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The influence of the trends in consumers' food behavior contributing to the formulation of marketing strategies for food companies

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to identify and discuss the most important trends in consumers' nutritional behaviour that contribute to the formulation of marketing strategies for food companies. The globalization, servicisation, virtualization, ecologisation and rationalization of consumption have been described as selected examples of new trends in consumers' behaviour. Across the studies covered by this paper it has been found that the creation of new innovative food products and services, the development of regional brands and pro-ecological products which are on line with utility and quality based on safety for health and for the natural environment are some examples of marketing strategies of food companies.

Keywords: new trends in consumers' food behaviour, marketing strategy, food behaviour

1. INTRODUCTION

Providing consumers with products that meet their needs and, at the same time, bring financial profits to the organisation is a particularly difficult task for food producers, because on the one hand, the preferences of purchasers result from subjective evaluation of sensory quality of food, which the producer should provide, and on the other hand, the manufacturer

must meet a number of systemic and legal conditions resulting from the necessity of ensuring the health safety of the products produced. Defining market needs and requirements for an organization is a key marketing task in building the company's strategy [1].

The aim of this article is to identify and discuss the most important trends in consumers' nutritional behaviour that contribute to the formulation of marketing strategies for food companies based on secondary sources of information published over the period of 2002-2016. Article shows theoretical aspects of new trends in consumers' food behaviour, marketing strategies of food companies and the interaction between these two aspects.

The study uses basic literature in the field of research selected for analysis, the main issues were national and foreign journals, reports of domestic and foreign research institutions, as well as publications of companies and organizations around the industry food. These items formed the basis for theoretical and empirical reasoning and made it possible to critically analyse the existing state of knowledge regarding new trends in consumer food behaviour and its impact on formulating marketing strategies of food companies.

2. THE NEW TRENDS IN CONSUMERS' FOOD BEHAVIOUR

In recent years, important changes in the consumers' food behaviour can be observed. The economic, demographic, cultural, social or environmental determinants influence on the formation of new phenomena, such as the globalization, servicization, virtualization, ecologisation and rationalization of consumption (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Chosen new trends in consumer food behaviour

The globalization of consumption is manifested by the penetration of patterns of food consumption between cultures. Among various factors, which contribute to the assimilation of food consumption patterns the following should be noted: the expansion of international retail chains (hyper- and supermarkets and discount stores) and the unification of their offers, the media, the development of the Internet, the development of the fast-food chain (Kentucky Fried Chicken - KFC, McDonald's, Pizza Hut), dissemination of convenience food (e. g. ready meals, instant soups, chips, bars), facilitated mobility, nutritional recommendations aimed at rational nutrition, based on the Mediterranean diet (higher intake of vegetables and fruits, lean meat, vegetable fats) and the loss of specific national characteristics typical for individual countries. It is worth noting that due to the dominance of the American pattern of consumption, the globalization of consumption process is often identified with Americanization or McDonaldization, i. e. the global unification of needs in relation to certain goods and services [2]. It should be noted that in response of unification consumers' customs and general culture more and more consumers try to express their national identity by taking an ethnocentric approach. These consumers do not purchase foreign products if they consider that they are likely to harm the economy and employment in the country of origin in this way. Therefore, regional products made in traditional way are more and more popular, and the companies offering that kind of goods are more respected [3].

The phenomenon of servicization of consumption is associated with reduction of consumption in the material sphere in relation to its growth in the intangible sphere, which leads to increased purchases in the sphere of intangible goods, i.e. services [4]. This trend also applies to food consumption. Eating out has been increasingly practiced around the world, significantly affecting the structure of household expenses [5]. Carvalho and Stacanelli (2012) notice that there is consistent rise in the number of people eating out. This trend is associated with practices such as eating in restaurants, hotels, snack bars, in-flight meals or at friends [6]. In addition, it should be noted a certain transformation of consumers' approach to products. Currently, they begin to prefer a variety of experiences rather than possessing material goods. That is why there is rising popularity of so-called 'sensory market', where products provide consumers a strong and more intense experience, the opportunity to experiment and take risks. Among some examples, the chocolates with salt, green tomato jam, flavoured beer in flower varieties, sushi bars, fondue or coffee Coca-Cola, as well as restaurants famous for their original design, arrangement or menu could be distinguished [7].

