

Referada za poslijediplomske studije i doktorate

U Rijeci, dana 2. lipnja 2024. godine

ZAHTJEV ZA OCJENU DOKTORSKOG RADA

Poštovani članovi Fakultetskog vijeća i Povjerenstva za poslijediplomske studije i doktorate, sukladno članku 35. Pravilnika o doktorskom studiju Ekonomija i poslovna ekonomija (pročišćeni tekst), Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci od 20. ožujka 2023. godine podnosim svoj zahtjev za ocjenu doktorskog rada s naslovom **Mentalni modeli u marketingu – povezanost menadžerskih kognicija i tržišne snage marke** kojem prilažem:


1. Indeks
 2. Odluka FV o prihvaćanju prijave teme i imenovanje mentora
 3. Odluku FV o prihvaćanju prikaza rezultata istraživanja
 4. Rješenje o priznavanju ECTS bodova sukladno čl. 27 i 28. Pravilnika o doktorskom studiju
 5. Pismenu suglasnost mentora/komentora da rad zadovoljava kriterije doktorskog rada (ispunjava mentor/komentor)
 6. 4 spiralno uvezena primjerka doktorskog rada
 7. životopis na standardiziranom obrascu u 2 primjerka (Europass)
 8. kratak sažetak doktorskog rada (300-500 riječi) te pet ključnih riječi na engleskom i hrvatskom jeziku
 9. prošireni sažetak koji se piše na engleskom jeziku ukoliko je rad pisan na hrvatskom odnosno na hrvatskom jeziku ukoliko je rad pisan na engleskom jeziku; ne smije biti kraći od 5000 riječi (sadrži ciljeve, postupke, rezultate i zaključke istraživanja zajedno s tablicama/grafikonima te popisom literature)
 10. naslov doktorskog rada na hrvatskom i engleskom jeziku (službena lektura)
 11. izvješće o provedenoj provjeri izvornosti doktorske disertacije (TURNITIN obrazac – ispunjava ga mentor/komentor)
 12. zapis doktorske disertacije u PDF formatu (jedna datoteka) – poslati mailom
- U nadi za vašim pozitivnim očitovanjem srdačno vas pozdravljam,

STUDENT:



mr. sc. Mario Fraculj

MENTOR SA ZAMOLBOM SUGLASAN :



izv. prof. dr. sc. Jasmina

EKONOMSKI FAKULTET RIJEKA

Primljeno	03-07-2024
Kl. ozn.	643-03/24-05/5
Ur. br.	111-01-24-001
Org. jed.	01

Ekonomski fakultet u Rijeci
Ivana Filipovića 4
HR-51000 Rijeka

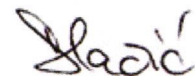
Rijeka, 2. srpnja 2024.

Ekonomski fakultet u Rijeci
Povjerenstvo za PS i doktorate

Predmet: PISANA SUGLASNOST ZA PREDAJU DOKTORSKOG RADA

Dajem suglasnost **Mariju Fraculju**, studentu doktorskog studija Ekonomije i poslovne ekonomije, za predaju u postupak ocjenjivanja doktorskog rada pod naslovom „**Mentalni modeli u marketingu – povezanost menadžerskih kognicija i tržišne snage marke**“.

Mentor:



izv. prof. dr. sc. Jasmina Dlačić

Mario Fraculj
Ratarska 35, Zagreb
Mob: 099 4555 575
e-mail: mfraculj@gmail.com

EKONOMSKI FAKULTET U RIJECI
Ivana Filipovića 4
51000 R i j e k a

Naslov teme doktorskog rada

Mentalni modeli u marketingu – povezanost menadžerskih kognicija i tržišne snage marke

(na hrvatskom jeziku)

Mental models in marketing – the relationship between managerial cognition and brand strength

(na engleskom jeziku)

Potpis doktoranda

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Fraculj', written in a cursive style.

Mario Fraculj



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Hrvatska

SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI
Filozofski fakultet

tel. (051) 265-600 | (051) 265-602
dekanat@ffri.hr
www.ffri.uniri.hr

KLASA: 643-01/23-01/77
URBROJ: 2170-1-41-09-23-2

U Rijeci 28. studenog 2023.

EKONOMSKI FAKULTET RIJEKA

Primljeno	01.12.2023
Kl. ozn.	643-02 / 23-12 / 24
Ur. br.	141-01-23-001
Org. jed.	01

POTVRDNICA

Potvrđujem da je predloženi naslov doktorskoga rada

**Mentalni modeli u marketingu – povezanost
menadžerskih kognicija i tržišne snage marke**

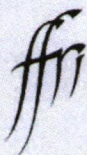
pristupnika mr. sc. Marija Fraculja

u skladu s normama hrvatskoga standardnog jezika.

doc. dr. sc. Maša Plešković
ovlaštena lektorica

SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI

Filozofski fakultet



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KLASA: 643-01/23-01/81

UR. BROJ: 2170-1-41-01-23-2

U Rijeci, 29.01.2024.

POTVRDA

Potvrđujem da je lektorirani naslov doktorskog rada doktoranda Maria Fraculja,

Mental Models in Marketing - the Relationship between Managerial Cognition and Brand Strength

u skladu s normom engleskog standardnog jezika.

EKONOMSKI FAKULTET RIJEKA

Primljeno	30-01-2024
Kl. ozn.	643-03/24-13/03
Ur. br.	141-01-24-1
Org. jed.	01

Jadranka Kim Musa



Jadranka Kim Musa, visa lektorica

OSOBNJE INFORMACIJE

Mario Fraculj



 Ratarska 35, 10145 Zagreb, Hrvatska

 01 7999847  099 4555575

 mfraculj@gmail.com

Spol muško | Datum rođenja 26/09/1975 | Državljanstvo hrvatsko

OSOBNI PROFIL

Magistar znanosti, voditelj Katedre za ekonomiju i predavač na studiju digitalnog marketinga, dokazani ekspert u području marketinga i komunikacija, član hrvatskog Effie odbora i stalni sudski vještak za marketing

RADNO ISKUSTVO

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 2018 - | Voditelj katedre za ekonomiju i predavač
Sveučilište Algebra <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrirane marketinške komunikacije, Međunarodni marketing, Strateški marketing, Društvena odgovornost marketinga, Upravljanje inovacijama i razvoj novih proizvoda... |
| 2018 - | Direktor
DIGITAL TALENTS (marketinška agencija), ZERO2ONE (konzultantska kompanija) |
| 2018 -2019 | Chief Strategy Officer
DRAP (jedna od prvih i najnagrađivanijih digitalnih agencija u Hrvatskoj) |
| 2017-2018 | Savjetnik uprave
I&F McCann Grupa (jedan od vodećih komunikacijskih sustava u Jugoistočnoj Europi) |
| 2014 - 2017 | Predsjednik uprave
McCann Zagreb (marketinška agencija) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Odgovoran za kreiranje, implementaciju i integraciju strateškog usmjerenja agencije Planirao, organizirao i kontrolirao sve funkcije kompanije; nadzor i evaluacija učinka različitih odjela Vodio tim od preko 60 agencijskih profesionalaca, optimizirao poslovne resurse Izgradio i njegovao odnose s glavnim klijentima uključujući Coca-Colu, Mastercard, Raiffeisen banku, Hrvatski Telekom, Carlsberg, Franck itd. Vodio agenciju do titule najučinkovitijeg komunikacijskog sustava u Hrvatskoj i regiji prema Effie indeksu učinkovitosti 2015. |
| 2013 - 2014 | Izvršni direktor
McCann Zagreb (marketinška agencija) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upravljaio operativnim poslovanjem agencije i koordinirao svakodnevne aktivnosti; nadzirao kros-funkcijske timove u provedbi integriranih marketinških projekata Vodio razvoj poslovanja, akviziciju novih klijenata i ugovaranje Ostvario dvocifreni rast prihoda na godišnjoj razini i vodio agenciju do osvajanja najviše nagrada za različite kampanje na središnjem nacionalnom festivalu oglašavanja (Dani komunikacija 2014.) |
| 2012 - 2013 | Direktor projekata
Kraš d.d. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Koordinirao marketinške, razvojne i prodajne timove Upravljaio resursima i nadzirao izvješća o statusima projekata Razvijao odnose i partnerstva s trećim stranama sa svrhom postizanja strateških ciljeva i povećanja prihoda |

2004 - 2012 Direktor marketinga

Kraš d.d.

