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## GREEN CONSUMERS IN THE COVID-19 ERA: WHAT IMPACTS ON THEIR CONSUMPTION? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF MOROCCAN CONSUMERS

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### INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 1960s, the ethical side of consumption, known as responsible consumption, began to take hold. According to Giannelloni (1998), “any consumption will have several consequences on the environment, and taking this into consideration in one’s consumption decision reveals a worry for the environment”. Thus, the consumer, through the act of consumption, reflects his desire to take into consideration the perceived positive impact on the whole society. (François-Lecompte and Valette-Florence, 2006).

This commitment is the origin of the “green consumer”, who expresses his ecological convictions through his consumption, which is transformed into responsible behaviour (Gendron et al., 2004). The concept of the green consumer is more valued. This notion began to intrigue researchers and it is known by many names, such as: the socially conscious consumer (Anderson and Cunningham, 1972; Webster, 1975); the ecologically responsible consumer (Anderson, Henion and Cox, 1974); the socially responsible consumer (Antil, 1984); the environmentally conscious consumer (Roper

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Organisation, 1992; Roberts, 1996); and the ecologically concerned consumer (Balderjahn, 1998). Indeed, the names are different according to the vision of each author and their axis of study which varies in perception, attitude, conative and affective behaviour or cognitive reference to personal beliefs and convictions.

Nowadays, the green consumer shows his conviction that the environment should be taken into account at the level of the different aspects of his life that were turned upside down by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019.

Having considered it to be the greatest pandemic after the Spanish flu at the beginning of the 20th century, some countries resorted to drastic containment measures such as the confinement in order to limit the spread of the virus. This later had a significant impact on energy consumption by reducing the use of gas, electricity etc. But also, by the change in the consumption habits of individuals who have limited themselves to necessities.

In this article we aim at understanding the changes that have modified green consumption habits during the period of the pandemic related crisis. Thus, the issue we raise takes on its full meaning and is presented as follows: “What is the impact of the COVID-19 health crisis on green consumption in Morocco?”

In order to answer this question, we will first present a review of the literature in order to demystify the key concepts of our article. Then, we will present the research methodology as well as the results of our qualitative study, which examined the behaviour of 21 Moroccan green consumers.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE GREEN CONSUMER APPROACH

Since the concept of the “green consumer” was born, various authors have tried to identify it and understand its behavioural routing. Several writings appear in this register, but we will limit ourselves to the behaviour of the green consumer satisfying demographic, socioeconomic and lifestyle criteria.

During the 1970s, two main figures of the green consumer appeared. Firstly, Anderson and Cunningham (1972) show the portrait of a middle-aged consumer: an executive with an unclear, cosmopolitan, unimaginative and non-conservative opinion. Secondly, Webster (1975) shows the portrait of a woman with a comfortable income and belonging to the middle-upper class. This consumer has opted for a different behaviour from her peers, without judgment of values or criticism of the world around her.

In the mid-1980s, Antil (1984), presented the profile of an urban consumer, more committed to the good of his community through the various social activities he

undertook. This author belongs to the middle class and does not consider himself an influential person despite his self-confidence.

Later, Schwepker and Cornwell (1991) present a consumer belonging to an upper-middle or even upper social class, with higher education and having a high income. On the other hand, Roberts (1996) describes the green consumer as a middle-aged woman who wants to improve society and has very good education.

During the 2000s, many authors (Makatouni, 2002; Zanolì and Naspètti, 2002; Fotopoulos, Krystallis and Ness, 2003) pointed out that the green consumer has a “medium” to “high” socio-economic status (education, income and occupation level) and tends more towards the consumption of values.

Also, different values appear in the literature:

- Altruism, through relationships with others and commitment to closed people and the community (Pontier and Sirieix, 2003; Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001);
- The value of ecology by adopting the values of sustainable development (Hill and Lynchehaun, 2002);
- The value of universalism through the desire to protect the environment in which we live (Wandel and Bugge, 1997; Soler et Al., 2002; Sylvander, 1999; Kréziak, 1998; Follows and Jobber, 2000; Hill and Lynchehaun, 2002);
- The value of volunteering through participation in improving community well-being (Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001; Wong, 2004);
- The value of spirituality through the search for universal harmony (Makatouni, 2002; Zanolì and Naspètti, 2002; Fotopoulos, Krystallis and Ness, 2003).

