Eco-Food Consumption: the Roles of Ethics, Healthstyles, and Environment

Natalia Maehle, Institute for Research in Economics and Business Administration (SNF), Norway

The focus of this roundtable is to discuss a phenomenon of eco-food (i.e. green, healthy and ethical food) and identify the main factors influencing eco-food consumption. We will also address the possible marketing strategies aimed at promoting eco-food and various methodological approaches, when researching eco-food consumption.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1013815/volumes/v10e/E-10

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Roundtable Summaries

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Chair
Natalia Machle, Institute for Research in Economics and Business Administration (SNF), Norway

Participants
Cele Otnes, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA
Benedetta Cappellini, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK
Elizabeth Parsons, Keele University, UK
Søren Askegaard, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark
Hilke Plassmann, INSEAD, France
Giana M. Eckhardt, Suffolk University, USA
Paolo Antonetti, Cranfield University, UK
Carolina Werle, Grenoble Ecole de Management, France

Food choice and consumption are complex phenomena. Eating represents a form of “congenial” consumption which involves not only objective and tangible benefits, but also subjective, hedonic, or symbolic components (Havlena and Holbrook 1986). The growing popularity of eco-food (i.e. green, healthy and ethical food) can be explained by the general trend that many consumers are switching towards socially and environmentally responsible products (Harrison, Newholm, and Shaw 2005). Moreover, changing lifestyles and an increasing focus on health make health concerns an important factor in food consumption. For example, interest in health has been found to be a primary motive for the purchase of organic food (Grankvist and Biel 2001). However, these new trends often contradict traditional purchasing criteria such as price and taste. Eco-food is usually sold at premium price, and many previous studies show consumers do not want to pay a price premium for ethical alternatives (e.g. De Pelsmacker, Driesen, and Rayp 2005). Moreover, consumers do not consider ethical company behavior as a substitute for product quality (Sen and Bhattacharya 2001). Few consumers agree to trade basic functional attributes for socially acceptable attributes (Auger et al. 2008). There is also evidence that less healthy alternatives are perceived as better tasting (Raghunathan, Naylor, and Hoyer 2006). Thus, consumers have to deal with many contradictory requirements and expectations while making their food choices. There is need for a unified understanding of the role of different factors affecting eco-food consumption. It is important to explore how consumers make the trade-offs in their food choices, and why eco-products are not always preferred. The previous research demonstrates there is a “disconnect between the issues consumers claim to care about” and “their purchasing behavior” (Belk, Devinney, and Eckhardt 2005, 276). What consumers say about the importance of eco-issues differs from their actual behavior. This “attitude-behaviour gap” is demonstrated in many studies (e.g., Auger and Devinney 2007; Carrigan, Szmigin, and Wright 2004).

References
Harrison, Rob, Terry Newholm, and Deirdre Shaw (2005), The Ethical Consumer, London: Sage.