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Impact of Responsibility on Consumer's Purchasing Decisions

Case Ecosto

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Thesis abstract

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Consuming and ethical business are current topics in today's world. The questions of right and wrong and how to be a responsible consumer are considered. Individuals are more aware of their impact on the external world. This can be seen in the increase of ethically produced products and the popularity of being "green".

Purpose of this thesis is to find out how much responsibility has an impact on consumer's purchasing decisions and how can Ecosto improve their product selection and marketing communications. This thesis is made for Ecosto, an online store highlighting green values. The research investigates consumer behavior among Ecosto's customers and how important green values are when it comes to making purchasing decisions.

Theoretical framework covers essential concepts that are handled in this study. Sustainability, responsibility, consuming and consumer behavior are the main focus on the theory. The empirical framework consists of the study and analysis. A mixed research method was used in the study and it was implemented by a phone interview. The analysis also includes development proposal improving marketing communications and product range.

Keywords: sustainability, responsibility, consumer behavior, consuming

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Kulutus ja eettinen liiketoiminta ovat ajankohtaisia aiheita nykypäivänä. Kysymykset oikeasta ja väärästä ja kuinka kuluttaa vastuullisesti ovat punninnassa. Yksilöt ovat tietoisempia heidän vaikutuksestaan ympäröivään maailmaan. Tämän voi nähdä eettisesti tuotettujen tuotteiden kasvussa ja vihreiden elämäntapojen suosioista.

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on selvittää vastuullisuuden vaikutusta kuluttajan ostopäätöksiin ja kuinka Ecosto voi kehittää markkinointiviestintää ja tuotevalikoimaansa. Tämä opinnäytetyö on tehty toteutuksena verkkokauppa Ecostolle, joka korostaa ympäristöarvoja. Tutkimus selvittää millaista kuluttajakäyttäytyminen on Ecoston asiakkaiden keskuudessa ja kuinka tärkeitä ympäristöarvot ovat ostopäätösten yhteydessä.

Teoreettinen osa tarkastelee olennaiset käsitteet joita tutkimus pitää sisällään. Kestävä kehitys, vastuullisuus, kulutus ja kuluttajakäyttäytyminen ovat teorian keskipisteenä. Empiirinen osa taas sisältää tutkimuksen ja sen analyysin. Tutkimuksessa on käytetty yhdistettyä tutkimusmenetelmää ja tutkimus on toteutettu puhelinhaastattelun muodossa. Analyysi sisältää myös kehitysehdotukset markkinointiviestintään ja tuotevalikoimaan liittyen.

Asiasanat: kestävä kehitys, vastuullisuus, kuluttajakäyttäytyminen, kulutus

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Terms and Abbreviations

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
Millennial	Generation born between 1980 and 2000
Ecological Footprint	A tool to measure human demand on nature
TBL	Triple Bottom Line

Tables, Figures and Pictures

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1 Introduction

This chapter explains the aim, research methods and the structure of this thesis. Sustainable development has become widely spoken topic within the society. This is not a trending topic any longer but a topic that is seized into our everyday life. Attitudes towards our actions have changed and so have business attitudes. The author aims to carry a research that helps the employer to understand their customers better and improve their marketing communications and product range through that.

1.1 Aim of this thesis

This thesis will take closer look into sustainability, responsible consuming, consumer behavior and what the ethics behind buying decisions are. Purpose of this thesis is to help Ecosto to improve their product selection and marketing communications. The Aim is to find out what kind of impact responsibility has to Ecosto's customers and what kind of decisions they make based on their values. Research will be implemented by interviewing Ecosto's regular customers. The author is already familiar with the company's operations, values and business by training period length of five months.

This topic is current in today's business world. Sustainability and consuming are as a point of discussion and there are a lot of discussions about the right ways to act and do business. This topic is not only accentuated in business but also in politics. Current state of the planet causes concern and to be able to continue to live the same way there are matters that need to be taken under closer observation and values reconsidered. Consuming is an important way to show and state one's opinions. Purchasing decisions have large effects on the worlds. Ethics, values and attitudes shape the market and consumers have a greater impact on the environment that can be thought.

With provided research the author aims to discover characteristics behind Ecosto's customers and their purchasing decisions.

The author aims to answer to following questions:

1. What effects on consumers' purchasing decisions?
2. What can be concluded from Ecosto's regular customers' behavior?
3. How can Ecosto improve based on gathered data?

1.2 Research Methods

The author has chosen mixed research method that allows to understand Ecosto's customers by deeper means. In addition the employer wants to approach their customers with these methods as well. Target group for the survey is a sample from Ecosto's regular customers. Interview is the length of 9 questions and held on March 2018. The questions are mainly open, this way answers will not be too defined. Target group will be reached via e-mail and phone. Participants will receive a gift card to the online store as an expression of gratitude.

Target group is regular customers because they have experience from the website, products and product information. With this experience they have defined opinions about the company they have a reason why they order regularly from the website.

Purpose of the study is to be descriptive and focus on the main characteristics of Ecosto's customers' behavior. Research helps Ecosto to understand their customers more and use that knowledge to improve their business.

1.3 Research limitation

Because this topic is very wide and number of pages limited in this thesis, theory part will be confined. Theory focuses on the main idea around the concepts and the overview but does not observe it too deeply. Research was limited in the point of view of the interview too. Sample was limited because the target group was contacted via phone and the group was defined to regular customers.

2 SUSTAINABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN BUSINESS AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Aim of this chapter is to put the research problem into perspective in order to understand concepts handled. This theoretical chapter will review related literature and explain sustainability, responsibility and consumer behavior. Different books, international articles and online publications are used to gather needed information. This chapter helps to understand the aspects of the empirical part of this thesis. This part starts by introducing the concepts of sustainability and responsibility. Later on an approach on consuming and consumer behavior follows.

By reviewing the literature and explaining the concepts of sustainability, responsibility, consumer behavior and consuming the research problem can be put into a correct angle. With this part of the thesis the author proves that they are capable to carry out research and provide professional overview of the topics handled.

2.1 Sustainability and responsibility as concepts

Kuronen states in her blog that before any actual changes can be made in the world and be successful on creating sustainable world that, it is needed to change the culture and to do that, individuals need to change the way of thinking. Only this way it is possible to make changes. She also highlights the importance of education on this matter. Schools should educate students and companies their employees about nutrition, sustainable lifestyle, consuming, being responsible and that people are depended on the earth. Sustainability and responsibility walk hand in hand. Businesses and consumers are the key responsible on the state of the world.

2.1.1 Sustainability

There are many statements and theories of what sustainability is and how can it be described. Most well-known definition is from 1987 stated by Harlem Brundtland: "Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (1987, 8). Ketola (2005) describes sustainable development as Brundtland.

It is also pointed out by Ketola that to achieve sustainability, harmony between people and nature needs to be created and maintained. Commentary "Defining and predicting sustainability" (Costanza & Patten, 1995, 1) concludes that the primary idea of sustainability can be straightforwardly explained as "a sustainable system is one which survives or persists". It can be seen that all these descriptions have similar idea behind them.

The World Summit on Social Development (2005) stated the seriousness of climate change and the effects on every part to the globe as a long-term challenge. They suggest that sustainability is based on three "pillars" that are equally co-dependent and they strengthen each other. These three pillars of sustainability are economic development, social development and environmental protection. With the documents World Summit Outcome 2005 and report Our Common Future (1987) the following concepts can be described the following way. Economic development means that natural resources must be utilized reasonably and have the most profit from them while minimizing the damage done to the nature. Social development means that education, health care and well-being is supported within society. Environmental protection stands for reducing polluting and any kind of harm done to the environment. It is argued by Hansmann, Mieg & Frischknecht (2012, 451) whether these pillars should be overlooked as equal since each of them include different values and they are not directly comparable with each other.

There is also another way to break down the concept of sustainability. It is similar to the three pillars and it was introduced by John Elkington in his book in 1999. The triple bottom line (TBL) understands the concept of three P's; profit, people and planet. This has roots to the Brundtland report (1987). TBL is more of a measuring system to measure and report how well company operates when financial, social and environmental performance is overlooked.

Sustainability is not a concept that has been invented recently. Jacobus a. du Pisani writes in his article (2007, 85) that the term has been in different languages for centuries. Environmental problems of the past like deforestation and loss abundance of the soil can be today defined as sustainability problems. During the whole human history there have been issues of environment caused by need and demand for raw

materials. Sustainable development as an actual concept and as a mission took place at the first time in the late 60's.

Since 70's, professionals have been warning about the danger of limitless economic growth and the effects of it and that corporations can support society to achieve sustainable development by aiming at sustainable business. Businesses should help the society to strive for sustainable business and smaller companies should practice sustainable entrepreneurship (Ketola 2005, 13).

It is argued whether turning business into sustainable operations is a positive change or not in the means of profitable operations. Griffin & Pustay (2015, 153) point out that by implementing sustainable business costs are reduced by re-engineering products and production processes.

