

ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING: THE GREEN APPEAL OF CERTIFIED PRODUCTS AND CONSUMER PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT: Given the expanding global niche of sustainable consumption, and the importance of environmental marketing being able to convey to sustainable consumers the image of a company committed to sustainability as well as that its products are sustainable, for success in this market, various promotion strategies can be adopted for this purpose. Thus, the objective of this study was to identify the adopted environmental marketing strategies, and the perception of entrepreneurs regarding consumer behavior in relation to these strategies, in the city of Natal-RN. The study was based on a qualitative approach, with convenience and non-probabilistic sampling through which management professionals participated in in-depth interviews, who were chosen because they are associated with working with certified products and environmental marketing strategies in their respective activities in the municipality of Natal, RN. Regarding the results and conclusions, the interviews showed that among the main environmental marketing strategies adopted by the companies represented or assisted by the interviewees, the most used is actually the environmental certification, or the adoption of green seals. Regarding the perception of the interviewed entrepreneurs, managers and consultants, regarding consumers' behavior in relation to the environmental certification strategy, according to them, even though it is important to communicate the origin of the company's products and actions, in the sense of sustainability, according to their view, consumers still do not perceive certification as a relevant differential to influence their purchase decision, because they do not have an adequate understanding of the importance of such seal.

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KEY WORDS: Certification; Consumer behavior; Green consumption; Sustainable marketing; Sustainable consumption.

MARKETING AMBIENTAL: O APELO VERDE DE PRODUTOS CERTIFICADOS E A PERCEPÇÃO DOS CONSUMIDORES

ABSTRACT: Considerando a expansão do nicho do consumo sustentável a nível global, e a importância do marketing ambiental conseguir transmitir para os consumidores sustentáveis a imagem de uma empresa engajada com a sustentabilidade, bem como de que seus produtos são sustentáveis, para o êxito nesse mercado, diversas estratégias de promoção podem ser adotadas para tal finalidade. Dessa forma, o objetivo deste estudo foi identificar as estratégias de marketing ambiental praticadas, e a percepção dos empresários em relação ao comportamento dos consumidores frente a essas estratégias, na cidade de Natal-RN. O estudo partiu de uma abordagem qualitativa, com amostragem por conveniência e não probabilística por meio da qual profissionais da área de gestão participaram de entrevistas em profundidade, escolhidos por estarem associados ao trabalho com produtos certificados e estratégias de marketing ambiental nas respectivas atuações no município de Natal-RN. Quanto aos resultados e conclusões, as entrevistas evidenciaram que entre as principais estratégias de marketing ambiental adotadas pelas empresas representadas ou assistidas pelos entrevistados, a mais utilizada é de fato a certificação ambiental, ou a adoção de selos verdes. Quanto a percepção dos empresários, gestores e consultores entrevistados, em relação ao comportamento dos consumidores frente a estratégia da certificação ambiental, de acordo com estes, por mais que esta seja importante para comunicar a procedência dos produtos e ações da empresa, no sentido da sustentabilidade, segundo sua visão, os consumidores ainda não percebem a certificação como um diferencial de relevância para influenciar a sua decisão de compra, isso por ainda não possuírem uma adequada compreensão da importância de tal selo.

KEY WORDS: Certificação; Comportamento do consumidor; Consumo sustentável; Consumo verde; Marketing sustentável.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING, ITS ACTIONS, STRATEGIES AND PURPOSE

A marketing which addresses environmental issues, or as it is commonly called, environmental marketing, green marketing, or sustainable marketing, is at the same time beneficial to consumers, the environment, and the organizations, if properly carried out. For, while generating increased sales for companies, by better adapting the characteristics of products and services to the expectations of sustainable consumers, as well as effectively disclosing these sustainable characteristics of their products and services to their target audience (MONTEIRO *et al.*, 2014), at the same time, due to the growth of this type of consumption, it is promoting environmental and social sustainability.

