

# Customers Attitudes towards the Environmental Components of Packaging at M&S

September 18, 2015

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## INTRODUCTION

The trend of sustainable consumption has become an important part of everyday life, influencing not only the political, economic and social context, but also the patterns of daily consumption. The findings presented as part of this report were collected via 263 face-to-face semi-structured interviews in 20 Marks & Spencer stores across England and Wales in order to gather consumer's opinions about the role of packaging during their daily shopping.

Of the 263 customers interviewed, 48 people (18%) bought loose vegetables at least in part due to their concerns over the environmental impacts of the packaging. Of the 153 who were also asked to discuss a soap purchase, not one suggested the environment as a reason for purchasing a particular type or brand. Overall, 21% of customers said they did not care about the environment and 43% demonstrated 'limited concern'. The remaining 36% appeared to show genuine concern about some facet of the environment. Given previous research that has indicated the difficulty in moving those from the 'unconcerned' category into one of even limited concern, our recommendations suggest focusing on those in the 'concerned' and 'limited concern' categories in terms of work to improve awareness and behaviour regarding environmental aspects of packaging.

It is clear customers think very little about packaging, and when they do consider the environmental components of packaging, the information they use is outdated or based on problematic assumptions. There is therefore a significant need for improving overall customer awareness. As such, we suggest a set of experiments that test different ways of communicating with customers so as to encourage them to consider packaging, and help to replace the information on which they are basing their decisions with more accurate and up-to-date understanding of the role packaging plays in the the production, consumption and disposal of products. We therefore suggest:

1. Design a pilot study to test different forms of communication about packaging and waste with four different goals:
  - a. identify which forms are the most effective in getting customers to become aware of and consider packaging in the purchase process,
  - b. dispel myths about which forms of packaging are best for the environment, such as 'loose is better'

- c. provide better information about packaging, such as how packaging reduces overall food waste in store and thus is better from a life-cycle perspective
- d. increase purchase of particular products with ideal forms of packaging

Working with an environmental psychologist to design appropriate interventions, INCPEN, M&S and other INCPEN members can use norm-based language to investigate how different interventions are more or less effectgive at encouraging customer awareness, and improving the uptake of more environmentally friendly behaviour relative to packaging.

## SAMPLING

263 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in 20 Marks & Spencer stores across England and Wales (see Table 1 for list of cities and Appendix I for further justification of those cities). The decision to select these stores was based on three different parameters: location, socio-economic situation and dimension. The selected stores are all situated in the city centre and/or shopping areas of the cities in order to ideally target customers during their daily shopping. Data was collected during a two weeks period from 13th-25th July 2015 and posters were put up in a visible place on the wall at the end of the tills to encourage customers to participate (see Appendix II).

City	Date of visit	M&S Store Address	Number of interviews
<b>Bath</b>	18/07/2015	<i>16-18 Stall Street, BA1 1QB</i>	9
<b>Blackpool</b>	13/07/2015	<i>49 Church Street, FY1 1HT</i>	11
<b>Birmingham</b>	20/07/2015	<i>42 High Street, B4 7SS</i>	14
<b>Brighton</b>	16/07/2015	<i>195 Western Road, BN1 2BJ</i>	11
<b>Bristol</b>	14/07/2015	<i>78 Broadmed, BS1 3DS</i>	15
<b>Cambridge</b>	16/07/2015	<i>6-11 Sidney Street, CB2 3HH</i>	13
<b>Cardiff</b>	13/07/2015	<i>72 Queen Street, CF10 4XG</i>	17
<b>Exeter</b>	14/07/2015	<i>211-219 High Street EX4 3QA</i>	16
<b>Leeds</b>	14/07/2015	<i>47 Briggate, LS1 6HF</i>	13
<b>Leicester</b>	15/07/2015	<i>18 Gallowtree Gate, LE1 1DA</i>	11
<b>Liverpool</b>	21/07/2015	<i>35 Church Street, L1 1DF</i>	14
<b>London Holborn</b>	15/07/2015	<i>330 High Holborn, WC1V 7PD</i>	20
<b>London Kensington</b>	17/07/2015	<i>113 Kensington High Street, W8 5SQ</i>	11
<b>Manchester</b>	25/07/2015	<i>7 Market Street, M1 1WT</i>	9
<b>Newport</b>	18/07/2015	<i>Retail Park, Units 16 to 18, NP19 4QQ</i>	7
<b>Nottingham</b>	23/07/2015	<i>1 Albert Street, NG1 7DB</i>	12
<b>Plymouth</b>	19/07/2015	<i>1 Cornwall Street, PL1 1DH</i>	14
<b>Sheffield</b>	22/07/2015	<i>250-266 Ecclesall Road, S11 8JD</i>	20
<b>Southampton</b>	20/07/2015	<i>23 Harbour Parade, SO15 1QB</i>	12
<b>Swansea</b>	13/07/2015	<i>270 Oxford Street, SA1 3BB</i>	14
<b>Total</b>			263