Sustainable development requires reconstruction of technology and fair access to the limited resources. Values need to be improved and promoted in a way that motivates individuals to consume in the terms of nature and it is rationally pursued. In addition, it requires that natural systems like waters and soils are not jeopardized (Brundtland, 1897).

Brundtland observes sustainable development as a process of change. This means that resources that have been used, the aim of investments and direction of technological development needs to be in balance to meet human needs in the modern world and in the future.

From the figure below it can be seen how the three different spheres form a balanced graph for sustainability. They are pictured as equal-sized circles. When all of them function together, sustainability is reached.

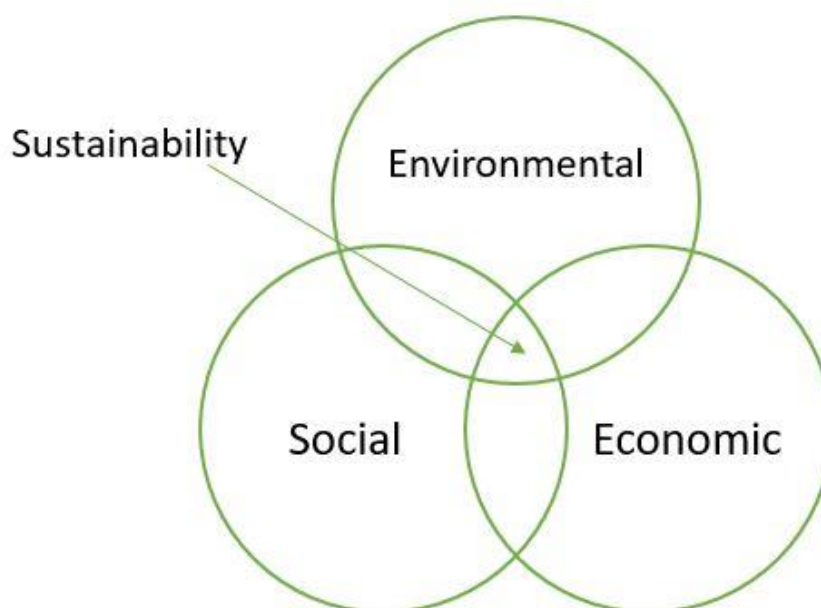


Figure 1. Illustration of three spheres of sustainability (Sustecs, Sustainability [Ref: 5.3.2018]).

2.1.2 Responsibility

MacMillan English Dictionary describes the word responsibility as “the state or job of being in charge of someone or something and of making sure that what they do or what happens to them is right or satisfactory” (2007). This can be understood in practice that when individuals and organizations are responsible for something they are aware of their impact so they operate the way that they can stand behind their actions.

Responsibility is part of business ethics. It contains handling the values, principles and standards. Ketola (2005, 13) states that corporate ethics take in consideration economic, social and ecologic view. Responsibility has similarities with sustainability when understanding the structure of the concept.

According to Helt (2013), responsible business does not mean charity but being driven forward by moral and ethical values. Responsible company operates more ethically than the law demands.

Responsibility can be divided into these three sections mentioned above. Division can be seen from the figure below.

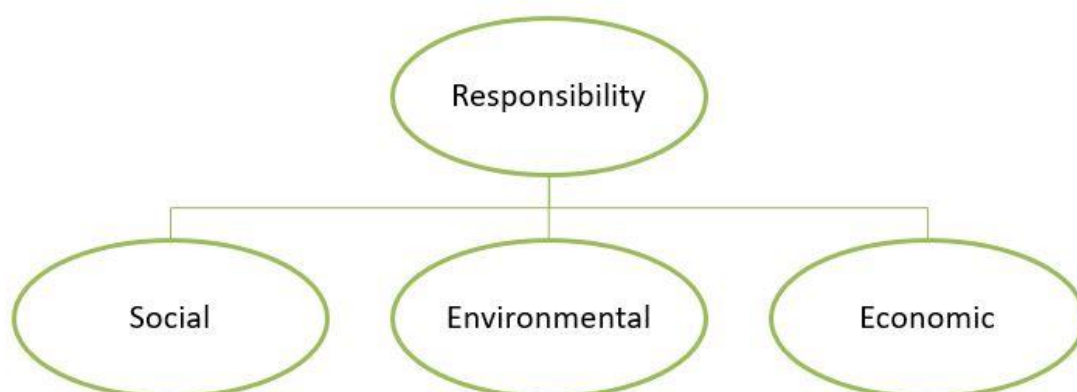


Figure 2. This picture visualizes the division of responsibility.

Ketola explains that company needs values that combine these three values together in order to operate sustainably. For some, economical value is an ethical value since they value wealth. However, these two are usually seen as opposite values. This is why companies that aim to create as much profit as possible is often seen as unethical company since the other values are not considered in their operations (2005, 53-60).

Following subcategories will explain what is content of the different subcategories and their influence on the overall responsibility.

Social responsibility

For companies, social responsibility can be legislated. However, in essence social responsibility is based on human rights. Physical health, safety, treating people respectfully and to fulfill mental, social and economic needs are the key features in

this concept. These vary between companies and cultures. In other words, this concept stands for the responsibility within society. Social responsibility in practice is for example doing charity. (Ketola, T. 2005, 40-41). Griffin & Pustay (2015, 146) suggest that concept of social responsibility is centered in the between of the relationship of an organization and its environment.

Pachamama Alliance presents that social responsibility is a theory of ethical purposes. In the theory whole society must benefit from individuals' actions as their responsibility to the community. Social responsibility is achieved when the stability between environment, well-being and economic growth is reached. Ethical involvement in decision making is often neglected due to personal benefit.

Maignan & Ferrel (2004, 2) observe in an article handling Corporate Social Responsibility that it is an obligation of corporations to inflate positive influence within a society and ascertain the reduction of negative impacts.

When this concept is viewed from the angle of business, the term is addressed as Corporate Social Responsibility. European Commission describes CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) as companies being part of supporting better society and cleaner environment. CSR can be seen advantageous from the perspective of risk management, cost saving, customer relationship and human resource management. In practice it means that business obey compliances like legal obligations but also go further than that. Expectations for the modern companies are to create processes and practices to manage all requirements that are included under the umbrella of social responsibility to maximize value to the stakeholders and minimize possible adverse impacts. EU has required companies (that have more than 500 employees) to provide annual report on environmental, social and employee-related, human rights, anti-corruption and bribery matters. They need to describe their business model, outcomes, and risks of the policies on the topics mentioned before. This way consumers are informed of companies' responsibility.

Morrison and Bridwell (2011, 6) suggest that corporations start to act more socially responsible way when they get indication from consumers that they want to support companies that behave responsibly even though it would cost more.

We First Branding blog examines a study by Cone Communications about CSR in 2017. From this study it can be seen that consumers want to support companies that share the same values as they and boycott companies that operate against their values. From this study it can be noted that consumers and especially millennials expect businesses to implement ethical values and operate responsibly.

Consumer social responsibility can be understood as a consumer being socially responsible by making responsible purchasing decisions. When a consumer buys a product from a company that promotes equality, they also promote that value. Consumers vote with their wallets (Jeseviciute-Ufartiene, 2017, 51-54).

Environmental responsibility

According to Joutsenvirta et al. (2011) the well-being of environment is in our responsibility. It needs to be taken into consideration how much capacity the earth has and the limit of natural resources and manufacturing. The planet cannot follow our consumption and manufacturing therefore keeping one's own ecological footprint small is crucial. Pollutions are not limited by the borders of the countries but they are spreading all around the globe through air and water. In addition it is noted that often operation of business is moved to developed countries because of cheaper manufacturing where natural resources already suffer from shortage.

Businesses need to become motivated to keep their ecological footprint small. The laws and regulations control actions of businesses but some companies have decreased harmful effects more than regulated. Joutsenvirta et al. (2011, 60) have observed that it is good for company's market value nowadays to be environmentally aware.

As stated by Ketola, companies are responsible for all harm it is done to the environment through their operations. Ecological footprint that measures the consumption does not directly tell how responsible the company is since amount of environmental effects vary between industries (2005, 46-47).

Studies and publications from the early 2000's stated in the book *Lean Sustainability* (Averill 2011, 11) promote the belief that good safety, health and environmental performance provide share value to the company. Attitudes towards safety, health and environment have faced an enormous change and it is a public expectation that businesses operate in the terms of safety and sustainability according to the study.

A study by Montgomery & Stone (2009, 4) proposes that environmental responsibility can be defined as a state where a person is willing to act in the means of environmental and societal well-being and not be concerned about their own economic interests. It is observed that some consumers show intentions to act but personal sacrifices are rather avoided.

As in social responsibility, environmental responsibility means in corporate world that businesses take responsibility of their actions considering their impact on environment and consumers are responsible for their purchasing decisions.

