

Europeans and Traditional Foods: Definition and Image from the Consumers' Perspective

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Abstract

This study provides a consumer-driven definition of traditional food products (TFP) and investigates the image European consumers have about this food product category. Data were collected from representative consumer samples in six European countries, including Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Poland and Spain, with a total sample size of 4,828 participants. European consumers define traditional foods as well-known products, products that one can eat very frequently, and products that were already eaten by grand-parents. Although positive, association of TFP with naturalness and low processing is less pronounced. Sensory, health and environment-related attribute perceptions contribute positively to the image of TFP, whereas perceived convenience, price, and availability contribute negatively to the TFP image. Finally, TFP are mainly pictured as foods that correspond well to people who love national or regional cuisine, people living in the countryside, equally so with men and women, though more so with families with children rather than singles or household without children. The empirical findings provide insights with particular relevance for TFP positioning, marketing communications around TFP and further development of the TFP market in Europe.

Aim of the study

- To obtain a consumer-driven definition of traditional food products. Such a definition should be multi-dimensional and applicable for the different countries, cultures and regions within Europe
- To gain insight in the image of traditional food as a food product category
- To obtain a profile of a traditional food products consumer

Result – Definition of TFP

A traditional food product is ...

a product frequently consumed or associated to specific celebrations and/or seasons, transmitted from one generation to another, made in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, that is distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated to a certain local area, region or country

- Multi-dimensional consensus definition
- Importance of the different dimensions varies upon
 - country
 - region/culture
 - personal characteristics

Result – Perceived profile of a TFP consumer

Personalities associated as “consumers of traditional food”

Personalities associated as “consumers of non-traditional food”

Old-fashioned people
 Housewife
 People loving national/regional cuisine
 People living in the countryside
 People who enjoy cooking
 Families with children

Convenience-oriented people
 Busy people
 Singles
 Frequent travellers



- Traditional way of life
 - stability rather than change
 - family role model
- High involvement with food
- Importance of locality



- Modern way of life
 - low time-availability
 - busy, hasty
 - no time for cooking
 - on the road

Method



Cross-sectional consumer study

- ✓ TRUEFOOD consumer data
- ✓ Self-administered web-based questionnaire
- ✓ Oct-Nov 2007
- ✓ TNS European Online Access Panel
- ✓ Six countries
- ✓ Representative for age, education, region
- ✓ n = 4,828 valid cases

Result – Image of traditional food products

Table 1. Results of stepwise regression. Positive (negative) signs correspond with significant positive (negative) regression coefficients; NS correspond with non-significant regression coefficients.

Product attribute	BELGIUM	FRANCE	ITALY	NORWAY	POLAND	SPAIN
Quality	+	+	+	+	+	+
Taste	+	ns	ns	+	ns	ns
Safety	+	ns	+	ns	+	+
Healthiness	ns	ns	ns	ns	+	ns
Supportive for local economy	ns	+	+	+	ns	ns
Nutritional value	+	ns	ns	+	ns	ns
Environmental friendliness	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Consistent quality	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	+
Special taste	+	ns	+	+	+	+
Appearance	ns	ns	ns	+	ns	ns
Availability	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Ease of preparation	-	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Assortment	+	+	ns	ns	ns	+
Time for preparation	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Low price	ns	-	ns	ns	ns	ns

- Traditional food has a general favourable image
- Image is most strongly influenced by a perceived positive quality of traditional food
- Country peculiarities dependent on traditional food typical for each of the countries

Conclusion

Overall, traditional foods can benefit from a very favourable image among European consumers. This favourable image is consistently related with the perception of TFP as being good quality and tasty products. Through focusing on six European countries with different culture and gastronomic heritage, this study managed to identify relevant cross-cultural differences in the perception of TFP, which entails valuable information in light of future traditional food product development, positioning, marketing and communication.