- Odgovoran za marketinške komunikacije, upravljanje brandovima, inovacije i razvoj novih proizvoda
- Vodio tim od preko 30 marketinških profesionalaca i upravljao marketinškim budžetom većim od 5 milijuna EUR-a
- Unaprijedio strateško planiranje, upravljanje brandovima i R&D
- Reducirao složenost kroz restrukturiranje proizvodnog portfolija i fokusiranje na ključne brandove
- Ubrzao proces lansiranja novih proizvoda i povećao udjel prihoda od prodaje novih proizvoda u ukupnom prihodu
- Kreirao desetke uspješnih brand kampanja i lansirao više od 200 novih i inoviranih proizvoda u uvjetima kratkih rokova i budžetskih ograničenja
- Lansirao prvu komercijalnu Facebook aplikaciju u regiji (Životinjsko carstvo u 2008.) iskoristivši društvenu mrežu za promociju brandova i interakciju s potrošačima te priskrbivši kompaniji titulu „predvodnika u usvajanju civilizacijskih trendova koje sa sobom donosi digitalna tehnologija“

2001 - 2004 Šef Odjela za istraživanje tržišta i razvoj proizvoda

Kraš d.d.

- Vodio tim od nekoliko brand managera i istraživača tržišta
- Dizajnirao i provodio projekte istraživanja tržišta i potrošača
- Analizirao tržišne trendove i razvijao strategije za rast i razvoj kompanije
- Koordinirao aktivnosti razvoja brandova i novih proizvoda

2000 - 2001 Pripravnik

Kraš d.d.

- Razvio holistički pogled na kompaniju i poslovne procese kroz rotaciju između različitih odjela i funkcija
- Izradio prvu portfolio analizu korištenjem BCG matrice

OBRAZOVANJE I OSPOSOBLJAVANJE

2019 – Doktorand

Ekonomski fakultet, Sveučilište u Rijeci

Poslijediplomski
studij

- Doktorski studij poslovne ekonomije, obranjena tema disertacije „Mentalni modeli u marketingu – povezanost menadžerskih kognicija i tržišne snage marke“ i prikaz rezultata istraživanja

2001 - 2005 Magistar znanosti

Ekonomski fakultet, Sveučilište u Zagrebu

Poslijediplomski
studij

- Poslijediplomski studij Organizacija i Management
- Magistarski rad: Strateška analiza hrvatske konditorske industrije

1994 - 1999 Diplomirani ekonomist

Ekonomski fakultet, Sveučilište u Zagrebu

Diplomski studij

- Diplomski studij ekonomije
- Dvije dekanove nagrade za akademska postignuća,
- Prosjek ocjena 4.8
- Državna stipendija
- Stipendija Grada Zagreba

1990 - 1994 Srednja škola

16. gimnazija u Zagrebu

Srednja škola

- Učenik generacije

PROFESIONALNI TRENINZI:

- Program "Brand Management", CBA Business School, 2006.
- Profesionalni trening "Developing Competitive Marketing Strategies", Marcus Evans, London, 2004.
- Seminari, radionice: Strateški brand management, Razvoj novih proizvoda, Komunikacijske i prezentacijske vještine, Asertivnost i timski rad, Upravljanje vremenom, Kontroling, Razvoj proizvoda i ambalaže, design thinking...

OSOBNOSTNE VJEŠTINE

Materinski jezik hrvatski

Ostali jezici

	RAZUMIJEVANJE		GOVOR		PISANJE
	Slušanje	Čitanje	Govorna interakcija	Govorna produkcija	
engleski	C2	C2	C2	C2	C2
Certificate of Proficiency in English, University of Cambridge					
njemački	B1	B2	B1	B1	B1
talijanski	A1	A2	A1	A1	A1

Stupnjevi: A1/2: Temeljni korisnik - B1/B2: Samostalni korisnik - C1/C2 Iskusni korisnik
Zajednički europski referentni okvir za jezike

Komunikacijske vještine

- Razvijene interpersonalne vještine kroz managersko iskustvo i međuodjelnu suradnju u jednoj od najvećih hrvatskih prehrambenih kompanija
- Sklonost timskom radu

Organizacijske / rukovoditeljske vještine

- upravljanje kompletnim poslovnim sustavom i optimizacija resursa
- vođenje tima od 60 ljudi
- kontrola budžeta od 5 milijuna €
- odgovornost za poslovne rezultate (P&L)

Poslovne vještine

- Područja ekspertize:
- marketing, komunikacije, mediji (sudski vještak)
 - strateško planiranje
 - istraživanje tržišta
 - upravljanje brandovima
 - razvoj novih proizvoda i usluga
 - inovacije
 - oglašavanje
 - industrijska analiza
 - digitalna transformacija
 - analiza konkurentskog okruženja
 - upravljanje projektima

Digitalna kompetencija

SAMOPROCJENA				
Obrada informacija	Komunikacija	Stvaranje sadržaja	Sigurnost	Rješavanje problema
Iskusni korisnik	Iskusni korisnik	Samostalni korisnik	Samostalni korisnik	Iskusni korisnik

Stupnjevi: Temeljni korisnik - Samostalni korisnik - Iskusni korisnik
Informacijsko-komunikacijske tehnologije - tablica za samoprocjenu

- napredno korištenje svih standardnih uredskih aplikacija
- poznavanje software-a za obradu fotografija i videa

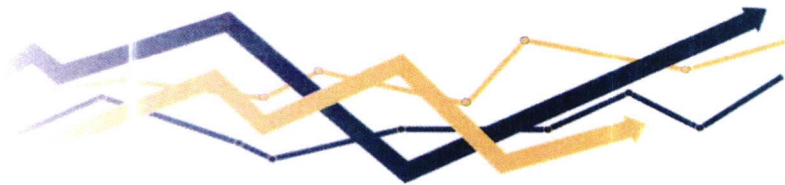
Vozačka dozvola B

DODATNE INFORMACIJE

Članstva
Priznanja i nagrade
Konferencije
Prezentacije
Seminari

- Stalni sudski vještak za marketing, tržišne komunikacije i oglašavanje
- Autor niza stručnih i znanstvenih članaka (<https://www.croris.hr/crosbi/searchByContext/2/35061>)
- Član Radne skupine za (samo)regulaciju IAB-a Croatia od 2023.
- Član uprave i Predsjednik Odbora za regulaciju i samoregulaciju u HURA-i (Hrvatsko udruženje društava za tržišno komuniciranje) 2014-2019
- Član hrvatskog Effie odbora od 2009, moderator i prvi predsjednik žirija
- Član Euro Effie žirija u 2011. i 2012. g.
- Član Global Best of the Best Effie žirija u 2023. i 2024. g.
- Dobitnik zlatne Effie nagrade za kampanju Životinjsko carstvo na Facebooku, i još deset srebrnih i brončanih nagrada za različite brandove, 2009-2013.
- Član Gospodarskog vijeća Visokog učilišta Algebra 2015-2018
- Glavni govornik (keynote speaker) na temu digitalnog marketinga i inovacija na 4. konferenciji M-Sphere u Dubrovniku 2015.
- Sudionik panel rasprave Marketing Management – Digital Business & Technology Trends na 2. regionalnoj konferenciji Lideri za lidere na temu poslovnih trendova, inovacija i rasta, Zagreb, 2015.
- Panelist na temu oglašavanja na 8. Weekend Media Festivalu u Rovinju, 2015.
- Govornik na temu promocije brandova putem društvenih mreža na 6. regionalnoj CRM konferenciji, Zagreb, 2009.
- Govornik na temu korištenja digitalnih tehnologija na konferenciji o marketingu i oglašavanju WAZZAP?, Best Marketing, Zagreb, 2008.

PRILOZI



KLASA: 643-03/22-03/05
URBROJ: 2170-57-07-22-006

Rijeka, 20. prosinca 2022.

Temeljem članka 65. Pravilnika o studijima Sveučilišta u Rijeci te članka 11. Pravilnika o poslijediplomskom sveučilišnom doktorskom studiju Ekonomije i Poslovne ekonomije Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci, Fakultetsko vijeće Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci na 276. sjednici održanoj 19. prosinca 2022. donijelo je

ODLUKU

Prihvaća se tema doktorske disertacije doktoranda mr. sc. Maria Fraculja, pod naslovom

„Mentalni modeli u marketingu – povezanost menadžerskih kognicija i tržišne snage marke“.

