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Free-packaging practices as a driver of customer loyalty in the Portuguese food retail market

Hugo André Rodrigues Miranda

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Hugo André Rodrigues Miranda

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Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Nowadays, the issue of sustainability is one of the most widely addressed problems in all sectors. In response to this new need and in order to listen to the needs of consumers, many companies have started to focus much of their attention on CSR. The relationship between CSR and consumer loyalty is not recent, in fact there is a varied literature on the subject in different sectors. However, this literature lacks specificity. We talk about CSR in generality and rarely study and understand the impact that certain specific practices have on the consumer.

This study aims to contribute to filling this gap in the literature by studying the effects that the practice of free-packaging food products in hypermarkets has on Portuguese adult consumers. To this end, a model was built consisting of 8 research hypotheses that relate the variables CSR/FPFP, Satisfaction, Trust, Brand image and Loyalty. In addition, the moderating effect of the Health Consciousness variable in the relationship between CSR/FPF and Loyalty was also studied. To put this model to the test, a questionnaire was carried out with 455 valid answers from adult Portuguese consumers.

Through these tests it was possible to draw a series of conclusions that, in some cases, go against what has been pre-established in the literature. It was not possible to prove a direct and significant effect between CSR/FPFP and loyalty, a conclusion that was reached with some surprise. This implies that the loyalty of Portuguese consumers in the food retail sector is not directly affected by this particular practice. On the other hand, most of the remaining hypotheses were confirmed and are in line with the rest of the literature. As already mentioned, we should also highlight the introduction, for the first time, of the moderating effect of the Health Consciousness variable in this type of study, which was confirmed to intensify the relationship between CSR/FPFP practice and consumer loyalty.

Finally, like all studies, this one also suffers from some limitations. In this case, the fact of having used a non-probabilistic sample, which may not be exactly representative of the total population, which will impact the results of the study. For future purposes, it is recommended that besides the direct effects between these variables, the indirect effects between them should also be studied, that new variables related to loyalty should be added, and that further studies on specific CSR practices should be carried out, which may help different companies from different sectors to allocate their resources more optimally.

Keywords: CSR; Sustainability; Free-packaging; Food Retail; Loyalty

Resumo

Na atualidade, a problemática da sustentabilidade é um dos problemas mais amplamente abordados em todos os sectores. Em resposta a esta nova necessidade e a fim de ouvir os desejos dos consumidores, muitas empresas começaram a voltar a sua atenção para políticas de CSR. A relação entre a CSR e a lealdade dos consumidores não é recente, de facto, existe uma literatura variada sobre o assunto em diferentes sectores. No entanto, esta literatura carece de especificidade. Falamos de CSR em geral e raramente estudamos e compreendemos o impacto que certas práticas específicas têm sobre o consumidor.

Este estudo visa contribuir para preencher esta lacuna na literatura, estudando os efeitos que a prática de venda de produtos alimentares sem embalagem em hipermercados tem sobre os consumidores adultos portugueses. Para o efeito, foi construído um modelo constituído por 8 hipóteses de investigação que relacionam as variáveis CSR/FPFP, Satisfação, Confiança, Imagem da marca e Lealdade. Além disso, foi também estudado o efeito moderador da variável Consciência de Saúde na relação entre CSR/FPF e lealdade. Para pôr este modelo à prova, foi realizado um questionário que agregou 455 respostas válidas.

Através destes testes foi possível tirar uma série de conclusões que, em alguns casos, vão contra o que foi pré-estabelecido na literatura. Não foi possível provar um efeito direto e significativo entre CSR/FPFP e a lealdade do consumidor, conclusão que foi alcançada com alguma surpresa. Isto implica que a lealdade dos consumidores portugueses no sector do retalho alimentar não é diretamente afetada por esta prática. Por outro lado, a maioria das restantes hipóteses foram confirmadas e estão de acordo com o resto da literatura. Como já foi mencionado, devemos também destacar a introdução do efeito moderador da variável Consciência de Saúde neste tipo de estudo, cujo efeito foi comprovado intensificar a relação entre a prática de CSR/FPFP e a lealdade dos consumidores.

Finalmente, como todos os estudos, este também sofre de algumas limitações. Neste caso, o facto de ter utilizado uma amostra não-probabilística, que pode não ser exatamente representativa da população total, o que terá impacto nos resultados do estudo. Para efeitos futuros, recomenda-se que para além dos efeitos diretos entre estas variáveis, se estudem também os efeitos indiretos entre elas, que se acrescentem novas variáveis relacionadas com a lealdade, e que se realizem mais estudos sobre práticas específicas de CSR, o que pode ajudar empresas de diferentes sectores a alocar os seus recursos de forma otimizada.

Palavras-chave: CSR; Sustentabilidade; Free-packaging; Retalho alimentar; Lealdade

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1. Introduction

Sustainability is one of today's most talked about and important topics. The preservation of life and the conditions for its existence, as well as the guarantee of equal opportunities for the entire population of the planet, are reasons that make sustainability a matter of public interest (Japiassú & Guerra, 2017).

The concept of sustainability is directly related to sustainable development, initially defined in the Brundtland Report, *Our common Future*, as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987, p. 41). Sustainable development is presented as a solution for the social, environmental and economic problems brought by a declining supply of essential natural resources, a rise in pollution, and by increasing disparities between rich and poor, either within or between nations, which marked the beginning of the millennium (*Vital Signs*, 2005, p. 15).

Since its seminal definition, the concept of sustainable development has grown in influence, although the sustainable development challenges are more critical than ever. Still, it is possible to witness a worldwide unity to combat current problems and to promote sustainable practices, namely in 2015 when 195 nations that committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 agenda by the United Nations (2015).

Alongside with sustainable development becoming a worldwide goal, the emergence of a sustainable dimension in the strategies of companies can be observed. This trend stems from the adaptation of companies to a change in society and its thinking, adapting values of the 2030 Agenda (freedom, equity, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility) into business models and product development (Leisinger, 2015). With this change in the practices and policies, the idea of companies as agents of social change flourished (Klein, 2014). This evolution brought changes in the strategic purpose of the businesses, which includes solving people's problems and protecting the planet, rather than solely focusing on making profit (The British Academy, 2019), and consequently in their practices and the offerings provided to their customers.

Business change is also triggered by the change in consumers' thinking and consumption habits. Consumers' concerns with current societal problems make them more "selective" about what they buy (Tan et al., 2021). Naturally, the growing adoption of environmentally friendly solutions challenges companies to adapt and review their offerings and processes to meet the needs and wishes of customers (Alamsyah et al., 2018) and consequently gain

competitive advantage (Alamsyah et al., 2018), namely due to the increase of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Overall, companies aim to satisfy customers' needs, to meet their expectations, and to create a long-lasting and close relationships with customers. Although the literature suggests a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Aksoy et al., 2013), Oliver (1999) explains that satisfaction does not become necessarily loyalty as it is itself a precursor which needs to be nurtured. Therefore, it is necessary to study the reasons that make this evolution from satisfaction to loyalty possible. A company's ability to build and sustain relationships with its most valuable customers is a long-term competitive advantage (Day, 2000), because loyal customers are significantly more profitable than the price-sensitive, deal-seeking switchers who see little difference between the options (Page et al., 1996). Furthermore, customer relationships are very difficult for competitors to understand, imitate or displace (Day, 2000), enabling the creation of sustainable competitive advantages.

A lasting and successful relationship between a brand and a consumer is based on customer loyalty. As stressed by Dick and Basu (1994) customer loyalty can be seen as an indicator of the strength of customer-brand relationship. Customer loyalty can be defined as a buyer's intention to acquire the same products/services (retention) and more products/services (expansion) from the existing provider in the future, as well as the customer's activities in referring the company to others (referral) (Larsson & Broström, 2020). Retention, expansion, and referral are all important to companies and will ultimately influence their performance. Therefore, the topic of customer loyalty is gaining new momentum and it is essential to understand what goes into creating it, particularly by exploring it regarding sustainability practices conducted by businesses.

Marín-García (2021) recently suggested that sustainability and innovation can foster the relationships with end-customers, particularly by positively affecting customer satisfaction. Increasingly, authors suggest that the true measure of consumer satisfaction can be observed through the creation of loyalty (Thomas, 2013). That is, a high satisfaction index will naturally culminate in consumer loyalty (Fornell et al., 1996).

Still, the literature on this topic is insufficient, and there is the need of more studies, namely exploring the impacts on consumers of specific sustainability practices conducted by companies.

1.1 Research Problem

Building on the research gap found in the literature regarding the absence of studies on relevant sustainability practices, the research problem tackled by this dissertation is:

What impact does the practice of selling free-packaging food products have on consumer loyalty in Portuguese hypermarkets?

Currently, several sustainable business practices are associated with the reduction of plastic, one of them referring to avoiding packaging and selling bulk products (Marken & Hörisch, 2019). This involves the sale of packaging-free consumer products by weight or volume, depending on whether they are dealing with liquid or solid products. This sale is characterised by the product being transported in a package provided by the shop or in a reusable package provided by the customer. This habit is becoming more and more popular in grocery stores. For example, Nielsen (2021) reports that in France, the purchase of bulk products grew by 41% between 2018 and 2019, having suffered a drop to 8% from 2019 to 2020 which is justified by the difficulty of access to this type of products brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, by 2022 this practice is expected to grow again with the strength it had in pre-pandemic levels, and it is expected to reach a turnover of around 3.2 billion euros (Lesurf, 2021). Extant research explain why people buy this type of products, however, there is no literature that explains the impact that this kind of practices have on consumer loyalty.

This dissertation focuses on the sale of unpacked products on Portuguese food retail sector. The Portuguese food retail sector is characterised for having around 1716 companies in 2020 and a turnover of around 18120.7 million euros (Banco de Portugal, 2021) . During the global pandemic COVID-19, this sector recorded a positive rate of growth both in 2020 and 2021 (Sanlez, 2021). Moreover, this is a sector that is growing not only in sales volume but also in number of companies (Banco de Portugal, 2021), but most of the turnover belongs to a restrict group of the largest companies. During the last decades, all over the western economies there has been a wave of mergers and acquisitions that have increased the degree of concentration in the sector (Allain et al., 2017).

In an industry marked by intense rivalry, consumer loyalty is particularly important. A positive and long-term relationship with customers can protect companies from price competition and end up retaining consumers and, consequently, increase profitability and market share (Balci et al., 2019). Thus, having customer loyalty as an end in itself is vital for the survival of a company in a competitive market, as far as it creates a competitive advantage.

It remains to be studied what are the possible reasons that create this loyalty and, in this case, to understand to what extent the use of sustainable practices through unpacked products is one of them.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main aim of this study is to analyse the role that selling unpacked products plays in building loyalty in the food retail sector. To this end, the research objectives defined for this study are:

- Analyse the determinants of customer loyalty regarding unpacked products sold by food retail stores;
- Adapting existing literature on CRS to the specific practice of FPF;P;
- Study the impact of the Health Consciousness moderator effect on the relationship between FPF;P practice and consumer loyalty.

1.3 Adopted Methodology

Through an online questionnaire survey, the study uses a quantitative methodology. Questionnaires have recently become a useful tool for data collection and customer behaviour analysis and are used more and more frequently by many authors (Bryman, 2016). This method was chosen not only for its purpose but also because it is considered by Andrade (2020), as an easy, convenient and inexpensive method of collecting information that allows a wider range of data to be reached than other methods. The characteristics of the questionnaire are also adapted to the target population insofar as, according to (Hootsuite, 2022), 85% of the Portuguese population has access to the Internet, thus demonstrating the accessibility of the survey, which allowed 455 valid answers to be collected.

1.4 Organization of the Dissertation

This study is divided into 5 chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion.