Table 1: Date of visit and number of interviews

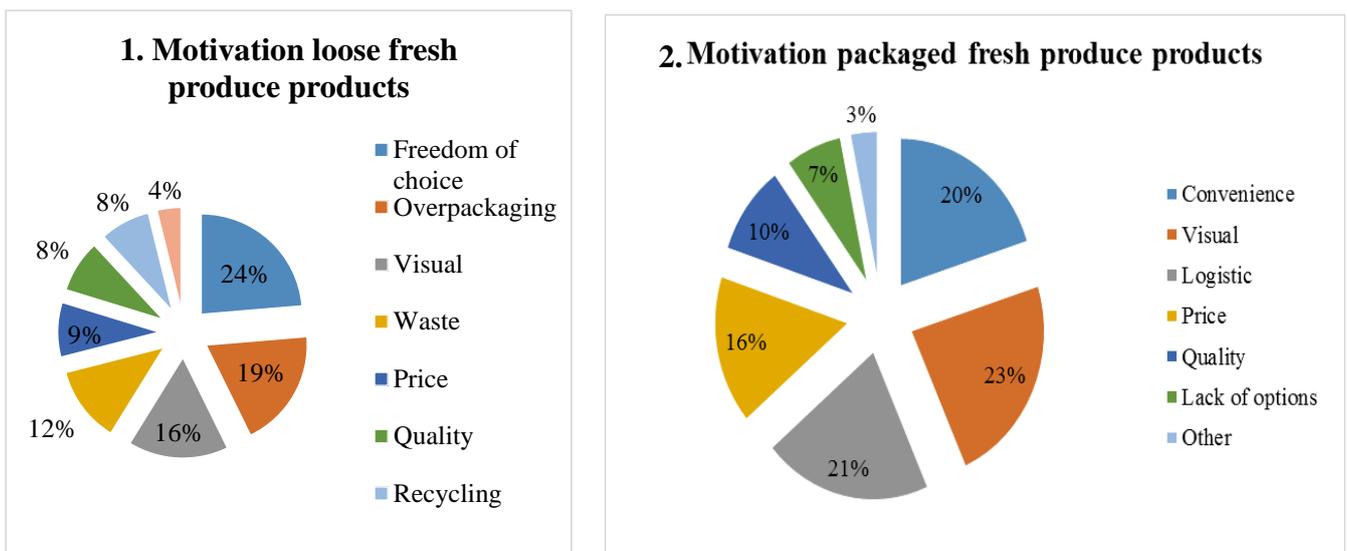
Customers were approached inside the supermarkets mostly after they had completed and paid for their shopping, but also around the Food Halls. In so doing, we were able to interview participants about purchases they had just made so as to discuss actual behaviour, and with their own reasons fresh in their minds. Customers were asked three questions (see Appendix III) using a technique called laddering to get as far as possible into their views within a limited period of time. To investigate the attitudes in particular, the interviews focused on two product categories common to a typical shop (fresh vegetables & soap), where there are different options available to consumers in terms of packaging.

## FINDINGS

The data collected regarded two product categories: fresh produce and general household products. In this section, the main findings relating to these items and the role of packaging connected to them will be illustrated. Successively, the findings about the environmental considerations will be described.

