Young adults and the consumption of soft drinks.
Aspects of consumer behaviour regarding soft drinks consumption and consumer loyalty

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RESUMO

Este artigo pretende sistematizar os resultados de um projeto de pesquisa sobre o consumo de refrigerantes entre jovens adultos, utilizando como população de estudo membros da Associação dos Escoteiros de Portugal (Escoteiros de Portugal), tentando estabelecer algumas conclusões sobre a fidelidade à marca. Há uma baixa perceção em relação a vários tópicos relacionados com o consumo de refrigerantes. Se alguém tem uma baixa ou completa ausência de preocupação/perceção sobre um fator fortemente influenciador da decisão de compra, o que (ser um fator fortemente influenciador) depende do segmento populacional a que a pessoa pertence, a repetição da compra de determinada marca é menos provável de ocorrer. Baixa preocupação/perceção de aspetos relacionados com o consumo pode provocar baixa fidelidade às marcas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Consumo; Refrigerantes; Jovens adultos; Fidelidade; Implicação.

ABSTRACT

This article intends to systematize the findings of a research project on the consumption of soft drinks among young adults, using as study population, members of the Portuguese Scouts Association (Portuguese Scouts)/Associação dos Escoteiros de Portugal (Escoteiros de Portugal), thus trying to establish some conclusions about brand loyalty. There is a low perception about several aspects related to the consumption of soft drinks. If someone has a low or complete absence of concern/perception on a strongly influencing factor of the purchase decision, which depends (be a strongly influential factor) on the population segment to which the person belongs, the repetition of the purchase of a particular brand is less likely to occur. Low concern/perception about consumer issues can lead to low brand loyalty.

KEYWORDS

Consumption; Soft drinks; Young adults; Loyalty; Implication.

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INTRODUCTION

The strong presence in the market of the product concerned in this project does not release it from the criticism of the public forum and the health authorities, since it is constantly pointed out as unhealthy, and diet is constantly related to the consumption of several types of beverages, namely soft drinks.

One of the several conclusions was that it is men who have a lower concern/perception with a sustainable diet. So, can we then say that it is among young men that there is less loyalty to brands in relation to this type of product?

As a starting point for this research project, several factors need to be taken into account, factors that were chosen by indication of the bibliography consulted: the fact that the level of involvement with the product could condition brand loyalty; the widespread influence of consumption of soft drinks on health; the fact that the aspects underlying the decision and the level of differentiation between brands of the same type of product are important for perceiving or anticipating the level of brand loyalty; and because the youngsters in the study age group are largely conditioned by their peer behaviors, it was also important to consider this variable. We used a quantitative study through a questionnaire, and the questionnaire was passed to a sample of 400 young adults, members of the Portuguese Scouts Association (Portuguese Scouts)/ Associação dos Escoteiros de Portugal (Escoteiros de Portugal), from various regions (Porto, Coimbra, Lisbon, Algarve, Azores and Madeira).

It is important to point out that there was a concern to seek information and bibliography that would allow us to establish terms of comparison, in some situations, between the results now obtained with those a decade or approximately a decade away, or for periods of every 10 years, but in Portugal research on this topic, in general and spe-

cific terms, is almost non-existent (even in other countries it is less than expected), and the comparison with completely different realities from the Portuguese reality, does not make sense at this point and taking into account the size and characteristics of the sample, then this hypothesis was abandoned.

1. METHODOLOGY

After a review of the literature to help define the lines of research, we have advanced to the fieldwork.

In terms of methodology what we did here, according to the bibliography consulted, is what is done for a long time in studies of this nature. So, what we did was what is usually considered appropriate in these cases, in terms of response scales used, data collection, process of organization, codification, and statistical treatment of collected data, methodological specifications, results analysis, which implies procedures, methods, techniques, topics analyzed and sequence with which these topics are analyzed.

1.1. Marketing research methodology

In the area of Marketing, as in other social sciences, knowledge advances with research and reflective analysis of past experiences. Therefore, we start by checking methodologies used in the past for the same theme.

The Marketing Research methodology has come over the years to be analyzed by several researchers who have come to define various procedures and steps. For example, we can never, for his importance, fail to observe the methodology of Richardson (2008) that defined 7 steps: 1 – observation; 2 – formulation of the research problem; 3 – reference information; 4 – formulation of research hypotheses; 5 – prediction; 6 – experimentation; and 7 – analysis. And, also for his importance, the methodology of Kumar (2005) that has previously defined 8 steps: 1 – formulation of the research problem; 2 – conceptualization of the research; 3 – construction of an instrument for collecting data; 4 – selection of the sample; 5 – define the research proposal; 6 – data collection; 7 – data processing; 8 –

research report. We decided to construct a methodology that, in some moments, combines the position of the two authors.