Thus, starting from a broad understanding of marketing actions, and not from an understanding restricted to the advertising stage, which is only the most visible part of an organization's marketing process, it is important to point out that environmental marketing actions go through all the stages of a conventional marketing process, however, in order to direct the organization to understand the specific expectations, desires and needs of a target audience with a higher level of environmental awareness.

That is, if the basic stages of marketing in any organization can be understood, based on the marketing concept provided by LUSCH (2007), such as the conception of products / services, the definition of the price of goods to be marketed, and the promotion of and distribution of these goods. Environmental marketing can be understood as a new guise of this conventional marketing process, which goes through all its stages.

From the conception of products and services, which should be understood, according to Drucker (2001), as one of the most relevant phases of the process, because it is through it that organizations that aim to reach the environmentally conscious public can, through market research, identify the needs, desires and expectations of this type of consumer, and thus provide information to the production that enables the development of products and services so suited to such demands that they sell themselves, or at least decrease the selling effort (Advertising,

Merchandising) (DRUCKER, 2001). Corroborating the importance of this phase of the marketing process for environmental marketing, Minton *et al.* (2018) state that understanding the consumer's values and their influence on the consumption of sustainability-related products and services may be critical to a company's marketing plans to promote sustainable practices.

As well as the stage of pricing the goods to be marketed; and finally the promotion and distribution of these goods. With regard to the promotion of products and services, environmental marketing should act as a driver of a sustainable image, both of the goods offered by organizations, and of the company or institution as a whole, to its target audience, highlighting the sustainable practices, materials and ideals that underpin the company's productive activities. This can be accomplished in many ways, including the green certification strategy, or green seals. Corroborating the above regarding promotion actions, from the perspective of environmental marketing, Silva, Silveira-Martins and Otto (2017) argue that in green marketing, the company's actions are market driven. Therefore, defining the attitude of the target consumers in relation to environmental issues becomes crucial for the adoption of effective communication strategies with this audience.

Dias (2014) also explains that environmental marketing goes through the various phases of conventional marketing. According to the author, this occurs from the identification of the determining factors of sustainable consumption, which in turn guides the production, packaging, promotion, distribution, consumption and even the return of post-consumer product (DIAS, 2014). A significant group of subjects contributes in an integrated way to environmental marketing, namely: producers, wholesalers, retailers and service providers. Thus, planning in the area of environmental marketing management is crucial to establish appropriate strategies for the competitive market (DAHLSTROM, 2011).

Communication can influence decision making when choosing a particular product, for this reason the consumer decides taking into consideration cultural aspects, values and beliefs, stimulated through campaigns by various media. However, before the act of buying, a previous process already directs the decision to consume a particular product or service (SOLOMON, 2008). Similarly, author Dahlstrom (2011) states that decision-making happens in stages: before, during and after consumption. There is a time to recognize the need, differentiate the ideal

from the real, research, in order to seek information, evaluate and understand, constituting the pre-purchase. It then defines how to buy by establishing the purchase. To conclude, the post-consumption that consists in evaluating the product and using it. Thus the environmental marketing should work these presented steps, influence the choice and its respective use in a sustainable way.

It is important that environmental marketing management develops its strategies to seek information on customer expectations, in order to guide the manufacture of products and the rendering of services to the best suited to these demands, as well as the advertisement of their sustainable actions, in order to consider the consumer's relationship with the product at all stages of the consumption cycle: Pre-use, use and post-use, in other words, from the selection of raw materials, the production process, purchase by the consumer, the use, disposal or reuse of the product (CAMINO, 2006; DIAS, 2014; OTTMAN, 2012).

1.2 SOCIAL-ENVIRONMENTAL IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING AND OF THE GROWTH OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN BRAZIL AND IN THE WORLD

Environmental marketing plays a key socio-environmental role, as it promotes the growth of a market niche that seeks to consume in order to generate the least possible negative impact on the environment and society (GENG; LIU; ZHU, 2017; DONG *et al.*, 2018; SUN; LIU; ZHAO, 2019), that, according to Straughan and Roberts (1999), Fraj and Martinez (2006), Silva, Silveira-Martins and Otto (2017) and Minton *et al.* (2018), by improving the alignment between what drives consumers to buy and consume sustainable products and services, and the characteristics of these products and services, as well as transmitting this image of sustainability through targeted advertising and advertising campaigns.