### Loose vs. Packaged Products

The data collected allowed to categorise the motivations for purchasing loose or packaged fresh produce products. The main motivations for purchasing loose products can be seen in Figure 1 and those for packaged products are illustrated in Figure 2.



### *Motives - loose*

In general, the most dominant reason for purchasing loose fresh products was found to be the freedom of choice, in terms of the possibility of choosing the number and type of products. Particularly, regarding volume, a number of comments were made. First, the possibility to pick one's own loose fresh produce items allowed the preferred quantity to be selected, which was regarded as advantageous by those participants. It was stated that when buying fruit and vegetables loose, there is no obligation to purchase a particular amount and it

is possible to examine the products better and avoid choosing, e.g. damaged, stained or bruised ones.

Additionally, over-packaging was considered as an important factor influencing the choice of a product, with participants specifying that they prefer to buy loose instead of purchasing unnecessary plastic. The visual elements of the products were considered as important in influencing the purchase decision, usually associated with the perceived quality of the product itself. Some participants also mentioned that they regarded packaging as an “extra cost” and inconvenient waste. Finally, price, quality and the recyclability of the packaging were mentioned, but did not appear to be significantly important for the purchase of loose fresh produce products.

### *Motives - packaged*

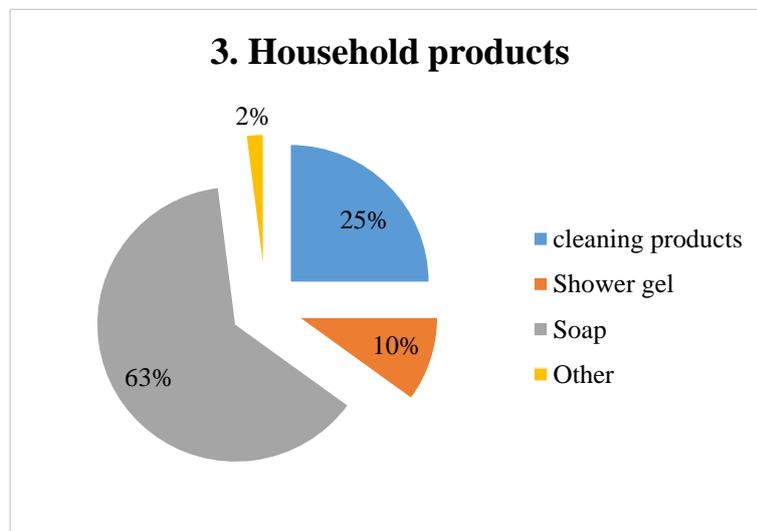
In relation to convenience, it was mostly mentioned that purchasing items in packages saves time, especially when one is in a rush. In a small number of cases, participants cited specific features, such as “pre-washed” or ease to prepare, as a consideration for their purchase. Information on the fresh produce items, in terms of knowing exactly how much one gets and how much it will cost, was regarded by a few participants as convenient. Finally, the ability to select fruit and vegetables in packaged form was considered several times as something convenient. Also in this case the visual elements played an important role, with customers admitting that the packaging made the items “more tempting”. Logistic elements were perceived as particularly significant, the protective function of the packaging was regarded as one the main factors influencing the purchasing decision. This trend was found especially regarding berries and soft fruits in general, where the majority of costumers stated that the packaging was necessary in order for the products to not get damaged. Moreover, several negative comments were made in terms of plastic packaging, which was perceived to generate condensation and subsequently adversely affect the durability and quality of the fruit or vegetable item.