Griffin & Pustay describe how some companies do not act responsibly for an environmental point of view. However, the challenge of developing sustainable business practices has been adopted and environment-friendly techniques have been taken in use by companies. It is mandatory to maintain these actions and develop them. There is a lot of pollution done by companies so alternative methods needs to be developed to reduce it (2015, 152-153).

Economic responsibility

According to Vilanova University economic responsibility at the point of view of business can be classified as the requirement to make profit for shareholders in order to pay obligated fees like taxes and salary for employees.

Many sources confirm the fact that economic responsibility is understood the way that business needs to create value and profit in responsible means and to build prosperity and wellbeing on its owners but also surrounding community as taxes and jobs. Anti-corruption countermeasures are involved in this matter too. In addition to profitable business operations, economic responsibility is also associated with

risk management and administrative practices. Griffin & Pustay further points out that bribery is a problem concerning economic responsibility (2015, 151).

Ketola advocates the view of setting limits the avariciousness of companies. In order to operate economically responsibly it is obligatory to restrain. Ignoring economic responsibility can lead to radical scandals and hence damage the company greatly. Business should not be profit driven on employers or environment's account (2005, 32-34).

Economic responsibility has increased its popularity in the financial sector also since investors seek responsible businesses to invest in (Vastuullisuusraportti, 2016).

At the point of view of consumer, economic responsibility can be understood as consumer being aware of their responsibility and rights. A consumer needs to acknowledge the laws and regulations when purchasing products and services. Economic responsibility covers the evaluation of the safety and quality (Kilpailu- ja kuluttajavirasto, 2015).

Yle News writes in their article in 2012 that responsible consuming requires wealth. It is not possible for all to make decisions based on the ethicality of the product, for some the price is the key factor when making decisions. Lack of money forces to bargain. Ahlqvist (2008, 65) explains that consuming is determined by wealth not by income.

2.2 Consuming and consumer behavior

In this chapter concepts as consuming and consumer behavior are observed. Consuming is the act after making purchasing decision, but it also means the usage of natural resources. Consuming and consumer behavior can be viewed as a causal connection.

2.2.1 Consuming

Encyclopedia Britannica defines consuming as “the use of goods and services by households”. Consuming is the larger scale of buying and using natural resources. Consuming stands for the products and services that have been bought but also the water and electricity we use in our daily lives. Consumers and organizations consume different ways. When we talk about consuming of an individual, we talk about the usage of water, buying products and services. When we talk about the consuming of organizations, we talk about all the usage of natural resources that goes into manufacturing products or providing services. There are differences obviously between these two but both affect on our natural system.

In the literature provided by Ahlqvist et al. (2008, 124-126) it can be concluded that there are great number of factors that effect on consuming. It can be seen for instance, in the current economic state of the country, current trends and education. Knowledge of individuals’ age, gender, education or socioeconomic position has helped to understand the consumption of households in most sectors. Between consumer behavior and structural background variables, strong dependency ratios can be found. The consuming pattern of households has changed within last centuries enormously. The way we consume has built different values, expectations and purposes compared.

Consuming responsibly has a large impact on the environment. Responsible consumption handles matters like usage, choosing and disposing of goods and services and how they are managed in the view of protecting natural resources and minimizing the harm done to the nature through our actions. Responsible consuming aims at society’ and individuals’ wellbeing and improved quality of life. Subjects on the table are social justice, human rights, poverty, global trade and viable ecosystems (Springer Link, Encyclopedia of Corporate Social Responsibility, 2013 edition).

A responsible consumer is aware and cautious that their purchasing decisions have large effects on the external world. Political and social views and thoughts are integrated into consumer responsibility. Consumers’ values, norms and attitudes effect

on the market so the meaning of the consumer responsibility should be emphasized more (Caruana & Crane, 2008, 1497-1515).

In a summary, responsible consuming means that an individual acknowledges their affectedness to the surrounding world and they choose products and services that do the least harm to it. Understanding and acting are the key words to this concept. Responsible consumer have values to live in harmony with the nature and the society. Responsible consuming does not reflect only on the environment but additionally to the working conditions of people. If a person buys a product produced in a factory that does not treat their employees well nor pay them properly, they support the company and their procedures. Purchasing products that are produced responsibly also the operations of the company is supported.

Ahlqvist et al. (2008, 94-98) explain that it is argued that stricter regulations are necessary in order to allow the development of sustainable economic and as result sustainable consumption. Environment is pressured by private consumption directly and indirectly. Direct effects are emissions from transportations like passenger cars, heating systems, various types of waste and noise. These direct effects are notable especially in wealthy countries. Emissions from the production of consumed goods and services are indirect effects. Material consumption per household has increased enormously. Even though improvement can be seen in eco-friendly per monetary unit, material wealth has grown increasing the environmental burden of Finnish Households. Macroeconomic policy has been successful in order to increase the material wealth of households but the success of external costs of consumption linked to environmental issues is rather confined.

2.2.2 Consumer behavior

Consumer behavior can be understood as the concept that is the key factor in the purchasing decision process. Consumer behavior can be examined and different behavioral manners and their meanings and effects researched to have a better understanding about different types of consumers and this way segment consumers in order to have the best marketing results. By understanding the consumer most profit can be made.

Griffin & Pustay stated (2015, 146) that combinations of the factors determine Individual's ethics. What is seen as ethical or unethical behavior is linked to the individual's own belief system. Beliefs can be very similar when you look at people from the same cultures. Culture and customs influence strongly individual's ethical values. Values are one's that individual believes to be the most important in their life. Values are usually connected with time, age, education and status. Values are for a fact individual beliefs.

The journal of Marketing Management discusses (2015, 1451-1462) about consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption. This article reveals that responsible consuming happens if it benefits the consumer which is based on a cognitive conceptualization of responsibility. Responsibility can be classified as a self-oriented cognitive process that has a beneficial impact on an individual. Responsible consuming is easier to achieve if the consumer knows that the purchase does not include any added complications. When a consumer chooses sustainable and socially responsible product based on the cognitive evaluation of personal gain and costs behavioral intentions are developed. The study found that when understanding sustainable consumption the role of emotions, mainly guilt is analyzed based on a different perception on responsibility. Guilt has an extensive effect on decision-making and actual behaviors meaning that it is a strong emotion particularly when ethical consumer behavior is overlooked. It is noted that consumers can see themselves as the firsthand reason of negative consequences in the result of experienced guilt of post-consumption. They can see their actions to effect directly to pollution, for instance. Therefore morality is connected with responsibility.

Steenhaut (2006, 48) suggests that from the point of view of consumer ethics, only relevant characteristics are cultural environment and personal qualities. Cultural environment stands for the impact of the ethical values that are developed through lived environment and culture that can effect on the consumer's choices. Personal characteristics imply individual's personality and the development of morality that can effect on the decision making process.

According to Steenhaut (2006, 254) consumers search for retailers they can build a relationship with. They crave for value beyond pleasant prices and appealing range. It is stated that it is more cost-efficient to retain existing customers than

seek new ones. Consumers' ethical decisions are also impacted by situational circumstances. In addition, the relationship with the retailer has a large influence.

Steenhaut (2006, 365) explains the development of the consumer behavior research and that recently it has been concluded that emotions play a significant role in the decision making process. Earlier studies claimed that consumer's choices are based on rational decisions. Emotions affect in different contexts like service failures and advertising too. Dissertation highlights the role of guilt at emotions when observing consumers' decision making.

2.2.3 Consumer behavior characteristics

There are many characteristics that have an impact on the purchasing decision process. These characteristics can be divided into three subcategories; Individual differences, environmental influence and physical processes. These characteristics and their impacts vary between every individual.

There are individual differences like consumer resources; time and money. These two are major influencers on a consumer. In addition there are other individual differences that affect extensively on consumer's behavior. These other categories are knowledge, attitudes, motivation and personality. Knowledge covers stored information and memory of products, availability and the usage. A consumer uses their experiences and knowledge and uses them judging if a purchase is good or not. Attitudes shape our evaluation of different alternatives. A consumer might have a certain attitude towards a brand or product and it shows in their behavior. Motivation manages consumer's needs and what drives their will. If a consumer needs or wants something, there is a motivation to buy. Personality is certainly a major factor too since, it includes consumer's values and lifestyle too. All of these characteristics vary between consumers (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995, 143-147).

The consumer's decision making process is also influenced by their environment. Characteristics that are categorized by environment are culture, social class, personal influence, family and situation. From culture consumers adapt values and habits. It is crucial to gather knowledge from target group's culture to be able to

success in understanding certain customers. Social class defines consumer's values too, among interests. For instance, what kind of car is preferred to drive or the way it is dressed is seen in consumer's social class. Behavior can be affected by whom the consumer associates with, through personal influence. Values can be adapted from others around us. This links to the next category; family. Family is an enormous factor since buying decisions can be affected by family members, habits are learned and values are shaped. Marital status and number of children effect on the purchasing decisions greatly. Furthermore, situation is an environmental factor simply in a way that situations change so can behavior (Engel et al. 1995, 143-147).