DEKAN:

Prof. dr. sc. Saša Drezgić



DOSTAVITI:

1. mr. sc. Mario Fraculj
2. mentorici
3. pismohrana



Klasa: 643-03/19-19/8
Ur.br.: 2170-57-19-19-11

Rijeka, 14. svibnja 2019. godine

Na temelju članka 11. st. 1. podst. 3. i članka 13. st. 1. i 2. Pravilnika o poslijediplomskom sveučilišnom studiju (doktorskom studiju) Ekonomija i poslovna ekonomija i članka 36. Statuta Ekonomskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Rijeci, Fakultetsko vijeće Ekonomskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Rijeci je na 220. sjednici održanoj 13. svibnja 2019. godine donijelo

ODLUKU

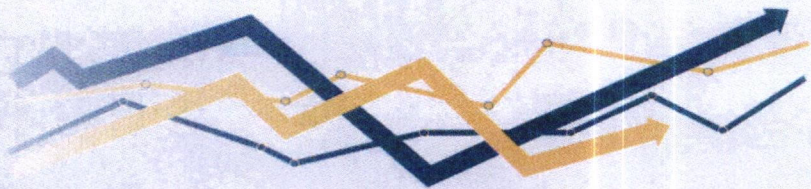
1. Doc. dr. sc. Jasmina Dlačić imenuje se za mentoricu mr. sc. Mariu Fraculju, doktorandu Poslijediplomskog sveučilišnog studija (dokorskog studija) Ekonomija i poslovna ekonomija Ekonomskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Rijeci.



Prof. dr. sc. Alen Host

Dostavlja se:

1. mr. sc. Mario Fraculj
2. Doc. dr. sc. Jasmina Dlačić, mentorica
3. Pismohrana



KLASA. 643-03/23-04/09
URBROJ: 141-07-23-002

Rijeka, 19. prosinca 2023. godine

Temeljem članka 65. Pravilnika o studijima Sveučilišta u Rijeci te članka 11. Pravilnika o doktorskom studiju Ekonomija i poslovna ekonomija Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci, Fakultetsko vijeće Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci na 293. sjednici održanoj 18. prosinca 2023. godine donijelo je

O D L U K U

Prihvaća se prikaz rezultata istraživanja doktorskog rada doktoranda mr. sc. Maria Fraculja pod naslovom:

„Mentalni modeli u marketingu - povezanost menadžerskih kognicija i tržišne snage marke“.

DEKAN:
Prof. dr. sc. Saša Drezgić

DOSTAVITI:

1. doktorandu
2. mentorici
3. pismohrana

Klasa: 643-03/19 -19 / 5
Ur. br. 2170-57/19 -19/19

Rijeka, 03. travnja 2019.

Na temelju članka 28. Pravilnika o poslijediplomskom sveučilišnom studiju (doktorskom studiju) Ekonomija i poslovna ekonomija Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci, povodom zahtjeva doktoranda Maria Fraculja, Povjerenstvo za poslijediplomske studije i doktorate je na 303. sjednici održanoj dana 01. travnja 2019. donijelo slijedeću

ODLUKU

O PRIZNAVANJU ECTS BODOVA

1. Povjerenstvo je na temelju zahtjeva i dokumenata priloženih uz zahtjev utvrdilo da je doktorand Mario Fraculj na Ekonomskom fakultetu Sveučilišta u Zagrebu završio sveučilišni poslijediplomski znanstveni studij Organizacija i management.
2. Povjerenstvo je utvrdilo da na temelju završenog poslijediplomskog studija navedenog u točki 1. ove odluke doktorand posjeduje kompetencije ekvivalentne kompetencijama koje se stječu završetkom poslijediplomskog znanstvenog studija u Republici Hrvatskoj.
3. Sukladno iznesenom doktorandu Mariu Fraculju priznaje se 80 ECTS bodova na poslijediplomskom sveučilišnom studiju (doktorskom studiju) Ekonomija i poslovna ekonomija Ekonomskog fakulteta u Rijeci.

Predsjednica Povjerenstva:

Prof. dr. sc. Helena Blažić



SAŽETAK

Predmet istraživanja ove doktorske disertacije uključuje dva primarna objekta, a to su mentalni modeli marketinških menadžera i marketinška uspješnost. Osnovni ciljevi ove disertacije bili su istražiti i produbiti prethodne teorijske spoznaje o ulozi menadžerskih kognicija u razvoju i primjeni marketinških sposobnosti te oblikovati konceptualni model i empirijski testirati povezanost mentalnih modela marketinških menadžera i marketinške uspješnosti mjerene promjenom u tržišnoj snazi marke.

U empirijskom dijelu rada koristio se mješoviti pristup. Podaci za kvalitativno istraživanje prikupljeni su metodom polustrukturiranih dubinskih intervjua, a u njihovoj obradi korištena je metoda analize sadržaja. Kod kvantitativnog istraživanja podaci su prikupljeni pomoću strukturiranog upitnika, a u obradi su korištene metode univarijatne (osnovni deskriptivni pokazatelji varijabli, t-test, ANOVA), bivarijatne (analiza korelacije) i multivarijatne statističke analize (eksplorativna faktorska analiza, konfirmatorna kompozitna analiza).

Pomoćne hipoteze koje se odnose na kombiniranu marketinšku ambidekstriju i jači naglasak na ambidekstričnoj sposobnosti odbačene su. Rezultat testiranja pomoćne hipoteze vezane uz balansiranu marketinšku ambidekstriju pokazuje da marketinški menadžeri koji jači naglasak stavljaju na marketinšku eksploataciju ostvaruju veći porast tržišne snage svojih marki od onih koji marketinškoj eksploataciji i eksploraciji streme na uravnotežen način. Ovo bez obzira na pretpostavljeni smjer razlike (empirijski nalazi su mješoviti) pruža uporište za djelomično prihvaćanje temeljne hipoteze da postoji povezanost mentalnih modela marketinških menadžera i tržišne snage marke.

Znanstveni doprinos rada ogleda se u povezivanju tri zasebna istraživačka pravca koja se bave menadžerskim kognicijama, marketinškim sposobnostima i ambidekstrijom. Postavljena je nova tipologija mentalnih modela prema odnosu marketinške eksploracije i eksploatacije te su razvijene dvije nove skale za mjerenje fokusa na upravljanju komunikacijom marke i fokusa na razvoju novih proizvoda, čime je djelomično popunjen istraživački jaz identificiran proučavanjem literature. Praktične implikacije uključuju mogućnost prosuđivanja angažmana menadžera u marketinškom procesu kroz prizmu definiranih mentalnih modela te potencijalni doprinos u području upravljanja ljudskim potencijalima u vidu selekcije i edukacije zaposlenika.

U daljnjim istraživanjima preporuča se uzeti u obzir i druge čimbenike koji mogu utjecati na kretanje tržišne snage marke, drukčije operacionalizirati konstrukte te identificirati jakosti i slabosti pojedinih mentalnih modela u različitim fazama poslovanja i životnog ciklusa marke i industrije.

Ključne riječi: Mentalni modeli, menadžerske kognicije, marketinške sposobnosti, marketinška ambidekstrija, tržišna snaga marke

SUMMARY

The research of this doctoral dissertation involves two primary objects, namely the mental models of marketing managers and marketing performance. The main objectives of this dissertation were to explore and deepen previous theoretical knowledge about the role of managerial cognitions in the development and application of marketing capabilities, and to develop a conceptual model and empirically test the relationship between the mental models of marketing managers and marketing performance measured by the change in the brand strength.

A mixed methods design was used in the empirical part of the dissertation. The data for the qualitative research were collected using the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews, and processed using the method of content analysis. In the quantitative research, the data were collected using a structured questionnaire, and analyzed using the methods of univariate (basic descriptive statistics of variables, t-test, ANOVA), bivariate (correlation analysis) and multivariate statistics (exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory composite analysis).

Auxiliary hypotheses relating to combined marketing ambidexterity and a stronger emphasis on an ambidextrous capability were rejected. The result of testing the auxiliary hypothesis related to balanced marketing ambidexterity shows that marketing managers who place a stronger emphasis on marketing exploitation achieve a greater increase in the brand strength than those who strive for marketing exploitation and exploration in a balanced way. This, regardless of the assumed direction of the difference (empirical findings are mixed), provides support for the partial acceptance of the main hypothesis that there is a connection between mental models of marketing managers and brand strength.

The scientific contribution of the paper is reflected in combining the three separate research streams of managerial cognition, marketing capabilities and ambidexterity. A new typology of mental models was proposed according to the relationship between marketing exploration and exploitation, and two new scales were developed to measure the focus on brand communication management and the focus on new product development, which partially filled the research gap identified in the literature. Practical implications include the possibility of judging managers' engagement in the marketing process through the prism of defined mental models and the potential contribution to the field of human resources management in the form of employee selection and education.

In further research, it is recommended to consider other factors that can affect brand strength, to operationalize constructs differently and identify the strengths and weaknesses of individual mental models at different stages of the business development and brand and industry life cycles.

