



## Consumer's purchasing intention for lamb meat affected by country of origin, feeding system and meat price: A conjoint study in Spain, France and United Kingdom

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### ABSTRACT

Food selection and consumption can be affected by different intrinsic and extrinsic cues. In this study, the effect of three extrinsic cues (country of origin, price and feeding system) on consumer's purchasing decisions making process for lamb meat in three European countries: Spain, France and United Kingdom was investigated, as well as the relative importance of each cue. Four countries were considered for evaluating the effect of the country of origin (local, Argentina, Switzerland and Uruguay), three feeding systems (grain-fed, grass-fed and grain + grass-fed) and different price levels (low, medium and high), which were simultaneously compared. Fifteen profiles combining the different levels for each of the factors considered where those obtained by means of an orthogonal design. These profiles were evaluated by 100, 99 and 92 consumers in Spain, France and United Kingdom, respectively. Moreover, consumers sensory evaluated lamb from four different feeding systems, grain-fed, grass-fed and two mixtures of grain and grass-fed. Conjoint analysis was carried out both for evaluating clusters of consumers in each country and for considering an overall evaluation of all the countries at the same time. In general, the origin of the meat was the most important factor in determining consumer's purchasing decisions making process, the local one being the most preferred. Uruguayan origin was the least preferred, which indicates that Uruguayan public and private sectors would need to enhance their country and meat image as well as support market promotion and penetration strategies in the European market. For some consumers the feeding system was the most important factor for choosing any particular meat amongst others, being grass-fed animal the most preferred. These results are not in agreement with the consumer's acceptability studies of lamb meat when taste the meat from different feeding systems in a blind condition (without information), showing a disconfirmation. Lamb meat price has a minor role in determining consumer's purchasing decisions. However, one segment of consumers, composed mainly by men, considered that the price is the most important factor. These findings showed the importance of studying consumer preferences and their segmentation for developing market promotions, which should have a holistic approach including extrinsic factors in the evaluation of consumer's purchasing decisions making process.

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### 1. Introduction

When consumers purchase meat, they receive different types of information that affect their choice prior to consumption. Some of these cues can be: price, country of origin, type of product, genetics, colour, marbling, production system, etc. The information that consumers consider more important in their selection of the

product depends on personal, situational and product characteristics (Verlegh & van Ittersum, 2001).

Among the different types of information that consumers receive, the country of origin of the product is an extrinsic cue that has usually a great influence in their purchase decision. This decision depends on the context of use of the product, the perceived risk, if the consumer is in charge of the shopping, and the level of perceived differences between origins (Filser, 1994). According to Obermiller and Spangenberg (1989) the country of origin effect has cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings or emotions) and

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normative (moral considerations) aspects, which have fuzzy borders and which are constantly interacting (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). The latter authors also found that the country of origin impact is higher for perceived quality than attitude and purchase likelihood. The country of origin effect depends, among other factors, on the type of product (Kaynak, Kucukemiroglu, & Hyder, 2000; Schnettler, Ruiz, Sepúlveda, & Sepúlveda, 2008), on the characteristics of the country of origin (economic development and culture similarities) and the social-demographic characteristics of the consumers (Juric & Worsley, 1998).

In some studies in which the effect of the country of origin of the meat and meat products was studied, consumers generally preferred local products (Iaccarino, Di Monaco, Mincione, Cavella, & Masi, 2006; Mesías, Escribano, Rodríguez de Ledesma, & Pulido, 2005; Schnettler et al., 2008). Chambers, Lobb, Butler, Harvey, and Bruce Traill (2007) found that national foods were preferred to imported ones due to the fact that consumers had the perception that they were fresher, tastier and with a higher quality. In addition some consumers think they should purchase local products and that the purchase of imported product is wrong for the domestic economy, morality, unpatriotism: they are ethnocentric (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Ethnocentrism is one of the most important normative aspects related to country of origin that can affect purchasing intentions.

The price of meat is another important extrinsic cue that can affect consumer purchase decision (Lange, Rousseau, & Issanchou, 1999; Lockshin, Jarvis, d'Hauteville, & Perrouy, 2006) especially when the product cannot be evaluated prior to purchase, as it happens with the meat. Although price is an important cue it is not the only factor that explains changes in meat consumption (Becker, Benner, & Glitsch, 2000; Issanchou, 1996), because other aspects, such as food safety and status of the meat may also affect consumption (Mannion, Cowan, & Gannon, 2000). Furthermore, the relationship between the price and eating quality is not clear; in some studies the eating quality of beef is very little affected by price (Becker et al., 2000) whilst in some others (Bello Acebrón & Calvo Dopico, 2000) price has a positive influence on expected quality. Schnettler, Vidal, Silva, Vallejos, and Sepúlveda (2009) found that in Chile price is not the most important factor that affects most of the consumers' beef purchase decision. According to these authors the most important factor is country of origin and in some cases also information about animal welfare, in particular animal treatment before slaughter are also considered. Agrawal and Kamakura (1999) also found that when country of origin and price were considered together, country of origin had no significant impact on price. In some cases the low price of meat (beef) was associated by consumers with low quality due to the fact that supermarkets offer discounts on beef closer to the use by date (Schnettler et al., 2008). Price was ranked fifth regarding perception of pork, beef and poultry attributes by consumers, behind quality, taste, free of hormones and healthy and ahead leanness, harmful substances, trustworthiness, tenderness, difficulty to prepare, safety, animal friendly, fitting with different dishes and type of consumption (daily or special) (Verbeke & Viaene, 1999).

