

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

**COURSEWORK SUBMISSION FORM AND
PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC HONESTY DECLARATION**

ACADEMIC SESSION 2016/17

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Candidate Number: 66272

MSc Programme: Psychology of Economic Life

Course for which work submitted: PS456

Word-count: 2,972 (essay) + 467 (case study)

Date: 27.03.2017

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Summative Assignment: Refining Unpackaged – The Supermarket of the Future

Course Code: PS456 – Consumer Psychology

Candidate Number: 66272

Date of Submission: 27/03/2017

Word Counts:

Part I: 462
Part II: 1083
Part III: 1889

I. Case Presentation

“Necessity is the mother of invention.” – Plato

In 2014, the UK produced 2.2 million tons of plastic packaging waste, of which 1.5 million tons passed through households (i.e. the consumer sector) and 1 million tons were generated by the grocery retail sector alone (Wrap, 2016). While this number is slowly shrinking, owed in part to long overdue government initiatives like the 2015 law requiring large retailers to charge 5p for single-use carrier bags, there is a lot more that can, and must, be done.

We need to follow the lead of social entrepreneurs like Catherine Conway, who founded “Unpackaged” in London in 2006, an innovative supermarket that avoids any unnecessary packaging and waste. The idea is simple: bring your own container, then “tare, fill, weigh, label, and pay,” following the three principles: reduce, reuse and recycle. After testing the ‘zero waste supermarket’ model at two markets, Catherine opened her first shop in 2007, a true pioneer in the field. The business ran successfully for five years. Unpackaged expanded by relocating and adding a café and bar, which distracted from “the core business of refilling,” resulting in its closure after only a year. In 2015, Catherine partnered with Planet Organic and re-launched (Unpackaged, n.d.).

The benefits of the innovative supermarket model are clear: waste reduction (from packaging to food waste), lower CO2 emissions (from local sourcing and reduced packaging), and mind-set change (getting consumers to think about what and how they buy). However, there are also many challenges to this model that need to be addressed. Firstly, consumers are asked to bring their own containers, which requires planning and new habit formation. Secondly, filling and estimating product quantities and prices requires some familiarization and practice. Occasional spillages are unavoidable. Thirdly, the lack of packaging may raise concerns about hygiene, safety and shelf-life of certain products. Then, there is no branding and marketing of individual items, which usually helps to promote and sell a product. In addition, the shop selection is limited, due to space constraints and the fact that certain popular, processed products are not available or feasible (yet) without packaging. Finally, a focus on organic and fair-trade products combined with the lack of economies of scale that larger retailers enjoy, can result in higher-priced items, cutting out budget-conscious shoppers.

The competition in London is strong, with many established supermarket brands (like Tesco, Sainsbury's, Waitrose, Iceland, M&S, and Wholefoods) available at what seems like every street corner. Nonetheless, 'zero waste' supermarkets have grown in popularity over the past few years and have proven to be successful in various big cities around the world, including "Original Unverpackt" in Berlin, Germany and "in.gredients" in Austin, Texas. Surely, this business model has the potential to be a great success in the UK as well.

II. Memorandum

To: Catherine Conway
Unpackaged at Planet Organic
111/117 Muswell Hill Road
Muswell Hill
London
N10 3HS

London, March 27th, 2017

Dear Catherine Conway,

Let me begin by saying that I greatly admire your efforts – as a social entrepreneur and sustainability advocate – to eliminate all the unnecessary packaging and waste in the grocery retail sector. Recently, I stumbled across “Unpackaged”, and as someone who is aware and alarmed by the exorbitant amounts of packaging and food currently wasted, I recognize the strong need for innovative business models like yours. As a pioneer in the world of zero waste supermarkets, you have paved the way for others, and since I believe your mission is such an important one, I would like to offer several suggestions, grounded in social psychological theories, that could be useful in further developing your business model.

Unpackaged appeals to more affluent, environmentally conscious shoppers who are willing to pay a premium price for high-quality, sustainable products. While I understand that Unpackaged faces several challenges, I am convinced it could effectively address these, and become not only more successful but also scalable, by: 1.) communicating its well-defined benefits; 2.) facilitating customer procedures; and 3.) creating a stronger brand community.

