

“The 2020 strategic marketing agenda”

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The 2020 strategic marketing agenda

Abstract

This article addresses the importance of having an agenda of research that is useful for industries, government and organizations. It departs from concepts that will be keen in the next 10 years, related to sustainability of business operations, and the importance of considering a company as a network of relationships and contracts. Then, a 10 topic list of research points is addressed in order to contribute to the community of researchers that will contribute to Marketing Studies. These points are empowerment, simplicity, technology, emerging consumers and markets, integration of economy, climate and environment, risk management and network value reengineering. In all these topics, a research agenda is designed, including sub-topics that will be useful to understand business and marketing.

Keywords: networks, sustainability, supply chains, marketing.

Introduction and objectives

This economic environment and growth challenge several companies operating on global markets. Competition gets tough and even with a larger market, companies have an extensive agenda since they operate in a global environment, where margins are getting smaller and management techniques are fundamental. It is also a new era of empowerment. Several countries like the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China), the MENA (Middle East and Northern Africa), Eastern Europe, Former Soviet Union countries have an incredible growth of importance in the world, and these emerging new consumers represent a large opportunity.

In marketing, also “simplicity” is the word for the new era. Companies should simplify market segments, give more attention to the cash generating products and have a very clear customer focus. Communications (advertisement and others) should be done under a deep understanding of their costs and impacts. There is no time anymore to media exposure without a clear understanding of the return in terms of value that a company is receiving from its investments.

In times of compressed margins and global competition, companies have to do a permanent “value reengineering”, which looks at product line with a lens of... how to capture more value? What could be reduced in terms of content, change of ingredients, packaging modification? When launching new products, companies should have a clear target, a message content easy to understand, and do research as much as possible to avoid risks of failure. There are no more margins today to keep on failing in launching new products. Existing products cannot afford anymore to keep on pushing money to support failure of new launches. But how to do this without information and knowledge?

It is a new era of understanding the behavior of consumers, and more than this, understanding that the consumer does not want to pay for inefficiencies over the supply chain and inefficiencies on companies

marketing activities. Consumers and business environment should become more studied and this knowledge should be available for marketing and strategies practices. The launch of this journal represents a major bridge to facilitate this knowledge and build a bridge with this emerging consumer.

The objective of this article is to raise a list of research topics, considered by the author as major ones for the next 10 years. Some important strategies for competition in the following years, considered as the “network era”, are applicable for companies operating on food markets and other markets with regard to an integrated supply chain and to offer a research agenda for the community that will be involved with Marketing Studies.

1. Method

The method used to offer this list of 10 topics is, in reality, a mix of methods. This list was done based on previous experience of the author, acquired in several international lectures, projects and interaction over the last 10 years of activities. Another method used was desk research and literature review in some topics, case studies done by the author to Harvard Business School and also several in-depth interviews with executives, conducted in projects of international investments (Bonoma, 1985; Yin, 1989; Eisenhardt, 1989; Woodside & Wilson, 2003; Voss et al., 2002).

Before coming to the central part of this article, the contribution on a 10-year research agenda, two major concepts that are central to this analysis, are raised: the need of sustainability (Section 2) and the need of an integrated view of the company, as a network (Section 3). These concepts are fundamental to establish the research agenda for 2020 (Section 4).

2. The 2010/2020 overall picture: an era of sustainability

Sustainability, previously defined as “responsible use of exhaustible energy resources and raw materials” has got a huge increase in awareness over the world. The facts for this arousal of awareness could be justified by the rise in expectations of consumers (more aware of problems), the emergence of the new generations more

worried with planet conditions (having a common sense to keep the planet), the scarcity of natural resources on the planet for all its population, global warming risks, bringing floods and hunger due to lost agricultural areas, and the impact of communications via Internet, which allows immediate knowledge of disasters, bad behavior of companies, excess pollution and others.

At a company level, there is a growing concern that they have to reduce impacts of their activities on the environment, they have to increase transparency (corporate social responsibility) to promote a better flow of information, to promote more inclusion and less social imbalance, and finally, to increase the company's usage of natural and renewable resources/energy.