Keywords: mental models, managerial cognition, marketing capabilities, marketing ambidexterity, brand strength

Extended summary

Introduction

Why are some firms in the same industry more successful than others, and their brands have more strength? In the strategic management literature, the success of a firm is predominantly interpreted through its positioning in relation to competitive forces (structuralist approach, Porter, 1980) or competitive advantage is related to the possession of particularly valuable resources that enable the firm to perform business activities better or cheaper than competitors (resource-based theory, Barney, 1991).

However, in some of the literature, differences in the performance are also attributed to differences in the way managers interpret the market situation, perceive market trends and define key marketing capabilities (Eggers and Kaplan, 2013). When managing marketing processes and making business decisions, marketing managers are guided by mental models that consist of their ideas and beliefs on how to develop the market orientation of the firm, customer relations and brand reputation. They have experience and quite firm views on what the key marketing capabilities are that will ensure effective market communication and the realization of business goals (Tollin and Schmidt, 2015).

In order to adequately solve the research problem, it is necessary to provide scientifically based answers to the following questions:

- What are the most important marketing capabilities? What new skills and capabilities do marketers need to develop to keep up with the times?
- Can managers' mental models explain the differences in the marketing performance of different firms and the strength of their brands? Is there a difference in the marketing performance of firms whose managers focus on different marketing capabilities? What do marketing managers whose brands achieve an increase in strength have in common?

- What are the key dimensions in mental models/capabilities when it comes to decision-making and resource use?
- Is marketing ambidexterity in the mental model of the marketing manager, combined and/or balanced, positively related to the brand strength? If imbalance is better, is it in the direction of marketing exploitation or marketing exploration?
- Are more successful brands led by marketing managers focused on new product development or those led by marketing managers focused on managing brand communications?

Based on the research problem and research questions and the identified research gap that is reflected in the insufficient research and lack of empirical confirmation of managers' mental models as a source of business and marketing performance, the subject of the research was determined, and that is to examine the connection between mental models of marketing managers and brand strength, i.e. empirically determine whether the differences in brand strength can be attributed to the differences in the mental models of managers who manage these brands.

The main purpose of this thesis is to develop a conceptual and theoretical understanding of mental models in marketing as a fundamental subject of research and their connection with marketing success, i.e. changes in brand strength. In accordance with the stated purpose, the following research goals have been defined:

- conduct a critical analysis of the scientific and professional literature on mental models, marketing capabilities, marketing exploitation, exploration and ambidexterity and various indicators of marketing performance, including brand strength,
- deepen theoretical knowledge of the role of managerial cognitions in the development and application of marketing capabilities, define the dimensions and typology of mental models,
- formulate and explain a conceptual model of the relationship between mental models of marketing managers and brand strength,

- To empirically test the relationship between mental models of marketing managers and marketing performance measured by changes in brand strength.

Based on the defined research problem and the results of previous research, and in accordance with the set research goals, the following main hypothesis was proposed:

H: There is a correlation between mental models of marketing managers and brand strength.

and three auxiliary hypotheses:

PH1: Brands managed by marketing managers who consider marketing exploitation and marketing exploration equally important achieve a greater increase in their strength than brands managed by marketing managers who place a stronger focus on one of these two groups of activities.

PH2: Brands managed by marketing managers who give more overall importance to marketing exploitation and marketing exploration achieve a greater increase in their strength than brands managed by marketing managers who give less overall importance to these groups of activities.

PH3: Brands managed by marketing managers focused on new product development achieve a greater increase in their strength than brands managed by marketing managers focused on brand communication management.

Theoretical framework

Mental models

Mental models form the basic concept of this doctoral thesis. The fact that mental models are an interdisciplinary phenomenon gives rise to a multitude of definitions that show that this concept is viewed differently by theorists from different disciplines. For the purpose of this thesis, mental models will be treated as a set of relatively stable ideas and beliefs of marketing managers about how to develop market orientation, customer relations and brand reputation, and which marketing capabilities should be focused on in a certain business context, which is closest to the understanding presented by Karin Tollin and her

colleagues in their papers (Tollin, 2008; Tollin and Jones, 2016; Tollin and Schmidt, 2015).

In addition to a large number of different definitions of mental models, there are also a large number of **synonyms**. In the marketing literature, in addition to the mental model, the most commonly used terms are 'mindset' and 'marketing logic' (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Tollin, 2008; Tollin and Jones, 2009). The latter is related to the concept of 'dominant logic' introduced by Prahalad and Bettis (1986, p. 490) to denote 'the way in which managers conceptualize the business and make critical resource allocation decisions – be it in technologies, product development, distribution, advertising, or in human resource management'.

Mental models (and in general this cognitive approach to strategy, organizational learning, and other areas including marketing) are based on several theoretical assumptions and concepts. According to the theory of bounded rationality (Simon, 1957), managers have limited cognitive capacities and mental abilities, so when solving complex business challenges, they tend to be selective and rely on heuristics and biases (Tversky and Kahnemann, 1974). Over time, and based on experience, learning, and past decisions, they construct mental models, as simplified representations of reality, in order to interpret industry trends, customer demands, competitors' actions, and other events in their environment (Mandal and Thomas, 2009; Karakaya and Yannopoulos, 2010; Uotila, 2015).

Another important pillar on which the concept of mental models rests is the theory of upper echelons developed by Hambrick and Mason (1984) which emphasizes the key importance of cognitive processes in the top management team for firm's strategic behavior (Buyl et al., 2011). The basic premises of this theory are as follows (Hambrick and Mason, 1984):

- Managers act on the basis of their personalized interpretations of the strategic situations they are facing,
- These personalized interpretations are a function of the manager's experience, values, and personality.

Among other concepts that are theoretically related to mental models, the **resource-based view** can be singled out due to the role of managerial cognitions in the development and application of marketing and organizational capabilities in general in a dynamic environment (Bogner and Barr, 2000; Tollin and Jones, 2009; Shang et al., 2010; Eggers and Kaplan, 2013) and the fact that in some previous typologies (including the one in this thesis) mental models are defined as managers' orientations towards certain marketing capabilities (Tollin and Jones, 2009; Tollin and Schmidt, 2015). Also, in dynamic capabilities theory, the role of managers was subsequently recognized and their mental models were integrated as an important factor in harmonizing the development of capabilities with changes in the environment (Augier and Teece, 2009; Shang et al., 2010).

By looking at the basic characteristics of mental models, it can be concluded that they are incomplete (Spicer, 1998; Jones et al., 2011; Gary & Wood, 2011) and sometimes inaccurate representations of reality (Porac et al., 1989; Barr et al., 1992; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000; Malmi et al., 2023) that depend on the context (Jones et al., 2011) and exist in the mind of the individual (Senge, 2001; Jones et al., 2011; Rook, 2013) and as such are not available for direct inspection and measurement (Norman, 1983; Jones et al., 2011; Magzan, 2012; Yrjölä et al., 2018). They are heterogeneous (Hodgkinson et al., 1999; Tripsas and Gavetti, 2000; Kaplan and Tripsas, 2008) and relatively stable (Hodgkinson, 1997; Karakaya and Yannopoulos, 2010; Magzan, 2012), which can result in cognitive inertia and then deterioration of business results (Porac and Thomas, 1990; Barr et al., 1992; Barr, 1998; Mandal et al., 2009; Malmi et al., 2023).

There are various concrete methods of detecting and measuring mental models, the application of which also depends on the type of knowledge that is sought to be discovered: interviews, questionnaires, analysis of the content of written narratives, simulation games, cognitive mapping, etc. (Cooke et al., 2000; Gary and Wood 2011; Kaplan, 2011; Buyl et al., 2011). With the advancement of neuromarketing, various methods of brain scanning, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging and quantitative electroencephalography, have come into use.

Abundant evidence suggests that mental models play an important role in firm performance (Barr et al., 1992; Walsh, 1995; Gary et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2019). The

study of the literature also identified a specific research gap. To measure the relationship or the impact of mental models on marketing performance, scales are needed to measure the presence of different mental models in managers and a framework with variables that link mental models to marketing performance (Hooley et al., 2005; Tollin and Jones, 2009). This research gap is addressed in this doctoral thesis by developing a conceptual model of the relationship between mental models of marketing managers and brand strength as a measure of success, and by developing measurement scales for two specific mental models.

Marketing capabilities

The term capability in the scientific literature refers to 'the ability of an organization to perform a coordinated set of tasks, utilizing organizational resources, for the purpose of achieving a particular end result' (Helfat et al, 2003, p. 999), or, as Tollin and Jones (2009) state the observations of several authors, it is 'the knowledge that has been built up over time through repeatable organizational learning processes'. Marketing capabilities refer to the processes by which firms combine and use available resources to create market offerings that customers find valuable (Morgan & Feng, 2024).

