

GROCERY CONSUMER TYPOLOGIES ON ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

João Menezes

Lisbon University Institute, ISCTE Business School (Business Research Unit/ISCTE-IUL), Department of Marketing, Operation and Management, 1649-026, Lisbon, Portugal, {joao.menezes@iscte.pt}

Catarina Marques

Lisbon University Institute, ISCTE Business School, Business Research Unit (BRU-IUL), Department of Quantitative Methods for Management and Economics, 1649-026, Lisbon, Portugal, {catarina.marques@iscte.pt}

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to characterize groups of customers based on their perceptions of value, satisfaction with retailers as well as on risk perceived in the seller-buyer relationship associated with their environmentally consumption practices. Most studies addressing the green consumption focuses on the product and in the buyer's decision about this product. An exchange perspective of the relationship customer-grocery recognizes the important role that both the seller and the shopper assume in their relationships, which influences consumer buying decision. However, studies on sustainable consumption in grocery stores are scarce justifying the need for greater knowledge about consumers' behaviour on this phenomenon. As a result of cluster analysis, supported previously by a qualitative study in order to understand the risk perceived by the consumer is in the context of their grocery purchases, we obtained a consumers' typology differing in their relational benefits, satisfaction and risks perceptions. Some suggestions are given to retailers and also recommendations about the need to closely consider their product offerings to ascertain what aspects contribute to the value considered by shoppers.

Keywords: Risk perceived value, relational satisfaction, environmentally sustainable consumption.

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Introduction

In Portugal, environmental quality has improved in the last years and the country is the second EU state with the highest burden of environmentally related taxes in total revenues from taxes and social contributions and the third largest on the weight of environmentally related taxes in GDP (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2013). However, in spite of consumers' expressed concern for environmental deterioration of the planet, and the growing prevalence of green products on retail shelves, consumers' are not purchasing green goods and services with the regularity expected. Sales of green products appear to be trending downward, allowing us to question whether the required value by consumers with their purchases of green products is clearly typified in the literature. This study attempts to better understand these consumers.

The sustainability as a "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", cited in Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (United Nations, 1987), has influenced the practices implemented at enterprise level. This was due to a growing concern in the recognition of the concept of sustainability and seeks to generate benefits for their consumers (Chabowski, Mena and Gonzalez-Padron, 2011), although sometimes still exist gaps in the consumer's level of knowledge all about the requirements for organic and green products standards (McCarthy and Murphy, 2013). The utilitarian and hedonic shopping value plays a crucial role in understanding and explanation on shopping satisfaction (Irani and Hanzaee, 2011). The product variety and the physical aspect of the store are important to consumers feel the utility value. On the other hand, the hedonic value represents the emotion expressed by the individual when shopping.

Accordingly, the consumer perceived value is a concept very important to understand the state of relationship between consumer and retailer. This concept is considered as a trade-off between benefits and sacrifices e.g. (Woodruff, 1997), or as the perception of psychological satisfaction of the transaction (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer and Burton, 1990).

Grocery shopping provides both utilitarian and hedonic value. Consumers obtain utilitarian value by conducting the task that justified the shopping trip, whereas hedonic value reflects the potential entertainment and emotional involvement associated to a shopping process (Babin et al., 1994). Analysing the perceived value of the relationship between the grocery retailer and his customer is crucial to understand the customer's store choice and frequency, as well as the store performance. Furthermore, the measure

of the perceived value should consider a multidimensional approach in addition to both interlocutors' perspective, but specially the customer's one. Nevertheless, studies about the value and satisfaction in the grocery retail are scarce (Davies et al., 2001).

Thus, this study intends to identify groups of young adults consumers based by the perceived value that underlie their relationship satisfaction with retailers and characterised regarding the risk of environmentally unsustainable consumption in those relationships, the state of relational satisfaction and consequently, about the consumers' repurchase intention.

