

Understanding the Specificities of Packaging-Free Professionals' Practices to Adapt the Retailing Mix: Contribution of Practice Theories

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Abstract

• *Objective*

Packaging-free shopping, e.g. selling products presented without any packaging, in quantities that the consumer chooses and in reusable containers, is a means of distribution that is currently enjoying renewed interest. Its development is changing the retailers' practices. Based on social practice theories, this article aims at understanding the specificities of packaging-free professionals' practices in order to better adapt the retailing mix to the case of packaging-free distribution.

• *Methodology*

This research uses a qualitative study, which includes interviews with retailers, instore observations and photographs, plus a systematic review of the subject in a professional journal.

• *Findings*

The analysis is based on the three sub-mixes of the retailing mix – the goods and service mix, the physical distribution mix and the communication mix. The results highlight the specificities of packaging-free distribution and, in particular, the permeability of the boundaries between the sub-mixes and the importance of the meanings that create heterogeneity in the practices.

• *Managerial and societal implications*

Analyzing packaging-free distribution through the prism of practice theories reveals the need to adapt the retailing mix to this particular case. The contribution of this research is to propose an appropriate retailing mix adaptation integrating the material dimension/skills/meanings to deploy it. Resulting managerial recommendations regarding the implementation of this specifically adapted retailing mix are then proposed. These propositions allow to remove some of the barriers that are hindering the development of the packaging-free distribution.

• *Originality*

Contrary to previous studies that used social practice theories at the individuals' level, this research uses these theories in a new framework, that of professionals in a specific sector. This proves to be relevant to understanding the specificities in distribution of unpackaged products, a topic that remains unexplored in marketing literature.

• **Keywords:** sustainable development, packaging, packaging-free products, retailing mix, practice theories.

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