

## **Influence of Social Marketing on the Behavior of Georgian Consumers Regarding Healthy Nutrition**

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**ABSTRACT.** The paper deals with the global problem of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) adopted by the United Nations, such as the importance of healthy nutrition for the well-being of the population. Particular attention is paid to the theoretical and practical issues of social marketing, which are recognized as innovative and effective forms of resolving social problems. Based on the Association Agreement with the European Union, the work emphasizes the importance of implementing facilitating activities for agribusiness and food industry. The study identified many issues that impede the introduction and popularization of healthy nutrition in Georgia. The article shows that in Georgia, despite some successes, forming a favorable environment for changing the behavior of consumers regarding healthy nutrition still remains a problem. The work demonstrates that the local market is filled with low-quality food and most consumers, because of low-income levels, prefer cheap products to environmentally friendly and healthy food. The research reveals that improper awareness and knowledge of the consumers about the importance of healthy nutrition, prevents the implementation of social marketing campaigns in Georgia. One of the main reasons for that is the inconsistency in the cooperation of the government, business and civil sectors, namely, inadequate attention to the production of food products in accordance with the international standards and to the systematic quality monitoring of the consumer market. The main solution to the problem, according to the work is the study of consumer behavior with regards to healthy nutrition, for which, the marketing research was conducted. The research reveals that the main factors defining the changing behavior of Georgian consumers regarding healthy nutrition are: interest, awareness and perception. As a result of dispersion analysis, statistically acceptable data were obtained on the impact of different demographic characteristics on the above-mentioned factors. © 2018 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

**Key words:** social marketing, well-being, healthy eating, behavior change

Healthy lifestyle is an integral part of the humanities and civilized world and is directly related to physical health and mental well-being. The global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) adopted by the United Nations in 2015, has further strengthened this approach throughout the world.

Provision of a healthy lifestyle and well-being for all people is a key component of the SDG. It is acknowledged that global health and social well-being are not only defined by the factors in the health care system, but it includes socioeconomic conditions, demographic and environmental

aspects, food consumption culture by the specificity of different countries. In 2017 FAO published the report “The State of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia”, underlined the importance of nutrition issues for achieving food security and improving the well-being of the citizens [1]. Popularization of healthy nutrition, research of its facilitators attracts the attention of the scholars and practitioners around the world. Social marketing is focused on the solution of social, ecological and public welfare problems, none of them were included in the classical goals of marketing [2].

Recently agribusiness faces global challenges in the world. Large companies are often unable to satisfy public demands for healthy and wholesome products. Agriculture was always the main pillar of the Georgian economy. In Georgia, the employment of rural population is 62% of total employment, of which 76% are self-employed. The fact of the matter is that the landowners are considered to be self-employed. In fact, the majority of them cannot cultivate the land for lack of funds and other reasons and therefore they have no income. The share of agriculture (%) in the gross domestic product (GDP) is miserable [3]. Unfortunately, due to the low development of the real sector of the economy, the country consumes more than it produces. Therefore, the import is 3-4 times higher than the export. The import goods constitute an average of 80% of the consumer basket (as well as the food basket) [4]. One of the main priorities of Georgian government is to ensure the policies of programs designed to revitalize the rural economy, including its agricultural production, processing and marketing functions. Ongoing economic reforms in Georgia in the frame of AA/ DCFTA with EU should be effective for developing food and agriculture sector in Georgia. Obviously, implementation of this agreement gives the opportunity to the country to modernize the economy, create an environment that will increase competitiveness in the food sector, promote the

stable growth of high quality products and ensure food safety and security.