Regarding the Moroccan consumer, various studies have looked at the values linked to responsible consumption. For Ladraa et Berrda (2021), the Moroccan consumer assigns great importance to environmental motivations, something that puts “health” and “environmental protection” at the centre of their aspirations. Benchekroun and Benjelloun Andaloussi (2018) also highlight this aspect. Indeed, Moroccan consumers are influenced by their belief in the benefits of green products and by the desire for environmental protection.

Thus, the green consumer displays a diversified profile. However, the representations mentioned are cosmopolitan portraits and do not make it possible to establish a particular profile of a green consumer (Ladraa, 2019).

## 2. GREEN CONSUMPTION DURING THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic represented a real change in consumption. For Cohen (2020), this health crisis launched a real-time experiment in reducing our consumption, starting with changing social practices imposed by governments around the world.

According to an Ernst & Young study based on a survey of 5,000 consumers in several countries in April 2020, 42% of consumers aged between 18 and 44 confirmed that their consumption habits had fundamentally changed due to the pandemic.

In Morocco, an online study of 907 consumers was conducted by Research & Quality Consulting office in May 2020. It reveals that 47% of consumers bought more products in larger quantities than usual, 50% of these concerned cleaning products.

The consumer was therefore confronted with a disorder caused by the announcement of the restrictive measures, and he had to adapt his lifestyle and consumption to it.

For Yi and Baumgartner (2004), there are eight strategies that the consumer adopts when he faces a stressful situation or one that involves fear, anger and disappointment:

- Planned resolution of the problem;
- The confrontation;
- Seeking social support;
- Mental disengagement;
- Behavioural disengagement;
- Positive reinterpretation;
- Self-control;
- Problem acceptance.

Also, the consumer is either focused on managing the problem: planned resolution of the problem and confrontation or he takes refuge in his emotions by trying to understand and regulate them: moral disengagement, behavioural disengagement, self-control, problem acceptance (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1996).

Indeed, with the pandemic, new coping practices have emerged taking into account physical and mental health, the environment and economic issues such as green consumption and slow living. The first aims to choose, use, dispose of or process products consistently, decently and fairly for oneself, for people and for the environment (Kanu, 2020). The second, namely the slow living lifestyle, highlights sustainability and avoiding the constraints of modern civilisation and the negative consequences of globalisation. It is linked to the “zero waste” approach, which consists of reducing the production of waste, limiting consumption and increasing the recycling of objects (for example by repairing them). Living according to the 5Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle, Rot (Klimczak and Ponikowska, 2016).

However, and due to the rare studies carried out on the subject, we were unable to collect more data on green consumption during the period of health crisis in Morocco.

### 3. EMPIRICAL STUDY

In this empirical part, we will start by presenting the research methodology adopted, which is based on a qualitative approach with the use of an interview guide in a survey of a sample of 21 persons. Then we will expose the principal results of our study.

#### 3.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We find that a qualitative approach via an exploratory method is the best way to get close to consumers so that we can answer our questions, which is aimed at understanding the impact of the COVID-19 on the behaviour of the green consumer.

Also, we opted for semi-directive interviews in order to structure the meeting and give sufficient freedom to the interviewee to express his point of view.

The interview guide used is structured around two main sub-themes:

- a) Report on green consumption, and
- b) Green consumption and COVID-19.

The two themes were developed according to the funnel logic, presenting an introduction by the first sub-theme and specifying at the level of the second question directly related to our problem.

A sample of 21 people was needed to carry out our study. Our sample consists of 12 women and 9 men from different Moroccan cities (Casablanca, Rabat, Settat, Marrakech, El Jadida, Fes and Tangier).

Our interviews were conducted on the phone from 10 to 23 June 2022. In order to recruit our interviewees, we used the Facebook platform by posting announcements to Moroccan consumer community groups. This approach allowed us to target respondents from different cities and backgrounds.

Once the person expressed interest in the study, we asked our first filter question and when they were familiar with the notion of “green consumption”, we asked for the possibility of calling them and recording the interview. Empirical saturation began to be reached from the 18th interview; the addition of three more interviews was necessary to ensure this.

