



Consumer perception of Karoo lamb as a product of origin and their consequent willingness to purchase

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 October 2010

Accepted 12 July 2011

Keywords:

Karoo lamb

Perceptions

Product of origin

Means-end chain

Association pattern technique (APT)

Willingness to purchase

Local food

ABSTRACT

Consumers are increasingly concerned to know where food comes from and how it is produced. Since South African lamb is usually produced on natural pastures and in arid areas, certain breeds have been specifically bred for arid areas, such as the Karoo region, renowned for its high quality lamb. Consumer's perceptions of Karoo lamb (bred in the Karoo region) and non-Karoo lamb (bred on other areas in South Africa) were studied using means-end chain theory, focusing on the association pattern technique (APT). The main aim of the study was to determine consumer's perceptions of Karoo lamb as a product of origin and furthermore to determine consumer's willingness to purchase product of origin. The motivational structures show perceived differences between Karoo and non-Karoo lamb consumers. Karoo lamb is preferred mainly due to its brand which signifies confidence in local produce, its taste and high quality. Non-Karoo lamb was seen as good value for money that satisfies the required values of consumers not interested in knowing the origin. Results suggest that consumers are willing to pay a premium for product of origin.

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1. Introduction

South Africa has abundance of resources that merit not only international recognition, but at a regional level too. There has been an increase in international protection of resources, but what about South Africa as a developing country? The Karoo has become known for its distinctive produce and has acquired a consequent reputation for it. The attributes of the Karoo region provide a certain commercial value or premium to products originating from the Karoo, as the name 'Karoo' has become synonymous with quality, tradition and wholesomeness (Bramely & Kirsten, 2007:70). The Karoo is renowned for its unique plants, which the animals feed off and are consequently, produced differently due to Karoo region and are known to have a unique and distinctive taste (Schonfeldt, 2007). In a study conducted by Schonfeldt and Vermeulen (2006) it was discovered that Karoo lamb has a definite flavour component that is very distinctive.

The fact that this acquired reputation may be scrutinised by others to benefit from the reputation warrants seeking protection. The issue of Geographic Indications has been around for many years, however, has only really been established in the wine industry within South Africa. Consequently, finding out whether a country or origin label is warranted within the food industry, particularly with regard to Karoo lamb is necessary, and, furthermore, will consumers be willing to pay for the security of a name?

The theory underlying consumer perception lies in the understanding of consumer behaviour. Gutman's means-end theory, established in 1982, is widely advocated for understanding linkages between values and consumer behaviour. Association Pattern Technique (APT) was developed in order to get a quantitative description of consumer's motivational structures (Feunekes & Den Hoed, 2001:1). This method was utilised to understand what makes consumers motivated to choose specific product, in particular Karoo lamb perceptions. Van Westendorp's price sensitivity technique was utilised to determine willingness to purchase.

The aim was to determine consumer's perception of Karoo lamb as a product of origin and furthermore their willingness to pay for origin status.

2. Materials and methods

Means-end chain theory, focusing on association pattern technique (APT) was utilised to understand consumers perceptions and determine the role that country of origin has on willingness to purchase, whereby Van Westendorp's price sensitivity technique was utilised.

2.1. Means-end chain

Gutman (1982) introduced the means-end chain (MEC) into the field of marketing and consumer research. He proposed the means-end chain as a way of explaining the relationship between consumer knowledge and consumer behaviour. MEC is therefore a cognitive

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structure that links consumer's knowledge of products to their knowledge of certain consequences and values connected with those products (Ter Hofstede, Audenaert, Steenkamp, & Wedel, 1998). In this theory, products are seen as means through which consumers obtain certain value ends. It recognises that consumers do not want products for their own sake, but for what the product can do for, and provide them (Feunekes & Den Hoed, 2001:1). Typically, means-end chains have been used to describe consumer's product and brand perceptions.

The conceptual model of MEC theory specifies that the consumers' subjective knowledge about product categories is stored in associative networks that are organised as means-end chains. The key constructs in these networks are attributes, consequences and values. Attributes are properties of a product that can be sensed, i.e. products that have a particular form, colour, smell, taste, sound etc. Benefits refer to what the product is perceived as doing for or providing to the consumer. Values are intangible, higher order outcomes or end-states of the consumer (Feunekes & Den Hoed, 2001:1).