The next new trends in consumers' food behaviour could be virtualisation of their behaviour, which is associated with growing popularity of online shopping, also grocery. E-commerce is becoming more and more popular among companies, seeking to access new markets, as well as among consumers who seek alternative methods of buying goods and having access to information about them [8]. According to many studies on factors that cause consumers 'satisfaction with online shopping, four main factors influencing the consumers' perception of Internet content can be distinguished: safety and privacy, website design, web site reliability and customer service of the website when shopping online [9,11]. It is estimated by various authorities that grocery online shopping is becoming more and more popular among consumers. Currently, there is a big number of various online supermarkets available where consumers can find almost all nutritional products that they need, and they even can have free delivery in the way, which is the most comfortable for them [10]. It should be noted that many consumers still buy things (particularly food) in traditional shops,

however many of them connect these two forms of shopping, but there are increasing number of consumers, who purchase only from online retailers [12].

When discussing trends in the consumption of food products and consumers' dietary behaviours, the very important phenomena of greening and rationalisation of food consumption should not be ignored [14]. More and more consumers prefer eco-friendly products [13], i.e. healthy, safe, traditionally made products that reduce waste rather than conventional ones. They are also willing to use non-renewable resources. Consumers believe that modifying their diet and using supplements are two of the most important conditions for reducing treatment costs and improving overall health. In addition, numerous educational campaigns promoting healthy and rational lifestyles contribute to criticism of consumerism and try to persuade consumers to rationalise many areas of consumption, including nutrition [14]. These conditions, which are in line with the concept of sustainable consumption, have influenced the development of the Voluntary Simplicity (VS) movement, which, according to D. Elgin, is 'a way of life that is externally simple and intrinsically rich'. This trend is related to food or diet, buying sustainable products, extending the life cycle of products, avoiding waste, recycling and transport [15].

Table 1 presents some examples of new trends in consumer food behaviour and activities of consumers associated with specified trends.

Table 1. Some examples of new trends in consumer food behaviour and activities of consumers associated with specified trends.

New trend in consumers' food behaviour	Selected manifestations of activity
Globalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eating fast-food foods • acquisition of food in international retail chains • acquiring fashionable, advertised food products • introducing new products to the daily diet and searching for new cooking methods • eating meals in restaurants with international cuisine
Servicization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating out • using catering • ordering dishes with home delivery • acquiring convenient products
Virtualization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grocery shopping online • ordering take-out food online • searching for information about food products on the Internet
Rationalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paying attention to the composition of products • purchase of products from local suppliers • buying food products comes from a reliable source • consuming vegetables and fruits in the recommended amount of 5 servings daily

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • checking the expiration date of purchased food products • not wasting food • broadening knowledge about healthy nutrition
Ecologization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • procurement of organic products in stores or from a well-known farmer • paying attention to the packaging of environmentally friendly products

3. MARKETING STRATEGY OF FOOD COMPANIES

Yeung and Yee (2010) suggest that marketing strategies ought to include ways of minimising the pre-decision risk to reduce the concern for making frequent or an important purchase. The most common marketing tools, which are identified as controllable parameters used for influencing consumer buying process is ‘marketing mix’, i.e. product, price, place and promotion (conventional framework). The other classifications could be also distinguished, e. g. goods and services mix, the distribution mix or communication mix. In the subject literature it could be found that the 4Ps mix has been adapted to various areas, including retail marketing [16]. Nguyen et. al. (2015) notice that 4Ps mix has been extended through the inclusion of new elements, such as store environment, store formats, personnel and physical evidence. In the context of food retailing, it is indicated that conventional marketing mix elements like product’s quality and package, store location, price and promotional tools shape consumers’ buying behaviour. What is more, consumers also more and more often pay attention to store environmental factors such as atmosphere and personnel during shopping at supermarket. It should be noted that these elements influence consumers’ perceived value as well as purchasing decisions towards food products [17].

If a company is to be profitable, it must create value for the product that meets the expectations of consumers while at the same time generates profits for the producer. Investigating current consumers’ preferences, creating their profiles, adapting actions to new trends and exchanging value with consumers is a prerequisite for effective marketing strategy. The company's activities aiming at creating a marketing include selecting the target market, determining the desired positioning of products in the consciousness of the target consumers and specifying a marketing action plan in order to achieve the desired positioning [21]. Marketing decisions, also in food companies, are usually based on some market and company analysis, such as Porter’s Five Forces, the 5 C’s Analysis, Marketing Mix Analysis, Pest Analysis, Break Even Analysis, which enables the firm to focus marketing efforts on strategic initiatives that generate the greatest return.

The development of a marketing strategy begins with the consumer. However, the specification of target markets is a precondition. At first, company should segment the food market consumers, i. e. find the best way to characterise and differentiate them. Demographic (e. g. age, gender, income), geographical (e. g. country of origin, urban or rural region) and lifestyle (e. g. hedonistic or value-based) criteria are most often taken into account.

