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Trade-offs involved in sustainable consumption practices: A study on consumer perception

Compensações (trade-offs) envolvidas nas práticas de consumo sustentável: Um estudo sobre a percepção dos consumidores

Compensaciones (trade-offs) involucradas en prácticas de consumo sostenible: Un estudio sobre la percepción del consumidor

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ABSTRACT
This article investigates how consumers perceive the trade-offs involved in sustainable consumption. It consists of an exploratory field study, with a qualitative approach, in which 9 consumers who declared themselves adept at sustainable consumption were interviewed. Most of the interviewees were aware that there are trade-offs involved in this consumption. Nevertheless, it was observed that they tend to simplify the concepts addressed, emphasizing the environmental aspect, in particular, the disposal of waste. This trend is reflected in consumption practices, which are highly focused on reuse to the detriment of other aspects of sustainability such as saving resources and non-consumption.
Keywords: sustainable consumption; ideal type; trade-offs; sustainability; consumer.

RESUMO
Este artigo investigou como os consumidores percebem as compensações (trade-offs) envolvidas no consumo sustentável. Tratou-se de uma pesquisa de campo, exploratória e com abordagem qualitativa, em que foram entrevistadas 9 consumidoras que se autodeclaram adeptas do consumo sustentável. A maioria das entrevistadas estava ciente de que existem trade-offs envolvidos nesse consumo. Porém, observou-se que elas tendem a simplificar os conceitos abordados, enfatizando o aspecto ambiental, em especial, o descarte de resíduos. Essa tendência reflete nas práticas de consumo, muito voltadas para o reuso em detrimento de outros aspectos da sustentabilidade como a economia de recursos e o não-consumo.
Palavras-chave: consumo sustentável; tipo Ideal; trade-offs; sustentabilidade; consumidor.

RESUMEN
Este artículo investigó cómo las consumidoras perciben las compensaciones involucradas en el consumo sostenible. Fue una investigación de campo, exploratoria y con enfoque cualitativo, en la que se entrevistó a 9 consumidoras que se declararon adeptas al consumo sustentable. La mayoría de los entrevistados eran conscientes de que existen compensaciones involucradas en este consumo. Sin embargo, se observó que tienden a simplificar los conceptos abordados, enfatizando el aspecto ambiental, en particular, la disposición de residuos. Esta tendencia se refleja en las prácticas de consumo, muy centradas en la reutilización en detrimento de otros aspectos de la sostenibilidad como el ahorro de recursos y el no consumo.
Palabras clave: consumo sostenible; tipo ideal; compensaciones; sostenibilidad; consumidor.

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1 INTRODUCTION

"For every seemingly ecological action, we need to be aware that there may be a reaction," said James Atkins, President of Vertis Environmental Finance (Griffiths, 2019). Behind this quote is the idea that sustainable consumption, widely discussed in academia and society (Banbury et al., 2012; Kostadinova, 2016), is a multifaceted and complex concept that involves the entire life cycle of products. (Sesini et al., 2020), thus often requiring consumers to make decisions that involve trade-offs (Luchs & Kumar, 2015).

Permeated by this complexity and by the large amounts of information regarding so-called sustainable products and behaviors (Calíope et al., 2016; Ceglia et al., 2015), consumers classify themselves as sustainable based on one or more consumption practices that they deem to be linked to sustainability. Nevertheless, this excess of information on highly specialized subjects, according to Gonçalves-Dias and Teodósio (2012), makes a correct judgment impossible, as much of this information is incomprehensible to the common citizen and, many times, may arouse controversies even among the specialists themselves. Thus, according to Kim and Schuldt (2018), a judgment of the environmental impacts of consumption requires great cognitive effort from consumers, who then resort to simplifications in their day-to-day choices, often in an automatic, unconscious manner (heuristics).

Gonçalves-Dias and Moura (2007) argue that consumers often summarize their individual contribution to choosing "green" products and increasing recycling. On the issue of recycling, for example, Silva (2014) purports that this activity seeks to contribute to the reduction of solid waste, although it commonly takes place in an unethical way, through informal, over-exploited and subhuman working conditions. We have, then, a clear example of a trade-off, within a practice considered sustainable, involving economic, social and environmental aspects.

Another example would be the electric car, a product offered marketed with a proposition for environmental sustainability, promising to mitigate the problem of CO_2 emissions, but involving high energy use and high release of CO_2 in its production (Edfenergy, 2020). Vargas-Berrones et al. (2020) argue that trade-offs are inevitable due to the limitations of all manufacturing and service systems.

We argue that sustainable consumption and, consequently, sustainable products, present trade-offs between different dimensions of sustainability (social, environmental, and economic), or within each of them, for consumers. Based on this, a number of questions arise for reflection: Are consumers aware that their choices classified as "sustainable" carry several issues, sometimes contradictory or inconsistent, which often involve trade-offs?

Given these considerations, the guiding question of this research is: How do consumers deal with trade-offs involved in sustainable consumption?

The general purpose, therefore, is to investigate how consumers perceive the trade-offs involved in sustainable consumption. To this end, the following specific objectives were outlined: 1) To understand the concept of sustainable consumption from the consumers' point of view; 2) To know the relationship of consumers with sustainable consumption practices; and 3) To understand how consumers perceive the effects of sustainable choices.

According to Gonçalves-Dias and Moura (2007), most studies on sustainable consumption are guided by the idea of consumption from the perspective of engineering and economics, arguing that a broader conception should incorporate sociology, anthropology, psychology, and philosophy. Furthermore, according to the authors, it is important to expand the frontiers of knowledge and debate on sustainability in consumption through the discussion of different understandings and possibilities dedicated to the topic.

