



# The Ethics of Freedom in Consumption: An Ethnographic Account of the Social Dimensions of Supermarket Shopping for Moroccan Women

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## Abstract

This research brings together insights from philosophy, political theory, and consumer research in conceptualizing and empirically examining the social dimension of negative and positive freedom in consumption. Drawing from ethnographic observations and interviews with Moroccan women regarding their shopping at the supermarket, the findings detail the roles of husbands, store employees, extended family members and friends as constrainer, protector, enabler, facilitator, indulger, and witness. The discussion explains a ‘domino effect’ in such innovative marketplaces, as these market and social actors together enact positive and negative forms of freedom in consumption in ways that co-disrupt social traditions. Implications for business ethics emphasize the need for greater theoretical understanding and practical transparency and accountability regarding the shared, yet disparate responsibilities among businesses and consumers for the changes to social traditions that result in the joint enactment of women’s freedom in consumption.

**Keywords** Freedom · Consumption · Ethnography · Market · Supermarket

Freedom is both the promise and guiding principle of market development (Sen, 2000) that when enacted, impacts societies profoundly (Piketty, 2014; Slater & Tonkiss, 2001). Marketing ethics scholars have issued stark critiques of retail practices for corrupting consumers and contributing to their dependence on consumption, while pointing out best practices that accommodate consumers and improve their lives (Gaski, 1999; Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2020; Peñaloza, 2022; Tadajewski & Brownlie, 2008). With some exceptions, most of this work approaches freedom in consumption at an individual level. For example, Mick and Humphreys (2008) emphasized consumers’ capabilities to choose from a set of market alternatives without interference or restriction, while Hill (2020) pointed to the detrimental effects to

consumers from lack of access to products and services, and addressed the ethical implications to marketers to address such restrictions. From a critical perspective, Markus and Schwartz (2010) questioned the equation of freedom with consumer choice, having noted a strong positive association between constraining social relations and enhanced well-being.

Research conceptualizing social dimensions of freedom in consumption has examined institutional arrangements contributing to its positive and negative aspects, including morality. To detail, in elaborating the struggles of Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP) consumers in India, Varman and Vikas (2007) emphasized the importance of rejoining production to consumption, as jobs and income provide crucial resources to consumers to overcome the negative freedom constraints of access and to enable the positive freedom to consume. In further critical work, Sandikci (2021) distinguishes between ethical consumption and consumption ethics in drawing attention to the importance of viewing consumption as a major institutional feature of contemporary political economy.

Our work builds on Varman and Vikas (2007) and Sandikci (2021) in emphasizing the social dimensions of negative and positive freedom in consumption, and related ethical

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issues, as social relations constrain and enable women's freedom in shopping at the supermarket. Social factors include norms that define and delimit the range of acceptable behaviors in a specific socio-cultural context (Botti et al., 2008), as well as the influence of others and interpersonal relations that restrict and enhance freedom for consumers (Krause, 2015). Interdependence with others and others' roles in contributing to consumers' experiences of freedom is well-documented in consumer research. For instance, Peñaloza and Barnhart (2011) describe the struggles and strategies of middle-class American consumers in accessing credit for consumption as a means of fitting in socially and gaining status among other consumers. Eroglu and Michel (2018) showed how clients as well as salespeople constrain consumers at their favorite shop, at times inadvertently, by triggering an obligation to buy items they otherwise would not prefer.

As Illich (1973) noted, individual freedom is realized in a social domain characterized by interdependence among persons, as others potentially impede and constrain individual freedom. Further, in invoking Rousseau's (1755) notion of the social contract, we note that one's freedom is circumscribed by others, such that one's freedom should be limited only in favor of an other's comparatively equal freedom.

The importance of the social in consumer freedom also is evident in research on communities, as posturing and public recognition accompany pursued and achieved forms of freedom. For instance, when performing in drag, gays proclaim their positive freedom of expression even as they resist the constraints of mainstream heterosexuality (Kates, 2002). Similarly, bikers show their freedom from the restrictions of mobility and sociality (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), while some women wear a veil to show their freedom from the constraints of secular politics (Sandikci & Ger, 2010). This literature suggests that by observing and expressing support, others contribute to freedom in consumption. However, and somewhat surprisingly, research has neglected to explicitly examine and qualify the important social dimensions of negative and positive freedom in consumption. As importantly, regarding ethics, the roles of social and market actors remain unclear as they shape the conditions and consequences for women's freedom in consumption, and disseminate knowledge about such roles and conditions.

This study contributes to theoretical knowledge of negative and positive freedom in consumption and its ethical considerations by shifting the focus from individualized consumer choice, autonomy, and self-mastery, to the important role of social relations and interactions. To examine these social dimensions of consumer freedom, we conduct an ethnographic study of Moroccan women's shopping activities in a supermarket. The supermarket is an intriguing servicescape, as a place conscientiously designed to accomplish marketing goals and to appeal to consumers socially and

culturally (Sherry, 1998). In Morocco, the social structure imposes many restrictions in women's daily lives that constrain their freedom to make important family decisions and to navigate public spaces (Mernissi, 2010; Sadiqi, 2003; World Economic Forum, 2021), and these activities are important parts of shopping and consumption there (Godefroit-Winkel & Peñaloza, 2020). In examining the shopping practices of Moroccan women and their interactions within and beyond the supermarket, this study addresses the following research questions: How do women experience negative and positive forms of freedom in a new retail servicescape? What is the role of others in relation to these forms of freedom in consumption for women there? And, what are the ethical considerations in women's freedom in consumption?

The theoretical framework begins by reviewing previous work in philosophy, political theory, and consumer research on the distinctions between positive and negative freedom, with special attention to their manifestation in the retail servicescape of the supermarket. We then turn to the Moroccan context, in overviewing women's positions in the family and traditions and formats of food shopping, with attention to gender interactions with family, friends, and retail personnel. Next, we detail the research methods, discuss the findings, and develop theoretical contributions regarding the social dimension of consumer freedom. We conclude the paper with a discussion of ethical considerations for retailers and consumers regarding such innovative market interventions and related consumer social interactions that enhance positive forms of freedom and contribute to negative constraints on consumer freedom. Ethical considerations highlight how the supermarket provides an alternative space where innovative market practices and consumer relations jointly: (1) foster and constrain freedom in consumption, and (2) enhance social change, as family and firm-employee-consumer interactions diverge from traditions. Ethical implications for retailers address their potential to gain awareness of their respective responsibility in social change, and to enhance their transparency and accountability for social change. Ethical implications for consumers address their potential to gain conscious awareness of their choices and of the consequences of their choices in relation to such market and social changes. Finally, we propose avenues for future research.

## Theoretical Foundations

### Positive and Negative Forms of Freedom

We use Berlin's (1969) conceptualization of freedom as a theoretical lens in examining the social aspects of freedom in consumption. Berlin (1969) distinguishes two forms of freedom. First, the negative form of freedom, *freedom from*, refers to an experience of freedom in the absence of external

constraints. *Freedom from* is emphasized in a vast literature in philosophy and political science that builds on Kant's (1781) seminal work in envisioning an autonomous self that is free from the constraints that are put into place when a person is subjected to others. Summarizing the debate of what constitutes subjection, Berlin (1969) refers to the interference of others on one's choices.

In contrast, the positive form of freedom, *freedom to*, refers to the ability to actively define and pursue one's goals. This positive sense of freedom is more open-ended in emphasizing autonomous free persons holding the potential to take control of their life and realize life projects. For example, in their focus on the autonomy of free agents, Gaston-Breton et al. (2020) address positive freedom in relating consumers' self-reports of happiness to their psychological capabilities of self-control and independent thought in achieving such autonomy.

Berlin (1969) further asserts that individuals can find "the area within which a [wo]man can act unobstructed by others" in writing, "I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no [wo]man or body of [wo]man interferes with my activity"<sup>1</sup> (Berlin, 1969, p. 15). He views the choices as *open doors*, in referring to the set of options that a free agent can access. He writes, "the extent of a [wo]man's negative freedom is, as it were, a function of what doors, and how many, are open to him[her]; upon what prospects they are open; and how open they are" (Berlin, 1969, p. xlviii).<sup>2</sup> In the ideal state Berlin envisions, every option must be accessible, preferred or not by those involved.

Building on Berlin's metaphor of the door, Krause (2015) calls for a social approach to freedom that extends beyond the condition of open doors and the ability to open them, by stipulating that the act of opening and walking through a door should be *seen by others*. If no one sees the free individual walk through the door, their freedom may be diminished and not fully qualify as freedom, she holds. Attuned to gender relations, the researcher added that sexist interference, domination, and oppression may be un/intentional and un/conscious.

In reviewing consumer research on freedom, we note its predominant focus on negative '*freedom from*' for individuals, especially how one deals with and tries to avoid the interference of others to increase their sense of freedom in consumption. In contributing to this work, we seek to provide a deeper understanding of the social dimension of freedom by examining interpersonal interactions and relations, and accounting for the roles of others in contributing to women's positive and negative freedom. For us, the opening of the supermarket door functions as a metaphor and

empirical question, as we are concerned with the circumstances in which consumers literally walk through that door and with what they do subsequently in enacting negative and positive freedom in consumption.

### Ethical Considerations Regarding Freedom in Consumption

Marketing ethics and consumer research scholars have a long tradition of critiquing retail marketing activity for stimulating consumer demand and enhancing consumers' dependence on consumption for identity, status, and community (Figueiredo et al., 2014; Peñaloza, 2022; Saren et al., 2007; Tadajewski & Brownlie, 2008). At the same time, scholars single out and praise the ethical marketing practices of offering fair prices and accurate information in provisioning vital goods and services (Gaski, 1999; Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2020). Much of this work treats consumers as individuals. For example, in an analysis of ten articles, Hill (2020) examines the emotional and psychological consequences of consumption restrictions for those who live at the margins of societies, including homeless, illiterate and incarcerated individuals who face stigma due to these restrictions. Pointing to limited access to consumer products and housing as forms of negative consumption restrictions on their free will, the author suggests that market inclusion can help consumers to achieve greater positive freedom to consume.

Some scholarship attends to social aspects of consumption and consumption as a feature of market institutions. Because we are concerned with social dimensions of freedom in consumption, we build primarily on this work. Varman and Vikas (2007) point to marketing activities in exacerbating differences between consumers in more and less developed societies. Their main contention is the separation of consumption from production for consumers in less developed, 'subaltern' societies, in pointing out how the privation of jobs and financial resources constrains consumers' access, which is a negative form of *freedom from*, and further limits their positive *freedom to* consume. Freedom for subaltern consumers thus requires that they be better integrated into more socially attuned market systems, as the reconnection of production to consumption supplies jobs that generate and distribute resources more widely and equitably, and provides vital consumption opportunities.