Driven by a portion of conscious consumers, environmental marketing directs the choice of products called "green", because the mode of consumption can bring environmental consequences and the conscious consumer already understands this reality (AFONSO, 2010). Environment-friendly and societal attitudes, well-publicized through assertive marketing, attract consumers and open the door to

one of the fastest growing global niche markets, the one of sustainable consumption (FISCHER *et al.*, 2017; LIM, 2017; HAWN; CHATTERJI; MITCHELL, 2018). As a result, companies that have the greatest ability to identify the key expectations of sustainable consumers, as well as to develop products and services that best fit those expectations, and ultimately to more assertively disclose the sustainable characteristics of those products and services to the consumer, will certainly stand out in this market (STRAUGHAN; ROBERTS, 1999; FRAJ; MARTINEZ, 2006; SILVA, SILVEIRA-MARTINS; OTTO, 2017; MINTON *et al.*, 2018).

The sustainable consumption segment has been growing significantly nationally and internationally in the last decades (ROBERTS, 1996; POLICYINTERACTIVE, 2014; AKATU, 2018). In Brazil, a survey conducted in 2018 by the AKATU institute with the objective of mapping conscious consumption in the country, which included a sample of 1,090 people from 12 capitals and / or metropolitan regions across the country, revealed that at least 24% of Brazilian consumers fall into what was defined in the study as the group with the highest propensity to conscious consumption, evidencing that although there is still a large portion of consumers who have their consumption decisions influenced mainly by social and environmental issues, there is a considerable niche market to be explored in the country regarding sustainable consumption (AKATU, 2018).

Internationally, in the United States, for example, a survey conducted more than 20 years ago, in 1996, by Roberts (1996), reveals that this market niche is even more robust, pointing out that at that time the amount of sustainable consumers was already over 90 million. Further, corroborating Roberts (1996), Ottman (2012) states that 83% of adult Americans adhere to some kind of environmentally positive attitude in daily life. Recent research conducted in the United States confirms the robustness of this market segment in the country, according to the study, which included a sample of 1,821 Americans, 85% of citizens are aware that they need to radically modify their consumption behavior to preserve the environment and at least 70% of them feel responsible for the negative impacts on the environment from overconsumption. Increased availability in the green products market can further leverage this demand, encouraging consumption that is committed to collective well-being, resulting in less long-term consequences for the environment (ROMEIRO, 2006).

1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL CERTIFICATION AS AN OPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Given the expanding niche of sustainable consumption at national and international levels, and the relevance of environmental marketing managing to convey to environmentally conscious consumers the image of a company committed to sustainability, as well as that its products are sustainable, for success in this market, several promotion strategies can be adopted for this purpose, among them, the environmental certification, or green seal, which is the focus of the present study.

Regarding the effectiveness of environmental certifications in order to convey a sustainable image to products and the company, as well as to positively influence purchasing decisions. The National Opinion Survey, 2012 version, reveals that Brazilians react positively to the appeal to the protection of environment in product labels. The survey considered the period between 2001 and 2012, when in 2001, 81% of respondents confirmed to be more motivated by this information, in 2006 the percentage was to 76% and returned to rise in 2012, when it reached the equivalent of 85%. The study also revealed a growing acceptance of organic products by the Brazilian consumer: 73% in 2001; 81% in 2012 (BRAZIL, 2012).

According to Ottman (2012), the easy reading and coherence of the information displayed on product packaging, potentiates the consumption of green products, as sustainable consumers use this information, such as green seals, to guide their purchasing decisions.

