

Sustainability in Retail Stores: a Case Study in Brazil

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Abstract: In recent decades, civil society has charged large corporations to investigate the environmental and social origin of its products and services and the retail has an important role influencing the entire production chain. The limit of natural resources, the high number of people aware, the model of interdependent relationships, and extensive organizational capacity of citizens in a systematic way, are some of the reasons for the effective change in the way companies conduct their business today. Thus, the objective of this research is to verify if the retail operations provide greater visibility to the retailer and the consumer influence in the buying process. Additionally, understand the concept of sustainability in the economic sector of greatest influence on the final consumer, the retailer.

Key words: Retail stores; Sustainability and corporate social responsibility

1 Introduction

The current socioeconomic context is showing profound changes, with continuous innovations and changes in the system. The changes which occurred in the markets in recent years, particularly because of globalization and technological innovations were accompanied by advances in information access for society as a whole. Simultaneously, there was significant increase in the level of awareness among consumers who are more picky about the products and services it consumes and more attentive to the actions of retailers, the object of this study.

Private companies are taking on significant proportions of activity and socio-economic influences. The American World Watch Institute estimates that the 500 largest companies control 70% of world trade and 30% of GDP. Studies of the Institute of Policy Studies show that among the 100 largest economies, 51 are corporations and 49 are countries (Shommo & Mendonça, 2000). This demonstrates the enormous power of corporations and the enormous responsibility they have.

Tashizawa says that ecological transformation and influence will emerge in business, growing fast and with profound economic effects. The author emphasizes that organizations what make strategic decisions integrated with the environmental and ecological will be able to have significant competitive advantages, reduce costs and increase profits in the medium and long term (TASHIZAWA, 2002).

The purpose of sustainable development implies a commitment to take the perpetuation of life the horizon of intervention and transformation of nature by humans. This incorporation requires knowledge and skills of action for the implementation of processes that are not only viable from a technical standpoint, but are also ethically desirable and may be characterized as the knowledge and skills to the perpetuation of life (Bartholo Jr, 2001).

Understanding the concepts and the adoption of sustainable practices in retail is growing every day, creating opportunities for improvement of business in the sector. It is known that retailers have critical points that deserve to be reviewed and considered for the sector to evolve consistently in the way of responsible survival, such as the need of a portion of companies to adjust with tax and labor laws, the elimination of child labor in the production chain and excessive packages, which cause large amounts of waste from the disposal after consumption. The inclusion of sustainability in the business of the retails firms is in a continuous process that includes the adoption of principles and values in dealings with its various publics which they deal, aiming at long-term sustainability.

The contemporaneous companies practice what Hommel (2004) calls the early management of contestability. The core of this explanation is the idea that the company's presence in the market depends on a legitimacy that is constantly challenged by a diverse set of actors. The "management of early contestability" would not be an event that the company is liable only in extreme cases, but, instead, is part of their daily activity. In situations where this rule was underestimated, as in the case of genetically modified organisms in Europe, the disastrous economic consequences manifested clearly (ABRAMOVAY, 2007). The same author, Abramovay (2009) notes that in this approach the corporate social responsibility component appears as organically integrated into the actual functioning of markets and not as a manifestation of good conscience or attempt to mitigate the adverse effects of economic activities.

In view of Senge (2007) no single entity, no government alone, no company or NGO itself will be able to face lonely the sustainability issues that we face today.

2 Theoretical Foundation

2.1 The retail

Since the beginning of humanity the retailers play an important role in the distribution of goods. And the need to exchange objects came from the time when man left the cave to hunt food. From the nineteenth century, appears in Brazil, a strong European influence in the uses, customs and methods of trading.

From 1930 there is a great influence in Brazil by American stores such as American Stores, House Sloper, Mappin and as the European standard, as Mesbla, a French company founded in 1912. Today, the trend in the Brazilian market, as in other countries, is a major decentralization in large cities with the development of retail in shopping centers.

Used to be said in the past that the exercise of retail activity was a matter of vocation. However, societies have evolved and the figure of the entrepreneur enterprising in retail was dimmed with time. Today large retail organizations are run by professionals who raise funds in the market and deal with sophisticated econometric models to forecast sales (LAS CASAS, 1992). The same author considers retail establishment companies with more than 50% of its sales operations in retail (LAS CASAS 2010).

For Kotler (2000), retail is all sales activities of goods or services directly to final consumers for personal use and not industrial. The ways that these goods and services are sold are included in the retail concept, either through the point of sale, mail, telephone, personal selling or automatic machine.

