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ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR:
HOW PARTNERS INFLUENCE EACH OTHER IN THEIR ATTITUDES
AND PURCHASE INTENTIONS

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Abstract

In the context of health and nutrition, this study tested the influence partners in romantic relationships have on each other's attitudes, beliefs and purchase intentions by using Kenny's actor partner interdependence model (2006). After reviewing established relationship theories and gender differences in consumer behaviour, the results of the study show in fact that partners' attitudes strongly influence an individuals' attitudes. Even though only one partner of the couple received a stimulus, an information about the possible harms of salmon, the willingness to pay more for this product increased for both partners 6.12% from day one to day two.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour, APIM, partner study, gender study

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

Through growing environmental problems, food safety concerns and increasing obesity rates (Food Market Watch, 2008), a consumer-shift towards healthier, less processed natural foods that are less harmful to the environment can be detected (VanDoorn, 2011). Food consumption is more and more seen on an ethical and health related dimension. Driven by the consumers' perceptions of the high quality and safety of organic foods (produced under the absence of synthetic chemical pesticides) and by the positive environmental impact this type of agriculture implies, the demand for organic foods is increasing (Dana, Thomas, Thomas, & Joseph, 2009). Furthermore, the demand for more transparency from the producers' side increases, as sustainability concerns impact the purchase decisions of consumers (de Boer et al., 2006). The market is reacting to this rising public interest on how food is produced and the increasing number of individuals that are willing to pay more for food-safe products (Angulo & Gil, 2007) with two developments: the use of eco-labelling and incorporating sustainability attributes and claims in their products on the one hand (Conner, 2002; Kletzan et al., 2006) as well as the offer of a large range of organic food options on the other. This development makes the market for organic foods, which are generally sold for a premium price over conventional products (Klonsky et al., 1992), one of the fastest-growing agricultural segments of the economy (Govindasamy, DeCongelio & Bhuyan, 2005).

Most of consumer-decision-making research assumes, that a consumers' choices are formed individually by the consumer, depending on the own personal attitudes and preferences. However, it is also important to look at consumer decisions in the context of their surroundings. The theory of social influence on consumer behaviour has already been studied to an extensive degree and it has been established that this concept plays an important role in consumer

decision-making, as decision-makers can be directly or indirectly influenced in their cognitions, emotions and behaviours by other people that are important to them.

Therefore, in the matter of close romantic relationships, the interdependence of partners and how a persons' attitude may not only reflect their own beliefs and preferences, but also the beliefs and preferences of their partner, is an important element to investigate (Simpson, Griskevicius, Rothman, 2011).

Hence, the present study aims at developing a model to investigate how partners in a relationship influence each other in their attitudes and behaviours and whether there are any prevalent gender differences. To test the before mentioned outcomes, a stimulus, introducing information about a harmful food will be presented, that is expected to shape the participants' attitude towards this food. Following, it will be analysed how the exposure to this stimulus is affecting the attitudes of the partner exposed to the stimulus, as well as the attitudes of the partner who has not been exposed to the stimulus. With the further introduction of a mediation model, it will be assessed if there are any indirect effects determining the final outcomes. For that purpose, the data collected will be analysed with the Actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) (Kenny et al., 2006). By applying a structural equation model, the study aims to confirm the hypothesised model. Finally, the obtained results will be discussed to assess the implications of partners influencing their partners' attitudes, behaviours, purchase intention and willingness to pay to serve marketers and researchers.

2. Literature Review

This review will first inspect the context of social influence in partnerships and consumer behaviour. This will be done firstly by considering a selection of relationship science theories that contribute to the understanding of how partners in relationships can influence each other, as for example Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988), Interdependence Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), Theories of power (French & Raven, 1959; Simpson, Farrell, & Rothman, 2015),

Social norm models (McCall, 1970; Venkataramani-Johar, 2005), and Evolutionary theories (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 2000) and secondly by investigating the APIM by Kenny et al. (2006). Then, the topic of green consumerism will be examined to understand how consumers behave in this context and how this behaviour can be influenced by their partner. Finally, these two topics, romantic relationships and consumer behaviour together with green consumerism will be connected to recent findings about gender differences in consumer behaviour on the basis of which this study draws its hypotheses.

2.1 Social influence and Consumer Behaviour

2.1.1 Theories of relationship science

In order to understand an individuals' decision-making one has to consider this decision in the context of the social influence it involves (Wood, Hayes, 2012). This is why consumer decisions cannot only be considered as the outcome of an individuals' own personal attitudes, beliefs and preferences but should be considered in relation to the individuals' relationships and social environment (Simpson, Griskevicius, Rothman, 2011).