Price was important, in particular for fruit and vegetable items that were part of an offer, e.g. ‘3 for £2’. It was also stated that packaged products were cheaper and therefore preferred. Similarly, quality was considered as an important element. Particularly, customers associated the visual aspects of the packaging, in terms of colours and design, with the freshness of the

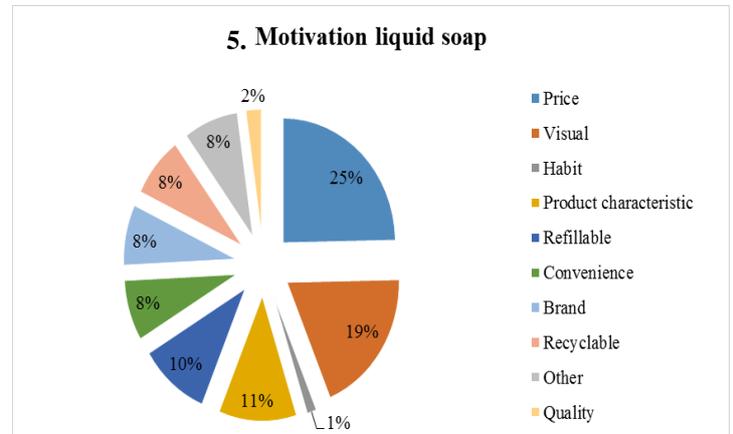
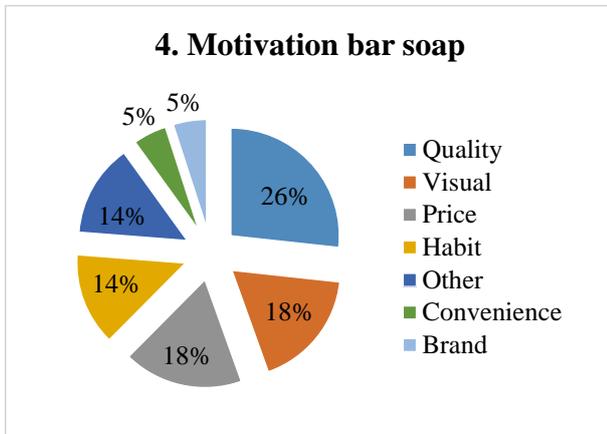
product. Finally, participants stated that the purchase of packaged products was due to the lack of a loose option of that particular item.

### Household products

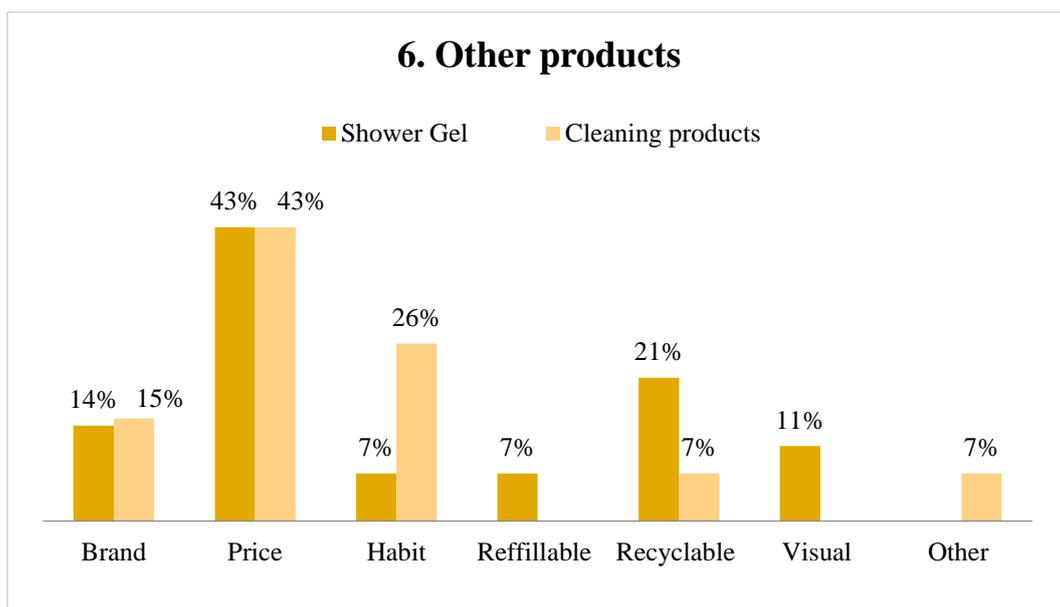
The data collected about household products were gathered only in one of the projects. Thus, the findings regarding this section are relative to only 100 of the participants. The products considered were: soap, shower gel and cleaning products. More details are shown in Figure 3.



