

HEALTH AS A DETERMINANT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIC FOOD MARKET

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Abstract. This article attempts to answer the questions if the desire to maintain good health is a major factor in the development of the organic food market and whether managers in the organic food market should focus on this factor in marketing communication strategies to win new customers and increase the number of buyers regularly. The organic food market is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the food industry, but it is still small. Consumers who appreciate healthy lifestyle, taste, life in clean environment can become potential buyers of organic food. Our study shows that health is an important motive of organic food consumption. Practitioners during the construction of promotional message, especially in mature markets should in the future pay attention to the environmental benefits and sustainable mode of production, while all the nutritional and health benefits should be treated only as a premium. There is no conclusive evidence that organic food is more health than conventional alternatives.

Key words: sustainability, organic food, health, consumer, green consumer

INTRODUCTION

Fear of civilization diseases, deterioration of health of societies, food scandals, environmental disasters and their exposure in the media cause health problems, which in turn has an impact on consumer behavior. The quest for health and wellness is becoming

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a driving force in today's food market, which is characterized by a relatively high level of innovation, which is a consequence of increasingly diversified consumer expectations about food products [Gutkowska 2011]. The consumer is looking for food products that meet a variety of added features which are conducive to preservation of health, fitness and beauty [Gutkowska and Ozimek 2005]. At present consumers are paying more attention to the health benefits of foods in order to achieve a healthier diet [Chrysochou 2010]. Consumers are interested in healthy food which increases the healthy products market [Sahota 2009]. Scientific publications show that health is an important theme of organic food consumption. Awareness of the impact of environmental pollution on health and safety make that the issue of sustainable development is included into business models.

This article attempts to answer the questions if the desire to maintain good health is a major factor in the development of the organic food market and whether managers in the organic food market should focus on this factor in marketing communication strategies to win new customers and increase the number of buyers regularly.

HEALTH AS VALUE FOR CONSUMERS AND BUSINESSES

Health, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), is not only physical welfare, but mental and spiritual as well as social one. It is a life resource which includes personal and social resources and opportunities for physical activity, and not only the shortages (illness or disability). It is the result of a balance between the organism and the environment. Health is a dynamic process, a system of mutual considerations in relation organism–environment. It is the potential adaptability of the organism to environmental requirements and supports body disposition to maintain a balance between it and environmental requirements [Karwat et al. 2012]. Currently, when analyzing health issues the holistic concept is developed, which includes four dimensions of health, namely physical (related to the proper functioning of the body), mental, social (connected with the fulfillment of social roles and maintaining normal relationships with other people), and spiritual (related to religion, principles and maintaining inner harmony). The health status of the people is conditioned to the greatest extent by their lifestyle, less by the physical and social environment and genetic factors, and the least it is affected by the health service. The health for consumers is a specific type of wealth, a life asset which is the most priceless value to them and also they have right to protect it. Research shows that among the top values and goals of Polish households it occupies the second position just after a successful family life [Kusińska 2011]. Consumers in the pursuit of their own individual needs focus on improving the quality of their lives, care for the health and maintaining good physical and mental condition [Światowy 2012]. Increasingly popular it is to adopt a healthy lifestyle and to respect the principles of sustainable development, thus increasing consumer segment of LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability). This is also reflected in the emergence of new trends in consumption such as slow life, deconsumption, ecological consumption. A group of consumers with particular interest in health and those who are trying to follow a healthier, balanced diet and a balanced lifestyle has a positive attitude towards organic food [de Magistris and Gracia 2008]. In recent years the demand for organic products in developed countries has shown a significant growth.

Organic foods are perceived by consumers as being less harmful to the environment and healthier than conventional food.

DETERMINANTS THE ORGANIC FOOD MARKET DEVELOPMENT

Currently, the organic food market is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the food industry, but it is still small. Consumer spendings in the EU for organic food in 2013 amounted to 22 billion EUR, which increased by almost 6% compared to last year [European Parliament 2015]. Not only the interest of consumers, but also agricultural policy and state aid and the inclusion of large stores to sell organic products affect its growth.

