CUSTOMER VALUE PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS NEW FARMED FISH SPECIES: A EUROPEAN CONSUMER SEGMENTATION

Machiel Reinders[1]*, Athanasios Krystallis Krontalis[2], Luis Guerrero[3], and Marija Banovic[2]

[1] LEI, Wageningen University and Research Centre, P.O. Box 29703, 2502 LS The Hague, the Netherlands

[2] MAPP Center – School of Business and Social Sciences, Bartholins Allé 10, 8000 Aarhus C, Denmark

[3] IRTA, Finca Camps i Armet, 17121-Monells, Spain

* E-mail: machiel.reinders@wur.nl

Introduction

The objective of this work is to explore consumer value perceptions in the form of trade-offs between perceived gains (i.e. benefits or 'values') and perceived losses (i.e. sacrifices or 'costs') from the consumption of new farmed fish species in the top-5 fish markets in Europe (i.e. UK, Germany, Spain, France and Italy). The conceptual basis of this work is the Customer Value (CV) model, an inclusive conceptual framework whose individual parts are well-established and extensively covered in the marketing literature. The CV model was initially proposed by Papista and Krystallis (2012) in the frame of customer adoption of 'green' products. The model integrates Zeithaml's (1988) and Holbrook's (2006) views that value and cost perceptions drive purchase decisions. The overall sequence of effects in the model is that perceived Values and Costs formulate an overall CV perception about products (i.e. in the current context: the new species under consideration), which in turn affects the quality of the relationship (Relationship Quality, RQ) expected to develop between the product and the consumer. At the same time, perceived Values and Costs might impact directly on RQ.

The work further aims to explore the possibility that a number of psychographic constructs at start unrelated to the concept of Customer Value (i.e. category involvement, subjective knowledge, innovative proneness etc.) moderate CV perceptions and resulting RQ. For this purpose, selected psychographic constructs are tested as segmentation bases with the objective to define a number of cross-border consumer segments with a distinctive and clear-cut profile in terms of perceived CV towards the new fish species and a number of additional belief, behavioural and demographic characteristics. Drawing on the exploratory nature of the work, the hypothesis here is that the selected psychographic constructs have large discriminating power and can indeed constitute solid segmentation bases that lead to consumer segments with different configuration of their CV perceptions towards new products (i.e. new fish species). Verification of this hypothesis will be a strong indication of the moderating power of those constructs, which should be tested in future research with more robust statistical techniques.

Materials and methods

Within the above-described framework, an on-line consumer survey with N=500 consumers in each country (nationally representative samples) was conducted in July 2014 in the five study countries defined above (2.500 households in all). A measurement model is operationalized via a number of items which defined various CV components (i.e. types of perceived values and costs as postulated in past research, adapted to the context of the current study). In addition, the model included as dependent variable(s) measurements of behavioural outcomes explicitly (i.e. operationalized through a relevant construct) or implicitly (i.e. measured through the use of other attitudinal constructs like intention to buy, (stated) willingness to pay, or word-of-mouth), as well as (stated) behaviour. Finally, the survey questionnaire included five psychographic moderators, i.e., (i) involvement in the category; (ii) consumers' domain-specific innovativeness; (iii) subjective knowledge; (iv) optimistic bias, and (v) social representation of food, which were used as criteria in the segmentation analysis.

Results and discussion

Based on the consumer psychographic profiles, three distinct segments have been emerged across the study countries: the *involved traditional*, *involved innovators* and *ambiguous indifferent*. The most interesting segment that could be a target of marketing positioning strategies for new fish products and farmed fish production is the *involved innovators*. The *involved innovators* represent consumers who are very involved in and knowledgeable about fish products, but at the same time quite innovative, when it comes to new farmed fish species. They showed the highest perceived value and the lowest perceived costs in association with the new farmed fish species, as well as the highest expected outcomes in terms of satisfaction and trust. They were very open to new experiences with regard to fish products, but even more of new fish species, being highly aware of the environmental problem caused by overfishing and actually seeing the future in farmed fish production. On the other hand, even though the *involved traditional* are involved in and knowledgeable about the fish consumption, they see it more as a 'cost' that this consumption might bring, being wary of safety issues and efforts to attain the proper fish products. Thus, this segment is much more conservative and reserved regarding the new experiences in fish products in general. However, they hold the strongest positive beliefs regarding the farmed fish production, being also aware of its possibilities both in connection to the environment but also regarding the hedonic aspects of fish consumption. But, more than that, the *involved traditional* would prefer farmed fish to wild fish, as the former is better handled, safer and tastier than wild fish. Furthermore, not only do they see wild fish as endangered species, but also as living organisms which might suffer pollution, containing heavy metals and parasites. Hence, even though they are conservative towards new fish product ideas, they could also be a segment worth looking into due to its positive visions of farmed fish production.

Overall, the hypothesis that the selected psychographic constructs have large discriminating power and can indeed constitute solid segmentation bases that lead to consumer segments with different configuration of their CV perceptions towards new products (i.e. new fish species) is verified. Furthermore, the above-described cross-cultural segmentation analysis provides a better understanding of the existing consumer segments in the top-5 fish markets in Europe and opens new possibilities for efficient marketing of products from farmed fish species. The future of farmed fish consumption in Europe seems to be less dependent on geography and more dependent on consumer lifestyles and their psychographic profiles.

References

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