

Promoting Climate Friendlier Food Choices in Weekly Grocery Store Flyers

ABSTRACT

Food retailers have the opportunity to influence consumers to make more climate friendly purchase decisions by, for example promoting food products that are climate friendlier, such as vegetarian food. One means of promotion is by weekly grocery store flyers. Weekly flyers are unaddressed promotion, directly sent to potential customers or provided in the store. In this paper we present a work in progress in form of an explorative study of to what extent food retailers in Sweden communicate sustainable consumption in general, and climate-friendlier food choices in particular, in their weekly flyers. Our proposition is that meat is promoted more often, compared with vegetarian protein alternatives and fruit and vegetables, on the cover page and also is given bigger advertising size and better page position. Another proposition is that the flyers address few direct references to the climate change issue but many more “indirect” references to environmental issues.

INTRODUCTION

During the past few years, the general concern about climate change has increased, and there is a growing consensus among scientists that the food system, in particular the agricultural sector and livestock production, is one of the main anthropogenic contributors (McMichael et al 2007; Weber & Matthews 2008; Garnett 2009). Thus, many researchers suggest a change of diets, towards eating less meat and more vegetarian food (Weber & Matthews 2008; Carlsson-Kanyama & González 2009, Garnett 2009). However, changing consumers eating and buying habits has shown to be a difficult task, Often there is a gap between consumers “good” intention and what they actually do (Vermeir & Verbeke 2006).

This paper explores to what extent food retailers in Sweden are communicating sustainable consumption in general, and climate-friendlier food choice in particular, in their weekly flyers. One proposition we have is that meat is promoted more often compared with vegetarian food on the cover page, and also given bigger advertising size and better page position. Another proposition is that there are few direct references to the climate change issue but many more “indirect” references to environmental issues. A last proposition is that meat is promoted by hedonic appeals (e.g., taste and festivity) while vegetarian food is promoted by functional appeals (e.g., nutrition and health).

EMPIRICAL STUDY

Weekly grocery store flyers is unaddressed promotion, directly sent to potential consumers or provided in store and the main purpose of the flyers is to create traffic to store by promoting the week’s special offer or bargain. Thus, the weekly flyer is a direct marketing communication channel from store to consumer.

The main research questions are:

1. To what extent is meat versus vegetarian food being promoted in weekly flyers?
2. What size (absolute and relative) is given to meat versus vegetarian food?
3. To what extent are words and phrases that are related to the environment and the climate, such as “climate”, “environmental”, “organic”, “local”, and so forth, being used to promote food choices.
4. What words and phrases are used to promote meat versus vegetarian food?

Sample procedure

Since more or less all food retailer chains distribute weekly flyers we need a sample of manageable size which will allow us to draw general conclusions about the extent of which Swedish food retailers communicate sustainable consumption, and climate-friendlier food choice, in their weekly flyers. We

intend to focus on weekly flyers from five major retailer chains: ICA Maxi, Coop Forum, City Gross, Hemköp, and Willy:s. In most cases, but not all, the production of weekly flyers is centralized. However, the cover page may differ from store to store, or from region to region. Due to the huge amount of various weekly flyers, we will choose one store per retailer chain located in Malmö and 10 weeks during the period May to September for 2014. This will sum up to 50 different weekly fliers for analysis.

Analysis

According to previous research the cover page of a flyer is regarded as the most prominent position in a store flyer. The cover page creates awareness and gets more attention than inside pages, thus having greater impact on advertising effectiveness (Griffith, 1990 and Rossiter & Percy, 1998). According to the theory of visual attention (Bundesen, 1990) also the position on a particular page is important, as well as relative advertising size (Pieters & Wedel 2004).

Thus, we intend to pay extra attention to the cover page when analyzing the store flyers. We will measure the following variables:

- Absolute size of advertising on the cover page (meat and vegetarian food).
- Relative size of advertising on the cover page (meat versus vegetarian food).
- Absolute position of advertising on the cover page (meat and vegetarian food).

To be able to measure the advertisements (size and position) we have developed a method of dividing the cover page into a square net. Absolute size is measured in terms of number of squares. Position is measured in terms of its central square position. In addition, to analyze words and phrases (research question 3 and 4) we intend to go through the content of each flier as a whole and identify as well as count the existence of such words and phrases.

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