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The assessment of the PhD Thesis
prepared by Anna Brack
titled: „**Dynamics of eating habits of sweets: German, Polish, and Russian consumers on the confectionary market"**, dissertation prepared under supervision of

dr. hab. Anna Maria Nikodemska-Wołowik, prof. UG and co-supervisor dr. Dagmara Wach,

Faculty of Economics, University of Gdańsk,

Gdańsk 2022, pp. 169 (including appendices)

I. Introduction

The basis for the opinion is a letter addressed by dr. hab. Przemysław Borkowski, prof. UG, dated 30th June 2022, concerning the review of the dissertation by Anna Brack.

While reviewing the dissertation the Act of 14 March 2003 on Academic Degrees and Academic Title and Degrees and Title in Art (as amended, including 21 April 2017) was taken into consideration as a legal basis. As indicated in the document a doctoral dissertation, should perform an original solution to a scientific problem ... and demonstrate general theoretical knowledge of the candidate in a given discipline ... as well as the ability to conduct scientific work independently. Therefore, in the review I have focused on the following aspects: the way the research problem and the subject of the dissertation were defined, the research objectives and hypotheses, the methodology of the research, the layout of the presented content and the substantive and formal assessment of the dissertation.

The attached documentation indicates that this PhD thesis is positioned in the Social Sciences, discipline of Economics and Finance.

In general, in my opinion the dissertation by Anna Brack meets the current legislation criteria and may be the basis for both public defense and, if it is positive, for awarding her a doctoral degree in the discipline of Economics and Finance.

II. Statement of the research problem, presentation of the objectives and hypotheses

Changing market environment, characterized by VUCA, influences the change in consumption habits of consumers. The emergence of new trends including LOHAS, changing customers' purchasing power, pandemic changes substantially food consumption patterns, including sweets consumption. The subject of the thesis refers to this problem, and the object refers to Polish, German and Russian customers. Both, the subject and the object of the thesis, allow expecting very interesting results since cultural differences may make consumer behavior differ in the three settings. The subject of the doctoral dissertation presented to me for review was correctly set in the discipline of Economics and Finance. The theoretical background supporting the choice of the research problem was in general properly presented in the Introduction part. The PhD candidate identified the research gap saying a priori that there is a gap as to whether and to what extent these three markets differ in terms of confectionary consumption. However, she did not analysed and presented previous research results regarding the scientific problem of the dissertation to support the existence of this gap. In the literature there are some publications on confectionary consumption in general or even in countries chosen by the Candidate. Thus, before she defined the research gap, in my opinion she should give a deeper theoretical background to support this gap.

The objective of the thesis is clearly indicated by the PhD candidate on page 16. The main goal of the dissertation is a good starting point for both theoretical studies and the development of concepts and carrying out original empirical research in this area. In my opinion it is specific and well formulated. The main goal was assigned with 4 research questions and 4 hypotheses. Their analysis allows concluding that the author of the dissertation has adopted a broad view of the confectionary consumption behavior, which should be emphasized as an advantage of the research approach. I assess positively both the research questions and the detailed hypotheses. However, in my opinion hypotheses and accepted assumptions should be derived from the literature and stronger justified with the analysis of the literature.

III.   Assessment of the selection of literature, structure and layout of the dissertation

The presented for review dissertation meets the standards adopted for doctoral dissertations in terms of the structure, volume and proportions of the issues raised. It comprises 169 pages, including appendix. The structure and content of the dissertation were subordinated to its purpose and the accepted assumptions. The thesis comprises six chapters, introduction, and conclusions coming from the dissertation, study limitations and directions of further research (chapter 6). However, in my opinion, because of the small volume of chapter five (dedicated to discussion and implications – 6.5 pages) and six (dedicated to conclusions, limitations and directions for further research – 4.5 pages) there was no need to dividing them into two parts. In the present version there is a big disproportion between chapters 1 to 4 and 5, 6. Individual chapters are structured in a proper way, i.e. they include theoretical as well as methodological and empirical part. The layout of the dissertation is logical and coherent when it comes to the order of the issues discussed, which confirms that the content of the dissertation has been properly considered. The discussed content creates a harmonious whole, and the PhD Candidate consistently implements her research intentions. The goals proposed by Mrs. Anna Brack were fully implemented in the course of a coherent, transparent and well-structured dissertation, which has a high cognitive and methodological value. It can serve the theory of marketing by showing the selected theories of consumer bahaviour, latest trends and dynamics of the analyzed markets. It has also some managerial implications that can be used as a valuable guide to manage companies operating in confectionary sector. The Introduction provides information regarding the objectives, hypotheses, research gaps and research motivations. It also outlines the structure of the dissertation.

The dissertation is based on a rich literature divided into monographs, scientific papers, conference papers, Internet sources, and other sources. The majority of literature is in English. The literature used is up-to-date and very well selected in terms of the content. The dissertation had been prepared with the use of the literature in the area of microeconomy, consumer behaviour, marketing, and sustainability. The literature also includes studies on the methodology of conducting scientific research and methods of statistical analysis. The references include a lot of articles published in recognizable global journals, which gives the basis for the PhD Candidate to be familiar with the latest global trends and research results in the field of consumer behaviour. My evaluation of references used is high. Despite the richness

of the literature used, the PhD Candidate did not make the mistake of thematic dispersion and too extensive discussion of the issues presented.