1.2. General goals

This project aimed to analyze the relationship between aspects of consumer behavior (among which we can highlight the relation health/soft drinks, but not just this) regarding soft drink consumption and consumer loyalty. For this, we defined the following research points chosen in line with the bibliography consulted: level of attention to health, implication with the product, purchase decision process, the role of the brand in the decision process, and the level of peer influence in the purchasing decision process.

1.3. Understanding the methodology and structuring the project

There are 3 widely used forms of research mentioned and used in many studies: 1 – exploratory (when the objective is to arrive at unknown information on the subject in question); 2 – descriptive (collection of characteristics and statistics related to the subject under analysis); 3 – causal (establishment of cause/effect relationships).

The present project followed mainly, not only, an exploratory form of research; and in order to allow a faster and easier treatment of the collected data, the quantitative method with closed questions was used, and the questionnaire was self-filled, due to the number of respondents and dispersion throughout the national territory, which facilitated the process in logistical terms.

1.3.1. Response scales used

In this project, primary data[1] were collected using various types of scales chosen as a consequence of the bibliographical research, as previously mentioned and indicated to other topics:

– Self-Efficacy[2];
– SProduct Involvement[3];

– SFood Choice Questionnaire (FCQ)[4];
– SPerceived Brand Parity[5];
– SInterpersonal Influence[6].

We used FCQ but excluding the original factors of packaging and weight. The Likert scale[7] served, what it is common in several projects, as the basis for the construction of all the scales, since it allows the construction of lighter response scales and a better crosschecking of factors.

1.3.2. Sample

For this research project, a non-probabilistic convenience sample was used, made up of 400 individuals between the ages of 20 and 30, and collected during the activities of the Portuguese Scouts Association (Portuguese Scouts), in the regions of Porto, Coimbra, Lisbon, Algarve, Azores and Madeira. The choice of this age range was due to the fact that the greater maturity of the respondents (as we are talking about young adults) allows a greater awareness of the topics in question and does not imply the need for specific authorization by the parents for the participation in the project.

1.3.3. Data collection, organization, codification, treatment, and methodological specifications

The questionnaire was administered at the end of December 2017, and as we said earlier, what was done here in terms of methodology, and consequently also in terms of data collection, have not gone beyond what is done in any study of this nature, so what we are describing here, is what is normally done and found to be appropriate in these cases, according to the bibliography consulted.

1.3.4. Process of organization, codification, and statistical treatment of collected data.

The data treatment was performed with the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS). The internal consistency of the scales was measured using Cronbach's Alpha; a descriptive analysis was also performed, due to some descriptive research carried out, which was done for each of the scales. The existence of more than one dimension in some of the scales used led to the use of paired samples allowing different types of comparisons, and some correlations between variables were also established. It should be noted that the results presented, in any case, will be only those in which relevant differences are observed.

1.3.5. Methodological Specifications

Cronbach Alpha[8]

Since each of the scales was composed of several items, and each scale intended to evaluate a variable, it was decided to evaluate the Cronbach Alpha (an internal consistency[9] measure).

Comparison between means

The analysis of the results obtained was based on the use of *t* tests[10] to compute and compare the means. If, in the *t* test for two independent samples[11], the mean is compared to the same variable in different groups; in the case of paired samples[12], the comparison is to analyze the same group of people twice, this being the situation used.

Bivariate correlation[13]

To calculate a correlation, we need to establish the degree of relation between quantitative variables, allowing us to know the extent to which one situation is followed by another, either in the same direction or in the opposite direction. The correlation coefficients[14] vary between -1, perfect negative association and +1, perfect positive association. If the value is zero or is close to it, the linear relationship[15] between variables is zero or almost zero. Related to the correlation is the significance, which should be less than 0.05 and more than 0.00.[16]

2. RESULTS

The topics included in the analysis of results are obviously related to the objectives of the present study, and the structure of this analysis respects what, according to the bibliography consulted, is considered as adequate and important in studies with the characteristics of this one, not escaping the orientations in force in this regard.