Regarding the soap, 75% of the participants claimed to prefer the liquid soap to the bar soap; the main motivations are illustrated in Figure 4 and Figure 5. As it can be noticed, environmental elements of the packaging, such as being refillable or recyclable only played a role in liquid soap purchases. It is unclear whether those who preferred bar soap did so for the environmental considerations of either the product or packaging. Again, visual elements were very important to customers with regard to their soap purchases.



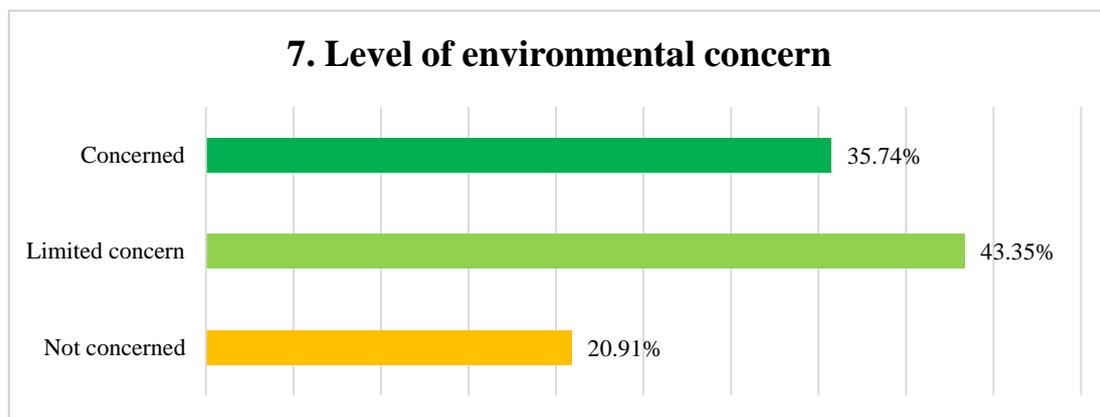
As shown in Figure 6, the purchase of other products such as shower gel and cleaning products were mainly motivated by the price. For cleaning products, participants appeared to be relatively loyal to a brand or a particular product after they had tried it, while in case of shower gel, the recyclability of the product was considered as an additional factor, as well as the possibility of refill them.



Finally, especially for soap and shower gel, customers emphasised the need of buying a particular product because of the intrinsic characteristics of it, relative to hygienic or medical reasons, for instance. Thus, the packaging did not play an obvious role in these products.

## Customer Environmental Concern

Based on trends in the data, participants could be divided in three different categories according to their level of engagement with environmental issues linked to the packaging of the purchased products and their respective use of rationalisations as justifications for the prioritization of other factors or the negligence of environmental considerations (see Figure 7).



Participants belonging to the first group clearly stated the environmental aspects of packaging for fresh produce and household products as a relevant and in some cases even deciding factor in their decision-making process. In general unprompted environmental considerations are mentioned much more often and explanations are generally more elaborate and well informed. Finally, for numerous participants the feeling of guilt and social norms played an important role in engaging in their environmental behaviour.

The second group is comprised of participants that mention that they are considering the environmental aspects of packaging, however, it is evident from the interviewees' answers that other factors are often equally or even more important. Furthermore, rationalisations are markedly more regular and stated as a form of justification for prioritizing other factors or neglecting environmental considerations. In this regard, rationalisations frequently signify a form of hindrance to their possibility to act more environmentally-friendly, such as time pressure or a lack of alternatives, or a type of compensation for prioritizing other factors, e.g. bring own bag or recycle.

The third group includes participants that clearly stated that they do not consider the environmental aspects of the packaging of fresh produce and household products, and generally regard it as an irrelevant factor in their purchase decisions. Rationalisations are only mentioned a very few times and rather general deliberations than actual justifications for prioritizing other factors or neglecting environmental considerations. All in all, rather than using rationalisations, this grouping just ignores the possible consideration of the environmental aspects of packaging altogether, which is another way of reconciling experienced dissonances.