Psychological processes are information on processing, learning and attitude and behavior change. The information process understands the process where information is received, stored and used in the future. Consumer's experience can lead to change in knowledge and behavior which is called the process of learning. Attitude and behavior change is strongly a psychological action and managing that is difficult and greatly valued skill (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995, 143-147).

2.2.4 Purchasing decision process

Every product and service bought have a process of actions behind them. This process moves forward from the need to the evaluation after the purchase. Process that takes place in every purchasing action has five stages according to multiple marketing theories. The figure down below visualizes these five stages.

First stage is the recognition of a problem or a need. The consumer acknowledges that their need and the feeling of missing something needs to be satisfied. A need is the motivator of this process. The second stage is the process of searching information. At this stage, the customer tries to find information about the product or service they long for. They search information about different options, prices, locations etc. to make the best possible decision and avoid any feeling of dissatisfaction or regret. The third stage is the evaluation of available alternatives. At this stage, the customer goes through different questions in their head and compares different options together to choose the one that satisfies them the most. Satisfaction differs

between consumers, for some better deal is a cheap alternative and for others it can be the one that is better quality. The fourth stage includes the final decision and purchasing the product or service. At this stage, customer has decided what they want and whom are they going to buy it from. Purchasing decision process continues to the fifth stage that is post purchase evaluation. At this stage, the consumer considers if the purchase satisfies their needs. If they are satisfied, it is the most likeable that they will share their positive purchasing experiences with for instance, friends who are possible future buyers of the same product or service. The same argument goes other way around; the consumer is likely to share experiences of dissatisfaction to future buyers that can be an affecting factor on their purchasing process (Milner & Rosenstreich. 2013, 14-25).

Engel, Blackwell & Miniard (1995, 141-143) suggest that there are two additional stages; consumption and divestment. The consumption stage is where consumer uses the product and divestment stage means the disposal of the product. However, these two stages are not included in the figure below.



Figure 3. Consumer purchasing decision process illustrated.

This figure shows the illustration of the purchasing decision model. It is formed based on the literature examined.

3 THE RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

In this part of the thesis, the company will be introduced more closely and the environment around this research. The company this thesis is implemented for, will be introduced but also the current business environment around it.

3.1 The industry of e-commerce

Online store retailing is based on selling goods online for consumers and shipping purchased items via delivery services. Online retailing started its path in the mid-1990s when technology developed and new market niche was found. Online retailing since then has developed since enormously and nowadays there is a wide range of different products available online (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2010, 3-14). E-commerce has changed business behavior and created a lot of different opportunities. Starting an online business is approximately inexpensive but there are its own risks like security (Zwass, 2018).

Vedenpää (2016) writes that the popularity of online shopping has somewhat abated. The growth of Finnish online retailing was predicted. However, the growth did not happen. It was seen in bigger cities that brick-and-mortar stores have increased their popularity. These kind of stores support the urban culture. An online store is usually operates together with the store, but the focus remains on the brick-and-mortar store.

A report by Postnord (2016) explains that younger generation drives e-commerce development forward. Consumers influence on e-commerce radically and to be successful company it is reasonable to provide outcomes according to customers' requests.

3.2 The Case company

Ecosto is a company based in Seinäjoki. Ecosto is an eco-conscious online store selling products for home, leisure and wellness. It is part of a Finnish retailer Hakara-dio Oy, a family business specializing in high quality durable goods since 1963. The

company had a brick-and-mortar store in Seinäjoki, but currently they focus on selling products online.

The product range is carefully selected to be as sustainable and good for the environment as possible. Product information is precise and encompassing. The aim is that the consumer has as much information about the product as possible. This way customer knows what they are buying and what they are supporting. Social media and newsletters are a key tool informing customers about products, campaigns and sustainable lifestyle.

Because they promote green values, they share lifestyle guidelines and instructions how to live more ecologically. They want to sell the lifestyle and inform consumers about the impact of their choices and encourage them to make sustainable choices. Campaigns like “Green Friday” (counter-campaign for Black Friday) and “Ditch the plastic” (Challenging customers to buy as least plastic as they can in March to acknowledge how much plastic is used in everyday life) inform customers about unsustainable materials, ways to consume eco-friendly and how to make a difference with one’s own actions. They want to offer sustainable lifestyle among sustainable products.

3.3 Current state of ethical business

There have been enormous changes within the past ten years in ethical business. Awareness of environmental effects has increased and consumers educate themselves more when it comes to products and companies compared with earlier years. There are more and more companies that turn their business in more ethical direction and businesses are established from the ethical baseline. It is more profitable to do ethical business than not.

In 2010 Chris McDonald took a look into the future of ethical business in his blog. He considered the current state of ethical business and discussed whether the era of ethicality has started. He pointed out that there will be many challenges that need to be faced to become successful business with ethical values.

Because of the current state of our planet, it can be presumed that ethical business is not a trend, it is a movement that needs to be made in order to continue living the same way. Demand from consumers also tells the concern of the future. The Raccourteur has written in June 2017 that there is a demand for ethical businesses and that it can be concluded from the statements of professionals that ethical business is good business. Also Triodos Bank explained one year before in their 2016 market report that the demand for ethical business has increased. Financial Times wrote in December 2017 that increasing number of younger consumers rather buy ethical products.

The Guardian writes in 2011 that businesses take interest on turning their behavior and operations into more environmentally and sustainable way. Consumers want to make more effort with their actions yet large number of consumers still think that individual efforts are not so significant. Also many consumers are not willing to pay extra for ethical products. The quality of the product still remains the key factor in consumers' purchasing decision according to The Guardian.

Article by Kaitlyn Mcavoy in Spend Matters Network (2016) explains that there is a demand for ethical products. Ethical business needs creativity and commitment. It can be concluded from this article that there are a lot of opportunities for ethical businesses and this is the time to shape consumers' behavior to more sustainable aware. From these kind of movements, a better future can be formed.

Degerman (2017) writes that purchasing behavior is slowly changing and ethical values are becoming new consuming trends. Studies show that it is easy to follow ethical values when it doesn't cost more to the consumer. There is an increase in knowledge of ethical values and environmental effects and one key factor for this is social media. Responsibility as a trend can also be seen in the way of accentuating matters that are believed to effect on the purchasing decision. For instance, companies emphasizes the locality or purity of the product in the packaging. There is only a certain group of consumers that include in ethical values to their purchasing decisions and they have educated themselves well about the subject.

Hybris Magazine comments on recent studies and explains that it is said that there is a connection between knowledge about environmental issues effect on consumers' purchasing behavior. However, knowledge has increased within society but purchasing behavior has not changed in a positive direction as much as it was desired. The magazine observes ethical consuming as hard to define specifically because individual's values determine whether the actions are perceived as ethical or not. The biggest motives to consume ethically are protecting environment and climate, the sustainable use of natural resources, the well-being of animals, reducing waste and declare a political statement. Consuming as a pleasure is considered questionable and recycling is admired. There are incongruities on consumer choices and lack of information increases the risk of making faulty decisions. Individuals prefer to consume the ways that suit their social identity and value system. Identity of the individual has a great effect on their consuming behavior. The obstacle to consume ethically is found to be high price of the products. A consumer might consider ethicality as economically challenging. Certain prejudice towards ethical products is still present. Companies have made use of ethicality as a sufficient sales argument. The magazine emphasizes that ethicality should be trendy enough to be attractive but not too much so it does not categorize users as people who chase trends which have a negative effect in turn.

4 THE RESEARCH

This part includes the research part of this thesis. Basic information related to the study is introduced whereas the implementation of the study. Secondly, the results are introduced and analyzed. Lastly the development proposal will conclude this chapter.

4.1 Research objectives

This study aims to find out what kind of impact responsibility has to Ecosto's customers and what kind of decisions they make based on their values and purchasing habits. Findings will also help Ecosto to understand their regular customers better and based on gathered information about how they can improve their marketing communications and product range.

To achieve the desired goal, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used in this survey. The focus is on the qualitative research because that way deeper understanding about customers' values and opinions are gathered. This is very useful method for the needs of this research. There are elements from a quantitative research too to maximize the quality. It is intended to get more specific information so doing an interview is the best way to reach that goal. The aim is to get opinions, get to know customer's values and learn through feedback and mixed research method help to do so.

A mixed research method collects data from quantitative and qualitative data and analyses both. This method is flexible and it allows to collect comprehensive data (Wisdom& Creswell, 2013, 3-8).

4.2 Implementation of the study

Study of this thesis will be implemented by interviewing Ecosto's customers. Target group in this study is regular customers who have ordered more than 4 times. Reason for this is that regular customers have developed certain opinions of the company, they are familiar with the product selection and they know their preferences.