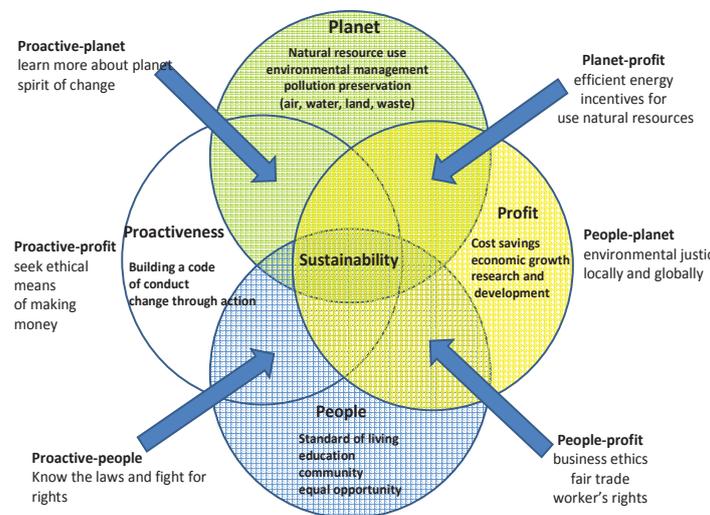
Sustainability has three traditional major pillars where it is needed to promote development: the economic dimension (profit), the environment dimension (planet) and the social dimension (people). A fourth "P" is being added: pro-activeness.

On the economic (*profit*) side, the major factors to be considered are how companies, networks and productive chains are dealing with margins, profit, compensation, losses on the chain, communication issue for final consumers, improving credit conditions with benefits to sustainable projects, risk management (knowledge of financial market and financial instruments), information technology (information access, reduce transaction costs) and overall strategies to reduce costs and achieve economic sustainability of the business. Without economic sustainability, any other request is impossible, since companies cannot pay for it, if they don't have margins. This is a first and important step. A company must be economically sustainable.

On the environment (*planet*) side, the major factors to be considered are the impact of the company on the environment, impact of the company's integrated suppliers, impact of transports (food miles), packaging (trying always to recycle/reuse/rebuilt – using new materials and less materials), waste management (generating less waste, separating and recycling, generating energy/fertilizers from waste), use of energy, emissions, water management (company view of usage, protecting water, management, and spreading best practices), more digital and less paper, reuse of materials, green and environmentally orientted buildings and facilities, carbon emissions/neutralization (carbon footprint), among others. Consumers also have an incredible task here, changing habits and having a more responsible consumption behavior.

On the social (*people*) side, the major factors to be considered are the working conditions for its employees, conditions also of the company's suppliers and distributors, the health and safety, usage of child labor, working climate, safety equipments, to promote actions for local community, to incentive cooperation, to have small holder friendly initiatives, try to do technology transfer for smallholders, improving local companies capacity and promote on the product line always benefits for consumers, being, for instance, more nutritional, more worried with health concerns and others.

Finally, a company must be *proactive*. Not only speak about sustainability, but to act. This involves building a code of conduct, to follow codes of industries associations, from Governments, to have awareness, to have a budget for sustainability, to initiate immediately steps to reduce environmental impacts, to monitor constantly the activities, to document, to have committees and boards and exchange of information and knowledge (see Figure 1).



Source: Author with contribution of J.G. Nogueira.

Fig. 1. 4 P's of sustainability

3. The fast changing consumer

Companies are nowadays facing important challenges that result from changes in the final consumer preferences. Here, just as an illustration example, are listed some changes in the desires of the food consumer, showing to companies some attributes that can be useful in the new products developing process and in their communication activities (messages for advertising, sales promotion). They will be pointed in a creative way, using the trends from A to Z.

Authenticity and ageing. Be authentic, recognizing mistakes with honesty and respecting the consumer (in recalls). Much additional care dedicated to the ageing consumer.

Beauty. Companies need to care about the appearance of the food, work hard at the sales place, and use beautiful packages, since more than 70% of the decisions are made at the point of sale.

Convenience and citizenship. Products need easy handling and practical packages. The distribution channels must be chosen for the fast and easy purchase and a need of social actions creating a closer contact with the local community.

Diversity. Consumers want a range of alternatives within the brand for each market segment, attract with colored, different, funny and mainly educative products.