Each of the key constructs may be split in two levels to allow a more detailed analysis of consumer knowledge structures; concrete and abstract attributes, functional and psychosocial consequences, and instrumental and terminal values, as is illustrated in Fig. 1 (Olson & Reynolds, 1983). Concrete attributes represent tangible, physical characteristics of the product, while abstract attributes represent intangible, subjective characteristics. Functional consequences are directly experienced, tangible outcomes of product use, while psychosocial consequences are more personal and less tangible outcomes. Instrumental values are the cognitive representations of preferred modes of conduct or behaviour. Terminal values represent preferred end-states of being (Peter & Olson, 1993). These constructs were utilised in determining the perceptions of consumers regarding Karoo lamb.

MEC theory suggests that product knowledge in consumers is hierarchically organised by level of abstraction. The higher the level of abstraction, the stronger and more direct the relationship with the person (Olson & Reynolds, 1983).

2.2. Association pattern technique (APT)

Association Pattern Technique (APT) is based on means-end theory (Feunekes & Den Hoed, 2001:1). APT is a quantitative data collection technique, in which a fixed format is used where links between attributes and consequences and links between consequences and values are measured separately (Ter Hofstede et al., 1998:38). This study, utilised means-end chain theory as the basis methodology, whereby APT was the main data collection method, measuring consumers perceptions at a higher level of abstraction, however, utilising the quantitative properties of APT.

Laddering is a common application used from the means-end theory and refers to an in-depth, one-on-one interviewing technique to understand how consumers translate the attributes of products into meaningful associations (Campomar, Veludo-de-Oliveira, & Ikeda, 2006:626). The laddering technique is utilised to gain insight into perceptions by holding one-on-one interviews that will explore the attributes, consequences and values of why consumers make certain purchasing decisions. APT is cheaper and faster than laddering, even though the laddering technique is the most popular means-end

theory collection method. However, it was found that laddering is very time-consuming, costly and requires highly trained interviewers. The results obtained from means-end chain and APT can be utilised to create a hierarchical value map (HVM) which is a graphic representation of the most frequently mentioned associations between categories of attributes, consequences and values (Nielsen, Bech-Larsen, & Grunert, 1998: 456; Reynolds & Gutman, 1998:11). Hierarchical Value Maps were utilised in order to understand reasons behind respondent's choices (Ares, Gimenez, & Gambaro, 2008:638). These maps were constructed from the data of the APT questionnaire. A Hierarchical Value Map (HVM) comprises of common sequences, stemming from the combination of individual ladders. As such the HVM consists of multiple means-end 'chains' based on multiple 'ladders' (Feunekes & Den Hoed, 2001:4). An HVM presents a graphical representation of a set of means-end chains which can be thought of as an aggregate cognitive structure map. An HVM consists of nodes and lines which connect these nodes. The nodes of the HVM represent the most important conceptual meanings (typically classified as attributes, consequences and values) derived from data collection and analysis. The line segments connecting these nodes represent the associations between these concepts.

2.3. Van Westendorp's technique – willingness to purchase

Knowing the price sensitivity by level of current and potential customers is crucial. Knowing the price sensitivity by level of product usage is a prerequisite to minimising the risks which occur when prices are changed (Draeger, 2000:21). Peter van Westendorp's Price Sensitivity Measurement Model (PSMM) consists of three parts. The first is the product description. Second, a price scale with at least 15 evenly spaced increments is given to respondents to use when they answer the questions. The final part of the PSMM consists of for simple questions about the price of the product or service. These four questions include (Draeger & Perham, 2000:19):

1. At what price on the scale would you consider the product or service to be expensive?
2. At what price on the scale would you consider the product or service to be cheap?
3. At what price would you consider the product or service to be so expensive that it is beyond you considering buying?
4. At what price do you consider the product or service to be so cheap that you would question the quality?

Upon completion of the questions, the analysis is done by graphing the cumulative percentage of respondents for each of the four questions (on the y axis) against the price scale shown to the respondents (x axis). The price that the market anticipates to pay for the product or service is determined where an equal proportion of respondents say the price is "cheap" and "expensive" (Draeger, 2000:21; Draeger & Perham, 2000: 19).

The objectives of this study include:

1. To establish consumer's behaviour in terms of identifying their perceptions of Karoo lamb.
2. To establish how and why product of origin influences consumer's perception of a product such as Karoo lamb.

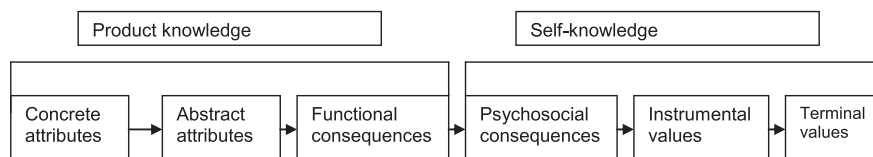


Fig. 1. Means-end chains connect product knowledge to self-knowledge.

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