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EVOLUTION AND CURRENT TRENDS IN MARKETING IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AMID DIGITALIZATION AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

EVOLUȚIA ȘI TENDINȚELE ACTUALE ÎN MARKETING ÎN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA ÎN CONTEXTUL DIGITALIZĂRII ȘI AL SUSTENABILITĂȚII ECONOMICE

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Abstract In the current context of rapid economic and technological transformations, modern marketing represents an essential tool for helping companies adapt to the new demands of the digital market and sustainable development. Organizations in the Republic of Moldova are increasingly aware that long-term success is not based solely on commercial performance but also on the ability to integrate innovation, social responsibility, and sustainability into their marketing strategies. Within this framework, process digitalization, online communication, consumer orientation, and the promotion of ethical values are key factors of competitiveness. The author analyzes the evolution and current trends of marketing in the Republic of Moldova, highlighting how companies are reconfiguring their strategies through the adoption of modern technologies, the use of digital platforms, and the implementation of the green marketing concept. The advantages of digital transformation—such as improved communication efficiency, market expansion, and customer loyalty—are presented alongside specific challenges like the lack of digital skills and resistance to change. Therefore, modern marketing is emerging as a catalyst for sustainable economic development, contributing to enhanced competitiveness and strengthening the Republic of Moldova's image in regional and global markets.

Keywords: *modern marketing, digitalization, sustainability, competitiveness, innovation, consumer behavior.*

JEL code: *M31, Q56, O33*

Abstract. În contextul actual al transformărilor economice și tehnologice rapide, marketingul modern reprezintă un instrument esențial pentru adaptarea companiilor la noile cerințe ale pieței digitale și ale dezvoltării durabile. Organizațiile din Republica Moldova devin tot mai conștiente că succesul pe termen lung nu se bazează doar pe performanțe comerciale, ci și pe capacitatea de a integra inovația, responsabilitatea socială și sustenabilitatea în strategiile de marketing. În acest cadru, digitalizarea proceselor, comunicarea online, orientarea către consumator și promovarea valorilor etice constituie factori determinanți ai competitivității. Autorul analizează evoluția și tendințele actuale ale marketingului în Republica Moldova, evidențiind modul în care companiile își reconfigurează strategiile prin adoptarea tehnologiilor moderne, utilizarea platformelor digitale și implementarea conceptului de marketing verde. Sunt prezentate avantajele transformării digitale – eficientizarea comunicării, extinderea piețelor, fidelizarea clienților – dar și provocările specifice, precum deficitul de competențe digitale și rezistența la schimbare. Prin urmare, marketingul modern se afirmă ca un catalizator al dezvoltării economice durabile, contribuind la creșterea competitivității și la consolidarea imaginii Republicii Moldova pe piața regională și globală.

Cuvinte-cheie: *marketing modern, digitalizare, sustenabilitate, competitivitate, inovație, comportamentul consumatorului.*

Introduction

In the context of rapid economic and technological transformations in recent years, modern marketing has become an essential tool for companies to adapt to the new demands of the digital market and sustainable development goals. It is no longer enough for companies to focus exclusively on commercial performance; long-term success increasingly depends on the ability to integrate innovation, social responsibility, and sustainability into marketing and business strategies [1]. This paradigm shift is also visible in the Republic of Moldova, where companies are becoming increasingly aware of the role of modern marketing in increasing competitiveness and strengthening their position in the regional and global market [2].

The digitization of internal processes, interactive online communication, consumer orientation, and the promotion of ethical and ecological values are now determining factors of competitiveness. Moldovan companies are reconfiguring their marketing strategies by adopting modern technologies, leveraging digital platforms, and implementing concepts such as green (ecological) marketing. At the same time, the government and support organizations, such as ODIMM, are backing these efforts through national digital transformation strategies and programs that promote the green economy and corporate social responsibility [1, 3].

The following sections will analyze the evolution and current trends in marketing in the Republic of Moldova, highlighting how digitization and sustainability are shaping the strategies of local companies. We will examine the advantages of digital transformation—streamlined communication, market expansion, customer loyalty—but also the challenges specific to this transition, such as the digital skills gap and resistance to change. Finally, we will highlight the contribution of modern marketing to Moldova's sustainable economic development and to improving its image internationally.