The present chapter, the introduction, has the function of presenting the theme of the study and contextualizing the reader of its importance, describing the main objectives of the research and also a brief description of the methodology adopted. Next is the literature review, where the main concepts are defined and where the variables used and the relationships between them, as previously proven by other authors, are presented. The research methodology is then covered in the third chapter, where the conceptual model, the data collection instrument, the structure of the questionnaire, and ultimately the sample and sampling procedure are discussed, along with the statistical analysis techniques employed. In the fourth chapter, we present the whole process that was necessary to create the SEM (structural equations modelling) model and also the hypothesis tests performed. Finally, the conclusion chapter summarises and highlights the main findings of the study, limitations and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will present the main concepts discussed throughout the study and the variables needed to build the model used. In order to deepen the knowledge about these variables and concepts, several contributions from different authors will be referred. Furthermore, there will be an attempt to relate the existing literature with the sustainable practice of free-packaging food products sales.

2.1 Sustainable Consumer Behavior

The concept of Sustainable Consumer Behaviour (SCB) or socially responsible consumer behaviour (SRCB) is a term that has changed its definition and evolved over time.

One of the first definitions was presented by Webster in 1975, where he defined SCB as: “all behaviors where a consumer takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change” (Webster, 1975). Today, the most generally accepted definitions move towards a broader concept of sustainability and conclude that the pursuit of sustainability will result in economic progress (Norman & MacDonald, 2004). Therefore, a more recent definition brought by White et al. (2019) is considered, in which SCB is composed by the “actions that result in decreases in adverse environmental impacts as well as decreased utilization of natural resources across the lifecycle of the product, behaviour, or service” (White et al., 2019, p. 24).

The concept of SCB is based on the customer taking responsibility for the impacts that their consumption may have on society, there is a balance between the negative externalities of consumption and their personal interests. Their goal is to reduce the negative consequences of their consumption while maximizing the long-term benefits to society (Webb et al., 2008). The research done on this concept is based on several theoretical perspectives among which responsible consumption, mindful consumption, anti-consumption (Lim, 2017) or ethical consumption (McDonald et al., 2012).

Given this thinking, consumer choices will change to align with this concept. Consumption decisions will fall on companies that pay attention to sustainability in the production and distribution of their products, in addition to various consumer trends that

also go towards environmental sustainability, such as recycling, assisting small and medium-sized firms, and helping the purchase of made in, local, organic, and ecologically packaged products (Séré de Lanauze & Lallement, 2018; Winterich et al., 2019; Yan & She, 2011).

Finally, the purchase and consumption of free-packaging products is indeed a sustainable behaviour by consumers, yet it is a practice that has been neglected by SCB or SRCB research. This practice has only been associated with some dimensions of SCB, namely deconsumption behavior and care for the environment (Louis et al., 2021).

2.2 No-packaging Products

Consumers are increasingly changing and guiding their consumption habits taking into account the various environmental problems affecting society. One of the biggest concerns is related to the amount of packaging waste (Lindh et al., 2016). Plastic is one of the most used materials in food packaging and has revolutionised the way products reach the final consumer. But it has one major drawback, it is an all-pervasive material that is at the centre of the criticism related to environmental pollution (Hawkins, 2018). As a response to this problem, package free shopping has emerged as a new form of sustainable consumption (Rapp et al., 2017).

Packaging-free shopping is a distribution system that involves “the sale of packaging-free consumer products by weight or volume (depending on whether they are solid or liquid products), prepared at the point of sale either in store-provided simplified packaging or in a container brought by the customer” (Louis et al., 2021, p. 4). It is a responsible consumption method and also a more ecological, sustainable and environmentally friendly process of distribution (Binninger & Robert, 2008).

Although there are several types of shops that follow this practice, this study focuses on unpackaged food sales, i.e. bulk food sales on super and hypermarkets, which follow the same principle as free-packaged products. In this type of sales the food products are weighed and the consumer is charged for what he takes inside the container (Brodňanová & Plachý, 2019). As stated by Rapp et al. (2017), there are three major advantages associated with the consumption of free-packaging products (Rapp et al., 2017). The first is related to an obvious decrease in the production of plastic waste (Lindh et al., 2016; Zeiss, 2018) and food waste (Beitzen-Heineke et al., 2017; Fuentes et al., 2019). The second major advantage is, according

to Rapp, the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. Finally, the last one is the decrease of transport costs, as this practice encourages a local market distribution (Rapp et al., 2017). Thus satisfying the values of all consumers who are environmentally concerned and who consequently pursue practices such as this to meet their needs.

The sale of free-packaging products is a practice that will affect consumers' behaviour and, based on values that meet environmental well-being, aim to form new habits (Fuentes et al., 2019; Winterich et al., 2019). These new habits require the consumer to make some efforts. In this case, contrary to the traditional commerce, consumers are supposed to bring their own containers so that zero-packaging products can be sold and distributed. Therefore, retailers can use these newly acquired sustainable behaviours to build their customer relationships and develop or increase customer loyalty to their stores (Louis et al., 2021).

2.3 Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is characterised by numerous interpretations and versions that have evolved over time (Louis et al., 2021). However, recent studies indicate that imposing measures that support CSR may be the key to a company's success (Tran, 2022).

In 2005, Kotler & Lee defined CSR as the commitment made by a business to improve social wellbeing through a company's business practices and through its own resources (Kotler & Lee, 2011). Yet, due to its oversimplification, this definition does not represent the complexity and wideness that is present in the concept and is therefore not fully accepted by the academic community (Moisescu, 2017).

All attempts to describe CSR are based on Freeman's stakeholder theory, which emphasises and values the relationships established between a firm and its stakeholders - namely consumers, suppliers, employees, communities, banks, investors, among others (Freeman, 1984). It is a theory that attempts to conciliate the company's objectives with the well-being of its stakeholders. In line with this theory, Chakraborty and Jha (2019, p. 428), define CSR as “the practice of favoring altruism over materialism, thinking beyond the shareholder to encompass all the stakeholders and giving back or maintaining the resources from where they are accrued”.

Most traditional approaches indicate that there are four dimensions of CSR - economic, legal, ethical and discretionary or philanthropic (Carroll, 1979). However, recent studies suggest a more detailed perspective on the topic and highlight six dimensions of CSR: social, environmental, governance, employee, external stakeholder (i.e., consumers and suppliers), and economic (Chakraborty & Jha, 2019). These are the areas that are affected by CSR and it is through them that the positive effects brought about by its measures are manifested.

As mentioned above, CSR is seen as essential for a company to be successful in today's market. In fact, CSR investment is considered as a competitive advantage and not as an expense, limitation or even an independent activity from the business operation (El-Garaihy et al., 2014). The literature notes that, through the benefits brought to society by CSR, companies become agents of change and good corporate citizens (Du et al., 2010), fostering customers to become brand ambassadors, increasing consumer willingness to pay a price premium for their products and services, and making the public more resilient to unfavorable brand news (Du et al., 2010). The company thus gains a series of advantages and competitive advantage.

The sale of free-packaged or bulk products is clearly a practice that meets the environmental dimension of CSR. In this sense, there are studies that relate this practice with the advantages brought by CSR. Consumers are expected to reward companies who provide sustainable items, such as free-packaging products (Rapp et al., 2017). Positive perceptions of a company, repeated purchases of the sustainable products offered, and positive word-of-mouth are all possible outcomes of CSR, all of which contribute to an increase in customer loyalty and in the company's benefits (Huang et al., 2017). Next sections explore the main outcomes that the literature associates with CSR practices.

2.3.1. Customer Loyalty

CSR-focused businesses tend to have a better reputation, which boosts their customers' likelihood of remaining loyal (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). Loyalty behaviour is characterised by an intention to repurchase the products or services offered by the combined with a positive attitude towards the brand (Yoo & Bai, 2013).

Research have also revealed that customers are willing to purchase goods and services from businesses that engage in socially responsible business practices (Jones, 1997). Therefore, it can be suggested that customers value businesses' efforts to engage in CSR

initiatives, meaning that CSR initiatives of the company might be crucial in fostering brand loyalty (Khan & Fatma, 2019). Consumers' perceptions of socially responsible behavior can increase brand loyalty because it projects a certain character (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Melo & Galán, 2011), a personality that cares about providing excellent customer service, respecting customers' values, and adhering to quality standards (Khan & Fatma, 2019).

In the study conducted by Khan and Fatma (2019), the influence of CSR practices on loyalty creation was studied. Two of the main conclusions were that CSR activities can produce unique and positive brand experiences, which in turn affects brand loyalty. Similar to this, CSR activities also increase brand loyalty by improving consumer trust in the company.

There are several studies that relate sustainable practices to the creation of consumer loyalty. In particular, Louis et al. (2021) studied the relationship between the sale of free-packaging products in grocery stores and the possibility of creating loyalty among consumers of this type of shop. Here it is stated that sustainability issues and, above all, the dimensions addressed by CSR are an increasing reality in consumers' lives. Therefore, it is necessary that consumers make an effort and gain new sustainable habits to adapt to this reality. These new habits are an opportunity for retailers to establish deeper and stronger relationships with consumers and, consequently, increase the level of loyalty towards their shops.

As the sale of free-packaging food products is a practice that falls within the CSR parameters, it is expected to follow the same behaviour as the above-mentioned practice. Thus, the hypothesis emerges:

RH1: CSR practice FFPF has a positive impact on Customer Loyalty

2.3.2. Brand Image

Brand image is the set of perceptions, whether reasoned or emotional, that consumers associate with a brand (Low & Lamb, 2000). These perceptions reflect what a particular brand represents in the mind of a consumer when using a product/service or when confronted with of the brand's advertisements (Nguyen, 2021; Saleem & Raja, 2014).

It is generally accepted that a good brand image generates positive consequences for companies. In fact, as explained by Almeida and Coelho (2019), a company can gain a variety

of advantages from having a positive corporate image, including brand identification and recall, brand loyalty, staff motivation and loyalty, and a favorable reputation among competing companies. A company's image is a valuable asset that must be positive and well-known since it influences how customers see the company's activities (Kang & James, 2004).

As a result, the adoption of practices that meet CSR values are crucial in delivering worthwhile content for brand image building, as these are practices that are only associated with positive values that meet the interests of stakeholders (Ramesh et al., 2019). Customers are impacted by both concrete benefits, such as quality and price, and intangible assets (where brand image is included), when making judgments about their purchases (Cretu & Brodie, 2007). Therefore, there is an impact of brand image on the profitability of a company.

Hence, the existing literature suggests a positive and direct relationship between sustainable practices and CSR and brand image, as evidenced by Zhang et al. (2022) in the construction industry; by Martínez et al. (2014) and Moise et al. (2018) in the hotel sector and even more important by Flores-Hernández et al. (2020) in the retail sector.

It also states that in retail companies, these effects can influence consumer behaviour (Lin et al., 2016) in such a way that it will also have consequences on consumer attitude which will contribute to the success of the company (Galbreath, 2009). Namely, through high levels of attitude and loyalty towards the company's products (López-Pérez et al., 2018). This stronger preference for a company's products can be attributed to the extra value that the brand, or the brand image perceived by customers, gives to the product (Flores-Hernández et al., 2020).

However, taking into account all the conclusions brought by the various studies on the general impact of CSR and some specific sustainable practices on brand image (Flores-Hernández et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2014; Moise et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2022), it is expected that the practice of free-packaging food products (FPFP) has also a positive impact on brand image. Therefore, the following hypothesis is defined:

RH2: CSR practice FPFP has a positive impact on Brand Image.

2.3.3 Customer Satisfaction

When analysing customer satisfaction, there are two approaches that can be considered (Tu & Chang, 2012). The first is after a transaction and looks at brand performance and how it meets consumer expectations (Oliver, 1997). Therefore, satisfaction

arises if the benefits resulting from this action are greater than the consumer's expectations. The degree of satisfaction can be obtained by comparing it to several benchmarks, such as the ideal, the achievable, the desired, or what it should be (Martenson, 2007). The other approach refers to a cumulative analysis, taking into account past and present customer experiences with the performance of a company's products and services (Tu & Chang, 2012). It focuses on a continuous time frame rather than a specific transaction.

