

Sustainable food consumption in marketing

Subjects: Others

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The objective is to define the Sustainable food consumption in marketing

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1. Introduction

Years after Keynes ^[1] published the role of consumption in his General Theory, economists devoted themselves in part to explaining the behavior of consumers ^{[1][2]}. For this, traditional theories were created in which consumption is considered as a function of income and prices. These theories have explained the real motivations that drive consumers to buy.

If we want to talk about sustainable consumption, we must consider that millions of people do not even have access to basic minimum consumption. Therefore, to call for less consumption, the promotion of sustainable consumption must be aimed at calling the population to consume differently^[3]. Sustainable consumption seeks to create an attitude and awareness about the importance and consequences for the environment and our future health with each choice we make.

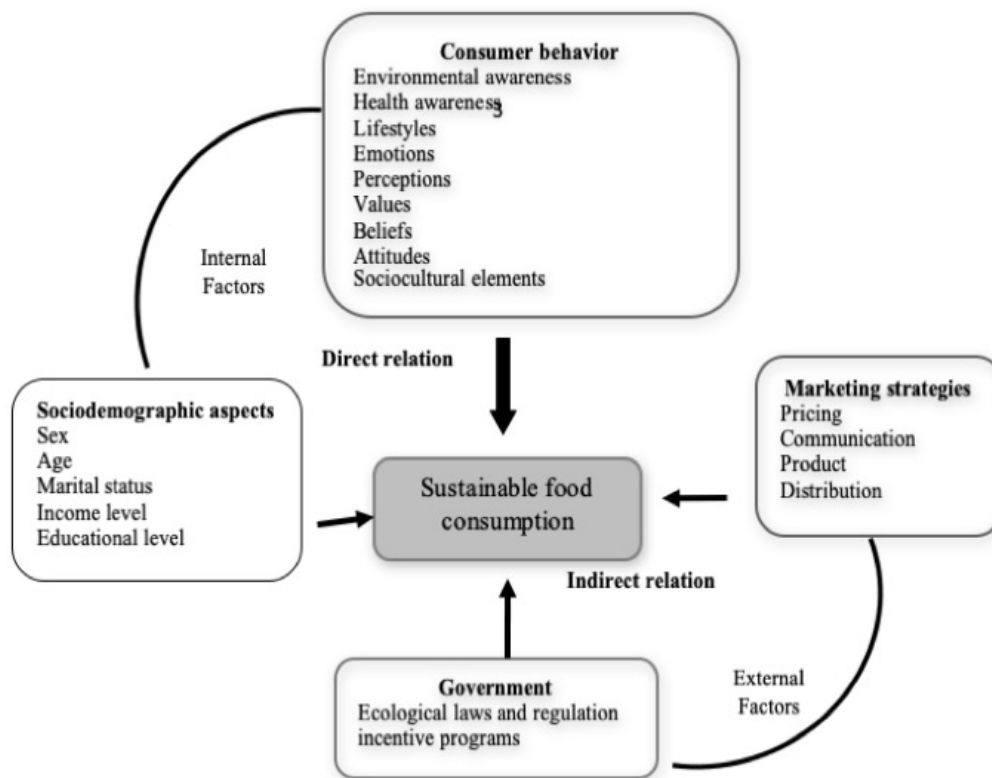
From a sustainability perspective, an emphasis on purchasing is also problematic, because to understand the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of any form of consumption requires an understanding of all the social and environmental impacts that occur throughout the entire production and consumption cycle of a product (whether it is a physically good, an intangible service or some combination of the two). This requires an understanding of consumption, not as the activity of purchase, but as a process of decisions and actions that include purchasing, product use, and dealing with any remaining tangible product after use ^[4]. Environmental awareness has spread to businesses, institutions, and society in general. Even with these efforts, the situation of the environment on a global scale cannot be said to have improved. Consumers have not left their traditional brands, and only a segment of people are consistent in their interests in the environment ^[5]. In this way, consumers are faced with a variety of consumption options, and can choose those that minimize environmental damage. In this context, the concept of sustainable consumption arises, as a purchasing practice that reduces the sources of waste, promotes recycling and the reclamation of purchased materials, without adversely affecting the execution requirements of such materials ^[6]. The critical factor in the sustainable consumption of food is not consumption by itself, but the amount of energy and resources used by consumption ^[5].

2. Elements involved in sustainable food consumption

The sustainable food consumer has attitudes that often cannot be observed directly, but are the result of the appreciation of the environmental, cultural, or psychological aspects of the consumer. In this sense, studies have been addressed from a socio-demographic view: sex, age, marital status, income, and educational level, with insignificant findings to explain the behavior of sustainable food consumers with regards to psychographic and sociocultural profiles. They have been based on environmental awareness, health consciousness, lifestyles, emotions, perceptions, values, beliefs, attitudes, and sociocultural variables; with significant results as indicators of sustainable food consumption, in particular-health consciousness ^[7].

Another element is the marketing strategies, as noted by Grundey and Zaharia^[8], Strategic greening requires a holistic approach, with all actions of the firm coordinated to integrate environmental issues across all functional areas so as to increase sustainable food consumption. Finally, the incidence of the Government as a regulatory entity of environmental policies in sustainable consumption needs to be a priority area for development (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Elements involved in sustainable food consumption



Source: Own elaboration base on: Salgado-Beltrán *et al* ^[9], Salgado-Beltrán & Beltrán-Morales ^[5] and Salgado-Beltrán ^[10]

3. Marketing implications

To promote sustainable food consumption, marketers should communicate aspects, such as the production form, origin, materials used, transport, impact on the environment, packaging used, and possible waste that will be generated. Sustainable consumption does not mean that sales of organizations are reduced, but that the consumer can choose the options that best meet their needs for social, environmental, and economic awareness (Triple bottom line). The emphasis of sustainable consumption has strongly been on the environmental dimensions, rather than the social and economic dimensions of sustainability, and even among the environmental dimensions, some impacts, such as energy use or carbon emissions, have dominated discussions compared with others, such as the impact on biodiversity ^[4]. That is to say, in order to satisfy their necessities, consumers search for information by means of the perception of stimuli, which generates previous memories that can start the process of awaited benefits and also contributes to a constant innovation in food products. For example, in a research project, a product test was carried out in 2 phases: 1) without environmental information and 2) with environmental information. As a result, all scores increased in phase 2, which is indicative of the relevance of the information prior to the consumer's sustainable purchase decision. This implies that the marketing efforts of the actors must be greater in order to encourage the purchase ^[10].

It is necessary to develop criteria and methods to evaluate the effects on the environment from unsustainable consumption. The results of this evaluation should be expressed in clear indicators to inform consumers and decision makers.

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