The context of digitalization and the adoption of digital marketing in Moldova

The digital economy and digital marketing have become inseparable components of modern economic development. For countries such as the Republic of Moldova, which are in the process of European integration and post-crisis economic recovery, digitization offers new mechanisms for economic growth, access to new markets, and optimization of business processes [2]. The level of adoption of digital technologies among the population and businesses has increased significantly: at the beginning of 2023, approximately 2.14 million Moldovans were using the internet (equivalent to 61.3% of the population), and the number of social media users was estimated at 1.60 million (about 45.7% of the population) [4]. This growing base of online consumers creates a favorable environment for the expansion of digital marketing and compels companies to be present where their audience is.

However, at the company level, the transition to digital marketing is uneven and still in its infancy. Recent studies show that only a small proportion of Moldovan companies use innovative marketing methods—approximately 4.6% of companies have implemented marketing or organizational innovations, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics 2021-2022 [5]. A sociological survey conducted in 2023 on a sample of 131 entrepreneurs shows that there are different levels of digital maturity among companies, which can be grouped into four categories:

1. Digitally underdeveloped companies that use minimal online marketing.
2. Companies with complex strategies but limited resources, which want to use modern tools but are constrained by budget or staffing issues.
3. Companies that combine traditional and digital marketing and are in a transition phase.
4. Businesses that are highly advanced in digital marketing, making full use of modern online channels [6].

A notable result of this research is that social media marketing occupies a central place in the marketing activities of companies of all sizes [6]. In practice, social media is the most popular promotional channel, used by 77% of micro-enterprises and up to 95% of large companies in Moldova [5]. Other digital tools, such as email marketing or mobile advertising, are used to a lesser extent. Interestingly, even traditional companies continue to use offline tactics (e.g., printed flyers), but combine them with an online presence—for example, in one of the less digitized segments of companies, 59% use social media, 43% use local ad sites (such as 999.md), and about a fifth still use

flyers for promotion [5]. In contrast, the most advanced companies take an omnichannel approach: almost all of them are active on social media (95%), but combine this channel with printed materials (71% use flyers), partnerships, and a mix of more sophisticated online tactics—for example, ~43% of these companies also invest in search engine optimization (SEO) or pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and about 37% do email marketing [5].

These data highlight that, although digital marketing is gaining ground in Moldova, there is still enormous untapped potential. Most small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face challenges in using digital tools – either due to a lack of internal skills or reluctance to change – which puts them behind large companies in terms of online presence [6]. At the same time, there is growing interest in digitalization and awareness that a modern marketing strategy can provide a competitive advantage, allowing companies to expand their audience and compete not only locally but also internationally [5].

Marketing in the digital age: modern technologies and consumer orientation

Modern marketing is closely linked to technological progress. The emergence of new digital platforms, analytical tools, and communication channels has fundamentally changed the way companies interact with customers. In the Republic of Moldova, as elsewhere in the world, consumer orientation is accentuated by the online environment: today's consumers are constantly connected, have instant access to information, and express their opinions publicly through social networks. Therefore, companies must be proactive and interactive in their online communication, provide relevant, personalized content, and maintain an open dialogue with the public.

Within the ongoing digital transformation process, Moldovan enterprises are increasingly turning to online marketing tools to boost both efficiency and brand visibility. Studies carried out by several researchers indicate that the implementation of digital marketing strategies on e-commerce platforms has directly influenced firms’ economic results—resulting in higher sales, reduced expenses, and stronger customer retention. The researchers note that the combination of innovative techniques—like targeted advertising, SEO optimization, integrated social media campaigns, and data-driven consumer insights—significantly improves competitiveness in the digital space. Furthermore, their findings highlight that investing in marketing digitalization provides not only immediate economic benefits but also long-term advantages, by ensuring sustainable growth and a lasting competitive edge for Moldovan businesses on both local and international markets [7].

Complementing these conclusions, Moroi E. underlines that digital transformation represents a decisive factor for economic competitiveness at both national and global levels. The author suggests that the digital maturity of Moldovan companies determines how effectively they can adapt to new business models and access international opportunities [8]. The study stresses the importance of allocating resources to digital infrastructure, professional education, and innovation, emphasizing that the technological gap between large corporations and SMEs directly affects productivity and performance. Therefore, digitalization should be regarded not just as a technological upgrade, but as a fundamental element of Moldova’s economic strategy—a key condition for integrating into the global knowledge economy.