These factors ensure that the information received is trustworthy. The employer wanted to approach this group. The interview will be implemented by interviewing the customers via phone. The employer chose this method because in their opinion this method is more personal and they want to approach the customer this way. An ideal sample was considered 10 customers.

Questions are based on the conversation author had with the employer. The employer had a few questions they demanded to be included in the survey. Questions were created around employer's needs. It was decided that the survey will contain maximum of 10 questions and it need to be short because of the nature of the interview. The interview should not last more than 10 minutes according to the employer so based on these instructions the final version of the interview base was created. The employer accepted the final version on 16th March 2018. The final interview base contained 9 question which had 7 open questions.

The sample is taken from Ecosto's regular customers. A regular customer is a customer that has ordered more than four times from the website. The sample is taken from regular customers because they are the most familiar with the company, website, product range and they have formed certain opinions towards them. The employer chose the sample of the database accordingly ordering information. The customers among the group who had ordered the most were chosen. Customers who have ordered more than 4 times can be characterized as regular customers. The number of regular customers is 80. All of them are from Finland so the interview was held in Finnish.

The process of gathering data for this study was begun after the contact information was received from the employer. The employer contacted the sample by e-mail and informed them about this interview and it being part of a project of Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences. The interview was handled 26.3-29.3.2018 and that time period was notified to the customers. A gift card valued for 20€ was promised to all participants. A gift card was considered as an appropriate reward to motivate customers to participate.

The author was given a phone provided by the employer to implement the interview. Interview answers were written on paper and later on written down to computer.

60% of the sample was reached on the first day. 20% was reached on the following day and the rest the day after. The whole sample was reached and they were willing to attend the interview. The base of the interview will be attached in appendixes.

4.3 Results

This part examines the results gathered from the interview provided. All regular customers that the employer gathered to the sample (10) were reached. There are 80 regular customers according to Ecosto's database. The sample covers 13% of the total number of regular customers. Results based on the interview are presented and analyzed in this part. The conclusions and findings of the results will be provided after this chapter. All interview questions are introduced below among the results.

4.3.1 Reasons to choose to buy from Ecosto

In the first question it was asked why they had chosen to shop in Ecosto. This question was put in the interview on request of the employer. They wanted to hear customers' main reasons why they order from them. It could be seen from the results that regular customers mainly chose to shop in Ecosto because the company's values met theirs and they could find products that answered their needs.

"The website is very handy, and it meets my values."

It was said that Ecosto's values matched their values and that is why they buy Ecosto's products.

"Company's values meet mine."

Ecological, ethical and sustainable were key words the sample used to describe their reasons to purchase items from Ecosto.

"It's environmentally friendly and an ethical choice."

In addition to ecological and environmentally friendly values, quality was mentioned too.

“Because there are the most quality products and the products are environmentally friendly, ecological and safe.”

Also, the easiness of buying and interest towards making environmentally friendly decisions were mentioned. It can be noted that Ecosto’s regular customers appreciate the values and operation of the company.

“I am interested in about environmentally friendly products.”

Customers consider the company as a reliable, effortless and familiar choice.

“It’s a familiar and comfortable place to shop from.”

Product selection is considered satisfying.

“I like the selection of products.”

“There are products available that I can’t find anywhere else.”

One customer answered this question very excitedly the following way:

“Because it is lovely! I find products well for my needs. It was easy to switch for ecological products when there is so much available. It is effortless place to shop, they have a good customer service, and everything simply works well. When I need something, I check first Ecosto’s website.”

4.3.2 Evaluating how much certain values effect on purchasing decisions

In this part of the interview participants were asked to evaluate how much certain matters effect on their purchasing decisions. The values that were asked to evaluate were ecology, ethicality, recyclability and the life span of the product and in addition the price-quality ratio. This evaluation task was chosen for this interview because the author wanted to find out if there were similarities between the assessment and the values that Ecosto promotes.

Evaluating on a scale from one to five, participants showed how much said matter effected on their purchasing decision. Number 1 represents that the matter is not important for the customer, number 2 that it mattered a little bit, number 3 that matters on average, number 4 that the matter is quite important and number 5 represents that the said matter is very important for them.

Every value point will be examined individually with visual representation. Value points mentioned above are represented together with a chart to understand the outcomes better.

The first evaluated value was the ecology of the product.



Figure 4. Bar diagram shows the results of how important ecology of the product is for the customers.

From gathered data it can be seen that the results are divided into the two highest categories; quite important and very important. The division was 50-50. It is noticeable that category *Average* did not appear in the data. The remained categories were not in the results either. Variation of the results was narrow.

It can be seen from this chart that ecology of the product is important to customers, but importance varies between very important and quite important. This concludes

that ecology of the product effects on their purchasing decisions and this matter they consider it meaningful.

The second evaluated value was the ethical production of the product.



Figure 5. This pie chart represents the data how important ethicality of the product is for the customers.

Data was divided between categories *Very important* and *Quite important*. The rest of the categories did not appear in the data. Variation of the results was narrow but it can be noted that data was primarily on the value *Very important* with 60% of the total answers.

From this pie chart it can be concluded that ethicality of the product is very important for most of the customers and that all the customers take in consideration the ethicality of the product in their purchasing decisions. This sample of Ecosto's regular customers share the attitude towards ethically produced products and consider it as a value point in decision making process.

The third evaluated value was how recyclable the product is.

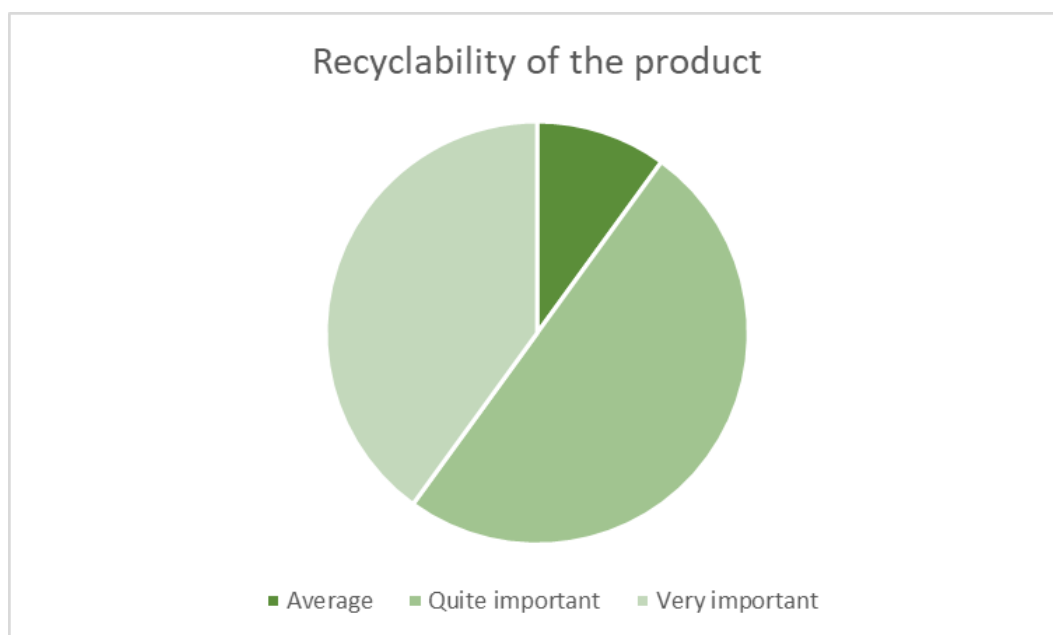


Figure 6 .This figure represents the data of how important recyclability of the product is for the customers.

From this pie chart it can be noticed that recyclability of the product is divided with three categories. Other answering alternatives did not appear in the data. 50% of the participants consider recyclability as a quite important factor for their purchasing decision. For 40% of the participants, recyclability is very important. For remaining 10% this value point shows its importance as average. Variation in this chart is wider than on the charts presented before.

Recyclability of the product is also important for Ecosto's customers but compared with earlier values, this appears not to be as important on average as value points presented before.

The fourth evaluated value was the long life span of the product.