Sandikci (2021) brings institutional level insight in shifting attention from consumption ethics to the *ethics of consumption*. Charging that the important roles of communities in mobilizing collective norms and critical discourses, and in shaping social conventions have been overlooked, she works to remedy this by elaborating the ideological repertoires of the multiple actors involved in consumption of an ordinary object, nail polish, as they negotiate appropriate consumption practices and norms. Consumers, entrepreneurs, public

<sup>1</sup> Gender inclusion added by the authors.

<sup>2</sup> Gender inclusion added by the authors.

figures, and the media are implicated in an ongoing moral struggle that has serious implications in dynamically reforming what is considered ethical in a particular context. Taking insight from this research, we work to identify the ethical implications in the roles of market and social actors pertaining to negative and positive forms of freedom for women as they shop at the supermarket.

### Women's Freedom in the Retail Servicescape

In a seminal article on markets and modernity, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) urged scholars to examine consumption for the way consumers use it to express discontent towards social conventions. They noted how consumption has served as crucial terrain for women in challenging and transforming traditional gender roles and household structures. Their work points to the importance of viewing retail servicescapes historically, with attention to how they have provided particular conditions for freedom in consumption for women in the mid and latter nineteenth century (Rappaport, 2000). Notably, in shopping, women transgressed key social conventions of that time: they went to the stores without a chaperon; interacted with salesmen, saleswomen, and customers they did not know; and they formulated desires for material products, including clothing, and home furnishings, while socializing, taking tea, and listening to music with their friends (Miller, 1981; Nava, 1997). Social relations at the store also featured salespersons trained to treat the women like “queens” (Bowlby, 1997, p. 96), to enable their participation in an emerging lifestyle by assisting them in identifying and formulating their tastes (Leach, 1993).

Berlin (1969, p. ix) addressed the conditions for experience of freedom generally, in sites where such social conventions could be “carved out” apart from those in other places. Here “one [wo]man is [her] his own master,” and she is “not obliged to account for [her] his activities” to others, so long as those activities were “compatible with” organized society.”<sup>3</sup> Innovative retail servicescapes supply good examples of how women have experienced negative *freedom from* the interference of their husband and asocial conventions, and positive *freedom to* shop and to experience new emotions and novel aspects of themselves.

In more recent times, department stores have been joined by a plethora of retail servicescapes, as the result of intense price competition, changes in socio-cultural trends, technological advancements in online shopping, and immersive design innovations. Sherry (1998) overviews a range from luxurious and expensive boutiques to stark self-service low-cost warehouse formats, such as Walmart and Sam’s Club, to colorful and spectacular, experience-oriented ‘theme’ stores

and parks, such as Niketown, American Girl, and Disney-World, and lavish cinemas featuring cushioned chairs and dining service.

Across these varied formats, recent studies point to various social constraints that impede women’s freedom in consumption. For example, Van Kerrebroek et al. (2017) showed that shoppers avoid the constraining emotions of stress and irritation at crowded stores and malls. We mentioned already Eroglu and Michel’s (2018) work showing the interference by employees and other customers on women’s choices. Similar observations have been made in supermarkets. Thompson et al. (1990) detailed how children impede women’s free choice in shopping for groceries in the U.S., while Miller (1998) drew a complex analogy of sacrifice and satisfaction for British mothers who privilege the tastes of their family members when grocery shopping.

In sum, there is evidence that others both constrain and enable freedom in consumption for women in retail servicescapes. On one hand, other customers and salespersons interfere and constrain their freedom of consumption. On the other hand, store formats and salespersons increase their access, while family members and friends give meaning to their consumption choices, thus fostering women’s freedom in consumption. This work is both historical and contemporary, and much of it has been carried out in Western contexts, with the notable exceptions of Varman and Vikas (2007), and Sandikci (2021), which we have discussed. In addition, while focused on the West, Markus and Schwartz (2010) unpack the equation of freedom with consumer choice there, in noting how the close social relationships that constrain freedom in consumption are at the same time instrumental in consumers’ wellbeing. The researchers point to the importance of examining socially oriented goals in consumption in developing nations, to better understand how consumers weigh social demands and connections with family and friends with individual autonomy in fashioning forms of freedom in consumption there. In the following sections we overview women’s positions in Moroccan society and the characteristics and gender traditions of food shopping in Moroccan food markets.

### The Position of Women in Morocco

Women’s social position in Morocco is complex and layered in this patriarchal and male dominated society. The revised family code (Moudawana & de la Famille, 2004) and the revised constitution of 2011 made legal changes towards gender parity. First adopted in 1958, the Moudawana family code governs areas of family law, including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Early provisions held that Moroccan women had a legal duty to obey their husbands, to the point that a husband could ask for divorce if his wife argued with him or did not show respect for his

<sup>3</sup> Gender inclusion added by the authors.

mother. Major changes to the family code in 2004 established joint responsibility for the family among men and women, and limited polygamy. The revised code also allows a woman to ask for divorce if her husband has not fulfilled his conjugal duty. However, she has to provide proof of misconduct, and interpretations of this law render it difficult for a woman to win claims of misconduct, be granted divorce, and receive compensation (Boussahmain, 2014). Informally, as Mernissi (1987) detailed, mother- and sister(s)-in-law gain authority in the family by exerting influence on the wife of their son(s) and brother(s), respectively. As a result, mother- and sister(s)-in-laws watch these women to ensure that they follow family traditions, and such oversight extends to constraining consumption practices. Article 51 still stipulates that a wife must maintain a good relationship with her in-laws.

The constitution approved in 2011 potentially strengthens women's legal rights and societal status, in updating provisions of the previous constitution that did not legally recognize gender equality. Article 19 states that "The man and the woman enjoy, in equality, the rights and freedoms of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental character." However, as Boussahmain (2014) noted, jurisprudence tends to follow traditional gender norms and relations, and changes in social practices are slow.

Regarding global gender gap rankings, Morocco ranks 143 of 153 countries (World Economic Forum, 2021), and women are poorly represented in national institutions (USAID, 2018). According to the Haut Commissariat au Plan (2018), the Moroccan national institution responsible for the production of economic, demographic and social statistical information, 20% of Moroccan women are employed, and 7% are paid for their labor; 35% of Moroccan women are illiterate; and educated, upper class working women represent 1.8% of Moroccan women. While the political and educational spheres represent some opportunities for women to experience *freedom to* and *freedom from*, the majority of women in Morocco lack higher education and a paid job.

In addition, 57% of Moroccan women polled reported having suffered from violence in 2019, and less than 12% of these victims reported the incident to police (Haut Commissariat au Plan, 2020). Sexual harassment remains the most common violent act carried out in public spaces. Within households, domestic violence represents the largest category, as reported by approximately 52% of women, and 38% of these women do not report it in the interest of maintaining family stability (Haut Commissariat au Plan, 2020). These figures increased by almost one third during the state of emergency lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic (Fédération des Ligues des Droits des Femmes, 2020).

In family settings, husbands command authority, and approximately 9% of wives are deprived from any form of decision-making (Ministère de la Santé, 2005). Consistent

with family legal codes and patriarchal norms in Morocco, wives experience strong social and familial pressure to submit to, and maintain good relationships with, mother- and sister(s)-in-law (Mernissi, 2010; Naamane-Guessous, 2007; Sadiqi, 2003). In this context, married women seldom express their interests and any discontent to their mother- and sister(s)-in-law. Even so, there is some indication that Moroccan women experience some freedom in consumption at the supermarket because it is more accessible to them than traditional markets.

### Food Market, Supermarkets, and Grocery Shopping in Morocco

In Morocco, like in other North African contexts, grocery shopping is traditionally performed by men, and therefore has different significance than in Western contexts (Kapchan, 1996). Further, men are responsible for major, expensive purchases, and this proved to be even more so during the Covid-19 lockdowns (Driouch, 2020).<sup>4</sup>

Grocery shopping is an important activity in Morocco, as grocery expenses represent more than 50% of family income for 80% of Moroccans (Haut Commissariat au Plan, 2009). The traditional food market sector accounts for 92% of grocery sales in Morocco (Euromonitor, 2021). This includes weekly open-air markets, *souks*, small independent sellers and street sellers, and urban markets comprised independent sellers. Conventions at these traditional markets are quite rigid, hierarchically organized, and male dominated. Few sellers at these markets in Morocco offer 'sensitive' items, like alcohol, pork, and feminine hygiene products, as they are considered inappropriate here, as in most Arab countries. Further, the merchandise tends to vary each week, information is scarce and uneven, and customers tend to buy from the same sellers and try to maintain long-term relationships with them. It is customary for men from the same extended family to shop together for groceries and socialize on weekends. It is not customary for Moroccan women to patronize weekly open-air markets, the *souks*. However, women purchase small quantities of bread, tea or sugar at the local

<sup>4</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic dramatically changed food markets in Morocco. The government imposed a strict lockdown and closed the traditional weekly open-air markets, the *souks*, from March 2020 through June 2020. Urban markets, traditional grocery stores, supermarkets, and pharmacists remained opened during this period, and official authorization allowed one person to leave each household to do the shopping. In a majority of families, a man claimed that authorization (Driouch, 2020). In addition, the government closed the national border from November 2021 to February 2022, and imposed a curfew from March 2020 to March 2022. July 2020 women returned to the supermarkets, and business resumed in the *souks* as well (Jazi, 2022).

grocer's, and buy some vegetables at urban markets for immediate needs.

Supermarkets and hypermarkets comprise the modern food retail sector in Morocco. They appeared quite recently, 1990 for the first hypermarket, and 2002 for the first supermarket (Amine & Gallouj, 2021). At that time, supermarkets were located in city suburbs, men were the vast majority of customers, and they patronized the supermarkets as they had patronized traditional stores in shopping alone or with male family members and buying large quantities of food for their nuclear and extended family. The authors further note that over the last two decades women have established a notable presence in these new urban retail servicescapes, and that half of these stores are located in the two major cities of Casablanca and Rabat. Today, there are approximately 500 hypermarkets and supermarkets in Morocco, and even with an annual growth rate of 6%, their sales represent less than 10% of the Moroccan grocery trade (Euromonitor, 2021).