An essential component of digital marketing is the presence on social platforms and the creation of tailored content for these channels. Almost every Moldovan company applying digital marketing relies on Social Media Marketing (SMM) to build brand visibility. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are widely used to form brand communities, run interactive campaigns, and collect feedback directly from users. With more than 45% of the country’s population active on social media [6], these platforms have become vital spaces for promotion. Modern marketing revolves around being present where the audience is—today, that means being online, engaging consumers who browse primarily on mobile devices and expect fast, personalized interactions from businesses.

In addition to social media, companies in Moldova are starting to use other modern technologies in marketing: from search engine optimization (SEO) to increase their visibility on Google, to targeted online advertising campaigns (through Google Ads or Facebook ads). There is also interest in content marketing (creating valuable content—articles, videos, guides—that

organically attracts customers) and mobile marketing tactics, as more and more consumers access the internet from mobile devices.

Another defining element for the transformation of modern marketing is the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in strategic decision-making and consumer communication processes. A study conducted by researchers highlights that artificial intelligence contributes significantly to the optimization of business strategies by increasing the accuracy of data analysis, personalizing offers, and automating marketing processes. The authors show that the use of intelligent systems—such as recommendation algorithms, chatbots, predictive analytics, and automated marketing—enables companies to reduce operational costs and increase the efficiency of digital campaigns. At the same time, the research emphasizes the importance of ethical responsibility in the implementation of AI, especially in the context of data protection and transparency in consumer relations. Thus, the integration of artificial intelligence becomes an inevitable step in the evolution of modern marketing, strengthening the competitive advantage of Moldovan companies in the context of global digitalization [9].

A global trend that is beginning to make its presence felt is the use of Big Data and advanced analytics in marketing decisions. Even on a small scale, some local companies are testing customer data analysis tools to better segment their audience and personalize their offers. *The effectiveness of digital marketing* is closely linked to the ability to collect and interpret data: what consumers' preferences are, how they react to our campaigns, what path they follow in the purchasing process, etc. Marketing automation (e.g., automatically sending personalized emails or displaying relevant offers on the website) is also becoming a recommended practice for optimizing the user experience and increasing conversions. Such approaches—which include big data analysis, automation, and personalization—are seen as key components of effective marketing in the digital age [5].

Last but not least, technological innovation is expanding into marketing through the adoption of new tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) and blockchain. Experts anticipate that in the near future, AI applications will become the foundation of digital marketing, allowing brands to anticipate customer needs and offer increasingly personalized experiences based on data about their behavior. The first applications are already visible—chatbots that provide round-the-clock customer support, machine learning algorithms that recommend products ("if you bought X, you might also be interested in Y"), or AI tools for content creation. For companies in Moldova, early adoption of such technologies could provide a competitive edge, but it also requires investment in advanced digital skills.

Sustainable marketing and social responsibility: from green marketing to greenwashing

Green marketing and the integration of sustainability principles into promotion are another important dimension of modern marketing. Consumers are increasingly concerned about the environmental and social impact of products and services, and companies are responding by highlighting the "eco" or social attributes of their offerings. Studies show that many consumers are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products and tend to choose companies perceived as environmentally friendly. In the Republic of Moldova, this trend is particularly noticeable among the younger urban generations, but it is gradually becoming a general expectation: customers appreciate brands that demonstrate corporate social responsibility (CSR), either through practices that reduce their ecological footprint or through contributions to the well-being of the community.

An essential aspect of sustainable marketing is understanding the behavior and motivations of consumers who choose eco-friendly products. According to a study by Mîrza S. and Chiriac L., consumer behavior in the Republic of Moldova towards eco-friendly products is influenced by both cognitive factors (level of information and perception of health benefits) and emotional and social factors (the desire to contribute to environmental protection and adopt a responsible lifestyle) [10]. The authors show that the urban youth segment is the most open to consuming organic products, but the main barrier remains the higher price compared to conventional products. The study also emphasizes that effective promotion of these products requires educational marketing strategies based on communicating ecological values, clear certifications, and campaigns that emphasize the real benefits to health and the environment. Therefore, companies that align their communication with

these motivations can contribute both to the growth of the green product market and to the consolidation of a culture of responsible consumption in the Republic of Moldova.