Exotic and environment. Meals from different origins (countries, regions of the country) with exotic characteristics. This is linked to the desire of fun during the meals. There is also a valorization of the environment, creating opportunities for actions of sustainability, and products with stamp of environmental preservation.

Functional foods. Add to the products functional characteristics as weight reducers and energizers, and also medical characteristics, working together with medicine and health researchers. "The food will be the medicine".

Guarantee. Companies must honor the commitments with the consumer.

Harmony and healthy. Consumers want equilibrium of the communication, price, products and distribution channels actions of a company. Think in products with lower level of sugar or cholesterol and healthy products. There is an opportunity here for products of the fitness line.

Innovation and individualization. Intensify the launch of innovative products and ideas really representing new solutions. There is also a trend towards individual products, smaller packages, to consumers that live alone.

Jobs. Products that can generate jobs, with brands and stamps for small producers, or "job friendly product".

Labeling. There are several opportunities to label products, as a very important source of information.

Meal solution. Offer real solutions to final consumer's desires. The food-service is getting bigger. More and more people have gone out for dinner or fast-food.

Nostalgic. There is also a movement towards bringing back special moments from the past. We see an increase of old fashioned, or "retro" designed products and packages.

Organic. Products that refer to a clean environment or a controlled growth process have growing market.

Practical and price. Practical products for the day-to-day, with quick prepare and easy to use. Price is fundamental in the decision's moment.

Quality. It is a basic requisite to operate in any market. Consumers have information and the media is pressuring companies towards quality controls.

Reliable. The origins, the sources, the way of preparation have to be reliable in the consumer's mind.

Services. There are always opportunities to offer services to consumer that really add value for the company and the consumer.

Tradition and traceability. One company has to evaluate carefully the maintenance of its tradition in product line. Use arguments of age and time in the market transmitting trust. Register all products history, from the farm to the final consumer. Then, it's necessary to communicate this action mainly on clear packages for reading.

Uniformity. Consumer is not willing to accept variations in the product, mainly those which a company to be standardized.

Value proposition. Add value to the food, at the lowest cost, bringing the concept of "best value" of the category.

Xenophobia. Present in some countries, linked to the question of the valorization of the domestic jobs and domestic production.

Young. There is the forever young movement; some consumers want to be and to feel young, to live more, to live healthier.

World-wide. Explore the global food consumer that likes to recognize the food wherever in the planet he or she is, linked to the open and global communications platform.

Zzzzz - Speed. Company cannot be slow. Speed is fundamental. Search on web pages, copy if necessary, have new ideas, be alert to the new opportunities, be always ahead of competitors, surprise them and the consumers.

Companies could think: What opportunities do you see in the future? What arguments, within those listed, do you have? How to use those arguments in a very positive way? Does the consumer identify and value this argument in his or her buying decision process? Which of those arguments can be adapted? In summary, this list brings ideas, arguments, messages to enable companies offer products that have consequently more value and acceptance.

The company is an integrated network in the new era.

All companies must understand that they are not isolated anymore. They operate in a complex network, interacting with suppliers, buyers, consumers, competitors, Government and other agents. Companies are a bundle of contracts of all sorts, types and ages. The first step for an executive or an academic is to describe and draw this complex network on a piece of paper, and then expand it, so all employees of the company have an overview that they are not isolated and researchers can see several other interactions. What happens to the external environment affects the company, if something happens to a buyer or to a supplier, also the company is affected and we all must keep a radar paying attention to everything and trying to anticipate what could happen and how will our company be affected.

Marketing is more often seen as a facilitator for transactions that may occur between companies. Companies are more and more interdependent and related to each other, literally forming networks. Whenever a company is analyzed it needs to construct a network, to be used for research, or to work the segmentation, differentiation, product, price, distribution channels or communication.

Therefore, the theoretical model of the company network can be defined as the group of supplier and distributor companies for which the process is being made (focus company). As stated by Alderson and Halbert (1971), these companies perform traditional flows of products, services, communication, information, orders and payments necessary to connect the suppliers of raw materials used in the production to the final consumers of their products or products processed from the original products.