However, despite these two points of view, there is in both the idea that satisfaction depends on the quality of the consumer experience and also on the communication between the company and the customer (Crosby et al., 1990). The literature that is now available suggests that consumer relationship outcomes including customers' willingness to make a purchase, a company's reputation, and customers' loyalty may be affected by customer satisfaction.(Park, 2019; Saeidi et al., 2015; Su et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2019).

According to Park (2019); Saeidi et al. (2015), CSR activities and customer satisfaction have been linked favorably in previous studies. This positive correlation is based on three main reasons. The first is related to the fact that CSR activities meet the expectations of consumers who are not only interested in the economic value but also in the social performance of the company.(Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). A further justification for this is the fact that it has been proven by previous studies that consumers are more likely to be satisfied when products and services are supplied by a more socially responsible company (He & Li, 2011; Lee, 2018). Finally, it is also proven that CSR practices enhance the company's brand image, something that will end up positively influencing the customers' assessment of the company and their attitude towards it, having positive effects on satisfaction.(Martínez García de Leaniz & Rodríguez-del-Bosque, 2013; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Concerning the proven impact of sustainable policies in different sectors, there are several studies already carried out on this topic. Naveenan et al. (2021) studied the impact of green practices on customer satisfaction in the banking sector and concluded that these had a very positive influence, stating that most consumers were highly satisfied with these practices. Taking further into account the work carried out by Karagiannis and Andrinou (2021), it can be observed that it has reached similar conclusions in the restaurant market. In his study, which focuses on the city of Athens, he also states that the imposition of sustainable practices by restaurants positively influences customer satisfaction, opening doors for the creation of loyalty. Although there are several examples that explain this

correlation, it is still interesting to highlight the work of Bellini et al. (2021), which studies how sustainable shops - that is, where there are several sustainable initiatives - affect consumer satisfaction, trust and loyalty to these grocery retail shops.

Finally, as free-packaging food products can be included in this range of sustainable practices, it is expected to have the same impact on consumers, especially on satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, based on these past conclusions, the following research hypothesis emerges:

RH3: CSR practice FFPF has a positive impact on Customer Satisfaction.

2.3.4. Brand Trust

The concept of Brand Trust can be defined as “the belief which a consumer in a purchase situation characterized by uncertainty, vulnerability, lack of control and the independent-mindedness of the transaction partners relies on, to the effect that a company identified as a corporate brand will deliver a good or service at the quality which the consumer expects” (Sichtmann, 2007, p. 1001). From the perspective of the consumer, trust is seen as the confidence that businesses will carry out all actions in accordance with consumers’ expectations (Park et al., 2014). Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán (2005) describe it as the perception of security while selecting a brand.

The study of the relationship between CSR activities and trust are not recent, there are several studies that address this issue. For example, the studies of Lin et al. (2011); Martínez García de Leaniz and Rodríguez-del-Bosque (2013) claim that companies where CSR practices are implemented are more likely to gain consumer trust in their goods or services. In fact, this relationship is demonstrated in the study of Kim et al. (2021), where the author states that CSR activities, especially environmental ones, have a direct influence on corporate brand trust.

Consumer perception of CSR and corporate reputation are correlated, and this link has a significant impact on corporate brand trust because CSR activities of a business persuade customers that the brand is ethical (Kim et al., 2015). The performance of business operations is substantially influenced by corporate trust and a company's stance on CSR engagement (Osterhus, 1997). Since a consumer's psychological process, in which perceived

quality implies objective quality, is influenced by the degree of brand trust, trustworthy brands increase a consumer's sense of quality (Park & Srinivasan, 1994).

This same behaviour is expected in the food retail sector. With the implementation of CSR practices an increase in brand reputation and, consequently, a perception that the brand is closer to ethical standards is expected, which will have a significant impact on the company's financial performance and on consumers' commitment to the brand. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

RH4: CSR practice FFPF has a positive impact on Brand Trust.

2.4 Customer Loyalty

The creation and maintenance of a relationship with consumers is extremely important for retailers. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that companies can derive numerous benefits from a strong and long-lasting relationship with customers that values proximity, value, satisfaction, trust, attachment, and commitment which will have a great impact on profitability (Louis et al., 2021). A company's ability to build and sustain connections with its most valuable customers is a long-term competitive advantage (Day, 2000). Customers with whom a firm has an in-depth relationship are significantly more profitable than the price-sensitive, deal-seeking switcher who sees little difference between the options (Page et al., 1996). Furthermore, according to Day (2000), another advantage of establishing customer relationships is that they are very difficult for competitors to understand, imitate or displace (Day, 2000). Therefore, due to their importance, companies should manage customer relations as strategic assets (Haas & Stuebiger, 2017). There is also a strong and obvious relationship between a strong customer relationship and the creation of loyalty. A lasting and successful relationship between a brand and a consumer is based on customer loyalty, in fact, as Alan Dick and Kunal Basu (1994) state, "Customer loyalty is viewed as the strength of the relationship" (Dick & Basu, 1994). Proving the importance of creating and maintaining strong and long-lasting relationships with customers.

According to Dick & Basu (1994), loyalty can be defined as consumers' repurchase intentions and positive attitudes towards specific services and products (Dick & Basu, 1994). The behavioural and attitudinal aspects of consumers demonstrate a connection with the firm that is selling their products or services, leading to a buyback attitude (Channa et al., 2022).

Over time, researchers looked into the topic of customer loyalty from several angles in order to define it. Customer commitment was characterized by Dick and Basu (1994, p. 100) as a "relative attitude" from the customer's perspective toward the institution, as well as favouring behaviour. On the other hand, in a more simplified way, customer loyalty can be defined as an intention by consumers to acquire the same services (retention) and more services (expansion) from the existing provider in the future, as well as the customer's activities in referring the company to others (referral) (Larsson & Broström, 2020). Attitudes of retention, expansion and referral are all important to companies and will ultimately influence their performance.

2.4.1. Brand Image

Brand Image can be described as the memory that consumers have about a certain company (Nguyen, 2021). Therefore, brand image has a central role in making known and helping consumers to identify specific values associated with the company (Forozia et al., 2013). The reality is that there are several studies confirming a direct link between a positive brand image and (re)purchasing behavior, which consequently leads to the creation of customer loyalty (Tu & Chang, 2012).

In the case of the food retail sector, it is worth mentioning the study carried out by Nguyen and Leblanc (2001), where it is stated that supermarkets with higher loyalty indices are those which have a more refined brand image. This is a growing sector that has more and more brands everyday, therefore consumers base their purchasing intentions largely on the brand image of each supermarket rather than the product itself (Zhang, 2015).

Brand approval by consumers is the basis that can lead to the creation of loyalty. This correlation will result in repurchasing behaviour by customers and consequently have an impact on the company's revenues (Keller, 1993). In the existing literature on the subject, it is indicated that brand image is indispensable for this approval and, therefore, becomes an important driver of customer loyalty (Zhang, 2015).

Based on this data, it is expected that brand image arising from the sale of free-packaging food products has the same effect on consumer loyalty, giving origin to the research hypothesis:

RH5: Brand Image has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

2.4.2. Customer Satisfaction

Customer loyalty should be the ultimate goal of customer satisfaction, a reality that has become more widely acknowledged. According to Fornell et al. (1996), a company with great customer satisfaction will have more loyal customers. The existing literature also positive associates customer satisfaction with repurchase intentions, likelihood of recommending a product or service and profitability (Bitner, 1992; Goldsmith, 1997; Thomas, 2013).

According to Johnston et al. (2012), satisfied consumers who believe they received value from the service are more likely to return, as well as more prone to spread good word of mouth about the business and its services. Similar to this, Howat and Crilley (2007) noted that satisfied consumers are also likely to use a service more frequently and to refer it to others, making customer retention "very profitable" and useful in attracting new clients. These conclusions are again confirmed in the studies conducted by Kotler and Armstrong (2010); Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) where they claim that customer satisfaction is the cornerstone of true loyalty, as highly satisfied customers are characterised by a re-purchase attitude and are more likely to recommend the service/product to others.

This attitude of loyalty on the part of a satisfied consumer is something that can be observed in several sectors (Assaker et al., 2020; Carranza et al., 2018; Thomas, 2013). In the model presented by Thomas (2013) on consumer behaviour in the food retail sector (supermarkets), it was possible to conclude that the various dimensions considered to define customer satisfaction (price, quality, shop service and product assortment) have a significant influence on consumer loyalty, being possible to observe an attitude of repurchase and recommendation. In the case of restaurants it is also possible to verify the same correlation, where satisfaction was considered as one of the most important drivers for loyalty (Carranza et al., 2018). The same can be said of the hospitality sector, where loyalty behaviour was based, once again, on customer satisfaction (Assaker et al., 2020). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

RH6: Satisfaction has a positive impact on customer loyalty.

2.4.3. Brand Trust

Normally, consumers will consider a variety of factors before making a purchase or using a product to ensure that it meets their needs and preferences. When consumers choose to purchase a product, they most often believe that it will fulfill their requirements and expectations. They depend on these products to provide the benefits desired or required (Budiono et al., 2021). Consumer brand trust is the necessary condition for a situation to exist where consumers believe that the brand's product or service will satisfy their desires and needs, the trust is what enables consumers to hold this belief (Ebrahim, 2020).

From a business perspective, consumer trust is indispensable to create demand for brand's products and services. Trust is what will influence customer behaviour before and after the decision to purchase the product. From this constant relationship, a long-term loyalty arises which strengthens the relationship between both sides (Mabkhot et al., 2017).

The direct effect between trust and loyalty is a topic that has been extensively explored in the existing literature related to marketing and consumer behaviour. Moorman et al. (1992) and Morgan and Hunt (1994) revealed that trust plays a crucial role in developing exchange relationships and that trust results in commitment or loyalty in relational exchanges. On the other hand, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) discovered that trusted brands are bought more frequently and generate a higher level of attitudinal commitment. Later, the same authors were also able to link trust with an increase in attitudinal loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). Therefore, after several authors have proven the existence of this relationship between these two variables in various sectors and different situations, the same behaviour is predicted in the food retail sector, becoming the last hypothesis of this study:

RH7: Brand Trust has a positive influence on Customer Loyalty.

2.5 Health Consciousness

Health consciousness can be defined as the degree of concern that an individual has about his or her health. This concern will influence his/her actions, as these will seek to improve or maintain his/her health and engage in health actions. It can be considered a measure of an individual's readiness to take health actions (Lee et al., 2014). Becker et al. (1977) states that preparedness to engage in healthy behaviors as having three elements: health-related reasons, threats posed by diseases or conditions, and the likelihood that engaging in healthy behavior will lessen the hazards around the individual's life. If people are aware of how their lifestyle choices affect their health, they are said to be more health-conscious (Wardle & Steptoe, 2003).

According to the literature on the subject, the concept of health consciousness is often related to the constant concern about one's own well-being. Thus, subjects characterized by having a high degree of health consciousness are characterized by practicing healthy actions (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008), obtaining health information, preferring healthy and organic products (Naylor et al., 2009) and having a tendency to buy eco-friendly green products (Ritter et al., 2015; Yadav & Pathak, 2016). Considering the study in question, this last characteristic behaviour will be the most interesting to motivate the moderating effect of this variable. Authors who address this variable tend to introduce it in studies, such as this one, where it is intended to study consumer behaviour (Naylor et al., 2009; Ritter et al., 2015) and in studies related to food (Chen, 2011; Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008; Yadav & Pathak, 2016).

However, it is important to highlight the Hao and Chenyue (2021) study where the relationship between health consciousness and the purchase of eco-friendly products is directly proven. The author successfully relates this variable with a sustainable practice on the part of consumers. Therefore, it can legitimately be assumed to have a strong relationship with sustainable food-related practices, such as FFPF, thus intensifying its effects. On the other hand, it is also relevant to exemplify numerous studies where this variable has been used as a moderating effect (Chen, 2011; Lee et al., 2014; Singhal, 2017). After it has been possible to relate this variable to the subject under study and its value as a moderator has been proven, it is assumed that:

RH8: health consciousness positively moderates the effect of CSR/FPFP on Loyalty.