Theory of Attachment

Attachment theory emerged with the work of John Bowlby (1988), according to whom individuals seek to bond with significant others, such as parents, close friends, and romantic partners. Resulting from their experiences with the respective others, people develop one of two attachment orientations that have essential influence on their thoughts, feelings and behaviours (Simpson, 1990). These attachment orientations are either anxiety or avoidance. The implications of these orientations are that anxiously attached individuals constantly try to satisfy their partners, seeking greater emotional closeness and while at the same time fearing to be rejected by their partner (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Oppositely, avoidantly attached individuals do not view their relationships as a close part of their identity and therefore maintain emotionally distant, as they crave to keep independence from their partners (Mikulincer &

Shaver, 2007). This theory is relevant for the present study since the behaviour, when decisions are jointly taken with their romantic partners, might differ greatly between these two types of individuals. So would anxious individuals adjust more towards the attitudes, beliefs and preferences of their partners (Tran & Simpson, 2009) while avoidant individuals might be less receptive to partner influence (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Rholes, 2001).

Theory of interdependence

Another theory of relationship science that can contribute to improve the understanding of consumer decision-making, is the theory of interdependence, according to which people depend on their partners, when they offer them unique benefits, no one else can provide them with. This interdependence can also take place in a bilateral context, when both partners depend on each other (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). As stated by Kelley et al, individuals reflect on their comparison level, meaning they assess their relationship in the context of whether they get what they deserve. If they conclude that, in fact they do get what they deserve or more, they are more satisfied with the relationship; if in turn they conclude that they do not get what they deserve, they are less satisfied and more inclined to re-evaluate their current relationship, possibly looking out for better alternatives. Building the bridge to the present study, the assessment of the comparison level of the individual as well as the dependence on the partner, can alter the extent to which the individual is influenced by his or her partners' attitudes and beliefs.

Theory of Social Power

The theory of social power (French & Raven, 1959) deals with asymmetric power ratios in relationships, related to differences in dependence between the partners (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The individual with more control over his or her partner, is also the one that has a greater influence on decisions made in the context of the relationship, as well as more capacity to change the attitudes and beliefs of the partner (Kirchler, 1995; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois,

2015). Social power emerges from one or more of the following six elements, which influence the way how the more influential partner exerts his or her power: coercion, reward, legitimacy, expertise, credibility and referent (French & Raven, 1959). Again, this theory can have important implications on consumer behaviour, since the less powerful partner might pay closer attention to and be prone to assimilate his or her attitudes, beliefs and preferences towards the ones of the more powerful partner (Dépret & Fiske, 1993).

Relationship norms

Social norms are an important concept for a number of theories of attitude and behaviour relations (Ajzen, 1985; Cialdini et al., 1990; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). These models address what an individual think should be done in a particular situation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In the context of relationships, new and unique norms might emerge, addressing what the partners think should happen in that relationship (McCall, 1970; Venkataramani-Johar, 2005). Some examples of norms in relationships, thus constructs that facilitate how the partners generally behave in certain situations, can be turn-taking norms, where partners take turns in making decisions (Corfman & Lehman, 1987) or consensual agreements about how certain decisions should typically be made. Understanding relationship norms can help to recognize how the exact decision making process in partnerships takes place.

Evolutionary perspectives

By looking at relationships from an evolutionary perspective, two explanations for behaviour can be established: ultimate and proximate explanations (Tinbergen, 1963). While consumer researchers traditionally have been more concerned with proximate explanations for behaviour, for example, with the question why people seek close relationships, the primary proximate reasons being sex, companionship and love. The evolutionary approach goes further and seeks to uncover the root of the motivation, by asking why people evolved in the first place to even want sex, companionship and love, and why these things provide the amount of intrinsic

pleasure they do. The ultimate explanation behind this question would be that relationships enhanced the ancestors' reproductive fitness during evolutionary history. These two types of explanations can complement each other as all behaviours are likely to have ultimate and proximate explanations, offering insights from different levels to the same behaviour (Simpson & Gangestad, 2001).

Hence romantic relationships satisfy two distinct functions from an evolutionary perspective: firstly, to replicate genes by attracting and mating with opposite-sex partners, and secondly to ensure a successful fostering of children by combining resources (Hill & Hurtado, 1996). If a couple did reproduce, the decisions taken would always centre around the child's wellbeing. Consequently, linking evolutionary perspectives to consumer behaviour, it can be an important determinant for marketers to know whether a couple has a child or not (Simpson, Griskevicius, Rothman, 2012).

2.1.2 Green Products Consumerism

Moving now to the topic of green consumerism in the context of relationships, research shows that partners in romantic relationships can have an impact on health behaviours of their partners, including eating behaviours (Markey et al., 2007). Studies conclusively demonstrate that long-term partners affect each other's health behaviours (Homish & Leonard, 2008; Lewis & Butterfield, 2007). Prior research revealed that messages have been much more effective in changing behaviour, if partners perceived these messages to transmit concern for their health (Dennis, 2006; Tucker & Anders, 2001; Tucker & Mueller, 2000).

2.1.3 Consumer Behaviour and Food safety

According to Shepherd (2005), the behaviour of consumers concerning food choice, is influenced by many interrelating factors such as physiological, social and cultural factors, which need to be taken into account when considering nutrition-related behaviours. Food safety one of the most pertinent motivations of consumer food choice. When food scandals arise, such

as the dioxin in meat scandal, and products consequently are perceived as being unsafe, an immediate decline of demand is caused. The recovery of the product at question to pre-scandal levels can be gradual and limited (Sckokai, Veneziani, Moro & Castellari, 2014).

