

Market regionalization of multinational food companies - Low income consumer's behavior in Recife-PE

Regionalização mercadológica de empresas multinacionais de alimentos - Comportamento do consumidor de baixa renda no Recife-PE

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to verify the response of low - income consumers located in popular neighborhoods of Greater Recife to the marketing strategy of regionalization of products by multinational companies of processed foods, in their quest to expand their markets. These companies decide to focus their marketing actions on low-income consumers in the Brazilian Northeast, adapting prices, products, packaging and even the flavors of their products with the intention of approximating this population and distancing themselves from the image of multinational companies that act Globally. The research was carried out from a sample of 150 interviewers in five points of sale, in three districts of the city: Ibura, Cohab and Várzea. The results indicated that this strategy was not successful among these consumers as the companies surveyed apparently did not take into account the profile of this population who, although poorer, also wish to have the best products and not only those that are "tailored" to them since this population is more susceptible to promotions and low prices.

KEYWORDS: Marketing regionalization; Multinational food; Great Recife.

RESUMO

O presente artigo teve como objetivo verificar a resposta de consumidores de baixa renda, instalados em bairros populares do Grande Recife, diante da estratégia mercadológica de regionalização de produtos por empresas multinacionais de alimentos processados, na busca em ampliar seus mercados. Tais empresas decidem por focar suas ações de marketing em consumidores de baixa renda no Nordeste Brasileiro, adaptando preços, produtos, embalagens e até mesmo sabores de seus produtos com a intenção de parecer mais próximos dessa população e se distancia da imagem de empresas multinacionais que agem globalmente. A pesquisa foi realizada a partir de uma amostra de 150 entrevistados, em cinco pontos de vendas, de três bairros da cidade: Ibura, Cohab e Várzea. Os resultados indicaram que essa estratégia não foi bem-sucedida entre esses consumidores, as empresas pesquisadas aparentemente não levaram em consideração o perfil dessa população que, embora mais carente, desejam também ter os melhores produtos e não só os que são feitos sob medida para eles, uma vez que essa população é mais susceptível à promoções e preços baixos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Regionalização mercadológica; Multinacionais de alimentos; Grande Recife.

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1 INTRODUCTION

There are a number of alternative marketing strategies chosen by companies in order to gain competitive advantage over their competitors, whether to increase market share, or to increase or improve their sales performance. But what strategies are those used by food multinationals to achieve these competitive advantages when operating in specific regions? How do they act? And, above all, how do consumers perceive these market strategies carried out by these companies?

Food multinationals have several competitors in retail, which include multinational competitors, and large domestic companies, as well as local ones. These companies have realized that the performance of local competitors was stronger in the region, as these not only had lower prices but also used local communication to approximate local consumers. Given this, these multinationals have decided to use a marketing strategy known as regionalization to try to win over these consumers and thus increase competitiveness against their competitors.

In this sense, this research intends to contribute to the topic of marketing regionalization. The research starts from the assumption that the low-income consumers of the peripheral areas of Greater Recife-PE respond positively to the marketing strategies carried out by the food multinationals and give preference to the processed and regionalized products offered by these companies.

2 THEORETICAL REFERENCE

For Haesbaert (1999), "regionalizing is not simply cutting space from generic, quantitative parameters, differences of degree in income brackets, GDP, trade flows, etc." Globalization (in the form of flexible specialization and the strategy of creating niche markets) explores local differentiation. Thus, instead of thinking of the global replacing the local, it would be more accurate to think of a new articulation between the global and the local.

According to Robins (1991), "[...] alongside the trend toward global homogenization, there is also a fascination with the difference and commodification of ethnicity and 'otherness'. There is, along with the impact of the 'global', a new interest in 'local'." The term 'glocal' emerged in the 1980s in Japan. The idea of glocalization was initially related to the personalization and marketing of global products and services to specific and differentiated markets. Applied to other areas, the glocal came to mean simultaneity and interpenetration.

The British sociologist Robertson (1995) was the first to popularize the term glocalization in his work *Glocalization: Time-space and homogeneity-heterogeneity*. Thinking and acting global and local is the mantra that many multinationals want to use in their marketing departments, Tiplady (2003) defines glocalization as "ideas and structures that circulate globally, change and adapt to meet local realities." A parallel, therefore, is drawn in this study, showing that the multinational companies that are working with the regionalization process, want to be accepted as local companies by these niches of consumers. That is, although they are global companies, they want to be local, hence the use of the term "glocal".