3. Methodology

After addressing all the fundamental concepts for understanding this study in the literature review, this chapter aims to present and describe the methods used to achieve the main objectives that allow us to answer the research questions.

This section starts with the sub-chapter Research model, where the conceptual model from which the study is produced is presented. Next, the data collection method will be explained in the sub-chapter on Study's data collection tool. The subchapters Scales of measurement of the study variables and Structure of the questionnaire, which discuss the design of the questionnaire, are then included. We also include the subchapter Population and sample, which describes the study's target population, the sampling method used, and the characteristics of the sample. Finally, the statistical analysis techniques used are explained in Techniques of Statistical Analysis.

3.1 Research Model

In order to better represent the rationale behind the study and meet the research hypotheses presented in the previous chapter, the conceptual model is presented in figure 1. It demonstrates the relationships between the variables under study that form the research hypotheses.

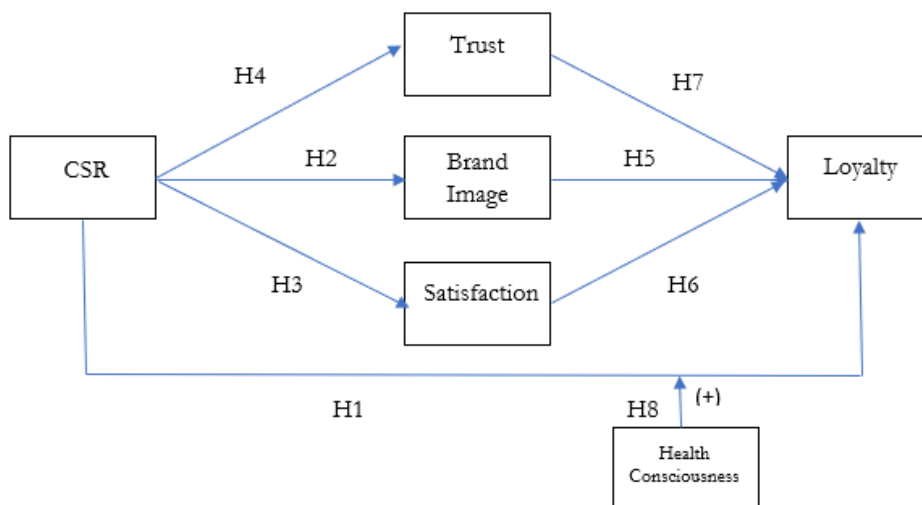


Figure 1 – Research Model

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection aims to provide the necessary information to validate or not the research hypotheses, according to the relationship between the variables. Only then can be possible to answer the research problem of the study, fulfil the objectives, and operationalize the conceptual model. To do that, the study uses a quantitative methodology, through the elaboration of an online survey, through the *Google Forms* platform. This method of data collection was chosen as it is described as easy, convenient and inexpensive (Andrade, 2020), which allows a wide range of data to be collected. Another advantage of this instrument is that it is suitable for examining consumer behaviour (Wright, 2017) and is easily adapted to the population under study, which in this study will be all adult consumers of food products in Portuguese hypermarkets. It is also important to mention that this method was chosen bearing in mind that 85% of the Portuguese population has access to the Internet, thus proving the ease of access to the survey (Hootsuite, 2022).

3.3 Development of Study Measurement

In order to measure the variables under study in the best way, guaranteeing the obtaining of reliable results, it was decided to use scales previously created and validated by other authors. Subsequently, these scales were adapted taking into account the topic under study. The original scales, their authors and the adaptations made are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Scales of Measurement

Variable	Original Scale	Adaptation	Scale Adapted	Autor
Loyalty	I shop here as the first priority	I shop at this hypermarket as the first priority	Tenho como prioridade fazer compras neste hipermercado	(Chen et al., 2010)
	I will recommend friend to shop at this store	I would recommend my friends to shop at this hypermarket	Recomendo aos meus amigos que façam compras neste hipermercado	
	I prefer product sold here than any other stores	I prefer the products sold by this hypermarket than by any other	Prefiro os produtos vendidos por este hipermercado aos de qualquer outro	
	I enjoy service offered here than any other stores	I enjoy service offered by this hypermarket more than by any other hypermarkets	Gosto mais do serviço oferecido por este hipermercado do que por qualquer outro hipermercado	
	I will keep on shopping here	I will keep on shopping at this hypermarket	Vou continuar a comprar neste hipermercado	
Satisfaction	Your level of global satisfaction with services of this hypermarket is...	Your level of global satisfaction with services of this hypermarket is...	O seu nível de satisfação global com os serviços deste hipermercado é...	(Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2019)

	This hypermarket meets these expectations	This hypermarket meets my expectations	Este hipermercado corresponde às minhas expectativas	
	Your decision of choosing this hypermarket was a good decision-making	Your decision of choosing this hypermarket was a good decision-making	A sua decisão de escolher este hipermercado foi uma boa decisão	
Brand Image	The products have a high quality	The products in this hypermarket have a high quality	Os produtos deste hipermercado têm uma alta qualidade	(Martínez Salinas & Pina Pérez, 2009)
	The products have better characteristics than competitors'	The products in this hypermarket have better characteristics than competitors'	Os produtos deste hipermercado têm melhores características do que os concorrentes.	
	The products of the competitors are usually cheaper	The products of the competitors are usually cheaper	Os produtos dos concorrentes são normalmente mais baratos	
	The brand is nice	The hypermarket brand is nice	A marca do hipermercado é boa	
	The brand has a personality that distinguish itself from competitors' brands	The hypermarket brand has a personality that distinguish itself from competitors' brands	A marca do hipermercado tem uma personalidade que se distingue das marcas da concorrência	
	It's a brand that doesn't disappoint its customers	It's a hypermarket brand that doesn't disappoint its customers	É uma marca de hipermercados que não desilude os seus clientes	
Health consciouness	"I choose food carefully to ensure good health	I choose food carefully to ensure good health	Escolho cuidadosamente os alimentos para assegurar uma boa saúde	(Squires et al., 2001)
	"I think of myself as a health-conscious consumer	I think of myself as a health-conscious consumer	Vejo-me como um consumidor preocupado com a saúde	
	"I think often about health issues"	I think often about health issues"	Penso frequentemente em questões de saúde	
	"I am what I eat"	I am what I eat	Eu sou o que eu como	
	I prefer unprocessed, natural foods	I prefer unprocessed, natural foods	Prefiro alimentos naturais e não transformados	
	I buy food that helps maintain my weight and appearance	I buy food that helps maintain my weight and appearance	Compro alimentos que ajudam a manter o meu peso e aparência	
Compared to others my age, I'm in better health	Compared to others my age, I'm in better health	Em comparação com outras pessoas da minha idade, estou de melhor saúde		
Trust	XXXX make me feel a sense of security	This hypermarket makes me feel a sense of security	Este hipermercado dá-me uma sensação de segurança	(Fatma et al., 2015)
	I trust on the quality of this banking company	I trust on the quality of this hypermarket	Eu confio na qualidade deste hipermercado	
	The hiring services of this company is a quality assurance	This hypermarket is a quality assurance	Este hipermercado é uma garantia de qualidade	
	XXXX is interested in its customers	This Hypermarket is interested in its customers	Este hipermercado está interessado nos seus clientes	
	XXXX is honest with its customers	This hypermarket is honest with its customers	Este hipermercado é honesto com os seus clientes	
	I feel confidence in [X] brand name	I feel confidence in this hypermarket's brand name	Sinto confiança na marca deste hipermercado	(Munuera-Alemán et al., 2003)
CSR		This hypermarket is committed to the sale of free-packaging food products	Este hipermercado está empenhado na venda de produtos alimentares não embalados	Developed originally for this study
		This hypermarket has greater offer of free-packaging food products compared to its competitors	Este hipermercado tem maior oferta de produtos alimentares não embalados em comparação com os seus concorrentes	
		This hypermarket makes a clear effort to avoid prepacked foods	Este hipermercado faz um esforço claro para evitar os alimentos pré-embalados	

	This hypermarket stands out for the sale of free-packaging food products	Este hipermercado destaca-se pela venda de produtos alimentares não embalados
	This hypermarket is a reference when it comes to free-packaging food products cause	Este hipermercado é uma referência quando se trata da venda de produtos alimentares não embalados

3.4 Survey Structure

The questionnaire, presented in Annex 1, is divided into 9 sections. The first section begins with the presentation of the scope of the study and the context in which it is being developed. Next, the concept of "Free-packaging food products" is presented, to ensure that all those who answer the questionnaire are aware of the true meaning of the study topic. Finally, this introduction ends with an indication of the target population, an estimate of the response time and, finally, the confirmation of consent, anonymity and confidentiality of response.

After the beginning of the questionnaire, still in this first section, there are the first questions, the first to confirm participation in the study and whether the respondent usually buys food products in hypermarkets (to guarantee the quality of the sample) and the remaining questions of a sociodemographic nature, which aim to collect certain personal data from the respondent in order to characterise the sample, namely gender, age, highest level of education completed and professional occupation.

In the second section, we wanted to assess how often the respondent buys pre-packaged food products and also, when there is a choice between pre-packaged and non-packaged food products, to understand how often they opt for the non-packaged product. Both questions were measured on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always).

In the third section, the respondent was also asked to indicate which hypermarket he/she prefers (from a pre-defined list) and to indicate how often he/she goes to this shop.

Finally, from section 3 to 9, we find the scales presented in the previous sub-chapter to measure the variables under study, with each section corresponding to the analysis of a variable. Section 4 corresponds to the evaluation of the variable "Loyalty", section 5 to the variable "Satisfaction", section 6 to the variable "Brand Image", section 7 to the variable "Health Consciousness", section 8 to the variable "Trust" and finally section 9 to the variable "CSR / FFPF". All scales were measured using a 5- or 7-point likert scale, depending on the number of levels existing in the scale created by the original author. This decision was made with the ultimate goal of maintaining the consistency of the scale itself.

As mentioned above, the questionnaire used in this study was created using the Google Forms platform. The answers were obtained through its dissemination through the different social networks (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp) and also through direct contact. This dissemination method was chosen taking into account the fact that a large part of the Portuguese population has access to the internet - 85%, according to Hootsuite (2022)- and also because, by January 2022, around 83.7% of the Portuguese population had joined at least one social network (Hootsuite, 2022).

In an initial phase, in order to validate the survey, correct errors and avoid misinterpretation of the questions by the respondents, a pre-test was performed where 4 people answered the questionnaire and gave their feedback. Minor corrections were made and after validation, the collection of answers began.

3.5 Population and Sample

The target population for this study is all Portuguese adult consumers who buy food products in Portuguese hypermarkets.

To collect the sample needed for the study, a close network of contacts was selected and used to help disseminate the survey. Therefore, we can conclude that the method used was non-probabilistic snowball sampling, also known as chain-referral-sampling. This method is characterised by the fact that an initial group of subjects is chosen to serve as "seeds". This group will have the function of recruiting more people, in this case, to answer the survey and also to share it with more subjects. As a result, the sample grows wave by wave, similar to how a snowball grows in size as it rolls down a hill (Heckathorn, 2011). One of the advantages of this method is that it is used when the total target population of the study is difficult to access or it is too expensive to do it, thus making it impossible to create a full population list for the researcher (Etikan et al., 2016). Since it is also impossible, in this case, to reach the entire population of Portuguese adult consumers who use hypermarkets, it was decided that this was the most suitable sampling method.

The response period for the questionnaire was from 10 August 2022 to 16 August 2022. The sample consists of a total of 472 individuals, of which 455 are valid. There were 17 responses that were excluded due to the respondents not belonging to the target population or some irregularities during the response process. According to Hair (2009), a sample should have five times as many observations as there are total items or questions related to the research variables in order for it to be deemed acceptable. In this case, given

that the number of items in this study is 33, the minimum number of responses required would be 165, a number greatly exceeded by the sample available.