The use of environmental certification has been giving visibility to the good social and environmental practices of several companies, because through certification, the conducts can be adopted and identified in the products as competitive differentials. As an example, the forest certification, which directed appropriate practices in relation to a scarce raw material, hardwood, from the origin of the product that can be monitored, allowing a follow-up of the initial process, until its processing. Or the certifications directed to organic products, which signal to the consumer that those products are free of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, which in addition to making the food healthier, palatable, still generates much less negative impacts on the environment, and avoids exposure of rural workers to harmful substances during the cultivation of vegetables, fruits and cereals. It is then

noticed that environmental certification contributes to corporate environmental management, adapting processes, and generates a sustainable image for products in the market (ULIANA, 2005).

The environmental certification aims to inform positively about the products and their origin. It guarantees processes that guide consumers' choices by exposing value-added items that can differentiate, such as: energy efficiency, the use of recycled material, among others (BARBIERI, 2011). It is noteworthy that waste generation and resource use are often treated separately in the production process, sometimes in a segmented manner. However, despite the use of certified raw material contributing to sustainability, care must be taken to monitor production chain as a whole, because, in addition to the environmental impacts that such a disjointed approach can generate, most sustainable consumers seek information on the sustainability of the entire productive process of companies, discrediting those who try to pass only a sustainable image, but that do not demonstrate a holistic and systemic action in this sense (CASSILHA *et al.*, 2004).

Despite the importance of good promotion strategies, to positively influence consumers towards sustainable consumption, it is important to consider that these consumers have as one of their differentiating characteristics, compared to the average consumer, a greater initiative in the search for information, especially regarding the confirmation of what is claimed by the organizations in their advertisements as being their sustainable practices and behaviors, so that it is not only useful to disclose a sustainable image, to win this public it is necessary that this image corresponds to reality, and that environmental marketing gives consumers easy access to proof of this consistency between discourse and practice. Environmental certification, or green seals, are a great alternative for this purpose (ULIANA, 2005; BARBIERI, 2011; BRAZIL, 2012; OTTMAN, 2012), as it attests to sustainable processes and practices developed throughout the production process.

1.4 DETERMINING FACTORS OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION: DEMOGRAPHIC (INCOME AND AGE) VERSUS COGNITIVE (ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS) ASPECTS

Although it is understood that green products are still marketed in Brazil and around the world at higher prices than their similar or unsustainable substitutes (Griskevicius; Bergg; Tybur, 2010), they are not only purchased by a portion of the economically most favored population, therefore, there is a global consensus among several authors that despite demographic segmentation (when segmenting based on demographic information such as gender, age, income, education, occupation, among others) is an important way to characterize several different segments (VINING; EBREO, 1990; BHATE; LAWLER, 1997; DANIERE; TAKAHASHI, 1999; HUTTEL *et al.*, 2018), is not an efficient approach to characterize the sustainable consumption segment (KASSARJIAN, 1971; ANDERSON JUNIOR; CUNNINGHAM, 1972; ANDERSON JUNIOR; HENION; COX, 1974; ROBERTS, 1996; ROBERTS; BACON, 1997; STRAUGHAN; ROBERTS, 1999; LAGES; VARGAS NETO, 2002; GONÇALVES-DIAS *et al.*, 2009; SUN; LIU; ZHAO, 2019), that is, it is not an efficient way to characterize the sustainable consumer, evidencing that he has behavioral or cognitive characteristics, as major determinants of his consumption behavior, such as environmental awareness.

As mentioned, several statistical studies corroborate the low influence of demographic variables as predictors of sustainable consumption, i.e., they indicate their low efficiency to characterize such market segment. Among them, even at the beginning of the robust researches on the subject, the study by Kassarian (1971) found that positive attitudes towards environmental problems can hardly be directly related to characteristics such as education, income, gender or age, for example, although they may indicate some expected behavior trend.

Next, the results of research by Anderson Júnior and Cunningham (1972), Anderson Júnior, Henion and Cox (1974) and Roberts and Bacon (1997) reinforced the low influence of demographic variables (education, income, gender or age) as predictors of sustainable consumption.

