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Better words for enhance health and welfare sustainability of food models

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to propose a reflection about specific tools of communication feasible to succeed in improving sustainability of feeding in a health dimension. Recognizing that consumption choices, especially regarding food, are determined by factors different from price and income, incorporating ideas both from behavioral economics, food marketing and psychology, we would try to give a first reflection about the possibility for an adequate use of 'terms' in communication to influence consumer food choices and improve diet and health.

In food markets, research has abundantly focused on analysis of consumers' perception of technical parameters, but also on links between psycho-sociological ones and emotions associated to specific foods. Less has been done, however, about opportunities deriving from interlinks between terminology and food consumption behavior. Expressing with a question: 'is it possible to modify food perception and in general, food styles, through the strategy of acting on words, food names, definitions, in order to address nutrition on a health and welfare sustainability path'?

From a methodological point of view, work has been done through the tool of experimental choice.

This paper, then, will offer a first review of related literature and propose a reflection on the possibility of considering bettering the 'words' used in communication (scientific, marketing, medical, institutional) as a tool to improve health and welfare sustainability of nutrition styles.

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1. Introduction

Modern agri-food systems are to be considered under a systemic approach, that means that consumers lead the system by addressing strategies and choices in a complex model of interrelationships.

In such a 'demand pulled' system, consumer is more demanding in terms of value for food products, thus requiring a growing amount of guarantee and information.

This gives communication a central role in multiple acceptations.

This paper aims to discuss the importance of using appropriate 'words' in agri-food communication as a mean to increase general welfare in the system.

For this purpose, starting by the individuation of interactions between terminology and agri-food economics, some of the methodologies used in sectorial literature will be reviewed with the aim of investigating about the potential role of 'words' in consumers' perception of food products attributes and overall quality.

2. Materials

The notion of a sustainable diet would have been curious a few hundred years ago, when people obtained the majority of foods out of their ecosystems (Covino *et al.*, 2008). Biodiversity was valued and utilized; ecosystems and agro-ecological zones produced the foods that they had produced for millennia. Traditional knowledge and practices ensured the conservation and sustainable use of food biodiversity within healthy ecosystems. Agriculture, diets and nutrition have changed so dramatically in recent decades, that now, the concept of a sustainable diet seems novel.

The notion of 'sustainable diets' recommends foods to be consumed for both their nutrient contents and with respect for their ecosystems. The concept was borrowed from 'sustainable agriculture', as an activity that is not wasteful of natural resources and produces food for local and seasonal consumption. With modern agriculture and globalization of foods, the concepts of the sustainable diet and human ecology have been neglected in favour of intensification and industrialization of agricultural systems (Boccia, Sarnacchiaro, 2015; Covino, 2011). The outcome has been huge increases in global food production, but this has not led to global improvements in nutrition. The confounding result, according to latest FAO estimates, is that the number of undernourished people has increased to more than one billion. This number reflects dietary energy supply only, while micronutrient malnutrition exists on an even larger scale (VV.AA., 2012).

In addition to the problems of undernourishment, obesity and its associated chronic diseases are rising. This, coupled with the alarming pace of food biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation, makes a compelling case for reexamining agricultural systems and diets. While good nutrition should be a goal of agriculture, it is imperative that concerns of sustainability not be lost in the process. Many dietary patterns can be healthful, but they can vary substantially in terms of their resource cost. The Mediterranean diet has been characterized, analyzed and promoted through a variety of methods within a number of scientific and applied disciplines (Covino *et al.*, 2013). It continues to be recognized and appreciated as a sustainable diet even if its practice is diminishing. The importance of the Mediterranean diet for the rest of the world lies not in its specific foods and nutrients, but in the methods used to characterize/analyze it and philosophy of sustainability at its core. These same methods can be used to characterize sustainable diets in other eco and food systems, to identify the necessary new paradigms of reference for the solution of the many challenges that face humankind, with more than one billion hungry people worldwide.

A decisive role can be played by communication in promoting human development in today's new climate of social change. As the world moves towards greater democracy, decentralization and the market economy, conditions are becoming more favourable for people to start steering their own course of change. But it is vital to stimulate their awareness, participation and capabilities. Communication skills and technology are central to this task, but at present are often underutilized. Policies are needed that encourage effective planning and implementation of communication programmes. We live in a communication era, with rapid expansion in the reach of mass media, and improved techniques for the interpersonal exchange of ideas.

Health communication is seen to have relevance for virtually every aspect of health and well-being, including disease prevention, health promotion and quality of life. This increase in the prominence of the field, externally, is happening contemporaneously with important developments taking place, internally, one of which is the focus on

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