Companies referred to as global companies and having in their portfolios globally recognized products are the major food industries in the world. This position makes them the most active companies in the growing markets.

These companies create their business units based on regionalization, some of which are specifically located in the Northeast region and others that, in their headquarters, usually in the Southeast of Brazil, have North and Northeast regional departments, research departments and / or communication agencies focused on researching these local consumers.

We may assume that in their strategies for global dominance, companies desire integration with a number of different markets, being under pressure from the universal needs of consumers, competitive pressures to reduce or re-adjust costs and also counter the performance of competitors; on the other hand, they are also under pressure to perform locally, taking into account differences in purchasing power and distinct consumer preferences, as well as distribution channels and sales

practices. The pursuance of global hegemony should not deflect from the need to address the heterogeneity of each location and vice versa, the evolution of the world economy, and interactions between nations should be given full attention, as should interactions which are not only global to global, but global to local, local to global and local to local. The conjunction of all these interactions leads to glocalisation.

The values, cultures and interests of these people are widely considered by multinational companies that wish to transform them into products and often into concepts, but the way in which these people wish to transmit this to the world must also be captured in its essence, so that they do not lose their identities. "Consumer behavior is the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, buy, use or discard products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires" (Solomon, 2011).

The big goal of marketing is to learn how to capture these wants and needs and transform them into products to be desired and consumed. This process of gathering information involves several factors and steps and should be a continuous work, since the purchase should not end at the moment that the consumer takes the product or service home but rather after he takes it and re-purchases it and recommends it to other people, making that product or service special to him and thereby decreasing the chances of switching to a competitor or even to stop consuming. Figure 1 shows the stages of the consumer process seen from the perspective of consumers and marketers.

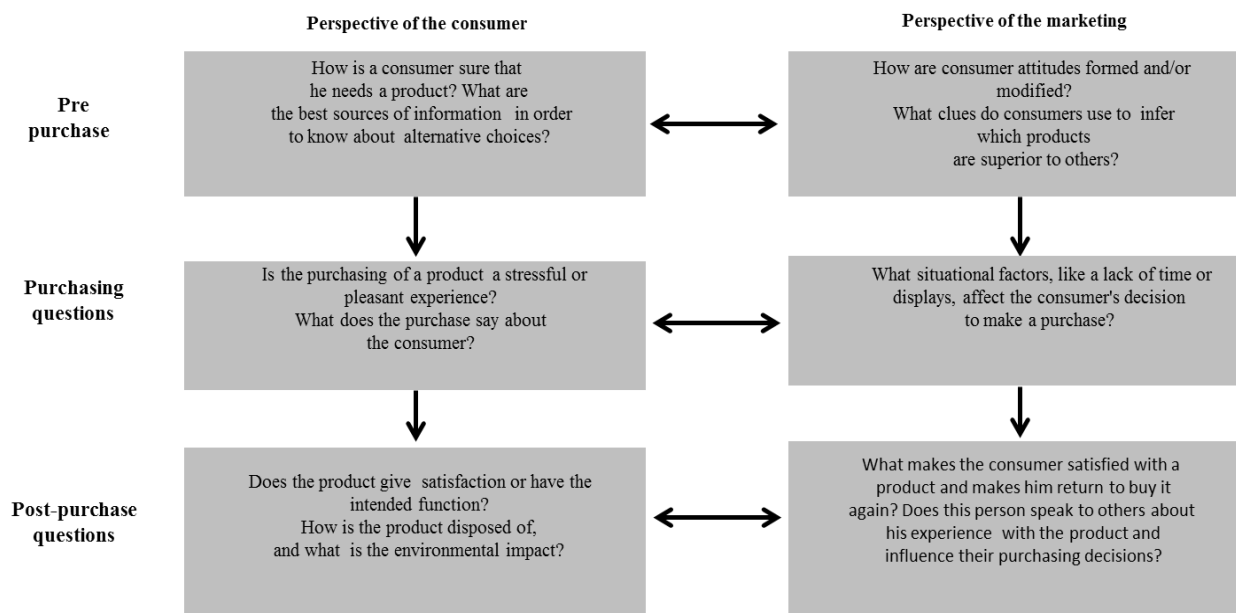


Figure 1 - Stages of the Consumption Process
Source: Solomon, 2011.