Despite the increasing amount of research in the literature, the research gap between attitude and behaviour in green consumption still remains. This paper makes a contribution to this stream of research considering the few studies that focus research on shopper's value in use with the retailer relationship approaching this problem.

Literature review

Environmentally sustainable consumption

The sustainability development is seen as a development process that reconciles aspects related to economy, society and environment. In others words, the main objectives of the corporation may still be to reducing risks and create revenues for its stakeholders. Thus, the sustainability should be cross-functional, because all functions of the company are affected and contribute to an overall policy of social responsibility. In a relational perspective, the retailers should adopt this policy of sustainable development to convey a positive image, for there to be a positive review and a relational proximity with consumers (Cacho-Elizondo, 2010).

Sustainable consumption complexity stems from the approach to the concept of consumption seen through the lens of sustainability. Belz and Bilharz (2005) distinguish between sustainable consumption in a wide sense and sustainable consumption in a narrower sense, the later refers to consumption patterns that can be generalized within and between generations while the former addresses ecological and social issues associated with production and consumption whether or not associated with generational assumptions. A major stream of research connects the purchase of certain products and services with pro-environmental consumption, such as sustainable tourism (Budeanu, 2007) and transport (Guy, 2009), energy consumption (e.g. Geppert and Stamminger, 2010), the buying of green products (e.g. Follows and Jobber, 2000), the consumer purchase of organic food (e.g. Paul and Rana, 2012), while others relate this concept with a wider socio-economic context bringing into question the prevalent ideology of consumption and discussing the need to limit consumption (e.g. Kjellberg, 2008; Varey, 2010) reflecting on questions like "consumer culture", "well-being" "happiness" and "quality of life" (Huang and Rust, 2011) or addressing the problem of overconsumption as unsustainable consumption within industrialized economies (e.g. Quelch and Jocz, 2007; Sheth et al., 2011).

The retailing literature has long been Involved in explaining the reasons how buyers develop their choices (e.g., Arnold et al., 1983; Mitchell, 2001) characterizing individual aspects of the consumers' pre-purchase and purchase behaviour. Previous studies seek to find reasons for shopping extended beyond functional utility (Miller,

1998) founded on hedonic satisfaction seeking behaviour (Babin et al., 1994). However studies that incorporate in their determinants, aspects of ethical consumption only recently begun to be carried out in a more generalized manner (Freestone and McGoldrick, 2008). A considerable number of consumers are no longer just concerned with the satisfaction they obtain from a product, but also want to be comfortable with its process of production and distribution (Nantel and Weeks, 1996). These consumers are willing to pay more for their products and support retailers who act in an ethical manner (Mohr and Webb, 2005). Building on the definition of a socially conscious consumer (Webster 1975), a green consumer is defined as one that takes into account his impact on the physical environment when making a retailer choice or/and product purchases. A green consumer purchases environmentally friendly products to minimize the potentially negative environmental impact of purchases and as such we consider that sustainable consumption can be considered under the umbrella of ethical consumerism.

Environmentally sustainable consumption focuses on formulating equity strategies that favour higher quality of life, efficient use of natural resources and effective satisfaction of human needs, while promoting the development of social equity (Pogutz and Micale, 2011). Organic foods are considered environmentally safe, produced using environmental methods, not involving pesticides and chemical fertilizers in their development, as well as having genetically modified organisms. Consumers perceive organic food as healthier and of better quality. Despite the costs associated with buying organic foods, but consumers understand that is correct, because they pay to protect the environment (Paul and Rana, 2012). It is necessary to understand how people's ordinary decisions and behaviours can be influenced toward greater sustainability. Moreover, environmentally conscious businesses need to better understand consumer behaviours, principally if they want to appeal to more mainstream consumers. Also social norms can act on environmentally conscious behaviour, and consideration must be made of precisely how a norm may impact an individual's behaviour (Moncure and Burbach, 2013).

