelligence tool (CSI, CPA, or EWA)	15.02	6.640	0.603	0.418	0.672
Level of entrepreneurial resilience decision (strategic, tactical, or operational)	15.11	6.558	0.541	0.312	0.690
Better positioning strategy on basis of relevant eco-label criteria	15.41	6.671	0.538	0.339	0.692
Entrepreneurial resilience outcomes focused on reinforcing eco-label market	15.13	6.560	0.540	0.310	0.688

The following section highlights the hypothesis testing process, revealing the market intelligence precursors for the entrepreneurial resilience approach in the case of the Romanian eco-label product retailers.

4. Results

Performing a reliability test with SPSS on the six items included in the conceptual model, we found out that Cronbach's alpha value was 0.742, which indicated a high level of research model internal consistency.

The findings emphasise the statistical meanings of the cross-tabulation processes related to the correlations between the variables previously defined. The application of the chi-square test in the case of the H_1 hypothesis involved designing a contingency table, which allowed for the classification of the observed frequencies, as can be seen in Table 3.

The null hypothesis associated to the first research hypothesis, $H_{0(1)}$, is the following: The sources for collecting market intelligence information do not significantly influence the level of entrepreneurial resilience decision (strategic, tactical, or operational).

The sustainability reports represent primary data sources, validated by experts in the field; their acquisition involved significant budgets, which allowed the competitors' monitoring process; the customer experience feedback on eco-label products required in-depth marketing research, while the reports on Web analytics depended on the marketers' skills in dealing with sophisticated IT infrastructures. As can be seen in Table 3, the market intelligence sources, mainly on the basis of eco-label sustainability reports, manifested the greatest propensity to provide operational support for specific marketing goals and objectives.

The results corresponding to the test of the H_1 hypothesis, after the configuration of the cross-tabulation process using the respondents' answers stored in the SPSS database, are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Cross-tabulation between the sources of market intelligence data and the level of entrepreneurial resilience decision.

Level of Entrepreneurial Resilience Decision / Market Intelligence Source of Data	Strategic	Tactical	Operational	Total
Sustainability reports	12	8	34	54
Customer experience feedback on eco-label products	18	8	18	44
Reports on Web analytics	6	14	2	22
Total	36	30	54	120

Table 4. The correlation results between the sources for collecting market intelligence information and the level of entrepreneurial resilience decision.

Chi-Square Test Indicators	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Asymptotic Significance
Pearson chi-square	14.712	4	0.005
Likelihood ratio	14.262	4	0.007
Linear-by-linear association	4.502	1	0.034
Number of valid cases	60	—	—

In this case, the value associated to the asymptotic significance (0.005) was inferior to the level of significance (0.05), and the Pearson chi-square value (14.712) was superior to the chi-square value corresponding to the statistics table (9.49), within the context of 4 degrees of freedom; the null hypothesis was rejected, and thus the sources for collecting market intelligence information had a positive influence on the level of the entrepreneurial resilience decision (strategic, tactical, or operational).

The application of the chi-square test in the case of the H_2 hypothesis involved the design of the contingency table with double entries outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. Cross-tabulation between the reasons for implementing a marketing intelligence project and the pillars of positioning strategies.

Pillars of Positioning Strategies / Reasons for Resilience Strategy Implementation	Lower Environmental Impact	Consumers' Awareness regarding Their Healthier Life	Contribution to the Romanian Sustainable Economy	Total
Following the trends in eco-minded consumers' behaviour	10	22	6	38
Launching new eco-label products in the distribution network	2	12	4	18
Boosting sales after the crisis	8	42	14	64
Total	20	76	24	120

The null hypothesis associated to the second research hypothesis, $H_{0(2)}$, is the following: The reasons for implementing the resilience strategy do not influence to a great extent the positioning strategies, on the basis of different pillars.

The main reason for a resilience strategy implementation was represented by boosting sales after the crisis, according to the majority of answers received from the participants in the survey. By taking into account the fact that Romanian consumers gradually orient towards eco-label products and that the rate of green purchases is very sensitive to the use in store communications and information, the retailers of eco-label products must be able to foresee the changes in eco-minded consumer behaviour and to launch new products in their distribution network. Putting forth significant efforts on improving their competitive positioning on the Romanian market, the retailers of eco-label products must be aware of the environmental impacts that exist for the same type of food products, depending on the type of production and the processing techniques.