Regarding the processing of our results, our interviews were transcribed manually and we opted for Content Analysis. This technique makes it possible to analyse

the interviewees' answers in an objective manner based on the transcription. It gives the possibility of commenting the results (the point of view of the interviewees) in accordance with the questions asked in the survey. It carries out a diagnosis of the information analysed and classifies it by identifying the pluses and minuses, the strong points and the weak points, the verified or non-validated hypotheses (Buber, Gadner, Richards, 2004).

### 3.1.1. RELATION WITH GREEN CONSUMPTION

We introduced our general theme "Relation with green consumption", by asking the respondents if they were familiar with green consumption before asking their opinion on its evolution in Morocco. This first question allowed us to continue the interviews only with people who knew the concept. According to the answers to this filter question, all our respondents were indeed familiar with this notion and qualified it as "committed" (6), "responsible" (15) and following the principles of "sustainable development" (20).

As far as its development in Morocco is concerned, five of our respondents find that it is a return to "Beldi" consumption patterns rather than an actual development. These later join the rest of our respondents who find that this niche is developing well and that new brands are interested in it by launching new ranges or by having specialised brands: "More and more stores are opening in the big cities and offer a wide choice of committed, organic and healthy products". Respondent 4 said: "When I returned from abroad after my studies a few years ago, the offer was low, now it is expanding considerably".

Answering the question: "Do you consider yourself to be a green consumer?", 15 of our interviewees agreed: "Yes, I have been one for a few years now because I was starting to worry about the environment and my health as well." [Respondent 20] The rest of the respondents say they are committed when necessary and above all according to their means, something that denotes how green consumption is present in their daily lives: "Being a green consumer is not easy for me it is not applicable to all aspects of my life. I try to respect the environment while following the logistical and financial requirements." [Respondent 12]

Also, four interviewees highlight that green consumption is not just a simple consumption of everyday products but a philosophy that should be adopted: "It is not enough to consume labelled products or to buy from stores that display a green colour; you also have to pay attention to your daily lifestyle, to the ingredients of the products consumed, to recycling etc. (...) it's a concept of consumption rather than a simple lifestyle." [Respondent 19]

The analysis of this part shows that the Moroccan consumer is familiar with green consumption, which is developing in Morocco slowly but for sure. This consumption is therefore linked, according to our interviewees, to the preservation of health and the environment. However, this lack of commitment to daily consumption is pointed out by financial and logistical constraints.

It is also important to point out that some respondents mention that the green consumption must be a lifestyle and not a periodic consumption.

### 3.1.2. COVID 19 AND GREEN CONSUMPTION

The second part of our interview guide focuses on the relationship between the pandemic and green consumption. All our interviewees were unanimous in assessing the impact of the pandemic on their consumption. Some (12 respondents) mentioned a return to basic necessities: “We were not able to maintain the same level of consumption; we only kept the essential of our necessities.” [Respondent 2] The rest evoked the rebalancing of consumption: “I find that this pandemic has prompted us to review our consumption and rebalance it.” [Respondent 9]; “I ate better, I returned to sport, I consumed fewer superfluous products and I rationalised my expenses. The confinement did not only cause inconvenience.” [Respondent 5]

Concerning the impact of the pandemic on green consumption and the changes that it caused, 13 interviewees affirm that they have tried to keep the same consumption as before the confinement but it was not possible: “Sometimes, we could not find certain products, especially food, but I noticed the development of individuals who sell and deliver organic products. For me it is not only commercial activity but it is part of a community spirit.” [Respondent 8]

The rest of our interviewees find that the pandemic has only confirmed the need to maintain good consumption habits: “It opened my eyes to different elements, it is not enough to consume but to consume efficiently and sustainably.” [Respondent 2]

Regarding the major changes, six respondents say that it is thanks to this crisis that they have had to rethink their consumption: “For me, confinement and the pandemic in general are an awareness. I was not specifically a committed consumer, but the change that I noticed in a few months of rest for the environment - the air, the fauna and flora - people have no more excuses for not repairing what they have caused and this requires changing consumption habits. At least I feel able to act at my level.” [Respondent 17] The other interviewees talk about changing consumption habits but without introducing a profound change.

Finally, in response to the issue of maintaining the same changes even after the pandemic, all our respondents are unanimous in expressing the opinion about the

persistence of their green consumption habits: “I kept the same habits because it became necessary. This situation has taught us that it is absolutely necessary to work for our and others’ wellbeing.” [Respondent 10]

Our analysis demonstrates a significant impact of the pandemic on the Moroccan green consumers. Several respondents reveal that it is a more rational consumption focused on essentials and basic necessities. Others refer to the awareness of the importance of the environment wellbeing.