In order to analyse the balance of the sample, the data presented in Table 2 shows that 455 individuals took part in the study. With regard to gender, women, men and two people who identified themselves with another gender participated, where clearly there was a greater emphasis on women, who accounted for more than half of the responses. Of these participants, it should be noted that a large part belong to the group of young adults, in the sense that the data is more concentrated in the first groups of ages and that their frequency decreases as their age increases (with the exception of the group which covers individuals between 46 and 55 years old). The sample is also characterised by having a higher education, with almost 70% having completed a bachelor's degree or higher. With regard to professional occupation, a large proportion are employed and there is a balance between the remaining professional situations.

In respect to the questions related to the theme of the study, it can be seen that most of the participants are consumers of pre-packed food products, with the majority of the answers stating that they are occasional or very frequent consumers of this type of product. On the other hand, regarding the preference for unpacked food products, there is a clear balance among all the answers. With the exception of the answer stating that they have never consumed this type of product, all the others have similar percentages, where the group with the highest frequency is the one that consumes unpacked food products very frequently (35.4%).

Finally, regarding the choice of the preferred hypermarket, Continente dominated the answers with 45.9% of the answers followed by Pingo Doce with 21.8%. It should also be noted that most of the respondents go to their favourite hypermarket at least once a week.

All the data concerning the characterisation of the sample can be consulted in table 2.

Table 2 - Characterisation of the Sample

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender			
	Male	174	38,2
	Female	279	61,3
	Other	2	0,4
	Total	455	100,0
Age			
	18-25	253	55,6
	26-35	52	11,4
	36-45	46	10,1
	46-55	74	16,3
	56-65	27	5,9
	Over 65	3	0,7
	Total	455	100,0
Level of Education			
	Primary Education	13	2,9
	High School	125	27,5
	Bachelor's Degree	201	44,2
	Master's Degree	115	25,3
	PhD	1	0,2
	Total	455	100,0
Professional Occupation			
	Self-Employed	59	13,0
	Employee	267	58,7
	Student	118	25,9
	Retired, Unemployed, Working as a household or similar	11	2,4
	Total	455	100,0
Purchase of pre-packaged food products			
	Never	7	1,5
	Rarely	61	13,4
	Occasionally	149	32,7
	Very Frequently	187	41,1
	Always	51	11,2
	Total	455	100,0
Preference for unpacked food products			
	Never	12	2,6
	Rarely	57	12,5
	Occasionally	122	26,8
	Very Frequently	161	35,4
	Always	103	22,6
	Total	455	100,0
Hypermarket preference			

Aldi	3	0,7
Auchan	14	3,1
Continente	209	45,9
Froiz	1	0,2
Lidl	58	12,7
Mercadona	51	11,2
Minipreço	4	0,9
Pingo Doce	99	21,8
Other	16	3,5
Total	455	100,0
Shopping frequency at the hypermarket		
Less than once a month	7	1,5
Once a month	17	3,7
2-3 times a month	114	25,1
Once a week	228	50,1
2-3 times a week	70	15,4
More than 3 times a week	19	4,2
Total	455	100,0

3.6 Statistical Analysis Techniques

In this sub-chapter, we will present all the statistical methods used to organise and analyse the collected sample, to validate and build the measurement model, to analyse and validate the SEM model and, finally, to test the hypotheses mentioned above. All processes were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics v.28 and SmartPLS 3 v.3.3.9. The analysis was carried out on the basis of the organisation presented in table 3.

Table 3 - Statistical analysis

Descriptive results	Mean, Standard deviation, Mode, Maximum, Minimum		SPSS v.28	
Validity and reliability of measurement model Or items of model	Outer loadings		SmartPLS 3	
	Validity	Convergent validity / Average Variance Extracted (AVE)		
		Discriminant validity using HTMT		
	Reliability	Composite Reliability > 0.7		
		Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7		
SEM	Validity Of SEM variables	R-Squared		
		Q-Squared		
		F-Squared		
		VIF		
	Hypotheses testing	T values / p-value		

3.6.1. Descriptive Results

In this first part of the analysis of results, using the IBM SPSS Statistics program (v.28), the descriptive statistics of each item in the study were organised and calculated. For each item, the maximum and minimum values were calculated, which were intended to indicate the minimum and maximum values used by respondents in each survey question; the mean, which aims to analyse the concentration of the participants' answers; the standard deviation, which serves to understand the level of data dispersion in relation to the mean; and, finally, the mode, which indicates the most frequent value in each item.

3.6.2. Validity and reliability of the measurement model

In this phase, now aided by the SmartPLS 3 v.3.3.9 program, we proceeded to evaluate consistency and reliability, convergent and discriminant validities of the measurement model (Hair Jr et al., 2017) . All these conditions will be indispensable to proceed to the creation of a Structural equation modelling (SEM).

Validity is defined as the accuracy of the outcome of a test, in other words, it refers to the precision with which a method measures what it is designed to measure (Karakaya &

Dunya, 2018). There are two types of validity, convergent and discriminant. When the items in a given measure converge to represent the underlying construct, convergent validity is established. This condition is assessed by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). AVE measures how much variance it is absorbed by a construct versus how much variance comes from measurement error. A greater value denotes a higher level of validity, and the values of AVE range from 0 to 1. When we are evaluating the convergent validity all AVE's values should be higher than the threshold value of 0.5 established by Fornell and Larcker (1981). On the other hand, discriminant validity is used to determine the distinctiveness of the constructs in the study. It demonstrates that the study's constructs have their own unique identities and are not overly connected with one another. In this study, to test discriminant validity we used the HTMT (Heterotrait–Monotrait) ratio. According to Henseler et al. (2015), this condition be verified, the HTMT ratio must be less than 0.90.

Moving on now to the analysis of reliability, when measurements are performed numerous times, a scale's reliability is the degree to which the results are consistent. The first thing to calculate to evaluate reliability are the outer loadings. Outer loadings are the predicted relationships in reflective measurement models. They determine the precise contribution of a given item to the construct to which it is assigned. The most recent literature states that the values of the outer loadings should be greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011), however, according to Chin and Marcoulides (1998), values above 0.5 should also produce good results. After calculating and evaluating the outer loadings, we have two methods to evaluate reliability. Through the composite reliability (CR) or the Cronbach's alpha. For both instruments, the minimum values required of 0.7 is required for discerning whether the item is able to produce reliable measures (Uma Sekaran, 2006). Since Cronbach Alpha is criticized for its lower bound value, which underestimates the genuine reliability, some academics prefer to use Composite Reliability (CR) instead (Peterson & Kim, 2013). Although the difference between CR and Cronbach Alpha is comparatively insignificant, CR can be used as a substitute (Peterson & Kim, 2013).

3.6.3. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)

After the validity and reliability of the measurement model have been proven, we can move on to analyse the SEM. A series of relationships between one or more independent variables, which can be continuous or discrete, and one or more dependent variables, which

can also be continuous or discrete, can be studied using a statistical technique called structural equation modelling (SEM) (Ullman & Bentler, 2012).

To begin the SEM study and hypothesis testing, it is necessary to reconfirm the validity of the SEM variables. For this, we need to use the values of R^2 , Q^2 , f^2 and VIF.

According to Hair et al. (2012), the coefficient of determination (R^2), which measures how much of each endogenous latent variable's variance is explained, is the main criterion for assessing structural models. According to the literature (Cohen, 1988), R^2 values can be ranked into 3 categories with the values of 0.02, 0.13, and 0.26 that correspond to a weak, moderate, and substantial level (Wetzels et al., 2009). Q^2 represents the blindfolding result of the cross-validated redundancy of the latent endogenous variable of the direct relationships model of this study. Q^2 represents predictive relevance, measures whether a model has predictive relevance or not. When the Q-square is greater than zero, the values are accurately recreated, and the model has predictive relevance.

F-Square represents the change in R-Square when an exogenous variable is removed from the model. Cohen (1988) suggests that values greater than 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate small, medium, and large f^2 effect sizes, respectively.

Lastly, Variance Inflation Factor, also known as VIF, is utilised to determine collinearity. When there is substantial correlation between two variables, this is referred to as collinearity, which makes it difficult or impossible to accurately estimate each variable's individual regression coefficient. So, for collinearity not to be a problem, Hair et al. (2011) recommends that VIF values should not be higher than 5.

After the SEM model has been validated, all conditions are in place to proceed to hypothesis testing. To proceed with the hypothesis test, there are two tests that were used based on the P-values and the T-Statistics. The P-values are numbers that describe the probability that the data occurred based on randomness. The significance of the results in relation to the null hypothesis is determined using a statistical test based on p-values, whereby the null hypothesis states that there is no relationship between the two variables under study. In this case a 99% significance level was used, which means that for a hypothesis to be valid, significant and supported it needs to have a P-value < 0.01 . The T ratio test is a variant of this test that compares results against a threshold of 1.96 using the T-statistic rather than the matching P-value, nevertheless the reasoning is the same. It should also be noted that these tests were performed to calculate the direct effects between the variables and also to test the influence of the moderating effect.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The results of data analysis will be presented in this chapter. We analyzed the 455 data set using Smart PLS (V. 3.3.9). This chapter will begin with a descriptive analysis of the results, then move on to the validity and reliability of the measurement model and will conclude with the results of the hypothesis tests.

4.2 Descriptive Results

Using the IBM SPSS Statistics program (V. 28), it was possible to obtain the descriptive statistics of the research variable items, namely the minimum, maximum, standard deviation, and mode. The results can be seen in table 4.

Table 4 - Descriptive analysis

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mode
LOY1	1	5	3.758	1.040	4
LOY2	1	5	3.789	1.078	4
LOY3	1	5	3.541	1.055	4
LOY4	1	5	3.640	1.027	4
LOY5	2	5	4.308	0.761	4
SAT1	2	5	4.152	0.674	4
SAT2	2	5	4.209	0.692	4
SAT3	2	5	4.248	0.710	4
BIM1	2	7	5.642	0.981	6
BIM2	1	7	5.101	1.269	5
BIM3	1	7	4.141	1.588	4
BIM4	2	7	5.743	1.106	6
BIM5	1	7	5.026	1.485	5
BIM6	1	7	5.475	1.181	6
HCO1	1	7	5.653	1.118	6
HCO2	1	7	5.763	1.123	6
HCO3	1	7	5.793	1.177	7
HCO4	1	7	5.580	1.366	7
HCO5	2	7	5.899	1.190	7
HCO6	1	7	5.356	1.354	6
HCO7	2	7	5.105	1.265	5
TRU1	1	7	5.648	1.140	6
TRU2	2	7	5.846	1.004	6

TRU3	2	7	5.712	1.059	6
TRU4	1	7	5.543	1.201	6
TRU5	2	7	5.468	1.175	5
TRU6	1	5	4.253	0.724	4
CSR1	1	7	4.712	1.366	4
CSR2	1	7	4.501	1.376	4
CSR3	1	7	4.413	1.362	4
CSR4	1	7	4.251	1.481	4
CSR5	1	7	4.277	1.530	4

N=455

The mean has the function of informing about the concentration of responses of the participants in the items of each research variable. Therefore, it is possible to observe that there are no great differences between the mean of each variable. All items have a similar behavior within each variable. The only exception is the Brand Image variable, which has average values between 4.141 (BIM3) and 5.743 (BIM4), which may indicate a difference of opinion within the sample about the items that measure this variable. The mode intends to demonstrate which is the most frequent value in the answers given by the participants in each item. However, there are variables where these values are more concentrated than others. In the case of the variable of CSR, Satisfaction and Loyalty, it is easily observed that there are minimal differences between the values within each variable. All of them have similar values, highlighting the case of CSR and Satisfaction that have equal values in all items. In the remaining variables, although the difference is slightly higher, there are no major divergences, since the mode value range never exceeds 2 units within each scale. Finally, the standard deviation allows the analysis of the degree of dispersion of the data in relation to the sample mean. The values are not very high, and in many cases are less than 1. The variable with the highest figures is CSR where, even so, the values are inferior to 2.

