



## Internet Technologies as a Tool for Consumer Empowerment

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# INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES AS A TOOL FOR CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT

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**Abstract.** Consumers' mistrust of food brands, the health crisis we are facing nowadays, have deeply affected their assurance. This disastrous situation allows the consumer or the eater to find himself in front of a food universe in full mutation. As a result, his anxiety grows and he finds it harder to know what he is eating. And as [1] writes, "If we don't know what we eat, doesn't it become difficult to know not only what we are going to become, but also what we are ?". The purpose of this article is to clarify through a literature review a new consumption trend adopted by the consumer or the eater in the choice of his products. It is mainly the search for information about products that should be consumed before any purchase decision. This behavior has evolved with the information technologies where the consumer is surrounded by any kind of information he may need. Technology comes to assist him, to lighten up him, to complete the missing information and to give him back the power or rather, his empowerment, in other words technology comes to transform him from a passive actor to an autonomous active actor, actor of his consumption and his food... He has become a "consum-actor" [2] . This power perceived by technology, would transform the way, consumers or eaters choose their food.

## 1 Introduction

Today consumers have become suspicious. They feel ignored and tired of the practices of some food companies that do not dialogue with their consumers and do not tell the truth about some information that is essential to put their choice on any product. Their wish is to take into consideration their expectations, their priorities, their life choices.

Consumers' awareness of their food and their distrust of food products have led them to adopt an informative approach. It is the use of technologies to get information about the products they consume.

The massive use of the internet and web technologies by consumers, has given them quick access to all types of information previously held by brands while facilitating the comparison of supply alternatives and rethinking the way they choose their consumption. This would voluntarily promote their autonomy from producers and distributors, and improve their ability to control their purchasing process [3].

The objective of this paper is to discuss different conceptions about empowerment and the way the consumer could acquire it. This has led us to follow a method of documentary research in order to clearly understand how the consumer has taken the power or rather his empowerment through a set of visions proposed by different authors in literature review and empirical cases in the food sector.

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1.Consumer empowerment and empowerment according to different authors views in the literature

As confirmed by [4], the use of the Internet would promote the consumer's power of expertise by helping to reduce the asymmetry of information within the market relationship. It would also promote the power of the consumer's voice by allowing the dissemination of positive and/or negative opinions to as many people as possible [5]. And finally, these Internet technologies would provide a legitimate power to the customer by challenging the traditional distribution of roles within the market relationship [6] when the brand promotes the power to be involved in the product or service development process. This perceived power of internet technology has contributed to developments in consumer empowerment [3] .

As [7] says, there are two sources of empowerment that the consumer can acquire: the power transmitted by the company to its consumers through the delegation of power for some tasks and the power perceived by the technology that the consumer acquires through the new internet technologies.

For the first, it is the companies that delegate the power to their consumers to participate in some tasks initiated

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by the company itself (structural empowerment or empowerment strategy), as for the second it's the power perceived by the consumer through the new technologies of the Internet to participate in some tasks initiated voluntarily by himself (psychological empowerment). For the first type of empowerment as a process, for some researchers, customer empowerment, also called "delegation of power" [8] is a "top-down" relationship. With the rise of digital technology, some tasks have been conceded to the consumer, such as the choice of technical or aesthetic characteristics of the product, its design, its distribution method or its price. In this case empowerment is then similar to an authorization granted to the consumer to control certain mixed marketing variables.

The second type of empowerment as a psychological state of the consumer is defined by [9], as "a mental state generally accompanied by action that enables a consumer or group of consumers to assert their own choices and make decisions based on their needs, desires, and demands towards other individuals or organizations in the marketplace. It is a "bottom-up" relationship where the initiative comes from the consumer himself. It is a power voluntarily acquired by the consumer through the new technologies of the Internet [7].

## 2.2 From consumer awareness of his food consumption to empowerment

The consumer's awareness of his food and his mistrust towards food products have allowed him to use internet technologies to collect information about the products he consumes and to ensure their quality and reliability. This leads industrial companies to adopt a new trend, It's mainly about involving the consumer in the creation of his own product in collaboration with the brands. This operation is rooted in the new SDL approach [10] which considers the consumer as an active actor able to choose his consumed products in a market which is considered as spaces where companies, as well as customers deploy and integrate resources, which are the basis of the creation of values and which are inspired mainly by the resultant of the combined effect of operating resources activated by each of the stakeholders, the food company and the consumer [11] in order to co-create the value. This trend has emerged in the food sector in various cases including witnessed by the creation of spirulina while inviting consumers in the upstream process to create the product spirulina: It is through interactions with consumers in the development phase that this company benefits from the creativity of their consumers and take into account their expectations [12]. For this company, involving consumers requires an open strategy called "open innovation ". This is a type of upstream co-creation that requires a strong involvement of the consumer. Another type of strategy adopted by companies in the food sector is the delegation of power to the consumer to participate in the co-creation of healthy, ethical and responsible products, in particular

the consumer brand " **C'est qui le patron**" which empowers consumers to create their own brand through co-creation platforms. This operation is defined in marketing by the empowerment of the consumer, an exceptional case of co-creation where we distinguish mainly two types of empowerment strategies: empowerment to create and empowerment to select. Empowerment to create refers to the involvement of consumers in the development of new product concepts based on their potential for innovation [13] [14] [15]. It is about calling on consumers to propose ideas or designs for new products. Empowerment to select refers to the involvement of consumers to select the offer that will be marketed by the company. Then this operation is developed in several countries around the world and witnessed for the first time in Morocco by the launch of the consumer brand " **dyalna** "in 2020. With this initiative of the brand " **almaosatahlik** "Moroccan consumers will have the opportunity to create together the products they want, as they want, that is to say qualitative products, more fairer and more responsible. The analysis of the literature through the set of visions debated by the authors and the empirical cases in the food sector identifies two kinds of empowerment that the consumer can acquire. An empowerment perceived through a delegation of power to the consumer by the company through co-creation platforms to participate in the creation of its own product and an empowerment perceived voluntarily by the consumer through internet technologies to get information and its reliability to make a good choice and to be involved in its consumption process..

## 3 Conclusion:

The rise of consumers' responsibility towards what they eat and the change of their eating habits, for the benefit of their health and the environment, is due to the rise of the nutritional information offered by Internet technologies. This finding should reinforce the efforts of the food industry for a new approach of co-creation which manifests itself in the involvement of the consumer through digital platforms in the creation of his own product whose primary goal is to increase the transparency of their offers and strengthen the health positioning of their brands for this new consumer aware of his food and the close link between food and health; while involving them in the upstream of the value chain through one of the strategies of empowerment to create or empowerment to select or the combination between the two strategies through the opportunities offered by the Internet technologies.

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