In this direction, this research is allied to that of Calíope et al. (2016), who discussed sustainable consumption practices as types of social actions according to the Weberian ideal-type model in a theoretical essay on the subject. According to the authors, Weber's ideal type was not constituted with the aim of being found in reality, but rather with the purpose of describing it, comprising an instrument for its analysis and understanding. We offer this construct to study sustainable consumption from the perspective of trade-offs perceived by the consumer, since this consumption, as an ideal type, cannot be achieved in its entirety in the practical field, serving only as a theoretical parameter – an idealization that can help in the analysis and comparison of more or less sustainable practices within certain standards.

Studies on trade-offs in the areas of supply chain (e.g. Gružauskas et al., 2018) and in the area of corporate sustainability (e.g. Vargas-Berrones et al., 2020; Hahn et al., 2010) are more common, but the literature on sustainable consumption involving these offsets is incipient. Existing research only addresses trade-offs between sustainability from the standpoint of environmental issues and product performance (Luchs et al., 2010; Luchs et al., 2012) and between that and other attributes valued by consumers (Luchs & Kumar, 2017). Thus, only one empirical study addressing trade-offs between sustainability attributes and other attributes of sustainable products, involving its three dimensions, was found, and even in the case, said study was limited to the trade-offs involved in the production and consumption phase of broilers (Sonntag et al., 2018).

This study aims to capture these judgments more broadly in relation to trade-offs within the three dimensions of sustainability from the consumer's point of view. It thus contributes to the growing discussion on the topic, already evident in events such as The Economist's 2019

Sustainability Summit, which brought together important thinkers and actors in sustainability to discuss trade-offs between sustainability attributes (Griffiths, 2019), in addition to works exclusively theorists who discuss the different concepts related to sustainable consumption through literature and their contradictions and trade-offs, such as Silva (2014), Gonçalves-Dias and Teodósio (2012), and Gonçalves-Dias and Moura (2007). Luchs and Kumar (2015) state that this discussion is important for product and marketing managers who need to make decisions that reflect how consumers respond to different exchange scenarios (trade-offs), but their contribution can be extended to public policy professionals and non-governmental organizations involved in actions and projects aimed at sustainable consumption, in addition to academics in the area and consumers themselves.

As for the method, an exploratory qualitative study was carried out using semi-structured interviews with consumers who declared themselves to be adept at sustainable consumption at some level and in any categories. The research subjects were also confronted with some situations of trade-offs between products through information, so that we could understand the level of awareness in relation to these trade-offs and how they deal with them. Data analysis was performed through content analysis. Next, the theoretical foundation on sustainable consumption as an ideal type and trade-offs in this type of consumption are presented. After that, the methodological procedures are presented, followed by the results found, discussion, and final remarks.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Sustainable Consumption as an Ideal Type

The most widespread concept of sustainable consumption is the use of services and related products that respond to basic needs while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials, as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants throughout the life cycle of the service or product, so as not to compromise the needs of future generations (Kostadinova, 2016). Luchs et al. (2011) define it as one that takes into account the needs of current and future generations and, therefore, seeks to simultaneously reduce the environmental, social and economic consequences of consumption. This concept highlights the three dimensions of sustainability (social, economic, and environmental), whose balance must be sought.

Mont and Plepys (2008) argue that there is no consensus on what defines sustainable consumption and that it is often addressed in a broad manner and in different ways in the literature. According to the authors, scholars question whether just a change in consumption is enough or if merely reducing this consumption can also mitigate its impacts. Gonçalves-Dias and Moura (2007) differentiate the concepts of green consumption and sustainable consumption, stating that the former is more restricted to individual behavior, in which consumers consider, in addition to the quality-price relationship, the environmental impact of the product, in a more moderate approach, not advocating for the reduction of consumption. Sustainable consumption, in turn, consists of a broader approach, also involving technologies, beliefs, and consumer culture, in a whole paradigm shift. For the authors, green consumption is only one part of sustainable consumption. Sebastiani et al. (2013, p. 473), in turn, use the term ethical consumption to describe “the behavior of ethically minded consumers who feel responsible for the environment and society” – a concept that is similar to the definitions of sustainable consumption presented earlier.

The literature acknowledges that the concept of sustainable consumption is based on sustainable development (Sesini et al., 2020; Gonçalves-Dias & Moura, 2007), whose definition, according to the Brundtland Report, is “development that meets the needs present generations without compromising the needs of future generations” (UN, 2020). This concept includes social and environmental dimensions, in addition to the economic one (Sachs, 2004). In this line of reasoning, Sesini et al. (2020) state that studies on sustainable consumption have given greater attention to the environmental dimension. Kadic-Maglajlic et al. (2019) remark that studies disregard other forms of sustainability, such as socially friendly consumption behavior. Despite this, the literature suggests that, like sustainable development, the concept of sustainable consumption deals with different dimensions – social, environmental, and economic – and their interactions, which are inevitable (Scherer et al., 2018).

Sustainable consumption can also be investigated as an ideal type. In this sense, Cahnman (1965) states that rational social action is the prototype of the ideal type. Quoting Weber himself (1922), the author states that these ideal typical constructions delineate “what course would human action of a certain kind take, if it were strictly oriented to a rational purpose, undisturbed by errors or emotions, and if, moreover, it were unequivocally oriented towards a single purpose, especially economic.” Although ideal types never correspond exactly to reality, they comprise hypothetical constructions formed from existing facts that have considerable analytical power and can be a useful tool in the investigation of phenomena found in the real world, allowing critical comparisons and further discussion (Casadei et al., 2020).