According to Solomon (2011, p. 34):

The response of the consumer is the decisive test to see if a strategy will succeed. So knowledge about consumers must be embedded in every facet of a good marketing plan. Consumer data helps organizations define the market and detect threats and opportunities for a brand.

The focus of this study is to understand the profile of consumption based on social classes and income. This aspect tends to be well studied by marketers and businesses, since the purchasing power of a class affects their decision to buy a certain product, brand or quantity. Since the income barrier has a high degree of influence, this cannot be considered to be irrelevant. There are several theories that define the motivations for purchasing: Behaviorist, Cognitivist, Psychoanalytic, Humanist etc. However, none of these theories were considered in this study. In fact, no value

judgment was given on any theory. However, an approach based on the theory of needs, proposed by Maslow, was made. The explanation becomes necessary since this theory has elements which connect with the financial conditions of the individual.

Although this condition is not explicit in his theory, it must be understood that an individual who is at the base of the needs pyramid will not be able to easily climb to the highest level in the pyramid as a result of his current income, since the theory deals with hierarchy. Figure 2 shows what Maslow's Theory is composed of:

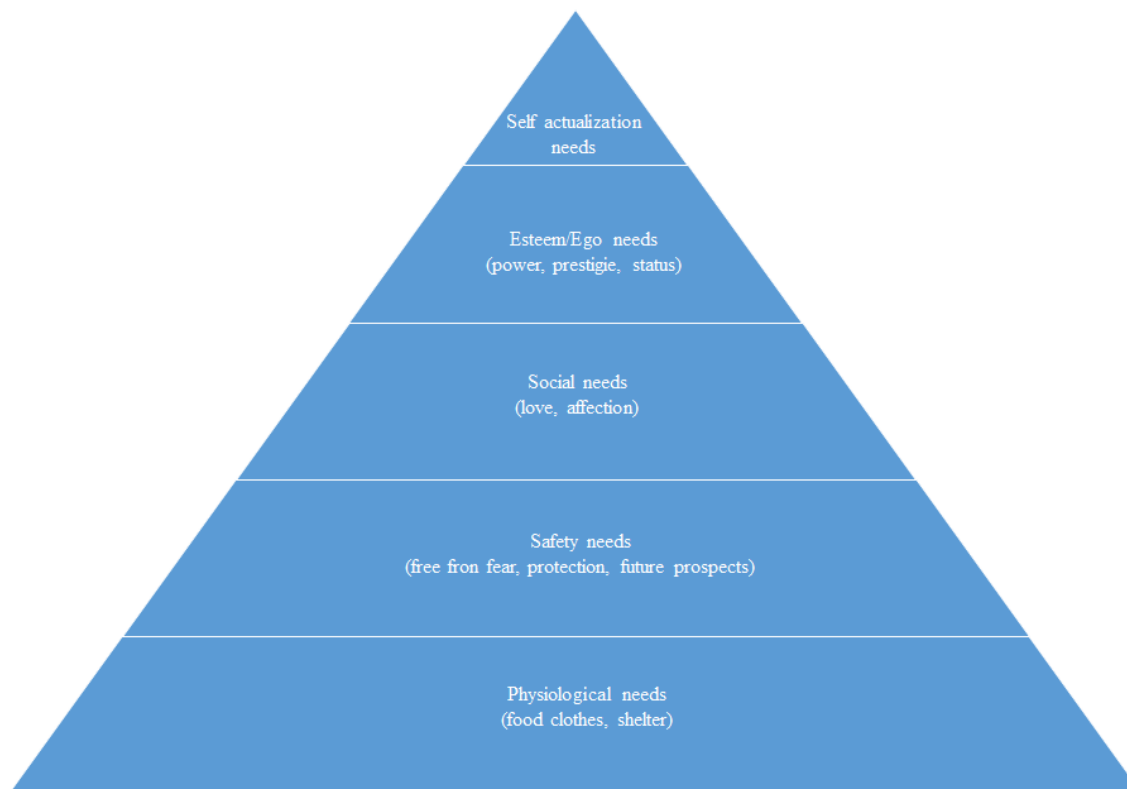


Figure 2 - Theory of Needs
Source: Maslow, 1943.