Most of the literature flow associated with the green consumption aims to identify why consumers buy environmentally friendly products. Specifically, the effects of culture (Webster 1975), personality (Balderjahn, 1988) and socio-demographic characteristics (Ngobo 2010) on consumers' attitudes and behaviours relative to green consumption.

Consumer perceived value

The concept of consumer value has been crucial to understand the buying behaviour of consumers, representing a growing concern for consumers, businesses and retailers (Kainth and Verma, 2011). In a retail perspective, recognizing the importance of the different dimensions of value should allow retailers to develop positioning strategies more sophisticated (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). For this reason, managers can achieve a competitive advantage and is essential to the existence of a strong emotional bond between company and customer (Kainth and Verma, 2011).

The study developed by Fazlzadeh, Sahebalzamani, and Sarabi (2012) focuses on grocery stores, in a retail context, noted that a majority of the competitive advantage of a retailer directly depends on the amount of information obtained from consumers. In these sense, the findings showed that the perceptions of image quality and economic

value offered by the retailers only in the supermarkets had a positive and significant impact on satisfaction. On the other hand, the services and convenience offered by stores had a positive and significant impact on the satisfaction offered by the supermarket and hypermarket.

Initially, Sheth, Newman and Gross, (1991) considered five dimensions: functional, emotional, social, epistemic and conditional. Later, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) did not consider two of the dimensions mentioned above: conditional and epistemic, reducing the scale to four value dimensions: emotional, social, functional and monetary. Those dimensions was tested and based on consumer perceptions regarding the consumption of durable goods, in a buying retail situation, in order to be determined consumer values which lead to the consumer purchasing behaviour (Ercsey, 2012). In conditions where the value is much more important to the consumer, this means an opportunity for retailers to explore all value dimensions of customer, before deciding on the most appropriate market approach (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

The emotional value can be considered as the knowledge or experience that the consumer has to develop and maintain relationships with retailers, which is defined as the experience result of the exchange of sensory stimuli, information and emotions between companies and customers (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The social value is seen as an image based on the reputation and credibility. Thus, the perceived value should incorporate as important elements of social citizenship and corporate identity (Seifi, Zulkifli, Yusuff and Sullaiman, 2012). The functional value is considered a more rational value dimension, with the perceived utility achieved from the capacity to be able to find an alternative for functional performance (Sheth et al., 1991). Finally, the monetary value that is as a sub-dimension of the functional value and what is known as "value for money" and is defined as the aggregate utility of the product, due to the decrease in their perception of the costs to long and short term (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

Perceived value could not only be a crucial determinant in maintaining long-term customer relationships, but also play a key role in affecting purchase intentions (Zeithaml, 1988; Zhuang et al., 2010). Besides, perceived value is also important in influencing customer trust (Kim et al., 2008). Chen (2010) defines "green trust" as "a willingness to depend on one object based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about environmental performance".

Perceived risk is a subjective evaluation by consumers associated with possible consequences of wrong decisions (Peter and Ryan, 1976). Perceived risk could impact consumer purchase decisions and behaviours (Chaudhuri, 1997). Perceived risk theory argues that consumers are willing to to minimize their perceived risk rather than to maximize their usefulness (Mitchell, 1999). If consumers perceive high risk towards a product or a seller, they would be reluctant to trust the product (Mitchell, 1999). Thus, prior research argues that perceived risk negatively affects perceived trust (Harridge-March, 2006; Chang and Chen, 2008).

There is a strong relationship between risk perceptions and negative consumption emotions which have a direct effect on trust (Chaudhuri, 1997). In environmentally sustainable consumption context, customers have more environmental consideration

which would increase their perceived risk. In this study we also use the “green perceived risk” construct (Peter and Ryan, 1976) as “the expectation of negative environmental consequences associated with purchase behaviour” to characterize groups of consumers with regard to their environmentally consumption practices.

Methodology

The research utilizes a critical incident qualitative study followed by a quantitative one to achieve consumers’ typology with regard to green purchase behaviours.