Numerous scientific and popular publications emphasize that healthy nutrition is directly related to the high quality of human life. For many years, only healthcare professionals were interested in the healthy nutrition problems. The studies revealed that public health care programs, on their own, are not always able to affect the beneficiaries and provide appropriate preventive measures. The majority of scholars believe that social marketing is actively used to solve health problems; it is an effective strategy to change the behavior of the consumers. Social Marketing is the best instrument for implementing social changes. Starting from the 50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has been attracting increasing attention of marketers, economists, sociologists, psychologists, nutritionists and healthcare professionals. The interventions offered by social marketing are especially valuable in the health care system. Social marketing aims to solve important social problems for society, plan, formulate and stimulate new social products. It is an institutional, state-driven policy that affects public processes, acts according to the public interests [5]. Social marketing is more oriented on social values rather than on targeted activity carried out by a specific company. Social marketing was developed as a new approach to achieve great changes in population and to have a positive impact on people's health and well-being [6]. Consumers are motivated to perceive social problems and change behavior through social marketing benchmark. Identification of the characteristics, such as taste preferences, knowledge about nutrition, and physical ability of the individual and the ability to transform are important for determining the nutritional behavior [7]. In 2011, a group of American scientists working on nutrition problems developed a new concept of “Nutrition as a well-being paradigm”. Their approach turned out to be different. If healthcare professionals believed that the regulation of healthy nutrition was only

associated with the medical field, according to the followers of the new conceptions, existing restrictions on nutrition are not enough to solve the problem. Therefore, attention should be paid to the positive perception of the individual. Psychological, emotional and physical state has a great influence on the motivation of the consumers to get a new nutritional behavior. The authors of the new conceptions discuss the five key areas of food well-being: food socialization, food education, food marketing, access to food and food policy [8]. "Food for well-being" concept uses Andreasen's social marketing benchmark criteria, as an organizational and logical framework, which gradually affects the target market. The influence of a well-thought-out, targeted messages cause a positive behavior change of the beneficiaries. After some time, the new behavior should transform into a social norm, which ultimately leads to improved environment and social well-being. The scientists of the Griffith University in Australia conducted a research on the effectiveness of the 6 benchmark criteria in social marketing intervention. Thirty-four cases of healthy nutrition were discussed. Only four case studies showed negative results. The monitoring of other studies confirmed that the nutritional behavior of targeted beneficiaries changed positively using benchmark tools [9]. Scientists and practitioners believe that healthy food and nutrition are one of the major challenges of the modern world. Nutrition, as a habit of balanced eating, safe product and healthy food is a guarantee of health and high life expectancy. Nutrition is a pleasure, which gives even more benefits if it is properly regulated, according to many researchers. The important discussion among the scientists and researchers is on how to achieve new social behavior. It is noteworthy that for many years, the formation of social change was only related to education and legislation, while the role of social marketing was neglected. The UK survey showed that the food companies spend more money (30 times more) on the promotion of unhealthy

food, than the government itself spends on the healthy nutrition popularization programs. The experts call on the government to take decisive measures to limit the unhealthy food advertising. The leading role of social marketing is argumentatively presented in many scientific works. However, healthcare policy makers, researchers often underestimate the importance of social marketing components in ensuring successful campaigns. In the book "Is Health Campaign Truly Social Marketing" published in 2017, Australian scholars clearly articulated the key characteristics of a social marketing campaign to change the health-related behavior, which discusses the prerequisites for changing behavior, raising awareness, changing attitude, mood and opinion [10]. One of the most important factors in healthy eating campaigns is food labeling, the impact of which on the healthy nutrition of the consumers is not well studied yet. The importance of food labeling is actively being discussed in multiple scientific works and studies. The scholars consider that the consumers are much more informed today, basically because the access to information is easier. Along with that, they mention that despite the high awareness of the consumers, its use in practice is still low. Very interesting studies on food labeling were conducted in six European countries. According to the study, the understanding of the label and its use was highest in Great Britain, Sweden and Germany, and relatively low in France, Hungary and Poland. This research confirmed the importance of food labeling, its influence on the consumers when buying a product [11]. The necessity of discourse on the topic, with the participation of all the public was also revealed. The study shows a superficial attitude and in some cases the neglecting of food labeling. Part of the population does not check the information on the packaging of the product and reads it less carefully. Social marketing campaigns affected the biggest companies in the food industry, which spent billions in the promotion and