Considering both the subject and the object of the thesis, as well as the hypotheses formulated, it should be stated that the whole concept of the dissertation is coherent, logically connected and complete. Analysing the aim of the dissertation, its research hypotheses and structure, as well as its content, I conclude that the dissertation is a scientific one, and meets the requirements of the applicable law. As such it deserves in general a positive evaluation.

IV. The assessment of the content of the dissertation

According to the low a PhD dissertation should confirm the candidate's general theoretical knowledge in a given scientific discipline, and the ability to conduct scientific work on her own. The analysis of the content of the dissertation allows me to state that the author has shown good knowledge of the discussed issues.

The Introduction part gives the background of the research, research context and motivation, research gaps, purpose of the thesis and hypotheses, as well as a short description of the structure of the dissertation. The condensed structure of the work presented in Figure 1 should be mostly appreciated. The information presented in the Introduction is properly prepared and show that the Candidate has skills to design a scientific work.

The first chapter refers to the literature review and provides a detailed discussion on the functioning of the market itself, theory of consumption, and decision-making process. Having this background discussed the Author focuses on consumer habits and trends treating these concepts as mutually dependent and discussing changes in these areas with the focus on the specificity of confectionary products. An important part of this chapter, in the context of the research problem discussed, is the discussion on classification of customers according to age (grouped in generations). The presentation is very general and not fully consistent. Firstly, in table 3 the Author identifies 7 generational cohorts, while later discusses only four of them. Why has she omitted GI Generation, Silent Generation, and Generation alfa? There is no explanation. Secondly, she tends to create conclusions without justification. For example, after presenting the four generational groups on page 34, she states that: "From the above list, it can be deduced that the costumer has become increasingly demanding..." Such conclusion cannot be derived from the above classification as she did not refer to the demands of the

following generations. Thirdly, although presented considerations are correct in their essence and well discussed I miss Author's discussion with presented concepts, researchers as well as presenting her own approaches and concepts. That would prove the Candidate to be a mature scientist, which can be expected from a PhD Candidate.

Chapter two is dedicated to the presentation of dynamics of selected confectionary markets. At first the Author gives a quick look at the specificity of the confectionary market. In the subsequent parts she describes the three selected markets in terms of the development of confectionary sector. The data presented here is interesting, reliable and up to date. The Author refers to statistical data prepared by the Statistical Offices in the three countries. These are correctly presented in the form of figures and consequently analyzed. The author showed a very good knowledge of these issues. From substantive point of view information presented here is correct. I have only one remark to make. The data characterizing confectionary market in the three countries should relate to the same indicators so that they could be comparable. Or, to make the analysis more transparent, and easy to compare the Author could have structured this part by indicators chosen for analysis to show differences between the three countries, not countries one by one with the use of different indicators.

The third part is dedicated to the presentation of the methodology applied in the study. The research methodology adopted in the dissertation reflects the topic of the dissertation, the adopted goals, research questions posed and hypotheses. In the dissertation, secondary and primary sources of information were used. I am positive about the methods of collecting empirical data. In order to achieve the objectives of the doctoral dissertation and answer research questions, the author conducted quantitative research. The PhD Candidate used questionnaire as a tool for research with a five-point Likert scale. The survey was conducted online on the web application platform. The assessment of the structure of the research tool, the way questions are formulated, applied measurement scales, is positive. It is a pity she did not explained how she had created scale items. Following this information, in chapter four, Mrs. Anna Brack has presented the analysis of the collected data and research results. The analysis was run with the use of methods of statistical analysis, including analysis of variance to indicate differences among groups (generations and countries). As far as statistical analysis is concerned, I do not have any questions. Most of the results are presented clearly and in a readable way, although I would suggest to put percentage values in figures in the future to read

the results easier. The Author had proven her knowledge on how to run statistical analysis and how to interpret the results. The statistical analysis enabled her to verify hypotheses stated in the dissertation at a satisfactory level. I have some remarks indicating the weaker points of the research part of the thesis. Firstly, in point 4.2.2. titled "Relations between disposable income and frequency of consumption" the Author does not indicate the relations between the two constructs. She had just limited her considerations to the analysis of the perceived financial situation of respondents in the three countries and presentation of the quantity of sweets consumed – not frequency as she indicated in the title of point 4.2.2. The same remark refers to point 4.3.2. Secondly, Figure no. 43 does not visualize the results of respondents' financial situation, as she states. Actually, that information is not visualized at all. Thirdly, in some cases it is difficult to read figures, e.g. Table 17, which in fact is not a table but a figure. There is too many information presented in one figure, and thus it is unclear.

In the fifth and sixth chapter the doctoral Candidate summarized the considerations mainly of an empirical nature, referring to the research questions and hypotheses indicated in the Introduction. In this part of the dissertation, I consider the limitations of the conducted research formulated by the author to be important and valuable. The directions for further research on the analyzed phenomenon also deserve a positive assessment.

V. Final assessment

Considering the requirement of law regarding Academic Degrees and Academic Title and Degrees and Title in Art in my opinion the dissertation presented by Mrs. Anna Brack meets the requirements for a doctoral thesis. The comments raised in the review do not alter the overall positive assessment of the dissertation. Basing on the above mentioned I state that the PhD dissertation prepared by Mrs. Anna Brack under the supervision of dr. hab. Anna Maria Nikodemska-Wołowik and co-supervisor dr. Dagmara Wach at the University of Gdańsk meets the requirements for doctoral dissertations and is the basis for the award of the academic degree of doctor of Economics and Finance. Therefore, I request that Mrs. Anna Brack be admitted to public defense.