In Poland factors that largely affect the demand for organic food in addition to changes in the system of values (increase awareness of the social or environmental) is an increasing consumer affluence and saturation of nutritional needs. It is expected that demand will increase due to the growing affluence of Polish society, the search for new solutions habits, as well as the growing ecological consciousness of the Poles [Pilarczyk and Nestorowicz 2010]. Polish organic food consumers perceive this as a specific group of food products with a primarily pro-health qualities. This is combined with motifs of the acquisition, which is dominated by health care. In comparison with other countries they are characterized by their relatively low percentage of indications of environmental concern and support of organic farms [Łuczka-Bakuła 2007].

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE ORGANIC FOOD MARKET

Consumer behavior towards organic food are determined by many factors. Health problems are a key factor in the purchase of organic food. This is indicated by several studies [Wandel and Bugge 1997, Schifferstein and Oude Ophuis 1998]. Ahmad and Kelana [2010] indicate that purchases of organic food are rising because consumers believe that organic food is safer than the conventional one. Hartman Group [2010] found three key determinants that induce consumers to do first organic shopping. These are: pregnancy, health conditions and social impact.

The attitudes and decisions of consumers towards organic food are also affected by demographic and social factors, such as age, gender and level of education [Aertsens et al. 2011, van Doorn and Verhoef 2011]. People with higher education are more likely to buy organic food than people with lower levels of education [Dettmann and Dimitri 2007, Roitner-Schobesberger et al. 2008, Tsakiridou et al. 2008]. Conflicting conclusions can be found in the research by Yin et al. [2010], who showed that age and educational level do not play a big role in purchasing organic food. Willingness to buy organic food has more to do with the impact of individual lifestyle than socio-demographic profile [Schifferstein and Oude Ophuis 1998, Chryssohoidis and Krystallis 2005]. Studies also show that organic food buyers have a higher level of income than consumers not buying this kind of food [Roitner-Schobesberger et al. 2008].

Place of residence may determine organic food choices. In industrialized cities we can notice a significant increase in the market share of certified organic food products

[Richter 2008]. The fact of having children is also a factor stimulating organic shopping [Frostling-Henningsson et al. 2014]. Consumer knowledge is an important construct that affects consumer behavior. Information on organic foods is an important issue because it affects its perception and is the only instrument that allows us to distinguish the attributes of organic food products from those of conventional products and build positive attitudes towards organic food [von Alvesleben 1997]. Scientists say that the lack of consumer awareness of organic food is an important factor slowing its growth. A higher level of objective and subjective knowledge with regard to organic food is positively correlated with a positive attitude towards this category of products and with more experience [Aertsens et al. 2011]. The experience of the consumer is essential for its attitudes. Consumers who have already bought organic food showed more positive attitudes towards organic food purchases than those who did not have any experience, and bought them at a higher frequency [Roddy et al. 1996]. Gil et al. [2000] suggest that lifestyle of consumers is the most important factor explaining the behavior of consumers towards organic food. Studies have shown that a segment of consumers with favorable attitudes towards organic food has a higher level of health orientation in relation to other segments [Nasir and Karakaya 2014]. The buyer regularly spend on average less than half of their budget to purchase organic products. The most important factors that discourage consumers from buying organic products are: high prices, insufficient availability and quality of the product [Buder et al. 2014].

MOTIVES OF ORGANIC FOOD PURCHASING

The motives of buying organic food are concentrated in the area of health or the environment [Honkanen et al. 2006]. The main motive is health [Shepherd et al. 2005]. Padel and Foster [2005] found that consumers buy organic food because they see it as better for their health. In contrast, the concern about the environment is not as strong motive as health [Tregear et al. 1994, Durham and Andrade 2005]. Also Millock et al. [2004] argued that attitudes towards the environment and animal welfare influence on the selection of organic food less than aspects of taste, freshness and health. Similarly Chrysosoidis and Krystallis [2005] indicate that the most important motive of purchasing organic products is an aspect of health and taste. Tregear and his colleagues [1994] found that 54% of consumers claim that they purchase organic foods because of concerns about their health or their families, while only 9% of consumers indicate that they buy as a result of concern for the environment. However, it should be noted that health is a more important motive to buy for casual buyers than regular ones who do this not only for health reasons as well as for environmental ones [Schifferstein and Oude Ophuis 1998]. The motives of purchasing organic foods are determined by demographic factors. Wandel and Bugge [1997] indicate that young consumers take into account more environmental issues, while older consumers consider a purchase organic food for health. The studies conducted by Chen [2009] have shown that a healthy lifestyle has an impact on consumer attitudes towards organic food. Also, the security of value in use was a factor that played an important role [Aertsens et al. 2009]. One can find research which shows that health has a negligible impact on the buying behavior of organic food [Michaelidou and Hassan 2008]. Attention to