By studying the marketing literature, two key characteristics of marketing capabilities can be identified, which are dynamism and hierarchical nature. In earlier theoretical views of marketing capabilities, dynamism was implicitly understood (Day, 1994; Hunt and Morgan, 1995), while in the concept of dynamic capabilities it is directly explicated (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2009; Leemann and Kanbach, 2022; Morgan and Feng, 2024). Also, certain marketing capabilities can be considered as 'higher-order' capabilities because they serve to develop specialized 'lower-level' marketing capabilities (Vorhies et al., 2011).

There are several different classifications of marketing capabilities, and the most exhaustive is Morgan's, which divides marketing capabilities into four main groups: specialized, architectural, cross-functional and dynamic capabilities (Morgan, 2012). Marketing capabilities are an important tool for achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Martin, 2017; Morgan and Feng, 2024), and Vorhies et al. (2011) classify them into marketing exploration capabilities and marketing exploitation capabilities.

Marketing exploitation refers to improving existing products, skills, processes and capabilities, reducing diversity, increasing productivity, successfully collaborating with other departments in a firm and meeting the needs of existing consumers in existing markets, while **marketing exploration** refers to developing new skills, processes and marketing capabilities by applying new market knowledge, extensive market research and monitoring trends, experimentation and development of radical new products (Kyriakopoulos and Moorman, 2004; Vorhies et al., 2011; Tollin and Schmidt, 2012).

The simultaneous commitment to exploitation and exploration is called **ambidexterity** and already March (1991), as one of the first researchers of this concept, pointed out that maintaining an appropriate balance between exploration and exploitation is crucial for the survival and prosperity of a firm. For the purpose of this thesis, marketing ambidexterity will be treated at the individual level, in the mental models of marketing managers, and the focus will be on its division into balanced and combined ambidexterity. Balanced ambidexterity is the pursuit of exploration and exploitation in a balanced way, and combined ambidexterity is the effort to achieve the highest possible level of exploration and exploitation, regardless of their relationship (Junni et al., 2013; Mehrabi et al., 2019; He et al. 2021; Muange et al., 2023).

Marketing performance

Marketing performance is a multifaceted and complex concept and represents an important challenge for marketing managers (Rust et al., 2004; Liang and Gao, 2020). According to Gama (2011a), from an organizational perspective, marketing performance is something measurable, dynamic (the choice of indicators is not a static reality, but is evolving), relative (depends on the temporal and spatial context and the comparison of what is planned and achieved) and multidimensional (there are a number of indicators used in marketing practice).

The complexity and multidimensionality of this concept is best illustrated by the theoretically based performance evaluation framework developed by a group of authors who previously studied 998 empirical studies published in the 15 most relevant scientific journals in the period from 1981 to 2014 (Katsikeas et al., 2016). They divide marketing performance into organizational, which includes accounting and financial categories such as sales revenue, profit, margin, credit rating, cost of capital, etc., and operational

performance, which lists groups of indicators related to customer attitudes and behavior (brand equity, perceived quality, satisfaction, attitudinal loyalty, retention...) and product-market performance (unit sales, revenue premium, market share, new product success...).

Due to the increasing demands to prove the contribution of marketing to business results and strengthen its role in defining business strategy, marketing managers have placed a focus on the identification and selection of marketing metrics (Ambler et al., 2004).

Brand strength

As an indicator of marketing performance in this doctoral thesis, brand strength was chosen, which represents a measure of attachment, i.e. consumers' relative preference for a brand (Feldwick, 1996; Walser, 2004). There are several reasons for this.

First of all, the way marketing performance is measured in the fundamental literature is highly fragmented, and evidence in the form of weaker correlations between different performance measures suggests that performance is not a global latent construct and that focus should be placed on one or more indicators of a specific aspect of performance (Katsikeas et al., 2016). Furthermore, brand strength is often used in marketing practice as a measure for objective setting and evaluation of marketing actions, and belongs to the component of 'customer mindset and behavior' which is causally closest to marketing activities, i.e. realized marketing programs in the marketing–performance outcome chain (Katsikeas et al., 2016). Finally, in addition to being crucial for the firm's financial success and growth, brand, as an intangible asset, often dominantly participates in its market value and this fact is a strong argument for choosing brand strength as a measure of marketing performance (Gama, 2011a, He and Calder, 2020).

Conceptual model and methodology

In the theoretical part, the concepts of marketing exploration, exploitation and ambidexterity were explained. When considering the optimal relationship between marketing exploration and exploitation, the results of previous research studies are quite inconsistent (Price, 2012; Mehrabi 2017). Some suggest that balance is the best for success (He and Wong, 2004; Atuahene-Gima, 2005; Uotila et al., 2009; Belderbos et al., 2010; Tu, 2010), while others suggest that it is better to place emphasis on one of the

capabilities (Slater et al., 2007; Vorhies et al., 2011) or that they are simply orthogonal constructs that can be highly developed, simultaneously or sequentially (Birkinshaw and Gupta, 2013; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). In their meta-analysis, Junni et al. (2013) conclude that it is not enough to balance exploration and exploitation to increase performance, but a larger sum of them is more important, which is confirmed by an empirical study subsequently conducted by Mehrabi (2017).

The relationship between the balanced ambidexterity mental model and brand strength will be examined using the first auxiliary hypothesis, and the relationship between the combined ambidexterity mental model and brand strength will be examined using the second auxiliary hypothesis:

PH1: Brands managed by marketing managers who consider marketing exploitation and marketing exploration equally important achieve a greater increase in their strength than brands managed by marketing managers who place a stronger focus on one of these two groups of activities.

PH2: Brands managed by marketing managers who give more overall importance to marketing exploitation and marketing exploration achieve a greater increase in their strength than brands managed by marketing managers who give less overall importance to these groups of activities.

Previous research on mental models in marketing has resulted in typologies in which, among other things, the focus is on new product development, which is related to marketing exploration, and the focus on brand communication management, which is related to marketing exploitation (Tollin and Jones, 2009; Tollin and Schmidt 2012; Tollin and Schmidt, 2015). However, since product innovations are divided into radical, which refer to the development of entirely new products, and incremental, which represent small improvements to existing products (Trott, 2021), we can treat this capability as **ambidextrous** because it includes both activities of production exploration and production exploitation.

Marketing exploitation activities largely involve advertising and other forms of marketing communication (Josephson et al., 2015), so brand communication management can be considered the dominant capability of marketing **exploitation**. With the help of a third auxiliary hypothesis, it will be examined whether a greater focus on ambidextrous, rather

than exploitative, capability in the manager's mental model can be linked to a greater growth in brand strength:

PH3: Brands managed by marketing managers focused on new product development achieve a greater increase in their strength than brands managed by marketing managers focused on brand communication management.

In accordance with the research goals and hypotheses, a conceptual model of the relationship between the mental models of marketing managers and brand strength was defined, shown in Figure 1.

