

# Contemporary Consumer Behavior – Sustainable Living

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**Abstract:** This article explores the implement ability of buying dry goods in bulk from the perspective of consumer behaviour. The article is structured as follows: firstly, a qualitative study (semi-structured interviews) identifies the factors that influence consumers to buy dry goods and the barriers to buying dry goods in bulk, and the expectations for improvement; then it provides recommendations based on primary data combined with theory and case studies on the current situation of buying dry goods in bulk in the UK in terms of customer gap and hygiene concerns.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Living; Dry Food; Consumer Behavior; Packaging

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## 1. Introduction

Packaging accounted for approximately 50% of the global plastic waste generated in 2015 (UNEP, 2018). This figure has remained high, with food packaging estimated to account for more than a third of the world's total packaging market (Nemat, 2019) and is still growing at a high rate of 12% per year, causing more environmental problems, including greenhouse gases and a larger carbon footprint (Kumar, 2017). And excessive food packaging is unnecessary and can be avoided as it is purely for marketing purposes. According to a study by the University of Portland, it was found that companies selling bulk food had an average of 54% lower material and transportation costs for their goods compared to packaged food (Fredrika, 2020), and these savings would be directly reflected in the price of the goods. This is a win-win situation for suppliers, consumers and the environment.

## 2. Objectives of Research

- Identify the current situation and factors influencing consumer purchases of dry goods
- Identify what are the main barriers for grocery shoppers to purchase food in bulk
- Identifying ways to promote people's intention to buy bulk goods

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Types of qualitative research

In-depth interviews provide richer insights into individual experiences, decisions and action sequences and allow for more questions to be asked, (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000, p. 48) which is why a qualitative research approach to interviews is most appropriate for this study, rather than interview groups. In-depth interviews also help to prevent unpleasant group interview experiences, such as confidentiality issues, and trust issues (Berger, 2011, p. 137).

### 3.2 Types of interviews

The semi-structured interview was the most appropriate interview for this study, due to the fact that it was both structured and flexible (Bryman, 2004).

## 4. Research design

In this paper, formal interviews were conducted with 2 interviewees. The general information about the respondents is as follows Table

Respondents were chosen for the following reasons:

- They are experienced dry goods buyers
- They have all had experience of buying bulk dry goods
- They were diverse in terms of gender, age and marital status

The interviews were conducted primarily through MS Teams, all recorded using an audio recording device in a mobile phone; later converted to text form via Otter; and then the final transcripts were formed after repeated listening, correcting any unclear points and confirming any confusion with the interviewees.

In terms of analysis, the deductive coding method was used for this study. Firstly, the Priori coding method was used to make a list of potential codes based on the pilot study; afterwards, by rereading each article, the appropriate information was found in the transcripts and marked in a different color; once obtained, the information was collated using thematic analysis; and finally, the information was reformatted and presented in a clearer and more direct way.

## **5. Limitations**

The limitations of this paper are that the findings are somewhat overly idealistic and limited in terms of diversity of thought. The reason for the limitations is identity theory: identity centers on the categorization of the self as a role, and people's behavior and thoughts are influenced by their role identity (Thoits 1986) and have evolved into a set of guiding criteria (Burke and Reitzes 1981).

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Identify the current situation and factors influencing consumer purchases of dry goods**

Mainstream supermarkets in Britain. It should be noted that one of the interviewees mentioned that he sometimes went to Eco shop. When it comes to the factors influencing their purchase of dry goods, the two interviewees have a great difference in the number of influencing factors (the difference may come from the different family situations: single; Married with three children and gender: male; female), but there was a high degree of similarity in their judgments of the importance of the influencing factors (the similarity may come from the same work background: university teachers). Firstly, the number of influencing factors: speaker1 mentioned 3 influencing factors, all from external factors; speaker2 mentioned 12 influencing factors of which 8 were external factors and 4 were internal factors. Secondly, the perceived importance of the influencing factors: both interviewees were very concerned about the packaging material (5/5) and clearly indicated that the packaging of the product would have a direct impact on their purchasing behavior; the same concern was also reflected in the sensitivity to price (5/5).

### **6.2 Identify what are the main barriers for grocery shoppers to purchase food in bulk**

Both interviewees had experience of buying dry goods in bulk in other country, but they did not use eco shops often or did not buy bulk dry goods in the UK. A possible reason is that there are serious barriers that prevent them from buying. Both interviewees agreed highly on the issue of inconvenience (5/5); in addition to this, speaker2 also mentioned her dissatisfaction with price, variety and expectations based on her experience of buying dry goods in bulk at the eco shop (4/5); finally, it is important to note that both interviewees mentioned the hygiene factor, but both said that it did not affect them much (2/5).

## **7. Recommendations**

### **7.1 Customer gap**

#### **7.1.1 Price strategy**

Reducing the price of bulk dry goods based on consumer perceptions and supported by psychological pricing strategies

##### **Demand-based pricing**

Demand-based pricing, also known as customer-based pricing, is a pricing strategy that focuses on the demands of customers

(based on perceived value) (Codini et al., 2012). Companies with value-based pricing are able to match customer perceived benefits to product prices, thereby increasing consumer willingness to buy (Grewal et al., 1998).

### **Psychological pricing**

Psychological pricing is a pricing strategy that uses psychological or subconscious forces to influence customers to increase their consumption. Recent research confirms that psychological pricing continues to play an important role in physical food retailing (Levy et al., 2020)

## **7.1.2 Promotion strategy**

### **Extrinsic rewards**

#### **Create Incentive Programs with smartphone apps:**

Mainstream supermarkets in the UK have their own membership and app that gives consumers points when they purchase items. To encourage consumers to buy bulk dry goods products, a separate area could be created for this segment: every time a consumer buys a certain amount of bulk dry goods they will receive an electronic medal, which when earned can be exchanged for free eco-friendly shopping bags and souvenirs from the shop, in recognition of their contribution to the environment.

## **7.2 Contamination**

It is not only the respondents who have concerns about hygiene, it is commonly accepted in the literature that hygiene is the primary consideration when it comes to buying bulk food (Doser, 1999;) and this has been exacerbated by outbreaks in recent years. Children playing with bins, incorrect use of equipment to remove products from bins, and the likelihood of persons coughing on open bins have all been identified as major sources of consumer worry regarding contamination. (Costa, 2018).

### **7.2.1 Contamination Strategy**

The open bin can be turned into a gravity dispenser with a top lid that is only opened when staff are restocking it. Customers would not be able to physically touch the product before purchasing it, and food would be dispensed into the container using a hand crank - or other type of mechanism - that could be adjusted to facilitate portion control by dispensing a fixed amount of product with each turn of the handle. (Costa, 2018).

## **8. Conclusion**

In summary, respondents were highly concerned about the environmental impact of packaging and clearly indicated that they were willing to pay extra for more environmentally friendly packaging, implying that there is a promising market for environmentally friendly packaging. At the same time, respondents also indicated that the primary factor preventing them from buying bulk fast food was convenience, the secondary factors were price and quality, and hygiene was not negligible. These issues can be mitigated through price strategies, promotional strategies and changes in hygiene conditions through new facilities.

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