Retail is the middleman who specializes in providing products and services to the consumer. In the supply chain, retail is an important link because they have information about the consumer and can make their loyalty to the point of sale and not just to the products.

In view of Parente (2000) retail are all activities that comprise the process of selling products and services to meet a personal need of the consumer. The author also adds that retailers buy, receive and stock products from manufacturers or wholesalers to offer consumers the convenience of time and place to purchase products.

There are several definitions for retail that derives from the French word "retailer" which means to cut a piece or in small quantities, but the definition used is provided by the American Marketing Association, where retail is defined as a business unit that buys goods from manufacturers, wholesalers and other distributors and sell directly to consumers.

Consumers are increasingly seeking to identify with the brands they consume, through intangible attributes such as experience of emotional attachment, so companies that want to work a long term relationship with their customers face the challenge of conquering this link with the brand permanently.

In current markets, the remarkable appearance of the "civilian and conscious consumer" awakens the challenge in companies to orchestrate initiatives that could open space for participation, collaboration and the construction of true and lasting relationships, thereby contributing to sustainable results in their business.

However, knowing the impacts of the production chain remains a difficulty for the conscious consumer. One of the major communication challenges to sustainability is to provide consumers with credible, clear and simple information about the environmental and social impacts of products.

The Institute Akatu presented in 2010 a research about the Brazilian consumer and sustainability, where the results show that in 2009 more than one million Brazilians left from poverty line. In recent years the proportion of the population belonging to the C class has grown, reaching 50.5% of the population. This represents a contingent of 29 million people who became part of consumption (AKATU, 2010).

According to the projection of Fecomércio - Federation of Commerce of São Paulo (June/2010), the consumption of products and services in classes C, D and E must maintain a growth rate between 7% and 8% per year, twice the expected to classes A and B in the period of 2010 to 2013. This increase in power consumption of segments which were excluded before becomes quickly in effective consumption (AKATU, 2010).

Therefore, in this perspective, companies should focus their strategies to supply this demand, but with creative proposals that take into account clean technologies in order to preserve the environment.

Companies in its production process exercise great impact on natural, economic and social resources, thus, having great responsibility on how these resources are generated, managed, used and

discarded after consumption, contributing especially for a just, healthy and prosperous society.

2.2 The sustainable retail

The sustainability finally came to the corporate agenda and is on the agenda of the business leaders worldwide. It's a strategic theme and of competitiveness, consequently the retail sector has significant responsibility for influencing the entire production chain, educating consumers and suppliers to adopt socially responsible practices.

According to research conducted by the Institute Akatu 2010, 60% of consumers surveyed have high expectations with the role being developed by companies. They believe that companies should go beyond what is established by the legislation, aimed at bringing greater benefits to society through their actions and not just focus on the benefits that such actions can bring to the company itself.

From the 70's, with the emergence of environmental movements, increased the importance of the sustainability issue in the organizations and consequently in retail, because it is recognized that retail is a system that mediates directly between the supplier and consumer, having the power to generate changes in consumer culture.

So, sustainable is the way to permeate socially responsible practices throughout the value chain, through transparent relationships ranging from the creation of a product or service, through the ethical commitments of suppliers by the form of commercialization of the retailer and by the purchase of the conscious consumer. "It's the business management that balances the profit, the care of the environment and the development of society" (Parente 2000).

According to the same author, Parente (2000), social responsible retail is the one that keeps an ethical and respectful relationship not only with some people, but with all its stakeholders, being: employees, government, suppliers, competitors, community, media, environment, shareholders and consumers. Retailers must have a posture that is not limited only to satisfy the client consumption needs with certain products and services, but should also focus on social equity and environmental sustainability.

Although has passed more than four decades, there still differences and disagreements in the global discourse on the issue of growth (often confused with development) and environmental and social sustainability (Sachs 1993, 2004).

Through the strategic position in the supply chain, the retail industry can influence their suppliers and their buyers in relation to social and environmental practices. And due to its high visibility there is a strong charge by customers and a very close relationship and this differs it from most other sectors. This contact allows the retailer to create a great influence on your target audience.

If the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) has the commitment of retail, we can expect a very large spread of awareness in the population (Pastore, 2010).