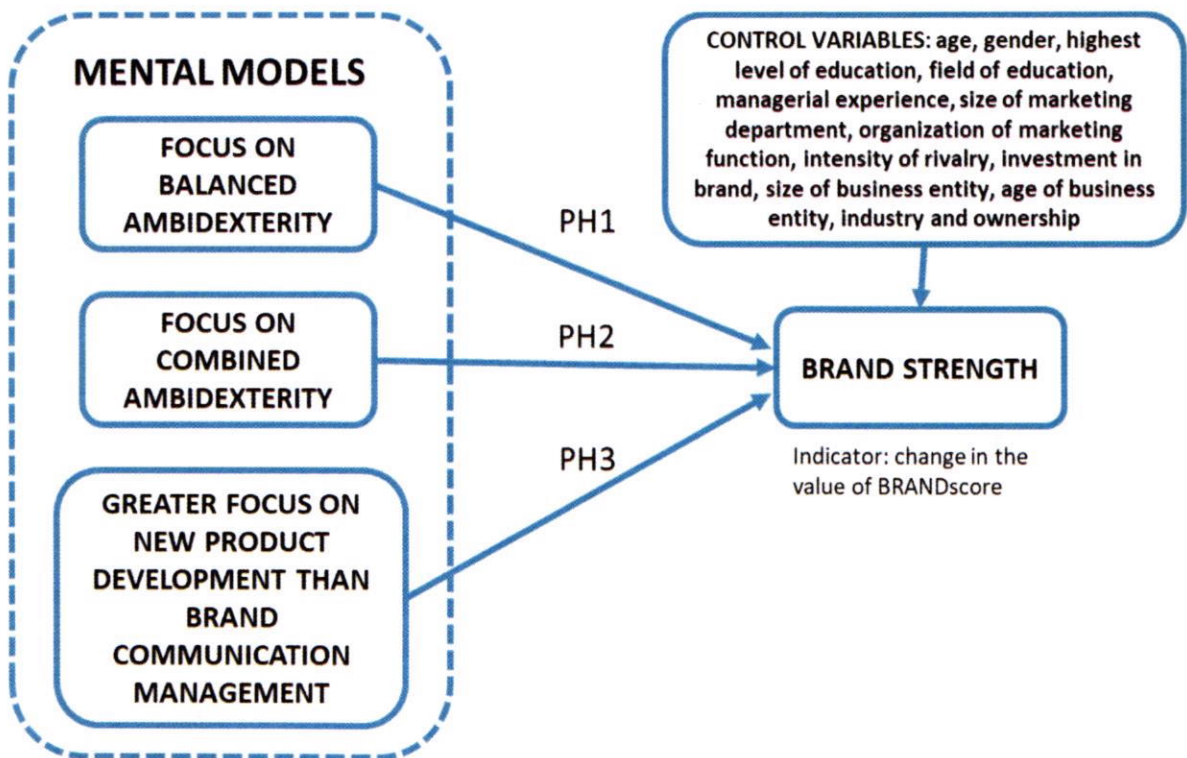


Figure1. Conceptual model

Source: author's work

The main variables of the model, their definitions, measurement methods and sources are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables, definitions and sources

Variable and abbreviation	Definition (description) of a variable	Measurement method (scales and items)	Source (based on):
Focus on Marketing Exploration (ER)	Focus on developing new skills, processes and marketing capabilities by applying new market knowledge, extensive market research and trend monitoring, experimentation and development of radically new products (Kyriakopoulos and Moorman, 2004; Vorhies et al., 2011; Tollin and Schmidt, 2012).	To what extent do you think the following is important in the job of a marketing manager who manages a brand: (from 1 - not important at all to 7 - extremely important)	Vorhies et al., 2011
		Continually developing new marketing procedures that are very different from others developed in the past.	
		Routinely introducing new marketing procedures which are daring, risky, or bold	
		Consistently using market knowledge to develop new marketing processes which deliver different outputs from existing processes	
		Using marketing knowledge to “break the mold” and create new marketing processes not used before	
Focus on Marketing	Focus on improving existing products, skills, processes and capabilities,	To what extent do you think the following is important in the job of a marketing manager who	Vorhies et al., 2011

Variable and abbreviation	Definition (description) of a variable	Measurement method (scales and items)	Source (based on):
Exploitation (ET)	reducing diversity, increasing productivity, successfully collaborating with other departments, and meeting the needs of existing consumers in existing markets (Kyriakopoulos and Moorman, 2004; Vorhies et al., 2011; Tollin and Schmidt, 2012).	manages a brand: (from 1 - not important at all to 7 - extremely important)	
		Consistently reexamining information from previous projects and/or studies to modify existing marketing processes	
		Routinely adapting existing ideas when developing new marketing processes	
		Incrementally and routinely improving our existing marketing procedures	
		Focusing changes in marketing procedures on improving efficiency	
Focus on Balanced Marketing Ambidexterity (BMA)	Striving for marketing exploitation and marketing exploration in a balanced manner (Mehrabi et al., 2019).	Calculation: marketing exploration divided by the sum of marketing exploration and exploitation, scale between 0 and 1 with the equilibrium point at 0.5.	Mehrabi et al., 2019

Variable and abbreviation	Definition (description) of a variable	Measurement method (scales and items)	Source (based on):
Focus on Combined Marketing Ambidexterity (CMA)	Focus on combining exploitation and exploration activities with the aim of achieving a high overall level of ambidexterity (Mehrabi et al., 2019).	Calculation: the sum of the results for marketing exploration and marketing exploitation divided by two.	Mehrabi et al., 2019
Focus on new product development (NPD)	Focus on cross-functional marketing capability related to creating a meaningful new value proposition for target markets (Morgan, 2012). It covers both incremental and radical product innovations.	To what extent do you think the following is important in the job of a marketing manager who manages a brand: (from 1 - not important at all to 7 - extremely important)	Scale developed based on literature analysis (Vorhies and Morgan, 2005, etc.) and primary qualitative research by the author (in-depth interviews with fifteen marketing managers).
		Development of new and improvement of existing products in line with customer needs and wants	
		Adaptation of the product range to market trends, business and consumer environment	
		Having a complete picture of the market, consumers and own production capabilities	
		Identifying opportunities to strengthen market	

Variable and abbreviation	Definition (description) of a variable	Measurement method (scales and items)	Source (based on):
		position through new product launch	
Focus on Brand Communication Management (BCM)	Focus on specialized marketing capability related to effective communication with existing and potential customers (Morgan, 2012).	To what extent do you think the following is important in the job of a marketing manager who manages a brand: (from 1 - not important at all to 7 - extremely important)	Scale developed based on literature analysis (Vorhies and Morgan, 2005, etc.) and primary qualitative research by the authors (in-depth interviews with fifteen marketing managers).
		Defining brand identity and unique features of a brand	
		Defining and selecting key communication messages and creative expressions	
		Finding relevant customer insights	
		Defining the functional and emotional benefits and a clear position of the brand in the minds of consumers	
Brand Strength (BS)	A measure of marketing performance (aggregated indicator) that takes into account various aspects of the consumer's relationship with the brand	Calculation: The shift in the BRANDscore will be measured, i.e. the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of the BRANDscore indicator will be calculated over the duration of the tenure of the marketing managers	BRANDpuls, Ipsos, N = 2.000, M/F 15-64, two waves per year

Variable and abbreviation	Definition (description) of a variable	Measurement method (scales and items)	Source (based on):
	(recognition, experience, usage, consideration, primary usage, loyalty, brand image, available users and non-users).	participating in the survey.	

Source: author's work

The research was conducted using an exploratory sequential design (Sekol and Maurović, 2017), i.e. a mixed methods approach that represents a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Such a research design made it possible to first shed light on the research problem, define the nature and scope of quantitative research and formulate/adapt the items for the survey questionnaire (initiation), to link and confirm the results from different phases (complementarity) and enrich them with different perspectives (diversity), to exclude the "method effect" and ensure greater reliability of the results, and finally to generalize the results and obtain more complete knowledge (Creamer, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

A detailed overview of the methodological procedures carried out in this doctoral thesis is shown in the figure below (Figure 2):