Studies have shown that supermarkets have specific characteristics that encourage women's patronage in Morocco and other Arab countries. Sehib et al. (2013) pointed out the value of security, while Godefroit-Winkel and Peñaloza (2020) added the importance of fixed prices in helping secure the trust of husbands in knowing that their wife would not be overcharged for items. Further, Belwal and Belwal (2014) documented the new forms of recreation at these emerging retail servicescapes, while Alhemoud (2008) detailed the pleasures women experience there. In addition, there is some evidence that grocery shopping in Morocco alters social boundaries and relations there. Godefroit-Winkel and Peñaloza (2020) demonstrated the empowerment Moroccan women obtain in grocery shopping, in modifying relationships with mother- and sister(s) in-law.

In reviewing this work, we note a gap regarding the influence of others on women's freedom in consumption. In filling this gap, we first explore how women experience negative and positive forms of freedom at the supermarket, and then proceed to examine the role of others, specifically family members, friends, and store employees in contributing to negative *freedom from* and positive *freedom to* in consumption.

## Ethnographic Research Methods

In exploring the research questions posed above, we employed the ethnographic techniques of participant observation and in-depth interviews. The first author started the fieldwork in two supermarkets, and then began the first set of interviews in 2010 with friends, acquaintances, and their referrals to access informants with a range of socio-demographic characteristics.

Fieldwork included observation and participation in daily routines, dinners, and family celebrations with informants *at their invitation*. While not of Moroccan origin, the first author has lived and shopped in Morocco for most of her life. She occupies the position of a privileged researcher (Rabinow, 1977 [2007]) there. Familiar with the local culture and speaking the local language, she readily accessed the field sites, while at the same time, she does not identify as Moroccan and is not identified as such by others. Even so, because she has lived in Morocco as a young girl and woman, she has faced some of the restrictions that limit girls and women at traditional markets and other public places there, and her experiences added understanding and empathy in analyzing the data. In carrying out this research, she drew from her observations of women shopping at supermarkets, and conversations with Moroccan women and men, together with her shopping experience there. Participant observations are described in 122 pages of fieldnotes, recorded during fieldwork and enriched soon after, with special care to detail personal reactions (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006).

Regarding interviews, the initial set included 24 long interviews (McCracken, 1988) conducted from 2010 to 2013. The interviews began with shopping behaviors and continued with aspects of the women's daily lives, including interactions with their husband, relatives, and friends. This initial set includes three interviews conducted by a professional interviewer, and five interviews carried out by graduate students, to enhance the class and age diversity of informants, as their contacts included illiterate, working class women. The first author trained the students to carry out interviews in a research methods class. A second set of seven interviews conducted by the first author from 2016 to 2019 strove to distinguish freedom from empowerment, and to further distinguish negative and positive forms of freedom in consumption for women. Analysis with the second author at this time worked to sift through the various interactions with personnel at the supermarket, with family members at home, and with friends, in deciphering their roles in facilitating and/or constraining women's freedom in shopping.

The data analysis followed qualitative research conventions in deriving categories and themes (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Categories included gender relations (wife, daughter-in-law, sister), Moroccan food shopping customs (who shops, when, where), supermarket features (prices, self-service product selection, accepted forms of payment), types of influence (constrainer, facilitator), and actor roles (employee, presenter, protector, beneficiary), while themes focused on negative and positive forms of freedom.

Finally, the first author conducted four additional long interviews and field observations from 2020–2021 in examining changes over time in grocery shopping and at the store, and to 'member check' (Belk et al., 1988), that is, to corroborate analytical insights regarding social influences

and roles affecting positive and negative freedom in consumption. In another form of triangulation (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006), the first author discussed findings and analytical insights with the professional interviewer and the graduated students who conducted interviews, and with Moroccan colleagues specialized in marketing.

Informant profiles are diverse in terms of education (illiterate to PhD), region (rural and urban, from southwest and northeast Morocco), age (18–62 years), occupation (professional, paid and unpaid work, nonworking), and family position/status (marital status and number/presence of children). See Table 1 for informants' profiles. All names are pseudonyms to provide anonymity to the women. The 35 interviews were translated from French and Moroccan Arabic to English.

## Findings

The findings are organized in five sections, each of which employs Berlin's metaphor of 'doors' *to* and *away from* freedom quite literally, in detailing particular social interactions and the related roles of others as they pertain to women's freedom in shopping at the supermarket. See Table 2 for a list of these roles, and Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 in the Appendix for examples of each. We begin with various social dynamics in accessing the supermarket, and then continue with such influences and interactions in women's consumption activities there.

### Husbands Open a First 'Door' in Presenting the Supermarket to Women

Fieldnotes describe a carnival atmosphere of entertainment at Moroccan supermarkets on weekends. Customers gather at the entrance to the stores, enjoying the music played by a DJ, watching their children play, and eating fragrant foods offered by vendors. Once inside, the first author noticed the prevalence of families, husbands and wives, often with children, and sometimes with an older woman, most likely a mother-in-law. She also noted gender distinctions at various departments in the supermarkets. Families and couples tended to patronize general food aisles of flour, oil, tea, and cheese, whereas groups of women tended to gather in the cosmetic and personal hygiene areas. Compared with traditional souks and small neighborhood stores, supermarkets were very clean places, with bright lighting, air conditioning, and pop music, and wide aisles and bins well-supplied with food and packaged items. Fieldnotes further detailed sales offers, refrigerated cases of frozen and cold foods, and imported products not available at traditional markets, such as Dutch and French cheeses and Swiss chocolate.

These observations were supported in interviews. Samira (45, housewife) recalls that going to the supermarket was "like a mini trip. Children would stop and enjoy the merry-go-round. [...] We would eat pizza. [...] We would shop, eat, and children had fun." For many women like Samira, going to the supermarket on weekends was a pleasurable event, an excursion out of the house. Samira's husband accompanied her to the supermarket, and there showed her various products displayed along the well-stocked aisles. In addition, for some women, going to the supermarket was an opportunity to receive a special treat, a wedge of Edam cheese or a chocolate bar.

Over time, as noted in observations and interviews, women gradually became more involved in shopping. They observed and learned from and with their husband. Some women reported that their husband began to teach them how to compare offers and maintain budget limits, and later, some women began to shop on their own. Below Khadouj (46, housecleaner) recalls her experience:

Before, I used to go to Marjane [supermarket] with my husband each month. [On my first shopping tours], my husband would tell me about the prices. He would tell me for instance, it's 120 rials [USD0.6] or 140 rials [USD0.7]. If it's too expensive, you don't take it, he said. He would show me the paper [label] and I would memorize it. [He said that] I must take apricot jam in a can, and strawberry jam in a jar. If I find a new jam, don't buy it [he said]. (Khadouj)

Khadouj's testimony is consistent with many field observations of a man shopping with three or four women, and at times pointing to a shelf and showing them a product or price. Thus, men play a crucial role for the women in gaining access to the supermarket. As *presenters* (See Table 2), men accompany their wife inside, and show them brands and products in the supermarket. The store visit is a mix of fun and work. Employing Berlin's metaphor of the door figuratively, we note the important role of husbands in sanctioning women's entry into the store. Yet ultimately it is the women who walk through that supermarket door, and there encounter products, prices, and sales offers not available to them at traditional markets.

### Supermarket Conditions Open a Second 'Door' in Accommodating Women

Supermarkets provide specific conditions in which women experience freedom in shopping at the supermarket. We highlight the role of security guards in protecting women from constraining harassment, and of the store in providing direct access to a wide assortment of items as a second type of door to women's freedom in consumption.

**Table 1** Informants' list by the three periods of data collection

Period 1: Years 2010–2013					
Name <sup>a</sup>	Age	Occupation	Education	Family income	Family status
Aisha	46	Housewife	Illiterate	Low	Married (lives with husband and children and grandchildren)
Aliaa	23	Student	Masters	Medium	Single (lives with parents)
Amina	43	Personal assistant	Secondary school	Medium	Married (lives with husband and two children)
Asmae	40	Translator	Bachelors	Medium	Single (lives with mother)
Fatima	27	Employee	Bachelors	Medium	Married (lives with husband and one child)
Fouzia	62	Retired	Bachelors	Medium	Widow (lives alone)
Ftouma	57	Housewife	Secondary school	High	Married (lives with husband)
Ghalia	56	Manager	Masters	High	Married (lives with husband and three children)
Hassna	32	Employee	Masters	Medium	Single (lives with parents)
Khadija	32	Housewife	Bachelors	High	Married (lives with husband and one child)
Khadouj	46	House cleaner	Illiterate	Low	Married (lives with husband and four children)
Malika	36	Housewife	Illiterate	Low	Married (lives with husband and two children)
Mina	45	Housewife	Secondary school	Medium	Married (lives with husband and three children)
Mouna	19	Student	Bachelors	Low	Single (lives with parents)
Nabila	28	Official	Bachelors	Medium	Married (lives with husband and one child)
Nour	22	Student	Masters	Medium	Single (lives with parents)
Rachida	37	Anesthetist	Doctor	High	Married (lives with husband and two children)
Rokia	40	Housewife	Illiterate	Low	Married (lives with husband and four children)
Saida	20	Student	Bachelors	Medium	Single (lives with parents)
Sanaa	28	Employee	Masters	Medium	Single (lives with parents)
Sofia	39	Housewife	Secondary school	Medium	Married (lives with husband and one child)
Soumia	30	Manager	Masters	High	Married (lives with husband and one child)
Wafaa	40	Housewife	Bachelors	Middle	Married (lives with husband and two children)
Yasmine	20	Student	Bachelors	Medium	Single (lives with parents)
Period 2: Years 2016–2019					
Name	Age	Occupation	Education	Family income	Family status
Btissam	37	Teacher	Bachelors	Medium	Married (lives with husband and two children)
Ines	25	Student	Masters	High	Single (lives with parents)
Kenza	23	Employee	Masters	High	Single (lives with parents)
Lamia	42	Employee	Masters	Medium	Married (lives with husband and one child)
Meriem	44	Employee	Bachelors	Medium	Married (lives with three children)
Meryem	32	Coach	Bachelors	Medium	Married (lives with husband and three children)
Nada	51	Manager	PhD	High	Married (lives with husband and two children)
Period 3: Years 2020–2021					
Name	Age	Occupation	Education	Family income	Family status
Btissam	37	Teacher	Bachelors	Medium	Married (lives with husband and two children)
Ines	25	Student	Masters	High	Single (lives with parents)
Kenza	23	Employee	Masters	High	Single (lives with parents)
Lamia	42	Employee	Masters	Medium	Married (lives with husband and one child)
Meriem	44	Employee	Bachelors	Medium	Married (lives with three children)
Meryem	32	Coach	Bachelors	Medium	Married (lives with husband and three children)
Nada	51	Manager	PhD	High	Married (lives with husband and two children)