The capillarity property of the retail trade, that is, the branch of its branches in different geographical areas also benefits CSR actions. This feature facilitates rapid communication and promotions, sensitizes partnerships and allows suppliers to social action through specific programs or volunteer directly in the community in which the company's selling point is inserted (PARENTE; TEREPINS, 2006).

When we say that the concept of sustainable development is necessary to meet the needs of contemporary society without compromising the future society, we must understand that it doesn't represents a break with capitalism, but adds an ethical dimension to the economic growth model (Laws, 1999).

Stressing the responsibility of companies to the conditions of life on earth, John Elkington (2001) coined the term *triple bottom line* in 1994, using it to synthesize that the corporate management must overcome an exclusive focus on economic interest of owners and shareholders, to dare the challenge to approach of the complex and multidimensional with economic, social and environmental results that stakeholders have their needs and values taken into consideration.

According to Savitz (2007), sustainable company is the one that can simultaneously generate profits for shareholders, protect the environment and improve the lives of people with whom maintains interactions, where its activities promotes the interests of the intersection between business, environment and society.

Shrivastava (1995) cited by Araujo and Carvalho (2011) pointed out the benefits and incentives that lead a company to adopt sustainable practices: cost minimization (of waste control, energy saving, reuse of materials and the use of efficient processes), creating competitive advantage, the existence of a growing group of consumers who value and demand products and responsible business practices, the possibility of market leadership, recognition of the company's image and contribution to the durability

of the ecosystem.

The strategically social responsibility arises from the creation of shared value, that is, either to society, or for the business, the company needs to know the impacts of your own activities, where such impacts are significant and which external environments are affected. It is from that point that the Corporate Social Responsibility starts to be really effective (Porter, 2008).

For Macedo (2007) the retail can reduce your impacts on the environment, supporting movements that encourage the full use, the reuse and the recycling of products, using or placing into the market new product lines which are sustainable in its processes; participating in initiatives that promote the development of the region where the store is inserted and therefore improving the quality of life.

Parente et al (2009) argues that for the retail opportunities become more sustainable it consists mainly three areas: (1) sustainable operations and stores: the retail industry can start controlling and managing social and environmental impacts in construction and operations of their stores; (2) supply chain management: retailers can encourage their suppliers to develop products with environmental differences and / or social; (3) education and information for consumers: retailers could encourage consumers to buy sustainable products, as well as educate them to use and dispose products properly.

Mappings made by Conservation International and by Food Marketing Institute (FMI) show that retail activities contribute 5-10% of the environmental impacts of the chain, while the remaining 90-95% of the impacts are generated by the supply chain and transportation of products (CARDOSO, 2008).

Economic development and care for the environment are compatible, interdependent and necessary. The high productivity, modern technology and economic development can and must coexist with a healthy environment (Dias, 1998).

Senge (2007) indicates that more and more businesses are incorporating sustainability issues among its goals for the future. For Senge the real innovation requires different mindset.

There is a need for planning and investment for the adoption of management that can allocate resources and implement processes to solve business problems and crises in relation to the environment, highlighting the technological evolution that must exist to make viable the expansion, creating a new mindset which implies the creation of sustainable knowledge (Barbieri, 2004).

Therefore, the authors Senge and Barbieri share the same vision, which is necessary the awakening of minds to have real changes in the system.

A comparative study of social policies in the Public Management and Citizenship Program of FGV-SP shows that the common denominator of social policies that have demonstrated high efficiency in different regions of the country is the fact that they run in partnership, involving the public sector, companies and civil society organizations. Thus, they become more sustainable and permanent (Dowbor, 2010).

The development and the environment are inextricably linked and should be treated by changing the content, the methods and uses of growth. Three fundamental criteria must be met simultaneously: social equity, ecological prudence and economic efficiency (Sachs, 1993).

Therefore, facing this scenario, all companies and, in particular, retailers must rethink their positioning and strategies, invest in their employees, which are the basis for the beginning of social responsibility, think about the relationship with customers in the administration of the price fair, in managing of their supply chain and partnerships, in order to minimize impacts on the environment and society.

Additionally, it is necessary to awaken a consciousness of the leaders and society to practice new attitudes, new behaviors and new looks for the transformation of the existing reality.

3 Company “C&C Casa e Construção”

The retail store *C&C Casa e Construção* (House and Building) was chosen as the unit of analysis of this research, because of your innovation in creating, two and a half years ago, the first sustainable Home Center of Brazil and for the reason that it is an ethical, innovative firm too and whose organizational behavior is grounded in beliefs that value and respect human relations. Located at 7207, Marginal Tietê, in the Capital of São Paulo.

