

MARKETING TO THE SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

Everett R. Brown, University of Scranton
Panos Apostolidis, University of Scranton

Abstract

The socially aware consumer today needs more information in order to make responsible purchases.

Product label information which heretofore has largely related to content values, must begin to provide information relating to societal and ecological benefits. Some suggestions for consideration are offered in this article.

Introduction

To say that today's shoppers are not well enough informed may be challenged by many. Never before has the buyer been given more "facts", clinical proof, and survey results concerning quality, effectiveness, and performance of various competitive products.

Price comparison has been made more convenient than ever with unit pricing, open dating, and product information available on every can and carton. Weights and measures are given for quantity comparison. Preparation instructions and serving suggestions take most of the guesswork out of the end use of the product, all of which is directed at assuring consumer satisfaction.

But in our expanding society, there are many factors relating to intelligent product selection other than package and product content as a measure of value. We are acutely conscious today of energy conservation, environmental impact, and world trade conditions. It would be nice if the shopper were able to make product choices with these factors in mind.

We have entered the era of accountabilities. The housewife stopped buying detergents with phosphates, not for any lack of effectiveness in cleaning powers (in fact, many of the non-phosphated products are inferior in this respect), but because the phosphates contributed to stream pollution. Products sold in biodegradable containers are preferred, not for any ease in disposal, but for what happens after disposal. Unleaded gasoline is accepted, even though it provides poorer mileage and has a higher knock rating (Pasztor, 1978) because the engine exhausts are less noxious.

Adam Smith writing his Theory of Moral Sentiment in 1759 expressed man's nature as being motivated, not only by self interest, but by a feeling for others. The same consideration is behind the purchase of a product which uses recycled paper. It is not only cost in relation to content value that determines purchase but a measure of social responsibility. Some of the impacting areas of concern today are illustrated in Figure I. It is the position of the authors that a more appropriate and

realistic classification of product attributes and benefits beyond quality, performance, etc. can create and facilitate decision patterns in the market-place; patterns in which consumers can still maximize their personal satisfactions while simultaneously evaluating additional product attributes. Socially oriented consumption patterns can be promoted and facilitated through strategic labeling of products in such a way that the issues of energy dependence, resource scarcity, ecological impacts, and econometric factors such as trade and labor balances, are included.

Such aims would also be self-serving for the producers. Kotler, in his description of societal marketing, includes the notion of generating consumer satisfaction and long-run welfare as the way to attaining organization goals. (Kotler, 1972).

The extent of a consumer's sacrifice of some of the intrinsic and utilitarian values of a product as well as the values of personal satisfaction for the sake of his conditioned responses to social constraints is not well known. It is felt that it is becoming a greater factor in buyer behavior and decision making in the market-place. The Howard-Sheth model acknowledges its place as one of the three structured channels, acknowledging what they refer to as social relationships through which are evoked "social environment stimuli" (Kotler, 1972).

The conditioning factors, or the magnitude of the influence on point-of-sale decisions may be a highly personal one, varying between individuals, products, and the current strength of attitudes as reflected in public opinions and the press. It is suggested by the authors that brand preference or product trade-offs based on sociological and environmental factors is feasible ground for continued survey and research.