The concept of CSR is relatively new in the Moldovan business environment, but recent years have seen an increase in companies' awareness of their role in social development [1]. *The Global Compact Moldova* network was formed under the auspices of the UN, with more and more companies joining – including ODIMM, a public institution supporting SMEs – a sign that there is a real concern for alignment with international sustainability standards. However, most local entrepreneurs still do not fully understand what CSR entails and are not aware of the benefits that integrating these principles into everyday practice can bring. This is where educational and incentive initiatives come in: for example, ODIMM organizes an annual national competition called "SME – Model of Corporate Social Responsibility," rewarding companies that excel in responsible actions towards the environment, employees, society, and partners. Such programs encourage the exchange of best practices and motivate companies to view CSR not as a cost, but as an investment in reputation and competitiveness.

Green marketing refers to how companies communicate their commitment to the environment. This can include promoting eco-friendly products, recyclable packaging, circular economy initiatives, or environmental certifications obtained. In the Republic of Moldova, although the green economy is still in its infancy, there are already companies that have adopted green initiatives for marketing purposes: from organic farmers to fashion brands that produce organic clothing lines, or energy suppliers that invest in renewable sources. For example, a grant program for greening SMEs run by ODIMM in 2023 funded 17 local companies to implement green projects—installing photovoltaic panels, energy-saving systems, waste recycling, etc. This shows an interest in aligning businesses with sustainable trends and using these improvements in communication with customers [11].

Conversely, businesses must remain cautious about the phenomenon known as *greenwashing*—the practice of presenting an environmentally friendly image that lacks genuine substance. Today’s consumers are more informed and critical than ever; when a company promotes itself as “eco-friendly” in marketing messages but continues to pollute, waste resources, or ignore fair labor standards, the backlash from the public can be severe. A recent case reported in the regional press involved environmental activists protesting against a major retail chain that claimed to operate on a “zero waste” model—a statement later challenged as misleading and categorized as greenwashing. Incidents like these demonstrate that false environmental claims can seriously damage a company’s credibility and brand image [12].

For this reason, adopting green marketing requires authenticity and transparency. When practiced sincerely, its benefits are substantial—ranging from enhanced public perception (a local study reveals that 68% of SMEs integrating social and environmental values into their operations improved their reputation within a single year [13]) to higher consumer trust and loyalty (74% of Moldovan customers say they prefer brands that follow social responsibility principles) [13]. However, these sustainability and social responsibility initiatives must be consistent and genuinely embedded in the company’s strategy, not limited to short-lived PR actions.

The advantages of digital transformation in modern marketing

The transition to modern, digitized, and sustainability-oriented marketing brings numerous benefits at both the micro level (for companies and customers) and the macro level (for the country's economy and society). Key advantages include:

1. Digital channels enable fast, direct, and two-way communication. Through social networks, website chats, or email, companies can respond instantly to questions and requests, thus building a closer relationship with the public. Online communication and promotion costs are generally lower than traditional media, allowing even small businesses to effectively promote their offerings.

2. Digitization removes geographical barriers. A local business in Chișinău can promote its products nationally and even internationally through an e-commerce website or platforms such as Amazon/Etsy, if it has the right product. Thus, digital marketing opens up access to new markets, giving Moldovan companies the chance to reach customers beyond their borders. This is crucial in the context of a small economy—in practice, the internet offers Moldovan companies the opportunity

to exponentially increase their customer base and export digital services more easily. Government strategies also emphasize the importance of this expansion: digitization is seen as a means of increasing competitiveness and integration into the EU market, allowing local companies to meet standards and compete alongside European companies.



Figure 1. Advantages of digital transformation in modern marketing

Source: created by the author

3. Modern marketing, with a focus on consumer experience, contributes to consumer loyalty. By using data and personalizing offers, companies can deliver relevant messages and products, increasing customer satisfaction. For example, a well-targeted social media campaign with content tailored to users' interests can turn occasional buyers into loyal customers. At the same time, the ethical and sustainable values promoted by the company (such as caring for the environment or community involvement) increase customer trust and emotional attachment to the brand [1]. Studies indicate that companies with well-implemented social responsibility strategies benefit from increased customer and employee loyalty—a double win that is reflected in long-term financial performance.