<sup>a</sup>Names are pseudonyms



**Table 2** Roles of agents in *freedom in consumption*

Agent	Role	Role description	Related freedom	Metaphor of 'doors' in Berlin's sense
Husband	Presenter	They show a new retailspace to women	<i>Freedom to shop</i>	They open 'doors'
	Constrainer	They interfere in women's shopping – shopping duration and product category restrictions	<i>Freedom from interference</i>	They impede women to walk through the 'doors' They close the 'doors'
	Witness	They observe/watch women who have transgressed their requirements	<i>Freedom to buy according to own wants</i> <i>Freedom from interference</i>	They watch women walking through 'doors'
Mother, sister, best friend	Facilitator	They help women to do their shopping and make decisions	<i>Freedom to make a decision</i> <i>Freedom from fear of making a bad choice</i>	They accompany women when they walk through open 'doors'
	Indulger	They help women to indulge themselves in shopping They help women to release from guilt	<i>Freedom to enjoy shopping</i> <i>Freedom from guilt of indulging herself</i>	
Mother-, sister-in- law	Constrainer	They interfere in women's shopping – surveillance, critique, standards of what to buy and how much to spend	<i>Freedom from interference</i>	They impede women to walk through the 'doors' They close the 'doors'
	Witness	They observe/watch women who have transgressed their requirements	<i>Freedom to buy according to own wants</i> <i>Freedom from interference</i>	They watch women walking through 'doors'
Supermarket employee	Enabler	They serve women They enable women to develop shopping practices that sometimes conflict with supermarket rules	<i>Freedom to shop as they want</i>	They open 'doors'
Traditional seller	Constrainer	They interfere in women's shopping – make unwanted comments, stare disapprovingly	<i>Freedom from interference</i>	They close doors

### Security guards protect women

Throughout fieldwork the first author observed security guards posted at the supermarket entrance scrutinizing all who entered. These *protectors* (See Table 3 in the Appendix) stood out in their blue uniforms, requiring that women open their handbags, and that men open their satchels. In her interview, Hassna (32, employee) notes that the presence of security guards at the supermarket, describing the “strong muscled bodyguards at the entrance,” who “intimidate anybody who might harass me. ...Nobody bothers me inside the supermarket!” she exclaims.

Aliaa's (23, student) interview is similar, in noting the catcalls of men who want to interact with her and those who pass loud comments about her physical appearance when she walks in the street with her girlfriend. In the passage below, Sanaa's comments summarize the challenge for young women in public spaces in Morocco (Haut Commissariat au Plan, 2020). She ranks the safe leisure time at

the supermarket alone above the cinema, where she would require a male escort to feel safe:

We are in Morocco! There is nothing [in terms of leisure facilities]! What? a café? cinema? For that, you have to be with someone [a man: husband, brother, father]. At the supermarket, you can go alone: nobody will disturb you.... I wouldn't even think of going out alone to a movie... It is like that in Morocco: you can't go to the cinema alone or to a restaurant... [...] If you do that here, everybody will look at you and think: what does she want? Is she looking for someone to have an affair with? (Sanaa, 28, employee)

While somewhat safer in public, older women informants also reported that they feel more secure in supermarkets due to the presence of security personnel. In her interview, Aisha (46, housewife) recalls seeing two young men on a motorbike steal a bag from a middle-aged woman while she shopped at a street stand. Fouzia (62, retired) adds that she can focus on her purchases in the supermarket, whereas in

traditional urban markets, she “never knows whether to look at [her] handbag because of the thieves or at what the seller gives [her].”

The presence of supermarket security widens the open door of the supermarket, in contributing to a protective, non-harassing environment for women to shop. Security personnel added another layer of protection during the Covid pandemic, as the first author observed them taking customers’ temperatures and checking their vaccine records. They also indicated to customers the sanitary gel dispenser, and distributed masks to clients who failed to bring one. In her interview, Maria compared security and sanitary conditions at the supermarket to traditional urban markets, in noting how the activities of security guards helped free her from the risk of being infected with Covid while shopping:

Traditional markets are crowded. It’s difficult to navigate in the aisles, people bump into you, they don’t wear their mask properly. I don’t feel secure. In my supermarket, the number of shoppers is limited. Customers have to sanitize their hands. The guard at the entrance gives masks to clients who don’t have one. (Maria, 60, retired)

### Supermarket assortments offer access to products and brands for women

Supermarkets offer women direct access to a greater variety of products than do traditional markets and neighborhood stores. As examples, the first author noted several brands of shampoo, and dozens of brands and types of tea and cereal stocked and displayed on supermarket shelves in readily accessible ways. In contrast, at traditional markets and stores women have to ask sellers to sell them a product and to examine the merchandise.

In addition, supermarkets supply items that are considered sensitive in the Moroccan cultural imaginary. These sensitive products include feminine hygiene products, tampons and sanitary pads, as well as the cultural tabus of alcohol and pork. Such sensitive and forbidden products are quite expensive and generally accessible only in supermarkets located in middle to upper class residential districts. In this sense, the assortment of products offered at supermarkets provides favorable conditions for women to escape from the interference of traditional sellers, who act as *constrainers* by enforcing cultural restrictions on what the women can purchase (See Table 4 in the Appendix).

Several informants reported their preference to buy alcohol in supermarkets over other places. For instance, Kenza (23, employee) says she feels uncomfortable and embarrassed when buying alcohol in small shops, because she feels people watch and judge her. Instead, she goes to the supermarket to buy alcohol, as when she buys Tequila on Friday

nights, because “it’s easier.” Ines (25, student) does not like to patronize an alcohol store because she considers it to be “...a scary place. There are always weird people who stare at you in there.” In the passage below Sanaa explains that she prefers to buy alcohol in supermarkets because there she can combine it with other items, and therefore her purchases are less obvious than at stores solely selling alcohol.

[The last time I went to the supermarket,] I got a bottle of wine. I got *Cuvée du Président*... Alcohol, everybody knows it is sold in supermarkets or in small stores. But I cannot buy it in a small store. I prefer to buy it in a supermarket. That’s it. Because if you go to a small [alcohol] store, it’s obvious that you go there to buy alcohol. By contrast, in a supermarket, it’s mixed with your purchases. So, people don’t pay attention. Yes! It’s good. (Sanaa, 28, employee)

Informants provided similar testimony regarding their purchases of tampons and pork. Informants who use tampons avoid buying them in the few independent stores that sell them. Khadija (32, housewife) prefers to go to the supermarket “because I can choose between several brands and take my time without that special moment when the [man] seller at the till looks at you in that special way that means... that he knows you intimately now [that he saw your tampons].” Nada (51, manager) buys pork in supermarkets. She avoids her neighborhood butcher shop, explaining that “the vegetable seller [next door to the pork butcher] did not want to serve [me] because he once saw [me] there buying ham.”

Informants avoid these negative constraints at the supermarket, and there they benefit from ready access to products not available to them or difficult to obtain in traditional markets. In access and privacy, the supermarket opens a second ‘door’ to new consumption opportunities for women.

### Supermarket Employees Open a Third ‘Door’ in Serving Women

For the most part, supermarkets in Morocco function with self-service. Customers walk through the aisles, where they choose products and put them in their trolley, and then wheel it to the checkout counters, where they stack the items on a conveyor belt and pay the cashiers. While much effort is involved here, women are not required to ask sellers for the products they want to buy, and are not dependent upon them to approve whether they are allowed to buy and what they buy, as is the case at traditional markets. Thus, at supermarkets women avoid these *constraining roles* of sellers at traditional markets, usually men, who also interfere in their shopping by making derogatory comments and/or staring disapprovingly at their product choices and/or the way they shop. For example, Hassna (32, employee) reports that when she shops in traditional

stores, the seller shouts at her when she does not make her choices quickly enough or does not buy. Due to this intimidation, she seldom dares to ask for more information on products. Other informants expressed how sellers constrain them in other ways while they shop. Asmae (40, translator) reported that a seller told her that she was “too picky.” Rachida (37, anesthetist) described sellers as “very aggressive sometimes,” whereas “nobody says anything [about how much time I take] when I shop [at the supermarket].”

Not all traditional sellers are aggressive towards women, yet even when they try to be nice with their women customers, their assertiveness can put off some informants. Irritation was palpable in the women’s voices in interviews as they expressed feeling forced to comply with sellers. For example, while shopping with Ester (61, coach), the first author observed that the seller added a bunch of coriander, despite Ester’s repeated responses that she did not want any coriander. The seller insisted that it was free, and Ester and the first author left with the coriander rather than continue the verbal exchange.

In another example, Samira (45, housewife) gently mocked her traditional grocer in her interview, in explaining her discomfort that he wears his Covid-19 protection mask on his chin, not on his nose and mouth, and “blows in the bag before putting in the bananas.” She explains that she recognizes that he is trying to provide good service and lacks knowledge of basic sanitation, adding that she initially tried to tell him not to blow into the fruit bag because of the risks of transmitting the Covid-19 virus, yet soon abandoned the effort. Once home, she disinfects the bananas she buys from him, but does not clean the items she buys at the supermarket, indicating her greater trust in its cleanliness and hygienic safety.

This is not to suggest that there is no service at the supermarket; rather, we point to the extent and quality of service here. At the vegetable, meat, and fish departments, employees behind counters serve clients by selecting and weighing vegetables, cutting portions of meat, and cleaning fish on demand. In serving women in these ways, supermarket employees act as *enablers* in opening a ‘door’ wider for *freedom to consume* (See Table 5 in the Appendix). Store employees’ service interactions with women foster their abilities to develop tastes and shopping practices, and thus consume as they want.

The first author observed supermarket employees performing extra services for women when they asked, in addition to the regular services that fall into the employees’ job descriptions, such as checking out items and receiving payment. For example, after watching as Fouzia (62, retired) asked an employee working in the back storage area to find artichokes for her and waited by the door while he went to search for them in the warehouse, the first author later

initiated an interview with her. In another observation, the first author watched as a woman at the fish counter asked for big shrimp not on offer that day. In fieldnotes, the first author recorded that both women availed themselves of customized service when they shopped, and that the employees accommodated the women’s requests.

Interviews provide more insight into the shopping practices the women develop, some of which test supermarket rules. For example, in her interview, Mina (45, housewife) explained that she opens tea packs to “see what I buy, and how the tea leaves are rolled,” and she expressed contentment that the employees do not stop her from opening packages of tea. The first author observed another such test when a woman with a trolley full of products purchased them at a ‘fast checkout lane’ limited to ten items.