1.) Communicating well-defined benefits

In contrast to conventional supermarkets, the ‘zero waste’ model offers a refined selection of high-quality, wholesome products, promotes seasonal and healthy eating, encourages portion control, and reduces all types of waste. These precise benefits should be at the core of its communication strategy.

One way to emphasize the uniqueness of Unpacked would be through the slogan: “*Simply Wholesome*.” If Unpacked promotes its products as “a selection of the finest whole foods, without the agony of overwhelming choice and manipulative branding”, customers will see the shop’s limited selection as a positive, liberating attribute, and understand why Unpacked products are well worth the premium prices and hassle of bringing containers.

Building on this idea of valuing simplicity and whole, natural foods, Unpacked could re-introduce seasonal fruit and vegetables into their product offering and launch a campaign called: “Back to the Roots”. The idea would be to appreciate “ugly” produce, that is organic and high-quality but does not meet the aesthetic requirements of conventional supermarkets, e.g. by offering discounts and using creative visuals (similar to the campaign launched by Intermarché in early 2014, promoting 'Inglorious' fruit and vegetables). This would not only raise awareness about unnecessary food waste, but also help reduce prices and thus expand the customer base.

In line with the values of *transparency* and *respect*, Unpacked could create in-store labels with scannable QR codes that link directly to an app, giving customers an abundance of product information. This could include: price, nutrition details, serving sizes, origin and supply chain, preparation instructions, recommended recipes, storage tips, customer ratings, as well as statistics on CO₂ and packaging reduction. The app would fully replace conventional packaging labels, which tend to be held in the customers’ hands for only seconds before landing in the bin.

2.) Facilitating customer procedures

The outlined app could also facilitate the building of customer habits. This could be done by offering valuable “extras”, like an easy product rating and feedback option, as well as a “refiller rewards” system for loyal customers, who bring their own containers and shop regularly (e.g. 10% off for bringing containers and one point per pound spent).

Unfortunately, despite rewards, customers will not always remember to bring their own re-usable containers. A way to tackle this challenge and facilitate the experience, especially for new customers, would be through the introduction of standardized, branded Unpacked containers. These would be pre-tared, available in different sizes, and include measuring lines, offered both

for purchase and loan. Trendy Mason jars (similar to the ones you already sell) are a good option, since customers may present these in their kitchen as part of their decor, while simultaneously promoting the Unpackaged brand. Posters could look something like this:



Sources: <https://www.olyamel.com/en/blog/cooking-tricks/canning-101/> & <https://www.amazon.com/Barbuzzo-Mason-Measuring-Jar-Clear/dp/B00RTLZ224>

To date, the Unpackaged logo and instructions can already be found on the shop walls and website, to ensure brand recognition, facilitate the filling process. and demonstrate its simplicity (as displayed below). These visuals, focusing on the container shape, are a great tool to facilitate customer procedures and should be built on further.



Source: <http://www.beunpackaged.com/how-it-works/>

While the filling process itself is not complicated, customers may experience trouble estimating amounts and costs of what they have filled. While this estimation is a skill regular customers acquire, it can cause initial uncertainty. A way to tackle this would be through dispensers with built-in scales, automatically indicating serving sizes and calculating total price whilst dispensing. Although this technology may not yet exist or be quite expensive, it would undoubtedly facilitate the process.

Furthermore, Unpackaged could install a container cleaning station near the entrance. This would alleviate any potential concerns about hygiene and safety, and support customers who may have

forgotten to wash their re-usable containers at home. As part of the station, there could be a mop and dustpan for employees to clean any spillages, with a sign for customers that reads: “Don’t worry, everyone spills! Let us know how we can help! ☺”.

3.) Creating a stronger brand community

Lastly, Unpackaged should work on building a brand community. As a first step, it could start selling unique, branded items like tote bags, aprons, water bottles, measuring cups, etc. with the logo, slogan “simply wholesome”, campaign name “back to the roots” or funny sayings on them, like: “Beets don’t kale my vibe”, “Thyme to Turnip the Beet” or “I shop unpackaged because I can” (with canning jar). Below are some examples:



Sources: https://rlv.zcache.com/beets_dont_kale_my_vibe_tote_bag-rdb57ae0e8f724647b5ef95479969dc49_v9w6h_8byvr_540.jpg;
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/38139928068912232/>; https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/41mxJ%2B6FFdL._AC_UL320_SR256_320_.jpg;
https://www.zazzle.co.uk/you_look_radishing_veggie_pun_kitchen_poster-228669830094843790