popularization of fast food in the society. The destruction of this stereotype affecting the consumers for many years was not so simple. Great Britain became the first country to announce on the international level that it will undertake strict policies regarding the control of the food industry and beverage production [12]. Ample studies show the role of social media in the formation of consumer mood and attitude. According to one study, the report on the social media is more important for the beneficiary than the information distributed by other media sources. The research conducted by American scholars showed that young people aged 19-32 who intensively use social networks are more likely to react to the message than their peers who are less involved in social networks. The challenges of Social Marketing and consumer behavior on healthy eating issues have been analyzed by the Georgian researchers. Given publications express different aspects of nutrition security and food policy, healthy eating, food labeling etc. [13-16].

**Methods.** Qualitative and quantitative methods were selected to accomplish the objectives of the study. The study consisted of two steps. As the first step (qualitative research) the focus group technique for the hypothesis formulation was chosen. Three focus groups were selected. In the focus groups of discussion participated about 10 - 12 representatives of a selected target market of a particular area participated. The discussions were conducted by a moderator, who trained theories of consumer behavior and marketing principles. The participants in the group were recommended to communicate with each other, share attitudes and give frank opinions on the topics presented to them by the moderator or the generated by the dynamics of the group. There was no need to reach a consensus. The moderator did not proselytize or train the respondents, rather, used the skills of the discussion, clarified the answers, controlled the flow of conversations and covered all relevant areas of interest for consumers. In the second step

(quantitative research) the online and face to face surveys of the respondents were conducted. As research tool we chose a questionnaire that consisted of several structured questions. The questionnaire contained information on the consent and confidentiality of the respondent, as well as explanations and the filling instructions. The self-administered survey method was used to avoid errors caused by the subjectivity of the interviewer. A systematic random sampling method was used. The confidence interval is 95% and the margin of errors is set to be equal to 4%. The survey was carried out with 1200 respondents aged 18 years and more, which represent 0.03% of the total population of Georgia. The survey covered the geographical area of Georgia's largest cities: Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Signaghi, Gori, Zugdidi, and Senaki. Among the respondents, 60% were women, and 40% - men with high and special professional education. Based on this the survey results were analyzed using statistical software SPSS (version 21.0) for windows. Along with research methodology we used variance analysis method – ANOVA. Numerous hypotheses were formulated, focusing on the relationship between healthy nutrition awareness and behavior of consumers.

H1: Age positively impacts on healthy nutrition awareness of consumers;

H2: Education positively impacts on consumer awareness about healthy nutrition;

H3: Income positively impacts on consumer awareness about healthy nutrition;

H4: Healthy nutrition awareness positively impacts on purchasing decision of consumers.

**Results.** The investigation revealed that most of Georgian consumers are informed about the healthy nutrition. The respondents were emphasized their positive attitude towards the healthy nutrition. The study found that 85% of the consumers have a certain view about healthy nutrition, but their level of interest, awareness and perception of healthy nutrition is rather low (Fig.

