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Research report

The role of appeals to tradition in origin food marketing. A survey among Polish consumers ☆

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ABSTRACT

The frequency of the use of tradition in marketing is growing. Appealing to tradition reflects the need to have reference points, trust and stability. The perceived authenticity of a product is strongly connected with its origin, which is expressed by the factors of time (history), place (area), socialisation (local community) and naturalness (raw materials). The paper aims to examine consumer attitudes, preferences and behaviours regarding origin food in Poland. We carried out a survey in a representative sample of 1000 Polish consumers. According to our respondents, the characteristics differentiating origin food from conventional food include links with tradition as well as sensory and health properties. Referring to the typology proposed by van der Meulen, traditionality and territoriality are the most important characteristics of origin food. The perceived authenticity of origin products depends to the largest extent on such factors as: natural taste, product quality, sale in the region of origin and labelling. The most important determinants of origin food selection include: traditional recipe, taste, and product uniqueness.

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Introduction

Consumers show an increasing interest in the quality of food. They often expect even more than higher dietary, health and hygiene standards from the products they buy. Affluent discerning buyers are increasingly looking for provenance, taste, and other product characteristics which are often attributed to the specific origin or production method. We may observe a 'quality turn' in the economy, from the 'industrial world', with its heavily standardised quality conventions and logic of mass commodity production, to the 'domestic world', where quality conventions embedded in trust, tradition and place support more differentiated, localised and environmentally friendly products and forms of economic organisation (Goodman, 2003).

Emphasising the regional origin of food products and traditional manufacturing methods becomes an increasingly attractive alternative to the model of mass and homogeneous production and consumption, which prevailed in the second half of the 20th century (Domański & Bryła, 2013). Tradition is used in marketing more and more often. For instance, the use of the term "tradition" in applications to register new brands in France grew from 10% in 1980 to 70% in 2000 (Amilien, Fort, & Ferras, 2007). Appealing to tradition reflects the need to have points of reference, trust and stability. It

is possible to copy all aspects of a food product, but it is impossible to change its history. The brands of regional food products are built on tradition, encompassing habits of manufacturing and consumption, and they are based on the localisation of production processes and the origin of raw materials. However, market success will occur only if the factor of tradition and localisation is highlighted by working out a high level of perceived authenticity of the shared brand.

Conventional food is the mainstream, mass production, characterised by lower prices and quality than origin food, usually subject to intensive distribution and standardised production processes. Origin food is available in fewer distribution channels, is often produced in the traditional manner and in a specific place, has a higher price and quality. Producer brands and private labels play a major role in the marketing of conventional food, while geographical indications and quality signs are crucial in origin food marketing.

Poland is an interesting setting for research on origin food marketing, because as the largest new member state of the European Union, it has recently undergone profound changes in the legal and institutional environment fostering value added in the agri-food industry. The system of protecting origin food products stems to the largest extent from European Union legislation. The introduction of European quality signs for regional and traditional food products constitutes a favourable ground for exploring their impact on consumer perceptions and behaviour. Moreover, the research on origin food marketing in Poland is scarce (unlike some more established markets, like France), so each attempt to improve our understanding of the subject is worthy.

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The previous research on origin food in Poland focused on consumer understanding of the traditional product category, a SWOT analysis and characteristics of consumers of such products (Borowska, 2007, 2008), consumer attitudes towards such food (Żakowska-Biemans & Kuc, 2009), the role of neophobia (Jeżewska-Zychowicz, 2009), origin food manufacturing (Domański & Bryła, 2013), and retailing (Bryła, 2014; Domański & Bryła, 2010, 219–222). This study is the first in Poland to determine what characteristics differentiate origin food from conventional food, to apply Meulen's framework in Poland to determine the most important characteristics of origin food, to rank the determinants of perceived authenticity of origin food and to establish the determinants of origin food selection in Poland. This paper will address these issues and present selected results of the author's empirical study in a representative sample of Polish consumers. Before we have a look at the Polish case study, we will paint a theoretical background and review the literature in order to better understand the research results.

Theoretical framework

Appeals to authenticity combined with nostalgia belong to promising marketing options. However, this authenticity is based on a reinterpretation of the past and allows a number of concessions, for instance regarding manufacturing methods. This is marketing based on looking to the past (the so-called *retromarketing*), but consisting in a skilful use of tradition and not necessarily its exact replication. For instance, the 'Tuscan Experience' represents new concepts of the idealised-self created through dietary renewal, lifestyle management, and rituals of imagined tradition and community (Chrzan, 2006). Tradition may even be invented (Boulianne, 2011). Certain consumers undertake 'pilgrimages' in their ritualistic quest to fully experience a food or cuisine in its 'authentic' and original cultural context (Long, 2006).