Unpackaged could also start a special events calendar, regularly hosting inspirational lectures and creative do-it-yourself workshops, e.g. cooking and canning classes or making gifts (cake mixes, granola, natural body butter, etc.). Another idea would be a featured “item of the week”, which could be on display in-store and promoted through social media and a newsletter, along with fun facts, health benefits and seasonal recipes. Unpackaged could leverage consumers’ creativity by using open innovation and competition, inviting customers to share their best Unpackaged food photos, submit their favorite recipes, and come up with designs for branded merchandise (giving contributors and “winners” both credit and rewards).

The combination of suggestions listed above would enable Unpackaged to expand its customer base, strengthen customer loyalty, and create a unique identity, by means of clearly communicating its benefits, helping customers develop embodied skills of refilling, and building a brand community.

I hope you find some of these ideas to be inspiring and useful. A summary overview is attached. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on both the feasibility and potential of my suggestions.

Sincerely,

[Name]

Installation	Challenges	Recommendations	Theories
Physical layer	• High-quality organic and fair-trade products combined with the lack of economies of scale lead to higher prices • Limited selection and no branding • The lack of packaging may raise concerns about hygiene, safety and shelf-life of certain products	Communicating well-defined benefits and differentiating from the competition: • Slogan “simply wholesome” • Campaign “Back to the Roots”: re-introducing and appreciating whole, natural “ugly” fruit & veggies • Labels and scannable QR codes linked to app containing all available product information (price, nutrition details, serving sizes, origin/supply chain, preparation instructions, recipes, storage tips, customer ratings, facts on CO₂ and packaging reduction)	• Consumption as the extension of self • Bounded rationality • Persuasion techniques to shift attitudes: Unconscious system 1 processing: heuristics & nudging Conscious system 2 reasoning: re-think typical purchasing behaviors
Embodied layer	• Customers need to remember to bring re-usable containers • Containers need to be washed & hygienic • Customers need to fill their own containers, which takes time and skill (e.g. estimate product quantities and prices as well as avoiding spillages)	Facilitate customer procedures: • “Refiller” rewards and feedback system for loyal customers • Standardized, branded containers (tared and stackable) available for purchase and/or loan (deposit) • Posters with jar/container sizes, filling instructions, storage tips • Dispensers with built in scales, indicating serving sizes and total price whilst dispensing • Container cleaning station near entrance including a mop and dustpan for spillages	• Habit formation • Social representations • Situated cognition • Social influence and compliance techniques based on commitment and consistency (e.g. foot-in-the-door and labelling technique)
Social layer	• Attracting a broader customer base in addition to loyal early adopters • Scaling the business model	Create a stronger brand community: • Unique, branded items like tote bags, aprons, water bottles, measuring cups, etc. with logo, slogan or funny sayings • Special events calendar: inspirational lectures and creative DIY workshops • A featured “item of the week”, using social media to enable sharing of food photos, and submission of recipes and designs for branded merchandise	• Signalling of social status and group membership • Establishment of a brand community • Customers as users and producers (“prosumers”) • Open innovation & competition

III. Theoretical Justification

In my memorandum to Catherine Conway, the founder of Unpackaged, I suggest three main recommendations, which I believe would help make her ‘zero waste’ supermarket model even more successful and sustainable. These are: 1.) communicate well-defined benefits; 2.) facilitate store procedures; and 3.) create a stronger brand community. The main framework underlying these recommendations is installation theory, supported by additional social psychological theories, which I will elaborate on in this section.

Installation Theory

A supermarket is an installation. It is an organized, local, social setting, “where humans are expected to behave in a predictable way” (Lahlou, in press, p. 33). Although most of us have likely visited many different supermarkets in our lives, we have a social representation of a supermarket in our mind – beliefs about what it looks like and how it works (Moscovici, 1984). Even if we enter a supermarket we have never visited before, we are fairly confident about what we are doing (i.e. finding what we need, purchasing, and leaving the store), without any incidents. While supermarkets are complex systems, and we – as humans – have limited cognitive processing abilities, they function astonishingly smoothly.

According to the theory, installations have three layers: a physical layer of affordances, an embodied layer of competencies, and a social layer of institutional regulations and norms, which together define, channel, and control ‘appropriate’ behavior (Lahlou, in press, p. 10). Thus, if all three realms of an installation are established and linked – as is the case for most conventional supermarkets – it functions like a well-oiled machine.