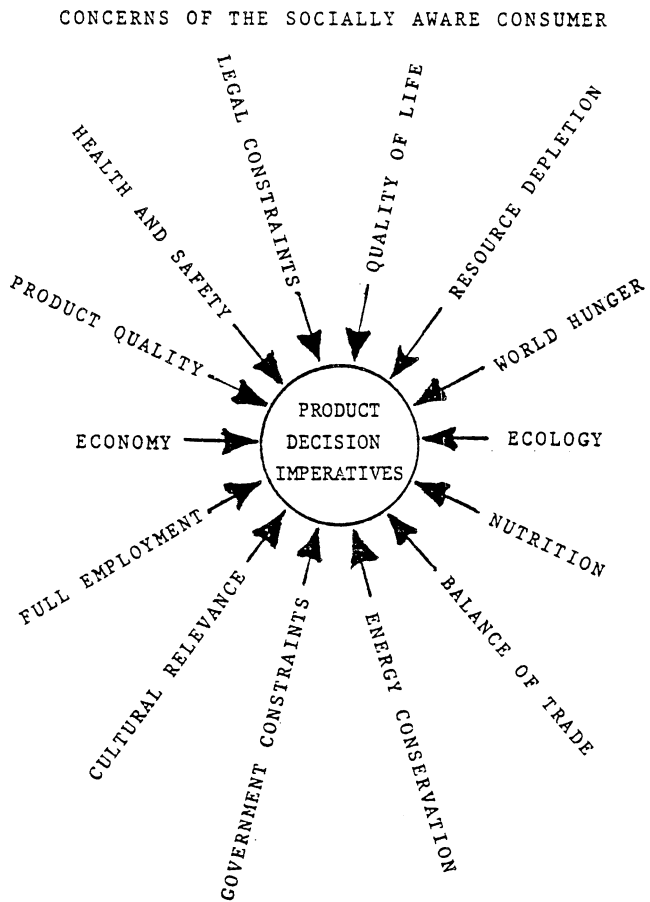
It is observed that, as the price differential between unleaded and leaded gasoline increases at the pump, more new car owners are illegally resorting to leaded gasoline, which is more polluting. (Hencke, 1979).

Social conscience has its price and may never become the ingrained automatic response behavior. (Howard, 1963).

Societal considerations still have not been treated explicitly in spite of consumer activists and government legislation proposals. Fisk has explored the concept of "ecological imperatives", referring to adjusting individual consumption patterns in the more affluent countries. He suggests two necessary conditions: a new, more intelligent attitude toward consumption, and a social organization or movement to implement the new attitude. (Fisk, 1973). It has also been stated that socially

acceptable market choices are made by providing the consumer with economy, efficiency, realism and safety factors. (Rothe and Benson, 1974).

FIGURE I



Marketing's Responsibility

To address societal dimensions of value in the mind of the customer, the marketing executive must expand his horizons. The company that prides itself on products which serve the customer very well, must assess the net effects of their production, use and disposal in the world at large, and at the same time inform the customer of these effects. In fact, it is one of industry's social obligations.

To make a purchase with an awareness of social responsibility and with benign environmental impact, the concerned shopper must be informed and prepared with parameters of information beyond those relating to the intrinsic and utilitarian nature of the product itself. Present information available, however, is often hard to decipher, incomplete, deceiving, or contradictory.

Press headlines predict coming shortages in energy and in many of the world's natural resources, and the declining value of the dollar in world markets makes us feel guilty, as if we were somehow partners in crime. The Government, with all good intentions, is attempt-

ing through legislation to provide an equal share of the good life for us all. Attempts on all sides are being made to develop an awareness of the need for sharing side by side, and at the same time not contaminating, the Earth's watering hole.

To help fulfill this need, the supplier needs to present the values in meaningful terms at the consumer level. This perhaps is a tall order. The marketer cannot influence or appeal to the large segment of the public with no interest or concern for these factors; and a large amount of consumer education is needed before presented data or facts become meaningful, even to those most interested. For instance, a Federal Trade Commission Survey has found that only two percent of people asked knew that energy and calories meant the same thing in food advertising. (Sulzberger, 1978).

Energy Concerns

Of all the energy consumption problems today, food energy is the most intimate one. The total food system in America consumes an estimated 17 percent of the total energy supply (OTA, 1978). Food is unique in that it both supplies us with energy and takes energy in its production. It is estimated that it takes the equivalent of 213,000 barrels of oil a day to meet the nitrogen fertilizer needs alone in the United States. (Bylinsky, 1975). For some foods the net energy equation is negative. More energy is required to produce some foods than the foods themselves provide.