Authenticity is a social and commercial construct referring to the product personality (Becut, 2011). The perceived authenticity of a product is strongly related to its origin, which is expressed by the factors of time (history), place (area), socialisation (local community) and naturalness (raw materials) (Cova & Cova, 2002). Five sources of authenticity were distinguished in the typology developed by S. Camus. The product may appeal to: 1) an epoch ('archaeological' origin), 2) its inventor or creator (inspirational origin), 3) a place (spatial origin), 4) a culture (ritualised origin), 5) a technology (technical or technological origin) (Camus, 2002). J. Ferrandi proposed a scale to measure the nostalgic authenticity of a food product, which encompassed the following dimensions: 1) origin, 2) naturalness, 3) identity (link with the consumer's personality and style), 4) uniqueness (Ferrandi, 2012).

Although originally nostalgia was treated as a pathology (Hofer, 1688), it subsequently became a sociological phenomenon, which helps people keep their identity in critical moments and face major existential changes (Davis, 1979). Meanwhile, in psychology, nostalgia is considered a positive, social emotion connected with the self-concept and fulfilling important psychological functions. It is defined as a sentimental longing for one's own past (Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008). During the last quarter of the century, this notion attracted the interest of representatives of marketing in the context of unleashing nostalgic reactions in the process of product and brand management, advertising messages and music (Holak & Havlena, 1991, 1992; Holbrook, 1993; Holbrook & Schindler, 2004; Kessous & Roux, 2010; Stern, 1992). A nostalgic product is an expression of individual and family history and identity. Thus, it is linked to the origin (a group of people, area, manufacturing method), which confers significance and originality on it. Due to its sensory properties, a food product may play the role of catalyser

of emotions and facilitate the recall of past experiences, people, places and events, becoming a vector of nostalgia (Ferrandi, 2012).

Appeals to the factor of tradition may have a commercial dimension. It is even possible to use a term 'consuming heritage', and the area of origin may constitute an important element of a food product brand. Creating associations concerning authenticity may contribute to the construction of competitive advantage. It is necessary to create the image of a genuine, ancient and traditional product, whereas certain elements of the recipe may be modernised in order to meet current expectations of consumers, e.g. fewer calories (Tellström, Gustafsson, & Mossberg, 2006). According to Gąsiorowski and Swulińska-Katulka (2002), the culinary heritage encompasses food products and dishes characterised by specific quality features as well as traditional methods of manufacturing and preparation, which may date back to ancient history. This kind of products are usually produced in small scale, with the use of specific capabilities and technologies, and are related to a given geographical origin. The culinary heritage may become a factor of rural development. Poland has a potential to make use of its culinary heritage, but in order to achieve the expected economic and organisational results, it is necessary to undertake a number of activities, including: sensitising the society and decision-makers; valorisation of traditional and typically Polish products and dishes; help to develop high value-added food products; promoting best practices; disseminating information, knowledge and capabilities; creating a system of counselling; preparing producers to organise and edit applications to protect their products.

Tradition (as well as authenticity and regional food) is a social construction that involves interested actors and that can be a site of contestation and conflict. On the basis of an international quality study, the following definition of traditional food products was proposed. They are often consumed or associated with particular holidays and/or year seasons, transferred from one generation to another, manufactured in a specific way in accordance with the culinary heritage, processed in a limited manner, distinguished and recognised due to their sensory properties and related to a particular local territory, region or country (Guerrero et al., 2009).

It is crucial to establish which aspects of the origin product determine its credibility. van der Meulen (2007) distinguished five dimensions: territoriality, typicity, traditionality, communality, and landscapeability, which will be subject to our empirical verification. Territoriality is defined as the ecological and cultural relationships that a food system has with its territorial context (Sonnino, 2007, 63). It may be applied to the regional or local level.

In France, there is a specific term *terroir*, which serves to designate the local origin of food products. Appealing to the *terroir* enhances perceived quality and constitutes a factor of differentiation and a source of value added. An exploratory study showed that it was a cognitive category, possible to be characterised with the use of three dimensions: 1) capabilities, including know-how, recipe, and tradition; 2) time and culture, which encompass history and rituals; 3) origin, including the territory, region, and land. A study of relationships among these dimensions and their constituent parts indicated the highest significance of the dimension called 'time and culture', which is directly related to consumers' nostalgia. The research took into consideration such aspects as: proximity (with the region, product and producer), image of the production system, place of purchase, look of the product (including the type of packaging, brand, quality sign), image of the region of origin of the product, taste, and typicity. The respondents believed that local products are determined by: 1) know-how, 2) tradition, 3) region, 4) recipe (the sequence stemming from the quoted research) (Aurier, Fort, & Sirieix, 2005). Therefore, the factor of tradition is critical in the process of defining regional and local food products.

Traditional food products (TFPs) are an important part of European culture, identity, and heritage, contributing to the development

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