

Consumer trust and behavior toward brands of safe vegetables in Vietnam

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論 文 内 容 の 要 旨

Thesis Summary

Foodborne diseases and food incidents have caused adverse impacts on public health, the growth of the food industry, and the economy worldwide. Increasing numbers of food poisoning and food crises have reduced consumer trust in food safety in both developed and developing countries. In Vietnam, such food safety concern has received great attention from the public, government, and researchers. Among food products, vegetables play essential roles in the Vietnamese daily meal, but the majority of consumers feel much worried about the safety of this food. Although the Vietnamese government has implemented several solutions and policies to improve the safety of food in general, vegetable safety in particular, yet their achievements remain poor.

Consumer trust/concern about food safety has been considered as one of the most barriers to hindering the expansion of the safe vegetable sector in Vietnam; however, there is a lack of evidence to explain why and how consumers place their trust in such food. Additionally, empirical studies on factors affecting consumer trust, attitudes, and behavior toward safe food remain limited. Recently, the function and role of state governance in food safety in Vietnam have been well discussed. Yet the limited capability of the government in food safety management requires the dynamic and active participation of private actors in restoring consumer trust and developing consumer loyalty toward brands of safe food. These gaps have motivated this research to emphasize consumer trust and behavior toward safe vegetables, which then proposes practical and policy implications for both public and private sectors to expand the market share of safe vegetables in the country.

This study was conducted in Hanoi city, where most of the inhabitants are great worry about the safety of vegetables, in two periods: the first period from March to April 2018 and second from January to March 2019. A range of the safe vegetable stakeholders was surveyed, including farmers/producers, cooperatives' managers, distributors/collectors, local government, and consumers, which contributed to updating and mapping the supply chain of safe vegetables. Especially, a sample of 361 consumers based on a stratified sampling survey of households provided rich information on exploring consumer trust and behavior toward safe vegetables in urban areas of Hanoi. Next, a further consumer survey with 250 participants who already bought one of the most popular brands of safe vegetables helped to evaluate market segmentation and significant practical and policy implications to build consumer loyalty. In this dissertation, factor analyses such as exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were combined with structural equation modeling (SEM) to explore consumer trust and predict the behavior toward safe

vegetables. In addition, cluster analysis and multinomial logistic regression were applied for market segmentation of consumer loyalty toward safe vegetable brands and finding factors associated with such brand loyalty.

The most important finding of this study is verifying the vital role of brand trust in forming consumer trust in safe food. Brand trust also acts as a mediating factor between system trust and confidence in the SV safety. These findings are very significant because little evidence of the role of brand trust is confirmed in both developing and developed countries. These help to change the current approach (focusing much on system trust) in restoring consumer trust in Vietnam. Furthermore, we modeled two-level influential factors (brand dimensions and the industry environment) toward brand trust. It is suggested that efforts to establish a reliable brand of safe food in the consumers' minds need to meet two crucial elements at the brand dimension level: the trustworthiness of product information on the label and reputation of the brand. Also, factors belonging to industry level have different effects on brand trust directly or indirectly through two dimensions of brand trust. In addition to exploring trust, the study also indicates that consumer intention to purchase safe vegetables is mostly influenced by attitudes. Subjective norm (social effects) and past behavior also had direct effects on the intention. The effect of trust on intention is positively indirect through attitude. This study is also one of the first to confirm the heterogeneity in consumer loyalty toward brands of safe vegetables and identifies the factors associated with loyalty in Vietnam. Specifically, four segments of brand loyalty can be formed from the interaction between attitudinal and behavioral loyalty dimensions: true, latent, spurious, and disloyal. Notably, a high proportion of consumers were characterized by either variety-seeking behavior and multi-brand loyalty, or low recognition of brands. Consumer satisfaction is the most important driver of loyalty. Also, brand familiarity and brand trust have significant effects on brand loyalty. Building a good image of the store and friendly staff also motivates the loyalty.

Overall, it is suggested that the Vietnamese government and food chain stakeholders should pay more attention to developing strong and reliable brands of safe foods while strengthening the effects of system trust. This can improve the Vietnamese consumer trust in food safety more efficiently. Additionally, the government needs to provide information on food safety risks/food hazards to the public more accurately, evidence-based, timely, and widely. To promote consumers purchasing and repurchasing more SVs, food chain actors should understand more consumer segments of purchasing and loyalty, which focus on psychological factors such as satisfaction, trust, attitudes, and social effects. Meanwhile, assistances of the government in developing brands of safe food are very important. The findings also suggest that it would be crucial to building a comprehensive food traceability system based on efficient and effective public governance of food safety. This implies that close public-private partnerships/collaborations are needed to benefit food safety in Vietnam.