Indeed, this health crisis has encouraged people to change their behaviour and adopt a more committed posture towards the environment. This corroborates what we found in the literature, which resonates the values of ecology through the adoption of sustainable development principles (Hill and Lyncheaun, 2002) and that of universalism through the desire to protect the environment that surrounds us. (Wandel and Bugge, 1997; Soler and Al., 2002; Sylvander, 1999; Kréziak, 1998; Follows and Jobber, 2000; Young and Al., 2000; Hill and Lyncheaun, 2002).

Also, two important variables emerged during our interviews: first, the desire to improve individual and collective well-being (Codron and al, 2002; Ferran, 2003), which is increasingly felt at the level of the Moroccan context and the altruism, which denotes the willingness of consumers to commit to their community and their personal circle (Pontier and Sirieix, 2003; Dobscha and Ozanne, 2001).

Also, we noticed that this consumption is also synonymous with encouraging the locals and maintaining the effort to commit to the environment and the community.

## CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic was a difficult time for the world but it has also provided fertile ground for behavioural research in Marketing. The changes that took place have impacted the behavioural but also the psychological side of the consumer. Thus, we sought to explore the changes in green consumption in Morocco during this period.

In Morocco, the studies on this subject are not extensive, and we found it wise to start our research with an exploratory study that targeted 21 consumers in different cities based on a semi-directional interview.

We mainly observed a return to essentials through consumption that has been reduced to the necessary and the utilitarian as well as a behavioural transformation that highlighted the environmental commitment of these consumers. The desire to take the environment, and individual and collective wellbeing into account was felt throughout our discussions.



Also, the desire to promote local products and focus more on consumption that respects the environment is the result of the reflection of these consumers, which grew during the lockdown period.

To conclude, it is important to highlight some limitations of our study; the qualitative nature of our research does not allow us to generalise our results. Having said that, expanding the sample size and addressing the issue from a quantitative perspective would give a new dimension to this study.

## APPENDIX

### Interview guide

First and second Name: _____
Function: _____
Age: _____
City: _____

#### 1. Relation with green consumption

Filter question: Are you familiar with green consumption?

In your opinion, how is green consumption developing in Morocco?

Do you consider yourself a green consumer?

How does this affect your consumption?

#### 2. Green consumption and COVID-19

Generally speaking, has the pandemic impacted your consumption?

And your green consumption? Have you kept the same level of consumption during the pandemic?

What were the main changes you noticed in your green consumption?

Did you keep the same habits even after the pandemic restrictions were lifted?

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### Abstract

Climate change and the current major preoccupation with preserving one's health and body have largely contributed to changing consumer behaviour, which has helped to promote responsible consumption.

This consumption has also been influenced by the COVID-19 crisis, which has not only troubled the balance of the economic spheres but has also changed the approach of the green consumption.

The objective of this article is to explore the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the consumption of the Moroccan green consumer through a qualitative study. The study analyses the behaviour of 21 consumers.

**Keywords:** green consumer, environmental commitment, responsible consumption, COVID-19

## ZIELONI KONSUMENTCI W ERZE COVID-19: CO WPŁYWA NA ICH KONSUMPCJĘ? EKSPLANACYJNE BADANIE MAROKAŃSKICH KONSUMENTÓW

### Streszczenie

Zmiany klimatyczne oraz współczesna wielka troska o ochronę zdrowia i ciała znacznie przyczyniły się do zmiany zachowania konsumentów, co pomogło promować odpowiedzialną konsumpcję.

Na taką konsumpcję wywarł również wpływ kryzys związany z pandemią COVID-19, który nie tylko zakłócił równowagę w sferze gospodarczej ale również zmienił podejście do zielonej konsumpcji.

Artykuł ma na celu zbadanie wpływu kryzysu wywołanego pandemią COVID-19 na konsumpcję marokańskiego zielonego konsumenta przy zastosowaniu badania jakościowego analizującego zachowania 21 respondentów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zielony konsument, zaangażowanie środowiskowe, odpowiedzialna konsumpcja, COVID-19

#### Cytuj jako:

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