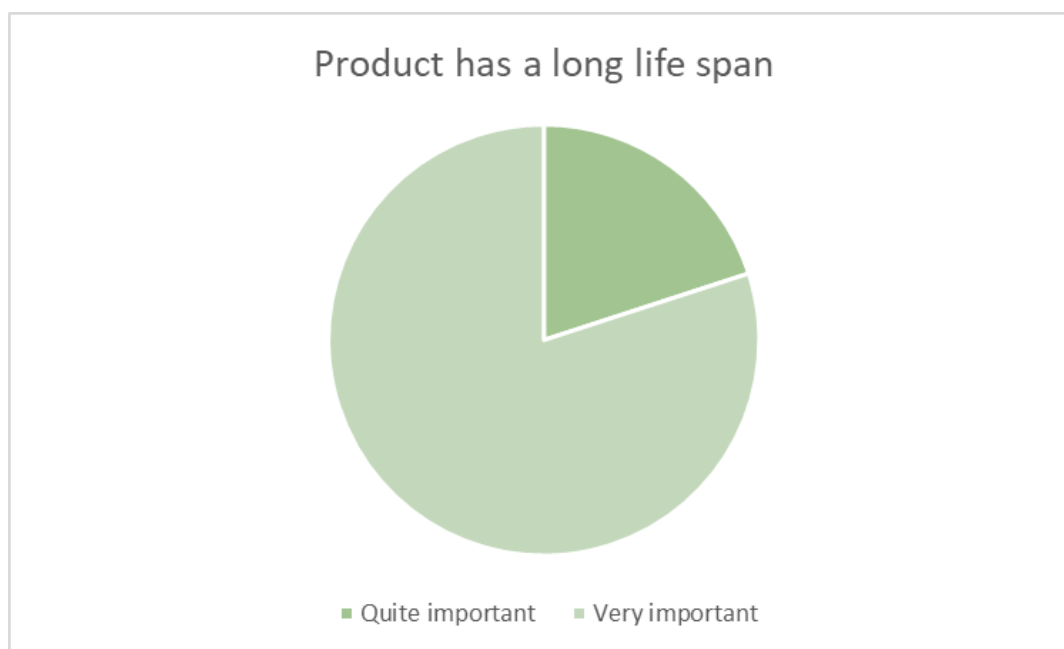


Figure 7. Pie chart representing the division of data on how important product's life span is for customers when making purchasing decisions.

This pie chart represents how important product's the long life span is for the customers. It can be noticed that majority of the customers consider this value very important. Alternatives *Not at all*, *A little bit* or *Average* do not appear in the data.

The long life span of the product is very important to 80% of the customers and for the remaining 20% this matter is quite important. It can be noted based on this data that most Ecosto's regular customers consider that the long life span of the product effects on their purchasing decision because for them it is a meaningful factor. Furthermore, this appears to be the most important value of all. It can be noted what Ecosto's customers value the most is long life span of the product.

It was also mentioned by the customers that they did not want to purchase an item that was not going to last for long. This chart confirms the fact that long life span of the product does effect on their purchasing decisions.

The fifth evaluated value was the price-quality ratio.

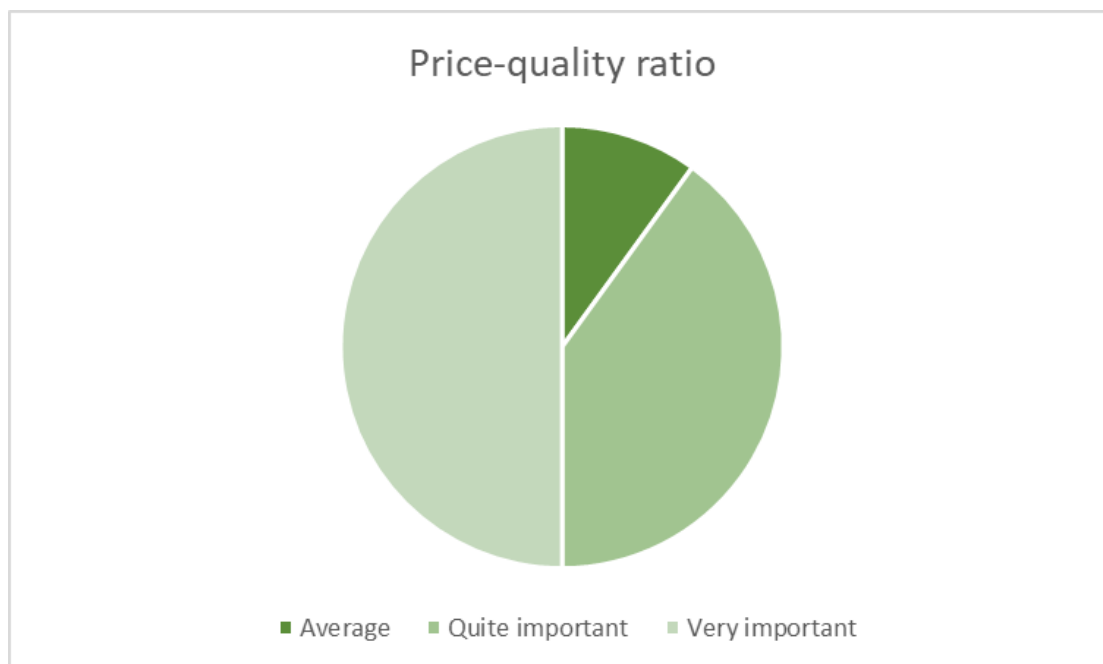


Figure 8. Pie chart representing how much price-quality ratio effects on regular customers' purchasing decision.

Price-value ratio as a contributing factor affects on the customer from average to very important. Remaining alternatives did not appear in the data. 50% of the participants experience that price-quality ratio is very important and effects on their purchasing decision. 40% of the participants consider the price-quality ratio as quite important and for remaining 10%, this value affects on average.

Variation in the data is wider than most of the presented charts. From this pie chart it can be concluded that price-value ratio appears to be important for the majority of the customers but compared with other values affecting purchasing decision this matter shares more opposing views.

It can be concluded based on these charts presented that Ecosto's regular customers share common values and consider examined matters to effect on their purchasing decisions. The most important factor was the long life span of the product. Recyclability and the price-quality ratio were values that differed the most from other alternatives, but all in all every value can be said to be a factor in Ecosto's customers' purchasing decisions.

4.3.3 Ecosto's product selection compared to customers' values

With this part of the interview, the intention was to compare customer's values on how they felt Ecosto's product selection meeting the values mentioned before. Participants were asked to evaluate this with the scale used previously.

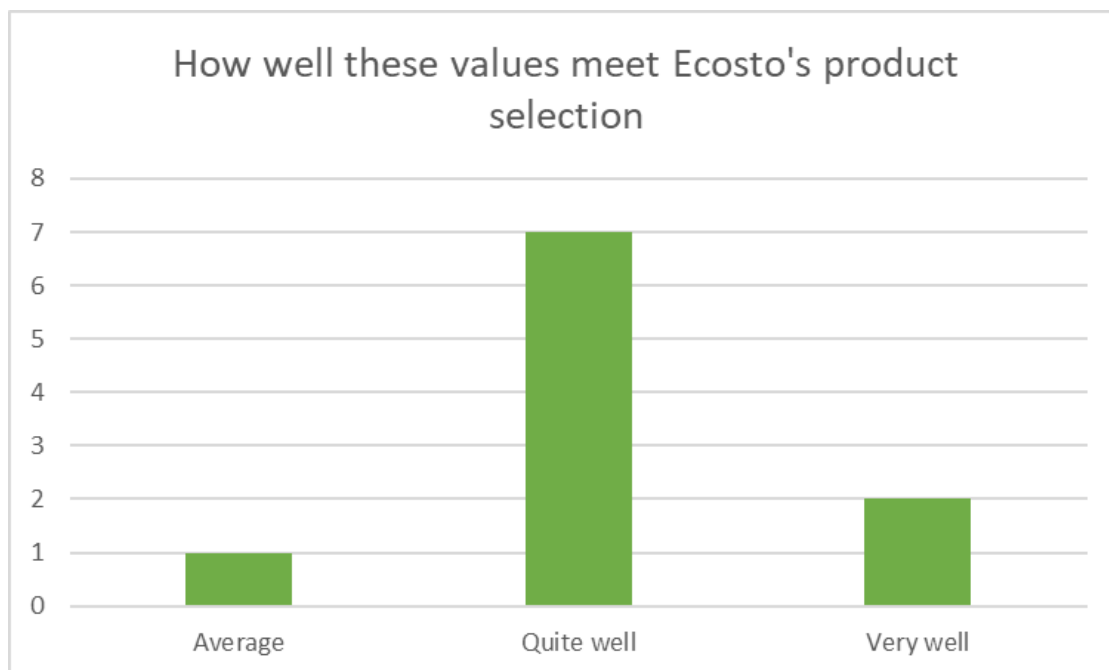


Figure 9. How well above mentioned values meet Ecosto's product range in customers' opinion.

Most of the customers think that Ecosto's product selection meets values mentioned before quite well. It can be stated that Ecosto's values meet customers' values quite well at customers' point of view.

One customer considered product range to meet these values on average and two customers as very well. Therefore it can be said there were some variation in the results.

In the bar diagram below there is a comparison between customers values examined before to Figure 9 how customers felt about the values being fulfilled in Ecosto's product range. Customers' values in the diagram are taken from the mean value from all value points examined in the second part of the interview.