The concept of networks varies according to the amplitude of the “zoom” used. In this book, we work with a “zoom” approach of the analyzed company, in other words, the “network of that company”. In this sense it is the analysis process of a company and its group of suppliers and distributors, the existing relations between them and

the relation with the environment. It is in essence an interaction and relationship approach. This concept is used by the “Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP)” which is known as the IMP method or approach (Gemunden et al., 1997; Bridgewater and Egan, 2002; FORD, 1998; Hakansson and Snehota, 1998; Gadde Hakansson, 2001).

The advantages of looking at the company as a network:

- ◆ instead of seeing the selling company as the active party and the purchasing company as the reactive party, the network perspective views companies as belonging to a network of businesses made of a large number of active and heterogeneous companies that interact among themselves and seek solutions for their different problems;
- ◆ companies are interdependent for sales, purchases, information, technology development and to access other companies in the network;
- ◆ instead of seeing the company as holder of all resources, abilities and technologies necessary to select and develop its strategies, the network perspective infers that no company has all necessary resources, abilities and technologies, but depends on the interaction with suppliers, clients, distributors, partners and even competitors. Thus, the importance of collective actions and the understanding of the “network zoom” are important for the planning process.

The network of the analyzed company allows also to add facilitator companies, for example, freight forwarders, insurance companies, certification companies, warehousing, logistics operators and others – the interfaces with other networks, whether by obtaining raw materials or by-products, the inversion of the network (common in cases of recycling or returning via recall, that demand the participation of the distributors) and the impacts brought by the uncontrollable variables (political and legal/institutional, economic, social and cultural, and technological environments).

Furthermore, the presence of competitors placed in the company’s network also allows thinking about collective actions that companies can pursue in marketing (examples range from the participation in a sectorial association to creating an exportation joint venture between competitors). The design of a network of a focus company is shown in Figure 2.

In order to draw the company’s network and establish strategies, two support references, among others, consolidate important theoretical components for its coordination: the first component, the distribution channels, defined by Stern et al. (1996, p. 1) as: “a group of interdependent organizations involved in the process of making the product or service of the

company available for consumption or use"; and the second component, the company's supply chain, which is the opposite of the first component, in other words, the organizations involved in the supply of all materials the company needs to produce and sell. This way marketing considers the part that goes from the company to the market. Logically, aspects such as material quality, scarcity, supplier's brands and other aspects related to the company's supply chain have an enormous impact on its marketing, and need to be monitored closely. But also, other areas such as human resources, finance, production, administration have an impact on marketing.

The marketing variables are divided in product, communication, distribution and price, with the objective of making their understanding and planning easier. However, marketing actions must be totally integrated and coherent. Marketing errors happen precisely because of the lack of integration in these tools. It is common to have an exaggerated communication, not corresponding to the true attributes of the product, or lack of products at the point of sale while doing a specific advertisement, or even a sales force which is not prepared to offer a product with high technical specificity.

In the network illustrated in Figure 2, the role of the marketing professional is to manage the relation between the company and consumer market. There are other professionals in the company that, in conjunction and obeying marketing principles, work on supply chain management, in other words, in the part behind the company. Companies need to look permanently on its supply chain to try to reduce costs, buy from the best available sources, from all over the globe, and always try to find product or ingredient substitutes and test quality and adaptability to see if it fits. Another source of losses in the supply chain is dealing with inventories. There is a need of building safe and secure continuous supply chains, in order to try to minimize inventories and losses due to transport inefficiencies and redundancies, also reducing transaction costs. Companies need to think in rationalizing packaging costs and always search for alternatives. And always ask: how could this be done better? After the concepts and views of sustainability and company network approach, next section settles a possible 10 year research agenda that may be useful for academics and businesses and even contribute to a research agenda.

4. A 10 topic list for a 10 year research agenda

4.1. Empowerment. Within the next 10 years, companies, networks and productive chains will be

more valued by consumers if they perform inclusion of the base of the pyramid (smallholders), if they have social responsibility (working conditions and others) and also fair trade networks. Inclusion will be a topic of growing demand in the following years.

4.2. Integration of economy. With the more and more integrated economy, researchers should study more about the developing countries' supply chains, as alternatives for developed world consumers, and developing countries' marketing channels, to sell products for these emerging consumers in several countries.

