



Transferability of private food marketing success factors to public food and health policy: An expert Delphi survey

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ABSTRACT

Public policy activities to promote healthy diets have been criticised for their lack of success. Applying a marketing approach to non-commercial policy objectives such as healthy eating, termed social marketing, is an emerging but as yet underdeveloped field. An earlier study conducted a case analysis of recent successful commercial food marketing and identified key success factors that may be further transferred to the public sector. Six of these factors (trend awareness, endorsement, emotion, common value, media coverage, and 'why and how') were presented to and discussed by 31 experts in a two-round Delphi survey. The objective was to determine to what extent these factors are used in public information and social marketing campaigns for healthier eating, and what is required to successfully transfer those factors into the public arena.

The analysis shows that 'classic' information campaigns prevail. In considering which factors to explore, emphasis is given to low-cost factors, trust building, and the potential to lead to long-term behaviour change. Close cooperation with stakeholders, targeted approaches with a fitting combination of factors, and a consistent message are highlighted. Important target group differences regarding the application of the success factors are age, life-cycle stage, education, and level of healthy eating involvement. It is argued that policy makers possess the data to help prepare targeted approaches and that they enjoy good credibility, but lack the knowhow to exploit the data and understand the target groups. Weaknesses are also seen in a lack of coordination and effective decision-making structures, as well as a lack of accountability among policy makers. A number of themes were repeatedly mentioned as being important, including the need for evaluating effectiveness, the issue of funding, and improved stakeholder cooperation and knowledge exchange.

It is concluded that, depending on the objective and target group in question, all factors are deemed relevant to consider, but low cost techniques can be an especially favourable addition. Effectiveness measurements ought to be established to determine the added value of new and different approaches. Of crucial importance for long-term success is building trust in public policy institutions and activities, cooperative efforts and consistency, and coupling public information and social marketing campaigns with structural changes.

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Introduction

A large number of European citizens are overweight or obese (WHO, 2007), a fact that is detrimental not only to the individual's quality of life, but also for current and future public health spending. Public policy makers as well as stakeholders from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the food industry have engaged

in discussions on how best to promote healthy diets. Repeatedly, public campaigns that promote healthy choices and eating have been criticised for their lack of success (Hornik and Kelly, 2007; Jepson et al., 2010; Mazzocchi and Traill, 2005), while the food industry and the marketing of food has been rebuked for aggravating citizens' difficulties with healthy eating (Seiders and Petty, 2004; IOM, 2006).

The fact that food marketing is negatively affecting public healthy eating objectives is, however, only one of the possible interactions between often-conflicting private and public activities. The application of marketing approaches to public, non-commercial activities for promoting favourable behaviour of citizens (for their

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own benefit or that of the society) is an emerging field termed social marketing. An empirical and comparative case study was conducted using recent successful cases in Europe to determine the key success factors in commercial food marketing (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2012). The cases selected were those with a specific focus on foods that are regarded as relatively healthy or on campaigns that use health-related messages in their communications. The 27 cases analysed led to the identification of six clusters of success factors, each consisting of two to three success factors.

There are key differences between the public promotion of healthy eating and the commercial marketing of food products. Major differences include the aim of changing dietary patterns and discouraging overconsumption versus encouraging the choice of a single food item. In only a few cases does the latter require the establishment of changed consumption behaviours. Also, there are great differences in how commercial marketing is organised and equipped with resources and competencies compared with how public policy-makers arrive at decisions, conduct their work, and allocate resources and knowhow. Therefore, transferring the success factors identified in commercial food marketing to the public arena requires an assessment of the challenges and possibilities.

In this study, a two-round Delphi survey was conducted in which 31 experts assessed and discussed the transferability of selected food marketing success factors. The objective of this study is 2-fold: first, to outline the possible interaction between private food marketing activities and public activities for healthy diets, highlighting the possible success factors that had been previously discussed in each field; second, to present and describe the results of the Delphi survey and to conclude with recommendations for the successful transferability of the factors, as well as their implications for the development of public activities in the promotion of healthy diets.