We can start to examine this problem by looking at Figure II, in which some common foods and fuels are compared, using a common denominator of kilocalorie content, the dimension used by weight watchers. Under extreme circumstances some materials may be converted from fuels to foods and vice versa. (Pope, 1978)

The shopper concerned with growing shortages of energy will want to know whether his or her purchase is a responsible one from an energy standpoint. From data obtained on the production required for various foods, we can arrive at a tabulation similar to the one in Figure III. (Adopted from Cervinka, et al., 1974). Most of our processed foods return less energy than they consume. A glance at the table may help to explain why many countries concentrate on production of grains. They cannot afford the energy consumption luxury that we enjoy. Primitive man's survival depended upon the conditioned selection of high energy foods in relation to the procurement energy expended. The backwoods settler, with his horse and plow concentrated on crops whose energy he, his family and his horse, could use not only for survival, but for further production. When energy percent return gets to be known by the energy-concerned segment of the population, it becomes an automatic influence in the marketplace. In times of emergency, we may have to conserve our scarce fuel supplies by limiting our diet to those foods above 100% in the food/fuel balance.

FIGURE II

ENERGY COMPARISON OF FUELS AND FOODS
(In Kilocalories Per Pound)

FUELS		FOODS	
Hydrogen	15000	Peanut Butter	2700
Natural Gas	5900	Sugar	1750
Gasoline	5200	Corn	1670
Fuel Oil	4800	Rice	1650
Coal	3500	Wheat	1510
Alcohol	2900	Beans(Dried)	1540
Wood (Avg.)	1600	Beans(Green)	560
Electricity	1000	Potatoes	350
(Home equiv- alent per pound of coal at generator)		Grapes	300
		Apples	250
		Carrots	190
		Broccoli	145
		Lettuce	80

(Adapted from Thorup, 1978)

FIGURE III

ENERGY OUTPUT/INPUT FOR
COMMON NUTRITIONAL FOODS

Unprocessed Crops	Energy Return as % of Energy Spent	Net Balance
Barley	660%	↑ Products which yield more energy than production requires. +
Wheat	535	
Corn	325	
Rice	255	
Potatoes	212	
Apples	127	
Carrots	106	
Grapes	105	
Lettuce	34	↓ Products which yield less energy than production requires. -
Broccoli	25	
<u>Processed Foods</u>		
<u>Refined</u>		
Sugar	53	
<u>Dried</u>		
Almonds	76	
Prunes	70	
Walnuts	53	
<u>Canned</u>		
Green Beans	29	
Apples	27	
Tomatoes	17	
<u>Frozen</u>		
Green	32	
Broccoli	13	
Cauliflower	12	

(Adapted from Cervinka, et al., 1974)

Resource and Environmental Concerns

Because of affluence in America, we give less thought to waste disposal than other countries. It is generally cheaper to make the new than repair the old, and to throw away rather than recover or recycle. As natural resources are gradually depleted, however, the differential between extractive and recoverable elements begins to tip the other way. In the future, automobile graveyards may be "mined" or gleaned for the metal alloys they contain, and all trash and sewage will be recovered for its valuable source of materials and organisms rather than dissipated in dumps, rivers and seas.

Although the consumer may be concerned with the depletion of our natural resources, wasteful or not, the responsibility to act responsibly rests largely with the producer or supplier. We don't place blame for the killing of the fur-bearing harp seal "whitecoats" so much on the buyers as on the seal hunters. (Lavigne, 1976). Public conscience may condemn and eventually ban the practice. Economics is in direct conflict with humanitarian principles. The location of refineries in deep water harbors makes ideal sense logistically and economically, but tanker spill concern has placed environmental sanctions above economy benefits. Concern for the snail darter may increase our electricity and irrigation costs. The public must be willing to pay the extra product cost in order to reduce the risk of pollution and damage to wildlife.

In many cases we cannot see these values represented in product information since go-ahead plans have been aborted before the product or service came into being.