In this sense, Straughan and Roberts (1999), after conducting a robust comparative study (with a sample of 235 US college students) between the predictive

efficiency of demographic and psychometric factors under sustainable consumption behavior, obtained strong statistical evidence that psychographic segmentation represent a better method of segregating this market than demographic one because it was identified that demographic factors explained only 8.7% of the total variance explained, while psychographic factors captured 39.1% of the variance of this consumption behavior.

Ratifying that identified by these authors, later studies, already entering the new millennium, (ROBERTS, 1996; LAGES; VARGAS NETO, 2002) obtained similar results, demonstrating that demographic factors have a weak correlation with ecologically conscious consumer behavior. Lages and Vargas Neto (2002) observed that, in harmony with previous studies, demographic variables seem to exert a slight influence on the sustainable consumption behavior of individuals.

Finally, much more recent studies from the end of the first and second decades of the new millennium continue to yield similar results to those identified throughout this previous body of research. Gonçalves-Dias *et al.* (2009) state that the demographic variables measured in their study were also ineffective in identifying and segmenting environmentally conscious consumers. Sun, Liu and Zhao (2019) further add that overall, demographic characteristics have a minimal impact on green consumption. This means that consumers from different social backgrounds are not very different in their implementation of green consumption.

For managers of companies that focus on the sustainable consumption segment, this implies that characterizing their target audience based on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, income, education, among others, is certainly not the best strategy, and these managers should invest in a characterization based on cognitive and behavioral segmentation. From this understanding, the strategy of environmental certification becomes even more pertinent, as it focuses on the appeal to consumers' environmental awareness, one of the main cognitive characteristics that determine sustainable consumption (DIAS, 2014; HAWS; WINTERICH; NAYLOR, 2014; LOREK; SPANGENBERG, 2014; GEIGER; KELLER, 2018; GENG; LIU; ZHU, 2017; FISCHER *et al.*, 2017; DONG *et al.*, 2018; SUN; LIU; ZHAO, 2019), and not simply on demographic issues.

Finally, it is clarified that green products are similar to conventional products once they have similar basic functions. The big difference is that green products focus

on developing processes that aim to minimize or totally eliminate environmental impacts throughout the product life cycle, and in the case of green food products, the difference extends to the issue of consumer and worker health, which, according to Garnett (2009), Friel *et al.* (2009) and Carrus, Pirchio and Mastandrea (2018), because they do not use pesticides and chemical fertilizers, as conventional products do, make it possible to offer healthier foods for consumption, as well as avoiding the exposure of rural workers to harmful substances during cultivation. The benefits are often exposed individually to the consumer, attracting green product enthusiasts, but the benefits go beyond the individual environment, reverberating throughout society (MICHAUD; LLERENA, 2011).

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

To understand the introductory issues, the qualitative approach was used for the present study, with convenience and non-probabilistic sampling. According to Vergara (2008), the use of qualitative exploratory research is adequate when employed to describe and report subjects that are still little explored through in-depth interview analysis.

To assimilate the phenomenon through agents involved and their daily attitudes, as a technique, in-depth interview was used, allowing to identify and confirm what was verified in the literature (SILVA; GODOI; BANDEIRA-DE-MELO, 2010).

To compose the sample, professionals of administration, managers and entrepreneurs from the city of Natal-RN were chosen, understanding that the research subjects had representativeness in the area, in order to deepen the content under analysis and thus collaborate with the objective of identifying the environmental marketing strategies, as well as consumer behavior towards these strategies (MATTAR, 2012), which is the focus of this study.

For Bardin (2011) it is possible to verify the verbal communication of the participants systematically, and later analyze them in the light of the literature worked on in the study. The instrument used to conduct the interviews comprises

a semi-structured script of questions, and a record of the professionals' reports, in order to explore the experience that each professional had on the subject.

The identification of respondents throughout the study was through the letter P, followed by the number established from the order of interviews, P1, P2, P3 ... P5. The research subjects were five professionals, of which four are women and one is man. The age group goes from 32 years and the average calculated at 41 years. Of these professionals, two are working in the business consulting area; one is a commercial manager of an implement manufacturing company; another acts as general manager of a local hotel that is run by an international group; and the latter is the owner and manager of a planned furniture store that is part of a national network.