2.1. Structural characteristics of the sample

As previously mentioned, we used a non-probabilistic convenience sample, made up of 400 individuals between the ages of 20 and 30; with great persistence we achieved in the end 200 men and 200 women respondents, for a greater balance and greater validity of some data crossings. Regarding the level of education, 60% attend Higher Education (some study and work at the same time), 30% revealed that they had already finished their higher studies, and 10% secondary education, in the first two situations at different levels of academic qualification (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD).

2.2. Internal consistency of Scales[17]

Before the analysis of the data itself, the internal consistency of the dimensions composing the scales needs to be, and was, verified. This is an essential step, since it is the analysis of these dimensions that is in question, not the analysis of the items that make up each of these dimensions individually.

Brand parity scale

In this scale we have similarity between brands – *Soft drinks are soft drinks; Most brands are basically the same; The only difference between the biggest brands of soft drinks is the price*; and we could continue with examples of answers… Here we have a lower level of internal consistency (*a* = 0.792). What this result conveys to us is the relativization of the respondents regarding brands when it comes to choosing a soft drink.

Interpersonal Influence scale

In this scale, which presents only 2 dimensions (Information – *I often collect information from friends and/or family; I often observe the brands that others are buying and drinking*;…; and Normative factors – *If I want to be like someone, I usually try to buy the same brands of soft drinks that other people buy; If other people will see me drinking a soft drink, I usually buy the brand they expect me to buy, …*), the internal consistency in respect to the normative aspects is higher (*a* = 0.908), than in relation to informative factors (*a* = 0.772).

Self-Efficacy Scale

The Self-Efficacy Scale, related to the importance that people attach to the relationship diet/health/well-being (*I try to exercise regularly; Poor health results from poor care; I pay attention to nutritional information*; and so on…), has in this investigation project had an internal consistency of *a* = 0.725.

Product Involvement Scale

The scale of implication with the product is composed of 5 dimensions – Interest, Hedonism, Perceived Symbolism, Probability of error, Perceived risk. The perceived risk (for example, *I would be annoyed with a bad choice*), had the least internal consistency (*a* = 0.69), and the one with the highest consistency (*a* = 0.93) is related to the interest aroused (*I attach great importance to soft drinks*, for example).

Food Choice Questionaire (FCQ)

The dimension with the greatest internal consistency was health (*a* = 0.926) (*Contain many vitamins and minerals; Keep me healthy*; etc.), and the one with the lower internal consistency was ethics (*a* = 0.744) (*Be made in countries that I approve of politically; Packaged in an environmentally responsible manner*; among other comments).

2.3. Factors influencing the purchase decision in soft drinks (FCQ Scale)

As we look at the results of all dimensions, in which this scale is divided[18], for the hypothesis of response 1 = Totally agree, 7 = Strongly disagree, we see positive results in relation to all of them. That is, all of them come into consideration at the time of the decision, but the price as a factor/dimension influencing the decision is the one that stands out the most. If men reveal themselves on the scale of implication with the product, to be more conditioned by the hedonic aspect and social aspects associated with soft drinks, on FCQ scale this aspect seems to be to the men,

in a general way, the one that is attributed less preponderance in the decision of purchase, this is translated by the results of the dimensions mood and sensorial appeal. It should also be noted that only among the dimensions of price, health, ethics and mood can we point to a high significance.

When we cross-refer these results to gender, we find that there are no major differences between women and men. However, and in the wake of something that has been stated here several times, men (with the least concern for the physical aspect) also attaches less importance to the presence of natural ingredients in the soft drinks. In this sense, and in coherence with these results, aspects such as choice for familiarity with the brand are less present at the moment of decision to purchase soft drinks in the case of women.

2.4. Implication with the product

The results may seem to allow to affirm that the level of brand loyalty in this type of product is low (the dimensions do not reach clearly positive values[19]) because they reveal a low implication with the product under study, and the low involvement leads to a low fidelity to the brand and the product. But are these results credible or do they result from an attempt by respondents to present, once again, an ethically/politically correct attitude or behavior?

When we cross the results obtained in this scale with the gender variable, we did not find significant differences, although slight differences point to a more superfluous attitude on the part of men in relation to the choice of this type of product, because in the case of men, more subjective aspects such as symbolism and hedonism are more prominent.

2.5. Health and young adults

The results reveal some concern about health care (1 = Very Important; 7 = Not important at all), although not very markedly (M^{20} = 4.6, SD^{21} = 0.98), which leads us to a question that remains in the air: are the concerns revealed

by young adults in relation to the consumption of soft drinks (since they imply with health) only an attempt of "ethically correct" behavior or a real concern?