Interaction between food marketing and public policy

Three possible interactions or relationships between food marketing and public policy are discussed in the literature. First, food marketing can negatively affect public health and thus evoke public policy 'counteractions' (actions by the public sector destined to lessen the negative effects of food marketing or restrict food marketing). Second, food marketing can positively affect public health, and this may call for public policy support of these actions in food marketing or call for increased cooperation. Third, food marketing may provide lessons to be learnt in public policy activities. A fourth potential direction, where food marketing learns from public policy activities, is of little relevance here even though Hastings and Saren (2003, p. 306) argued that it is time to regard the relationship between social and commercial marketing as "an adult to adult one". Most authors, but especially those emphasising the second direction, stress that the food industry can and should be 'part of the solution' of combating obesity via the contribution of expertise and by engaging in public-private partnerships, but the authors are also cautious about the various limitations (e.g., Kraak et al., 2009). The following is an outline of the various issues discussed on the three directions of the interaction of food marketing and public policy.

Food marketing can negatively affect public health

The food industry may have a negative impact on public health, first by their food marketing activities, and second by counteracting calls to restrict their marketing activities. Food marketing is often depicted as the 'next battlefield' following tobacco marketing (by both sides of the 'battle'). A large number of studies and reviews have analysed the influence of food marketing on

consumers, especially children's food choices (e.g., Hartmann and Maschkowski, 2009; Hastings et al., 2006; IOM, 2006; Matthews, 2007), mostly to identify possible negative influences that call for counteraction. It has, for example, been shown that children's food preferences, purchase-related behaviour, and short-term consumption behaviour are influenced by food advertising (IOM, 2006), which is alarming given that advertising directed at children has been found to primarily show savoury snacks and confectionary (Matthews, 2007).

Seiders and Petty (2004) identified food industry marketing practices most criticised in the debate. These are (1) product formulation and package size, (2) nutrition disclosure, (3) advertising and promotion, and (4) product distribution. They argued that policy remedies are required to address the current market failures that contribute to obesity: the lack of disseminated information on the causes and consequences of obesity, the long-term and probabilistic nature of obesity-related health-threats, incomplete nutrition information with regard to obesity, and the restricted food choices for some consumers.

In reaction to the criticism that food marketing is facing, it has been argued that the food industry has tried to redirect attention to physical activity, "implicitly de-emphasising the role of food" (Kraak et al., 2009, p. 2030), as well as trying to divert attention away from the companies' roles by stressing the individual's responsibility through "talking about 'choice' and 'balance'" (Dorfman and Yancey, 2009, p. 304).

Food marketing can contribute to public health

Contrary to what holds for tobacco, food marketing has not only potentially negative but also potentially positive influences on public health (Grier and Kumanyika, 2010). A number of studies have discussed the role of food marketing with regard to possible 'win-win situations' (Dorfman and Yancey, 2009; Kraak et al., 2009; Seiders and Petty, 2004), where the food industry could help combat obesity through its own business or related activities. Kraak et al. (2009) stated that the food industry could become involved in combating obesity because food marketing is based on greater financial resources and marketing expertise and that it reaches a greater number of consumers. If food marketing favoured healthy food and eating, it could also be beneficial to public health.

Seiders and Petty (2004) concluded that there are a number of areas in which food marketers step in to support public health activities. These include the following: (1) influence consumer attitudes regarding obesity risks; (2) improve the effects of nutrition disclosure; and (3) reconsider the marketing of food to children. Kraak et al. (2009) suggested an increase in the adoption rates of codes of conduct and transparent accountability mechanisms for industry activities, but in the same vein as Dorfman and Yancey (2009) they stressed the importance of involving the industry not only in the promotion of healthy choices and the development of healthier products, but also in further developing healthy environments and communities.

Food marketing lessons to public health policy

A number of authors have stated there are lessons to be learnt from food marketing that can be applied to public policy (Fitzgibbon et al., 2007; Grier and Kumanyika, 2010; Hartmann and Maschkowski, 2009). These lessons are seen as beneficial in two ways. The first is to determine where food marketing is especially impactful, and when it should be restricted if public health is threatened, for example legislation prohibiting the marketing of food with low nutritional value to children (e.g., Grier and Kumanyika, 2010). As a consequence, this leads to actions to combat

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