Max Weber’s ideal-type model was used by Calíope et al. (2016) to assume sustainable consumption in this perspective, the which should consider the practices of this type of consumption as social actions. The authors justify this approach to sustainable consumption given that it is influenced by internal variables, but also, according to Weber’s (1999) concept of social action, it is guided by the behavior of others, be it past, present, or expected. In other words, the consumer suffers external influences

(from individuals or institutions), subsequently responding to these influences.

Consumers' social actions are considered sustainable actions under this approach, given that people who engage in sustainable consumption behaviors act in response to socially constructed internal and external stimuli (Calíope et al. 2016). Calliope et al. (2016, p. 10) thus define sustainable action as a "mode of social action guided by the behavior of others, having a meaning and being guided by rationality, referring to ends and values and motivated in an affective and traditional way, so that the latter vary from individual to individual." Table 1 presents a summary of the authors' elaboration:

Table 1
Sustainable consumption as sustainable action

SOCIAL ACTION	SUSTAINABLE ACTION
Rationally regarding ends	Consumers who believe that their decisions can significantly affect the environment and social issues are more likely to behave sustainably (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014). The underlying assumption for many studies is that individuals make rational choices and opt for alternatives with greater benefits against lower costs (e.g., in terms of money, effort, and/or social approval) (Wang et al., 2004). The sustainable consumption behaviors of individuals are not in all areas of apparent consumption but are especially in those areas where there is economic advantage (Şener & Hazer, 2008).
Rationally regarding values	Sources of sustainable value systems vary widely: from various religious traditions to radical ecology or research on happiness to ancient appeals calling to a return to the values of pre-industrial society. Regardless of the type of initiative to consume sustainably, people must become reflective about the environmental impacts of their consumption and then choose to replace the consumerist calculation with an ethical one (Holt, 2012). Sustainability-oriented people are cooperative and help other people in need (Pol, 2002), which means they are altruistically motivated (Schultz, 2001); moreover, these individuals constantly practice actions that result in the conservation of natural resources (Kaiser, 1998). All of this means that a sustainability-oriented person seeks, at the same time, to conserve natural resources and care for other human beings. Thus, a series of studies and proposals indicate that sustainable actions encompass pro-ecological, frugal, altruistic and equitable behaviors (Corral-Verdugo et al., 2012).
Affectively, especially emotionally	Self-conscious emotions, such as feelings of guilt and pride resulting from previous experiences, motivate consumers to support sustainable consumption alternatives (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014).
Traditionally	An important part of culture is the norms by which people live or because they are prescribed or determined by custom. What most people do is set a standard of comparison, which influences the behavior of individual members of society (Thøgersen, 2005). Subjective norms that refer to perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Most predispositions to sustainability are culturally learned, which emphasizes the significant weight that socialization has on the development of sustainability-oriented citizens (Corral-Verdugo et al., 2012).

Source: Calíope et al. (2016, pp. 10-11).

In the Table 1, these sustainable actions take place in four ways: (i) rationally regarding ends, according to expectations regarding the behavior of other people, which is used as a condition or means to achieve one's own ends, in a rational manner; (ii) rationality regarding values, through the conscious belief that, regardless of the result, there is an absolute and inherent value to a certain behavior; (iii) affectively, especially emotionally, being guided by current affects or emotional states; and (iv) traditionally, i.e., according to ingrained customs.

Despite the understanding of sustainable consumption as an ideal type, this theoretical and idealized view of consumption is opposed to the perspective of trade-offs involved in the practice of consumption by consumers. In this way, this research proposes that, as sustainable consumption cannot be achieved in its entirety in the practical field, it is up to consumers to evaluate the trade-offs involved in their consumption practices considered as sustainable in the social, economic and environmental spheres. The next topic deals with the trade-offs involved in sustainable consumption and provides some practical examples.

2.2 Trade-offs in sustainable consumption

Ottman (1999) states that no product is fully sustainable or ecologically correct, as all products consume energy and resources and generate emissions into the atmosphere during their production. Additionally, sustainable consumption must overcome a merely environmental concern, as well as considering social and economic aspects at all stages of its life cycle (Sesini et al., 2020).

Because it involves so many aspects, a consumer would have to consider infinite variables when making choices, in addition to those already inherent to any purchase. From an environmental standpoint alone, sustainable consumption would imply the need for consumers to learn about toxic materials and waste emissions in the life cycle of the products they buy and subsequently promote a change in consumption behavior based on this knowledge (Hobson, 2002). Considering social and economic variables, this choice would become even more complex. In this sense, Kim and Shuldt (2018) reinforce that judging the impacts of consumption requires

a lot of cognition and, often, consumers can resort to heuristics to simplify their judgment.

Because it is not possible for consumers to take stock of all aspects involved in sustainable consumption, they are often required to deal with trade-offs or trade-offs. For example, following the ideal-type model as an approach to sustainable consumption, one move in this direction – i.e., one that seeks to consider the sustainability of the product from production to disposal in different dimensions (economic, social, and environmental) – is slow fashion. Its goal is to pursue fashion consumption that is attentive to the triple bottom line of sustainability through the appreciation of local producers and artisanal work (economic and social dimensions), reduction of resources used at all stages of production (environmental dimension), quality and durability of the garments in relation to quantity, and discouraging consumerism regarding clothes (environmental dimension), among other aspects (Sobreira, Silva, & Romero, 2020). Therefore, a product manufactured and consumed based on this logic would approach a sustainable product of the ideal type. Despite this, even this type of sustainable consumption will involve several trade-offs for consumers, either in the production process or in other stages related to consumption.