health has been recognized as a priority for which consumers are willing to pay a higher price [Paul and Rana 2012]. Purchasers treat organic food purchases as an investment in good health. The perceived nutritional attributes of organic food represent a competitive advantage over conventional foods.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The article provides useful information for the operators in the market for organic products to indicate that the most important determinant choices by consumers of organic food are health benefits. Therefore, managers should emphasize marketing communication that organic food is produced without the use of artificial chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, does not contain genetically modified substances or other additives. In order to encourage consumers to buy organic food, the health statements pointing out the manufacturing method can be useful in marketing communication strategy. However, such campaigns must be designed with care as most research indicates that there are no significant differences in food content or additional health benefits between organic foods and conventionally produced one, but in spite of this, consumers perceive organic food as healthier, tastier and more environmentally friendly than the conventional food [Shepherd et al. 2005, Dangour et al. 2009].

The concentration of various antioxidants in organic crops are much higher than in conventional food [Barański et al. 2014]. There is no conclusive evidence that antioxidants increase health and organic food is more nutritious and reduces health risks than conventional alternatives [Smith-Spangler et al. 2012]. Practitioners during the construction of promotional message, especially in mature markets should in the future pay attention to the environmental benefits and sustainable mode of production, while all the nutritional and health benefits should be treated only as a premium. Managers can give rise to associations of organic food purchases from socially responsible consumption [Nasir and Karakaya 2014].

The results of our study indicate that Polish consumers with still low environmental awareness and at this early stage of development of the organic food market will be receptive to marketing messages that focus more on health benefits than on environmentally responsible actions. Therefore it should be considered whether manufacturers should look for links between health and the quality of the environment. This study may be useful as a set of guidelines and suggestions for producers and retailers of organic food, which identifies buyers of organic foods, their motivations and barriers to purchase. Organic food is seen as difficult to access food and of high prices [Aertsens et al. 2011]. For a large group of consumers it is a barrier to their purchase, so consumers should explain in detail the source of the higher costs that are necessary to produce organic food and re-evaluate distribution channels. The results on the determinants of consumer behavior imply some guidance for product strategy and marketing communication. Market participants should take care to provide knowledge on labels of organic products and their characteristics, the explanation of worse physical look and stress the flavor attributes or benefits for the environment. The problem is not only in the Polish market, but also in developed countries there is a small number of regular buyers. Hence, a useful tool in the animation may

be loyalty programs as well as forms and means of sales promotion. Many surveys show the results of declared answers, and not the picture of actual behavior. It is suggested to conduct research, both quantitative and qualitative ones, in order to minimize the effect of double talk of the answers that quite often appear in the quantitative surveys and to obtain in-depth knowledge about the causes and motives of consumer choices towards food [Gutkowska and Ozimek 2005].

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ZDROWIE JAKO DETERMINANTA ROZWOJU RYNKU ŻYWNOSCI EKologicznej

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest podjęcie próby odpowiedzi na pytanie czy dążenie do utrzymania dobrego stanu zdrowia jest głównym czynnikiem rozwoju rynku żywności ekologicznej oraz czy menedżerowie na rynku żywności ekologicznej powinni koncentrować się na tym czynniku w strategii marketingowej żywności ekologicznej, a zwłaszcza w strategii komunikacji marketingowej, aby pozyskać nowych nabywców oraz zwiększyć liczbę kupujących regularnie. Artykuł dostarcza cennych informacji wskazując że najważniejszym wyznacznikiem wyborów żywności organicznej przez konsumentów są korzyści dla zdrowia. W celu zachęcenia konsumentów do zakupu żywności ekologicznej, użyteczne w strategii komunikacji marketingowej mogą być oświadczenia zdrowotne podkreślające metodę wytwarzania. Jednak takie kampanie muszą być zaprojektowane z ostrożnością, ponieważ większość badań wskazuje, że nie ma istotnych różnic w zawartości żywieniowej lub dodatkowych korzyściach zdrowotnych między ekologiczną żywnością a tradycyjnie wytwarzaną.

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, żywność ekologiczna, zdrowie, konsument, konsument ekologiczny

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