

# PERCEPTIONS OF GEORGIAN CONSUMERS ABOUT HEALTHY NUTRITION

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## ABSTRACT

The paper studies the role of healthy nutrition in ensuring food security and sustainable development of consumers. The main focus is on awareness consumers about healthy nutrition, which is presented, as the most important issue of social marketing. One of the important factors of changing healthy behavior are increasing awareness in healthy nutrition among the general publics. On the basis of the research revealed sources of information, also levels of consumers' interest, awareness and perception regarding healthy nutrition. From the point of view of the relation to healthy nutrition, in the work is determined influence of the age, education and income on consumers healthy nutrition awareness. In the paper is given the impact of consumers' awareness of healthy nutrition on the decision-making to purchase. On the basis of the conducted study, conclusions have been drawn that give a possibility of global vision on the attitude of the Georgian consumers towards healthy nutrition.

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**Introduction.** The prevention of diseases and healthy lifestyle changes are key factors of the well-being of the population. Social marketing instruments are very strong to provide health care campaigns to change public health-related behaviors. The knowledge about health behavior change is crucial for achieving improvements in the health of individuals. Healthy nutrition are the basis of human health and well being of the population. Healthy nutrition is a target behavior of social marketing - new social product, which significant for the society and serve for the well being of the population. For many years, scientific studies on healthy eating is only a prerogative of the doctor dieticians. However, recently it has been given a social dimension. The concept of social marketing became popular from the seventies of the twentieth century, as along with the meeting of target market needs, it puts emphasis on ensuring the public well-being, several features are essential to social marketing Social marketing is influencing behavior, that will improve health, utilizing a systematic planning process, that applies marketing principles and techniques, capturing on priority target audience segment and delivering a positive benefit for society (Andreasen, 2006; Lee and Kotler, 2011).

Social marketing is the use of marketing concepts in a program designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences in order to improve health in the society (Andreasen, 2002). Using marketing tools fort he social marketing campaigns, making health facilities more accessible and attractive for the population (Andreasen, 2006). Social marketing is focused on people, their wants and needs, aspirations, lifestyle and freedom of choice aiming aggregate behavior change (Lefebvre, 2013). Public health issues are so complex that no single agency is able to provide effective activities resolving existing problems. Why is important collaboration and partnership between different stakeholders (local, international, government, private sectors, media and individuals). No wonder some social marketers even deem partnership as one of the "additional social marketing Ps" (Weinreich, 2011). Ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well- being are essential to the sustainable transformation of the world. Promoting healthy lifestyle is crucial in helping people to learn and develop life skills. Conceptually social marketing is relayed on the behavior change theories. Social marketing implications are very popular for the public health empowering. Health Belief Model (HBN) is one of the most widely used conceptual frameworks for understanding health behavior. The Health Belief model is a framework for motivating people to take positive, health actions in order to avoid a negative health consequence (Orji at al., 2012). Health belief model states, that the perception of personal health behavior threat is itself influenced by general health values, which include interest and concern about health specific health beliefs about vulnerability to a particular health treat beliefs about the consequences of the health problem (Lee and Kotler, 2011).

Healthy eating is a target behavior of social marketing - new social product, which significant for the society and serve for the wellbeing of the population (Cheng at al., 2011; Donovan, 2011). There are many factors, that contribute why individuals behave a certain way, it is important to facilitate a desired change among a group of people. It should be noted, that behavior change refers to human actions that transform or modify overtime. While always complex and often unpredictable, one

useful way of viewing behavior change is also series of stages that people move through (A Guide to Health Promotion through Social Marketing, 2013). There's a lack of appreciation among government and private sector, many campaigns often are unable to use social marketing approaches due to not well understanding the importance of the issue. There are many academic publications on the public health topic, social marketing experts have underlined that simply providing nutrition information without helping consumers interpret the information is unlikely to effectively encourage most consumers to make healthier choices (Hieke and Harris, 2016). Social marketing uses traditional marketing instruments to promote healthy attitudes and behaviors (Glanz at al., 2008; Gordon at al., 2006). One of the important factors of changing healthy behavior are increasing awareness and knowledge in healthy nutrition among the general public.

Social marketing interventions and initiatives, that focus on food and nutrition skills not only improve knowledge, competence and attitudes, but may amplify the impact of other policies, such as nutrition labeling, and help to reduce inequalities. Many investigations in this field demonstrated, that successful habit change depended on a deep understanding the target audience. They are influenced by many sectors of society, including families, community organizations, health care providers, faith-based institutions, businesses, government agencies, the media, and schools (Wechsler at al., 2004). Barriers faced consumer in this regard are the following: education level, low awareness of food labeling, low income and time scarcity. The ability to choose prepackaged food based on information obtained on its label requires knowledge and ability to read, understand and interpret information (Sunelle at al., 2010).

The empirical observation revealed the positive changes in the society, to increase healthy life programs in Georgia. It should be emphasized that, there is a lack of awareness about the significance of healthy lifestyle education at Georgian public schools and universities. Policy and regulation change became crucial tool, while social marketing promotes behavior change, help people to adapt to the new behavior (National Nutrition Study in Georgia, 2016). More and more businesses in Georgia are interested in promoting healthy lifestyles. And they are building up the benefits of good nutrition through their sponsorship of active, healthy living programs worldwide. But marketing instruments such advertising, PR and selling stimulations are not efficient. It intends to implement capacity building programs for encouraging social dialogue between local authorities, business and civil society on the food security.