4.3 Validity and Reliability of Measurement Model

In the first stage, we employed the SmartPLS3 v.3.3.9 to assess internal consistency and reliability, convergent and discriminant validities of the measurement model (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

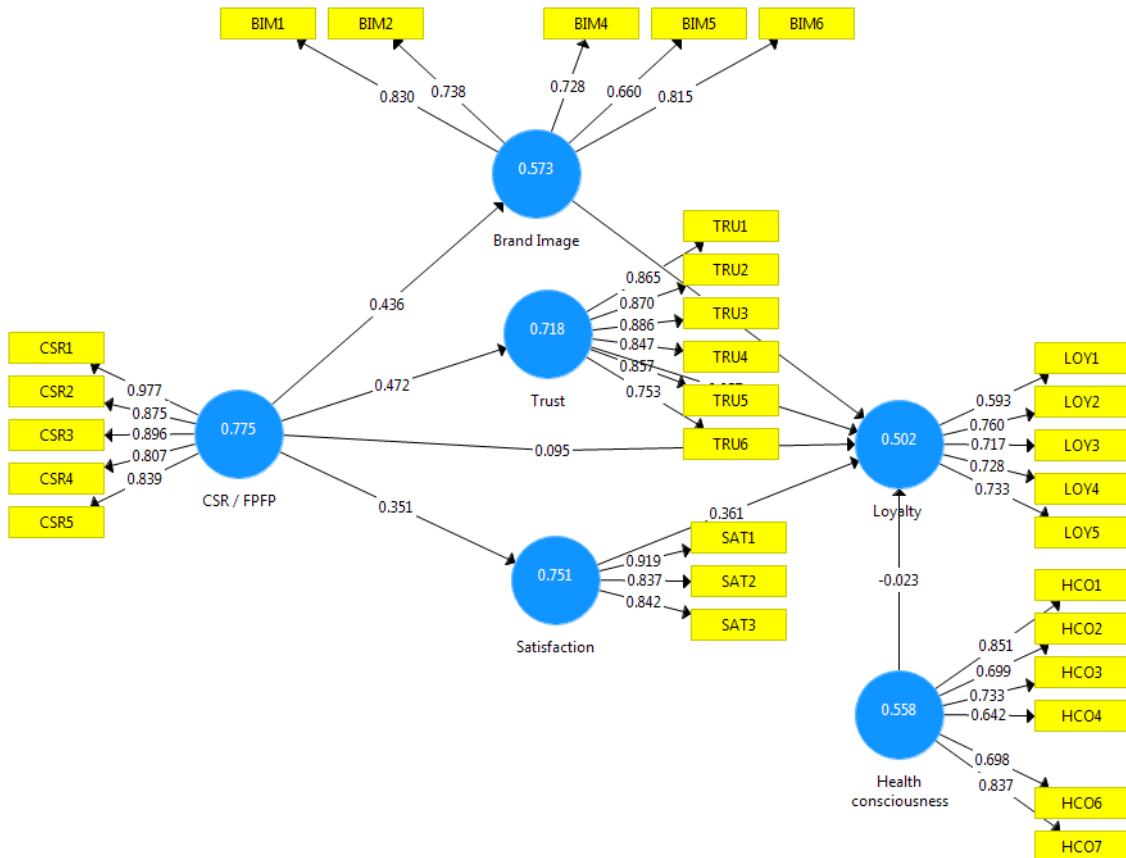


Figure 2 - Validity and reliability of measurement model

N=455

4.3.1. Outer Loadings

Table 5 - Outer Loading

	Brand Image	CSR / FFPF	Health consciousness	Loyalty	Satisfaction	Trust
BIM1	0.830					
BIM2	0.738					
BIM4	0.728					
BIM5	0.660					
BIM6	0.815					
CSR1		0.977				
CSR2		0.875				
CSR3		0.896				
CSR4		0.807				
CSR5		0.839				
HCO1			0.851			
HCO2			0.699			
HCO3			0.733			
HCO4			0.642			
HCO6			0.698			
HCO7			0.837			
LOY1				0.593		
LOY2				0.760		
LOY3				0.717		
LOY4				0.728		
LOY5				0.733		
SAT1					0.919	
SAT2					0.837	
SAT3					0.842	
TRU1						0.865
TRU2						0.870
TRU3						0.886
TRU4						0.847
TRU5						0.857
TRU6						0.753

The estimated relationships in reflective measurement models are known as outer loadings. They establish an item's absolute contribution to the construct it is assigned. These relationships between items and variables can be found in Table 5.

Hair et al. (2011) recommended that each item's outer loading be larger than 0.7. However, Chin and Marcoulides (1998) also indicated that each item's standardized loading of 0.5 or

higher would also give good results. By analyzing Table 5, it is possible to conclude that most of the results are positive and that they are above the minimum values required by the two authors. Only the values of BIM5, HCO4 and LOY1 are between the levels required by both authors. Due to the values below the accepted cut-off point, BIM3 and HCO5 are excluded from model.

4.3.2. Convergent Validity and Reliability

Table 6 - Convergent Validity and Reliability

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7	Composite Reliability > 0.7	Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.5
Brand Image	0.869	0.870	0.573
CSR / FFPF	0.946	0.945	0.775
Health consciousness	0.883	0.882	0.558
Loyalty	0.835	0.834	0.502
Satisfaction	0.901	0.901	0.751
Trust	0.938	0.938	0.718

Table 6 presents the information regarding Cronbach's Alpha, the Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Internal consistency, or how closely connected a group of items are to one another, is measured by Cronbach's alpha. It is regarded as an indicator of scale reliability. A value greater than 0.7 is considered the minimum value for discerning whether the item is able to produce reliable measures (Uma Sekaran, 2006). As shown in table 6, all variables meet this requirement and are therefore considered reliable.

The quality of a measure is correlated with the average extracted variance and the composite reliability coefficients. AVE is a measurement of how much variance is absorbed by a construct in comparison to how much variance results from measurement error. AVE is a convergent validity assessment metric. The value of AVE and CR ranges from 0 to 1, where a higher value indicates higher reliability level. All composite reliabilities (CR) values were above 0.70, in support of the reliability of the multi-item scales (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). In the case of AVE, all the values are greater than the cut-off value of 0.5 set by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

4.3.3. Discriminant Validity

To evaluate discriminant validity, the HTMT (Heterotrait–Monotrait) method was used and it is presented in table 7.

4.3.3.1. HTMT results

Table 7 - HTMT Results

	Brand Image	CSR / FFP	Health consciousness	Loyalty	Satisfaction	Trust
Brand Image						
CSR / FFP	0.438					
Health consciousness	0.264	0.317				
Loyalty	0.777	0.411	0.199			
Satisfaction	0.75	0.349	0.211	0.734		
Trust	0.841	0.47	0.373	0.685	0.755	

The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), a new approach of evaluating discriminant validity, was employed. According to Henseler et al. (2015), the HTMT ratio must be less than 0.90. As demonstrated in Table 7, each construct's HTMT ratios of correlation are less than 0.9, indicating that the discriminant validity has been demonstrated.

4.4 Structural Model

The Consistent PLS bootstrapping resampling procedure using 5000 subsamples and the default settings (i.e. parallel processing, no sign changes) was used to assess the path coefficients and their significance levels.

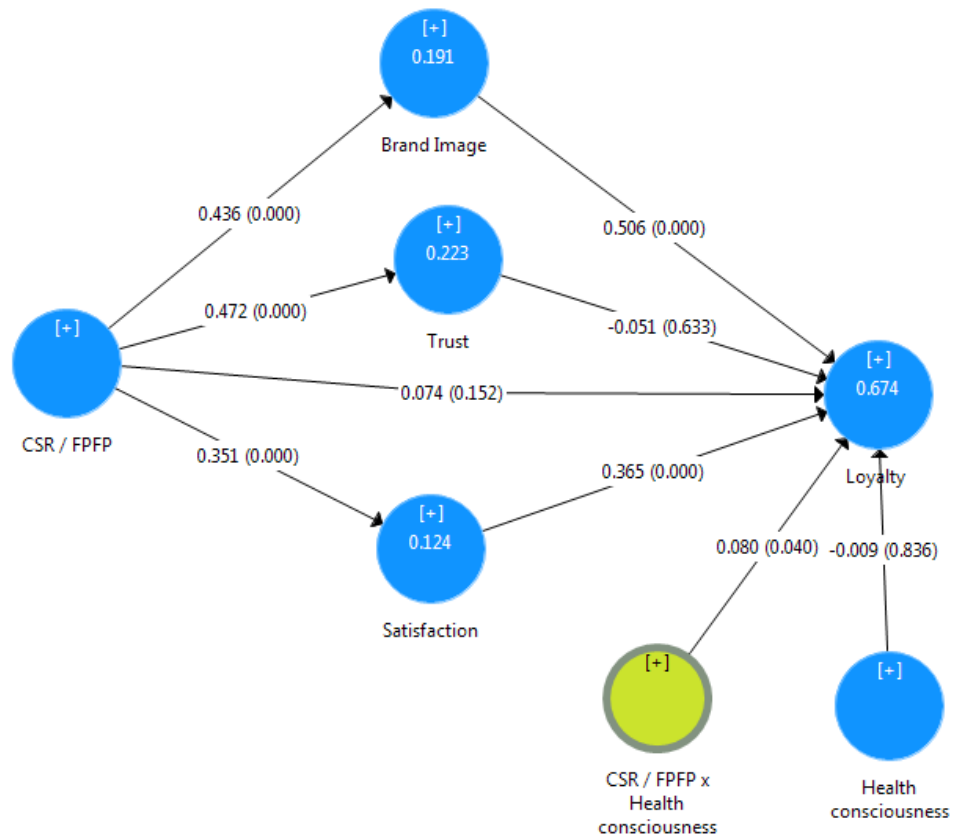


Figure 3 – SEM Model

4.4.1. Results of Coefficient of Determination (R^2 values) and Predictive Capacity (Q^2)

Table 8 - R^2 and Q^2 values

	R^2	Q^2
Brand Image	0,191	0,104
Loyalty	0,674	0,31
Satisfaction	0,124	0,085
Trust	0,223	0,15

According to Hair et al. (2012), the primary criterion for evaluating structural models is the coefficient of determination (R^2), which quantifies how much of each endogenous latent variable's variance is explained. As an illustration, the SEM model indicates that the Brand Image variable, which has an R^2 of 0.191, is only influenced by the CSR/FPFP variable. Accordingly, 19.1% of the change in the variable Brand Image may be attributed to the variable CSR/FPFP.

According to Cohen (1988)'s recommendations, R^2 values of 0.02, 0.13, and 0.26 indicate weak, moderate, and substantial level (Wetzels et al., 2009). This line of reasoning leads us to the conclusion that only loyalty may be evaluated as considerable, whereas brand image, satisfaction, and trust are all ranked as moderate.

Table 8 also represents the blindfolding result of the cross-validated redundancy (Q^2) of the latent endogenous variable of the direct relationships model of this study. As cross-validated redundancy (Q^2) of Brand Image (0.104), Loyalty (0.31), Satisfaction (0.085) and Trust (0.15) are greater than zero, it clearly indicates that the model is relevant to predicting that factor (Chin & Marcoulides, 1998).

4.4.2. Results of F^2 Effects Size of Path Coefficients and Collinearity (VIF)

Table 9 - F^2 and VIF results

	F^2	VIF
Brand Image -> Loyalty	0,199	3,926
CSR / FPFP -> Brand Image	0,235	1,000
CSR / FPFP -> Loyalty	0,012	1,343
CSR / FPFP -> Satisfaction	0,141	1,000
CSR / FPFP -> Trust	0,287	1,000
Satisfaction -> Loyalty	0,154	2,645
Trust -> Loyalty	0,002	4,387

According to Hair et al. (2011), who indicated that VIF values should be less than 5.0, an analysis of Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values was conducted to determine collinearity. As evidenced by the values of VIF varied from 1 to 4.387 in Table 9, all exogenous constructions have VIF values less than 5.0, indicating no multicollinearity issue in the structural model.