But, after all, what are trade-offs? Trade-offs are defined as "the exchange of one thing for another: especially the forgoing of a benefit or advantage for another considered more desirable" (Angus-Leppan et al., 2010, p. 231). According to Orsato (2006), trade-offs represent a choice between options. Some examples of classic trade-offs involve delivery time versus punctuality, consistency of quality versus price (Filippini, 1998), or the choice between financial and social objectives to which organizations are subject (Slawinski & Bansal, 2015). Van der Byl and Slawinski (2015) raised the discussion about trade-offs in sustainability by mentioning that a special issue of Business Strategy and the Environment "explored how trade-offs and conflicts between economic, environmental and social elements of sustainability were ignored in the literature and require exploration" (p. 56). This article takes the discussion of trade-offs involved in sustainable consumption to the consumption area, specifically from the perceptions of consumers about their practices.

From this perspective, an example of the trade-offs involved in sustainable consumption are electric cars, marketed as a more sustainable option in relation to cars powered by fossil fuels due to their ability to reduce CO_2 emissions into the atmosphere. Conversely, they require a high consumption of energy for their production and the emissions generated during this production tend to be higher than those of a conventional car, which should be gradually improved as the technologies involved evolve, according to a British electricity company Edfenergy (2020). Another example would be disposable plastic bags, which have become a serious problem in terms of marine pollution and contamination. Nevertheless, the manufacture of paper bags emits three times more carbon than plastic. On the future of public transport, Manfred Rudhart, CEO of Arriva Group, highlighted that a Euro VI diesel bus is more sustainable than 50 Tesla cars (electric cars) on the road (Griffiths, 2019).

Also, based on this perspective, a German study on consumer perceptions of trade-offs involved in broiler production concluded that consumers are generally not aware of these trade-offs. These included connections between animal welfare, climate protection, and profitability. When analyzing citizens' reactions when faced with these trade-offs, it was realized that the decision-making process to resolve these issues was heterogeneous and dominated by animal welfare preferences (Sonntag et al., 2018). The methodology of this research, which involves such questions, will be presented in the following section.

3 METHODOLOGY

The study was exploratory, with a qualitative approach and using the field study as a research method. The exploratory study aims to provide greater familiarity with the topic through consultations with the individuals in contact with the problem studied (Gil, 2010). Godoy (1995) states that qualitative research allows obtaining descriptive data about people, places and interactive processes, as it involves the researcher's direct contact with the situation studied. The field study is used when the researcher intends to understand complex social phenomena in their real context, particularly when there is no clear delimitation between the phenomenon and the context (Yin, 2001).

The capture of participants was carried out intentionally, for convenience, through invitation. The subjects agreed to participate in the study, after reading the consent form that ensured the confidentiality of the study and their anonymity, in addition to containing the possibility of requesting, at any time, withdrawal from participation. Additionally, consumers who met the following inclusion criteria were also chosen: (1) accepting to participate in the research; (2) being of legal age; (3) declaring to be a supporter of sustainable consumption practices in any category, such as recycling practices, reuse, saving renewable and non-renewable resources, reducing consumption, purchasing products with sustainability appeal, etc.

The interviews were carried out from April to June 2021 and, due to the restrictions established in light of COVID-19, were conducted remotely through the Google Meet tool. Prior to the interviews, authorization was requested from the interviewees so that they could be recorded, and the interviews were transcribed by the researchers for later analysis.

The data collection phase was carried out through a semi-structured interview, the script being drafted according to the research objectives and based on the theoretical framework, following the structure: 1. Questions

about the sociodemographic profile of the interviewees; 2. Questions related to the consumer's understanding of the concept of sustainable consumption; 3. Questions related to the sustainable consumption practice(s) undertaken by the consumer to understand their involvement with these practices and their perception of the trade-offs involved; 4. Next, three (3) hypothetical situations were presented to the interviewees involving trade-offs related to some sustainable products explored in the theoretical framework in order to enable the consumer to make choices and justify them. This last action aimed to verify the perception of consumers in relation to the trade-offs involved in consumption and how they respond to them. The situations were designed with the objective of allowing the interviewee to expose their opinions/perceptions so that it is possible to analyze their responses to the trade-offs involved in the consumption of sustainable products.

Interviews were conducted with 9 consumers who claimed to be adept at some sustainable consumption practice. Thus, after conducting the interviews, the profile of the interviewees was verified (Table 2) which revealed that they are, on average, 30 years old and mostly young married women, without children and who attended Higher Education. The interviewees have training in several areas, such as Administration, Biology, Nutrition, etc.

Two criteria of validity and reliability were used in conducting the research: triangulation of researchers and concern for clear and detailed exposition of methodological procedures (Paiva et al., 2011). For the first case, the interviews were carried out by different researchers who met with the rest of the team every two weeks to report the partial results and compare them with each other. This process constitutes the triangulation of researchers, i.e., the use of more than one researcher in the process of construction, collection and analysis of research results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). For the second case, the researchers valued clarity and detail regarding the exposition of the procedures adopted in the search and analysis of the results.

Table 2
Profile of the interviewees

Interviewee	Age	Occupation	Marital Status	Education	Household Income
Moderate 1	30	Public Servant	Married	Complete Higher Education	Above 4 minimum wages
Frugal 1	26	Student	Single	Incomplete Higher education	2 to 3 minimum wages
Creative	35	Nutritionist	Married	Complete post graduate degree	Above 4 minimum wages
Frugal 2	34	Public Servant / Laboratory Technician	Married	Complete post graduate degree	Above 4 minimum wages
Animal Lover	31	Administrator	Married	Complete higher education	3 to 4 minimum wages
Organic 1	27	Sales Manager	Single	Complete higher education	More than 4 minimum wages
Organic 2	53	Housemaker	Married	Completed secondary school	Above 4 minimum wages
Novice	32	Housemaker	Married	Complete higher education	Above 4 minimum wages
Moderate 2	32	Library Scientist	Single	Complete higher education	3 to 4 minimum wages

Source: Developed by the authors.