There is a greater concern among women in this respect, which follows the orientation of a greater concern for a sustainable diet, that is the consumption of sustainable food, due to the greater concern of women towards the physical appearance, this statement can be supported by the final results achieved in this research project. That is, the application of the *t* test allowing the perception of a mean in relation to women of: (M = 4.7, SD = 1) and in relation to men of: (M = 4.4, SD = 0.9) ($p < 0.05$)[22].

2.6. Interpersonal Correlations Influence/Implication with the Product

We observed that the influence of peer's opinions increases in the same proportion as the level of implication with the product increases; however, the low means of the two scales, necessitates consideration in this conclusion. And because the observed correlations were exceedingly tenuous, so its presentation is not justified, they need further consideration in a future investigation.

2.6.1. Interpersonal Influence

The Interpersonal Influence Scale encompasses informative and normative factors. The mean values observed are in both cases low (informative factors M = 2.2706, SD = 1.18136 / normative factors M = 1.7021, SD = 0.96575), for the hypothesis of response: 1 = Totally agree; 7 = Strongly disagree. Which means, according to these results, that peers have no influence when it comes to choosing a soft drink. We didn't find any significant differences between gender after the *t* tests.

2.6.2. Perceived Brand Parity

There is some perception of differences between brands, which can be stated by the moderate response (M = 3.4, SD = 1.4). However, this does not translate into their assessment of this category of products. That is, the

respondents cannot point to large differences between the various brands of the same type of soft drink, which leads to price assuming a greater preponderance in the purchasing decision process; which establishes a relationship of coherence with the results obtained with regard to the FCQ scale, where the price has taken on greater prominence.

The gender difference was tested through *t* tests, but the differences were not relevant.

ity, to indicate large differences between brands, leads us to say that, according to these results, there is a low or questionable brand loyalty and consequently a low degree of implication with the product concerned (soft drinks).

This seems to merit a later study dedicated to this issue, for the doubts it gives us, mainly in relation to peer influence, and the low importance attached to pleasure as a supreme aspect and purpose of life, due to the age group in question, since the answers seem to us to have resulted from an attempt to be politically correct.

CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude that the results may represent axes of change in terms of how promotion, distribution, product development and even the price of this type of product should be designed. For example, an increased tendency towards a greater concern with health and/or physical appearance – which has led to greater acceptance of new food trends, particularly by women – may be indicative of the need for brands to exploit, more vehemently, the development of more sustainable soft drinks, and the development of a women-centered product segment, thereby strengthening brand loyalty by, in particular, women. To do this, we can point to a few paths: a higher percentage of innocuous ingredients, and not to center the campaigns so much on the philosophical doctrine that makes pleasure a supreme aspect and purpose of life in association with the product, due to the result obtained by the mood factor (as the least important in general terms), which is surprising considering the age range of the sample.

Emphasizing, in promotional terms, the role of social framework that this type of product can provide, seems, according to the results obtained here, not very important; respondents did not reveal themselves to be influenced by peers; as well as for health reasons, with some difference between men and women, as previously mentioned and highlighted. The low importance attached to pleasure as a supreme aspect and purpose of life, as stated above, the importance attributed to the price factor in the purchase decision, revealed in some results/situations (which may lead to the assertion that the price can be used as an augmentative factor of brand loyalty), and a low capac-

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[1] The collection of primary data concerns the collection of information directly from the source. Secondary data refers to the collection of previously existing information, using databases such as the Census (Kumar, 2011).

[2] This scale is part of a larger set of scales and attempts to characterize people's behavior towards their own health (Jayanti and Burns, 1998).

[3] The fundamental objective is to understand the level of implication with the product (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985).

[4] It aims to understand what leads consumers to make a particular purchase decision (Steptoe and Wardle, 1999).

[5] The purpose is to understand how brands are or are not really distinguished from each other and what differences are pointed out (Muncy, 1996).

[6] It aims to measure the level of peer influence on a particular purchase decision (Bearden et al, 1990).

[7] In the scale proposed by Rensis Likert in 1932, respondents are asked to report on their degree of agreement or disagreement with a statement. Each response is assigned a number that reflects the respondent's attitude toward the affirmation. The typical scale is: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Indifferent, Agree, Totally Agree. In satisfaction research it is common to associate the items with the terms: Very dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Indifferent, Satisfied, Very satisfied. But other outcomes are also possible. Some prefer to use the so-called Expanded Likert Scale, with seven or even nine levels, as exemplified: Strongly disagree, Moderately disagree, Slightly disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Slightly agree, Moderately agree, Strongly agree.