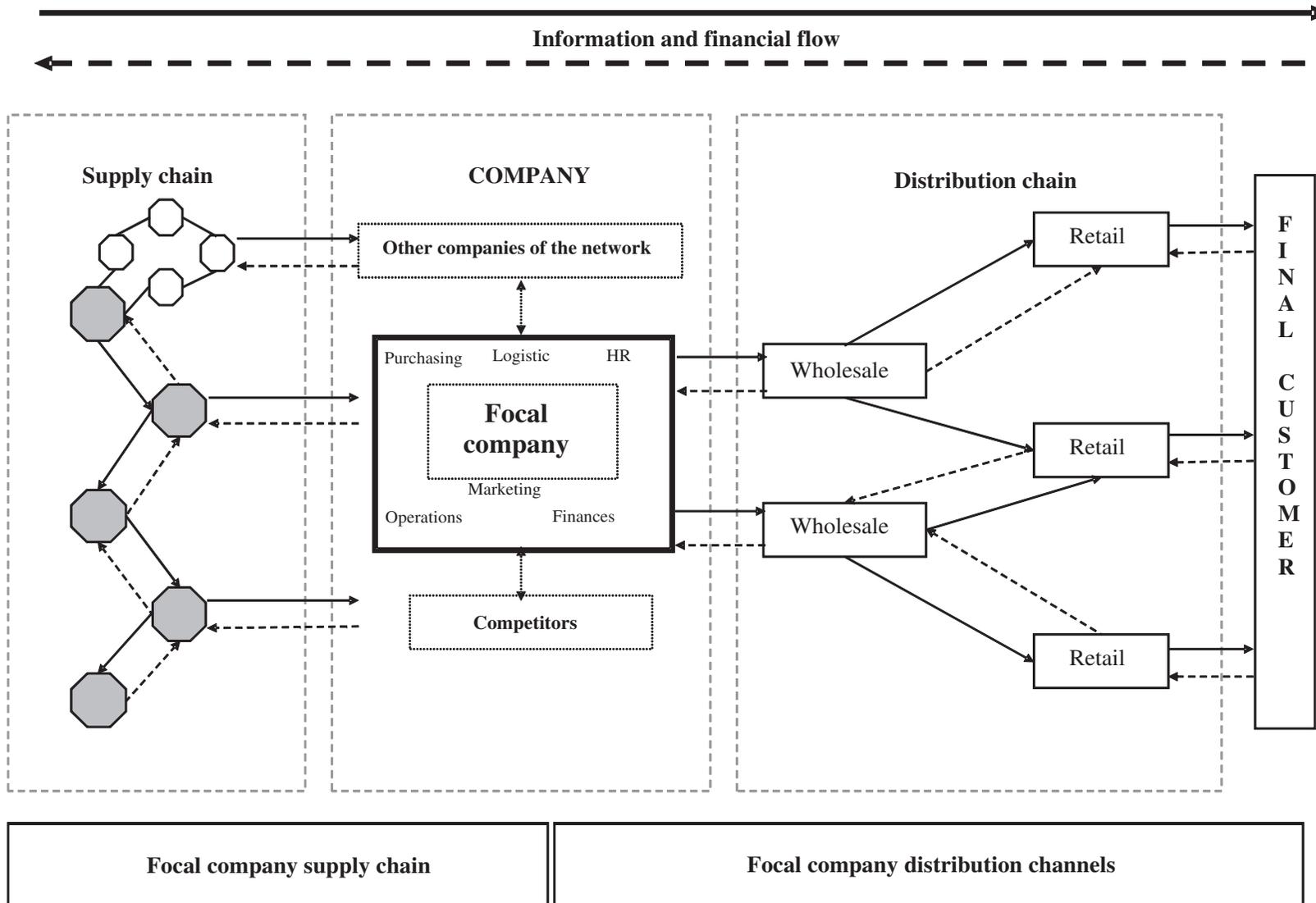
4.3. Income distribution. Due to a growth in income distribution in several nations, these emerging consumers should be more studied and know to do network positioning for these consumers. How to build also incentives for coordination (association/cooperatives) and the impacts of these new consumers on the planets capacity to produce (e.g., from grains to proteins).