Pseudonyms were assigned to the interviewees based on characteristics observed by the researchers in their speeches, which revealed the emphasis of each interviewee's relationship with sustainability and sustainable behaviors. Thus, those that presented similar characteristics in terms of the characteristics of this relationship were grouped and named: (i) Moderate, i.e., consumers who sought to make simpler substitutions, but without changing their routine or habits much; (ii) Frugal, those who believed that it would only be possible to be sustainable by reducing consumption; (iii) Organic, composed of those who sought consumption as natural as possible, especially in terms of food. In addition to these, three interviewees received, respectively, the following pseudonyms: Creative, as the interviewee not only presented sustainable behavior, such as waste sorting, but also employed creativity to reuse waste in a way through the manufacture of toys, decorative objects, etc.; Animal lover, since the interviewee's interest in sustainable practices was mainly based on her love for animals; and Novice, representing the consumer who became aware of the amount of waste produced and her unnecessary purchases and, in the last year, had been adhering to various sustainable consumption practices.

The analysis of the collected data was carried out through the technique of content analysis, to ensure a critical understanding the collected data. According to Severino (2007), content analysis is a set of communication analysis techniques seeking to describe, analyze and interpret the information found in communications, whether oral or written or through images or gestures. Bardin (2011) adds that the objective of this analysis is to ensure that the researcher can go beyond the apparent reality and superficial statements and strive to understand the meanings behind the discourse.

The analysis of the content of the interviews took place in the three phases established by Bardin (2011): pre-analysis, material exploration, and data processing and interpretation. Among the pre-analysis actions, a previous reading was performed followed by a systematization of the initial ideas based on the objectives already established. In a second step, the coding was carried out using words and related terms as a registration unit.

The categories were not previously established by the researchers but were constructed as the terms and

words appeared in the speeches by frequency and relevance and were grouped thematically. Only in the last topic, where they are confronted with the situations, due to the nature of the questions, the categories were previously more or less established. one example includes small local producers vs. large retail chains, which would result in one or the other as the final category, but other words and terms were found as intermediate categories, such as "family farming," "craft work," etc. Finally, inference and interpretation were carried out, supported by the theoretical framework.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1 "Green Consumption:" Focus on the Environmental Pillar and on Waste Disposal

This first block was based on the specific objective established to collect the related concepts of sustainability and sustainable consumption in the consumer's view and compare them with the most widespread concept found in the literature addressed and other concepts found (Luchs et al., 2011; Gonçalves-Dias & Moura, 2007).

When asked about the concepts of sustainability and sustainable consumption, most respondents showed a greater focus on the environmental dimension, although social issues were also mentioned in a more discreet and secondary way. The economic dimension of the triple bottom line was virtually ignored by most subjects, not having been mentioned directly, but inevitably, indirectly, as the pillars are deeply interrelated, according to Scherer et al. (2018). Therefore, when citing aspects such as "human development," it is assumed that this includes both social and economic aspects. This discourse resulted in the identification of the "Green Consumption" category.

Given that, consumers adjust to the literature, where, according to do Sesini et al. (2020), studies on the environmental dimension of sustainable consumption have received greater attention. Furthermore, it demonstrates that consumers often understand sustainable consumption as "green consumption," according to Gonçalves-Dias and Moura (2007), the latter being merely a portion of the broader concept of sustainable consumption.

It was also possible to note that, within the preponderance of the environmental issue, the issue of disposal of materials in consumption was the one that received the most attention from consumers. This issue was addressed both in the sense of reducing consumption to discard less waste and in replacing disposable products with reusable ones and replacing materials (e.g. plastic for paper due to the degradation time). Saving resources (e.g. water, energy) was also mentioned, in addition to the sourcing of products and their production process (organic, vegan, etc.), but in a more case-specific way. Therefore, a category identified in this discourse was "waste disposal." A possible explanation for this concern appears in topic 4.2 and relates to the external influences to which consumers were exposed.

Specifically in relation to sustainable consumption, the subjects emphasized awareness when buying and discarding products, i.e., according to them, consuming sustainably means being aware of the environmental impacts that they promote and seeking to avoid this impact through of pro-environmental choices and attitudes.

> ORGANIC 1: I see sustainable consumption as carrying out responsible consumption so as **not to discard** many things (…). There is also the second part, which is the issue of the **sourcing of products.**

> FRUGAL 2: Sustainable consumption would be me taking what I need, **neither too much nor too little**, and trying somehow not to damage the environment with leftovers (…). This includes, for example, **packaging, waste, and not consuming too much** in the case of water.

Regarding the perspective of the future present in the concepts of sustainable consumption literature, most adepts of sustainable practices believe that, by maintaining consumption patterns as they currently are, environmental problems will worsen, and the planet may collapse in the next few years. decades. There was a division between those who believe in this change in behavior and those who do not believe in it.

Regarding what must be done to guarantee a better future for the next generations, the issue of the environment, especially disposal, gains emphasis in the speeches. Additionally, the issue of raising awareness among people close to one and education for children with a greater emphasis on environmental issues were also pointed out as the recognition that sustainable consumption may become a possible solution only if carried out in a systematic way. The subjects' perspective of the future and their belief in sustainable practices as idealizers of this future led to the "Sustainable Consumption as Key" category. For the analysis of sustainable consumption as a sustainable action by Calíope et al. (2016), this would involve the so-called rational mode referring to values, as there is a conscious belief in the absolute and inherent value of a certain behavior (in this case, sustainable consumption), regardless of the result (despite the uncertainty regarding the change in behavior of people).