The type of animal diet is an extrinsic cue that can affect consumers purchase decisions. The diet influences meat texture and flavour because it modifies the level of intramuscular fat and the fatty acid composition. Some studies have shown that meat from lambs fed on concentrate had higher intramuscular fat and was tenderer than those fed on pasture (Díaz et al., 2002; Priolo, Micol, Agabriel, Prache, & Dransfield, 2002; San Julián, Luzardo, Brito, & Montossi, 2007; Schönfeldt, Naudé, Bok, Van Heerden, & Sowden, 1993; Smith, Dutton, Hostetler, & Carpenter, 1976). Regarding the fatty acid composition of intramuscular fat of meat, lamb from grass-fed animals had higher  $\alpha$ -linolenic acid content than lamb from concentrate-fed animals (Aurousseau, Bauchart, Calichon,

Micol, & Priolo, 2004; Cañeque, De la Fuente, Díaz, & Álvarez, 2007) which is related in some studies with a more intense lamb flavour (Fisher et al., 2000; Sañudo et al., 1998, 2000) and in some others with a less intense lamb flavour (Borton, Loerch, Mc Clure, & Wulf, 2005; Priolo et al., 2002). Moreover pasture fed animals had higher skatole content (Young, Lane, Priolo, & Fraser, 2002) that can affect negatively meat flavour decreasing their acceptability by consumers as happens in pork (Font i Furnols, 2000; Matthews et al., 2000). From the consumer's point of view, the type of diet affects consumer acceptability of the lamb when they taste it (Font i Furnols et al., 2009). However there is very little information about the influence of this cue (lamb meat from animals fed on different diets) in the purchasing intention of consumers.

When consumers have to make a purchasing decision more than one factor will be used. Thus a methodology of analysis that allows an estimation of the importance of various attributes at the same time in the purchasing decision of the consumers could be very useful. In this sense, conjoint analysis could be a good methodology because it allows the study of the effects of various variables in the purchasing intention or selection decision but it can also help to explain the relative contribution of each variable in the global decision. Conjoint analysis is a common methodology of research in sensometrics and it is a practical tool because it allows answering cognitive problems in product research (Moskowitz & Silcher, 2006). The use of conjoint analysis implies the construction of different stimuli, constructed by the combination of various levels of various factors. Normally factors and levels used in conjoint analysis that try to cover the key characteristics that are used for consumers in a purchase situation, however it can also be applied to understand consumer perception/beliefs of different options even though some of them are not feasible. These stimuli were presented to the consumers, who were asked to rank them or rate them on a rating scale (Grunert, 1997). It has been widely applied in studies relative to meat (Bernabéu & Tendero, 2005; Mesías et al., 2005; Schnettler et al., 2009).

Usually consumer's attitudes, beliefs or purchase intention are not homogeneous. Consequently attributes of the different products do not have the same importance attached to them by different consumers (Verbeke & Viaene, 1999). In that case it is of interest to detect segments of consumers with similar preferences, purchase behaviours and other characteristics (Andrews & Currin, 2003) using backward approaches and, for that purpose, the clustering approach is very appropriate (Sahmer, Vigneau, & Qannari, 2006) because it allows finding out clusters with different opinions or preferences when purchasing. Segmentation is important to choose the most appropriate marketing strategies that better fit the interests of each segment (Naes, Kubberød, & Sivertsen, 2001) especially if segments can be characterised in terms of demographic characteristics (Andrews & Currin, 2003) or even quality label and perceptions (Sepúlveda, Maza & Mantecón, 2010). The importance of the segmentation of consumers has been proved in several studies (Carbonell, Izquierdo, Carbonell, & Costell, 2008; Font i Furnols et al., 2006; Naes et al., 2001; Oliver et al., 2006; Realini et al., 2009; Sepúlveda et al., 2010; Verbeke, Pérez-Cueto, de Barcellos, Krystallis, & Grunert, 2009).

Uruguay is a lamb producing country that exports a higher amount of lamb every year (around 15–20,000 Tm/year) according to Montossi et al. (2007). The European market is an important high value target for exporting lamb, and for that reason Uruguayan producers are interested in knowing the preferences of EU consumers and the relative importance of some extrinsic cues in their purchasing intention. In the present work, the purchase intentions of consumers regarding to lamb from different production systems were studied to evaluate other possibilities for the Uruguayan lamb in the EU market. Three extrinsic cues (country of origin, price and feeding system) were considered. The aim of

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