On the other hand, a structural model variable may be impacted/affected by a variety of other variables. The dependent variable may change if an exogenous variable is removed.

When an exogenous variable is taken out of the model, the R-Square changes, which is known as the f-Square. As a rule of thumb, values higher than 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 represent small, medium and large f^2 effect sizes (Cohen, 1988). The results indicated that the value f^2 for Brand Image on Loyalty is 0,199 (medium effect), for CSR / FPF on Brand Image of 0.232 (medium effect), for CSR / FPF on Loyalty of 0,012 (small effect), for CSR / FPF on Satisfaction of 0,141 (small effect), for CSR / FPF on Trust of 0,287 (medium effect), for Satisfaction on Loyalty of 0,154 (medium effect) and finally of Trust on Loyalty of 0,002 (small effect).

4.4.3. Results of Hypotheses Testing

In this last stage, we will test all research hypotheses and analyse their direct effect and also understand the influence of the moderation effect.

4.4.3.1. Moderation Effect

Table 10 - Moderation Effect

Paths	Beta	T Statistics	P Values
RH8: CSR / FPF x Health consciousness -> Loyalty	0,080	2,053	0,040

This hypothesis aims to analyse the influence that the moderating effect of Health consciousness has on the relationship between the variables CSR/FPF and loyalty. The results indicated that Health consciousness strengthens the positive relationship between CSR / FPF and Loyalty ($\beta = 0.080$, $t = 2.053$, $P < 0.05$). This conclusion is also supported by the literature. tells us that health consciousness is what influences individuals to take healthy behaviours, eliminating threats that could possibly affect their health (Becker et al., 1977; Lee et al., 2014; Wardle & Steptoe, 2003). Therefore, this relationship between CSR/FPF and Loyalty is intensified by the fact that consumers are aware that by taking sustainable attitudes they will be positively impacting the environment, which will decrease possible threats to their health in the future.

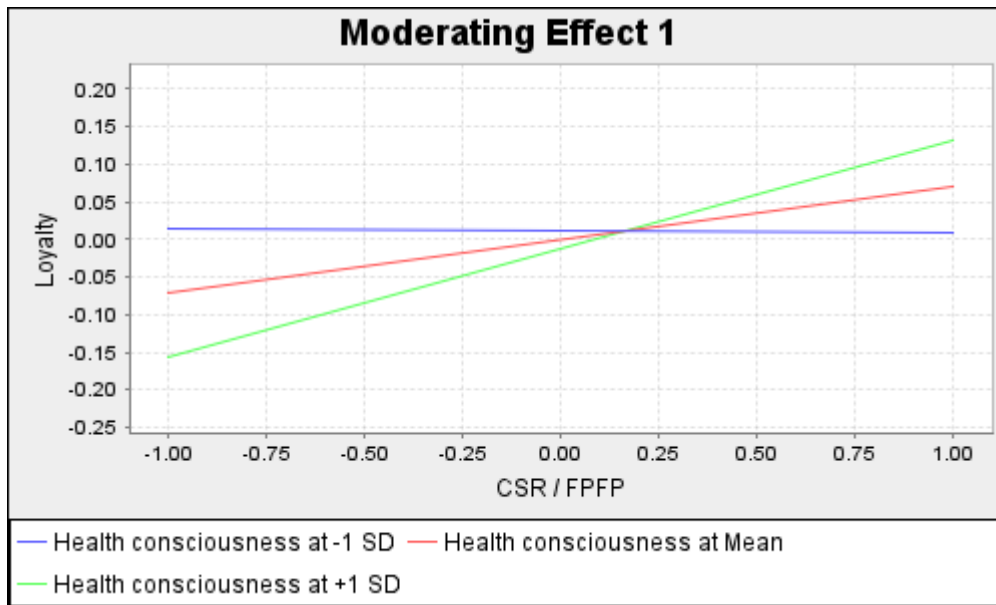


Figure 4 - Moderating effect of Health consciousness between CSR/FPFP and Loyalty

A simple slope was carried out in further analysis for the significant interaction terms to scrutinize the moderation effect (see Figure 4).

4.4.3.2. Direct Effects

Table 11 - Direct Effects

Paths	Beta	T Statistics	P Values
RH1: CSR / FFPF -> Loyalty	0,074	1,431	0,152
RH2: CSR / FFPF -> Brand Image	0,436	9,817	0,001
RH3: CSR / FFPF -> Satisfaction	0,351	7,808	0,001
RH4: CSR / FFPF -> Trust	0,472	10,617	0,001
RH5: Brand Image -> Loyalty	0,506	4,766	0,001
RH6: Satisfaction -> Loyalty	0,365	5,118	0,001
RH7: Trust -> Loyalty	-0,051	0,478	0,633
RH8: CSR / FFPF x Health consciousness -> Loyalty	0,080	2,053	0,040

Hypothesis 1 predicted that CSR/FPFP would have a positive impact on customer loyalty. That is, the willingness of consumers to consume regularly in certain hypermarkets would be greater if these practiced sustainable practices, such as the sale of free-packaging food products, thus meeting the scope of Jones (1997)' study. However, according to the statistical results, this statement is not entirely true in the food retail sector. The hypothesis

presents the following results $\beta = 0.074$; $t\text{-value} = 1.431$; $p = 0.152$. Therefore, being that T-statistic is less than 1.96 and $p > 0.01$, it leads to this effect being insignificant, contrary to what the literature presents. **RH1 is not supported.** Although much of the literature suggests a positive impact of CSR activities on loyalty (Jones, 1997; Khan & Fatma, 2019; Louis et al., 2021; Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013), there is also literature where it is proven that such practices may have no effect or, in some specific cases, even negative effects on the consumer's intention to repurchase (Pava & Krausz, 1996). This conclusion may be related to the importance that Portuguese consumers give to this type of sustainable practices in the food retail market. The imposition of these practices can be positive for the consumer, but this effect can not be strong enough to generate loyalty, so the relationship between these two variables is not significant enough. Another cause associated to this relationship may be the ease of transportation and the maintenance of quality. The existence of pre-packaged products in hypermarkets makes consumers avoid bringing their own packaging or having to pay for reusable packaging from the shop, thus facilitating the process of transporting the food product. On the other hand, another point that plays in favour of this point of view is quality assurance. The pre-packaged products come already packaged from the producing company, so it is necessary to have a quality guarantee from the company, since the function of this packaging is not only to facilitate the transport but also to protect the product.

In the case of **Hypothesis 2**, we can verify that it doesn't have the same behaviour as the previous hypothesis. With the values of $\beta = 0.436$; $t\text{-value} = 9.817$; $p < 0.01$, we can verify that this hypothesis is in accordance with the literature and is significant. **RH2 is supported.** Therefore, this study is in line with the aforementioned literature (Flores-Hernández et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2014; Moise et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2022) and proves that CSR practices, in this case FFPF, have a positive influence on a company's brand image.

Turning now to the analysis of **Hypothesis 3**, we see that there is a positive and significant effect between the CSR/FPFP and Satisfaction variables ($\beta = 0.351$; $t\text{-value} = 7.808$; $p < 0.01$). **RH3 is supported** Once again, this is in line with the literature (Park, 2019; Saeidi et al., 2015; Su et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2019) where it is stated that consumer satisfaction is not only dependent on the economic value that a company has to offer but also on the social performance of the company and its values.

Now testing **Hypothesis 4**, we clearly see that, as already mentioned, sustainable practices, especially FFPF, have strong effects on brand trust ($\beta = 0.472$; $t\text{-value} = 10.617$; $p < 0.01$).

RH4 is supported. As expected, the trust consumers have on a certain brand is clearly influenced by the sustainable practices practiced by brands. In fact, Martínez García de Leaniz and Rodríguez-del-Bosque (2013) even states that sustainable practices, especially environmental ones (such as FFPF), earn consumers' trust in its products and services. Which, given the statistical analysis, is a conclusion supported by this study.

Moving on to the impact that the variables have on loyalty, **Hypothesis 5** studies the effect of brand image on loyalty ($\beta = 0.506$; $t\text{-value} = 4.766$; $p < 0.01$). From the values presented, it can be seen that it is a significant impact. **RH5 is supported.** Therefore, we found that brand image is decisive in creating loyalty. In fact, this conclusion is in line with the literature. As mentioned before, consumer brand approval is the foundation for building customer loyalty. The research that has already been written on the issue indicates that brand image is essential for this approval and, as a result, becomes a significant factor in determining customer loyalty (Keller, 1993; Nguyen & Leblanc, 2001; Tu & Chang, 2012; Zhang, 2015).

From the data provided by the table, **Hypothesis 6** has the same behaviour as the previous ones ($\beta = 0.365$; $t\text{-value} = 5.118$; $p < 0.01$). **RH6 is supported.** This conclusion is also in line with what was previously mentioned in the literature review that satisfaction has significant effects on the creation of consumer loyalty and that loyalty is the ultimate goal of customer satisfaction (Fornell et al., 1996). This effect was already expected, as the fact that a satisfied customer is a necessary condition for the creation of loyalty, which creates a repurchase intention on consumers, as well as make them more prone to spread good word of mouth about the company (Ahearne et al., 2005; Bitner, 1992; Fornell et al., 1996; Goldsmith, 1997; Howat & Crilley, 2007; Osterhus, 1997).

Finally, we proceed to the analysis of **Hypothesis 7**. As can be seen from the values presented $\beta = -0.051$; $t\text{-value} = 0.478$; $p > 0.01$, the hypothesis does not meet the requirements to be valid. **RH7 is not supported.** This means that the effect of the trust on loyalty is not significant. Several authors have positively related these two variables, stating that the trust that a consumer has in a brand is represented by his belief that the products or services of this company will meet his expectations and satisfy his needs (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Gupta et al., 2019; Mabkhot et al., 2017; Moorman et al., 1992; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). However, this is not the case in this study. One of the possible explanations for this conclusion may be the profile of the Portuguese consumer. The fact that for the consumer trust is no longer something differentiating, that it is something acquired in all hypermarkets and, therefore, is not a cause for loyalty creation.

Table 12 – Summary of Research Hypotheses validation

Hypotheses	Validation
RH1: CSR practice FPFPP has a positive impact on Customer Loyalty	Not Supported
RH2: CSR practice FPFPP has a positive impact on Brand Image.	Supported
RH3: CSR practice FPFPP has a positive impact on Customer Satisfaction.	Supported
RH4: CSR practice FPFPP has a positive impact on Brand Trust.	Supported
RH5: Brand Image has a positive impact on customer loyalty.	Supported
RH6: Satisfaction has a positive impact on loyalty.	Supported
RH7: Brand Trust has a positive influence on Customer Loyalty.	Not Supported
RH8: health consciousness positively moderates the effect of CSR/FPFPP on Loyalty.	Supported

5. Conclusion

The last chapter aims to draw the final considerations on what was found about the influence that the practice of FPDF has on consumer loyalty, building a model with the variables CSR/FPDF, Loyalty, Satisfaction, Brand Image and Trust, being the first relationship moderated by the variable Health Consciousness. We will start by mentioning the main findings of the study, going on to indicate the theoretical and empirical contributions and finally mention the major limitations found and the recommendations for future research.

5.1 Main Findings

Loyalty and corporate sustainability are themes that are gaining importance in several sectors. The business world has evolved and changed its vision, focusing much more on the consumer and in the trends that affect them (Leisinger, 2015). The food retail sector is no exception and, therefore, we decided to study a possible relationship between these two topics, focusing on the specific practice of selling free-packaged food products in supermarkets and the influence that this practice may have on the consumer.

According to the existing literature on the subjects, namely CSR and Loyalty, there is an intimate relationship between these two variables. As already mentioned, there are several studies defending the existence of a significant effect between CSR and loyalty (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). However, one of the most significant findings of this study is exactly to contradict this "certainty" brought by other researches. A total of 455 answers were collected to a questionnaire produced on the subject which concluded that in the food retail sector the sustainable practice of selling free-packaged food products has no direct effect on consumer loyalty. On the other hand, although there is no direct effect between these variables, the CSR/FPDF variable is related to Satisfaction and Brand image, which, in turn, are related to loyalty.