The company founded in 2000 with 100% national capital, is the leader at the retailer market of construction materials, renovation and decoration stuff in Brazil. The network currently has 43 stores in the state of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Pioneer on the Internet, it has an online sales channel since 2001.

The store offers thousands of products and items that generate eco-social and environmental benefits. In addition to the low water and energy consumption, does not harm the environment, uses renewable raw materials, encourages the responsible consumption and sustainable attitudes.

In the bathroom were installed taps with timer and low consumption toilets. A system for capturing and storing rain water allows the store to makes your irrigation and washing with recycled water. The consumer can also deposit cash in green packaging product you just bought, but also has a space for disposing recyclable waste. The store uses translucent roof that takes advantage of natural lighting. Solar panels that turn sunlight into electricity. And on cloudy days, usually with more wind, wind turbines to supplement energy harvesting. Solar power also provides hot water in bathrooms and air conditioning system uses green gas. The floor is of some ecological environments. The construction of the store followed guidelines of sustainability, preserving native trees and creating an outdoor garden. The client can simulate your own home eco-friendly, with products available in store.

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Figure 1 Sustainable Home Center - C&C (Source: Institutional Folder of the Store, 2011)

4 Methodology

Was performed, first, a literature search, aiming to review the literature of the concepts that concern to retail, sustainable development and corporate social responsibility. We used multiple sources of evidence: a survey of secondary data, document analysis and interviews through semi-structured questionnaire. The semi-directed interview is certainly mostly used in social research (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1998).

Thus, the research project was developed in the field of case study as proposed by Yin (2001) that is characterized as an empirical research on a phenomenon that allows by its comprehensive vision make different interpretations, dependent on adequacy of the theories used and the object studied.

Severiano (2007) defines the case study as a research study that focuses on a particular case, considered representative of a set of similar cases and that the data should be collected and recorded with the necessary rigor and following all the procedures of the field research.

The in-depth research had 12 participants: a Director of Marketing, a sustainability manager, five vendors, a promoter and four customers.

For data collection was carried out in-depth interviews with marketing manager, in order to understand business objectives by implementing sustainability initiatives in the store.

The same technique was applied to the manager of sustainability and for the vendors, in order to identify the motivations and beliefs of respondents, as well as knowledge of sustainable practices at the point of sale. Likewise, the technique was applied to major customers that have relation with the company, to evaluate the opinions regarding the company's sustainable practices. In addition, was held the technique of hidden consumer and participant observation, allowing researchers to observe the group, who perform the processes occur and how the interactions between them.

5 Research in the Field (Report of the Interviews)

The interviewed Director of Marketing says that the actions of sustainability permeate the C&C

since its formation in 2000 and is being increased every year. Here are some answers of the interviewee: "The combination of business with sustainable practices is an orientation toward the C & C. And all this culminated in actions for the new store opening at the time". "C&C is always focused on providing the best either to customers, or to the community that surrounds us and the satisfaction of our employees. Always acting with professionalism, we value professionals who work with us, with training activities and development of all". "We respect all legal guidelines and requirements for all products that have on your manufacturing processes elements of sustainability, we attach importance to it". "There is awareness at all for sustainable practices, whether of individuals, businesses and government". "Everything is being valued and from the better understanding on the subject of all, the collection by all will be intensified". "We must remember that economic interest is part of the whole, and will walk along with the other processes". "A walk becomes from the first steps. And these have already been taken by us. It is an irreversible process". "The biggest audit that a company can have is from your own customers. These will provide the continuity of business". "We work only with certified suppliers".

The sustainability manager of the store has a significant knowledge in relation to green products and sustainability initiatives. He also said that employees receive training to offer these products.

In relation to the four clients, all have a good image of the store, said that there is a diversification of products, great brands, personalized service, nice store, spacious, differential treatment (the day of the interview on the occasion of Easter, the store was distributing Easter eggs to customers), proper payment, in short, everything related to the store was in agreement, however issues related to sustainability, the object of this study, appeared a bit timid and only if the interviewer addresses this subject. Following are some respondent's answers: "I found this store great, I remember that the old C&C was super-hot and this this one breezy". "In accordance with the green products, I would choose then as long they were not so more expensive". "I never received any correspondence from C&C to talk about sustainability". "I appreciate who knows about this, but it is not for my generation but for the young". "I appreciate who knows about this, but it is not for my generation but for the young". "It's the first time I come here, and in the parking lot I saw an announcement of water reuse, but I didn't bought any green product line and in my house I don't do recycling". "I already came here a few times, I know that the store has this green feature, but it didn't come here because of this". "Before the tap used to be opened and now I have this concern. And I don't throw oil in the sink, I set in the garbage". "I support the *SOS Mata Atlantica*, I already visited the Amazon with this NGO, but I didn't bought any sustainable product here".