Opening product packages and bringing a full trolley into the fast checkout lane go against supermarket rules. Not all supermarket employees let women break the rules. In some instances, employees try to enforce the rules, which poses some interference in the way the women prefer to shop. For example, in the passage below Rachel (43, housewife) asserts her freedom to shop like she wants. While initially instructing Rachel to place her items on the conveyor belt, the employee soon capitulates, saying nothing as she continues.

Sometimes, they [employees] try to tell you what to do: how to put your items on the counter at the cashier, for instance. I know that I do not bother anybody [with the way I sort my items on the counter]. Yesterday, he started to tell me to sort my items in another way. I had put half of my trolley on the belt. I told him that this was not a problem for him and I kept with my way of putting things on the counter. He was just trying to impose on me. (Rachel)

Her actions are more confrontational than those of Fouzia (62, retired), who waited patiently for the employee to search the refrigerated storage area for the artichokes she had requested. In making sense of these episodes in field observations and interviews, we note the importance of age and social class in the degree to which women made their choices known to store employees. Middle-aged and older women showed a higher tendency to express their desires, such as for a crunchier bread or fresher yoghurt. In contrast, younger women tended to restrict their interactions and choices to a minimum and accept what the sellers give them. Further, we noted the power that Rachel has gained in her family and social life due to her status as a married woman and mother to an adult son, and because she holds a university degree. The confidence gained in her family extends to her behavior in the supermarket, in asserting her choices to a younger employee and taking the positive *freedom to organize* the items on the conveyer belt as she wishes.

The women's assertiveness is indicative of the way positive *freedom to consume* overlaps with empowerment (Godefroit-Winkel & Peñaloza, 2020) over time. We return to this point in the discussion.

In serving women, in answering their requests and helping them to find products, supermarket employees recognize and treat women as legitimate consumers. Over time, the women enact this role and assert their product choices. Employing Berlin's metaphor literally to employees, we note that they open a third 'door' to a new range of relationships with sellers and thus contribute to women's freedom in consumption at the supermarket.

### Women Walk Through the 'Door' in Shopping Without a Chaperon

We mentioned already that after several incursions with their husband and/or their mother- and/or sister(s) in-law(s), some women go shopping without them. This was the case for several interviewees over the course of the study.

#### Women Escape Their Husbands' Constraints

Our data analysis elaborates that women escape the limitations husbands set on shopping time, items purchased, and amount spent. In this role of *constrainers* at the supermarket (See again Table 2), husbands partially close the door of freedom to consume by shortening the duration of the visit, and limiting the categories of items that women buy and the amount of money they spend when they shop together. In shopping without them, women release themselves from these restrictions. For example, Nabila (28, official) described her husband as "always in a hurry. He does not stop, saying that he has to go back home to watch his soccer game." Now Nabila shops regularly with her friend, a woman who "takes her time." She further reports that her husband is happy to stay home, watching a soccer game instead of doing the shopping.

As importantly, as the women experience the freedom to consume without their husband, they become more aware of the constraints he formerly imposed. For instance, in her interview, Amina (43, personal assistant) recalled initial struggles with her husband when she tried to buy skincare products when shopping with him. She soon stopped trying, and now buys them when she goes to the supermarket without him after work. She notes that when she shops alone at the supermarket she has more time to choose and buy the products and brands that she wants, and adds that when she buys the skincare items she pays with her own money to further avoid his interference.

Malika (36, housewife) also has forged a workable agreement with her husband such that she serves him dinner, waits for him to eat, and then while he watches TV she goes to the

supermarket before it closes. For her, purchasing is not the main objective, as she goes to the supermarket to enjoy a solitary walk in a safe and quiet place after dinner, "particularly at 20:00 h [8PM]," and she reports typically spending little (less than one dollar U.S.). Malika lives in a relatively safe district, and the supermarket is close by. For her, shopping in a supermarket without her husband is a pleasurable activity of discovery, "looking at the items on the shelves... I like the supermarket, I feel comfortable [there]. It is well organized... Everything [at the supermarket] is perfect!"

Thus, many informants report sidestepping the constraints of their husband over time. However, as this happens, some report that they start to consider shopping as a more serious activity and somewhat less enjoyable. Btissam (37, teacher) notes that over the past few years, she has become responsible for shopping at the supermarket, although her husband continues to buy meat for the family. She thus is still limited by him in buying specific categories of items, such as turkey, an item that is cheaper than beef. She is not alone, as other women report that some constraints remain for them in terms of when they shop, what they buy, and how much they spend. Figuratively, the women's access to the supermarket 'door' of freedom to consume is open, yet not widely, as husband/*constrainers* keep that 'door' half closed.

#### Women Escape Their Mother- and Sister(s)-in-Law's Constraints

In the Moroccan collective imaginary, women are the guardians of tradition (Sadiqi, 2003). Further, according to the Moudawana family code (2004) that we mentioned earlier, Moroccan women have a legal obligation to maintain good relationships with their in-laws. Thus, women experience strong constraints as a result of law and tradition that their in-laws carry out in the domain of consumption. In-laws play roles of *constrainers* that are somewhat similar to those of husbands, in ensuring that choices of products and brands, and amount expended conform to their expectations of family standards (See again Table 2). For these reasons, tensions can run high when women go shopping with their in-laws.

We note that many women expressed awareness that they shop more freely when their mother- and sister(s)-in-law are absent. They spoke of avoiding the surveillance, critique, and standards of what to buy and how much to spend imposed by their mother- and sister(s) in-law. In her interview, Fatima (27, employee) expressed feeling constrained when she shops at the supermarket with her sister-in-law. In the passage below she describes shopping without her in-laws' interference, and surmises being even more free to consume while shopping with her best friend instead:

[Last time I went to the supermarket], I was with my sister-in-law. But I was not feeling very comfortable...

It [her presence] influenced me. So, I did my shopping on a rational basis. I was, in a way, forced to respect her view. But I am convinced that if I had been with Naima, my [woman] best friend, I would have felt more comfortable. You know, family matters... So, I have to be very cautious and behave in a certain way because it's my image, which counts. I have to meet their [the in-laws'] expectations. This means that I have to buy exactly like them. That is how I belong to their family. It means that I have the same way of thinking. You know, it is a family matter, but most of all (it is) a women's matter... it counts for a lot. (Fatima, 27, employee)

Escaping from in-laws' interference can be difficult. In her interview, Wafaa (40, housewife) expresses a challenge in choosing her favorite brands when she shops with her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law, a Moroccan Berber, loyally buys a flour brand owned by Berber families, while Wafaa prefers another flour brand that she claims has higher quality.

With time and experience, some women manage to shop without their in-laws. Meriem (44, employee) finds excuses to avoid shopping with her mother-in-law because she accuses her of buying too much and buying expensive items, and further derides her product choices. "She even comments on my Tupperware when I bring a [home-made] cake to my nephew," Meriem laments, adding, "I already have so many issues in my life, and don't want to add more. No, really, no shopping with my [mother] in-law."

### Freedom Facilitators: Mothers, Sisters, and Best Friends

Seldom do women go shopping alone. Instead of shopping with their husband, they shop with other women, most often in groups of two or three. Interviews confirmed these field observations of the first author, that the women shop with their mother, sister(s) or best friends. We use the term *facilitators*, to refer to the trusted women who bolster confidence and assuage fears, share shopping experiences and knowledge, give advice on products, and help calculate expenses and budgets. Literally, *facilitators* accompany women as they step through the open 'doors' and shop in the supermarket (See Table 6 in the Appendix).

Shopping requires much effort for the women, in learning about products, making choices, and respecting budget limits. In interviews, informants shared their tasks and the fears they had in carrying them out. As an example, Nour (22, student) reports receiving a shopping list from her mother each Saturday, and insists: "I have to follow the list." For Nour, shopping has become a task that is part of her family duties. Saida (20, student) explains that she and her mother make

sure to buy all of the important household items, and that they calculate the total prices of the items as they place them in their trolley and pay in cash to not exceed their budget. As an example, she reports that they cannot buy shampoo because it is a product of minor importance as compared to the flour required to make the bread that is a daily staple for their family. Buying shampoo instead of flour would mean that they would not be able to make bread for the entire week. In these cases, checklists and financial budget limits are important guidelines that the women follow.

In addition to the work, there is risk in shopping that shopping with a trusted friend(s) helps lessen (Thompson et al., 1990). In the quote below Meriem explains how shopping with her best friend helped her deal with the risk in buying the "wrong" fabric and choosing the "wrong" color trousers for her husband, who then was in jail. During the latter stages of fieldwork, the first author interviewed Meriem (44, employee), who then was focused on making a good choice for his trousers.

I went with my best friend to get her advice. She always has good ideas, and is very pragmatic. I felt more confident in my choices. You, know, it's not easy to buy clothes for someone who is in jail. The colors have to be catch-all, the fabric should not be too fragile, they should not look too new. (Meriem)

In another example, Amina (43, personal assistant) admits that she does not understand the calories and nutrients listed on packages, and fears buying food with too many calories. While she is concerned that she is overweight and wants to lose weight, she likes to eat and is tempted by product displays to buy treats for herself. Amina chooses to shop with her sister because she knows much about diets and helps her to decipher information about calories, vitamins, and proteins. These examples show the importance of others in facilitating women's freedom to shop for their family and themselves, and that women enact such freedom in going shopping for their family and for themselves.

Yet not all advice leads to purchases. During her interview, Soumia (30, banker) said that she wanted to buy a mixer because she thought that it would help her in her cooking. But she hesitated, explaining, "If I buy something that is not practical, I lose the money that I paid," adding that she had always cooked without a mixer, and was quite good at cooking. Though she had talked to a friend, she had not yet purchased the mixer.

For informants, shopping with facilitating friends supports their tasks and ushers in novel forms of recreation in rewarding being a consumer, both of which are other aspects of freedom in consumption. For example, Ines (25, student) reports that she likes to shop at the supermarket with a supportive friend and that they sometimes go there after finishing their schoolwork. "I tell my mother that I go to the

supermarket to buy a bottle of soya milk with Sarah.” She and friend, Sarah, return home after two hours in which they have looked at mascaras and lotions, and had a latte. In this case, the bottle of soya was a pretext to go out with her friend. She explains that she would not spend two hours in the supermarket alone, adding, “I prefer to go with Sarah. We take our time and enjoy.”