When formulating the marketing strategy, it is also necessary to take into account such issues as the proper selection of staff, training tailored to the specific nature of a commercial offer, as well as the system of motivation, evaluation and control enabling to ensure the appropriate level of products.

It should be remembered that the groceries market is often a place of exploratory purchases, which means that some consumers, buying a particular brand or product for a longer period of time, feel fatigued and decide to change something. That is why a very important element of the company's strategy is to take care of its continuous product range development.

The basis for an effective marketing strategy is to acquire and analyse information about customer needs and to take into account their results in the design phase of a new product. The process in which the company understands and shapes customer acquisition and retention is referred to as the management of the producer-consumer relationship. A well-designed customer management system strengthens customer loyalty, and this in turn generates more profit [21-24].

4. DISCUSSION

Nowadays the success of food companies is composed of two combined circumstances: the efficiency of the organisation's operation and a complex of external market and non-market conditions. Market orientation is becoming a necessity in a competitive and sustainable buyer market, and the success of the company depends on the quality of satisfying the needs of consumers. Marketing has an important role to play in forming companies' strategies, because through it, by meeting the needs of consumers, the value for their consumers is created. A well-functioning marketing unit has an important role in the structure of every organization. The task of the marketing is to be open to the needs and changing requirements and preferences of the consumer [21-24].

The new trends in food behaviours described above have a significant impact on the marketing strategy of companies from the food industry, which are trying to prepare an offer and distribution of goods in a way that meets the expectations of purchasers as much as possible.

The technological progress, globalisation, servicization and virtualization of consumption contribute to the situation when people look for products and services that can meet their needs. Consumers search the nutritional alternative that will allow them to shorten food preparation time, use their free time for work or rest, avoid wasting time on cleaning, maintain a balance between work and leisure life and maintain a good health condition [18]. In response, food companies launch new innovative products and services to the market that will satisfy consumers, such as convenient and functional food products as well as specialised catering services [25-27]. More and more restaurants attract customers by unique and attractive localisation, arrangements or menu proposals designed to stimulate their imagination and provide unusual impressions and emotions. Among companies marketing strategies, which are response for new trends associated with servicization and globalisation of consumption the production of designed food that are adapted to the individual nutritional needs of consumers or groups of consumers, the development of gastronomy in modern shopping and entertainment centres, the development of regional brands, confirmed by a certificate guaranteeing the high quality of products, their origin in a specific region and the use of traditional production methods, the set up online platforms and supermarkets for buying food products and meals online or by telephone, the use of biodegradable food packaging can also be distinguished.

Today's consumers are aware of a number of diseases or dangers and pay more attention to the protection of the environment, therefore they watch the production of products which should be qualitatively rich in minerals and nutrients and have a minimum content and quantity of controversial components [19]. The ecological concept is very popular among consumers, as well as among organisations. The ecologisation of consumption is one of the most characteristic contemporary trends in consumption processes. This phenomenon has a significant impact on the management processes in organizations. This is due to the fact that pro-ecological consumers pay more attention to the attitude of companies towards the natural environment. From the perspective of companies, greening of consumer behaviour is a significant fact, as it involves waiting for offers that will be competitive not only in terms of price, but also in terms of utility and quality based on safety for health and for the natural environment.