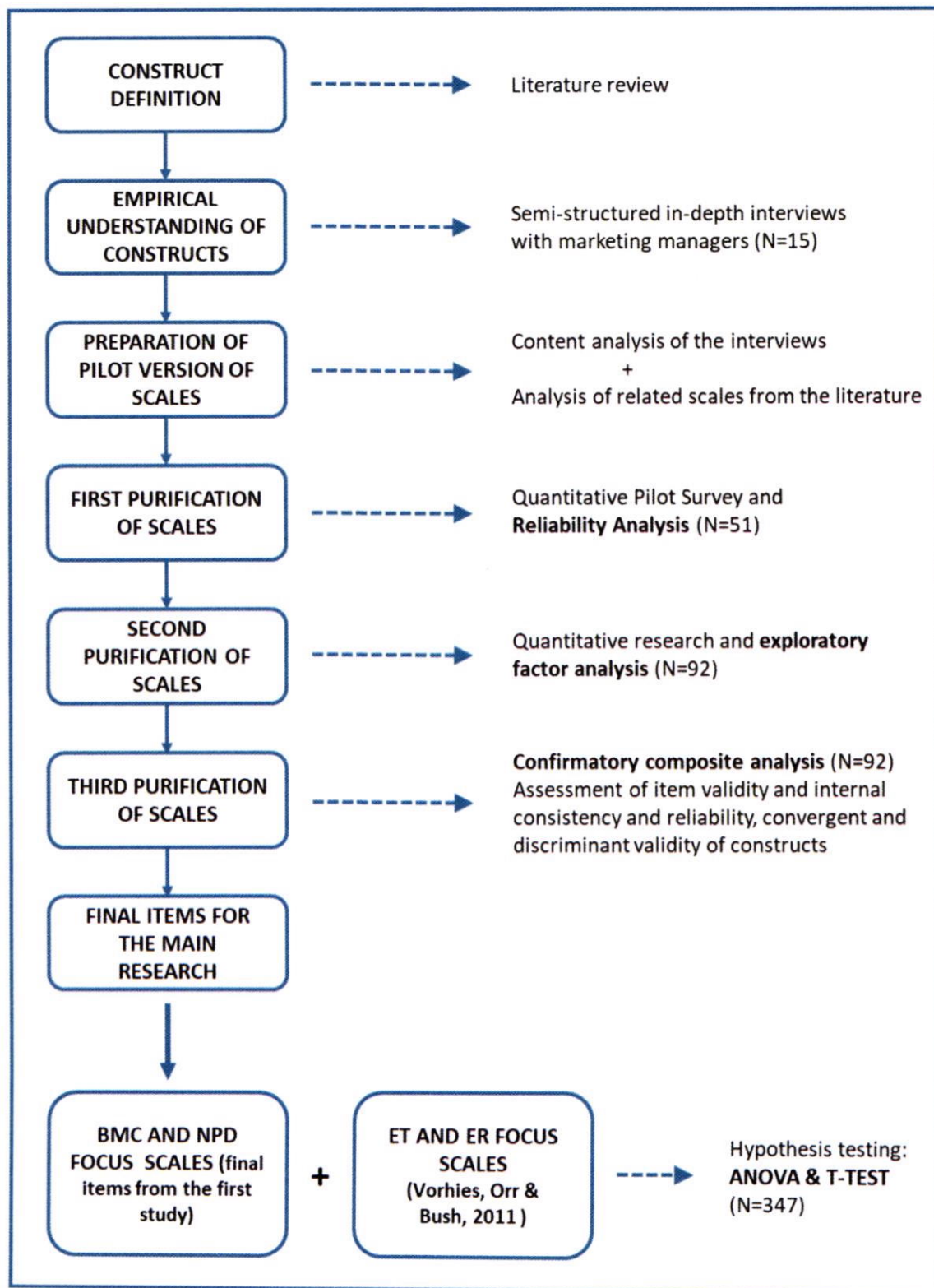


Figure 2. Overview of methodological procedures

Source: author's work

Since the scales that measure managers' focus on new product development and focus on brand communication management were not found in the literature, these scales were developed based on the results of qualitative research, analysis of related scales in the literature (Vorhies and Morgan, 2005; Morgan et al., 2009; Ramaswami et al., 2009; Vorhies et al., 2011; Luxton et al., 2015) and conducting a quantitative pilot research on respondents from the ranks of marketing managers and members of the academic community with relevant experience in marketing practice. In the development of scales, the steps suggested by Churchill (1979) were followed. After descriptive statistical analysis and the first selection of items based on the values of arithmetic means, matrix of correlations between items was produced, and by gradual rejection of items based on the values of the Cronbach alpha coefficient, final scales of high reliability were obtained. The criterion for the item rejection was the increase of the Cronbach alpha coefficient if the item was rejected. Finally, the Cronbach alpha value for the overall scale that measures the focus on brand communication management is 0.731, and for the scale that measures the focus on new product development is 0.868.

In order to check whether the scales used in the questionnaire are suitable for use in further analyses, an exploratory factor analysis was first performed, which resulted in the rejection of two items, and then a confirmatory composite analysis using the partial least squares method, which is especially recommended in cases where a small population limits the sample size.

The assessment of the reflective measurement model was made in the SmartPLS 4 software tool, and included the following (Hair et al., 2022):

- assessment of indicator reliability
- assessment of internal consistency and reliability
- assessment of convergent validity
- assessment of discriminant validity

Table 2 summarizes the results of the measurement model quality assessment.

Table 2. Summary results of the measurement model assessment

Constructs (latent variables)	Items	Convergent validity		Reliability of internal consistency		Discriminant validity
		Outer loadings	AVE	Cronbach alfa	CR	HTMT
		> 0,70	> 0,50	0,60 -0,90	0,60 – 0,90	Significantly less than 0,90?
Focus on Marketing Exploration (ER)	ER1	0,800	0,674	0,759	0,861	DA
	ER2	0,836				
	ER4	0,825				
Focus on Marketing Exploitation (ET)	ET1	0,815	0,707	0,862	0,906	DA
	ET2	0,856				
	ET3	0,833				
	ET4	0,857				
Focus on new product development (NPD)	NPD1	0,671	0,574	0,633	0,800	DA
	NPD2	0,746				
	NPD4	0,846				
Focus on Brand Communication Management (BCM)	BCM1	0,714	0,559	0,742	0,835	DA
	BCM2	0,814				
	BCM3	0,772				
	BCM4	0,686				

Izvor: Analiza rezultata dobivenih u programskom alatu SmartPLS

All indicators included in the measurement model assessment are within the cut-off values, except for the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the construct "Focus on new product development" (RNP), which is slightly below the threshold (0.633). However, as the composite reliability measure (CR) is not only above the threshold, but within the recommended zone (0,8), it can be concluded that the criterion of reliability of internal consistency is also met, and thus that the quality of the overall measurement model is confirmed.

After the successful assessment of the validity and reliability of the measuring instrument, a descriptive analysis of the collected data and hypothesis testing were performed.

Results and discussion

The main goal of the research in this thesis was to theoretically elaborate the concept of mental models in marketing and to empirically test the relationship between the individual mental models of marketing managers (with a specially developed typology) and the brand strength of the brands they manage. For this purpose, an extensive analysis of the literature in the field of marketing, strategic management, organization, cognitive psychology and other scientific disciplines was conducted, qualitative research was conducted using semi-structured in-depth interviews, a quantitative pilot study and the main quantitative research with the measurement model assessment by confirmatory composite analysis and hypothesis testing.

Based on the results of semi-structured in-depth interviews with marketing managers, an overview of the most commonly used marketing metrics was obtained, and the insights highlighted the importance of marketing capabilities and their treatment in the practice of Croatian marketing managers. The answers to questions about the behavior of marketing managers who are focused on brand communication management and those who are focused on new product development served as the main source for generating items in the development of two new scales with which two variables in the conceptual model were operationalized.

The results of hypothesis testing are only somewhat surprising. Namely, as mentioned in several places in the doctoral thesis, the results of empirical studies investigating ambidexterity are very mixed. In some, a positive correlation with business and marketing performance was found, in some negative, and in some none was found (Price, 2012; June, 2013; Adiwijaya et al., 2020).

The first hypothesis referred to balanced marketing ambidexterity, i.e. the relationship of a mental model with a balanced focus on marketing exploration and exploitation with marketing performance measured by a shift in brand strength. The results of this research have shown that managers who place a stronger emphasis on one capability achieve a greater increase in brand strength than those who strive for marketing exploration and marketing exploitation in a balanced way. This difference is statistically significant when

comparing managers who place a stronger emphasis on exploitation and those who focus on balanced ambidexterity.

Despite the rejection of the hypothesis due to the direction of the difference, this research outcome is actually in line with the findings from some previous empirical studies, the results of which have shown that instead of balance, focus on one of the observed two marketing capabilities, most often exploitation, is better (Slater et al., 2007; Vorhies et al., 2011; Solís-Molina et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2022). It can be stated that the question of the optimal relationship between marketing exploration and exploitation remains open in the marketing literature, especially if this relationship is observed dynamically, over a longer period of time.

The second hypothesis tested the relationship between a mental model with a focus on combined marketing ambidexterity and brand strength. Three different groups of observations were compared according to the level of this focus, and the observations belonging to managers with a medium level of focus on combined marketing ambidexterity had the largest increase in brand strength, so this hypothesis was also rejected, although it was confirmed in some previous studies, albeit with a different conceptualization of marketing and business performance (Junni et al., 2013; Mehrabi, 2017).

It should be noted here that the test result may have been influenced by the way of operationalization of combined marketing ambidexterity as a construct based on the sum of marketing exploration and marketing exploitation. Namely, in some empirical studies, instead of summation, multiplying marketing exploration and marketing exploitation is used, which is an approach that has its advantages, but also conceptual drawbacks such as ignoring the direction of a possible imbalance (Kim et al. 2022).

Finally, in the third hypothesis, it was tested whether a mental model with an emphasis on an ambidextrous capability such as new product development, which includes both elements of marketing exploration and elements of marketing exploitation, is more linked with marketing performance than a focus on brand communication management, which is considered a typical exploitative capability (Tollin and Schmidt 2012; Josephson et al., 2015). The result leaned in that direction, but the difference did not turn out to be statistically significant.

Nevertheless, this is a hypothesis that deserves attention in future research as well, as it has a foundation in studies that have investigated the relationship between investment in advertising or overall marketing activities, on the one hand, and investment in research and development, on the other, and performance measured by various indicators (profit, risk reduction, consumer satisfaction, etc.). For example, the results of a study conducted by Vadakkepatt et al. (2021) showed that higher investments in R&D than in marketing and advertising lead to retention of sales leadership, especially in a dynamic environment and with higher levels of investment.

