

Drivers of choice: What motivates consumer behaviour



09 December 2016

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A recent EUFIC qualitative study in five countries finds that food plays a much bigger role in consumers' lives than just to nourish and feed them. Food can mean wellness, for example enjoying one's food is often linked to comfort, relaxation and a positive attitude. It also shows that what people see as good for their health depends on their own perceptions, i.e. what makes them feel good, comforts them and leads to well-being.

In a nutshell, we find that the perception of food products can differ by country.

- The same product may be seen as more indulgence-related in one country and more health-related in another country.
- The same product may be viewed as a more simple or complex category in different countries.
- The same product may be used in different situations and fulfil different motives in different countries.

Yoghurt

For example, yoghurt invokes feelings of indulgence in one country but is seen as more health-related in other countries.

In the UK, yoghurt is linked to indulgence as well as health, due to low-calorie options that are perceived as helping people manage their weight. UK consumers link good tasting yoghurt products to health because taste ensures that the product is eaten. Yoghurt, in the mind of Italian consumers, is enjoyable to consume because of its creamy and thick texture as well as good taste. They therefore consider that it promotes moderate consumption and contributes to a healthy and balanced diet, which is ultimately linked to a healthy life. Italian consumers also quote product attributes such as naturalness or containing fruit ingredients as decisive for their food decisions. For French consumers, yoghurts are enjoyable to consume due to several product attributes such as good taste, fruit ingredients, and a creamy texture, but also by offering versatility and variety. Enjoyable consumption brings a positive attitude and provides comfort as well as relaxation which ultimately is linked to well-being. Yoghurts are also perceived as good for one's health, due to ingredients such as dairy and calcium, which helps consumers achieve a well-being state of mind.

So, what we see is that in the UK, consumers display a health-dominated theme which corresponds to the so called 'foods-as-nutrients' approach found in the literature, in relation to yoghurt. French consumers are mainly driven by enjoyment and they link an enjoyable consumption to a positive health outcome. This corresponds to a more holistic 'food-for-enjoyment' approach. Italian consumers display a combination of both themes: they strongly link enjoyable consumption to their health.

Biscuits

Consumer perceptions of biscuits have differing levels of complexity in different countries. In the UK, biscuits are a simple, indulgence-oriented product. In Italy, they are not only about indulgence (good taste), but they also fulfil a functional role as a suitable breakfast that provides energy. In addition, brand is seen as a driver that instils confidence in one's food choice and gives people a sense of responsibility. In contrast, in France, biscuits are mainly about indulgence as they remind French consumers of their childhood. Enjoying the food comforts and relaxes people, makes them happy, and they link it to overall well-being.

Additional select country results for different product categories:

- Sweet snacks are all about indulgence for both UK and French consumers. Good taste leads to an enjoyable consumption which creates happiness and satisfaction. Well-being as an overall state of mind was often mentioned as the ultimate desired value in France.
- Ready meals are an interesting category in the eyes of UK consumers. They are not only about indulgence but are also seen as convenient because their minimal preparation saves time which comforts and relaxes people, to a point that they link personal relaxation to their health. Consumers establish a direct link between convenience and health, due to the wellness aspect

(comfort and relaxation) created by saving time. Ready meals can further lead to happiness when consumers save money due to affordable prices.

- For Italian consumers, breakfast cereals are linked to health because of their ingredients, but they are also seen as contributing to a healthy and balanced diet and helping people with their weight management. Italian consumers are also driven by brands as they are perceived as ensuring a good quality product.

About this study

The results come from a qualitative study, carried out in the first half of 2016 that employs the laddering technique, to investigate how consumers make their food choices. The project studies drivers of food choice by means of in-depth interviews. In total, six different product categories were looked at: breakfast cereals, ready meals, yoghurts, sweet snacks, biscuits and cold drinks. The theoretical framework for this study is the Means-End Chain theory, which presupposes that consumers experience products in terms of their attributes (e.g. price, taste, value for money), the consequences they perceive from consuming the product (e.g. saves money, enjoyable consumption), and ultimately the personal values that these products help them realise (e.g. happiness, satisfaction, healthy life).