During World War II, tin cans were salvaged because of the need for steel and the coating metals. We also did without fats, sugar, and gasoline. The public willingly did this because of patriotic concern, although resource conservation was at the heart of it. The same concerns are alive today, but with an increased awareness. Almost all products and elements of production come under surveillance. Conservation today is voluntary, not mandated as in times of emergency. Therefore, conservation is marketable through product information. The company with the most efficient image has the advantage.

Delineation of Concerns

The matrix shown in Figure IV may help in delineating some areas of concern for the informed and socially aware consumer. Also included in the upper part of the matrix, are the information blocks of personal concern; those already being provided on labels and containers by most manufacturers. For many of the blocks, reliable yardsticks for measurement and comparison need to be developed.

FIGURE IV
MATRIX OF CONSUMER CONCERNS

	IN PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION	IN PREPARATION AND USE	IN DISPOSAL
VALUES IN PRODUCT CONTENT VALUES IN SOCIAL CONSCIENCE	Intrinsic nature of ingredients and elements of production.	Quality, durability, and consumable values such as nutrition, purity, etc.	Messiness, inconvenience and other problems in discard.
ENERGY FACTORS	Energy consumed during production, processing or fabrication, and transportation.	Energy consumption during preparation consumption or use. Use efficiency factors.	Energy savings in recycled components, or recovery thru incineration, burnables, etc.
RESOURCE FACTORS	The impact which the product has on scarce commodities or elements.	Degree to which its consumption depletes scarce materials.	Possibility for partial recovery or recycling after use.
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	Factory waste, pollution generation, salvaging of extractive elements.	Contaminants: Gasses given off; sprays, fluorides, poisons, etc.	Wrapper or product biodegradability. Dangers or hazards to society or environment in disposal.
ECONOMETRIC FACTORS	Percent U.S. made import restrictions, balance of trade, employment impact.	Degree to which its purchase or use aids the local economy.	Resale or scrap value, Restoration, Economic Reclaimable Values, etc.

If a matrix panel such as this were to be a part of the product package or label, with colors used to identify the areas of concern, the shopper interested in ecological impact, for instance, could identify this at glance. By comparison with the label of a competitor, a concerned choice could be made.

The individual shopper's own set of benefit trade-offs may become part of his or her selection process. "Production" pollution, for instance, may be less concern for a shopper

than "disposal" pollution, since there is little he can do about it. Other shoppers, however, may give more weight to other areas of concern. The choice is an individual one, just as shoppers already make purchase decisions on product characteristics, such as the washability of a fabric, or the nutrients in a food.

Such a matrix may present new problems, such as just how to identify and quantify the factors. It is not presented here as a complete and final solution.

It becomes evident that in some areas we don't have convenient yardsticks for measurement. The layman is not familiar with, or comfortable with, the terms used by the chemist, the biologist, the engineer, or the economist. Terms may have to be developed or modified. We have, however, become used to seeing calories, vitamins, and terms for nutritional elements, on food packages. The marketer has also educated the consumer to such things as preservatives and BHT, artificial sweeteners, and polyunsaturates as related to cholesterol. In light of this, it doesn't seem too much of a step to introduce the consumer to terms for balance of trade or magnitudes of pollution. Some simplification, however, may be in order. Since we are joining the metrics movement, some terms may evolve naturally.

Energy Dimensions on the Package

In the field of energy, the layman has always been confused. Calories in his food, BTU's in his furnace, horsepower in his car, and kilowatts for his refrigerator and TV set have always been a mystery. The terms are too hard to grasp. Conversion tables are necessary to translate equivalents. What is needed is a reference term that everyone can understand: one with every day "hands on" familiarity.

One possibility is the "cuppa" representing the energy necessary to prepare a cup of hot water for tea, coffee, hot soup, etc. The average size cup is the same in most countries, whether they have been using metric units or not, and the temperature change from the average faucet or tap, to the boiling point is the same heat or energy quantity, whether you use centigrade, celsius, or fahrenheit. Slight differences due to elevation above sea level can be adjusted for (as package information already does in cake mixes), or can be largely ignored, since it is a magnitude concept we are shooting for.