> ORGANIC 2: If they [people] become aware that the right thing to do is conservation and preservation, it will be better. Otherwise, if there is no **drastic change** in the population, **the environment will not be able to withstand it.**

> ORGANIC 1: I believe that there will be more and more pressure from society itself regarding the companies, for the means of production to be cleaner and more sustainable (…). I think people will be **a little more aware** in relation to disposal and sorting (…).

> FRUGAL 2: I believe that, today, we have to think about the **education of children** and our own education.

In summary, it is observed that consumers tend to simplify the concepts discussed, emphasizing the

environmental aspect through various sustainable consumption actions and paying less attention to social and economic issues. Additionally, one finding of this topic and one contribution was that, within the environmental issue, the issue of disposal was the one that received the most attention by the subjects. Furthermore, there is uncertainty regarding the future of the next generations, which according to the subjects, can only be achieved through the systematic adoption of sustainable consumption practices. Table 3 summarizes the categories identified in the speeches.

Table 3

Categories related to sustainability and sustainable consumption

SUSTAINABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION	
Green consumption	Focus on the environmental dimension of sustainability and less attention to social and economic aspects.
Waste disposal	Within the environmental dimension, a relevant concern regarding the disposal of packaging and polluting materials in the environment. Issues regarding saving of resources and sourcing of products appear as secondary.
Sustainable consumption as key	They recognize the risks of unsustainable patterns for the future of the planet and believe that only a systematic change in consumption behavior can avoid a collapse in the global ecosystem, but they were torn between hope and pessimism regarding this change.

Source: Developed by the authors.

4.2 Involvement, Selectivity, Reduction and Reuse, External Influences

Regarding consumption, in general, the interviewees stated that the products they most consume are food and cleaning and hygiene products (weekly frequency) and the products they most like to buy are cosmetics, books, clothes, and travel (occasional frequency). As for the aspects that they consider when choosing these more general products, for most consumers, cost-benefit was what emerged as the most important, followed by quality. This part demonstrates the rational aspect regarding the ends of sustainable action proposed by Calíope et al. (2016), present in Table 1, in which individuals make rational choices and choose alternatives with greater benefits against lower costs (Wang et al., 2004).

Following that, the environmental aspect appears spontaneously with different emphases for each consumer, although disposal is again an aspect present in all discourses. Aspects of health and well-being also arise, in a more secondary way, which also demonstrates a rational aspect of individual gain with sustainable behavior.

It is clear that consumers who are more highly engaged in environmental causes seek to reduce or even eliminate consumption in some product categories, in addition to replacing products that are more aggressive to the environment for less harmful ones. More moderate and less involved consumers in relation to sustainable consumption focus more on this substitution for products that are less harmful to the environment and on the correct disposal of materials, albeit without this being part of their routine or being something that requires great sacrifices in relation to their normal consumption.

Through this discourse, the “Involvement” category was identified. This category is consistent with what is purported by Mont and Plepys (2008), who claim that there is a heated academic debate around whether reducing consumption is the only way to achieve sustainability or simply making changes in consumption behavior would be enough to mitigate environmental problems. Also, again, the question posed by Gonçalves-Dias and Moura (2007) between green consumption vs. sustainable consumption becomes evident.

MODERATE 1: I am careful when it comes to **disposal** and so forth, but when it comes to buying, what I consider the most is the **cost-benefit ratio** (…). At work, I avoid **disposable cups**. I used to always take my bottle or cup with a **[reusable] straw**.

MODERATE 2: I try to **minimize the use of plastic bags** (…). I cut back on **disposable sanitary napkins** as much as I can. I always buy product **refills** and separate the packaging for recycling…

FRUGAL 2: I am actually very **hesitant when it comes to shopping**. When I go to shopping, it is because I spent the whole month thinking (…) We have already replaced our toothbrush with a bamboo one. **Although it costs a little more, it is worth it**. I have also **cut back** on buying hygiene products for the home. (…) I have a capsule wardrobe, so I buy few clothes.

It is also possible to observe that aspects of sustainability receive greater attention when the consumer values that particular product category more, in which there is greater knowledge and personal involvement. For example, consumers who care a lot about health and food seek to consume organic food from family farming or to reduce the consumption of animal meat and processed foods with added chemicals (preservatives, artificial colorings, etc.). Consumers who like to use cosmetics, in general, also look for products in this category that are more natural, vegan and cruelty free, with biodegradable, recyclable or reusable packaging (refills). In terms of clothing, they look for handcrafted items, bought from small producers, etc. In addition, there is generally a benefit of its own relating to these characteristics: health, well-being, and affinity. With that, it was possible to verify the “Selectivity” category. This category also reinforces the rational aspect regarding the ends, as it evidences the individual gain with sustainable behavior, according to the model proposed by Calíope et al. (2016).

ORGANIC 1: In terms of **cosmetics**, I really appreciate this issue of sustainability (…) regarding the solid shampoo and conditioner: first, you generate no more **plastic waste**, you do not use a bottle because it is a bar, and it is **much gentler to your scalp.**

ORGANIC 2: I read everything about where it came from, **if it came from small farmers**, the **origin** of that [organic] food, if it is close to my city, if it is far from my city, or if it is **fresh**.

CREATIVE: I prefer to buy from **small producers**. In the case of clothing, I like more **handcrafted** things.

NOVICE: Before, I did not use to take anything into account. I would buy whatever appeared to be of higher quality to test it. As for cosmetic products, I only buy what is **not tested on animals**.

Regarding the sustainable consumption practices of which they are adept, the main highlight is the reduction of consumption and reuse. This concern is consistent with the focus on the environmental issue, with greater emphasis on disposal. If there is a concern about the materials that will be thrown into the environment, such as plastics, paper, and chemical substances, among others, consumers seek to reduce this amount of waste, either by consuming only what is necessary or by giving priority to what can be reused. Resource savings appear again in the discourse.