Somewhat like Ines, Nour spoke in her interview of going shopping with her friend, adding that she and her friend Kenza sometimes would buy ice cream after shopping for the family. “I would not dare to buy an ice cream if I were alone,” she admits, explaining that she would feel guilty to spend money on something for herself that the other members of her family would not have. Her testimony resonates with the observations of Heath et al. (2016) that women can feel conflicted when they make purchases that value their desires over considerations for their family. Her friend Kenza acts as an *indulger* (See Table 7 in the Appendix), as shopping with her releases Nour from guilt in buying and eating something her parents and brother lack, and gives new meaning to shopping in the supermarket as work that should be rewarded.

In addition, the first author observed several abandoned trolleys filled with various products over the course of fieldwork. In a member check regarding these observations, Saida (20, student) casually explained that women “play.” For them, purchasing is not the goal; rather, filling a cart has recreational value that they experience alone or with friends. For them, shopping is a matter of discovery and imagination, as they go to the supermarket to see what is there, role-play what they would buy *if they had the money*, and buy a small yoghurt or other inexpensive product after looking for some time.

Our work builds on that of Thompson et al. (1990), in elaborating how shopping with family members and friend(s) facilitates women’s efforts by providing information and support for their choices and lessening their fear of making a bad choice, at the same time such accompaniment adds to the rewards in shopping for the family and ameliorates their guilt when shopping for themselves. Both facilitating and indulging roles support women’s freedom in consumption (See again Table 2). We elaborate the ethical implications of these tradeoffs in freedom in consumption for women in the discussion.

### Witnesses to Women’s Freedom in Consumption

Women’s freedom in shopping is not limited to the supermarket; it extends to the home when they return with their purchases. In most cases, women like Nour and Saida buy items on their list, thus provisioning important household foods and other products. Yet, tensions may surface with a husband and/or in-law(s) when women return with the

‘forbidden’ or ‘extra’ items they have bought. For example, Rokia (40, housewife) explains how she bought meat at the supermarket, although her husband had forbidden her from buying it, and she knew that she could be beaten for doing so. In explaining this transgression, Rokia says that she served the meat to her husband for a meal, because “I wanted him to know that I bought it.” Ultimately, when he did not react, she concluded, “He is kind of ok with it.” In this vignette Rokia puts her husband in the role of *witness* to her freedom in consumption, with conscious awareness of her risk in invoking his reaction, and possibly even punishment (See Table 8 in the Appendix). It is further noteworthy that Rokia wanted her husband to witness her freedom to purchase meat, as this product traditionally falls in men’s domain in Morocco.

In another example, Sofia (39, housewife) laughed as she related the pleasure she experienced in using plates she had purchased, when serving food to her mother- and sisters-in-law when they came to dinner as invited guests. Notably, flaunting these ‘forbidden’ purchases to her in-laws heightens her freedom in consumption.

I invited my sister-in-law and used the new plates that I had just bought. I like to show her that I can buy what I want, and that my husband does not say anything against my shopping. [laughter] (Sofia, 39, housewife)

Both Rokia and Sofia have taken freedom in consumption in exceeding the constraints of their husband and in-laws by buying “forbidden” items. As crucially, Rokia and Sofia are aware of the potential consequences of overtly displaying their purchases: Rokia risks a beating and Sofia risks being criticized by her mother in-law in front of her husband and children. Both women could have hidden their purchases from *constraining* husbands and in-laws, but they did not. Instead, they implicate their husbands and in-laws as *witnesses* to their *freedom* to consume. As *witnesses* who take no action, husbands and in-laws ultimately support women’s freedom to consume. Our analysis points to such witnessing in tangibly accomplishing a higher form of freedom in consumption for the women, in validating their *freedom* to consume in buying according to their wants and their *freedom* from the interference of constrainers. Our analysis thus lends empirical support and explanation to Krause’s (2015) observation of the importance that others witness the enactment of freedom.

### Discussion

As the cornerstone of market development (Sen, 2000), freedom is a key notion in market activity and related consumer culture formation, and it holds important ethical implications. This section discusses the theoretical contributions

of this research by detailing negative and positive aspects of freedom for women in shopping at the supermarket, with particular attention to their social dimensions. We then discuss key ethical issues for the supermarket, as a market innovation, and for consumers, as together they advance social changes that result from such freedom in consumption.

### **Negative Freedom from, and Positive Freedom to in Consumption**

In his *Essays on Freedom*, Berlin (1969) emphasizes both negative *freedom from* constraint and positive *freedom to* engage in activities. Our research contributes to his work in delineating Moroccan women consumers' experience of negative freedom from constraints in shopping at the supermarket, and then elaborates their positive freedom to consume there. These results enrich existing knowledge that has focused on women in developed societies by elaborating how women achieve negative and positive forms of freedom in consumption in developing societies.

First, women develop forms of negative freedom from in shopping at the supermarket as they evade the external constraints of sellers in traditional markets and independent shops and stands, and the external constraints within the family that feature the interference of their husband, and mother- and sister(s)-in-law. We explained how husbands open a first 'door' to freedom by bringing their wife to the supermarket. In addition, we detailed how women walk through the supermarket door and shop without their husbands and/or in-laws, and in doing so experience freedom from the constraining interference of these chaperons. In addition, women free themselves from the internal constraints of fear in making a bad choice and guilt in buying what they desire.

Second, women develop forms of positive freedom to consume, aided by their husband, supermarket conditions, supermarket employees, and other family members and friends. Store conditions and interactions with employees open a second 'door' of freedom to consume in providing access to women and accommodating them, and thus legitimizing women's presence as a consumer in the supermarket. In addition, women are supported by their mother, sister(s) and trusted friend(s), who serve as facilitators for the women as they gain access to this marketplace and engage in activities learning about products, developing tastes, and making choices, and thus establish themselves as consumers in their own right. Further, positive freedom to consume is elevated when women implicate their husband and extended family members as witnesses to their freedom in consumption. By displaying and utilizing purchases at home, especially those that exceed the directives of their family members, women put their freedom in consumption to the test. While our results showed several instances in which women received

the support of family members, other outcomes are likely in which women's freedom in consumption has less support. These results extend knowledge of freedom in consumption by providing a more comprehensive account of its negative and positive forms.

In addition, we relate negative and positive forms of freedom in shopping at the supermarket to the empowerment women experience there (Godefroit-Winkel & Peñaloza, 2020). Extrapolating from analyses of our data, we suggest that freedom is intimately inter-related to empowerment. As women experience freedom from constraints and experience positive freedom in consumption, they empower themselves to develop their tastes and skills further in leveraging consumption to benefit their families and themselves. We suggest that the converse also applies, such that women enhance their freedom in consumption as they empower themselves to assert their abilities and tastes to family members and friends.

### **The Social Dimension of Freedom in Consumption**

By elaborating social influences on freedom in consumption, to include its positive as well as negative forms, our study complements the stream of research on individual freedom. These studies conceptualize consumer freedom as the ability of an autonomous individual to select an option from a set of alternatives without interference (Mick & Humphreys, 2008), and thus view others as primarily restricting and interfering with individual freedom (Gaston-Breton et al., 2020; Hill, 2020). In contrast, our approach is more consistent with work by Sandikci (2021) and Varman and Vikas (2007) in situating consumers as social beings who are embedded in nuclear and extended families and in specific socio-cultural traditions and market systems. In pursuing this social approach, we offer a revised definition: freedom in consumption consists of *the exercise of consumers' capacities to choose an option from a set of market alternatives, to consummate such choice, and to be consciously aware of the consequences of engaging in such consumption to oneself and as a member of family and society*. Freedom in consumption is not absolute; it is a state of being that consumers achieve subject to the market conditions of meaningful and valuable choices, and to the social relations of avoiding harm to others and respecting their consumption.

Table 2 summarizes the multiple roles of each type of social agent in freedom of consumption for women in Morocco, and Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 in the Appendix provide empirical examples for each of these roles. We note that family is of particular importance for freedom in consumption for the women informants in this study. In Morocco, the family is a central domain for women's identity and self-worth (Mernissi, 2010; Sadiqi, 2003), and Markus and Schwartz (2010) allude to the family as a vital source of

wellbeing for consumers in developing nations. Husbands, and in-laws serve as *facilitators*, in contributing to women's positive freedom in consumption, as well as *constrainers*, in bringing about their negative freedom in consumption. In addition, we documented the roles of mothers, sisters, and friends as *facilitators* who advise and support women, and friends who serve as *indulgers* in assuaging their guilt and reinforcing their rewards in shopping, thus also contributing to women's positive freedom to consume. As women shop with family and friends, and as they interact with employees, they experience positive *freedom to shop* in a domino effect of roles that act together in ways that benefit the women, personally and socially, in the families they love, and the cultures in which they are embedded.

Our analyses further show how women implicate family members and friends as *witnesses* to their freedom in consumption. The role of witness merits further elaboration as a form of social validation. Krause (2015) noted that one's freedom depends on how other individuals respond to one's actions. To again use Berlin's metaphor of the 'door' in conceptualizing freedom, we paraphrase Krause's view that freedom is manifest under the social condition that others see and understand that s/he intentionally acted in certain ways after walking through the door. Similarly, we contend that the experience of consumer freedom requires social recognition and acknowledgement in the form of witnesses. Women consummate their freedom in consumption in displaying and utilizing the products they have purchased with those who previously interfered and disapproved, with conscious awareness of the risk they take in doing so. In showing and utilizing their purchases with witnesses, women manifest positive freedom in consumption.

## Ethical Considerations

Our elaboration of the ethical implications of this research stems from our revised definition highlighting the social dimensions of women's freedom in consumption. Ethical freedom in consumption demands that both *market* and *social* conditions and consequences be made transparent; that is, both market and social actors take efforts to understand such conditions and consequences, and to disseminate this knowledge among themselves and each other. Business researchers can contribute to the production and dissemination of such knowledge and understanding among market and social agents.

Berlin (1969) noted the importance for individuals to carve spaces where they can act without being interfered with and without being obliged to account for their activities. Yet to cast individuals as exempt from the social obligations of their activities, as he does, is to privilege individual freedom and to deny responsibility to others. Instead, in extrapolating from this research detailing the social dimensions

of women's freedom in shopping at the supermarket, we elaborate the ethical challenges and opportunities for businesspersons operating innovative retail servicescapes such as this, and for the consumers shopping there, in this case, women, their family members, and friends.

Market innovations are often credited for fostering consumer freedom, at the same time research consistently shows their mixed effects, in contributing to production and exchange capacities, wealth, and infrastructure, while exacerbating materialism, social inequality, and division (Figueiredo et al., 2014; Gaski, 1999; Shabbir et al., 2020). In building on this work, our research elaborates how store conventions and employee conduct at an innovative retail servicescape enable freedom in consumption for women in Morocco. The supermarket provides an alternative place where women evade the interference of male sellers and bystanders in traditional marketplaces, such as souks and neighborhood shops. Further, security guards protect women from harassment and enforce hygienic standards. Inside the store, abundant assortments of products readily are accessible to women, including gender-sensitive feminine hygiene products and culturally tabu items. In addition, male employees enable women in shopping by answering their questions, responding to their requests, and otherwise serving them as legitimate customers. Such store conditions and personnel are important in advancing freedom in consumption for women.