Once again, contrary to what the literature suggests, a negative and insignificant relationship was found between the Trust variable and loyalty. The literature suggests that trust plays a crucial role in developing relationships between consumers and brands (Ebrahim, 2020), which later becomes an indispensable condition for creating loyalty. However, through the hypothesis test performed, we conclude that these conclusions do not apply to the Portuguese adult consumer in the food retail sector.

In addition to the above, it is worth mentioning the moderating role that the health consciousness variable played in the relationship between the FPDF practice and the Loyalty variable. A positive effect was found that intensifies the relationship between these variables, which may describe the way of thinking and acting of the Portuguese consumer in this sector.

Finally, several hypotheses previously tested by other authors were also confirmed, namely the relationship between CSR practices and satisfaction, brand image and trust: and also the relationship between brand image and satisfaction with loyalty.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study aims to complement the existing literature on the effects that CSR practices may have on consumer loyalty, namely by focusing on the specific practice of selling free-packaged food products and by studying this relationship in the Portuguese food retail market.

Currently, there are gaps in the literature on CSR that address the effects that certain practices have on consumers. Therefore, we chose a practice that has been growing in recent years to be studied and to understand how it influences Portuguese consumers. As noted earlier, the literature states that a business that engages in responsible and sustainable business practices will have a higher level of customer dedication and repurchase rate (Jones, 1997). However, as it was possible to test, these conclusions do not apply to all practices, to understand this it was necessary to take the general literature on CSR and narrow it down to a specific practice. The focus on this specific practice allows us to understand how the consumer reacts to this type of practice and also for hypermarkets to understand if it is worth investing in these trends or, on the other hand, if it is effectively worth investing in other areas that more effectively improve their brand image and customer satisfaction, which are directly related to creating consumer loyalty.

Besides this new relationship, we also added a moderating effect related to Health Consciousness to understand how consumer habits and way of thinking would influence loyalty to a particular brand, something that had never been introduced in relationships with these variables. According to Ritter et al. (2015); Yadav and Pathak (2016), people who have a higher level of health consciousness are more likely to buy eco-friendly products. Therefore, it made sense to combine this FPDF practice with this moderating effect. It was found that it indeed strengthens the relationship between the practice and consumer loyalty.

5.3 Empirical Contributions

This study offers great inputs for all stakeholders involved in the food retail sector. Although the direct relationship between CSR/FPFP and loyalty was not verified, hypermarkets should not give up on implementing this type of practice. Although this specific practice is not related to loyalty, nothing prevents others from being. And, therefore, it would be a mistake to judge all CSR measures as a whole based only on the case of FPFP. Moreover, hypermarkets should also understand that although this relationship has not been proven, others have. Namely, the relationship between Brand Image and Satisfaction, so they should invest in activities and actions that promote these variables, so that they can have a higher impact on loyalty.

Since hypermarkets do not have much incentive to develop this practice, someone to regulate the use of packaging is needed. Although it is not advantageous for the hypermarkets, it is a worldwide environmental problem and, therefore, it is the duty of the legislative bodies to intervene and launch legislation that encourages and forces the "de-plastification". If there is no such will on the part of legislative bodies, then it will also be the job of environmental organisations to create the necessary pressure for this to happen.

Consumers are also a group that stands to gain from the imposition of this practice. Besides the environmental benefits that will be enjoyed in the future, with the imposition of this practice there is a greater proximity between the consumer and the product. It is possible that the consumer directly understands the quality of the product, besides being a practice that encourages the consumption of healthier food products.

Finally, there is also a role for producers. They should also take an interest in starting to reduce the use of packaging in food products. The truth is that besides the environmental benefits, with the absence of packaging, production and transport costs would decrease and, ultimately, producers would only benefit from this practice.

5.4 Limitations and future research directions

Obviously, all studies have limitations and, as such, this one would be no exception. One of the major limitations of this study was the fact that a non-probabilistic population was used, which may have as a consequence, a poor representativeness of the population and the extrapolation of the results (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, as a suggestion for future studies, a probabilistic data collection is recommended in order to better compare the validity of the data.

Another suggestion for future studies is related to the consideration of new variables that impact loyalty, such as brand awareness or product quality. It would be interesting to understand if the impacts are maintained and how the entry of these new variables in the model could influence the final conclusion.

In addition to new variables, as mentioned earlier, there is the likelihood that the conclusion drawn for this practice is not representative of other CSR practices. Therefore, it is advisable that this kind of studies be done with other practices, also considering the impact of other measures that the hypermarket has in place and that also influence loyalty, such as a loyalty card.

Finally, only the direct effects between the variables were studied in this study. As previously verified, there is no direct relationship between CSR/FPF and loyalty. However, the truth is that CSR/FPF may also influence loyalty indirectly. In future studies, we suggest studying these indirect effects to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

-Introduction

Produtos alimentares não embalados

Este estudo está a ser desenvolvido no âmbito de uma dissertação final do Mestrado em Economia da Empresa e da Estratégia da Faculdade de Economia da Universidade do Porto, e visa analisar o papel que a venda de produtos alimentares não embalados desempenha na fidelização do consumidor no setor do retalho alimentar português.

Produtos alimentares não embalados são alimentos vendidos tendo em conta o seu peso, preparados no ponto de venda em embalagens simplificadas fornecidas pelo próprio estabelecimento. Assim, o principal foco do presente inquérito recai sobre produtos alimentares que podem ser vendidos pré-embalados ou não embalados (por exemplo: legumes, frutas, carne, peixe fresco, frutos secos, pão, peixe congelado, etc).

Este estudo destina-se a adultos residentes em Portugal, compradores regulares de produtos alimentares em supermercados e hipermercados e o preenchimento deste questionário tem uma duração aproximada de 6 minutos.

Não há respostas certas ou erradas às questões colocadas, pelo que lhe pedia apenas as suas opiniões e respostas sinceras.

A sua participação é totalmente voluntária, anónima, confidencial. Os dados serão analisados de forma agregada e para fins científicos pelo que, em nenhum momento, são pedidas informações que permitam identificar os inquiridos.

Para esclarecimentos adicionais, estou ao dispor através do seguinte e-mail: up201603536@up.pt

Muito Obrigado,

Hugo Miranda (917951869)

- Section 1: Personal Data

Confirmando que pretendo participar neste estudo. A minha participação é voluntária, e autorizo a utilização dos dados da forma descrita. *

- Sim
- Não

Costumo fazer compras de produtos alimentares em supermercados ou hipermercados. *

- Sim
- Não

Tenho mais de 17 anos *

- Sim
- Não

Perfil dos participantes

Esta informação é necessária apenas para a caracterização da amostra

Género: *

- Masculino
- Feminino
- Outro

Idade *

Nível máximo de educação que completou *

- Ensino Básico
- Ensino Secundário
- Licenciatura ou bacharelato
- Mestrado ou pós-graduação
- Doutoramento
- Outra: _____

Ocupação Profissional: *

- Apenas estuda
- Trabalha por conta de outrém
- Trabalha por conta própria
- Reformado, desempregado, trabalho doméstico ou similar

- Section 2: Preference for free-packaging food products

Seção 2 de 10

Produtos não embalados

Produtos alimentares não embalados são alimentos vendidos tendo em conta o seu peso, preparados no ponto de venda em embalagens simplificadas fornecidas pelo próprio estabelecimento. Assim, o principal foco do presente inquérito recai sobre produtos alimentares que podem ser vendidos pré-embalados e não embalado (por exemplo: legumes, frutas, carne, peixe fresco, frutos secos, pão, peixe congelado, etc).

Com que frequência compra produtos alimentares pré-embalados? *

1 2 3 4 5

Nunca Sempre

Quando o produto alimentar que pretende adquirir está disponível pré-embalado e não embalado, com que frequência opta pelo produto não embalado? *

1 2 3 4 5

Nunca Sempre

- Section 3: Hypermarket preference

Seção 3 de 10

Escolha de um supermercado ou hipermercado ✕ ⋮

Descrição (opcional)

⋮

Por favor indique um supermercado ou hipermercado que habitualmente utilize. Se utiliza vários, por favor escolha o que use mais frequentemente. *

Aldi

Auchan

Continente

Froiz

Lidl

Mercadona

Minipreço

Pingo Doce

Outra opção...

Com que frequência vai a este supermercado ou hipermercado? *

Menos de uma vez por mês

1 vez por mês

2-3 vezes por mês

Uma vez por semana

2-3 vezes por semana

Mais de 3 vezes por semana

- Section 4: Loyalty

Seção 4 de 10

Sobre o supermercado ou hipermercado que escolheu ✕ ⋮

Considerando o supermercado ou hipermercado que indicou anteriormente, indique o grau de concordância com as seguintes afirmações, de 1-Discordo totalmente a 5-Concordo totalmente.

Tenho como prioridade fazer compras neste hipermercado. *

1 2 3 4 5

Discordo Totalmente Concordo plenamente

Recomendo aos meus amigos que façam compras neste hipermercado. *

1 2 3 4 5

Discordo Totalmente Concordo plenamente

Prefiro os produtos vendidos por este hipermercado aos de qualquer outro. *

1 2 3 4 5

Discordo Totalmente Concordo plenamente

Gosto mais do serviço oferecido por este hipermercado do que por qualquer outro hipermercado. *

1 2 3 4 5

Discordo Totalmente Concordo plenamente

Vou continuar a comprar neste hipermercado. *

1 2 3 4 5

Discordo Totalmente Concordo plenamente

- Section 5: Satisfaction

Secção 5 de 10

Sobre o supermercado ou hipermercado que escolheu

Considerando o supermercado ou hipermercado que indicou anteriormente, indique o grau de concordância com as seguintes afirmações, de 1-Discordo totalmente a 5-Concordo totalmente.

O seu nível de satisfação global com os serviços deste hipermercado é elevado. *

1 2 3 4 5

Discordo totalmente Concordo totalmente

Este hipermercado corresponde às minhas expectativas. *

1 2 3 4 5

Discordo Totalmente Concordo plenamente

A sua decisão de escolher este hipermercado foi uma boa decisão. *

1 2 3 4 5

Discordo Totalmente Concordo plenamente

- Section 6: Brand Image

Os produtos deste hipermercado têm uma alta qualidade. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Os produtos deste hipermercado têm melhores características do que os concorrentes. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Os produtos dos concorrentes são normalmente mais baratos. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

A marca do hipermercado é boa. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

A marca do hipermercado tem uma personalidade que se distingue das marcas da concorrência. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

É uma marca de hipermercados que não desilude os seus clientes. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

- Section 7: Health consciousness

Escolho cuidadosamente os alimentos para assegurar uma boa saúde. *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Vejo-me como um consumidor preocupado com a saúde. *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Penso frequentemente em questões de saúde. *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Eu sou o que eu como. *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Prefiro alimentos naturais e não transformados. *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Compro alimentos que ajudam a manter o meu peso e aparência. *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Em comparação com outras pessoas da minha idade, estou de melhor saúde. *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

- Section 8: Trust

Este hipermercado dá-me uma sensação de segurança. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Eu confio na qualidade deste hipermercado. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Este hipermercado é uma garantia de qualidade. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Este hipermercado está interessado nos seus clientes. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Este hipermercado é honesto com os seus clientes. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Sinto confiança na marca deste hipermercado. *

	1	2	3	4	5			
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>			Concordo plenamente

- Section 9: CSR/FPFP

Este hipermercado está empenhado na venda de produtos alimentares não embalados. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Este hipermercado tem maior oferta de produtos alimentares não embalados em comparação * com os seus concorrentes.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Este hipermercado faz um esforço claro para evitar os alimentos pré-embalados. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Este hipermercado destaca-se pela venda de produtos alimentares não embalados. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

Este hipermercado é uma referência quando se trata da venda de produtos alimentares não embalados. *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Discordo Totalmente	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Concordo plenamente

FACULDADE DE ECONOMIA