Phase 1 – Given the need to better understand the issues related with the perceived risk in the Portuguese grocery green consumption context, the first phase utilized the narrative inquiry research approach (Webster and Mertova, 2007). The narrative is well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of human experience focus on critical life events while, at the same time, exploring holistic views on grocery consumptions practices. The informants are asked to recall a recent event of a green product purchasing and explain what are the fears and risks associated to this purchase, particularly when compared with an experience of a traditional product and if this risk was a determining factor or not in the purchase.

Phase 2 - The target population consists of Portuguese young adults consumers aged between 22 and 45 years with educational qualification equal or higher than 12th grade. The data collection was done through the administration of a questionnaire. Most respondents were interviewed; however a quarter of the sample was obtained by an on-line self-administered questionnaire. The quota sampling was adopted and the proportional strata were defined by region, age groups, gender and educational qualification (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2002). The survey took place between June and October 2013.

We initially proceeded to the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to reduce the number of variables related to the perceived value by the consumer. Then, a hierarchical cluster analysis was performed using the hierarchical method Complete Linkage.

Findings

Qualitative study

The majority of the informants held very simplistic attitudes toward green products. They even though they had a sense of what can be considered green products, unaware of where to find them in the store. In general, cleaning products and food organic options are the only green product they may consider purchasing. They consider that this type of products have high price (65%), functionally not fit to their daily practices (42%) and quality and trust (risk) must be considered together (71%). Green product availability in the shop was also a barrier identified by 20% of the informants.

The main determinants of sustainable consumption risk identified by most respondents to support a long term relationship as a usual customer with the grocery store of their choice, was:

- Ecological footprint – “To be sure this store through time assures me buying local products or products that come from surrounding regions and by doing so I help to minimize the so-called "ecological footprint", ie, help minimizing the transport distances between production and consumption”
- Place of origin – “We never know if the involvement in this relationship through time can lead me to consider more the place of origin of the products I buy (Portuguese products)”
- Production by sustainable methods – “I intend with the involvement in this relationship to minimize my concern that the products I buy were produced / achieved by sustainable methods (no use of pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, etc.)”
- Unfair trade – “With this relationship there is a higher probability (risk) of not worrying so much about the products I buy – for instance if they come from socially unfair business/unfair trade (exploitation of suppliers, use of child labor, etc.)”
- Overconsumption - With the involvement attained in this relationship I risk purchasing products which I do not need

There was not surprising the price dominated the characterization of these type of products. Which is already unexpected is that the concept of risk associated with sustainable consumption is quite wide and covers topics that in literature have been addressed separately. However, we used these determinants in the construction of the variable risk in the second phase of the study taking into account the contextual nature of this variable in this study.

Sample characterisation

The sample consists of 327 respondents, where approximately 59% are female. A total of 43% of respondents live in regions of Greater Lisbon. About 41% of respondents live in a family without children up to 14 years and the majority have a BA/ BSc (52%) and is employed (67%). In terms of, household income, about 36% of respondents earns less 1500€ per month.

With regard to the shopping habits, the majority of respondents decides what to buy and does most of the household shopping (66%). This analysis reveals that these consumers probably have a concern in addressing frequently the same spot of shopping, that is, to keeping the relationship satisfaction with a specific retailer.

Segmentation Analysis

The initial set of 15 variables of perceived value that support the relationship between consumer and retailer was reduced to only four dimensions by a PCA. The PCA solution was assessed by oblimin rotation method and it explains 77.8% of total variance. The PC names are as follows: “Functional value”, “Social value”, “Monetary value” and “Emotional value”.

Applying the Complete Linkage method to the consumer perceived value dimensions, four clusters were identified and characterised in terms of the type of perceived value between consumer and retailer.