Market innovations foster and harbor social change because they typically are detached from the social customs that configure traditional marketplaces. As we observed in this case, the marketing principle, serve the customer, departs from the Moroccan cultural mandate privileging men, as many customers are women. In serving women, supermarkets open a path for increasing women's status in society, and it is important to note that this path is consistent with the 2011 Constitution. Such social changes are gradual, however, and they are accomplished *jointly* by market and social agents.

We noted already that much of the research on ethics concerns the social responsibility of firms to provide products and services (Hill, 2020; Viswanathan et al., 2005), which Varman and Vikas (2007) extend to the responsibility to provide jobs in the areas where they conduct business. Thus, much of the scholarship on ethics deals with negative *freedom from* in explaining how firms can and do lower and remove constraints, and with positive *freedom to* consume, which translates to offering consumers more categories of products, more sizes, and more colors, and thus more freedom to choose (Markus & Schwartz, 2010). Yet, we suggest that businesses give explicit consideration to their roles in consumers' *freedom to*, that is, attend to the roles contributing to what consumers do in the stores as they act free



of the constraints that store conditions and employees free them from.

Our discussion thus includes yet extends beyond basic ethical recommendations of not marketing harmful products, fully disclosing prices, providing accurate and relevant information, and acting earnestly in market exchanges (Gaski, 1999; Kociatkiewicz and Kostera, 2020), to include cultural activities and consequences (Peñaloza, 2022). Indeed, ethical considerations for firms necessarily address their roles in women's negative and positive freedom in consumption because such *freedom from* and *freedom to* in consumption are manifest in marketplaces.

Our research documents how market conditions and conventions facilitate women's freedom in ways that endorse consumption. Our research further elaborates the importance of social involvement for market innovations to be integrated and diffused in societies. Noteworthy in this research is men's involvement in women's *freedom to* consume, in presenting the supermarket to them, and there teaching them to shop, scrutinize sales, and budget by example and explicit instruction. As such, men implicate themselves in condoning women's shopping activities, and they benefit from women's consumer labor. In turn, men's involvement sends key signals of acceptability to their mother- and sister(s)-in-law, such that they go along with women's *freedom to* consume, and benefit from it as well. In addition, family and friends facilitate freedom in consumption for women by giving advice and support, and even indulging in personal rewards and desires that extend beyond family provisions. Further, upon their return home, women position members of their family and friends as witnesses to their freedom to consume, as they display and utilize their purchases with them. The reinforcement of these witnesses provides powerful social validation to women's positive *freedom to* consume.

Consumer culture has emerged as a major force operating in conjunction with marketing activity in shaping social structures. Sandikci (2021) details the complex ethical struggles that consumers experience in their day-to-day consumption. Similarly, our findings show that the ethical considerations in grocery shopping are tacit and happen sporadically. Husbands accompany wives to the supermarket, and subsequently many women follow their directives, and then gradually experience *freedom from* their husbands and in-laws, and *freedom to* make decisions and choices that advance their tastes and desires, and those of family members. Noteworthy in our study is how women juxtapose and combine *freedom to* consume with their will to continue to be a good wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law. We further show how a routine practice, grocery shopping, raises questions about what defines being good in these social positions, and which interpersonal relations are appropriate in the marketplace and the domestic sphere. As such, our findings shed light on the ethical issues that surface

as women's grocery shopping challenges traditional gender relations and social structures.

Teasing out the ethical responsibilities of market and social agents is tricky. Taking inspiration from Thompson's (1971) exhortation to make ethical negotiations visible, Sandikci (2021, p. 289) pointed to "multiple, entangled moral repertoires" that are informed by particular cultural traditions. In building on her work, we note the challenges for scholars accustomed to living and conducting research in developed societies to make sense of conditions in developing ones. Having never experienced the negative freedom constraints of physical deprivation or gender limitations, or experiencing them to a lesser degree, makes it difficult to appreciate the lives of those who experience this regularly and are habituated to such circumstances.

In 1944, Sartre wrote that he never felt so free as when living under Nazi occupation. These perplexing words suggest his increased capacity to experience freedom, once it was taken from him. While much less life challenging, the situation of many marketing and consumer researchers is nonetheless similar, in the sense that insight regarding constraint is difficult to achieve in the absence of its experience. Still, we can observe and compare constraining social and market conditions, and listen and learn from informants as they grapple with them. In addition, we can learn from scholarly, journalistic and literary accounts of social and market conditions. Such 'contexts of the context' have proved useful theoretically (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011), and offer ethical insights as well, when we feature such social and market conditions as part of the phenomenon under investigation, and not extraneous to it.

In further discussing our analyses, we concur with Miller's (1998) conclusion that women's experiences in grocery shopping are a serious matter, as we emphasize the ethical benefits and challenges our findings raise for the stores as well as for the women, and for their families and societies. Previous work has shown women to demonstrate prudent reasoning (Hill, 2020; Viswanathan et al., 2005), and their findings are comparable to ours regarding women's purchases of meat, other foods, and other products for their families. At the same time, we observed a mix of fun and adherence to beauty customs in informants' purchases of ice cream, alcohol, and diet food at the supermarket that is similar in many ways to Scott's (2006) account of women validating themselves as women in their purchases of skin crème and makeup. While at times as light-hearted as the women taken in by the novelty of department stores who Zola (1883) depicted over a hundred years ago in his classic novel, the women informants in this study are nevertheless important agents in modernizing market economies (Nava, 1997). Entering into consumer culture is fraught with opportunities and challenges for Moroccan women, and their

similarities and unique circumstances in comparison with their Western counterparts are important to evaluate.

Ultimately, ethical freedom in consumption requires effort on the part of market and social actors to develop market and social spaces where persons and groups re/shape traditional conventions in ways that enhance the freedom of members of that society. Analyses situating the microsocial interactions of women in shopping at the supermarket within the macrosocial positions of women in their family and society provide valuable sources of insight into how subaltern women consumers redefine themselves and their social position as they exercise and realize freedom in consumption. Though women such as Rokia, a poor illiterate housewife, do not escape from poverty or from the constraints of family, they gain power in the household as they experience freedom in consumption. In complementing Shabbir et al.'s (2020, p. 236) insight that freedom through market institutions and practices is "complex but tractable," we emphasize that women's freedom in the supermarket servicescape is complex, dynamic, and indeed, tractable.

## Conclusions

In this paper we provide an in-depth, robust empirical account of women's negative and positive freedom in consumption. In extending previous work that has conceptualized freedom as individual consumer's ability to make choices without interference or restrictions, our research shows that freedom in consumption is a deeply social enterprise. Husbands, store employees, family and friends play crucial roles as *presenters*, *enablers*, *facilitators*, *protectors*, and *indulgers* in the social process of freedom of consumption, although they constrain it as well. Further, when family members and friends serve in the role of witness, consumers experience a fuller sense of freedom in consumption.

This research further addresses the ethical implications of market and social agents in the innovative retail servicescape of the supermarket. In demonstrating that men serve women at the supermarket, and that women shop for and buy products there that are traditionally reserved for men, this work demonstrates the important role of market and social agents in the transformation of a society. It is worth noting that many of these supermarkets are branches of large foreign firms that have a scale advantage over local firms, and that part of their appeal to customers is enabling modern ways of being (Wilk, 2006). Further, increased concentration in the

food retail sector yields monopolistic profits at the expense of suppliers and workers globally (Allain, 2002/3; Sexton, 2010).

Consumer culture advances in these large firms and resists them. The halal market is one such manifestation, with estimated annual buying power of \$2.1 trillion globally (Izberk-Bilgin & Nakata, 2016). In Morocco, Amine and Gallouj (2021) noted resistance to shopping malls for catering to rich people and advancing social division. In Turkey, Izberk-Bilgin (2012) documented how activists challenged the marketing practices of Western firms for contributing to materialism, greed, and selfishness, and instead supported Islamist brands for advancing community and social cohesion. While consumer culture can foster cultural traditions, social connection, and environmental sustainability, its dark side propels egoism, deceit, and social discord. Sandoval (2013) elaborates the important blend of critical thinking skills in interpreting marketing messages and activity with relational skills in organizing that advance social goals. For consumers, such critical skills favor the businesses that accommodate their families and communities while discerning their interests versus those of the community (Peñaloza, 2018). Marketing ethics scholars can contribute to the development of such skills.

Many questions remain. To advance the insights in this study further, we suggest the investigation of other spaces and customs in the marketplace that facilitate the emergence of new social dynamics, with special attention to their impact on freedom in consumption and on social formations, particularly the family and gender relations. A second suggestion would be to examine consumer freedom through a lens other than gender. Regarding age, for instance, studies could investigate how older consumers maintain, enhance, and even lose their freedom in consumption over time. A final suggestion would be to examine freedom in consumption in activities other than grocery shopping: in entertainment, such as travel/tourism, cinema, and music; in sports, such as soccer, boxing, and swimming; and in entrepreneurial activities, such as start-ups and buyouts, with attention to social relations, such as gender, class, ethnicity, and age. This work is crucial to better understand the intricate and evolving relationships between social traditions and market innovations and work for more free and ethical consumption.

