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Application of nutritional marketing tools in press advertisements

Abstract. In chosen periodicals of the food industry and so-called “women’s press,” food advertisements containing nutritional marketing messages were analysed. The frequency and type of these tools was observed and scientific value and correctness was evaluated. The study results show that most of the advertisements do not comply with current legal regulations. Producers often emphasize the presence of ingredients which are recommended from the nutritional point of view although the product’s overall nutritional value is low or controversial.

Key words: food, nutrition and health claims, nutritional marketing, advertisement, magazines

Introduction

Consumers are increasingly becoming more interested in healthy lifestyles and in ways to introduce rational and balanced diets. This trend has inspired many food producers to develop unconventional marketing tools, such as “nutritional marketing.” Nutritional marketing is defined as a new method of providing scientifically proven information about food products, including their positive influence on human body and health, which should in turn lead to pro-health consumer choices and – over the long-term – to health and economic advantages in the population [Rejman and Halicka 2008]. It is therefore a form of activation (boosting) and promotion of sales, which utilizes data on nutritional value and health aspects of food products in the process of communication with consumers.

Nutritional marketing uses the following tools:

1. Nutritional value information – up to now, still voluntary data placed by producers on the food product packaging. The “Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2011, on the Provision of Food Information to Consumers” makes it obligatory for all producers from December 2016. Currently the obligation applies only to the labelling of food products enriched with vitamins and minerals as well as with nutrition and health claims [Wierzejska 2012].
2. Claims – defined for the first time in the European legislation in 2006. The “Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on Nutrition and Health Claims Made on Foods” (with subsequent changes) stipulates labelling rules from July 2007 and defines claim as “any message or representation, which is not mandatory under Community or national legislation, including pictorial, graphic or symbolic representation, in any form, which states, suggests or implies that a food has particular characteristics”. The regulation differentiates three types of claims:

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- A. Nutrition claims – which concern the particular beneficial nutritional properties of the given food product due to the energy (calorific value) it provides, provides at a reduced or increased rate, or does not provide; and/or the nutrients or other substances it contains, contains in reduced or increased proportions, or does not contain. The product could be labelled solely with claims specified in the list of claims generated and lead by the European Commission, and with respect to the given application terms. The list of claims contains 29 types of nutrition claims.
- B. Health claims – which state, suggest or imply that a relationship exists between a food category, a food or one of its constituents and health. This group is divided into two types of claims:
 - 1) generic claims, which regard the role of nutrient or other substance in growth, development or physiological functioning of human body;
 - 2) reduction of disease risk claims, which regard significant reduction of risk factor in the development of a human disease.
- C. The list of 222 permitted generic health claims which may be made on food, other than those referring to the reduction of disease risk and to children’s development and health, was set out in the Commission Regulation (EU) No 432/2012 of 16 May 2012. It applies to all food producers since December 14th, 2012.
- 3. Voluntary nutrition-labelling schemes, like GDA (Guideline Daily Amount) or “My Choice”, which are front-of-pack labels with the aim to help consumers choose food products facilitating the adoption of a balanced diet.

Nutritional marketing contributes to an increase in nutritional awareness among consumers through enhanced knowledge about food and nutrition and the links between them [Rejman and Halicka 2008]. In consequence food choice can in larger degree be determined by the anticipation of health consequences of individual diets [Rejman and Borowska 2009].

Nutritional marketing can bring not only social benefits, but also help to build competitive advantages of food businesses. By emphasizing the nutritional qualities and health benefits of certain food products, companies can build their positive image based on concern about consumer health. Nutritional marketing can be introduced in all stages of the company’s marketing strategy according to the “5P” concept (i.e. Product, Place, Price, Promotion, Packaging). Food companies which provide information matching the needs and knowledge of consumers or introduce nutrition or health claims, urge potential buyers to become acquainted with their market offer [Rejman and Halicka 2008].

This type of marketing was for the first time used at the beginning of 1990s on the US food market. In the following 15 years an unprecedented increase in its application was observed [Colby, 2006] and legal regulations in this matter became highly advanced. Producers who wanted their products to “stand out” introduced information on their pro-health properties on packaging and marketing releases. However, many of these claims are not scientifically proven and do not comply with current regulations.

Aim and method

The aim of this paper was to analyse the application of nutritional marketing in advertising press releases. Randomly chosen periodicals, available in Poland between January 2010 and June 2012, were reviewed. These included: *Poradnik Handlowca* and

Przemysł Spożywczy (monthlies focused on the food market and food processing) as well as: Olivia, Poradnik Domowy, Shape, Twój Styl (monthlies dedicated to women). In the selected magazines – 30 issues of each title – the frequency of food advertisement publications was analysed. Additionally the number and character of nutritional marketing arguments was studied and the correctness of given information (nutrition and health claims) was evaluated.

