

Chapter 19

3Rs of Sustainability Values for Retailing Customers as Factors of Influence on Consumer Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to identify the impact of different 3Rs of sustainability approaches on consumer behavior and people's values. Some results, through multi-method study, with ethnography and quantitative research, show that people's priority is on "recycling," performing few activities of "reduce," and lesser actions of "re-use." The focus is on reducing packaging and the use of lower levels of inputs (as energy and water), and to reduce the carbon foot print, mainly using public and/or alternative transport. People are concerned about sustainability; however, they present a low level of activities related to major societal concepts on behalf of the environment. The 3Rs of sustainability have changed from Reduce-Reuse-Recycle to Recycle-Reuse-Reduce. However, this new order does not cause such impact on consumer behavior and in people's values.

INTRODUCTION

Through the recent decades, people worldwide are becoming more concerned with the impact of human activities on the environment. In different *Zeitgeist*, countries are apprehensive with the extinction of animal species, with river pollution, air pollution, garbage recycling, reverse logistics, production of "green" goods, climate change and even the reduction of consumption. All these sets of activities rely on

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a changing paradigm that mankind could interfere directly or indirectly on the destiny of the planet. For many years, the common word to express concern was “global warming”, until Europe winter season of 2004 with very low temperatures had weakened the theory of never ending growing temperatures that would melt North Polar ice cap and turn Antarctica into an immense ocean (Gore, 2016). Afterwards climate change and sustainability are the words to refer to subjects relate to preserve the planet. Sometimes the same expression brings different meanings and therefore, different uses and consequences. For example, the concept of 3Rs of Sustainability (Mohanty, 2011), highlights the sequence “Reduce, Re-use and Recycle”. This sequence has been adopted mainly in the northern hemisphere, while the Southern countries the sequence has changed to “Recycle, Re-use and Reduce”. It is not a simple word swap. It changes the logics of the 3Rs paradigm and the consequences in people’s life and values and its different impact on consumer behavior.

Retailers, like most of the companies of all industries, are aware that for achieving economic and market results they have to adopt responsible behavior towards the market, the environment, employees and consumers, in order to respond to the increasing awareness of stakeholders to sustainability issues. Retailers have more reasons for doing this, because retail companies are surrounded by a large number of stakeholders, and they play a dual role. On the one hand, they regularly communicate with consumers, for whom the information and image of the company are decisive in the choice of products. On the other hand, retailers act as intermediaries in the supply chain, so they do not operate alone in the market and are likely to pay more attention to sustainability related issues. As a matter of fact, sustainability is a key issue in this industry.

In this study, a comparison between retailing customers of two different countries – Brazil and Italy – respectively located in the southern and the northern hemisphere, has been conducted in order to identify the differences in consumers’ perceptions as regards sustainability values. The aim of the study was to identify the impact of the two different perspectives of the 3Rs of Sustainability Approach on consumer behavior and people’s values, and the consequences for retailers’ policies. In order to achieve this aim, in the following sections, the evolution of environment paradigms and concepts through time will be presented; then, the different uses and the impacts of 3Rs of Sustainability on customer’s behavior as well as the changes in people’s values will be analyzed through the empirical research. Finally, discussion, implications for management and future research directions will be proposed.

BACKGROUND

The subjects of this research are presented in four groups: Sustainability, 3Rs of Sustainability, Customers Behavior, and People’s values.

Sustainability

Sustainability is mentioned in many documents and research, however, most of the authors have linked it to the concept of sustainable development without really defining it (Castro and Avila, 2013; Faria, 2015; Parente and Barki, 2014; Tortato and Catapan, 2016). Sustainable Development “is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987).

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