In general, consumers are adept at more than one sustainable consumption practice; however, they choose certain environmental issues through certain categories of products to focus on, seeking to eliminate, reduce or replace them with others that are less aggressive to the environment. Through this discussion, the "Reduction and Reuse" category emerged. This is in line with the literature by Kim and Schuldt (2018), which demonstrates that consumers end up simplifying and resorting to heuristic mechanisms in this type of consumption, given its complexity and the cognitive effort to make fully rational decisions regarding its impacts.

MODERATE 1: I use **reusable** sanitary napkins, ecopads, and ecobags [objects that can be reused].

FRUGAL 2: I do not use disposable sanitary napkins; I only use [reusable] **menstrual cups**.

The influences for the journey towards more sustainable consumption were mainly experiences that provided information about environmental issues and sustainability and, consequently, made these individuals reflect on the effects of their consumption on the environment. These experiences can be related to sustainable tourism trips (e.g. Tamar Project), academic training, work, religion, and closer contact with nature. Another key factor was the influence of family and friends (reference groups). In these responses, we can observe the power of information, role models, and an approach – intentional or not – to the topic as key factors that motivated more sustainable consumption behaviors.

It is possible that these influences also helped to shape the awareness and sustainable behaviors of these consumers. For example, most documentaries and travel experiences focused on the issue of waste production, the damage caused by plastic and poor waste management, etc. There are also family influences that taught, for example, how to carry out waste sorting, friends who influenced certain replacements from disposables to reusables, and consumers who are more critical and more involved in issues related to sustainability, due to their proximity to social or environmental issues or due to their academic background, demonstrating a more in-depth view and a more "radical" consumption behavior in relation to sustainability. These observations generated the "External Influences" category.

This category brings up again the issue of green consumption vs. sustainable consumption, as proposed by Gonçalves-Dias and Moura (2007), in addition to corroborating in a much clearer way in relation to sustainable consumption as an ideal type, as proposed by Weber (1999), and taken as a sustainable action, according to Calíope et al. (2016), as people who have sustainable behaviors act in response to socially constructed internal and external stimuli. This demonstrates that consumers are influenced by the past, present and expected behaviors of others – whether individuals or institutions – responding to them.

MODERATE 1: "We then went to the **Tamar Institute** (Fernando de Noronha) and they talked and showed the turtles there and the issue of plastic s… like, a straw going into its nose."

FRUGAL 1: "I believe that when I began studying **Biology**, it was a highly debated subject (…). I attended some lectures and a few courses."

Table 4
Categories related to sustainable consumption practices

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PRACTICES	
Involvement	There is a visible difference in behavior between consumers who are more involved in environmental causes and those who are less involved. The former seek to reduce or eliminate certain consumptions or are more willing to bear the costs of time, effort and money within these sustainable consumption practices, while the latter focus on small, less costly substitutions.
Selectivity	The products or product categories that consumers value the most or those in which they have a deeper personal involvement and, therefore, greater knowledge of appear to be where they take all the details into account the most, including aspects of sustainability.
Reduction and Reuse	Consistent with the concern with disposal demonstrated in the previous topic, the issue most addressed by consumers was the reduction of consumption (especially among consumers most involved with sustainability issues) and the reuse of materials in order to reduce this disposal.
External influences	The different external influences, to a greater or lesser extent, guide consumers' concerns in relation to different sustainability issues and shape their behavior in terms of sustainable consumption.

Source: Developed by the authors.

4.3 Awareness of Trade-Offs, Disposal as a Priority, Small Local Producers

When asked about the negative side of their sustainable consumption practices, some of them showed that they never thought specifically about this issue.

Nevertheless, after being given a moment to think, the majority said yes, as there is no fully sustainable consumption, since all production and consumption carry with them the use of material, energy, water resources, etc. In this, consumers agree with Ottman's (1999) statement that no product is completely sustainable or ecologically correct, as all of them consume energy and resources and generate emissions into the atmosphere in their production.

MODERATE 1: If there are any downsides to sustainability practices…The ones that I adopt… [long pause]. Whether we like it or not, they use products. I believe the **ideal thing would be not to consume plastic and not just reuse…**

MODERATE 2: I believe that there is a product that **reduces the amount of waste we produce**, but I do not believe that there is one that is 100% sustainable.

Consumers with a greater involvement in relation to environmental issues and who are a little more critical, as mentioned in the previous topic, cited the social and economic aspects as trade-offs of reducing their consumption, since a reduction in consumption for the purpose of environmental preservation, if done systematically, could lead to unemployment, the end of certain businesses and, consequently, social problems. This observation gave rise to the "Awareness of Trade-Offs" category. This finding, with due regard for the particularities, is in line with the study by Sonntag et al. (2015), in which consumers were not aware of the trade-offs involved in a given product category – possibly because it is a specific category, with a much more detailed study, thereby hindering consumers' ability to make a judgment.

FRUGAL 1: I believe that does not apply to the environment, because they [reducing consumption] are actions that seek to help the environment; however, on **social issues**, I believe it could be so, because it is not encouraging consumption, so it no longer encourages businesses or sellers.

When confronted with the dilemma between reusable plastic packaging – which would have to waste water resources and throw chemicals into the environment – and paper packaging, which would be discarded, most consumers said they preferred reusable packaging. This choice demonstrates coherence in the discourse, as the focus of these consumers was on disposal, and the most frequent sustainable consumption practices included using packaging or materials that could be reused. In this part, there were no differences in choices between those who are more involved and those who are less involved in the causes, as there was no option to choose neither option.