Although no clear and unambiguous argumentation has been found through the observed relationships that there is a connection between mental models of marketing managers and brand strength, after conducting a statistical analysis of the collected data, it can be concluded that one result provides a foundation for a partial acceptance of this main hypothesis. It is a finding according to which managers who place a stronger emphasis on marketing exploitation achieve a greater increase in brand strength than those who strive for marketing exploration and marketing exploitation in a balanced way, i.e. show the features of a balanced marketing ambidexterity. This finding indicates that the marketing performance of a firm is not only influenced by its favorable positioning in relation to competing forces in the industry (Porter, 1980) and the possession of unique and rare resources that are difficult to imitate and replace (Barney, 1991; Hamel and Prahalad, 1996) but also managerial cognitions, i.e. mental patterns by which managers interpret the business environment, focus on certain marketing capabilities and make decisions (e.g. Barr et al., 1992; Walsh, 1995; Gary et al., 2012; Yang et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Theoretical and practical implications

The topic of this doctoral thesis is positioned at the intersection of three scientific disciplines – marketing, strategic management and cognitive psychology. This thesis develops a conceptual and theoretical understanding of mental models in marketing and deepens the knowledge of their connection with marketing success.

The aim of the research was to define the dimensions and typology of mental models and to empirically test the relationship between mental models of marketing managers and marketing performance measured by changes in brand strength. Based on the analysis of previous research, it was not observed that any of the researchers analyzed the relationship between mental models of managers in charge of brand management and brand strength, and the thesis addressed and partially filled this gap in the marketing literature. In accordance with the stated goal, a conceptual model was developed, and for testing the relationship of variables in the model, data from quantitative research were collected with a questionnaire and statistically processed.

In addition to the development of scientific thought on the concept of mental models in marketing and the relationship between managerial cognition and marketing performance, the scientific contribution of this thesis is also manifested in the examination of the relationship between individual capabilities and marketing ambidexterity in the mental models of marketing managers and brand strength as a selected metric of marketing performance. An overview and critical analysis of previous conceptual and empirical research is presented, and emphasis is placed on the individual origins of marketing ambidexterity, somewhat neglected in the literature.

This paper uniquely combines three previously separate research streams dealing with managerial cognition, marketing capabilities and ambidexterity. A new typology of mental models has been developed with regard to the relationship between marketing exploration and marketing exploitation and with regard to the focus on brand communication management and new product development, and mental models have been measured at the level of "brand managers", i.e. people directly in charge of managing brands, and not top managers and chief marketing directors, which represent the usual level of analysis in research on managerial cognition. Ambidexterity itself is viewed as a focus in the individual mental model of a "brand manager", which represents a new perspective in the study of this phenomenon and draws attention to the role of the individual in ambidextrous approaches.

This thesis also brings a very concrete **methodological contribution** that is reflected in the development of a model for testing the relationship between the observed constructs and in the development of two new scales – the one for the focus on new product

development and the one for the focus on brand communication management, which together with the scales taken from the marketing literature were used in the empirical research. This will potentially encourage the continuation of research into mental models and marketing capabilities, especially since new product development and brand communication management are precisely the capabilities that marketing professionals are predominantly engaged in, which is confirmed by the results of the qualitative research. Also, this reduces the identified research gap that refers to the lack of instruments for measuring the presence of certain mental models in managers, i.e. their focus on certain marketing capabilities.

In terms of practical contribution, marketing managers will be able to critically assess their own engagement in the marketing process based on the proposed typology of mental models and dimensions of marketing exploration, exploitation, communication management and new product development by reflecting on marketing capabilities that are key to increasing marketing performance and should be focused on in their business context. They should be aware of the mental models they are prone to and use, their characteristics and potentials, the aspects they emphasize and those they ignore. In this way, a better understanding of the practices, processes and principles used in decision-making can be achieved.

It is also worth noting the potential contribution of this thesis in the field of human resources management. Since appropriate mental models are a prerequisite for organizational success, organizational interventions should be based on them. This is especially true for the processes of selection and education of employees because certain jobs in marketing require a focus on specific marketing capabilities and skills that are described and measured in this thesis.

Furthermore, at different stages of brand, firm and industry life cycle, different mental models and a focus on different capabilities are needed, especially when it comes to exploration and exploitation, which often evolve in cycles, i.e. successively. When a firm undergoes a strategic transformation or, for example, adopts a new business model, it requires a change in management logic, and sometimes even the replacement of the entire top management team because mental models are deeply rooted below the level of the conscious and difficult to change.

One of the key roles of human resources experts is to recognize the mental models of managers and employees, help them become aware of them, and if necessary, change them, because changing thinking is a prerequisite for changing behavior, and thus for improving business performance. In the conditions of digital disruption and increasingly fierce market competition, this competence will become increasingly important in order to ensure timely reactions to changes in the environment and avoid cognitive inertia, i.e. the undesirable consequences of deeply rooted mental models.

Limitations and further research

This, of course, is not the first study to address ambidexterity at the level of marketing, but it is the first to measure ambidexterity at the level of marketing managers who manage individual brands, i.e. their mental models (previous studies have used either a firm or a department within a firm as a unit of analysis). When choosing the managerial level, and given the research gap and the conceptual model that uses brand strength as a measure of marketing performance, it was appropriate to test mental models in those individuals whose main task is to manage brands. However, this may also be a potential limitation that is reflected in weaker managerial discretion, i.e. weaker influence on strategic decisions regarding the brand in the context of authoritative top management, especially in large business systems with multiple levels of decision-making.

The next limitation is related to cognitive dissonance, i.e. a possible discrepancy between the cognitive component of managers' attitudes and their behavior, i.e. actions in different business situations. In addition to this gap between belief and action, it is worth mentioning other limitations that are inherent in the very concept of mental models, such as their hiddenness, heterogeneity, variability, incompleteness (the concept of bounded rationality), inaccuracy and context dependency.

The marketing performance and brand strength is influenced by many other factors besides the mental models of managers, such as previous cumulative investments in brand awareness and image, longevity and stage of the brand life cycle, the intensity of industry rivalry, the activities of competitors and many others. Some of these factors were treated as control variables in the conceptual model of this research.

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Of the methodological limitations, the use of only one source of data for marketing performance (BRANDscore as a measure of brand strength) can be singled out, which is why the sample was limited only to managers who manage brands of fast-moving consumer goods. Also, the way of measuring focus on combined marketing ambidexterity (adding marketing exploration and marketing exploitation) ignores the existence and direction of the imbalance.

From these identified limitations, recommendations for future research also arise. Managerial discretion (the level of influence on brand decisions) can be assigned a more important role than just a control variable, and the consistency of thought and action can be examined by adding a parallel set of questions to the questionnaire. For each marketing capability or activity, the respondents should indicate to what extent they consider it important and to what extent they apply it in practice.

In further research into the relationship between mental models and brand strength, it is recommended to consider other factors that can affect the level of brand strength, such as category trend, competitive environment, media investments, level of technological turbulence, etc. Observations can be weighted with the level of influence on brand decisions and the brand's market relevance as measured by annual sales revenue. Also, longer tenures in brand management may be preferred or, for example, only tenures of three years or more may be considered.

Methodologically speaking, constructs can be operationalized differently. For example, except for BRANDscore, some other way of measuring brand strength, or even a completely different measure of marketing performance, can be used. In this way, marketing managers who manage brands in other large and significant industries, such as financial industry, telecommunications and retail, can also be included in the research.

Combined marketing ambidexterity can, as in some previous studies, be calculated by multiplication rather than summation of marketing exploration and exploitation, which would also take into account the existence of a possible balance between marketing exploration and marketing exploitation that brings stronger synergy effects. Depending on the content, mental models can, in addition to being measured using scales, also be displayed graphically, i.e. operationalized in the form of cognitive maps.

Future qualitative research can be based on interviewing successful and less successful marketing managers and revealing their mental models and the differences between them. In quantitative research, instead of testing the differences between separate groups of observations, a structural model can be developed so that cause-and-effect relationships between constructs can be tested, or the relationship between different predictors and the dichotomous independent variable defined as marketing success or failure can be examined using logistic regression.

It would be interesting to empirically test the reverse direction, i.e. how marketing success or failure affects managers' mental models. Some assumptions have already been made explicit in this thesis, such as that success leads to the retention of mental models and the status quo (and consequently to cognitive inertia and reduced ability to react to changes in the environment), while failure triggers the change of mental models, i.e. dominant managerial logics.

Finally, instead of brand managers' mental models, individual mental models of higher-level marketing managers or collective mental models of brand management or marketing teams can be explored, in situations where several people manage brands and make marketing decisions together. Future research could also focus on identifying the strengths and weaknesses of individual mental models at different stages of brand, firm and industry lifecycle, as well as the complementary role of different mental models.

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