UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES AND VALUES OF CONSUMERS CONCERNING SUSTAINABILITY

Abstract

This study is an attempt to find the attitudes and values of people in the domain of 'Sustainable consumption'. The method adopted is an in-depth interviewing technique of 'laddering'. The respondents were chosen through a judgmental sampling approach, to identify 'Responsible Consumers'. The respondents were taken from a material level of attributes of a product to a higher level of abstraction of their values. This is a qualitative and exploratory study to gain insights into people's ways of thinking. One of the key insights is that; behaviour is more apparent at the time of buying; and attitude is reflected at the time of using the product; and values come into play at the time of disposing or reusing a product.

The project

Design endevour has been targeting the behaviour of consumers, but it is found that the attitudes and values people hold in relation to products of consumption are more enduring. It has been found that even though a large number of people are concerned about sustainability issues, they are not able to translate it into action. This may be due to many reasons such as lack of information or lack of time. Studies have been conducted by many to find this 'value-action gap' or 'behaviour-attitude gap' and the reasons thereof. Taking a cue from this fact, this investigation will be conducted through 'Sustainable' or 'Responsible' consumers who consume sustainably. 'Consumer' and 'consumption' are terms shunned by sustainability literature as being associated with the unsustainable phenomenon of consumerism. It is used here in the spirit of understanding the phenomena rather than endorsing it.

Identifying values of well-being within people through the products they consume is the area of investigation of this study. The responses of the consumers have been qualitatively analyzed to derive patterns of 'ways of thinking' and for gaining insights. The laddering technique used to do this was first formulated by Dennis Hinckle(1965) to be used in the area of clinical psychology.

From the sample frame, a sample size of 14 respondents were selected, as 'Sustainable consumers' through judgmental sampling approach.

Laddering interview (extract)

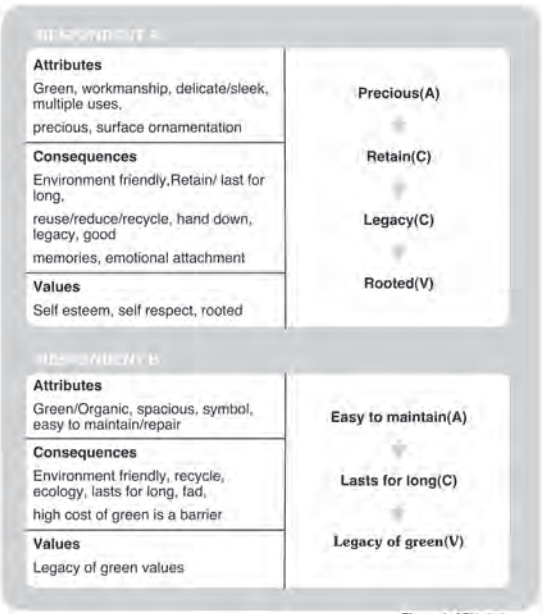

Figure 1. ACV chain

Attributes	Code	Consequences	Code	Values	Code
Cotton/Organic/ Natural	01	Familiar/Habit	07	Stability/rooted/ traditional wisdom	15
Handmade	02	Reuse/recycle/extend use/flexibility	08	Caring/Emotional bonding/Active involvement	16
Precious	03	Less things/simple/ time investment/ economical	09	Contribution	17
Unusual/Uniqueness	04	Help craftspeople/protect art and craft	10	Continuity/reinvent/Legacy of green values	18
Multiple uses/ease of use/functional/easy to maintain	05	Legacy/traditional	11	Self esteem/appreciation/ inspiring others	19
Comfortable/Strong/ Quality/Tough/Fit	06	Retain/lasts for long/Durability	12		
		Feel good/confidence	13		
		Knowledge of product/brand/trust	14		

Figure 2. Coding the elements

	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
01		0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	1.0	0.0	0.1	1.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
02			0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
03				0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
04					0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
05						0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0
06							1.0	1.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1
07								0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
08									0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0
09										0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0
10											0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0
11												1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
12													0.0	1.0	0.1	1.0	0.0	2.0	0.0
13														0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.0
14															0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
15																0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
16																	0.0	0.0	0.0
17																		0.0	0.0
18																			0.0
19																			

Figure 3. Implication matrix

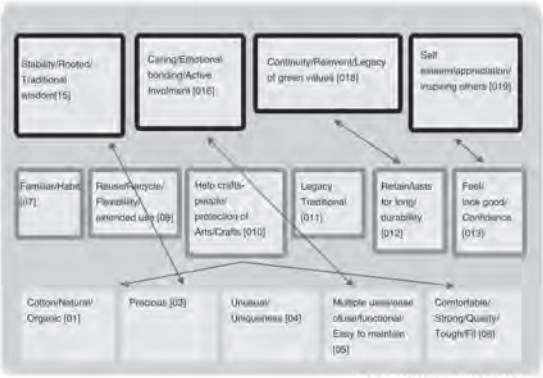

Figure 4. Heirarchy Value Map

The strongest ladder is rung (05) to rung (012) to rung (018). Laddering revealed that the attribute of multiple uses was what gave the flexibility to retain and make the product last longer with them. Multiple uses of the product lent itself to reinventing and harked back to the legacy of green values handed from parents and grandparents.

Attribute (05) and Value(016) are directly connected due the factor of ease of use and easy to maintain. Respondents found that this quality of the product got them more involved with the product, therefore the sense of caring and emotional bonding was high.

In studying the relationship between consumer and consumption, people and product; interesting patterns emerge which can be used to make design more meaningful and sustainable.