First segment has about 48% of consumers and is named "Prudent", because they elements appreciate the functional value and monetary value. These consumers opt for more rational, rather than emotive, dimension of the relationships, because they believe that quality of the relationship is essential to preserve the satisfaction with the store. The consumers need look for perceived performance of service, while pondering about the monetary value which for some authors can be argued as associated to price as functional subfactor and contribute to perceived value (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

In the second segment are concentrated 36% of consumers. This is a group where consumers only prize the emotional value. These consumers manage their relationship with the store through the feelings, experiences and emotions. This is the segment of "Intimates" consumers.

Third cluster has about 9% of all consumers and was named "Influenced". This designation was attributed, because these consumers truly value the social factor. They believe that shopping in a certain store give them a higher reputation or a social status. They are driven by the choices made by others (mainly the public figures or elements of their social group) such as the store or retailer where they will make their daily shopping.

Finally, the fourth and last cluster has around 8% of consumers and is named "Pragmatic". They primarily seek functional value, but also the social and monetary values. These consumers want the best, but also want to be socially acceptable. Although of less importance, they also ponder the monetary value. "Pragmatic" group considers that emotional side is dispensable to have a relational satisfaction.

Regarding the risk of environmentally unsustainable consumption, relational satisfaction and repurchase intention, the segments are characterised as follows. In terms of risk of environmentally unsustainable consumption, the "Prudent" consumers consider more the place of origin of the products they buy (Portuguese products) over time in their relationships with retailers. In average, the consumers declare that this relationship has been satisfactory and they intend to continue buying at this retail store in a regular basis; however they somewhat agree that they stop buying in a regular basis if a problem occur.

In the "Intimates" segment, the individuals are increasingly unanimous that the origin of the products they buy are considered over time in relationship. The satisfaction that consumers has with its retailers is not the best, but they consider that frequently shopping at their store is worthwhile. Then, there is a lower probability of these consumers stop buying regularly in the store, if a problem occurred, when compared to the other segments.

The "Influenced" group runs the risk of buying products which do not need, with the involvement attained in the relationship, over time. Usually, the influenced consumers often buy things, thinking how they are viewed by others. There is a trend and consumers follow it, resulting in purchase intentions. In this group of consumers, the

relational satisfaction is good and consumers believe that is exactly what they expected. In this sense, the consumers frequently keep buying in the same store.

The “Pragmatic” group is more apprehensive than others. They present greater agreement on actions which concern the relationship between them and the retailer. They care very much about the products origin and recognize it has impact on their satisfaction levels. The consumers are very satisfied and strongly recommend to their friends to make routine shopping in this store. As a result, they intend to proceed buying in the same retailer.

Conclusion

The study emphasizes the perceived risk of the consumer not to bring their purchases to their desires for a more sustainable planet. In general, the Portuguese organic products consumer considers that this type of products have high price, functionally not fit to their daily practices and quality and trust (risk) must be considered together in their buying decisions. Green product availability in the shop was also a barrier identified.

This study identified four segments, the “Prudent”, “Intimates”, “Influenced” and “Pragmatic”. Prudent” and “Pragmatic” segments are looking for a very functional relationship, which is in line with the consumer grocery idea as a self-service concept. The “Prudent” consumers want a perfect balance between quality and price, i.e., they expect that perception of service provided it to be excellent to the point of being a fair payment or sacrifice. In the other hand, the “Pragmatic” segment wants to have a good experience in their shops, in accordance with their needs and trends. The “Intimates” segment does appreciate the trust in the relationship. The trust is based on quality perceived from the most basic feelings and result from the first moments of contact that occurred in each transaction between the consumer and retailer. The “Influenced” group has a more similar position with respect to the prudent consumers, however they are more concerned with the place of origin of the products. In addition, the influenced consumers agree that the involvement in the relationship through time can induce to a risk of environmentally unsustainable, i.e., the consumers have a risk of purchase products that do not need.

These findings provide useful managerial guidelines for decision-making in grocery retailing. In particular, this study emphasizes the key role of exchange in relationships and the dimensions of perceived value considered by the shoppers in relational practices with the retailers critical to understand their patronage behaviour.

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