Canned vegetables, frozen food packages, etc., should show the preparation energy information (not the same as heating instructions) on the container and would be worked out by the processor based on water content, specific heat, and so forth. Preparation energy for frozen foods would generally show up higher since they are heated from a lower temperature and usually require some minutes of boiling for the contents to become tender. The frozen packages also require refrigeration energy per month in the store, or in the home freezer.

Of course, it is not only foods that we are talking about. Cold water detergents use less

energy than hot ones. Woolens, may be energy conserving in production (since they are not man-made fibers) and in washing (warm water rather than hot) as compared with many of the new synthetics. Paper cartons may use less energy source material than plastic ones.

Production energy consumption for both contents and container, should also be provided as part of label information. The proper energy costs are the responsibility of the manufacturer, to indicate on the appropriate blocks in the matrix.

Global Concerns

When it comes to our concerns as members of the world community, the consumer can sway the balance, depending upon his buying behavior.

What percentage of his purchases of products or product components come from foreign sources? It may be less expensive to buy Japanese tuna, but what is the effect on our own fishing industry? The purchase of a foreign car reduces the production tonnage of our steel mills, the output of our tire plants, and the activity of our assembly lines; and increases the unemployment in Youngstown, Akron and Detroit.

On the other hand, a favorable image might be generated by buying products having origin in third world nations. It makes for better world citizenship to buy chromium from the developing nations in Africa, and improve their economy in this fashion, than by paying out the same dollars in world relief. In countries with a high percentage of their GNP devoted to agriculture, their available energy supply for funneling into food processing and industrial development becomes a critical factor. Some underdeveloped countries, as well as countries like Turkey and Portugal, might fall in this category. (Coopers and Lybrand, 1973).

Without a more complete understanding of the effect that the consumers' purchases have in these areas, choices are governed only by the extent of personal knowledge. An uninformed shopper will most likely become a misguided one, or even an irresponsible one. Information given on the label matrix will help guide the shopper toward a more responsible decision.

Marketing Implications

Some major efforts will be required, including adjustments in thinking and cooperative persuasion for consumers, corporations, and institutions to evolve habitual buyer behavior patterns which are oriented toward concerned consumption.

At the production level, this requires a tactical approach in informing consumers, which will enhance both personal choice and ethical rationale. A cooperative posture must be developed which rises above placing blame for any social or ecological problem on either producer or consumer. Consumer enlightenment should be just that: evolved from unbiased

information. The manufacturer should not use package labels or matrix information on the container, as a sounding board for personal aggrandizement or generation of consumer guilt.

The consumer must be responsible for developing an unbiased method for product choice, and for his own factoring of the purchase, or consumption impacts. No supplier should attempt to do this for him.

The government's role must be to remain supportive of both producer and consumer in developing information disclosures and legal suasions which foster a progressive march toward responsible consumption patterns.

Summary

The consumer has largely viewed the dimensions of value in products as limited to intrinsic qualities, such as nutrition, performance, or economy. Extrinsic differences in source or origin, production techniques, and environmental impact, represent product dimensions with which the consumer is increasingly concerned. He wants not to pollute the environment, waste energy, or create an unfavorable global image. Information to aid the consumer in responding to these concerns makes for better informed, more responsible citizens.

It is time for marketers to add to the range of information given to prospective buyers, so that they can take account of social conscience factors in decision making. The package or label which has an easily grasped information matrix of concern factors is suggested as the ideal information medium.

Willingness to give information, not only enhances the potential saleability of a company's products, but increases the public image of the manufacturer. Corporate social responsiveness and responsibility is of growing public concern. (Ackerman and Bauer, 1978).

The company which makes the buyer feel comfortable in these areas is going to gain a significant advantage in the market-place.

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