### Environmental Considerations of Packaging on Fresh & Household products

The large majority of participants mentioned the environmental aspects of the packaging only after the questions relating to the topic, which indicates that these are not top-of-mind concerns for most customers when buying fresh produce or household products. Nevertheless, participants stated a number of environmental considerations with regard to the packaging of fresh produce and household products. Furthermore, participants' ability to articulate concerns varied greatly. Some seemed to mention rather generic considerations, whereas others gave a lot more detailed and elaborate comments. Finally, several participants mentioned external sources, especially the media, as the provenances for their knowledge of the environmental impacts and their enactment towards minimizing or mitigating these.

In particular the recyclability and degradability of the packaging were considered as a main concern by a majority of the participants, especially in regard to the disposal of plastic and the over-packaging issue. In this regard, particularly plastic was perceived as negative or even harmful to fauna and flora, partly because it is not biodegradable. Paper-based materials were mostly considered as impacting less on the environment. Additionally, a small percentage of participants emphasised not only the minimisation of the packaging in fresh and general household products, but further extended their environmental considerations, with remarks about “doing one’s little thing”, which was especially in terms of saving the environment or contributing through recycling.

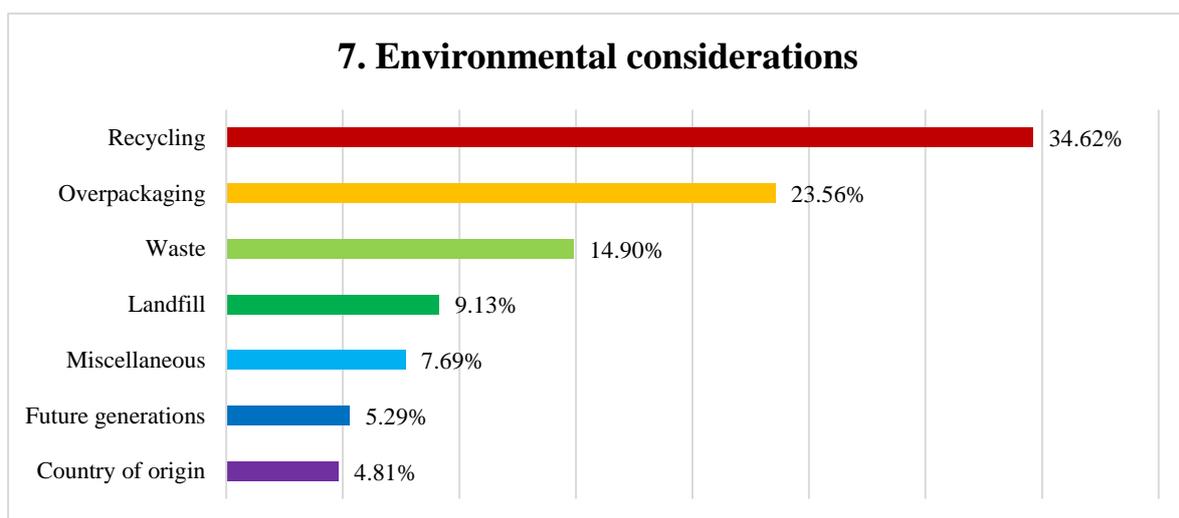
A small percentage took into account issues such as waste, landfills and pollution. In this regard, deterioration of the oceans was a regularly mentioned consideration. Other participants stated the “ozone layer”, “atmosphere”, “forests” or more generally “the