2.1.4 Willingness to pay for green products

When a consumer is evaluating a choice for or against organic food, he or she needs to assess between individual motives that evaluate determinants such as quality or price, against collective and social interests such as the impact on the environment (Auger et al., 2008; Dawes, 1980). Claims of organic products should therefore influence a consumers' evaluation of a product, and may determine the willingness to pay a premium for said product (Doorn, Verhoef, 2011). As established in several studies (Ott, 1990 & Eom, 1994; Angulo & Gil, 2007), the willingness to pay for food safety, can have an influence on the purchasing behaviour of consumers (Lin, & Wu, 2016). Tsakiridou, Zotos, and Mattas (2006) found that consumers would be willing to pay a premium up to 35% for organic products. Also a higher willingness to pay for certified pesticide-free produce could be found (Ott, 1990 & Eom, 1994). Overall it can be stated that consumers are generally willing to pay a premium for high-quality food products (Skuras & Vakrou 2002). Many factors have been found to affect the willingness to pay for reduced pesticide produce and organic produce. In most cases, gender and income are among the most significant determinants (Govindasamy, DeCongelio & Bhuyan 2005). As this study's focus lies on distinguishable dyads (two individuals), the characteristic, that will be assessed more in detail, will be gender.

2.2 Gender Differences in Consumer Behaviour

For the purpose of this study, it is important to connect the existing knowledge about gender, an important indicator of differences in consumer behaviour (Beards worth et al., 2002; Worsley & Scott, 2000), to green product consumerism. Previous research indicates that men and women have different approaches to health and green consumerism. According to Socrates

and Grunting (2006), women express higher levels of concerns towards foods, because they are usually the ones that have more responsibility for complex decision-making in everyday food preparation and consumption. Meyerbeer and Casimir (2005) suggest that even though the roles of men and women in the household have slightly shifted and men have become more involved in household responsibilities, women remain the ones making decisions related to food selection and preparation. When evaluating environmental sustainability in the context of gender attitudes, Casimir and Dustily (2003) suggest that female perspectives are the ones that are more associated with environmentalism and sustainability (Ling, Santos, 2013).

Following the reasoning of Worsley, Wang and Hunter (2013), men and women are likely to hold different perceptions about the risks posed by food. In prior studies, it has been found out, that women lean more towards healthy food while men on the contrary associate a higher importance on the intrinsic pleasure of food (Rappaport et al., 1993). Also, according to Clamoured (1995), women showed greater concerns for healthy food than men. Lastly, concerning the knowledge about effects of foods on health, women were found out to be more informed than men (Eagerly & Wendell 1999). When looking at the ethical differences between men and women, it can be inferred from a research conducted by Schinke (1997) that they have different predispositions about ethics and therefore may differ in the evaluation of ethical situations. Consecutively, men and women should have differing ethical behaviours (Rao, Al-Lucayan, 2008).

3. Objectives and Research Model

It is important to understand the relationship between the variables mentioned in the literature review, their impact on each other through the means of mediation and finally to understand the exact determinants of how the interdependence of members of distinguishable dyads influence each other in their attitudes and purchase intentions.

3.1 APIM – Actor Partner Interdependence Model

When conducting studies with dyads, the APIM is a statistical model that has already been used by many researchers to examine a prevalent actor-partner interdependence. This model developed by Kenny et al. (2006), enables researchers to study actor and partner effects. Actor effects assess to which extent the choice of an individual is influenced by his or her own attitudes, beliefs and preferences, while statistically controlling his or her partners' attitudes, beliefs and preferences. Partner effects on the other hand assess to which extent the individuals' choices are depending on their own attitudes, beliefs and preferences, statistically controlling for his or her own attitudes, beliefs and preferences. This method provides a richer understanding of the actual influences of partners on each other and the dynamics of interactions (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006), which again, facilitates the understanding of processes and outcomes of consumer decision-making in relationships (Simpson et al 2011). Over the last decade, researchers have begun to also examine mediating mechanisms in dyadic data. Mediation models can provide information about causal relationships between variables that are mediated by one or more sets of intervening variables. Mediation refers to a mechanism through which an initial (X) influences an outcome (Y) by a third variable (M), the mediator or intervening variable (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Judd & Kenny, 1981).

3.2 Research hypotheses

A number of research hypotheses were defined according to the literature that has been reviewed previously, as well as according to other conclusions drawn from the effects found during the statistical procedure based on data that has been gathered in the context of this study.

As previously stated, the attitudes and beliefs of consumers that are part of a relationship rely heavily on the attitudes and beliefs of their partners (Simpson, Grievous, Rothman, 2011). It is therefore appropriate to study if this influence can be statistically proven in the context of this study. This effect will be tested for both gender groups.

H1: Male partners influence female partners in their attitudes through partner effects.

H2: Female partners influence male partners in their attitudes through partner effects.

