

## **Factors Influencing On-campus Branded Grocery Purchase**

### **Behaviours among University Students in China**

Ziyin Gao<sup>1, a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Asia Pacific Network for International Education and Values Education, China

<sup>a</sup>Gaoziyin629@sina.com

**Keywords:** Consumer behavior, Grocery purchase, Socio-cultural context determinant, Demographical factors, Objective characteristics, Situational influents, Students

**Abstract:** Tertiary institutions students' purchase intentions and behaviours on the daily necessities are largely affected by a range of external and internal influents, both on line and offline. This article focus on the students' offline brand buying patterns in on-campus grocery stores for necessities through a series of qualitative methods namely focus group, semi-structured interview and observation. The article adopted coding and themed recombining as data processing tools. Findings of the results are categorized into four dimensions namely socio-cultural context determinants, personal demographical factors, objective characteristics of the products and situational influents. The factors indicate product providers to develop the marketing methods in a multi-dimensional strategy to achieve customer satisfaction and self-reinforce their brands.

### **Introduction**

Businesses to gain competitive edges for their brands become increasingly customer-targeted and stress on the importance of understanding the nature of consumers' buying code. Whilst customers who step in the store facing multiple choices tend to encounter a series of complex and mixed drivers, distractions and influents during the decision-making process. Thus, customers with different background follow certain patterns in their buying behaviours. As a homogenous group of segment with similar characters, Chinese university students shared common cultural background and age range, which showed consentaneous results in fieldworks regarding to this dimension. At the same time, the fieldworks presented heterogeneous results in personal attributes such as differed social class and demographical characters from different students. The customer's buying propensity varied upon their own gender and lifestyle, which can be segmented into more detailed subcategories. Furthermore, part of the branded product objective characteristics and its added value such as brand image and service work as drivers to direct students purchase behaviours. From the fieldwork results, the purchase intentions are largely driven by the products' quality and price. Besides, the buying process also will be affected by situational factors such as purchase happening environment, weather and mood.

### **Fieldwork Results**

**Group composition.** Focus group: 6 people, 2 females and 4 males, age: 21-22, nationalities: Chinese, students Interviews: 2 females, 22,nationalities: Chinese, students

Observations: 2 females, 22 and 21, nationalities: Chinese, students

Results: As a “problem solver”, consumer’s purchase behavior involves complicated information process, decision process and behavior responses, among which different influencing variables play parts to alter and finally form the buying behavior [1].

**Social-cultural context determinant.** The social-cultural context and environment in which purchase take place with reference to the culture, religion and status of consumers influence purchase behavior a lot. However, the fellow students, a small segment of the whole community, always share similar social-cultural attribute. From the result of fieldwork, sample of Chinese students all share the same culture, language, religion and educational background, showing coincident high uncertainty avoidance, good personal qualities and similar custom on purchase habits. A female in the focus group, 21, stated that she “*would not buy a product with uncertainty of the quality*”, which is approved by the other members. Moreover, the social influence determinant also includes reference group, referring to family, friends, expertise consultant. Nevertheless, the three fieldwork’s findings showed that students would like to take advice from person who trusted by them.

**Personal demographical factors.** Personal demographical factors like gender, personality, lifestyle, personal taste and economic situation also has impact on the decision making, which varied among the fellow students. All the three fieldworks showed that the buying decision partly depends on the amount of fund and personal purchase taste or habits. In the interview, a female, 22, expressed that “*how many things and what things to buy on shopping process depends ultimately on how much money she holds.*” What’s more, a female in focus group, 21, said that she “*always tended to buy the looked-good product to show her status*” without concerning about the price while the other one (male, 22) seldom buy expensive things concerning the limit budget. In the observation, participant found her favorite flavor directly without hesitation. At the same time, lifestyle, gender and personality also count a lot in buying activities. A male member in focus group regards shopping as necessities seeking and seldom go shopping while all of other females enjoy shopping and go shopping almost every day. The result shows that individual’s behavior varies and is controlled by personal value. According to Trasorras, value is subjective and dependent on who is making that determination [2]. as a consequence, the attitudes towards certain attribute of products are always different among different demographical factors.