The script addressed the following points related to the theme: What environmental marketing strategies are known and practiced in the daily lives of professionals? How do they perceive consumer behavior? What could undermine the credibility of pro-environmental actions taken by organizations, in the view of consumers? Is the use of environmental certification a sales driver? What are the advertising tools that expose the green product? Is the consumer receptive to disclosure?

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 CHARACTERIZATION OF THE STUDIED ENVIRONMENT

Initially it is relevant to contextualize the city where the research was developed and the vocation for green market or sustainable products. The chosen city was the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Norte, Natal, which has, according to the estimate made in 2018 by the IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, 2018) about 877,640 inhabitants, not to mention the population living in its metropolitan region, when this amount is added, the population exceeds 1 million people.

The city is characterized by its beautiful beaches, dunes, remnant vegetation formations of the Atlantic Forest, and, contrary to common sense, it is not located in the semiarid region of northeastern Brazil, but in the so-called Zona da Mata. All these lush natural features, coupled with a good offer of services and commerce, such as hotels and inns, restaurants, shopping malls, cinemas, environmental and leisure parks, make Natal one of the most sought after destinations by Brazilian tourists, next to Gramado. (RS), Rio de Janeiro (RJ) and Fortaleza (CE), according to a study by the Ministry of Tourism (BRAZIL, 2015) and the travel company Trip Advisor.

According to a survey by the Institute for Research and Development of Commerce (IPDC), released by the Federation of Commerce of Goods, Services and Tourism of RN (Fecomércio) in 2018, most tourists who frequent the city of Natal are Brazilians (71.2%), only 28.8% are foreigners. Being the majority of Brazilian tourists, coming from the southeast region (45.9%). (FECOMÉRCIO-RN, 2018)

One of the interesting results of the research is that it can be seen from the interview with the hotel manager that the flow of these tourists from all over Brazil and around the world ends up positively influencing the green products market in the city. According to her, most of these tourists are looking for products that have less impact on the environment, which has been helping to promote the supply of such products in the Potiguar capital in recent years. Moreover, the interaction of these tourists with locals also generates a positive influence in this regard, not only in buying green products, but in sharing sustainable habits.

Regarding the supply and demand for green products in the city of Natal, as pointed out in the previous paragraph, both have been growing in recent years. According to an article published by the newspaper *Tribuna do Norte* (2017), the production of organic products for example has been expanding considerably in the state, having gone from only 120 producers in 2013 to about 450 in 2017. However, according to the newspaper, demand is much higher than supply, and it is reinforced by tourists who routinely frequent the capital, showing the strength of this segment and the relevance of developing effective marketing strategies to conquer this niche.

Finally, the article of the newspaper *Tribuna do Norte* (2017) points out that the main strategy adopted by producers who sell organic products in the state of RN is green certification, or organic seal. It also emphasizes that those producers who cannot access the label, due to its costs, lose a considerable share of the market

because consumers place such a factor in their buying decision. This has led to the emergence of cooperative green certification strategies where smaller producers take on the role of overseeing each other to receive a simpler and cheaper type of organic seal for their products.

3.2 INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

It was noted that all respondents had contact with environmental marketing strategies in their respective activities, however, the examples presented in the interviews revealed that information about pro-environmental practices is generally exposed superficially, so that the green cause could be better worked out. As reported by the professionals below.

[...] some companies know how to use this tool well to communicate, others do not. This caught my attention, sometimes the customer doesn't even know if it was made from demolition or reforestation wood, or something that has had some treatment, or concern for the environment, they can't say that to the customer, the store visitor or the customer of furniture, just want to demonstrate this with certificate. (P2)

For professional P2, the strategy is linked to the communication and disclosure of the origin of the raw material. To this end, environmental certification is used as a strategy to legitimize the origin of the product, but the strategy is deficient because it does not value the potential of the raw material that makes up the product. With this, it cannot attract through the environmental cause, because it does not clearly expose the information and sometimes does not exploit the certification of the good itself.