Adapting this theory to the profile of the low-income consumer, one imagines an individual who has income limitations and, as a result, is unable to acquire a particular product. In this case, because of its price being beyond his price range. This consumer will not have satisfied his need for consumption, as would be the case of another consumer who has a totally satisfactory income, and who would consume the product freely. Therefore, what is called market segmentation occurs. Karsaklian (2008, p. 13) comments on Maslow's theory as follows:

The physiological needs are basic to survival, such as hunger, thirst, sleep, etc. and remain the basis of our desires. Only with these needs met is possible to perceive other stimuli, worry about secondary matters and superfluous. In an industrialized society, generally those needs are met, allowing the individual to spend worrying about the next level.

The theory further states that the next in the hierarchy of physiological needs is that of safety, in which the individual is concerned with aspects of housing and protection. Next, the hierarchy addresses the issue of belonging and affection. These three layers of theory fit the consumer profile, which is the basis of this study. The next level, which deals with the issue of status and self-esteem, will not be relevant, since factors such as education and employment are still being worked on in this profile in order to identify, if possible, more levels which ultimately influence the last level, which is the need for realization. Finally, imagine an individual who has a limited family income,

and who will still have many levels to reach the top of the pyramid if we use the logic of the analysis, and assumptions about finance. Returning to consumer behavior, we see that:

Modern societies seek something beyond the vision of products as needs. It is no longer the use value that matters, but the value-symbol. Thus, the consumption of certain objects only makes sense when done in a social context. And because social classes differ in various respects, companies rely on these differences to select their marketing strategies. (Karsaklian, 2008, p. 26)

The identification of target markets can be facilitated considerably when cultural variables are taken into account, in which there are particularities or differences of taste and behavior among the different social groups that coexist within the same market. (Karsaklian, 2008, p. 26)

Universalization is the strategy of marketing the same product in all the markets in which a company operates. Conversely, we have the local marketing approach "when developing a specific strategy adapted to the environment and the local cultural system. The Nescafé bought in Switzerland does not have the same taste as the one sold in France, even though it is on the other side of the border "(Karsaklian, 2008, p. 153).

3 METHODOLOGY

The strategic approach in commercializing products adapted to the system of local food habits of a low income urban population used by the multinationals in the food sector addressed in this article, is based on the approach of Karsaklian (2008) from Maslow's theory of needs, 1943) which consider market segmentation by class income. This approach allowed the choice of focus groups for the survey. Initially, secondary data obtained from publications in books, articles and dissertations were used in order to obtain the theoretical construction and formalization of the initial parts of this study, within the chosen theme. To achieve the objectives of this study, the actions adopted were divided into three stages.

The first step was to evaluate how low-income consumers in the city of Recife behave in relation to the marketing effort of regionalization employed by food multinationals. To identify where consumers were to be approached, one needed to know where they were concentrated. The selection of neighborhoods whose nominal monthly household income was low were selected and, after this selection, the three neighborhoods were chosen: Cohab, Várzea and Ibura, because they were the poorest in the city of Recife-PE.

In order to identify the points of sale participating in the field survey, after determining the neighborhoods, the points of sale were selected from the database of the Association of Supermarkets of Pernambuco and also researched through specific retail sites. The profile of these points of sale should be in line with the profile of the consumer that is the object of this survey, that is, smaller retail outlets that are concentrated in the selected neighborhoods, with low-income consumers.

After making this selection, we studied 14 retail outlets, five in the Cohab neighborhood, five in the Várzea area and four in the Ibura neighborhood. For the Ibura neighborhood, which comprised of four outlets, a small sample was drawn to participate in the survey, and for the neighborhoods of Cohab and Várzea, which both had five identified retailers, two markets were selected for each neighborhood, making a total of five selected outlets for the application of questionnaires to clients.