**Objective characteristics of products.** Despite the fact that consumers are rational animals with personalities which are subjective to determine. There are many objective characteristics underlying the products which concerned most by the customers.

Quality: From the result of all fieldworks, the foremost factor of product motivating the sample students to buy is the quality. As the interviewee put that “*If a product has great flavour and quite acceptable price, once it is a low quality one, I won’t buy it anyway.*” Stone-Romero and Stone’s research [3] shows that consumers’ perception on total product quality include four general dimensions --- flawlessness, durability, appearance, and distinctiveness whilst Toivonen [4] argued that it relies on both tangible level (technical characteristics, appearance) and intangible level (services).

Package: The information provided by three fieldwork all shows that fellow students regard package and appearance as indicators to judge the quality, which are also important factors to refer to. A female student in focus group believe that “*product always can be tasty and in high quality if the exterior package is great.*” Moreover, in interview, a female reported that she likes

*“elaborate packaging, it will be better if there are many independent small packaging inside.”*

*Durability:* Since it is food purchase behavior, the durability and perishability of the product also affect the decision. All the sample students care about the quality guarantee period of the product, some even spend lots of time on selecting a fresher one.

*Hazard free:* hazard free, green food and healthy food are increasingly welcomed by public, which is also referred in the fieldwork. However, it is not a necessity that fellow students concern about for they are “*still young and healthy*”. What interesting is that a female in focus group said she would not buy food with high calorie during the weight loss, who still buy high calorie sauce in the observation. As Liu and Pieniaka and Verbeke’s research [5] showed that Chinese consumers generally hold high levels of awareness and whereas low knowledge about safe food.

Price. Another factor of food product that counts a lot is the market price. “*Under the circumstance of acceptable quality, price is the most cared factor*”, said by an interviewee. A product is always judged by the perception of value, which is defined as “a trade-off between the quality or benefits they perceive in the product relative to the sacrifice they perceive by paying the price” by Johnson *et al.*[6]. Quality is evaluated first, and then compared with market price. However, market price can be seen as an indicator or“cue” of quality [4], which is manifested by one of focus group’s views “*I believe in some brands with much more expensive price than other products. It deserve!*” and talks about price of the participant mixed with quality to a large extent.

*Promotional tools:* concerning the perceived value theory mentioned before, discount and other promotional tools may increase the perceived value of the product. Fieldwork result shows that consumers often have a anticipation of proper price to compare with the market price. Lower price with constant other qualities may be the best offer to consumers.

Brand. The perception of the product’s quality based on indirect cues such as image, brand name, advertising. In the interview, a female reported that advertisements influence her to a certain degree. Moreover, the results of fieldwork showed that all the sample students have one or two loyal brands and the loyalty is formed after a few trials and satisfaction of experiences. Dalton [2] cites three factors that drive customers loyalty --- value, trust and going the extra mile. An interviewee, female,22, also expressed that “*a preferred brand always ruins my rationale and leads me to make unintended buying.*”, “*once I form a sense of brand loyalty after once or twice purchase, I will forgive the little stain on their prestige.*”

**Situational influents.** From the observation, many dynamic and situational influents occurred on the buying process, like the mood, weather and shop decorations. moods have been shown to impact upon spending, word of mouth, and repeat purchase intentions especially in retail settings. [7] In focus group, some students can feel offensive to refuse purchase for shop’s “little trick” --- put the fresh one back on the shelf; In interview, a interviewee suggested that she hates “*annoy me over and over and never buy it!*”

## Implications on business

From the findings mentioned above, what a marketing manager should indicate firstly is that the social-cultural determinant plays a fundamental and intangible part in the decision making. To satisfy consumers with different social-cultural attributes, managers must design differentiated marketing programme towards different parts of international target customers

concerning different cultural atmosphere.

