Marketing’s Influence on the Food Culture of a Nation: As told through the Edmonds’ Cookery Book

Ann-Marie Kennedy
Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Abstract

Purpose – This article explores how marketing has influenced the food culture of a nation. Specifically the influences of aspects of marketing such as distribution, price, promotion and availability on the creation of food culture in New Zealand between 1880 and 1955 are considered.

Design/methodology/approach – An historical analysis is undertaken which looks at the influences of aspects of marketing such as distribution, price, promotion and availability on the creation of food culture in New Zealand between 1880 and 1955. As a cultural artifact used to produce and record cultural production, The Edmonds’ Cookery Book guides this historical piece. The Edmonds’ Cookery Book is the longest lasting cookbook in New Zealand and has been published since 1907 until the present day. A market penetration and promotional strategy the cookbook is a commentary on the diffusion of aspects of food culture in the country.

Findings – Distribution and price have been two major influences on New Zealand's food culture along with trends from the UK. Overall, what has been found in this study is interaction between marketing and food culture in New Zealand, with the Edmonds’ Cookery Book tending to be a follower rather than an instigator.

Research limitations/implications – Given the influence that marketing can have on the consumption practices of developing nations and obesity levels, a study of the interaction between marketing and food culture development adds to the historical marketing literature and has implications for macromarketers. Influential marketing promotions such as free cookbooks may place the responsibility for developing nations’ health in marketer’s hands. In these cases, healthy and sustainable foods should be emphasized in any such communications.

Author Biography

Ann-Marie Kennedy, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

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The Edmonds cookery book started life as Sure to rise cookery book in 1908 (a small giveaway booklet had been distributed by the company the previous year). The first edition was a 50-page pamphlet of recipes promoting Thomas John Edmonds’ baking powder and jellies through ‘economical everyday recipes and cooking hints’. The marketing ploy proved so successful that the second edition, in 1910, had a print run of 150,000. With its prominent slogan and beautiful gardens, the factory became a landmark and is depicted on the front of later editions of the Edmonds cookery book. Amidst much controversy, the factory was demolished in 1990. The following year the Christchurch City Council acquired a major portion of the original Edmonds’ factory garden. Influence (1903) declared that bad food found its way into homes because the housewife was untrained in identifying additives. On June 30, 1906, at the urging of President Theodore Roosevelt, the U.S. Congress passed the Pure Food and Drug Act, which launched an interstate watchdog on fraudulent, mislabeled goods. In 1958, the Food Additives Amendment banned such carcinogens as lead and halogenated compounds and required clearance of questionable additives, including binders, enzymes, gelatin thickeners, stabilizers, and texturizers. Early in 2001, a new product for identifying dangerous levels of lead set consumers’ minds at rest on the subject of toxic metals in food cans and water.