In order to define the categories of the products which would be surveyed, categories of products that were marketed by food multinationals were identified in the sales outlets, so that the products of the companies surveyed had the opportunity to compete with local companies, which enabled the consumer to recognize their brand and product as a regional product, as detailed in the following interventions:

- Processing model - New product - Sachet - Nestlé launched a product called Nescafé Dolca that is only sold in the Northeast and changed its formula in order to make the flavor more similar to the coffee flavor consumed in the Northeast (weaker and sweeter);
- Processing model - New product - Sachet - Nestlé launched a product called Leite Ideal that is only sold in the Northeast and changed its formula in order to transform the product with nutrients that were lacking in the health of consumers in the Northeast region (they added more iron and more vitamins);
- Processing model - New packaging - Powdered chocolate - Garoto launched a product called Magic Chocolate with reduced grams in order to make the price of the product more accessible to classes C, D and E, in order to compete in the market with the other multinationals and regional competitors;
- Processing model - New flavor - Powder refreshment - Mondelez/Kraft Foods launched a product called Tang Sabor Cajá, in order to maintain in its portfolio fruit products from the Northeast region;
- Processing model - New packaging - Stuffed biscuit - Nestlé (Biscoito Bono) and Mondelez/Kraft Foods (Biscoito Oreo) have launched products with reduced weight in order to make the price of the product more accessible to classes C, D in order to be able to compete with other multinationals and regional competitors.

The second step was to verify if this effort translated into preferences to buy the products of these companies versus their local competitors. We sought to analyze regional products and their competitors, as well as evaluating the consumers' recall of promotions and brands. In order to represent the population, a sample model was chosen by type. According to Gil (2002, p. 114), "sampling by typicity is also a type of non-probabilistic sampling and consists of selecting a subgroup of the population that, based on the information available, can be considered representative of the entire population." For Malhotra (2011, p 109) "in single cross-sectional studies only a sample of respondents from the target population are extracted and information is obtained only once." For each selected market, 30 consumer interviews were conducted, making a total of 150 applied questionnaires. In order to apply the questionnaires, we sought, in the selected sales outlets, the authorization to conduct the interviews with the consumers. The interviewees were chosen randomly, through accessibility. Those who came to make a purchase were asked if they agreed to do a questionnaire, and the consumers who accepted were selected to participate in the survey.

In the third, and last, step, the data of the applied questionnaires were tabulated in Excel and transformed into data relating to the presupposition in this article, which is that the regionalization of products influences the preference of lower income consumers, as will be seen in the analysis and discussion below of the results of the study.

4 ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The results of the research with the consumers showed their perceptions of the actions of regionalization implemented by the food multinationals, in addition to presenting the last three studies of brand preference that were undertaken by the two largest newspapers in Recife-PE, as a complement to consumer perception.

It is important to note that several strategies were taken by companies to sell their products. The companies selected as participants in the survey were the food multinationals which carried out some kind of regionalized marketing strategy. For each company, a different strategy was adopted: Nestlé opted to launch two new products, both the sachet coffee called Nescafé Dolca and the sachet milk powder, called Ideal. The strategy chosen by this multinational company was more aggressive than other companies. For the category of powdered refreshment, the multinational company Mondelez (Kraft Foods), chose to include caja in its portfolio, which is a regional fruit; for the categories of powdered chocolate and stuffed biscuits, the companies opted for a strategy

directed at changes in the packaging; Nestlé brand Garoto created a smaller package for its powdered chocolate and Nestlé opted to adapt the packaging of its cookies, reducing its weight, so that the price would be more competitive against its regional competitors.

From the data obtained in the application of the questionnaire to the consumers of low-priced foods, one can perceive their profile and, from this, compare with the other data also obtained in the research and draw a conclusion within the sample about their perception of the actions of regionalization implemented by food multinationals for processed products.

4.1 Consumer profile

In relation to consumers, female customers stand out as having a greater presence in the points of sale surveyed, representing 68% of total customers. The men who accepted to participate in the study had a larger age range, with an average age of 38 years and women, with a mean age of 33 years. Most consumers surveyed are married, followed by singles and divorced/separated. A higher percentage of people were without children, followed by those with two children and one child. It should be noted that large families, that is those with more than three children, represented a low percentage of the sample obtained.