Since the willingness to pay a price premium represents an important element of this study and the willingness to pay of consumers depends on their attitudes towards health, it will be tested, if partners influence each other's willingness to pay and if yes to what extent. The mediation component of the underneath hypotheses aims to detect the exact determinants that indirectly impact the willingness to pay.

H3: The perceived Health Benefits of the product of the female control group will mediate the relationship between the male experiment groups' perceived Health Benefits of the product and the female control groups' Willingness to pay a price premium.

H4: The perceived Health Benefits of the product of the male control group will mediate the relationship between the female experiment groups' perceived Health Benefits of the product and the male control groups' Willingness to pay a price premium.

3.3 Research Model

The research model developed for this study, was elaborated in order to understand the research hypotheses and to detect the actor, partner and mediation effects.

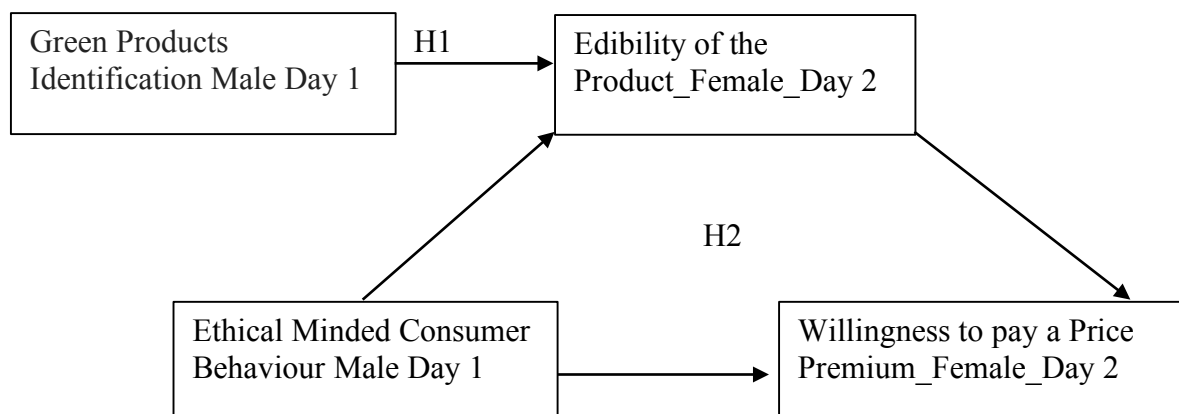


Figure 1 - Research Model Group 1

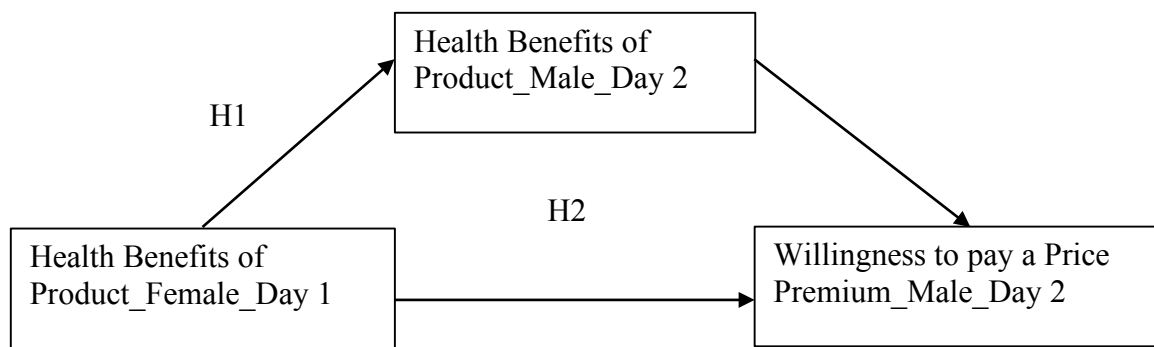


Figure 2 - Research Model Group 2

4. Method

For the purpose of this research a quantitative approach has been used by means of questionnaires, available in the first chapter of the Appendix, whose process will be explained following in more detail.

4.1 Data Collection and Sample

4.1.1 Sample

The sample of this study consisted of 66 distinguishable dyads (heterosexual couples). To increase the number of participating couples, the questionnaires have been constructed in three languages, English, Portuguese and German. The demographics of the respondents, age, occupation, nationality, have been asked only in the end of the second questionnaire. To identify the couples and for being able to distinguish between male and female respondents, each couple received a three-digit couple code they had to indicate on each questionnaire. Participants have been recruited in multiple Universities in Lisbon and from personal contacts. In order to test for the gender specific implications of the study, only heterosexual couples were included in the sample. The total sample of 66 couples was divided into two groups to test the influence of a male experiment group on a female control group (*Group 1*) and vice versa the influence of a female experiment group on a male control group (*Group 2*). The male experiment group was

composed of 32 couples, the female experiment group of 34 couples. 90 couples started participating in the study, but 26.5% of them stopped their participation, before the observation was completed. Corresponding to the couple-based approach, the respondents were 50% male and 50% female. The age group that was represented most frequently was for both genders of age 18 – 24 years (40% of male respondents, 54% of female respondents). In regard to the employment status, 50% of male and 26% of females were employed full time, 40% of males and 64% of females were students, the remaining 10% of males were either employed part-time or disabled and the remaining 10% of female respondents were either employed part-time or unemployed and looking for a job. The sample consisted to 53.7% of Portuguese, 26.5% Germans and 19.8% other Nationalities including Italy, Austria, Angola, Morocco, Greece and Switzerland.