The challenges of Social Marketing and consumer behavior issues were analyzed at the Georgian researchers (Apil at al., 2008, Jashi and Todua, 2013). Research on the attitude of Georgian consumers to foods was investigated too (Todua, Babilua and Dochviri, 2013; Todua and Dochviri, 2015a; Todua and Dochviri, 2015b; Todua, Gogitidze and Phutkaradze, 2015; Meskhia, 2016; Todua, Mghebrishvili and Urotadze, 2016; Mghebrishvili and Urotadze, 2016; Todua, Gogitidze and Phutkaradze, 2017; Todua, 2017). Despite some works undertaken by Georgian scientists on the Social Marketing, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive research on this issue. The given study will attempt to fill a gap about the healthy nutrition awareness of Georgian consumers. The objective of the research is to analyze the impact of healthy nutrition on behavior change of Georgian consumers.

**Research Methodology.** Qualitative and quantitative methods were selected to accomplish the objectives of the study. The study consisted of two steps. At the first step (qualitative research) have been choosing the focus group technique for the hypothesis formulation. Three focus groups were selected. In the focus groups for discussion participated with 10 to 12 representatives of a selected target market of a particular area. The discussions was 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 should not proselytize or train the respondents, rather, used your skills to 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) were conducted online and face to face survey respondents. The 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 the study explanation and the filling instructions. A five-point Likert scale was employed (Malhotra, 2004). 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 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, 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 (Malhotra, 2004). 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 consumers awareness about healthy nutrition;

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

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

**Research Results.** The investigation revealed that most of Georgian consumers is informed about the healthy nutrition. It was emphasized by the respondents, that they positive attitude trends towards relating the healthy nutrition. This study found, that 85 % of the consumers have a certain view about healthy nutrition, but their level of interest, awareness and perception on healthy nutrition is rather low (See Figure 1). At that, the level of healthy nutrition awareness is changing with age, education and family income of consumers. Most of the respondents (41 %) receiving 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 the respondents to do this use different methods. EU Association Agreement impacts on the perception of the respondents regarding the healthy lifestyle and healthy nutrition: 26 % 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.

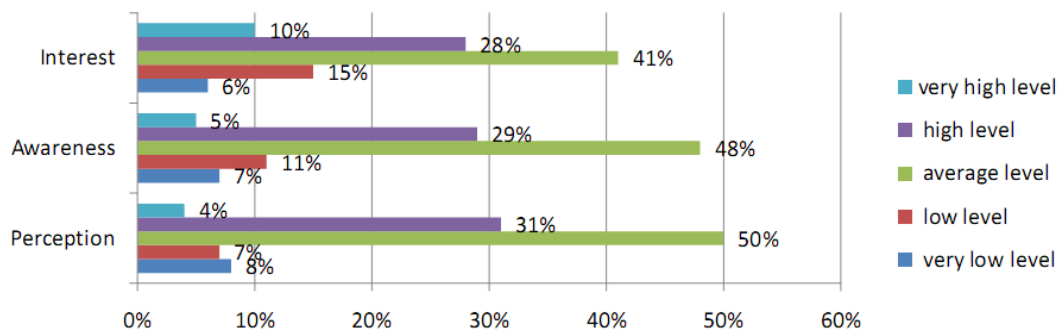


Fig. 1. Frequency distribution of levels of consumers interest, awareness and perception regarding healthy nutrition (in %)

Conducted analysis of variance in order 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, investigated how the age influences on consumers awareness about healthy nutrition. The findings indicate the coefficient of age is significant at the 5 % level, meaning 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 (see Table 1).

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.

One Way ANOVA F-Test has been used to check education level impacts on consumers' awareness about healthy nutrition (see Table 2). The results suggest that education plays an important role in awareness of consumers ( $F = 5.033$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). High and vocational education consumers 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 on healthy nutrition (see Table 3).

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.

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.

Analysis of the relationship between awareness about healthy nutrition and the consumer purchasing behavior revealed that the relationship is significant at the 5% level. Based on F-statistics ( $F = 4.756$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) the  $H_4$  hypothesis is supported healthy nutrition awareness influence on purchasing decision of consumers. This relationship could be confirmed (see Table 4).

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.

**Conclusions.** Georgian National Health Strategy recognizes nutrition, as a priority in public health care issue. It is urgent to provide such public health policy, that has the effect of improving the availability, affordability and acceptability of healthy behavior of the consumers. One of the significant action in this regard is raising public awareness on healthy nutrition. There is a significant progress in terms of food safety and nutrition policy in Georgia. However, the country still faces some serious challenges in this field. The majority of the consumers are not satisfied with the food quality in the local market.

It should be noted that the consumer perception regarding social marketing intervention is very positive. After increasing awareness of consumers of healthy nutrition, they 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 an enabling institutional environment for successful implementation of nutrition policy and healthy behavior change of the consumer.

It is important to elaborate national food safety strategy and nutrition policy to respond to the current challenges of Georgia. Obviously, implementation of the obligations according to the Association Agreement with EU is significant for Georgia, which requires the concerted effort of governments, the private sector and civil society for encouraging healthy behavior for well being of the population.

It is crucial to promote a healthy lifestyle for the population, the government should collaborate with private and civil society to initiate social marketing interventions, increasing public awareness about healthy nutrition. There's a need to strengthen marketing communication channels for increasing demand of consumers healthy nutrition issues. The given study of a will good contributing to improving knowledge entrepreneurs about healthy nutrition awareness of consumers, provide education, as well develop policy on food labeling in Georgian market.



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