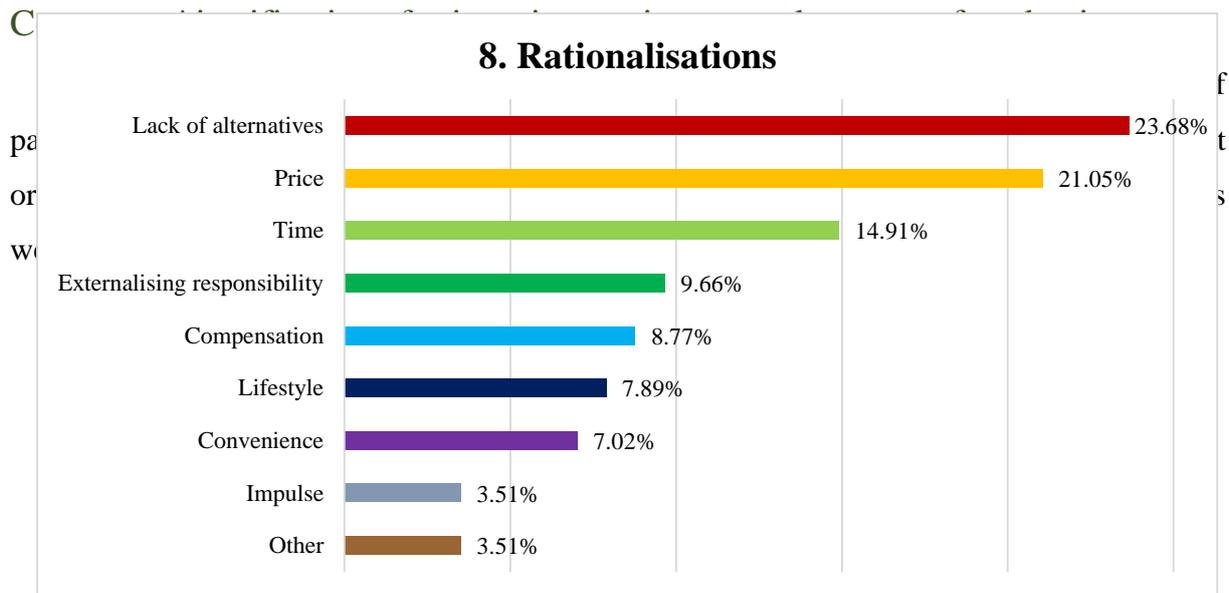
environment” as parts of nature that were being damaged. Littering was cited by a few customers as a consideration regarding the environmental aspects of packaging, which was thereby considered as waste or rubbish that “spoils the environment”, if it is not disposed of properly.

Finally, a few comments were made relating to future generations and country of origin. Although some people cited also economic reasons, such as their wish to “support the local economy”, a number of times locality was stated due to fewer “air miles” and thus a lower environmental impact. Shoppers stating future generations as a concern often seemed to regard it as an obligation to look after the environment for them, and act in such a way that the Earth will be preserved.

Interestingly, 10% of the respondents asked about household products claimed to prefer and purchase them in stores such as *The Body Shop* where refillable options are available or they stated their preferences for concentrated packaging. Thus, some customers were going elsewhere to purchase household goods due to packaging considerations.

Figure 7 illustrates the environmental considerations mentioned by consumers assigned to the concerned and limited concern groups, as those from the third group produced no results. So the results in Figure 7 below demonstrate the percentage of those who considered the environmental components in some way.





Lack of alternatives was the most widely mentioned rationalisation by participants. It was often heard that “everything was packaged”. There were often common complaints that there is too much packaging and that it is often unnecessary. In this regard, it also did not seem to occur to most people to simply not buy a product because it was packaged, but they rather rationalised their decision and tried to find logical reasons for their behaviour, which were quite often external to them.

Time constraints and price were mentioned among the main limitations to the purchase of environmentally-friendly products. Thereby, customers stated that they purchased packaged fresh produce items because they were cheaper or part of an offer. In this respect, it was also

mentioned that they would have bought the loose option, if it had been part of the same offer. Furthermore, the packaged option was regularly regarded as quicker and more convenient.

Another rationalisation that was frequently mentioned evolved around participants externalising responsibility. Similarly to the lack of alternatives, also here customers referred to external reasons and either pointed to someone else, e.g. retailers or suppliers, for being responsible with regard to the environmental impacts of the packaging, or simply denied responsibility.

In a number of cases participants made statements related to what we might call off-set behaviour that they used as a form of permission or compensation for them to not consider the environmental aspects of the packaging. For instance, some indicated that they brought their own bags and so had already considered the environment, while others indicated that they recycled, again meaning their environmental ‘work’ was done.