Unpackaged is unique. Even though it is also a type of supermarket, it does not quite fit into the box of our supermarket representation. Not only does it look different (physical layer), it also requires different behaviors (embodied layer) and relies on different norms (social layer). Since an installation is distributed, meaning only a combination of the layers will make it truly resilient and sustainable, I would argue that elements of all three need to be strengthened.

Although an installation cannot inherently change behavior, through careful re-design, behavior-change can be scaffolded. Thus, installation theory has provided the framework for my analysis of Unpackaged and the creation of interventions to improve it. While there are many

stakeholders to be considered (customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers, and the government), my recommendations are mainly customer-focused. They target either a.) potential customers, who care about their health and the environment, but have not yet committed to Unpackaged, or b.) current customers, who are already convinced of the business model and committed to refilling, with the potential of becoming brand promoters, or both.

The Physical Layer

As a first step, addressing the physical layer of the installation, Unpackaged should clearly communicate its benefits to customers and thus visibly differentiate itself from the competition. The new slogan “simply wholesome” and the “back to our roots” campaign use wordplay and are based on **persuasion techniques** to shift attitudes. By making use of **system 1 processing and heuristics** (Samson & Voyer, 2012), these two interventions nudge customers to avoid processed food and waste, while linking shopping at Unpackaged to simple, healthy habits, ethical consumption and positive emotions. These ‘shortcuts’ are particularly helpful in the light of **bounded rationality**, the notion that we face constraints during every day decision-making, due to limited information about alternatives, limited cognitive processing capacities, and limited time (Simon, 1999).

Ideally, the campaign would also incite **more conscious (i.e. system 2) reasoning** in current consumers who already identify themselves as sustainable shoppers, willing to re-think their typical purchasing behaviors and eager to learn more about the ‘zero waste’ model (Samson & Voyer, 2012). Furthermore, these committed consumers are likely to see their affiliation with Unpackaged as means of identity expression, a way to communicate to others that they care about quality, the environment and their bodies (Belk, 1988; Elliot, 1998). Surely, this **extension of the self** through consumption of Unpackaged goods, could even go as far as active resistance and endorsement of products (‘boycott’ and ‘buycott’), however, the slogan and campaign should emphasize the high quality and health benefits of Unpackaged products, rather than pointing out the ‘bad’ products and business practices of competitors.

In addition, studies have shown that charging a premium price for “green” products is difficult, only proving successful if the products are seen to be comparable, if not superior to non-green alternatives (Griskevicius, et. al, 2010). Thus, the focus should be on the quality of the products rather than on the fact that they are “green,” which should be considered a

‘complimentary attribute’ (Ottman, Stafford, & Hartman, 2006). This is where the transparent labels and QR codes come in. Consumers know exactly where products come from, what they are paying for, and they even get free “extras,” like recipes and ratings, which add additional value.

The Embodied Layer

Once the physical layer is well-established, the next step entails reinforcing the embodied layer, which relies on the interpretive systems of consumers. Shopping procedures at Unpackaged deviate from conventional ones, which seem to be engrained in our ‘second nature’. Bringing, washing and filling own containers is a competence that needs to be learned and internalized by new customers. In order to assist this process and encourage more customers to try refilling, the **social representation** of a supermarket needs to be shaped or at least expanded.

The suggested Unpackaged app would be a tool to **make the unfamiliar familiar** (Moscovici, 1984), by redefining the future supermarket and “normalizing” the refilling process. Firstly, it would offer instructions on store processes (bringing, washing, refilling containers) and more information about products, which would benefit new and potential customers. Secondly, the app would be a tool to give current customers both a chance to give feedback and receive rewards for bringing own containers and returning regularly, two techniques that have shown to reinforce desirable ‘reuse’ behavior (Tasaki, et. al, 2011).