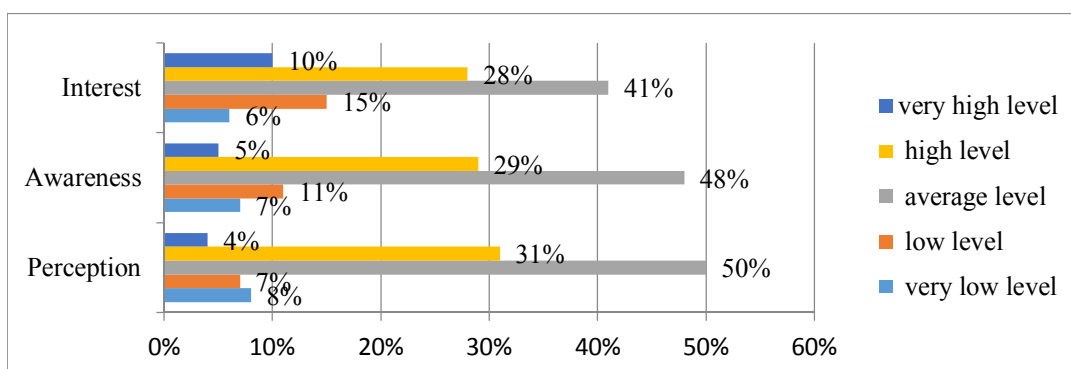


Fig. 1. Frequency of distribution of the levels of consumers interest, awareness and perception regarding healthy nutrition (in %)

Table 1. Impact of age on healthy nutrition awareness of consumers

Estimated Marginal Means					
Dependent Variable: <i>healthy nutrition awareness</i>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Age	33.241	4	8.310	5.229	.000
Error	1698.913	1069	1.589		

P<0.05 means that the differences between the groups studied are statistically significant.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2. Impact of education on healthy nutrition awareness of consumers

Estimated Marginal Means					
Dependent Variable: <i>healthy nutrition awareness</i>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Education	20.899	4	5.225	5.033	.001
Error	843.675	813	1.038		

P<0.05 means that the differences between the groups studied are statistically significant.

Source: own elaboration.

1). At that, the level of healthy nutrition awareness is changing with age, education and family income of consumers. Most of the respondents (41%) receive essential information regarding healthy nutrition from internet resources, 21% - from mass media, 10% - from relatives and word of mouth, 7% - from special literature, 5% of respondents use different methods. EU Association Agreement impacts on the perception of the respondents regarding the healthy lifestyle and healthy nutrition: 26% of respondents consider that it is particularly important; 49% - important; 12% - neutral, 11% - not so important, others have no answer. Respondents of all age groups believe that the new requirement of the EU Association Agreement will increase significantly the awareness and knowledge of consumers on the healthy nutrition.

Analysis of variance was conducted to verify the hypothesis of interest. One Way ANOVA F-Test used to understand the interaction between the independent variables and the dependent variables. At first, it was investigated how the age influences on consumer awareness about healthy nutrition. The findings indicate that the coefficient of age is significant at the 5% level, mean age is a significant determinant of consumers' awareness about healthy nutrition (F=5.229, p=0.000). H1 has been supported, thus Younger and middle age consumers are relatively more informed about healthy nutrition (Table 1).

One Way ANOVA F-Test was used to check education level impacts on consumers' awareness about healthy nutrition (Table 2). The results suggest that education plays an important role in awareness of consumers (F=5.033, p=0.001).

**Table 3. Impact of income on healthy nutrition awareness of consumers**

Estimated Marginal Means					
Dependent Variable: <i>healthy nutrition awareness</i>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Income	33.241	4	8.310	5.229	.000
Error	1698.913	1069	1.589		

P<0.05 means that the differences between the groups studied are statistically significant.

Source: own elaboration.

**Table 4. Impact of healthy nutrition awareness on the purchasing decision of consumers**

Estimated Marginal Means					
Dependent Variable: <i>purchasing decision of Consumers</i>					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Awareness	30.602	3	10.201	4.756	.003
Error	1992.341	929	2.145		

P<0.05 means that the differences between the groups studied are statistically significant.

Source: own elaboration.

Consumers with high and vocational education are relatively more informed about healthy nutrition.

In order to test the third hypothesis employed both ANOVA and the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. The ANOVA test illustrates that income is an important factor with regards to awareness about healthy nutrition by consumers. F-test = 5.229 (p=0.000) is significant at the 5% level. Consumer's incomes influence on the awareness of healthy nutrition (Table 3).

Analysis of the relationship between awareness about healthy nutrition and the consumer purchasing behavior revealed that this relationship is very significant. Based on F-statistics (F=4.756, p=0.003) the H4 hypothesis is supported. The healthy nutrition awareness influence on purchasing decision of consumers. This relationship could be confirmed (Table 4).

