

Agri-Food Transparency and Traceability: A Marketing Tool to Satisfy Consumer Awareness Needs

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Abstract : The link between man and food plays, in the social and economic system, a central role where cultural and multidisciplinary aspects intertwine: food is not only nutrition, but also communication, culture, politics, environment, science, ethics, fashion. This multi-dimensionality has many implications in the food economy. In recent years, the consumer became more conscious about his food choices, involving a consistent change in consumption models. This change concerns several aspects: awareness of food system issues, employment of socially and environmentally conscious decision-making, food choices based on different characteristics than nutritional ones i.e. origin of food, how it's produced, and who's producing it. In this frame the 'consumption choices' and the 'interests of the citizen' become one part of the others. The figure of the 'Citizen Consumer' is born, a responsible and ethically motivated individual to change his lifestyle, achieving the goal of sustainable consumption. Simultaneously the branding, that before was guarantee of the product quality, today is questioned. In order to meet these needs, Agri-Food companies are developing specific product lines that follow two main philosophies: 'Back to basics' and 'Less is more'. However, the issue of ethical behavior does not seem to find an adequate on market offer. Most likely due to a lack of attention on the communication strategy used, very often based on market logic and rarely on ethical one. The label in its classic concept of 'clean labeling' can no longer be the only instrument through which to convey product information and its evolution towards a concept of 'clear label' is necessary to embrace ethical and transparent concepts in progress the process of democratization of the Food System. The implementation of a voluntary traceability path, relying on the technological models of the Internet of Things or Industry 4.0, would enable the Agri-Food Supply Chain to collect data that, if properly treated, could satisfy the information need of consumers. A change of approach is therefore proposed towards Agri-Food traceability that is no longer intended as a tool to be used to respond to the legislator, but rather as a promotional tool useful to tell the company in a transparent manner and then reach the slice of the market of food citizens. The use of mobile technology can also facilitate this information transfer. However, in order to guarantee maximum efficiency, an appropriate communication model based on the ethical communication principles should be used, which aims to overcome the pipeline communication model, to offer the listener a new way of telling the food product, based on real data collected through processes traceability. The Citizen Consumer is therefore placed at the center of the new model of communication in which he has the opportunity to choose what to know and how. The new label creates a virtual access point capable of telling the product according to different point of views, following the personal interests and offering the possibility to give several content modalities to support different situations and usability.

Keywords : agri food traceability, agri-food transparency, clear label, food system, internet of things

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