Thus, we realize the importance of environmental marketing, as it contributes to the dissemination and promotes the engagement of consumers and other stakeholders (ALVES, 2011).

[...] what I see more is this, people misuse the disclosure of their certifications or sometimes abuse their use, for example, says: my product is organic, the company cannot say that the product is organic, who has to certify if it is organic is the institute that performed the

audit, which certified that product, so the company should disclose how it got that certification. (P1)

[...] Company X has the friends of the earth day, it has to turn off the lights for a certain time, they disclose, but I don't know how much they reach, because it is still in the matter of awareness of people to do it [...]. Disclosure is often done, but it undermines it, because the staff is not really engaged to do so. (P5)

Analyzing the reports of professionals P1 and P5, one can see specific actions such as attitudes performed by large companies in the environmental area, while this action is valued by P1, professional P5 wonders how the specific attitude will affect and raise consumer awareness if there is no ongoing process to encourage engagement. For author Ottman (2012) appeals to the green cause, even if individual, should be encouraged, for this, environmental marketing will direct motivational actions according to target audience. Thus, government involvement in collective mobilization should prevail over individual aspects, however individual values and attitudes end up serving as an example for the environmental cause, it is not the lack of knowledge that impairs engagement, it would be the absence of global actions that would reach a significant repercussion, generating greater results for the cause (ASSADOURIAN; PRUGH, 2013).

For the interviewed professional P2, from the education of the new generations, which for her, currently happens in a different way, an increasingly perception will be promoted in future consumers regarding the choice and search for companies and products with an environmental nature. This gives an optimistic view of future generations about the green cause and its interest. Other professionals point out in their reports wrong attitudes and lack of knowledge and interest in the environmental cause.

[...] I observe well the food issue, the supermarkets that we usually go to, they put the hydroponic products, next to the organic ones, inducing, making it reach the consumer's head that buying a hydroponic product is an organic product, on the contrary [...] In fact, it is much more chemical than a conventional product, which has no organic or hydroponic appeal, it induces the consumer to think it will be good for their health, thus interfering with the credibility of the organic product. (P1)

[...] working on awareness, with a program, with process, so that it can be realized and articulated with several fronts, and not only to say: we have to do this, to start education at school, be it at public, state or in a paid school, but to engage everyone in a program of awareness, it has to be in full line, it not enough for the middle class to be aware and wanting to realize it if the poor little one there thinks that because he is poor he does not need to. So awareness has to be global. (P5)

The use of environmental certification mainly in the furniture sector ensures the credibility of the raw material from its origin, handling, travel and control through tracking conditions to the final destination. The importance of environmental certification as an incentive at the time of purchase should be a sales driver. However, contrary to what national and international research has been pointing out (CASSILHA *et al.*, 2004; ULIANA, 2005; BARBIERI, 2011; BRAZIL, 2012; OTTMAN, 2012) when this question was asked, the answers indicated by the interviewees did not signal environmental certification as a differential for sale, because according to them, most consumers still do not realize the importance attached to certification. Next, we can observe the perceptions of respondents from the recorded reports.

[...] the green seal induces more people who are sensitized. The company may even have the green seal, but as long as people don't know what it can mean, it ends up inducing nothing. (P1)

[...] important as a way of communicating, sometimes the product is, or you do something but don't tell the customer that, so the seal is a way of communicating, it's a way of ensuring the customer that that product is meeting all the required criteria and that someone has certified and verified that in the production process all concepts and practice for sustainability are really used. (P2)

[...] It will depend on the culture that is focused on it, conscious consumers, but we do not have it, it is a minority that will realize, you, me, some of our environment, but the vast majority do not, unless they worked very hard on media terms. (P4)

Respondents P1 and P4 associate positive aspects with the green seal and point out that certification will reach the public who has prior knowledge of the importance of the seal, who already has some knowledge related to the

environmental cause. Respondent P2 gives the label a form of disclosure, that is, the label communicates that that product has something different in relation to the environment.