4.4. Climate and environment (preservation). This topic was addressed in Section 3, but in the research agenda, the low carbon networks (carbon management), networks adaptation to climate change, renewable energy networks, certification, resource usage efficiency, network reversal (material reuse and recycling) and network integration for optimization of usage of by products will gain importance.

4.5. Technology. In this new era, consumers will value network transparency and information exchange and technology systems that will make possible the hi-tech, but also consumer "hi-touch" networks, that is companies really driven by consumers and communicating to consumers on a individual basis. Technology will allow the agenda of innovation driven networks.

4.6. Merge of industries. The next 10 years will be special in the merge of industries, like what happened with mobile phones that now are cameras, computers, watches and other activities. The world will see the growth of nutraceutical networks (food and pharmaceutical), nutricosmetics networks (food and cosmetics), nutrituristics networks (food and tourism business), nutricar networks (food and biofuels).

4.7. Risk management. An integrated network risk management and mitigation will be of fundamental importance in this connected world. Several risks are present in a global perspective, being financial, sustainability, just in time and others. An integrated management is fundamental.



Source: Elaborated from Neves (2003).

Fig. 1. Flow of products, services and marketing communication

4.8. Communication. This definitely is one of the areas that will suffer major changes, with the new media network communication, proactive network communication with stakeholders, associations of origin, communicating inclusion processes, traceability and other trends.

4.9. Era of simplicity. As pointed out at the beginning of this article, it is a new era where simplicity will be valued, in terms of the company network management, market segmentation, new product launching, brand management, services, customer focus, sales management, and others.

4.10. Network value engineering. Finally, it is an era of permanent look at the integrated network described in Section 4, promoting permanent supply chain redesign; marketing channels' value capture and customer intimacy.

Concluding remarks and managerial implications

The next 10 years will represent several challenges to companies and academics to address research. Companies will need to focus more again, to return to their core business, have a very efficient

use of capital and resources, and work even more on planning, collective actions and cost structure. Companies will also need to have a very close look to risk monitoring. It is an era of establishing global and more competitive supply chains and an area of strong value proposition for human talents in companies. Finally, it is an era of more conservative leverage and financing, and to take advantage of opportunities of consolidation, acquisition, mergers and other, like several opportunities for cheap asset acquisition in the world.

In the next 10 years, to face all these changes, academics will need to be more in touch with the real world, addressing topics and doing research that is useful for private companies, for Governments and for Organizations, with real impact. There is an outstanding opportunity to face these challenges and to be a portal of knowledge of these emerging consumers, giving real messages for Governments, for integrated company networks on how to address these markets, how to build up planning, strategies, how to do marketing, with the important view of sustainability.

Table 1. 10 major topics as research agenda for 2020

10 major topics	Research issues for managerial methods and networks
1. Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Chains & networks inclusion of the base of pyramid (smallholders) ◆ Chains & networks social responsibility (working conditions) ◆ Fair trade networks ◆ Margins allocation and distribution
2. Integration of economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Developing countries supply chains (trade barriers relief) ◆ Developing countries marketing channels
3. Income distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Emerging consumers and chains & networks positioning ◆ Building incentives for coordination (associations and cooperatives) ◆ Neo-consumption (volumes/grains to proteins)
4. Climate and environment (preservation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Low carbon networks ◆ Chains & networks adaptation to climate change ◆ Renewable energy networks ◆ Measurement and certification of chains & networks ◆ Chains & networks resource usage efficiency/optimization of usage of by-products ◆ Network reversal (re-use of materials or recyclable inputs)
5. Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Chains & networks transparency and information exchange ◆ Consumer "hi-touch" networks ◆ Innovation driven networks
6. Merge of industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Nutraceutical networks ◆ Nutricosmetic networks ◆ Nutritouristic networks ◆ Nutricar networks
7. Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Integrated chains & networks risk management and mitigation ◆ New markets risks (carbon foot print)
8. Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ New media chains & networks communication ◆ Proactive chains & networks communication with stakeholders ◆ Origin and processes (inclusion) ◆ Traceability
9. Era of simplicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Chains & networks management ◆ Market segmentation ◆ New product launching ◆ Customer focus
10. Network value engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Supply chain redesign ◆ Marketing channels value capture ◆ Collective actions in chains & networks

Source: Author.

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