The interview with five sales man was divided as: open interviews with three vendors and technical of hidden consumer with two vendors. The first three had technical knowledge about the subject, they said that they are trained to inform the client that C&C is the first Sustainable Home Center of Brazil, but they said that they only deal with the practical and the sustainable products if the client goes open, otherwise they that they will embarrass then. They said that the relationships with peers and managers is very friendly, even they said that they have a very good freedom to work, they can express their opinions, because the manager does not rule but guides. The company invests in training and values the employee.

The technique of hidden consumers, with questions about the store for the two vendors, the data confirms the facts mentioned by previous, that just if the customer gives them an opening approach they use the issue of sustainability, otherwise they don't sell directly green products and don't talk of the sustainable features of the store.

6 Analysis of the Results

The case study sought to answer whether sustainable practices can become differentials in consumer choice by a company, how to understand whether such practices ensures greater visibility to the retailer, as a differential to influence the consumer during the buying process.

We conclude that the company "C&C Casa e Construção", for your leadership in the retail market of materials for construction, reform and decoration in the Brazil for 11 years, it's automatically recognized by its performance that assures good visibility to the store, however for the sample of respondents, the actions of sustainability, are not decisive in influencing the choice of the consumer to shop and purchase of products. This way, sustainable practices at the beginning of the operation may take a while to mature.

In the approach with customers, the concept of sustainability does not seem to present uniformity in the speech, each individual defines it in a way. The choice of the Home Center is not motivated by the actions but for convenience and in some cases for the loyalty to the store. The client does not seek the

store because it has green products, but knows that this factor is highly important today. They said that if the vendor address this issue and the green product presents the same quality of the traditional and have fair prices, eventually, would choose to the one that present social and environmental values.

Some clients have knowledge and practice in their homes some actions such as recycling waste and cooking oil, avoid wasting water and energy, support NGOs, therefore, it seems that this profile will be more sensitized to purchase of products of this nature.

We note a gap between technical knowledge of vendors that have extensive knowledge about the environmental issues that permeate the store and what actually they communicate to customers, because only deal with the practical and sustainable products if the customer address it. According to Cruz & Boehe (2010) because of its position in the supply chain, the retail industry can strongly influence your buyers and retailers can become a leader in Corporate Social Responsibility practices, for the company improve visibility is necessary to communicate the actions to their customers.

In the technique of the hidden consumer, when interviewers asked the sellers about the eco-social products, they had some options, but not on its own initiative, so it follows that the demand originates from the consumer and not by the approach of the seller.

Additionally, it was observed that human values and freedom of expression give meaning to work and motivate the employees of this organization, even pressured by the dynamics of sales, have good relationships among peers and managers, committed to transparency, ethics and focus on results.

7 Concluding Remarks

So everything seems to indicate according by the different definitions found in the publications surveyed, that retail is critical to the dissemination of products, promotions and any information you want to communicate to a large mass of consumers, being possible to use this channel to influence people and the entire production chain.

The retail sector as an important interlocutor in the field of social responsibility and sustainability, can foster new consumption habits and collaborate with the social and environmental change, which may be a great business strategy for retail.

However, the result of the field research showed that there is an appreciation by consumers with sustainable actions, but, still not a determinant for the choice of the store, in this case the object of study.

We noticed a legitimate intention of the store managers in the construction of the Sustainable Home Center and in the medium term it is understood that the intention may be consolidated and that actually the choice of a store happens by variables such as quality, fair price, social responsibility, along with environmental issues, designed by sustainable retail.

It is understood that sustainability goes along with profitability. Business without profit is not sustainable. In the future, it is believed that there will not be "green" shops because all they will be. The learning and dissemination of good practices will make environmental issues, labor and community relations "commodities" among retail companies. This is a movement without return. The sustainable stores can join business with pleasure, as the retailer reduces costs, the customer values the posture and the environment is preserved.

The goal of the researchers in this study was largely satisfied, but the theme is very broad and requires further studies, with companies in the same business to extend the results presented here.

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