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FOOD -RELATED COMMUNICATION IN HUNGARIAN POPULAR PRESS

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Abstract

The poster analyses some characteristic features of Hungarian food –trade communication. It is obvious, that the communication is often misleading, and tries to follow some trends, without a well-defined strategy. In last years we seen an increasing importance of food supplements.

Keywords: media analysis, statistics

Introduction

The Hungarian society and economy has undergone considerable changes during the last decades. The relatively narrow choice of food industrial products and the moderate consumers' purchasing power has been replaced by an extremely wide choice of food products facing with a moderately increased, but extremely differentiated purchasing power. The economic transition of food chain (e.g. emergence of hypermarkets, and hard discounts) as well as the privatization of the food industry (mainly by foreign direct investments) have created a new economic environment of food –related communication. At the same time, the health –condition of the Hungarian population is extremely unfavourable, and there is a high share of the population, which considers its health-status as bad or extremely bad.

The aim of the current article is twofold:

1. Characterize the most important tendencies of changing in Hungarian food promotions during the last decades;
2. Determine the most important system of food-related arguments and counter-arguments in Hungarian popular press.

Methodology

In first part of our research we have analyzed the food related promotion in the most important Hungarian popular newspapers and magazines between 1965 and 2009.

In next phase we have carried out a discourse analysis concerning the food consumption in Hungarian popular press, based on articles, which have been published between 2006 and 2009.

Foucault's theory of discourse is based on network conceptualisation of it. Foucault proposes to consider of various discourses as "monuments", "in their own right" (Foucault, 1972: 39.). A discourse is depicted as a field composed by statements. In his opinion the aim of discourse analysis is to describe the principles of the dispersion of statements in the field of the discourse. The definition of a statement equals the identification of its position in the space formed by the other statements of discourse. We can define a statement only by describing "how it is isolated in the general dispersion of statements" (Foucault, 1972:54).

The tool for mapping of different statements was the conceptual network mapping. A conceptual network is a mode graph indicating which statement is connected to others. We have collected all articles from the major Hungarian popular press papers. In first round we separated the discourse centred on food consumption. In the second round we have selected the articles, which contained some valuation and opinion for or against the consumption of certain food products.. In the third step we coded the statements. Statements were considered as the essential part of the individually different utterances. In first phase we have used a relatively high number of categories, than we have recoded these statements to form large, robust categories. The discursions have been analysed by the statistical apparatus for network analysis.

Results

The content –analysis of food promotions has proven several important trends. The most important are as follows:

1. During sixties and seventies the most important message of food-related communication has been the "healthiness" and energy content of food. This approach has been in line with the prevailing ideology of the epoch, emphasizing the importance of the work, as in public and private life of the society.
2. From eighties the quality and the international brands gained in importance. These have been parallel with the opening of the Hungarian economy and society.

3. In first years of nineties the cultic over-emphasizing of different quality –assurance systems (e.g. ISO) got an extraordinary importance, however these messages had been practically uncodable for the majority of consumers, that’s why the producers and the trade organizations abandoned it.
4. The regional approach in former decades had been totally neglected in Hungarian food economy. It is an important contrast, that in the last years the regional origin of food has gained an increasing importance. This can be explained by increasing dissatisfaction of consumers with imported product-quality.

The network-analysis has been proven as an effective tool for discourse analysis in popular press on food products.

The most important lessons of these discourses are as follows:

1. The most frequent argument of food –related communications is healthiness, but there is not a general accepted approach, what does it mean as healthy food.
2. There is a strong link between “healthiness” as a value and the low energy content of products.
3. There is a confusion between the vegetarian consumer behavior and the consumption of organic products. The majority of articles treat these two things as synonyms, however this is far from the reality.
4. The majority of articles considers the bio-products as *per se* safe ones, ignoring the possible dangers which are inherent in application of some traditional technologies.
5. Some buzzwords (e.g. anti-oxidant, omega-2 fat acid rich, and pH –regulation) are present practically in each “scientific” article, but the explanation of these arguments are lacking or scientifically ill-founded.
6. The majority of articles emphasize the importance of different slimming diets, but they are focusing mainly on some products. There is a considerable lack of emphasis between the diet and the lifestyle, especially the increased physical activity.
7. There are hardly any communications, highlighting the importance of the effect of stress on eating behavior and overweight. The most important message of articles: if you considerably decrease the energy-intake, you will achieve short-time results. Bases on research of specialists, this approach offers only a short-term success.

References

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