MODERATE 1: "When you wash something, you are also **using water** and harming the environment, but I would choose reusable products because, in my view, it is more harmful to keep consuming **more plastic, which is a material that harms the environment**, and discarding materials by using disposables."

CREATIVE 3: "This [choosing reusable packaging] would contribute to **reducing the production of waste**…"

Another situation confronted plastic and paper bags. In this sense, the subjects also unanimously preferred paper bags because they believed that this material would be easier to degrade in the environment. Once again, the issue of disposal was the point most widely considered by respondents, ignoring the issue of the production of these materials, emission of chemicals, greenhouse gases, and water or energy involved in this process. The answers in these two situations gave rise to the "Priority in Disposal" category and was corroborated with the previous categories of "Waste Disposal" and "Reduction and Reuse."

MODERATE 1: "Paper, because I believe that paper is less harmful to the environment (…), because **plastic takes longer to decompose in the environment**."

FRUGAL 2: "The paper one **degrades much faster**, while the plastic one does not – it takes more than 100 years."

Finally, a situation brought large corporations and small producers into conflict. Between the two options, consumers always preferred the small producer or trader, claiming to seek encourage the work of these people and make a greater positive impact. This choice corroborates the previous observations regarding the preference for small producers as one of the aspects considered in sustainable consumption practices. Therefore, a "Small Local Producers" category emerges.

FRUGAL 2: "Definitely, at a local market. It is the same situation as the one I mentioned regarding buying books at a second-hand bookstore… the **impact on the small seller's life** with my purchase is much greater than my purchase on the life of the owner of a supermarket chain."

Table 5

Categories related to trade-offs in sustainable consumption

TRADE-OFFS IN SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION	
Awareness of Trade-Offs	Although initially they never thought about it, when questioned, they stated that all consumption carries an unsustainable side and results in environmental or social impacts, including practices labeled as sustainable.
Disposal as a Priority	Again, the issue of disposal emerges as a priority among the interviewees. Between consumption of water resources to wash reusable packaging and disposal, the latter received again more attention; among plastic or paper bags, paper bags were chosen because they degrade faster in the environment, without taking into account any other issue.
Small Local Producers	The unanimous preference for local producers also demonstrates coherence with the previous discourse in which, although less so than in disposal, regarding social issues, small producers, family farming and artisanal work were spontaneously mentioned in the previous topics.

Source: Developed by the authors.

5 FINAL REMARKS

This research aimed to investigate how consumers perceive the trade-offs involved in sustainable consumption. It was observed that the focus given to the environmental issue, especially regarding the aspect of disposal, permeated both the practices of sustainable consumption and the perception of consumers in relation to the trade-offs involved in this consumption.

This focus can be the result of several factors, such as these consumers' sources of information, influences, difficulties in making these practices more comprehensive, or the complexity of the concept. It is concluded that the concept of sustainable consumption for consumers cannot encompass all aspects addressed in the concepts present in the literature, established by scholars in the area and by international agencies involved in the topic and brought to this research as an ideal type of Weber, comprising an abstraction for the purposes of conceptualization and investigation, which cannot be found in reality in its entirety.

As is the case with democracy, liberalism, and other more abstract concepts, it is possible to perceive that there are more or less sustainable types of consumption, more or less sustainable products, more or less sustainable societies, but no completely sustainable item, as the construct itself carries its own characteristics, contradictions, and trade-offs, and consumers are forced to live with them, often choosing what they believe will be less harmful choice regarding the environment and society. Nevertheless, this choice is often made blindly, because given the complexity involved, it is not possible to access so much information, or even process it. Thus, consumers who are more concerned and involved with the causes of sustainability even choose to reduce their consumption as much as possible, seeking to cause as little damage as possible to the environment, but still understanding that this reduction or elimination may entail social and economic problems.

The main contribution of this research lies in the study of trade-offs of sustainable consumption within the dimensions of sustainability, as there was, thus far, no research with this focus, but rather only between sustainability and other desirable variables such as price, design, and others. It also presents sustainable consumption as Weber's ideal type and the actual vision of consumers in relation to it, demonstrating the differences between both and how they can affect consumption in a practical way. Moreover, the study is not limited to the literature to address such apparently abstract problems, but rather uses the main stakeholders involved in this sustainable consumption: the consumers themselves. Therefore, the study contributes to the academic and marketing discussion around the trade-offs involved in sustainability, moving towards consumption and seeking to obtain consumers' point of view without sticking to a specific category, but rather in a broad way.

The results of this research have implications for companies, governments, scholars on the subject, and others who are interested in demolishing barriers related to sustainable consumption; to the media that brings information to consumers and citizens; and to consumers and citizens who are interested in adopting more sustainable practices.

The limitation of this study lies in the fact that virtually the entirety of the interviewees are women, except for one man. Future research may investigate men's relationship to sustainability and its trade-offs, as, in general, females have been more associated with sustainability and a variety of sustainable behaviors than males (Brough et al., 2016). Another limitation was the incipient literature on the subject and the multidisciplinary nature of the subject, which hindered the confrontation of certain products and their trade-offs, thus requiring simplification. Additionally, the study has a broad range in terms of sustainability, since a specific category or product was not chosen, but rather any sustainable practice, including those that involved purchasing products or not (e.g. resource savings, waste management). This is justified, however, by the exploratory nature of the research. The objectives were achieved, and the first step was taken towards a deeper reflection on the subject.

For future studies, it is suggested that emphasis be given to the categories of sustainable practices that emerged as findings of this research, in order to deepen knowledge and consumer relationships regarding the trade-offs of sustainable consumption, confirming the results of this article, or exploring other issues involved in such trade-offs.

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