## Appendix

Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

**Table 3** Examples of PROTECTORS in *freedom from*

Protector	Type of freedom	Practices	Quotes	Feelings	Effects on the woman
Supermarket employee: Supermarket employees who ensure sanitary conditions	Freedom from risk of infection	Shop within a sanitary clean area	<p>Traditional [urban] markets are still crowded. It's difficult to navigate in the aisles, people bump into you, they don't wear masks properly. I don't feel secure. In my supermarket, the number of shoppers is limited. Customers have to sanitize their hands. The guard at the entrance gives masks to clients who don't have one. (Marie, 60, retired)</p> <p>When you go to the supermarket, a guard takes your temperature, and you are forced to use sanitary soap. That's good. Anybody who is sick does not enter. That's good. I would not go shopping if it was not so. (Souad, 45, housewife)</p> <p>I used to bleach all my purchase when I would come back from the supermarket. Now, I don't do it anymore. I saw employees have masks, gloves, and sanitary hats. And most clients don't touch products if they don't buy them. I am not afraid anymore. (Ester, 62, coach)</p>	Feeling secured	The woman can shop without fearing to be infected

Table 3 (continued)

Protector	Type of freedom	Practices	Quotes	Feelings	Effects on the woman
Supermarket employee: Supermarket employees who protect women against unwanted comments	Freedom from psychological aggressions	Shop without enduring unwanted comment on physical appearance	When I am with my brother, nobody says anything in the street. But if I am alone, they don't stop. [...] In a supermarket, I can go in the aisle, take my time, stop. Nobody looks at me or tries to talk to me. (Yasmine, 20, student) The supermarket! That is almost the only place, with the shopping mall, where I can walk alone without receiving comments like "Hello, you are fresh" or without boys whistling at me. (Aliaa, 23, student) They have strong muscled bodyguards at the gates [of the supermarket]. Nobody bothers me inside the supermarket. (Hassna, 32, employee)	Feeling secured	The woman can shop without fearing harassment
Supermarket employee: Supermarket employees who protect women from physical aggressions	Freedom from physical aggression	Shop without surveilling her purse and bag	[In traditional urban markets], I never know if I have to look at [my] bag because of the thieves or at what the seller gives me [because he can cheat with the quality]. In the supermarket, I can be focused on the products and nothing else. (Fouzia, 62, retired) I have seen so many thefts in the streets, outside supermarkets. Inside, it is safe. (Blissam, 37, teacher) Many women in my neighborhood have been aggressed. Last week, I heard that somebody snatched my neighbor's purse when she was coming back home. [...] No, in a supermarket, this can't happen. (Meryem, 32, coach)	Feeling protected	The woman can shop without fearing to be robbed

**Table 4** Examples of CONSTRAINERS in *freedom from*

Constrainers	Type of freedom	Practices	Quotes	Main feelings	Effects on the woman
Husband Absence of the constrainer: the absence of the husband releases the woman of the time and item constraint imposed by the husband	Freedom from the interference of the husband	Shop without husband	My husband is always in a hurry. He does not stop saying that he has to go back home to watch his soccer game. (Nabila, 28, official) I go to the supermarket at night, when it's empty. I leave my husband at home. It's quiet and I stay long watching the shelves. (Malka, 36, housewife) I buy my day crème without my husband. He keeps telling that it costs too much, even if I chose the cheapest. (Amina, 45, housewife)	Feeling less constrained in her time and choice	The woman becomes aware of the constraints imposed by her husband and of the opportunities to free from them
Mother- and sister-IN-law Absence of the constrainer: the in-law releases the woman of the expectations and standards of her in-laws	Freedom from the interference of in-laws	Shop without in-laws	My husband wants my mother in law to shop with me. [...] Sometimes, I do not want to buy [what she wants]. Last time [we went to the supermarket], I have been able to buy the flour brand that I wanted. (Souad, 38, housewife) [Last time I went to the supermarket], I was with my sister-in-law. But I was not feeling very comfortable.... It [her presence] influenced me. So, I did my shopping on a rational basis. I was, in a way, forced to respect her view. But I am convinced that if I had been with Naïma, my [female] best friend, I would have felt more comfortable. You know, family matters.... So, I have to be very cautious and behave in a certain way because it's my image, which counts. I have to meet their [the in-laws'] expectations. This means that I have to buy exactly like them. That is how I belong to their family. It means that I have the same way of thinking. You know, it is a family matter, but most of all women's matter... Maybe it doesn't mean much, but it counts for a lot. (Fatima, 27, employee) My mother in-law does not know how to read and write. So sometimes she wants to buy not-halal products because it's written in Arabic, but it's pork. I try to tell her [when we shop together], and it's difficult [to make her understand that I am right and she is wrong]. (Fatima, 36, housewife)	Feeling less constrained in her choices	The woman becomes aware of the constraints imposed by her in-laws and of the opportunities to free from them

Table 4 (continued)

Constrainers	Type of freedom	Practices	Quotes	Main feelings	Effects on the woman
Traditional sellers Absence of the constrainer: the judge the woman for purchasing sensitive items) releases women	Freedom from the interference of independent sellers	Shop sensitive items without receiving unwanted comments and glares	Tampons are so difficult to find in some supermarkets. I go to Carrefour Gourmet [luxury supermarket]. Nobody cares. And I am not alone there [other women also buy tampons] (Ghita, 22, student) [The last time I went to the supermarket,] I got a bottle of wine. I got Cuvée du Président [wine]... Alcohol, everybody knows it: it is sold in supermarkets or in small stores. But I cannot buy it in a small store. I prefer to buy it in a supermarket. That's it. Because if you go to a small [alcohol] store, it's obvious that you go there to buy alcohol. By contrast, in a supermarket, it's mixed with your purchase. So, people don't pay attention. Yes! It's good. (Sanaa, 28, employee)	Feeling less judged, less criticized, less embarrassed	The woman becomes aware of the opportunities in the supermarket to free from the interference of sellers and customers and from some social norms

**Table 5** Examples of ENABLERS in *freedom to*

Enablers	Type of freedom	Practices	Quotes	Feelings	Effects on the woman
Supermarket employee: Supermarket employees who serve women	Freedom to be served	Address supermarket employees to be served	Fouzia (62, retired) addresses an employee and asks him whether there are any fresh artichokes in the backroom. The employee responds that he will look for them. He leaves and enters in the backroom. Fouzia waits. The employee comes back with a basket of artichokes and asks her how much she wants. Fouzia says that she wants four pieces. The employee takes four artichokes from the basket, weight them, wraps them in a bag and gives them to Fouzia. (Fieldnotes, Casablanca, Hypermarket 2, March 2012, 11:00 AM)	Contentment	The woman becomes aware of the opportunities to claim her own wants
Supermarket employee: Supermarket employees who enable women develop their own shopping practices	Freedom to develop her own shopping practices	Shop how she wants and ignore or overtly respond to employees' comments	Sometimes, they [employees] try to tell you what to do: how to put your items on the counter at the cashier, for instance. I know that I do not bother anybody [with the way I sort my items on the counter]. Yesterday, he started to tell me to sort my items in another way. I had put half of my trolley on the belt. I told him that this was not a problem for him. And I kept with my way of putting things on the counter. He was just trying to impose on me. (Rachel, 43, housewife)	Contentment	The woman becomes aware of the opportunities to develop her own practices, and wants

**Table 6** Examples of FACILITATORS in *freedom to* and *freedom from*

Facilitator	Type of freedom	Practices	Quotes	Main feelings	Effects on the woman
Best friend, mother, sister: the presence of and interactions with the best friend, the mother, the sister facilitates women's shopping and decision-making process	Freedom to make a decision, Freedom from internal constraints	Choose items with a friend, mother, sister	It is very important for me to be with someone who helps me to choose. A woman friend who tried a particular product, for example. Then, I know that I have made a good choice. (Soumia, 30, banker) I had to buy clothes for my husband [who is in jail]. I went [to the supermarket] with my best friend to get her advice. She always has good ideas, and she's very pragmatic. I felt more confident in my choices. You know, it's not easy to buy clothes for somebody who is in jail. (Meriem, 44, employee)	Feeling less fear to choose a product that is not adequate, appropriate, functional, ...	The woman feels supported; she feels free to choose and she feels free from internal constraints, fear
Best friend, mother, sister: the presence of and interactions with the best friend, the mother, the sister facilitates calculus and to stay in the limit of the budget	Freedom to manage a budget, Freedom from internal constraints	Calculate with a friend, a mother, a sister	When I shop with my mother, we spend our time calculating. We take a product, then we calculate. We say: "this is now this or that amount [of money]." Each time we choose a product, we add its price. At a moment, we say "stop." We never go beyond the money we have in our pockets (Saida, 20, student)	Feeling less fear to buy too much or too expensive items, to go beyond the family budget, ...	The woman feels free to manage a budget and she feels free from internal constraints, fear



**Table 7** Examples of INDULGERS in *freedom to* and *freedom from*

Indulger	Type of freedom	Practices	Quotes	Main feelings	Effects on the woman
Sister and best friend: Sisters and best friends who help women to indulge herself and to reduce internal constraints, guilt	Freedom to enjoy shopping and to indulge herself, Freedom from internal constraints	Shop with a best friend and buy treats	My mother gives me a list for shopping, and I have to follow the list. [...] But with my friend [Kenza], if we have some money left, we stop and buy an ice cream after shopping. She says that it's a good way to reward us for our work [shopping]. And I like that [...] I would not dare to buy an ice cream if I were alone, I would not spend money on that. (Nour, 22, student)	Feeling happy, relaxed Feeling less guilty to buy a treat	The woman feels free to enjoy shopping and she feels free from internal constraints, guilt

**Table 8** Examples of WITNESSES in *freedom to* and *freedom from*

Witnesses	Type of freedom	Practices	Quotes	Main feelings	Effects on the woman
Husband: observes the products his wife has purchased for him and/or their family	Freedom <i>to choose, to buy, and to consume</i> what she deems is best for the family Freedom <i>from</i> husband's interference in family consumption practices	Buying items that her husband has forbidden, and consuming them with family members without objection or argument	Last time [I went to the supermarket], I bought meat [though my husband forbids me to buy meat]. I cooked the meat and served my family [children and husband] the meat that I bought. He did not say anything. [...] If I tell him that I bought meat, he would shout at me and say: "Why did you buy expensive meat?"... Here, he did not say anything. [...] I think that he is ok with that. Or he did forget [that he did not buy this meat]... I want him to know that I bought meat. (Rokia,40, housewife)	Confidence Empowerment Determination	The woman becomes aware of opportunities to manifest and assert her desires and choices to her husband The woman takes on some of what were his tasks, and with them, more responsibility for family consumption
Mother and sister(s) in-law: observe their daughter and sister purchasing product(s) for their family or for her consumption, and use those products with her	Freedom <i>to choose, to buy, and to consume</i> for the family and what she desires for herself Freedom <i>from</i> in-law's interference in family and/or her consumption practices	Purchasing items that in-laws do not approve of Displaying to in-laws items they do not approve of Using items in-laws do not approve of with them	I am too old to accept her [sister-in-law] taunts. Before, I used to keep my mouth shut and to ruminate for days [...] Next time that she [sister-in-law] comes home, I will remove all the toilet paper from the washrooms and serve food in new plates, again. And we will see what happens. (Lamia, 42, employee)	Validation Exhilaration Empowerment	The woman gains awareness of opportunities to manifest and assert her choices and desires in the family The woman gains stature in the extended family

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The author certify that she has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript. The authors have no financial or proprietary interests in any material discussed in this article and have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose. They have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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