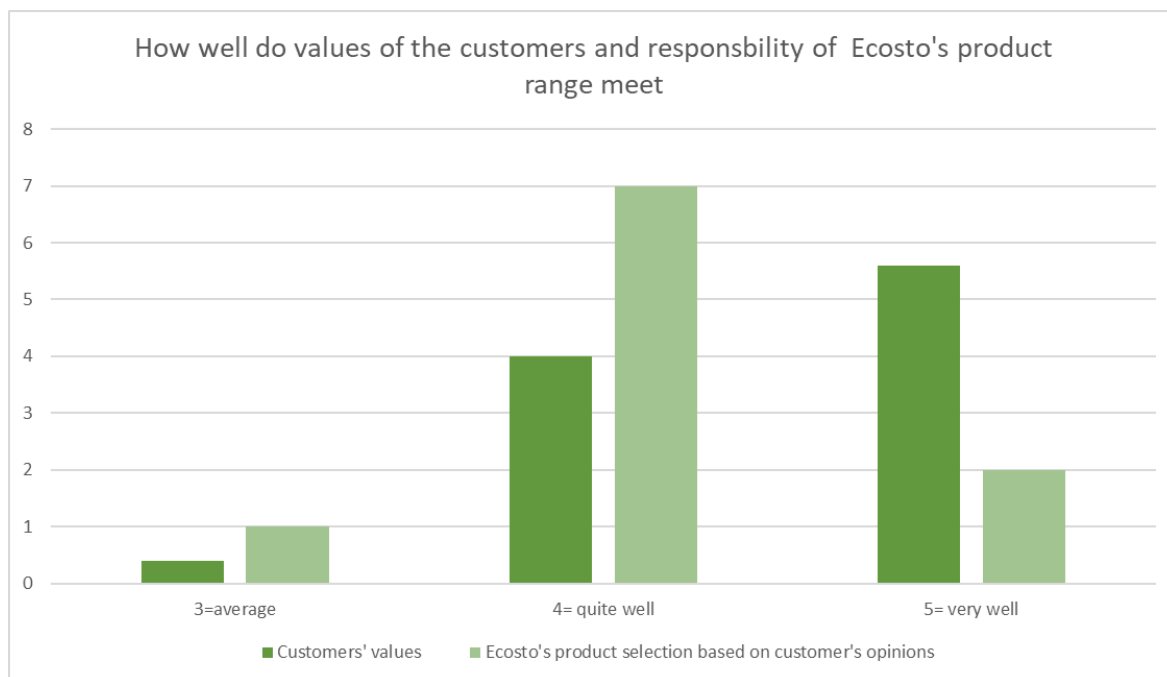


Figure 10 Comparison between customers' values and Ecosto's product selection based on customers' opinions.

This bar diagram shows the comparison between customers' values and Ecosto's product selection's on the point of view of the values mentioned before. Based on above, we can see that there is small deviation between Ecosto's product range and customers' values. Difference is so small that it will fall into the normal statistical deviation and is not statically significant. A conclusion can be made that the customer values are matching with the product range.

4.3.4 Key factors effecting on customers' final purchasing decisions

With this question, "What are the key factors that effect on your final purchasing decision?" it was a purpose to find out what participants consider when making purchasing decisions. The intention was to hear participants telling with their own words what the key factors are for them.

There were many answers to this question. Mainly there are mentioned values that were in discussion before as ecological, ethical, long life span and sustainable. Customers mentioned other values too. All agreed that they want to purchase items that last long, so they do not need to purchase a similar item immediately.

One participant highlighted that for them clean and toxic-free products are substantial detail when making purchasing decisions: “For me it is important that products are clean and toxic-free”. Results to this question showed that Ecosto’s customers know what is important to them and they want to purchase based on that: “I am very careful what I buy, I don’t want to buy something that doesn’t last”. For some, the price was a key factor and some of them mentioned that they will not purchase an item that is too expensive and on the other hand some of them mentioned that they want to pay for quality: “The price doesn’t matter if the product is a quality item”. Quality seemed to be a highlighted term too as: “The age and the quality ratio is very important to me”.

Other matters that came up were domestic, local, sustainable, production information and that there is no need to buy a new product right away. “When I make decisions, I want to be sure I don’t have to buy a new product one right away”.

One customer emphasized her values to consuming. They explained that they try to live as eco-friendly as possible. It is her lifestyle and environmental values important to her.

“I don’t shop a lot and when I do, I try to minimize my consumption. I buy a lot of recycled clothing and furniture. For me recycling, ethical and ecological products are very important. I try to do my best to buy carbon compensated products.”

From results gathered and examined it can be said that there are certain opinions that they have and they can be strict about their decisions. It can be seen that they have knowledge about sustainability and how to do ethical choices. This knowledge effects on their choices and they evaluate products from the viewpoint of their values.

4.3.5 Provided information about products’ environmental effects on Ecosto’s website

The fifth question was “Are there enough information provided about the product and its environmental effects?” and the intention with this question was to find out

if customers received enough information about the products. This way it can be seen how much importance information about the products has on customers. The author wanted to also find out if there is a need for Ecosto to improve their product descriptions of the website. Information about the products is important part of the website but it also gives customer more to considerate when making purchasing decisions.

To this part of the interview similar opinions were stated. Participants mainly agreed that there is mainly enough information, but more could be applied. Customers showed the interest to read more product information.

“It would be nice to know more about production if that kind of information can be found. In general there is enough information, but there can always be more”.

One customer stated that they are not satisfied with the amount of information provided about the kitchen utensils.

“There is enough information generally but information in kitchen utensils could be improved. And I think there is no such a thing as too much information about the products.”

It was also mentioned by one customer that they do not know if there is enough information or not. They explained that the company is trustworthy enough to just buy products without familiarizing oneself with them.

“I am a mom and I don't have a lot of time to settle down, read that much product information and familiarize myself with new things, but I consider Ecosto as a reliable company and if I don't have time to read the description that well, I am confident that I can trust that the product is environmentally friendly. Ecosto's online store is very user-friendly so I would say that they have enough information.”

It can be concluded that customers feel like there is enough information in general, but they are interested to read more and many of them stated that there cannot be too much information. Customers value information and showed that they would like to extend their knowledge about the products. Based on the results, customers are

also interested in the information related to the whole life cycle of the product. Responsibility of the supply chain seems to be important among the product information.

Ecosto is seen as a company that provides trustworthy information among the customers and they rely on information provided by Ecosto. This a valuable sign of trust but it creates a lot of responsibility to Ecosto too.

4.3.6 Ecosto's product selection from customer's view

Ecosto wanted to know if their product selection responded to their customers' needs and if they were satisfied enough. Through this question it is aimed to find ways to improve company's product selection. It was asked should there be other products or product ranges on the website and if so, it was asked to give an example. This question had a lot of different results. Mainly, participants were satisfied with the current product selection, but there were few products mentioned that they felt like adding to the selection. One that came up several times was ecological clothes for men and women. Customers who mentioned this specified that they mean basic clothing like t-shirts and tops.

“This might be too much to ask for but I would like to add eco-fashion like ecologically produced tops and so on”.

According to one customer, men's ecological wear is hard to find.

“Well, I think they have a good selection already but I would really much like to buy ecologically produced clothes since it's hard to find them, especially for men.”

Other products that were mentioned were natural cosmetics and skin care products. In addition one customer mentioned the lack of refill packages.

“I think they have a wide selection of products and I am satisfied with it. Only thing I miss is refill packages for soap and shampoos. At the moment I go to Ruohonjuuri to fill my bottles.”

Containers for food made from glass were a wish of one customer and it was mentioned that otherwise they are satisfied with the selection. Among these products mentioned, customers were mainly satisfied with the selection and did not feel the need for adding anything.

“There is everything that meets my needs, I don’t think I would add anything.”

There was a mention that it would be nice to see in future to see Ecosto to collaborate with similar companies.

“I don’t have anything that pops into my mind but in my opinion it would be nice if they made cooperation with other similar businesses and join forces in the future.”

Based on these answers it can be noted that Ecosto’s customers are mainly satisfied with the product selection but some would make minor additions. Current product selection meets customer’s needs quite well.

4.3.7 Ecosto’s social media

The question was “Are you following Ecosto’s social media channels (Instagram and Facebook)?” With this interview question Ecosto wanted to know how many of their regular customers followed them on social media and with the follow up question what are the most interesting features in their social media feed. They also wanted to learn through this question if there is something they can focus on or improve.

Most of the interviewed customers did not follow Ecosto’s social media and most of them mentioned that they don’t use social networks. On the other hand, a few of them pointed out that they read Ecosto’s newsletters and that they get enough information from there and they don’t feel the need to go to social media.

“I don’t use social media, I read the newsletters and for me that gives me enough information.”

It turned out only three of the participants told that they follow Ecosto in social media.

“I follow them maybe once a week, I don’t use a lot of social media.”

The following question for those who followed Ecosto’s social media was: “What are the things that interest you most?” Like mentioned before, only a few of the participants followed Ecosto’s social media. The features that came up that they felt interesting were information about new products and offers. It was mentioned too, that Ecosto as a company is interesting too and lifestyle content is pleasant to follow.