**Conclusion.** A lot has already been done in Georgia in order to implement healthy food policy, but there are still serious problems regarding food security and healthy nutrition in the country. The local consumer market of Georgia is full of products of uncertain origin and quality that are often dangerous to human health. Georgia's integration into the world economic system affects the purchasing behavior of local consumers related to healthy diet. Georgian market is not well informed when it comes to healthy food. Particularly important is the low level of consumer

awareness about the introduction of a new range of healthy food. The youth segment shows the awareness regarding the importance of a healthy food and willingness to provide more costs for ecologically clean regular diet more. Only a small number of Georgian consumers can easily understand the information written on the labels of healthy food products. The main problem is not labeling itself, but the ambiguous understanding of the similar information provided to the consumers. The additional income of the population does not lead to the increase in the demand of the usual products, therefore only the manufacturer focusing on the quality of the healthy food, innovations (including marketing research of the market and consumer advantages) and the new ways of competition, will be able to realize his full potential. It should be noted that the consumer perception regarding social marketing intervention is very positive. After increasing the awareness of consumers of healthy nutrition, they can pay attention to the quality and innovation of food products, as well as promotion strategies such advertising, public relations and sales promotion. Social Marketing interventions will help to elaborate food standards of health products, to create a favorable institutional environment for successful implementation of nutrition policy and healthy behavior change of the consumer. The research is the basis for the objective data collection

with the aim of production and development of healthy food products to Georgian market, as well as for further study of consumer demand. The results of the research are useful for establishing the global perspective on the attitude of consumers towards healthy food for people who are employed in Georgian food business, which gives them the opportunity to understand and

envisage the main trends of the local market development.

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## ეკონომიკა

# ჯანსაღ კვებასთან მიმართებით ქართველი მომხმარებლების ქცევაზე სოციალური მარკეტინგის გავლენა

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(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის ა.სილაგაძის მიერ)

ნაშრომში განხილულია ჯანსაღი კვების მნიშვნელობა მოსახლეობის კეთილდღეობისათვის. განსაკუთრებული ყურადღება გამახვილებულია სოციალურ მარკეტინგზე, როგორც სოციალური პრობლემების გადაჭრის ინოვაციურ და ეფექტიან ფორმაზე. საქართველოს ევროპასთან ასოცირების ხელშეკრულებიდან გამომდინარე, ხაზგასმულია აგრობიზნესისა და კვების ინდუსტრიის ხელშემწყობი ღონისძიებები განხორციელების აუცილებლობა. სტატიაში ნაჩვენებია, რომ საქართველოში, გარკვეული წარმატებების მიუხედავად, კვლავ პრობლემად რჩება ჯანსაღ კვებასთან მიმართებით მომხმარებელთა ქცევის ცვლილებებთან ადაპტირებული გარემოს ფორმირება. კვლევა ცხადყოფს, რომ ჯანსაღი კვების მნიშვნელობის შესახებ მომხმარებელთა არასათანადო ინფორმირება და ცოდნა ხელს უშლის სოციალური მარკეტინგის კამპანიების განხორციელებას საქართველოში. აღნიშნული პრობლემის გადაჭრის საშუალებად ნაშრომში მიჩნეულია ჯანსაღი კვების შესახებ მომხმარებელთა ქცევის შესწავლა, რისთვისაც ჩატარებულია მარკეტინგული კვლევა. კვლევის შედეგად დადგენილია, რომ ჯანსაღ კვებასთან მიმართებით ქართველი მომხმარებლების ქცევის ცვლილების განმსაზღვრელი ძირითადი ფაქტორებია: დაინტერესება, გათვითცნობიერება და აღქმა. დისპერსიული ანალიზის შედეგად მიღებულია სტატისტიკურად მნიშვნელოვანი სიდიდეები ზემოაღნიშნულ ფაქტორებზე სხვადასხვა დემოგრაფიული მახასიათებლების გავლენის შესახებ.

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