4. Digital platforms offer advanced methods of measuring results (Google Analytics, Facebook insights, etc.), allowing marketers to track in real time what works and what doesn't. Thus, budgets can be dynamically allocated to channels or ads with better returns. This flexibility and analytical basis are lacking in traditional marketing (where the effectiveness of a billboard or TV commercial is more difficult to evaluate). In addition, automating marketing processes reduces manual effort and errors, increasing the productivity of the marketing team. Overall, companies that embrace digital transformation end up doing smarter and more cost-effective marketing, achieving a higher ROI (return on investment) for their campaigns.

5. Integrating new marketing technologies (AI, augmented reality, chatbots, etc.) and sustainable practices gives companies a differentiator in the market. They can stand out from their competitors either through the creative way they interact with customers online or through their brand's "green" story. In addition, adopting modern marketing creates a virtuous circle of innovation—companies become more agile, more oriented toward experimentation and learning, developing their ability to absorb new knowledge and techniques (so-called *dynamic marketing capabilities)*. All of this leads to increased business resilience in a volatile economic environment.

From a macro perspective, the spread of digital and sustainable marketing among companies contributes to the country's sustainable economic development. On the one hand, it stimulates the growth of domestic companies' competitiveness, which cumulatively raises the competitiveness of the Republic of Moldova as a whole on foreign markets. On the other hand, the adoption of green marketing and CSR practices brings social benefits—supported communities, protected environment—and aligns the Moldovan economy with European strategic directions (the Europe 2020 agenda and the UN SDGs for sustainable development) [1]. We can therefore say that modern

marketing is becoming a catalyst for both the progress of individual businesses and the positive transformation of society, creating a balance between commercial objectives and the common good.

Challenges in adopting modern marketing

Despite the clear benefits, **the transition to modern marketing** is not without obstacles, especially in an emerging economy such as that of the Republic of Moldova. Among the main challenges are (Figure 2):

1. Many companies, especially SMEs, do not have staff trained in new marketing technologies. Low digital literacy at the management or employee level makes it difficult to adopt tools such as advanced online advertising, data analysis, or managing presence on multiple digital platforms. Professional training in digital marketing and e-commerce is still in its infancy, and well-trained specialists tend to migrate to larger markets.

2. Although internet penetration has reached ~61%, there are disparities between urban and rural areas, connection speeds can vary, and access costs can be a burden for some. The lack of reliable infrastructure in peripheral areas limits the potential of companies there to operate online (e.g., online stores serving the entire country). At the same time, local e-commerce faces logistical challenges (delivery, unpopular online payment), which slows down the development of digital marketing geared towards online sales.

3. Some companies still view digital marketing as a risky novelty or consider it "unsuitable" for their field. There is a conservatism among some managers who prefer traditional promotion methods (personal recommendations, trade fairs, local radio/TV ads) and are reluctant to allocate significant budgets to online campaigns. This mindset may also be fueled by a lack of understanding of how new media works—for example, the difficulty of directly measuring how a Facebook *like* or share translates into sales causes some to underestimate the importance of online brand engagement. Changing this perspective requires time, education, and concrete examples of local success.