Working competitive advantage with clear information in environmental appeal products is the role of environmental marketing, thus the adoption of certification is an important instrument to safeguard the organization's responsibility and commitment to that cause (ALVES, 2011). This is why the use of certification is relevant, but should be well articulated with business marketing.

The green speech should be transparent and clear avoiding the appeal through jargon that camouflages the real attitude and action, the image of organizations in relation to the environmental cause should move away from the appalling appeal in the exposition of the activities developed by the company.

The disclosure depends a lot on what the consumer can absorb, the consumer by seeing that green name, already thinks that is very appropriate, if he is not fully oriented, if he is not aware of what it is actually [...] Sometimes I notice some green seals that when I seek information refer only to the name, always green vegetables, is hydroponic associated with the color of the vegetables and this is still very strong. [...] The lack of education of people, sometimes the media itself, induces that that product is correct and people believe it, regardless of social class or having better purchasing power, that is often induced there. (P1)

It is observed in the answer of professional P1 that the consumer can adhere to the consumption of green products without observing the depth or seeking information about that product. The fact that it presents something related to green or the indiscriminate use of the term green, induces, appeals and ends up leading to the green cause without analyzing in detail what it refers to and how it is worked. In addition, according to Griskevicius, Bergh and Tybur (2010) many so-called conscious consumers actually seek to consume green products primarily for the sake of status, to publicly demonstrate their commitment to environmental protection, as well as their financial capacity to acquire sustainable products, which are often more expensive than their similar or conventional substitutes.

It is up to companies to pay attention to the marketing aspects and to emphasize the responsibility of those involved, driving actions through environmental marketing and directing practices that contemplate the social sphere and the market.

Legislation and certifications already lead to new practices, highlighting one action over another can weaken corporate attitudes internally and reflect it externally impairing organizational credibility (GONÇALVES; DISIDERIO; GUTIERREZ, 2006).

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The interviews showed that among the main environmental marketing strategies which were adopted by the companies represented or assisted by the interviewees, regarding the presentation and proof of sustainable practices developed by the organizations towards their target audience, the most used is actually the environmental certification, or the adoption of green stamps.

Regarding the perception of the interviewed entrepreneurs, managers and consultants, regarding consumers' behavior towards the environmental certification strategy, according to them, even though it is important to communicate the origin of the company's products and actions, in the sense of its sustainability, according to their view, consumers still do not perceive certification as a relevant differential to influence their purchase decision, because they do not have an adequate understanding of the importance of such seal.

However, it is indicated as a possible influencer of such perception of respondents in relation to the little influence of the green seal on the purchase decision of consumers, the fact that, despite having sought to interview managers, entrepreneurs, and consultants with a strong grounding in the issues regarding sustainability, the answers to the questions asked during the interview were denoted by most of the interviewees, although they are managers, owners or consultants of companies that disclose an image of engagement with the social and environmental cause, a superficial domain of the subject. This may have influenced their perspective on consumer behavior in relation to the environmental certification strategy. In the meantime new studies are suggested, with more diverse samples of managers and entrepreneurs, as well as proven engagement with social and environmental issues, in order to better clarify the questions and objectives raised in this study.

It was also observed that all respondents, despite being related to the proposed theme or directly dealing with the main raw material in the manufacture of

furniture (wood) or holding executive positions linked directly with large companies, agree that there is a gap in environmental education that favors consumers' lack of awareness in the subject, corroborating what Coelho *et al.* (2018a) and Coelho *et al.* (2018b) state, which is that deficiency in sustainability education is one of the main drivers of individuals' environmental awareness deficit. It was spontaneously identified during the responses, the lack of knowledge by consumers as the main point, in the common understanding of these professionals, which undermines the engagement in environmental actions.

The price was approached as a decisive factor of consumer choice, the financial concern is still very strong, ignoring or disregarding the sustainable or environmental characteristics of the products. In this sense, it is important to act in marketing as a management tool in the development of coherent strategies that can generate credibility in actions and that approach the reality of the consumer.

5 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001.

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Recebido em: 22/08/2017

Aceito em: 04/11/2019