4.1.2 Procedure

The sample was divided into the previously mentioned two groups, (*Group 1* and *Group 2*). The data was collected via two web-based questionnaires per person, that the respondents were instructed to fill out on two consecutive days. To make sure the partners had time to interact after responding to the first questionnaire, therefore making partner effects possible, the second questionnaire was sent only 24 hours after both partners responded to the first one. In the first questionnaire on day one, the participants were asked about their general assessment of their own consumer behaviour in an ethical context, their ability to identify green products and their evaluation of their personal health. After this, they were asked about their attitudes toward salmon healthiness, consumption and purchase. The experiment group was then shown the stimulus, a ten-minute documentary about the practices of the production of farmed salmon in Norway and the harmful impact the consumption of farmed salmon could have on the human health. They were then again asked to assess the implication of consuming salmon, while the control group was exposed to this stimulus only on day two of the experiment. Both surveys

took around 15 minutes, plus 10 minutes for the cases in which the video appeared. To ensure that only the experiment group would see the video, respondents were instructed to answer the questionnaires by themselves, but were told that after completion they could communicate in their typical fashion, also about their questionnaires.

4.2 Measures

All items used in this research were selected from pre-existing scales. The chosen scales appropriate for the objectives of this research were Ethical Minded Consumer Behaviour, Health Consciousness, Health Risk Assessment, Attitude Towards Consuming a Food, Green Products Identification Ability, Health Benefits of a Product in the long-term, Edibility of a Product and finally Willingness to pay a price premium.

The Ethical Minded Consumer Behaviour (EMCB) and Green Products Identification Ability (GPIA) scales were only tested on day one, to assess the overall self-reported perception of the consumer's own ethical consumption choices as well as ability to recognize green products. The remaining items were used to test the attitude and purchase intention of the respondents.

Ethical Minded Consumer Behaviour

The consumer behaviour related to ethical consumerism was assessed with 10 items developed by Sudbury-Riley and Cohabiter (2016). The items were rated on a five point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The scale included items such as "I do not buy household products that harm the environment" or "If I understand the potential damage to the environment that some products can cause, I do not purchase those products." The initial study has been conducted in several countries and the study reached an internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.86 (Japan) to 0.93 (UK, Hungary).

Health Consciousness

To test the respondents Health Consciousness, the scale, consisting of seven items, that measure the amount of attention given to one's health and to monitoring any changes, developed by Haws and Winterich (2013) was applied. The items on this scale were taken from the Health Consciousness Scale by Gould (1990). The scale includes items such as “I reflect about my health a lot.” or “I'm very self-conscious about my health.” The scales' alphas were 0.96 and 0.92 in the two Studies they have been previously used in.

Health Risk Assessment.

This scale tests how likely a person believes he or she will be threatened by a particular health condition sometime in the future. For the purpose of this study, the scale has been adapted to not one specific health condition but to “serious health problems”. For consistency reasons the scale was measure on a five point Likert scale instead of the original seven point Likert scale. Samper and Schwartz (2013) applied this scale in two of their three reported studies. Items applied for the present study were for example “How likely are you to have serious health problems in your lifetime?” with answer options ranging from 1 (extremely likely) to 5 (extremely unlikely). The alphas for the scale in the studies of Samper and Schwartz were 0.72 and 0.82 in Studies 1 and 3, respectively (Samper & Schwartz 2013).

Green Products Identification Ability

This four item scale was chosen to measure a person's ability to recognize so-called "green products" and distinguish them from products that are not "green".

The scale that was developed by Gleam et al. (2013) inspired by research conducted by Seiders et al. (2007). The construct reliability reported for the scale by Gleam et al. (2013) was 0.91. Examples of scale items are “I can identify green products” or “I do know the difference between green products and standard products.”

Attitude Toward Consuming the Food

A person's attitude towards eating a particular food was tested on this four item scale developed by Haws and Winterich (2013). The items emphasize how tasty the food is expected to be. The scale reached an alpha of 0.96 in Haws and Wistrich's study. In the present study this food was adjusted to salmon, as it was the stimulus serving the study. "I would enjoy eating salmon" or "Salmon would taste good." are some examples of the scale adapted for this study.

Health Benefits of the Product (Long Term)

The scale developed by Passover and Lee (2013) has three items that measure the extent to which a person reports that he or she was thinking about the long-term health-related consequences of using the product featured in an ad they just watched.