Most of the people surveyed lived with their partners and children (33%), followed by those who live with their parents (23%). The percentage of people who lived alone stood at only 3%. The income range of most consumers surveyed (Table 1) is less than one to ten minimum salaries. Considering the criterion for definition of social class applied by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics [IBGE] (2010), which takes into account the number of minimum salaries received by a family during 2015, whose value was R\$ 788,00, we can classify the majority of those surveyed as being in classes C, D and E, which shows that the respondents are part of the profile that interests the food multinationals as clients for their processed products.

Table 1 - Range of consumers at the points of sale in Greater Recife by social class

Social Class by Income	Consumers in the Sample	
	Number	Percent
Classe A and B (< 10 SM*)	3	2
Classes C, D and E (> 0 to 10 SM*)	147	98
Total	150	100

* SM - minimum wage

Source: Field survey.

It is worth noting that the number of respondents who reported having a family income below a minimum wage was very low and this also applies to consumers who declared that they had a family income above ten minimum wages (only 2%). Almost all the people in the sample (98%) said they had an average family income of less than one, and up to ten minimum wages.

More than 50% of respondents fall within a range of schooling from high school to an incomplete tertiary level, which is a profile that shows that respondents already have a degree of knowledge about price and promotion which is much more marked than the interviewees who have a low level of schooling. That is, the marketing strategies of the companies used to conquer consumers within this profile of respondents must possess an even greater degree of information, for one is not dealing with the majority of illiterates who would have the greatest difficulty perceiving such actions, nor is it dealing with a highly educated profile of high schoolers, in which such actions would have a very different impact. This result is in line with the recent research published by Instituto Popular Popular (<http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/educacao/noticia/2015-04/data-popular-escolaridade-do-brasileiro-sobe-8-pontos-percentuais-em-dez>) which depicts changes in the educational profile of Brazilians in the last decade:

The number of years schooling in Brazil has increased 8 percentage points in the last decade, the research released in April 2015 by the Institute shows. In 2003, 28% of the employed population had incomplete or completed secondary education. In 2013, the percentage rose to 36%. On the other hand, the total number of workers with completed university education increased from 12% to 14% in 10 years, while the number of workers with incomplete or complete primary education fell from 50% to 43%.

4.2 Food expenses

After understanding the profile of consumers from socioeconomic data, how they behave in relation to food consumption habits is now presented, and how much they spend, on average, on each trip to the point of sale.

Considering the result of the profile of the interviewees with respect to income, in which the majority was classified as classes C, D and E, the amount they spend on food showed values above the established range of over R\$ 40,00. These values were established based on information obtained from selected sales points that provided an average value above R\$ 40,00 on each occasion 84% of consumers went to the point of sale during the month. It should be noted that the other spending ranges with a number of respondents were very small, reaching only 16% of the total. These are very specific cases and do not represent the profile of the majority. The decision on how much you spend on a purchase varies a lot, depending on the reason for the purchase (if it is to purchase supplies or if it is to replace something), the date (if it coincides with pay day), family size, type of food etc.

4.3 Choice of places of purchase

Choosing the place to buy food should be taken into account as 77% of the consumers approached were in the habit of making their purchases at the establishment where they were interviewed.

The factors that motivate the consumer to choose the place of purchase are: location, presence of promotions, pricing policy practiced by the point of sale, payment terms, service, etc. It is evident that the main factor for 53% of respondents is the location. They said they choose to make their purchases at the selected point of sale depending on the proximity to their residence or work. The price also seems to be of some relevance for 30% of the interviewees and is an important factor in the consumer's decision, while conditions of payment and service, did not have much importance in the selection of place of purchase.

It was also observed that 77% of the respondents stated that they made their purchases at the selected point of sale and 23% commented that for some reason they chose to buy some food at the selected point of sale, but that is not the main choice. These consumers are divided when it comes to shopping frequency: 36% say they go to the point of sale every fortnight; while 33% answered that they go once a month, 25% once a week, and only 6% do daily shopping, which leads us to understand that most of these purchases are for supply rather than replacement.

4.4 Acquisition of Regionalized Foods

Now that the consumer's profile and buying habits regarding food-related expenses and the reasons for choosing the point of sale for purchase are known, it is time to check their knowledge of promotions and their preference for regionalized products, and then to conclude whether their knowledge about promotions and preferences for regional products, or not, is translated into preferences for products developed by multinationals to serve the local consumer (regionalized) or products of regional companies or multinationals' products.