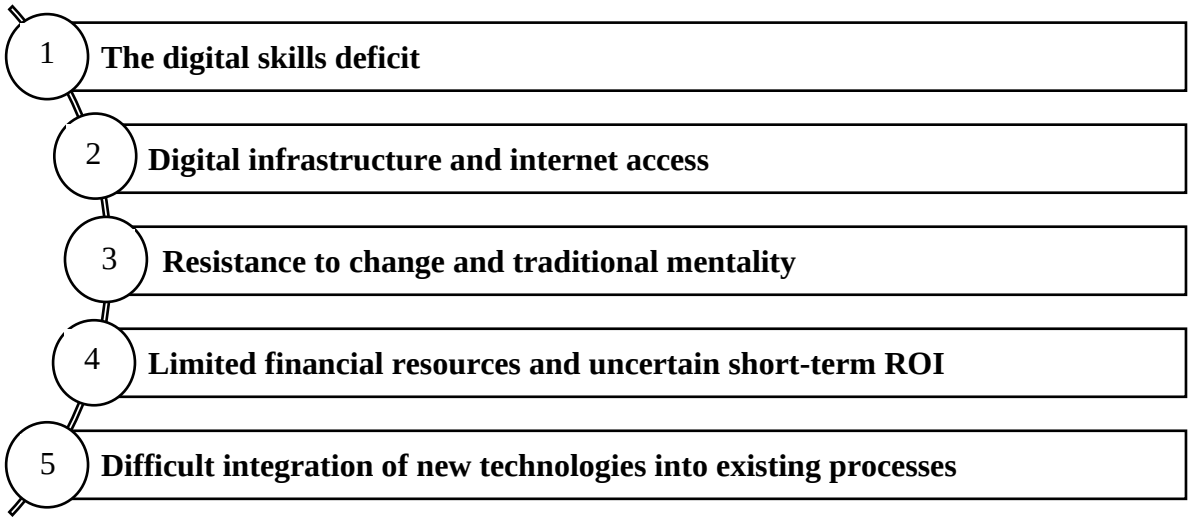


Figure 2. Challenges in adopting modern marketing

Source: created by the author

4. Implementing modern strategies (digitization, green campaigns) may require substantial initial investments – in equipment, software, training, environmental certifications, etc. For SMEs with limited budgets, this can be daunting. For example, adopting solar panels or eco-friendly packaging increases costs in the short term, even if it can bring savings and image capital in the long term. Similarly, hiring a digital marketing agency or a dedicated specialist may seem like a luxury. The return on investment is not immediate or easy to quantify in the first few months, so companies need to have a long-term vision to sustain these expenses.

5. Digitization is not just about creating a Facebook page, but often involves rethinking business processes. A traditional company that decides to enter e-commerce, for example, must adapt its inventory, order fulfillment, customer relations, delivery, and after-sales services. This internal transformation can be complex and time-consuming. Similarly, implementing a CRM (Customer

Relationship Management) or automation tools requires organizational changes and training [15]. Many companies struggle to coherently integrate online and offline channels, achieving an omnichannel view of the customer. Without consulting or know-how, such projects can fail or be underutilized.

Awareness of these challenges is important because it provides clues about areas where intervention is needed. Steps are already being taken in the right direction: national strategies such as the Digital Transformation Strategy 2023-2030 aim to improve digital infrastructure, increase IT skills among the population and businesses, and strengthen an innovative and resilient economy ready for global competition. Various programs also support SMEs in adopting technologies (e.g., grants for digitization, e-commerce courses) and implementing sustainable practices (green grants, CSR consulting). The local ecosystem of tech startup s (Moldova Innovation Technology Park, entrepreneurship support organizations) plays a role in disseminating digital innovations that can also be adopted by traditional companies.

In the medium term, overcoming these obstacles will determine the extent to which modern marketing spreads throughout the economy. If we succeed in training specialists, modernizing infrastructure, and changing mindsets, Moldovan companies will be able to fully capitalize on the opportunities offered by the digital age and the shift towards sustainability.

Conclusions

The rapid evolution of markets demands that Moldovan companies fundamentally rethink their marketing mindset. Modern marketing—anchored in digital transformation, innovation, and sustainability—has become a key driver of long-term business success. The analysis indicates that many Moldovan firms have already embarked on this transition, increasingly adopting digital platforms (particularly social media) and recognizing the strategic value of embedding social responsibility into their brand identity. Emerging patterns reveal a shift in marketing approaches, with greater emphasis on customer engagement in the online space, the use of analytics and automation, authentic communication of ethical principles, and the promotion of eco-friendly initiatives.

These developments bring considerable advantages, from improved communication efficiency and access to new markets to stronger customer loyalty and brand reputation. Nonetheless, several challenges persist—such as the digital skills gap, disparities in infrastructure, resistance to organizational change, and limited financial resources. Addressing these issues requires coordinated action among businesses, government institutions, and academia to foster an environment that empowers SMEs to digitize and integrate sustainability into their operations. Encouragingly, national programs focused on digitalization, as well as grant schemes supporting CSR and innovation, are paving the way toward this transformation.

In summary, modern marketing can serve as a genuine catalyst for sustainable economic growth in the Republic of Moldova. By embracing new technologies and maintaining a responsible, forward-looking attitude, Moldovan companies not only strengthen their competitiveness but also contribute to social and environmental progress. Over the next few years, this evolution is expected to deepen, with more enterprises incorporating digital and green marketing practices—positioning Moldova as an adaptable, innovative, and sustainability-oriented economy within both regional and global contexts. For those organizations that successfully align with these trends, the outcome will go beyond financial gains, leading to greater resilience, relevance, and long-term success in an ever-evolving marketplace.

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