The scale's alpha in the study conducted by Passover and Lee (2013) was reported to be 0.84. For the purpose of this study the „ad“-shown in this case was adapted to the image of a clearly recognizable filet of farmed salmon. The items were adjusted accordingly to refer to the image shown: „While you were viewing the image of this salmon, please describe: To what extent were your thoughts about the long-term benefits of salmon?“ Answer options ranged from 1 (A great deal) to 5 (Not at all).

Edibility of the Product

Following the research conducted by Castro, Morales, and Knowles (2013), this scale measures the degree to which a person believes a certain product is ingestible and how likely they are to consume it. The scale's alpha was 0.91 (Castro, Morales, & Knowles, 2013). For the present study, this scale was tested after respondents were shown the image of a farmed salmon filet. Three items were introduced, such as "How likely are you to ingest this product?". Answer options ranged from 1 (Extremely likely) to 5 (extremely unlikely).

Willingness to pay a price premium

The scale developed by False, Niemeier, and Burton (2012), originally measures the degree to which a customer is willing to pay more for a particular brand of a product over competing brands is measured with three, seven-point Likert-type items. Their reported alpha was 0.87. For the purpose of this study, the scale has been adapted to four items measured on a five point Likert scale. Instead of testing the difference in willingness to pay for two brands, the elements tested were farmed and wild salmon. The respondents were shown an image of two filets, one of farmed and one of wild salmon, which were also labelled as such in order to be recognizable to the respondent. The items adapted for this study were:

1. “I am willing to pay a higher price for wild salmon than for farmed salmon. “
2. I am willing to pay _____% more for wild salmon over farmed salmon.
3. How much will be available to pay for each product in euros/kg? -Farmed Salmon
4. How much will be available to pay for each product in euros/kg? -Wild Salmon

4.3 Measurement Validity and Reliability

For the purpose of verifying the constructs validity and internal consistency of the previously described measures, a Cronbach reliability test has been applied to all the chosen scales. Moreover, a Kaiser-Olkin test has been executed, to assess multicollinearity. Adequacy is according to Field (2000) given when the KMO value is greater than 0.5. For this study, to ensure multicollinearity, reliabilities of 0.6 or greater have been considered to be adequate. Values below 0.30 have been suppressed in order to better understand the factor loading. Furthermore, in order to be appropriate for the use in the factor analysis, the data needed a significance value below 0.05 (He et al., 2013). For more detailed information regarding the factor analysis applied please see Appendix section *Multivariate analysis*. There, all the Cronbach’s alpha and KMO values, are presented for both groups.

4.4 Methodological Approach

To conduct the data analysis, the questionnaire answers have been transferred from Qualtrics to SPSS 24. Descriptive statistics were applied and presented in frequency tables in order to characterize the sample in terms of socio-demographic indicators. The variables were analysed in terms of their internal factors, by the means of a Factor Analysis conducted on each variable. In the next step, the means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables presented in the study have been analysed. Subsequently, structural equation modelling methods have been conducted using maximum likelihood estimation in order to scrutinize the hypotheses. In pursuance of the fit of model and data, incremental and absolute model-fit indices were combined to evaluate the overall fit. The specific indices were chi-square (χ^2), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) (Kline, 2001). The goodness-of-fit criteria acknowledging an acceptable fit for this study were a CFI > 0.90, a RMSEA < 0.08, TLI > 0.90 (Cunningham, 2007).

5. Results

For this study, structural equation modelling (SEM) has been used in order to test the established hypothesised model. SEM is a general statistical modelling technique, that is broadly applied in behavioural sciences and that connects factor analysis and regression analysis, (Levite, 2009) allowing to test hypotheses practicing latent constructs (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The software used to conduct the SEM was IBM AMOS 22.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Concerning the overall self-reported perception of the consumers own ethical consumption, it can be taken into account what has been established in the literature review, namely the prevalent gender differences concerning healthy food and perspectives associated to sustainability and environmentalism. These cues are reflected in the data collected. Looking

at the means of the Ethical Minded Consumer Behaviour scale, it can be stated, that women consider themselves to be slightly more sustainable consumers than men. Moreover, they expressed a higher consciousness (HC) towards their health than the opposite sex. While this is merely surprising information, it is especially interesting to look at the variables that were expected to be influenced by the stimulus that has been introduced to one of the partners. Looking at the remaining scales, this influence can be clearly detected. The results of the Health Risk Assessment (HRA) for *Group 1* show an increased perceived probability of facing serious health issues for the experiment group from 2.95 on day one to 2.79 on day two, after they were exposed to the stimulus, lower values signalling an increase. This change in the perceived probability of facing serious health problems can also be exposed in the control group from 3.17 on day one to 3.06 on day two, even though they were not yet exposed to the stimulus. As expected, this change in perception was even bigger after the control group saw the video (2.67). The same pattern stands for *Group 2*, a slight decrease of the values from day one to day two for the unexposed control group, followed by a stronger change from before and after watching the video on day two can be found in the variables Edibility of the product (EP) (day one = 2.22, day two = 2.32, day two after watching video = 2.78) with higher values signalling lower perceived edibility. For the variable Health Benefits of the product (HBP) the values of the male control group were on day one 2.83 on day two 2.62 and on day two after watching the video 2.45, with lower values signalling worse perceived health benefits. For detailed values please see Appendix section *Item Statistics*.