Regarding promotions, the question was whether the consumer agrees to switch their usual product for another that is offered under some type of promotion. This question wanted to test the

loyalty of the consumer to the brand, that is, how much he is able to remain faithful to the same brand and habitual product, because if one of the strategies of the multinationals is to carry out promotions, and if the strategy was well implemented the consumer could change products and choose the regionalized product offered by the multinational.

Figure 3 shows that 67% of respondents agreed to change the brand of the product purchased if the other brand is offering some money saving promotion. This therefore shows that the consumer is not so faithful to the brand of the product and that the promotional factor is a great influence on purchasing decisions.

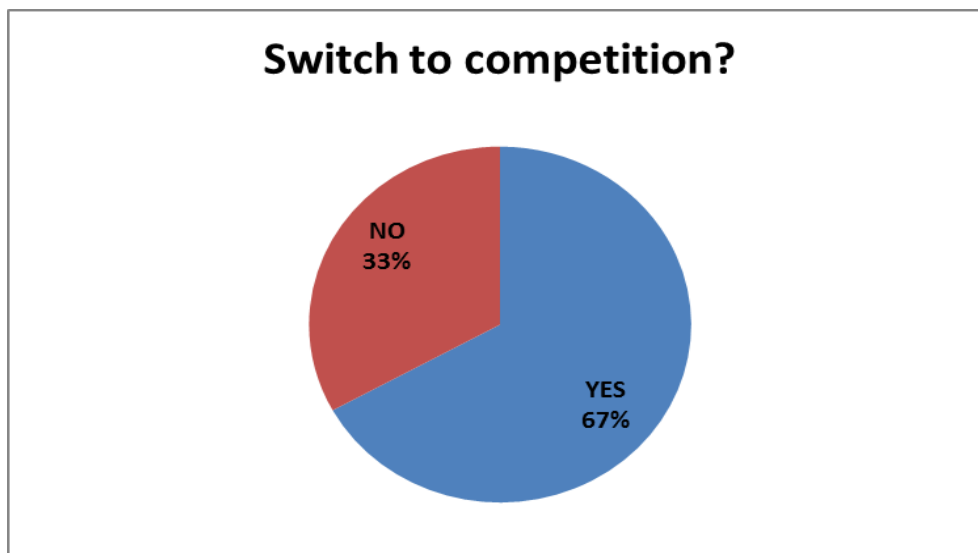


Figure 3 - Product brand loyalty
Source: Field survey data.

In the 14 preselected sales outlets in the survey, the brands listed in Figure 4 were identified as undertaking promotional actions. This identification seeks to understand if consumers remember the promotions, independent of the food category, which were being undertaken at the points of sale in the survey. With the exception of Nestlé, which was the brand most remembered for using promotions, the other brands are tied. When people were asked about the promotions, men and people over 60 years of age mentioned not remembering any promotion, while younger women remember different brands at the same time.

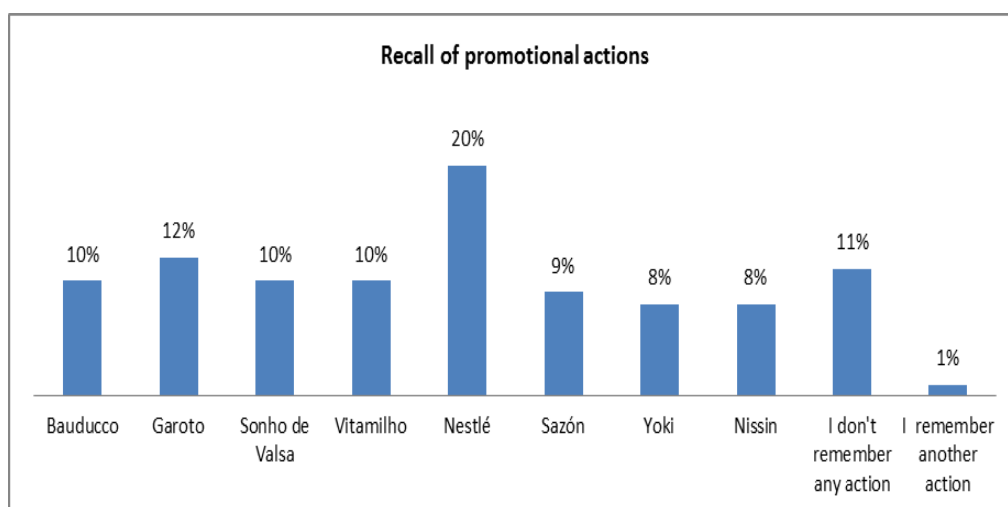


Figure 4 - Remembrance of brands linked to promotions by the interviewees
Source: Field survey data.

