

Effects of E-Commerce on Sustainability: A Stakeholder's Perspective

Bachelorarbeit

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades „Bachelor of Science (B. Sc.)“ im Studiengang Wirtschaftswissenschaft
der Wirtschaftswissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Leibniz Universität Hannover

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Hannover, den 28.08.2019

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1. Introduction

The topic of sustainability has increasingly become the focus of the media in recent years and has also been the subject of heated debate in politics. It has become one of the main topics of discussion since the Fridays for Future movement and the increasing digitalization and economic growth have brought the topic of sustainability into focus (cf. Schirmer; 2019). For this reason, scientists all over the world are working on the topic and are trying to work together on sustainability. The topic of e-commerce is playing an increasingly important role. It is largely unclear what effects e-commerce has on sustainability. Previous literature already deals with the topics of e-commerce and sustainability. However, so far the main focus has been on the individual dimensions. There is no connection between the dimensions. Furthermore, the main focus is on the ecological aspects. A holistic analyze is missing. This work aims to close the research gap and connect the three dimensions with each other. Moreover, the various stakeholders are addressed and their goals compared. Building on this, the following central question will be examined in this paper:

[How does e-commerce affect sustainability and what role do the various stakeholders play in this?](#)

In order to answer the research question, the term e-commerce is first defined in Chapter 2 and its various stakeholders are characterized. Then the term sustainability is explained and the three dimensions (ecology, economy, social) are defined. The literature methodology used is presented in Chapter 3. With the Grounded Theory a qualitative literature search is carried out. The selected articles are evaluated and coded with MAXQDA. In Chapter 4, the twelve topics identified are analyzed and explained. In addition, the topics were subdivided into the three dimensions of sustainability, whereupon in Chapter 5 the elaborated topic is discussed with regard to its effects on sustainability. In addition, the common and different views of the stakeholders are compared. The 5th chapter concludes with a summary of the conclusions drawn in the previous chapter, as well as a limitation and an outlook on further research needs.

It is important to attribute the same importance to the three dimensions and not to favor one of the three. Just as it is important to place all three interest groups in the same priority and not to favor the interests of the companies as in previous research. In order to achieve long-term and holistic sustainability, it is necessary to include all dimensions. Another example is that without a certain degree of sustainability in a company, fewer customers will be achieved, because they demand a transparent sustainable corporate culture. In order to improve the impact of e-commerce on sustainability in the long term, it is therefore necessary to work on joint solutions and to make compromises on the individual dimensions and stakeholders. However, these compromises should be made equally and not just in favor of one dimension and at the expense of the others.

6. Limitation and Outlook

The chosen research method was a qualitative literature search according to the Grounded Theory. By means of an extensive sample search an attempt was made to provide a holistic overview. Nevertheless, it cannot be guaranteed that all aspects relevant to answering the research question were included. Due to the given volume and the given time, the work could only refer to a part of the available literature. Furthermore, the search was limited to English literature. Literature in other languages can also provide new insights.

This thesis could not deal with every aspect in detail. For each subitem a separate thesis could be formulated due to its extent. For this reason, it is advisable to investigate this topic further in future publications and, for example, to generate further data with the help of a survey addressed to society or expert interviews in companies. Further work should also address the different impacts of small, medium and large enterprises on sustainability. Depending on the size of the company, different impacts may have developed.

7. Summary

The aim of this thesis was to work out how e-commerce affects sustainability and how the various stakeholders are involved. To answer this question, basic terminology was first explained in Chapter 2. These were e-commerce and sustainability. Furthermore, the research method was presented in Chapter 3. This was the Grounded Theory, a qualitative literature method. These were evaluated with the help of the computer program MAXQDA and explained in the 4th chapter. In this chapter the twelve topics

were first assigned to the different dimensions of sustainability and then compared in the discussion. In order to make the role of the various stakeholders clear, the 5th chapter also dealt with conflicting goals and goal harmonies.

E-commerce has an impact on sustainability in all three dimensions of sustainability. In the economic dimension, e-commerce has a positive impact on economic growth. Globalization means that e-commerce can spread further and open up new markets. Furthermore, e-commerce leads to cost reductions. Established companies will be put under pressure by the changes in electronic traffic, but will ultimately also be able to reduce costs by including e-commerce.

In the social dimension, e-commerce has an impact on the Labor market, developing countries, data protection and transparency. It remains unclear whether e-commerce will lead to the expansion or reduction of jobs. However, it became clear that e-commerce would lead to a shift in the field of work. Consumers demand an increase in consumer protection. There is too little transparency, especially in data protection. This could cost companies important customers. Accordingly, the handling strategies for enterprises resulted here to be more transparent with the data collection. Consumers also demand transparency in sustainability issues. Developing countries will benefit from e-commerce in the long term. In addition, the new technologies can bring skilled workers to developing countries.

Transport, storage, dematerialization and packaging were topics of the environmental dimension. There is still room for improvement especially in the area of transport and packaging. The splitting of deliveries increases transport routes and more packaging is needed. For the environment, this has negative effects in the form of air pollution, climate change, etc. Nevertheless, solutions are already being worked on and more electric vehicles will be used in the future. Dematerialization has a largely positive effect on the environment. By switching to digital CDs and videos, etc., resources have been saved. The effects on the environment can also be improved when it comes to storage. JIT deliveries save companies storage space, which is also good for the environment.

Finally, it can be said that e-commerce has a lot of positive effects on sustainability, especially in the economic dimension. However, it also entails significant disadvantages. Since the 3 dimensions are difficult to separate, and sometimes move in different directions, the dimensions have one big common goal: sustainability. However, this is interpreted differently and results from several subgoals. Which often differ greatly from each other. So it remains to be ensured in which order one proceeds and which goals are of particular importance and which ones can be put aside for the time being. The dimensions should be included equally, as this is the only way to

achieve long-term sustainability. In the future, attention must continue to be drawn to the problem and the involvement of society should increase even more. This is the only way to stop climate change and safeguard resources for future generations. Working on new innovations will continue to be the focus of the various stakeholders in the future.