Based on these comments it can be noted that most of the company’s regular customers do not use social media and those who do are following them. Many of the customers that are not in social media mentioned that the newsletter provides enough information and they do not feel that they would be missing out of something. Interesting content for those who follow Ecosto’s social media is information about new products, offers, lifestyle and Ecosto as a company.

4.3.8 Social media content for Ecosto’s website

This question was a certain follow-up to previous question. The employer wanted to know if customers were interested in reading content that appears in social media from the website. This kind of content can be illustrated for example as tips on living sustainably, information about materials, environmental effects and ecological lifestyle.

All of the participants mentioned that it would be nice to read more information about different companies producing sustainable products and information about these kind of products from the website. One customer mentioned that it would be also interesting to read blogposts about user experience and articles about sustainable lifestyle and read tips to live more ecologically.

“I would like to read user experiences more, that interest me. I make a lot of purchasing decisions based on recommendation and experiences I read online. But the blog posts with paid cooperation does not interest me. I like to read honest opinions.”

Some mentioned that they are satisfied with the newsletter, but extra information is never a negative feature. “Well it would be nice but not a necessity, for me the newsletter is enough.” Many of the participants said that it would be a nice addition for the website: “Product and company information is always interesting to read”.

Any strict opinions could not be seen neither on opposing nor promoting, in other words, a clear point of view was not reached.

4.3.9 Additional mentions

In this last part of the interview it was asked if they had anything to say in addition about the interview, the website or the company. With this open question, the employer wanted to find out if there is something beyond previous questions that customers have in their mind about the company or the website. The answers to this question were positive. It was said that the online store had improved and it is easier to search for products than before: “Online store has improved and I really enjoy visiting the page since products are easier to find and the whole page is clearer”.

Satisfaction towards the company, products and delivery was stated. Customers described the webpages as effortless, customer-friendly and well designed. One customer said their gratitude towards the icons next to the product information that explains why the product is a sustainable choice; “The icons make it so much easier to decide what to buy”. Customers also described company the following ways: “A unique company” and “Everything simply works”.

“Ecosto is a refreshing company that stands out. Values are in place and they have a clear vision and good range of products. It is good that they have a wide selection that isn’t too broaden anyway. I am very satisfied I found this company once I compared prices and came across their website.”

In addition to previous statements, one customer showed her interest towards pop up stores.

“I would love if they made pop up stores! For me the availability of all kind of different detergents has been the best thing. It has been nice to follow Ecosto and how it evolves. I am very satisfied with the company.”

Based on these results it can be stated that Ecosto's regular customers are satisfied with the company and its operations.

4.4 Suggestions

In this part development proposition will be formed by analyzing the results and examine what can be developed and how. Employer wanted to learn how the company can develop their marketing communications and product selection based on the opinions of regular customers.

4.4.1 Social media

Ecosto uses social media and newsletters as marketing communications. From this study it was found that Ecosto's regular customers who are using social media and following Ecosto's social media channels find information about new products, offers and lifestyle as the most interesting content. However, the research showed that most of the regular customers do not follow Ecosto's social media and that those customers are satisfied with the information received from the newsletter. From the customers that were not following Ecosto's social media channels, most of them told that they do not use social media at all. Based on this information, it can be said that it is productive to concentrate on the features that interest customers the most. From Ecosto's Instagram page it can be seen that most likes have gotten updates that are related to lifestyle, certain new products and announcements of offers. It can be pointed out that it is reasonable to put effort on these kind of updates. In Facebook, the amount of likes varies considerably, therefore a connection between likes is complicated to observe. Nevertheless, certain new products and offers have gotten particularly attention. Furthermore, as seen from the results customers that follow Ecosto's social media find information about new products, offers, lifestyle and Ecosto as a company as the most interesting content.

Facebook and Instagram have different users and there are differences between the using behaviors. It can be seen that similar content does not function similar way

on these mentioned channels. Moreover, in order to succeed on providing creditable content, more research about this matter should be executed.

According to the results, the newsletter is comprehensive and provides sufficiently information. Most of the regular customers do not follow Ecosto's social media so there is a possibility that potential customers share this similar behavior. From this observation it could be considered if the distribution of the newsletter should be broadened.

4.4.2 Product range

Like mentioned before, Ecosto's regular customers were relatively satisfied with the current product selection. Based on Figure 10, it can be noted that even though there is a small deviation, it does not significantly have an influence on the outcome. According to the interview, it can be said that natural cosmetics and skin care products among the refill packages of shampoos and conditioners could be expanded. One particular matter that came up several times was ecological clothing. This is one could be taken into consideration when thinking about taking new products into the product selection. Ecological clothing could be sold with a small range that would contain basic t-shirts and tops for men and women.

As a conclusion to the question how can Ecosto improve, any specific proposition cannot be made. Further market analysis is recommended due to gather more specific data.

5 CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned before, this study aimed to find out how responsible Ecosto's regular customers are and based on information gathered from the interview to learn is there ways for Ecosto to develop their marketing communications and product range. Because Ecosto is an environmentally conscious company, it was clear that these aspects needed to be examined in the theoretical part to ascertain the concepts around this study are understood.

5.1 Validity and reliability

Bryman and Bell (2003, 167) describe the term 'validity' as whether the used indicators certainly measure the object or not. According to Price, Jhangiani & Chiang reliability can be explained as the consistency of the procedure (Ref: 11.4.2018).

It has to be taken into consideration that the sample of this study does not represent statistically adequate sample size therefore any conclusion made of this study should be treated as the opinion of limited user group with their respective opinions. Distribution of this study does not represent the whole customer base. The opinions are from a sample that has formed a customer relationship with Ecosto. Based on this fact result might be biased.

5.2 Findings

The sample for this study included 10 regular customers and they were taken from Ecosto's database which represented 13% of the group of regular customers. All 10 were reached within 3 days. Interview was implemented via phone. A mixed research method was used in this study in order to carry out comprehensive study. The interview revealed interesting facts about regular customers.

Furthermore, due to information gathered from the interview it can be stated that Ecosto's regular customers share similar opinions, values and behavior. Regular customers appreciate Ecosto as a company and they are satisfied with their operations. They rely on Ecosto and consider it as a responsible company that share

similar values with them. Customers value information and trust that Ecosto provides valid and trustworthy information. Based on results it can also be noted that responsibility has a significant impact on Ecosto's regular customers' purchasing decisions. Results showed that customers make purchasing decisions based on their values. Ecosto's customers can be characterized as individuals who have ethical and responsible values and their purchasing decisions are affected by them. According to the research, Ecosto's regular customers appreciate ethical values, ecological products and long life span of products. It can be concluded that Ecosto's regular customers are responsible. It can be noted that they buy from Ecosto because the company and its product range meet their values.

Generally, customers were satisfied with their product selection but they mentioned a few products they would add to the selection. Current product selection meets customers' needs quite well. Most of the sample do not follow Ecosto's social media so it is difficult to state what the positive and negative features are and what could be developed. When asked if the same kind of content should be added to the website, most of them regarded it as a considerable choice. Many of them mentioned the extensive content of the newsletter and that it provides satisfying amount of information for their needs.

5.3 Evaluating research process

The author is satisfied with the outcome of this study. After evaluating work put into this process, it can be said that even though the aim was reached some procedures could have been executed differently. More research and planning could have been done in the means of the interview in order to achieve the best possible results. In addition, more precise limitation should have been made to avoid the expansion of the theme around the study. Nevertheless, many theses were examined to obtain a view of the structure required, more research concerning this matter should have been done to save time during the process. Furthermore, the author has proven the skills required to fulfill a relevant and professional study.

5.4 Suggestion for future research

The author recommends conducting market analysis in order to expand knowledge about improving marketing communications and product range in deeper means. Because this study was limited to certain themes that observed the matters generally, a specific development proposition cannot be made. This research could find out what kind of customer are reached by certain channels and this way marketing communications could be improved more. Further research concerning the satisfactory of the product range is recommended if the company has a need to gather more comprehensive data about the subject.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Interview guide

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Interview guide

1. Why do you buy from Ecosto?
2. From 1-5 evaluate how much next matters effect on your purchasing decision (1 being “not at all” and 5 being “very importantly”)
 - Ecological
 - Ethical production
 - Recyclability
 - Long life spam
 - Price/value
3. How well these previously mentioned values meet Ecosto’s product selection? (1-5)
4. What are the key factors that effect on the final purchasing decision in your everyday life?
5. Are there enough information provided about the product and their environmental effects?
6. Should there be other products or product ranges on the website? If so, give an example.
7. Are you following Ecosto’s social media channels (Instagram and Facebook)?
 - If yes: What are the things that interest you most and you prefer to read and see?
8. Would you like to read similar content from the website that appears in their social media? For example lifestyle posts, tips for sustainable living, information about materials and so on.
9. Based on this interview would you like to add something or say about Ecosto or their website?