[8] To measure the internal consistency of a test or scale, Lee J. Cronbach developed the alpha coefficient in 1951, which is now the most widely used statistic to measure the consistency of a questionnaire. It is easy to calculate this coefficient and still has the advantage that it can be calculated even when the questionnaire is applied only once (Tang et al., 2014).

[9] Internal consistency is defined as the proportion of variability in responses that results from differences in respondents (Pestana and Gageiro, 2014). The Cronbach Alpha, in turn, is defined as the correlation expected to be obtained between the scale used and other scales of the same universe, which measure the same characteristic, varying between 0 and 1, and the closer to 1 more internal consistency it has.

[10] They allow to examine hypotheses about means of a quantitative level variable in one or two groups, formed from a qualitative variable. These tests compare the means of two groups of individuals in the same variable or in the same group of variables. This test compares with zero to mean differences between pairs of observations of the two variables (Pestana and Gajeiro, 2014).

[11] Independent samples are measurements made on two sets of different items; are randomly selected samples so that their observations do not depend on the values of other observations (Pocinho, 2010).

[12] Different, but matched subjects, in terms of age, sex, profession and other characteristics that seem important to each particular research. These types of designs can be considered related designs once it is controlled in their relevant characteristics. Disadvantage: difficulty in finding subjects that allow the pairing of all relevant characteristics. Difficulty: arranging large samples (Pocinho, 2010).

[13] There is a correlation between two variables when one of them is related to the other; bivariate, because it implies the analysis of two variables, and a cause-and-effect relationship between them can be established or not (Copper and Schindler, 2016).

[14] The correlation coefficient is a statistic that measures the degree of linear association between two variables. Its sign corresponds to the slope of the trend line adjusted to the point cloud of a scatter diagram. If the correlation coefficient is positive, the variables tend to walk together and in the same direction (the trend line is upward). If it is negative then the variables tend to walk together, but in opposite directions (the trend line is downward) (Triola, 2017).

[15] There is a linear relation when we analyze two variables in a dispersion graph and we verify that the points or dispersion cloud are a linear line. Positive relationship – If the variable y tends to increase as x increases. Relationship is negative – If the variable y tends to decrease as x increases (Spiegel and Stephens, 2009).

[16] Statistical significance is the number, called p-value, which indicates the probability of a result, being observed, based on a certain assertion (the null hypothesis), to be true. If the p-value is small enough, we can safely assume that the null hypothesis is false (Agresti and Finlay, 2012).

[17] It is usually a measure based on correlations, between distinct items within the same test. For example, if a respondent agrees with the statements "I like to ride a bike" and "I liked to ride a bike", and disagree with the statement "I detest bikes", this indicates good consistency. It is usually measured using the Cronbach's Alpha test (Agresti and Finlay, 2012).

[18] Price M = 5.3722, SD = 1.52294 / Natural Content M = 4.9660, SD = 1.56431 / Familiarity M = 4.9296, SD = 1.54008 / Weight Control M = 4.6796, SD = 1.65896 / Sensory Appeal M = 4.5558, SD = 1.45855 / Convenience M = 4.2702, SD = 1.71485 / Health M = 4.2068, SD = 1.56428 / Ethic M = 3.8803, SD = 1.60241 / Mood M = 3.6375, SD = 1.55145.

[19] Perceived Risk M = 3.4830, SD = 1.76233 / Interest M = 3.1141, SD = 1.61331 / Hedonism M = 2.2605, SD = 1.24486 / Problem-Error M = 2.2532, SD = 1.27241 / Symbolism M = 1.9903, SD = 1.25972, for the hypothesis of response: 1 = Totally agree; 7 = Strongly disagree.

[20] Mean.

[21] Standard deviation.

[22] The value of $p < 0.05$ is about the statistical significance of the test. That is, the probability that the result of the statistical test to which we submitted our data is due to chance alone is less than 5%. It is noteworthy that the probability range is chosen by the investigator according to the field in which it moves – for example, in some social sciences permissible probability is 20%. The p-value is defined as the probability to observe a larger test statistic value or same as found. Traditionally, the cutoff value to reject the null hypothesis is 0.05, which means that, when there is no difference, a value as high as the test statistic is expected to be less than of 5% of the time.

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