The results corresponding to the test of the H_2 hypothesis, after the configuration of the cross-tabulation process using the respondents' answers stored in the SPSS database, are revealed in Table 6.

Table 6. The correlation results between the reasons for implementing the resilience strategy and the positioning strategies.

Chi-Square Test Indicators	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Asymptotic Significance
Pearson chi-square	1.939	4	0.747
Likelihood ratio	1.846	4	0.764
Linear-by-linear association	1.164	1	0.281
Number of valid cases	60	—	—

In this case, the value associated to the asymptotic significance (0.747) was superior to the level of significance (0.05), and the Pearson chi-square value (1.939) was inferior to the chi-square value corresponding to the statistics table (9.49), within the context of 4 degrees of freedom; the null hypothesis was accepted, and thus the reasons for implementing the resilience strategy did not significantly influence the positioning strategies, on the basis of the lower environmental impact, consumers' awareness regarding their healthier life or the contribution to the sustainable economy.

The application of the chi-square test in the case of the H_3 hypothesis involved the design of the contingency table with double entries outlined in Table 7.

Table 7. Cross-tabulation between the market intelligence tools and the entrepreneurial resilience outcomes.

Entrepreneurial Resilience Outcomes / Market Intelligence Tools	Benchmarks between Eco-Label Products	Support for Differentiation Strategies	Value Proposition Upgrade	Total
Customer Satisfaction Index	20	10	4	34
Customer Perceptions Audits	6	24	20	50
Early Warning Alerts	2	16	18	36
Total	28	50	42	120

The null hypothesis associated to the third research hypothesis, $H_{0(3)}$, is the following: The use of market intelligence tools (CSI, CPA and EWA) does not significantly influence the outcomes of the entrepreneurial resilience strategy.

According to the respondents' opinions, CPA is the market intelligence tool providing valuable assessments of their differentiation strategies, if the audits are properly performed throughout the

entire pre- to post-purchase experience; moreover, this tool facilitates the design process of upgrading the value proposition, which has a high impact on customers' perceptions if sales representatives are available in the store department specialising in eco-label products. Implementing and developing a market intelligence tool such as the CSI provides the retailers an opportunity to design specific scorecards, through which it is possible to make relevant benchmarks between different eco-label products. EWA help retailers' managers to plan their future marketing activities by identifying the market risks and developing the entrepreneurial resilience contingency plans.

The results corresponding to the test of the H_3 hypothesis, after the configuration of the cross-tabulation process using the respondents' answers stored in the SPSS database, are highlighted in Table 8.

In this case, the value associated to the asymptotic significance (0.001) was inferior to the level of significance (0.05), and the Pearson chi-square value (17.836) was superior to the chi-square value corresponding to the statistics table (9.49), within the context of 4 degrees of freedom; the null hypothesis was rejected, and thus the use of market intelligence tools (CSI, CPA and EWA) had a positive influence on the entrepreneurial resilience outcomes.

Table 8. The correlation results between the use of market intelligence tools and the entrepreneurial resilience outcomes.

Chi-Square Test Indicators	Value	Degrees of Freedom	Asymptotic Significance
Pearson chi-square	17.836	4	0.001
Likelihood ratio	17.308	4	0.002
Linear-by-linear association	12.447	1	0.000
Number of valid cases	60	—	—

5. Discussion

The results from the analysis of the Romanian retailers' market intelligence capabilities regarding the eco-label products can be summarised as follows: The retailers' entrepreneurial resilience strategies are mainly based on market research and available sustainability reports, and their most relevant market intelligence instruments are CPA, which play a pivotal role in supporting the differentiation strategies, while the positioning strategies are primarily focused on the consumers' awareness concerning the opportunities of eco-label products for a healthier way of life. These results are in line with relevant research focused on the development of a strategic marketing intelligence and multi-organisational resilience framework, which reveals that competitive intelligence staff should engage in marketing intelligence activities, such as scenario analysis and CPA [28].

A key finding from this quantitative survey was that the entrepreneurial resilience and market intelligence practices adopted by Romanian eco-label retailers are expected to purposefully address the alarm signals to push companies to increase marketing activities focused on green consumption behaviour, as mentioned in other research conducted in Romania [29].

Most eco-label retailers from Romania only concentrate their marketing efforts on existing and potential clients with high revenues [29]. Therefore, this study outlines that a focus on changing customer mentalities at the level of the entire market, not only on the high-end segment (to turn them into more eco-friendly mentalities through appropriate market intelligence techniques) would play a decisive role in the sustainability strength of their resilience strategy.

