

Can Facebook save Australia's dairy farmers?

May 20 2016, by Niki Widdowson



Consumers turning to branded milk.

Social media is coming to the aid of Australia's dairy farmers by promoting the virtues of stumping up an extra dollar to buy branded milk, leaving the \$2 house brands on the shelves, says QUT retail expert Dr Gary Mortimer.

"Shoppers have consistently and routinely been grabbing the cheap milk since January 2011 when the supermarket 'milk wars' first began," Dr Mortimer.

"But now Facebook and Twitter are awash with images of the Coles and Woolies \$2 milk left on the shelf and all the branded, more expensive offerings gone."

Dr Mortimer said the change in attitude to cheap milk defied general marketing logic that grocery staples were a 'low-involvement' buy.

"We are dealing with \$2 milk or \$1 bread. Supermarket shopping is a very low involvement, routine [purchase decision](#) and the majority of [shoppers](#) will rely on simple attributes, like price and brand, to speed up selection," he said.

"While many shoppers claim a desire to support local producers, dairy farmers and small businesses, sadly few do."

"It is quite frustrating to marketers who survey shoppers on their 'intentions to buy' or 'willingness to pay' and receive positive intentions, but then watch them select the private label milk, the cheap mince and

the \$1 bread."

"In other words, intentions don't lead to actions."

Dr Mortimer said what appears to be spurring this 'change of heart' and behaviour is the influence of [social media](#) and its ability to reinforce 'subjective norms' or the sense of approval from others.

"Marketing theory states there are three things needed to bring about behaviour: a positive attitude toward a behaviour, subjective norms, and belief that it can be achieved.

"In the case of cheap milk – if a shopper considers a behavior as positive (attitude – 'I will buy branded milk because this supports dairy farmers'), and if they think their family would want them to do that (subjective norm), and they think it will be easy to perform (self-efficacy) the behavior, this leads to a higher intention to act.

"It's a lot of cognitive energy to spend on making a purchase decision, something usually left to larger, less frequent buys than groceries.

"Dairy farmers' associations have had to change shoppers' behaviour, and this week we are starting to see the results transpire across social media sites.

"They changed behaviour using intervention strategies, like educating shoppers that branded milk is only 99 cents more expensive than the private label. This taps into our self-efficacy in that we feel we can easily afford an extra \$1 to support them.

"These social media postings about buying branded milk are tapping into our subjective norms and we feel good about using social media to let others know we 'didn't buy the cheap [milk](#) and therefore supported [dairy](#)

[farmers'](#).

"This in turn encourages our friends and family to emulate our behaviour and to tell everyone and so the movement grows.

"It indicates that it is shoppers who ultimately drive trends and pricing, not the supermarkets."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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