Secondly, personal taste and demographical characteristics varied a lot, which is impossible to satisfy by a single brand positioning. According to Huffman and Kahn, a common strategy in retailing has been to compete by offering a wide variety of items within a category, designed to appeal to every consumer taste [8]. However, large assortment strategies can backfire to lead to the consumers' confuse or obscure of the branding. Marketing managers should make customized strategy to meet what the target customer really want. This should base on complete knowledge of what are the preferred product attributes of different consumers.

Thirdly, for the objective characteristics of product, findings show that perceptive value of product counts a lot in consumer decision, with high perceptive quality and relatively reasonable price. To achieve this, marketing managers can try to improve the perceptive quality by upgrading package design or use elaborate separated independent packages. According to Yan and Senguptab and Wyer,[9], package size, which is one of the most accessible and easy-to-process product cues to which consumers are exposed, can have a significant impact on quality judgments. What's more, it is easy for company to achieve. At the same time, price is another factors influence the consumers behavior, indicating that marketing managers should try to make use of promotional tools to appeal to more customers. According to the results of the fieldworks, students with limited financial capacity will be attracted by lower price to a large extent. However, price on the other hand is kind of indicators of the quality. Consequently, managers should pay attention to that price must correspond the positioning of the product and design a proper original market price together with attractive promotion tools like discount or "special offer". As for brand image building, what the managers should take into account is try to attract the customers to form a sense of loyalty, from which a company can gain a lot of benefits. Advertisement is an effective tool to build and promote the brand which influence the behavior significantly according to the fieldwork result.

To conclude, the goal of the marketing business is to obtain more market share in order to gain profit [11]. The determinants influencing the consumer behavior are complicated which need to be elaborately understood by companies to achieve customer satisfaction.

## **References:**

- [1] Evangelos D. (2013) “*Food Consumer Information Behavior: Need Arousal, Seeking Behavior, and Information Use*”, *Journal of Agricultural & Food Information*, Vol.15(2), pp. 81-108
- [2] Trasorras, R. and Weinstein, A. and Abratt, R.(2008) “*Value, satisfaction, loyalty and retention in professional services*”, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 27(5), pp.615 - 632. Available from: <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/journals.htm?issn=0263-4503&volume=27&issue=5&articleid=1801132&show=html>
- [3] Stone-Romero, E.F. and Stone, D.L.(1997) “*Development of a multidimensional measure of perceived product quality*”*Journal of Quality Management*, Vol.2(1), 1997,pp.87–111. Available from:<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1084856897900237>
- [4] Toivonen, R. M. (2012) “*Product quality and value from consumer perspective—An application to wooden products*”, *Journal of Forest Economics*, Vol. 18(2), PP. 157–173
- [5] Liu, R. and Pieniaka, Z. and Verbeke, W.(2013) “*Consumers' attitudes and behaviour towards safe food in China: A review*”, *Food Control*, Vol.33(1),pp. 93–104.

- [6] Johnson, W.C., Chinuntdej, N. and Weinstein, A. (1999) “*Creating value through customer and supplier relationships*”, IMP 15th Annual Conference, pp. 1-15.
- [7] Furnham, A. and Milner, R.(2013), “*The impact of mood on customer behavior: Staff mood and environmental factors*”,*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, Vol.20,(6),pp.634–641. Available from:<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0969698913000647>
- [8]. Huffman, C. And Kahn, B. E.,(1998) “*Variety for Sale: Mass Customization or Mass Confusion?* ”,*Journal of Retailing*, Vol.74(4), pp. 491-513,
- [9] Yan, D.F. and Senguptab, J. and Wyer, R.S.(2014) “*Package size and perceived quality: The intervening role of unit price perceptions*”,*Journal of Consumer Psychology*.Vol.24(1),pp.4–17. Available from: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1057740813000636>
- [10] Dillon W.R. and Madden, T.J. and Firtle, N.H. (1987) *Marketing research in a marketing environment*.Times Mirror/Mosby College Publishing, St. Louis
- [11] Eric, A. (2013) “*Test for the real option in consumer behavior* ”,*Research in Economics*,Vol.68(1). pp.70–83