Results

The conducted research showed that the largest number of food advertisements was published in the Poradnik Handlowca magazine (56% all total food ads), while the smallest was in Przemysł Spożywczy (5.5%). Marketing releases in the overviewed food industry periodicals seldom refer to nutritional and health arguments and definitely more often accentuate the high quality of a certain product, its market share or packaging change. In the analyzed time not one nutritional marketing advertisement was found in Przemysł Spożywczy. In Poradnik Handlowca only 7% of all food ads included nutritional information.

Food advertisements in monthly magazines focusing on women comprised less than 20% of all ads, but the largest percentage include nutritional marketing: ranging from an average of (in studied years) 36% in Poradnik Domowy to almost 65% in Shape (Table 1).

Table 1. Total food advertisements (A) and with nutritional marketing arguments (B) in the chosen magazines in the period of January 2010 – July 2012 (% of all advertisements)

Magazine title	On average		2010		2011		2012	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Poradnik Handlowca	56.1	7.2	57.7	7.1	56.9	6.9	51.7	7.7
Przemysł Spożywczy	4.5	0.0	4.0	0.0	4.9	0.0	4.6	0.0
Olivia	17.6	44.3	16.7	49.4	21.2	34.7	11.3	63.6
Poradnik Domowy	15.6	35.8	18.3	40.5	12.3	25.5	15.7	38.2
Shape	14.8	64.9	19.8	60.4	11.9	69.6	6.7	85.7
Twój Styl	10.2	32.9	11.3	39.4	9.3	24.4	10.0	38.2

Source: own calculations.

The analysis of collected data shows that the number of advertisements using nutritional marketing tools concerning the nutritional value, nutritional and pro-health characteristics of food stuffs decreased in 2011. However in the first half of 2012, an increase was observed and the percentage in all titles/magazines surpassed those of 2010. In two periodicals these tools were applied in more than 50% of advertisements (64 and 86%)

Analysis of the nature of advertisements applied in press releases with nutritional marketing arguments in the studied period (Figure 1 and Table 2) demonstrates that in the magazines for women, readers were most frequently informed (in 42% of ads) about presence of certain food ingredients, mainly fibre, vitamins, minerals and polyunsaturated

fatty acids. The highest number of such messages were found in Poradnik Domowy magazine – in the whole period circa 50% of all advertisements had nutritional and health messages, and in 2011 more than 90%. In almost 20% of press advertisements producers referred to the product’s influence on health, emphasizing that it “lowers the level of bad cholesterol”, “regulates blood sugar”, “influences the development of bones” or “increases body resistance”. In 9% of the ads consumers were informed that the product has “no sugar added”, in 8% – that its components were of natural origin, and in circa 5% – that the product had a lower content of fat, sugar or salt.

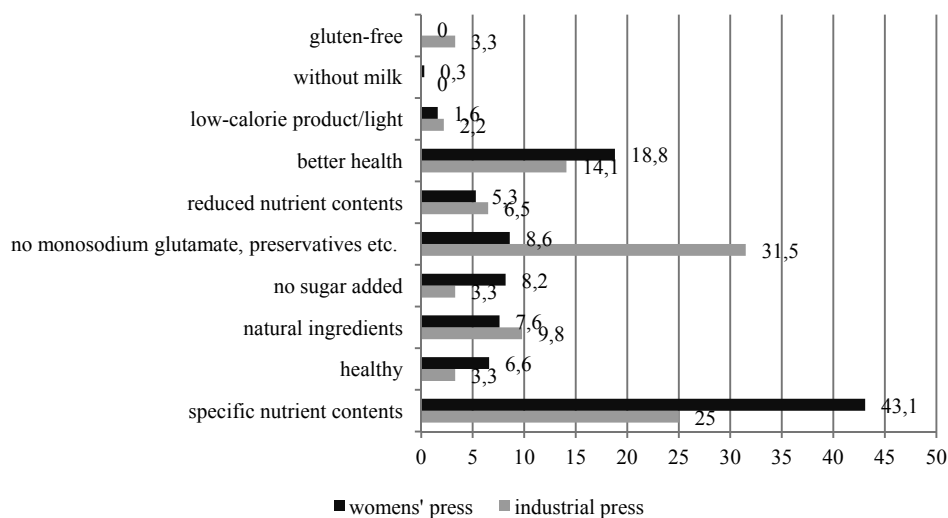


Fig. 1. The nature of nutritional marketing arguments in advertisements (% of all nutritional information)

Source: own calculations.