Concerning the Attitude Towards consuming salmon (ATCF) one can again see a decrease of the attitude towards the product for the male experiment group that saw the video from 1.77 on day one to 2.14 on day two, as well as for the female control group from 1.82 on day one to 1.95 on day two, even though this group did not see the video yet. However, for *Group 2*, this pattern cannot be detected. The values of the male control group did not present a lower attitude

towards salmon (day one = 2.18, day two = 2.15) and therefore seem not to be influenced in the same way as the female control group. But as this study aims to connect relationship influence to consumer behaviours, the most interesting variable to observe is the willingness to pay a price premium (WPP) that is directly connected to the purchase stage.

Inspecting the means of this variable, the actor and partner effects can evidently be observed, as shown in the table below. While the change from 2.16 to 1.91 for the male experiment group is probably influenced by the exposure to the stimulus, the change from 2.32 on day one to 2.22 on day two of the female control group, is presumably resulting from information obtained from their partner. After watching the video on day two, the value decreases even stronger to 1.75. This pattern goes through all items of this scale and is especially strong in the expressed willingness to pay a higher percentage for wild salmon over farmed salmon. The percentage changes for the control group from day one to day two 3.08% and rises 12.93 % more after exposure. For *Group 2*, the partner effect for the male control group is even stronger, as the willingness to pay a high percentage rises from 21.97% on day one, 6.12% to 28.09%. Worth mentioning is the fact that the willingness to pay more for wild salmon rises to the same extent, 6.12% for the experiment group that has been exposed to the stimulus. After exposure, the WPP rose another 4.58% for the control group, resulting in a total reported willingness to pay 32.94% more for wild salmon over farmed salmon. Also in the items means related to an actual € amount, the partner effect is clearly visible as the price that the control group respondents reportedly would be willing to pay for farmed salmon decreases from day one to day two, without being exposed to the stimulus, while the amount available for wild salmon rises. In this case, the change from day one to day two is even bigger than the change from before and after exposure on day two, which is a unique fact among all variables. Comparing the results concerning the WPP for both groups, it can be stated that the partner effects of *Group 2* are much more powerful, since the changes of the control group correspond

more to information obtained by the partner after answering the questionnaire on day 1 (partner effect) and less to the stimulus seen on day 2 while in *Group 1* the exposure to the video has a much stronger effect (actor effect) than the interaction with the partner. Therefore, it can be concluded that the influence of a female on her male partner is stronger concerning WPP, than the influence of males influencing their female partners. For detailed depiction of all values for *Group 2*, please see the section *Item Statistics* in the Appendix.

	I am willing to pay a higher price for wild salmon than for farmed salmon.		I am willing to pay ___% more for wild salmon over farmed salmon.		How much €/kg would be available for farmed salmon?		How much €/kg would be available for wild salmon?	
	Mean	SD	Mean (%)	SD	Mean (€)	SD	Mean (€)	SD
Experiment Male Day 1	2.16	0.99	27.9	20.22	12.44	8.14	18.63	11.77
Experiment Male Day 2	1.91	0.86	33.85	22.73	12.82	7.69	19.66	14.56
Control Female Day 1	2.32	0.76	21.99	10.86	13.4	8.01	16.85	9.43
Control Female Day 2	2.22	1.07	25.07	14.95	11.8	7.67	18.86	12.35
Control Female Day 2 (after watching video)	1.75	0.98	38	21.17	12.52	10.49	18.83	12.7

N = 32

Table 1 - Item Statistics Willingness to pay a Price Premium Group 1

5.2 Variable correlation

In order to understand the correlation between the variables as well as the strength of the relationship between them, a correlations matrix has been created. The correlations have been considered to be significant for a p value < 0.05 and very strong for $p < 0.01$. The correlations between the variables are very divergent for the two groups. Especially the correlations between variables of the experiment group of day one and variables of the control group of day two before watching the video are of interest, since they indicate partner effects. Interesting to point out is that in *Group 2* many variables of the control group are significantly correlated with the willingness to pay of the control group. In *Group 1* however, this

development cannot be identified. This finding corresponds to the conclusion previously drawn, that the partner effects in *Group 2* are stronger than the partner effects erected in *Group 1*. The correlation tables can be consulted in the section *Correlations* in the Appendix.

5.3 Testing for research model and hypotheses

To validate the previously established research hypotheses and mediation effects, a bootstrapping estimation procedure has been conducted in AMOS which is a suitable resampling procedure to strengthen relatively small samples. It estimates indirect effects in the data sets by estimating statistical parameters as standard errors or confidence intervals (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

In the first step, the relationship between the depended and independent variables needed to be analysed as it is a prerequisite for mediation analysis that their relationship is significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In the second step, the existence of a mediating variable had to be investigated. Lastly, the nature of mediation had to be analysed, by reviewing whether the significance of the relationship of the depended and independent variables were still significant. From this result, it could be derived whether the mediation was of full (no significance between the variables) or partial nature (remaining significance between the variables). For detailed information on the hypotheses, please see the section *Hypotheses Testing* in the Appendix.