According to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of **situated learning**, cognition cannot be separated from context, and education is only effective if it can be translated into practice. The authors argue that learning happens *in situ* and must become embodied. Standardized containers, filling instructions, “smart” dispensers, and the cleaning station are all proposed tools to assist this learning process. The interventions will help make in-store procedures smoother, while customers gain confidence and refilling becomes embodied. The sign on the cleaning station (“Don’t worry, everyone spills! Let us know how we can help! ☺”) is also meant to aid the learning process, while simultaneously establishing the injunctive norm that spilling is normal (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Additional **social influence and compliance techniques** based on commitment and consistency could be used for customer attraction and retention. One example is the foot-in-the-

door technique (Freedman & Fraser, 1966), where you begin with a small request to gain acceptance of a larger one later. The small request would be asking first-time customers to borrow an Unpackaged container, and the larger request would be encouraging customers to bring their own. This would enable potential customers to try out the refilling concept without feeling the need to “be prepared”, in order to participate. Another example is the labelling technique (Tybout & Yalch, 1980), where customers are labelled, in order to reinforce a specific behaviour. By using the term “refiller rewards”, Unpackaged could label current customers, encouraging them to become both loyal “refillers” and advocates of the concept.

The Social Layer

After the physical and embodied layers have been strengthened, the social layer of the installation should be reinforced. Humans are social animals that use consumption to **signal preferences, social status and group membership** (Bliege Bird & Smith, 2005), so by means of the proposed interventions – including branded merchandise, participation at events, and active contribution on social media – shopping at Unpackaged can signal a commitment to health, the environment and the community. In this way, Unpackaged could also build a stronger relationship with its existing customers, attract potential customers, and **create a brand community** (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Through personal contact at events and online platforms (the app, website and social media), customers could support and inspire each other, while linking the brand’s values to their own.

Customers play an active role in establishing the brand, by spreading the word and “normalizing” Unpackaged as the supermarket of the future. They act as **“prosumers” (users and producers)** (Mahony & Lakhani, 2011) by using the app, co-creating content (ratings, feedback, recipe contributions, etc.) and attending DIY workshops. Unpackaged could leverage some of the consumers’ creativity, making sure to cater to refillers’ wants and needs, by using **competition and open innovation** (von Hippel, et. al, 2011). Asking customers to share their favorite photos, recipes, and designs, would strengthen trust and commitment towards Unpackaged, as long as recognition and rewards are appropriately given.

Limitations

While the proposed interventions do not require any major monetary investments, technical skills and time would be required both to develop the app/website with the features outlined above, and to monitor the rating, feedback and rewards systems. In addition, some customers might not be willing or able to use the app, so an alternative should be offered (e.g. an in-store interactive screen). Furthermore, seeing as Unpackaged is now part of Planet Organic and only focusing on “dry” foods, the campaign to re-introduce and promote “ugly” produce may not be feasible. Instead, Unpackaged could try to persuade Planet Organic to collaborate on a larger waste reduction campaign, or at least start using local surplus fruit for its trail mixes and dried fruit.

The proposed branded container and loan system, would also need prototyping. The Mason jars certainly look nice, but since they are made from glass, they may not always be practical. Observing the types of containers current customers use will be a good indication of customer preferences and needs. In regards to special events, the location, organization, and costs would need to be considered. Here, a collaboration with partners may be beneficial, to share the burden and ensure broader customer interest and attendance.

The focus of my paper has been on potential and current customers; however, other important stakeholders need to be taken into account. Firstly, employee and supplier processes should be analysed and (if necessary) optimized. Secondly, existing and potential partnerships with health supermarket chains, non-profit organizations and the government should be explored, in order to create a wider impact on the environment and take the model “beyond the obvious customer base and into the mainstream” (Conway, 2015, p. 3).

Conclusion

With the help of installation theory as my framework, I analyzed the challenges of Unpackaged and propose interventions that not only help to highlight the supermarket’s benefits, simplify its processes, and build a brand community, but even have the potential to make the concept of refilling more mainstream. Studies have shown that general environmental concerns of consumers do not automatically translate into pro-environmental shopping behaviour, but that "environmental consumerism can be increased by strengthening proenvironment consumer

beliefs, [and] improving structural factors (availability, labeling, and affordability of environmentally friendly products)" (Mainieri, et. al, 1997, p. 202). With my proposed recommendations I attempt to do both, strengthening all three layers (physical, embodied, social) of the installation, and aiming to make the refill supermarket model more simple, convenient and fun. In the words of owner Catherine Conway, "Unpackaged is a mindset and a way of doing business, it can be adopted in any sector" (Conway, 2015, p. 4), which I hope will prove to be true soon.

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