Retailers' resilience strategies enable the structuring of operational decisions to match growing eco-minded consumers' interests in sustainability, while the building blocks of market intelligence reports leverage the potential of boosting sales after the crisis, through designing appropriate value propositions in line with resilience requirements. The "organizational resilience value system" framework proposed by Lee and Trim [30] can be used by Romanian eco-label retailers' marketing planners to link organisational learning to market intelligence outcomes.

6. Conclusions, Limitations and Managerial Implications

The reports delivered by the market intelligence campaigns have shown that eco-label products have led to increased sales among Romanian retailers after the economic crisis, as a result of the entrepreneurial resilience strategy they have adopted. As the consumers "get in touch" with eco-label products at the point of sale, the role of retailers is crucial. Without a tailored entrepreneurial resilience strategy, it is difficult to manage a market intelligence project focused on the identification of the most effective positioning of eco-label products.

The resilience approach of the Romanian eco-label market uncertainty allows managers of eco-label product retailers to understand how to tailor their marketing strategies according to the eco-minded customers' evolving expectations.

The research attempts to provide some managerial implications in the area of entrepreneurial resilience strategy, which can be translated into eco-label product retailers' insightful mindsets. The conceptual model and the results of the hypothesis testing could support marketing a decision-making process in the case of retailers at strategic, tactical and operational levels. The design of a market intelligence plan enables the retailers of eco-label products to collect and analyse data on competitors, consumers and market trends by means of entrepreneurial resilience techniques for the right decisions. Thus, it is concretely suggested that eco-label product retailers should implement training programs for sales representatives in order to provide a customised approach to their clients and to promote premium price brands for the purpose of increasing the satisfaction and, implicitly, the loyalty rate. Moreover, the entrepreneurial resilience strategy allows retailers to capitalise upon the increased demand of eco-label products in the post-crisis period.

Managerial practices of entrepreneurial resilience configurations fitting market intelligence constructs will be validated through purposefully leveraging sales boosting post-crisis toward developing eco-label product retailers' capability to generate resilience-based business models.

The main limitation of the study consists of the convenience sample of eco-label product retailers that participated in the survey, as we were unable to find data about the entire population of eco-label retailers in Romania and their distribution in each region of the country. We assume the disadvantages of the convenience sample were the following: high vulnerability to selection bias and influences beyond the control of the researcher and a high level of sampling error.

The sampling technique will be changed in the future research, when insights into the Romanian eco-label market become available.

Another limitation of this paper is the marketing behaviour-driven perspective of the resilience strategy, because this might limit its precise scope. In further research, a qualitative comparative analysis will be developed to purposefully address this limitation.

We intend to develop this research in order to integrate a complete suite of market intelligence deliverables related to the entrepreneurial resilience strategy, from competitor profiles to more advanced strategic tools focusing on scenarios analysis, which will contribute to the trends forecasting on this market.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Q1: Has your company applied an entrepreneurial resilience strategy to recover after the economic crisis?
(a) Yes (Go to Question 2)
(b) No (Stop)

Q2: Which is the most relevant source of data used for further analyses by means of Market Intelligence techniques?
(a) Sustainability reports
(b) Customer experience feedback on eco-label products
(c) Reports on Web analytics

Q3: In your company, the level of entrepreneurial resilience decision is:
(a) Strategic
(b) Tactical
(c) Operational

Q4: What is the main reason for your company to implement a resilience strategy?
(a) Following the trends in eco-minded consumers' behaviour
(b) Launching new eco-label products in the distribution network
(c) Boosting sales after the crisis

Q5: What is the most representative pillar of your company's positioning strategy?
(a) Lower environmental impact
(b) Consumers' awareness regarding their healthier life
(c) Contribution to the Romanian sustainable economy

Q6: What is the most frequently used Market Intelligence tool in your company?
(a) Customer Satisfaction Index
(b) Customer Perceptions Audits
(c) Early Warning Alerts

Q7: The most valuable entrepreneurial resilience outcome for your company is:
(a) Benchmarks between eco-label products
(b) Support for differentiation strategies
(c) Value proposition upgrade

Q8: Which categories of eco-label products/services are available in your offer?
(a) Personal care
(b) Cleaning-up
(c) Clothes and textiles
(d) Food and drinks
(e) Electronic equipment
(f) Furniture
(g) Gardening
(h) Household appliances
(i) Lubricants
(j) Paper products

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