Other rationalisations referring to constraints such as impulse and lifestyle, which were either related to participants purchasing a particular product without further consideration of environmental aspects, or although they used to be quite green but then they have got kids and they had to change their lifestyle.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR M&S, INCPEN & INCPEN MEMBERS

It is clear customers think very little about packaging, and when they do consider the environmental components of packaging, the information they use is outdated or based on problematic assumptions. There is therefore a significant need for improving overall customer awareness. As such, we suggest a set of experiments that test different ways of communicating with customers so as to encourage them to consider packaging, and help to replace the information on which they are basing their decisions with more accurate and up-to-date understanding of the role packaging plays in the the production, consumption and disposal of products. We therefore suggest:

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## Appendix I – Justification for city selection

City	Location in GB	Population	Demographics	Other characteristics
<b>Bath</b>	South-West	88,859	Small city	University city World Heritage Tourist destination
<b>Blackpool</b>	North-West	142,065	Mid-sized city	In 2013 most unhealthy city in England 3 <sup>rd</sup> lowest job growth in UK
<b>Birmingham</b>	West Midlands	1,000,000	Large city (2 <sup>nd</sup> largest in UK)	International business centre
<b>Brighton</b>	South-East	160,000	Mid-sized city	Tourist destination
<b>Bristol</b>	South-West	430,000	Mid-to-large-sized city	Green European Capital 2015
<b>Cambridge</b>	East	122,700	Mid-sized city	University city High-technology centre Tourist destination 3 <sup>rd</sup> highest job growth in UK
<b>Cardiff</b>	South Wales	350,000	Mid-to-large-sized city	Low economic activity rate
<b>Exeter</b>	South-West	100,000	Small city	High employment level, high economic activity rate
<b>Leeds</b>	North	757,700	Large city (3 <sup>rd</sup> largest in UK)	Largest legal centre in the UK outside London
<b>Leicester</b>	Midlands	329,600	Mid-to-large-sized city	Culturally diverse
<b>London</b>	South-East	8,600,000	Largest city in UK	Capital Very international Tourist destination Culturally diverse Kensington and Holborn very affluent areas in London
<b>Liverpool</b>	North-West	460,000	Large city	Tourist destination
<b>Manchester</b>	North-West	514,417	Large city	Tourist destination Culturally diverse One of UK's largest metropolitan areas (population & economy)
<b>Newport</b>	West Wales	145,700	Mid-sized city	Port city (in past esp. for coal) 4 <sup>th</sup> lowest job growth in UK
<b>Nottingham</b>	East-Midlands	300,000	Mid-to-large-sized city	Tourist destination
<b>Plymouth</b>	South-West	256,600	Mid-sized city	Royal Navy base
<b>Sheffield</b>	Yorkshire	550,000	Large city	University city
<b>Southampton</b>	South	253,651	Mid-sized city	Port city
<b>Swansea</b>	South Wales	240,000	Mid-sized city	University city

Appendix II – Sample poster

**YOUR OPINIONS on YOUR**  
**SHOP TODAY?**



*Takes ca. 5 minutes*

*The purpose is to investigate **consumer buying behaviour** in UK supermarkets*

*Part of **Master research** for the University of Bath*

*Thank you for your participation!*

## Appendix III – Interview guide

### Unprompted introductory question:

#### 1a. Questions about the product:

- *Did you purchase any fresh vegetables today? What kind of vegetables?*
- *I can see that you bought this type of vegetable...*
- *How often do you buy this type of product?*

#### 1b. When you were shopping for \_\_\_\_, what did you consider, or take into account?

- *Anything else?*

### Prompted questions:

#### 2. Questions about packaging:

- *Did the packaging played any role in your purchase?*

If yes:

- *What specific elements of the packaging influenced your decision?*
- *Why is that important to you?*

If no:

- *Have you considered the packaging in a similar product?*

If yes:

- *Why is that important to you?*

If no:

- *Have you considered the packaging in a different type of product?*

If yes:

- *Why is that important to you?*

If no:

- End of the survey.

#### 3. Questions about environmental impact:

- *Have you considered the environmental aspects of the packaging?*