Consumers were asked if they had a preference for products manufactured in the region (Figure 5), and whether they would have a sense of where the products were manufactured and whether this influenced the purchasing decision. The results were tied, with 38% answering yes and with 34% saying they were indifferent. That is, consumers who prefer the products manufactured in the region and those who are indifferent, are almost in the same proportion and 28% of people stated that they have no preference for products manufactured in the region. This similarity in responses makes conclusions about this difficult, leading one to believe that the communications or actions of the food companies that produce the regionalized products are not effective, or this strategy is irrelevant in determining, or not, the consumption of their products because they are produced locally.

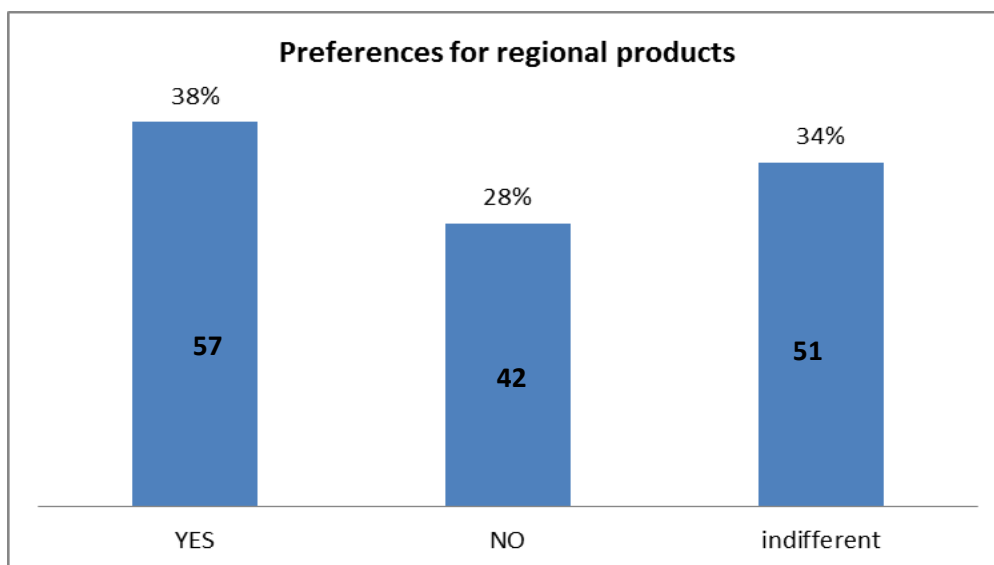


Figure 5 - Consumer preference for regional products
Source: Field survey data.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article dealt with a topic that has not yet been dealt with in the scientific environment, which is regionalization from the marketing point of view. The field survey of low-income consumers in Recife-PE neighborhoods allowed us to know more about the profile of this consumer and his preferences, his purchasing behavior regarding the categories of processed foods provided by multinational companies, as well as verifying the recall of the brands researched and promotions offered by these companies.

The poor want, and consume, well known brands and choose them for their flavor attributes, and often the price is not the predominant factor in the consumption decision. On the other hand, what was perceived, considering the sample carried out, is that multinationals, when executing marketing strategies of regionalization and appropriating information from the local consumer, failed to tailor the processed products to these consumers when the products chosen by them, leading us to believe that there is a weakness in the strategy adopted by such companies, which is supported by the verification of the hypothesis denial for all categories of food surveyed.

The research had limitations in the sample, although the poorest districts of the city were chosen, since this was the target of the research. Other studies could work with larger samples, revealing other important information, thus enabling the research to advance in terms of space and time. It is suggested that the research on this subject is continued, whilst understanding that there is a lack of information on consumer behavior in the food market, and this market is vast enough to arouse the interest of academics.

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