Table 2. Nutritional marketing arguments used in food advertisements in women press (% of all nutritional information)

Information	Olivia	Poradnik Domowy	Shape	Twój Styl
Specific nutrient contents	45.4	46.4	39.7	38.3
Healthy	8.2	0.0	12.7	6.7
Natural ingredients	11.3	10.7	0.0	5.0
No sugar added	7.2	8.3	11.1	6.7
No monosodium glutamate, preservatives etc.	6.2	7.2	6.3	16.6
Reduced nutrient contents	7.2	2.4	6.3	5.0
Better health	12.4	25.0	17.5	21.7
Low-calorie product/light	2.1	0.0	4.8	0.0
Without milk	0.0	0.0	1.6	0.0

Source: own calculations

It is important to notice that advertisements referring to improved product content (no sugar, lower nutrient content, lower energy content) were found in Shape magazine, which is addressed to women interested in health and with potentially higher awareness about the relationship between diet and human body – c. 22% of messages. More information about artificial additives occurred in advertisements in Twój Styl – almost 17%.

In the studied industry magazines, in more than 30% of marketing messages producers stressed that no additives, such as monosodium glutamate, preservatives, artificial food dyes and aromas were present in the product. In about 25% of cases the presence of certain nutritional ingredients was advertised. As in the case of women's magazines information about impact on health (14%) and the term "natural" was marketed (10%).

The analysis of information contained in advertisements of "health claim" nature showed that most of it does not comply with current legal regulations. The most frequent mistake made by producers is the application of messages that are not specified in the official list of claims conducted by the European Commission. For example producers advertised that the product "increases resistance", provides "iron for brain development", influences "healthy bones and happiness" or contains "prebiotics which supports the development of proper gut microflora". Despite the necessity to inform consumers about the amount of ingredient which causes the positive effects mentioned in the claim, only in some of the messages this was found. Another frequent mistake was to include information on "unspecific benefits": "improves mood", "stimulates energy flow", "makes you feel great". Producers have to remember that health claims requirements apply also to advertisements and therefore many of them – after December 14th 2012 – have to be changed according to Commission Regulation (EU) No 432/2012.

A smaller number of mistakes was observed in the case of information of "nutrition claim" type. Among those, the most frequent was referring to the product as "natural". This term should not be used in the case when no artificial ingredients were added [Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011]. Also, three times producers declared "lower fat content" without giving information about the specific amount. One time the claim "light" was used without indicating the product's properties which made the product "light".

Mieczkowska and Panfil-Kuncewicz [2011] observed that in many cases the application of nutrition and health claims on packages and advertisements of milk products was against the law. It therefore seems important to conduct training sessions for the food industry which would lead to the growth of knowledge on proper food product labelling.

By applying nutritional marketing tools in press advertisements producers often underline the presence of ingredients which are recommended from the nutritional point of view although the product's overall nutritional values may be controversial. They indicate the high levels of vitamins and minerals in food products dedicated to children, such as dairy and sweet desserts, cereals or chocolate drinks in which one portion of product contains from two to four teaspoons of sugar or in sweets which contain 80% of sugar in the form of glucose-fructose syrup. In one of these cases a product was promoted as "light" because of "lowered fat content" although it contains four teaspoons of sugar per 100 g. In another case, chocolate was called "light" although it had more fat than a standard product and the energy value of both were similar.

Summary

A general principle of the European food law [Regulation (EC) 178/2002] is to provide a basis for consumers to make informed choices in relation to food they consume and to prevent any practices that may mislead the consumer. Moreover the European Authorities in the Regulations regarding the provision of food information to consumers underlined that in order to achieve a high level of health protection for consumers and to guarantee their right to information, it should be ensured that consumers are appropriately informed.

However the presented research results showed that food producers like to apply nutritional marketing arguments in press releases aimed at women readers but do not always follow the tools' concept. A lot of information provided in the form of health claims in studied advertisements does not comply with current legal regulations. Producers should take into consideration the fact that the requirements related to using health claims concern also advertisements, therefore these should be prepared according to the rules. In the case of nutritional claims a smaller number of such cases was observed. Producers often stress the presence of ingredients which are recommended from the nutritional point of view whereas the product's overall nutritional value is controversial. In effect, such practice may mislead consumers with low nutritional knowledge.

It is important to add that in comparison to analogical studies conducted in 2005 [Gajek 2007], the overall percentage of advertisements in women's press did not change, however the percentage of ads with nutritional marketing messages increased. Incorrect terms such as "portion of healthy energy" or "good calorie" were commonly used.

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