H1: Male partners influence female partners in their attitudes through partner effects.

To test H1 a bootstrap analysis has been conducted in AMOS that resulted in $p = 0.015 < 0.05$. Therefore, the hypothesis is not rejected.

H2: Female partners influence male partners in their attitudes through partner effects.

To test H2 a bootstrap analysis has been conducted in AMOS that resulted in $p = 0.014 < 0.05$. Therefore, the hypothesis is not rejected.

H3: *The perceived Health Benefits of the product (HBP) of the female control group will mediate the relationship between the male experiment groups' perceived Health Benefits of the product and the female control groups' Willingness to pay a price premium (WPP).*

As previously established, in order to test for mediation effects, the significance between the depended and independent variable has to be confirmed first. For H3, the p value obtained for the variables HBP for the female experiment group on day one and the male control groups' WPP was $p = 0.496 > 0.05$ and is therefore not significant. With this result, it is not possible to proceed with testing mediation effects. Consequently, the hypothesis will be rejected.

H4: *The perceived Health Benefits (HBP) of the product of the male control group will mediate the relationship between the female experiment groups' perceived Health Benefits of the product and the male control groups' Willingness to pay a price premium (WPP).*

Again, the significance between the depended and independent variable has to be confirmed first. For H4, the p value obtained for the variables HBP for the female experiment group on day one and the male control groups' WPP was $p = 0.02 < 0.05$ and is therefore significant. With this result, the analysis is proceeding with testing the nature of mediation. After running the mediation procedure, the p value of the before mentioned variable changes to $0.096 > 0.05$ and is therefore not significant anymore, meaning that the perceived HBP of the male control group on day two fully mediates the relationship between the female HBP on day one and the male WPP on day two. Therefore, the hypothesis will not be rejected. Since this is a simple mediation with only one mediator that fully mediates the relationship of the variables, the mediation process has been sufficiently explained and further analysis of indirect effects is unnecessary (Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011).

6. Discussion

This chapter reviews the conclusions reached during the statistical analysis and offers interpretation of the results, aiming to understand the implications for marketers, as well as highlighting the limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future research.

6.3 Implications

The main focus of this work project was to investigate how partners in a relationship influence each other in their attitudes and behaviours and if there are any gender differences that can be detected. The established hypotheses predict that the partners will influence each other with partner effects, meaning to which extend an individuals' choices depend on their own attitudes, beliefs and preferences, as well as their partners' attitudes, beliefs and preferences. The hypotheses also predict a prevalent mediation effect that influences the Willingness to pay a price premium of the respondents.

There are several implications resulting from the findings of this study. As confirmed by the collected data, individuals take information provided by their partner into account and are heavily influenced by their attitudes and beliefs. This connection has to be taken into account by manufacturers and marketers when they want to persuade consumers of their products. As can be seen in the descriptive statistics of this study, the perceived edibility and healthiness of a product has an immediate effect on an individuals' willingness to pay. As already mentioned in the literature review, messages transmitting concern for the health of the partner, have been very effective (Dennis, 2006; Tucker & Anders, 2001; Tucker & Mueller, 2000), suggesting that it can be an effective direction of manufacturers and marketers to focus on easy to process information, eco labels and transparency to make consumers understand the positive features of their product on the individual they can then pass on to their partner. Marketers and manufacturers should also take into account, that women can exert greater

influence on their male counterparts which can have implications on how to communicate to women, while trying to target male consumers.

6.4 Limitations & Future research

The findings and conclusions drawn from this research have to be interpreted with the following caveats in mind. Firstly, the study relies on self-reported data, bearing the risk of bias. Therefore, it cannot be ensured that the results concerning EMCB, GPI and WPP reflect the actual behaviour of the respondents.

Secondly, the measure used to collect the data is bearing some peril. As the respondents filled out online questionnaires at home, it could not be controlled that they followed strictly the instructions. While the study was designed for both partners to answer the questionnaires on two consecutive days, many of the respondents waited longer times to answer. Thus, intermittently one of the partners filled out the first questionnaire a longer period after his or her partner, causing a holdup in the process. Also, in some cases, dyads took a longer time before answering to the second questionnaire, jeopardizing the desired partner effects. Further, it could not be controlled that both partners answered individually, leaving a chance that the control group was exposed to the stimulus earlier than planned. In that case, it can be expected, that the influence of the stimulus the experiment group was shown, decreased due to the longer period before answering the second questionnaire and therefore influencing the results.

In future research, in order to control these limitations, the study should make sure the respondents stick to the outlined process. This could be achieved by being present when the couples fill out the questionnaires, to make sure only the experiment group is exposed to the stimulus and that the planned timings are respected. Moreover, future research could go further and connect the findings obtained to the theories of relationship science, reviewed previously, to achieve a more complete understanding of the decision making in the context of romantic relationships.

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