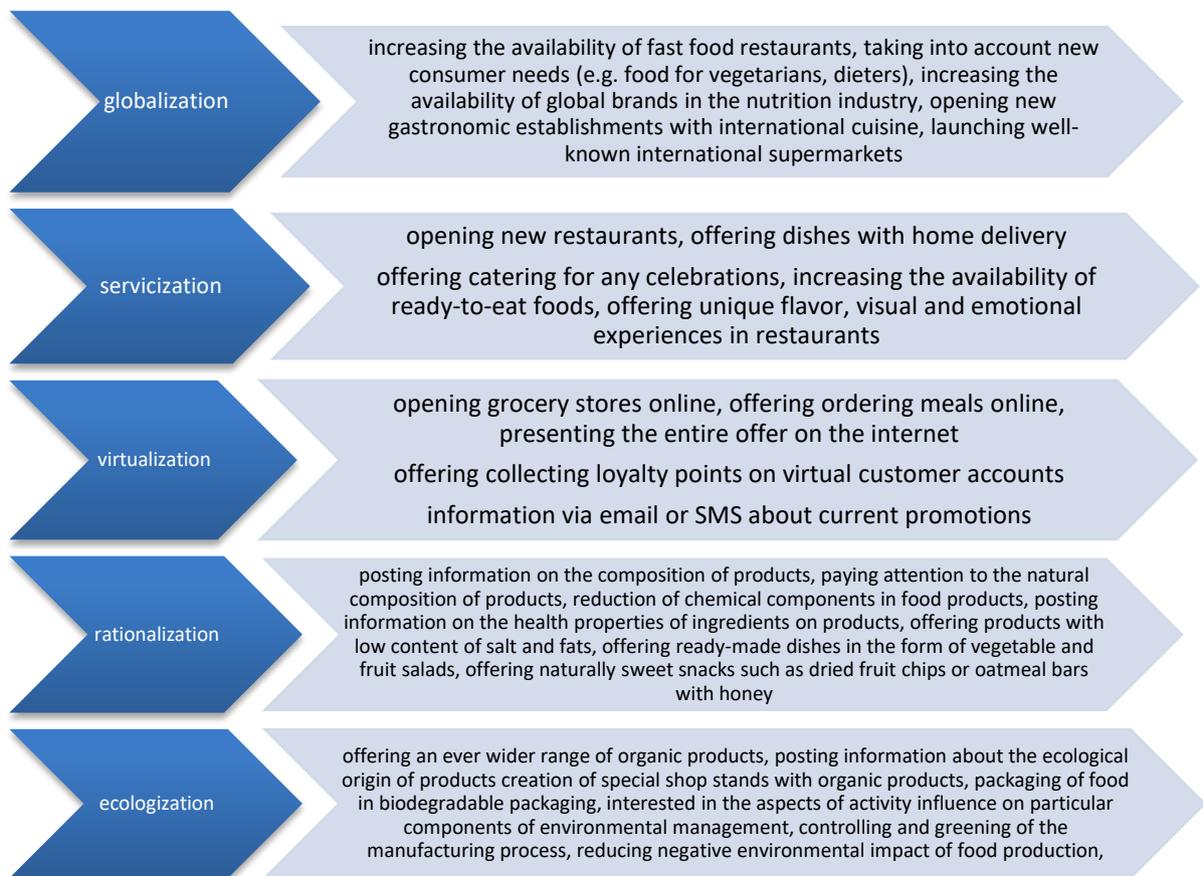


Figure 2. Some examples of company response for new trends in consumers' food behaviour

The demand for raw materials and energy-saving products, which generate reduced waste, as well as goods that are safe for human health (e. g. organic food) is still growing. As many scientists point out, there is a growing need for safe, healthy, less chemically food with higher quality characteristics [31,32].

Moreover, traditional products with a regional character are positively associated by consumers and increasingly preferred [34,35]. Importantly, consumers are willing to pay higher prices for this type of goods [20,33].

In addition, consumers are increasingly reacting positively to eco-innovation proposed by businesses. This also gives companies new growth opportunities. Among some changes and initiatives, which can be observed in companies' strategies based on trend of ecologization and regionalization of food consumption the increased interest in the aspects of activity influence on particular components of environmental management systems with the proliferation of environmental management systems according to ISO (International Organization for Standardization) and EMAS standards (The EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme) ought to be distinguished. Also a new approach to the production of products taking into account their entire life cycle (controlling and greening of the manufacturing process, using and disposing the product), ecological product innovations (the search for new technological solutions reducing negative environmental impact) and the development of distribution of pro-ecological goods are often noted.

Attention is also paid to using of environmental issues in marketing and advertising, i. e. using the system of ecological trademarks, as well as generally understood environmental protection issues in advertising messages [28,29]. As result of some studies show greening the supplier through green innovation contributes significant benefits to the environmental performance and competitive advantage of the firm [30].

Figure 2 presents some examples of company response for new trends in consumers' food behaviour.

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

In a market economy, the consumer is the focus of attention. The success of a company producing and selling products depends on consumers' market decisions. Knowledge of the consumers' behaviour and the factors that shape the consumer is the basis for the company's marketing strategy. The aim of this article was to identify and discuss the most important trends in consumers' nutritional behaviour that contribute to the formulation of marketing strategies for food companies. Across the studies covered by this paper it has been found that some examples of new trends in consumers' food behaviour are globalization, servicization, virtualization, ecologisation and rationalization of consumption.

This phenomenon has a significant impact on the marketing strategy of companies from the food industry, which are trying to prepare an offer and distribution of goods in a way that meets the expectations of purchasers as much as possible. Among some activities associated with new trends in food consumers' behaviour the creation of new innovative food products (e. g. convenience or functional food products) and services (e. g. attractive restaurants, online platforms and supermarkets for buying), the development of regional brands, as well as the development of production of pro-ecological goods, which are in line with utility and quality based on safety for health and for the natural environment can be distinguished.

The future research may focus on topics associated with marketing communication methods that are the most effective for the food industry.

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