



How young people in Finland respond to information about the origin of food products: The role of value orientations and product type



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the effect of personal values and product type in an experimental study/survey concerning food origins. Two studies were conducted among young consumers (N = 1491) using three different types of products (vegetables, bread, and meat) and an experimental design where information about the food origin varied (neutral, domestic, local). The origin of the food had a positive effect on the product experience and food choices. Value orientations had an effect on the product experience and the likelihood of choosing the product, and this effect was dependent on the product type. More specifically, a Self-Transcendence orientation was positively associated with the product experience in the context of vegetables and a Conservation orientation was positively associated with the product experience in the context of meat, however, the value orientations showed no effect in the context of bread. Individuals regarding Self-Transcendence as important, especially valued a local origin in the context of vegetables and meat. The findings regarding a Conservation orientation were less consistent. These findings indicate that knowing the origin adds some value to the product for young people. Even if the product is not necessarily in line with an individual's values, the origin may in fact exceed the effect of the product type. The study provides further knowledge about the underlying factors explaining consumer choices on a personal level, especially when extrinsic information cues about food origin are available.

1. Introduction

The perceived quality of food and the determinants of food choice are very complicated phenomena (Cardello, 1995). A great deal of the experienced quality is induced by the physical product properties experienced through our senses (Hoppert, Mai, Zahn, Hoffmann, & Rohm, 2012). In addition to the physical properties, the perception of food is also based on the expectations placed on the product in relation to the contextual information (Gutjar, Graaf, Palascha, & Jager, 2014; Grunert, 2005). Some extrinsic cues (such as labelling) raise expectations and thus have an effect on the experienced quality (Deliza & MacFie, 1996), and some expectations may also be formed via personal attitudes and values. If the expectations are not fully met, the consumer may adjust his/her perception of such expectations via a mechanism called assimilation (Deliza & MacFie, 1996). All information has the potential to raise expectations, but not all consumers react similarly to the same cues (Piqueras-Fiszman & Spence, 2015). Some individuals may be indifferent to the information while for others it may modify the experienced quality and their decision making (Köster, 2009). People

have different types of beliefs, attitudes, and values that modify their expectations. Even though attitudes and intentions cannot fully explain consumers' behavior, they are strongly correlated (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). A more thorough study is needed to understand the underlying qualities behind individual preferences.

1.1. The origin of food

There have been numerous food scandals during the last few years; the most recent being tainted meat from Brazil, which raised demands for more familiar supply chains as those from domestic or local markets. Consumers often place more positive expectations on the product when the production site is closer to the place of consumption (Iaccarino, Di Monaco, Mincione, Cavella, & Masi, 2006). Food origin may have an effect on the perceived quality and it has the potential to produce a positive perception among consumers (Stefani, Romano, & Cavicchi, 2006). Domestic and local foods are typically trusted as opposed to those with unknown or global origins (Lobb & Mazzocchi, 2007; O'Hara & Stagl, 2001). Foreign food products are often perceived as inferior to

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domestic products and those locally produced are considered better than domestic products (Stefani et al., 2006). Fairness, tradition, freshness, safety, better quality, ethical production, and environmental friendliness are properties that are attached to local products (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Campbell, DiPietro, & Remar, 2014; Motta & Sharma 2016; Lusk & Briggeman, 2009). Consumers, in many cases, are willing to pay premium prices for local or domestic produce (Carpio & Isengildina-Massa, 2009; Seppä, Latvala, Akaichi, Gil, & Tuorila, 2015).

Due to the various properties attached to local produce, different kinds of preferences such as pro-environmental opinions may predict the experienced quality of local products (Cosmina, Gallenti, Marangon, & Troiano, 2016). Some people consider domestic and local origins to be superior in comparison to foreign origins, whereas others may be completely indifferent to the information on food origin (Schnettler, Ruiz, Sepúlveda, & Sepúlveda, 2008; Campbell et al. 2014). In fact, there seem to be considerable differences between consumer groups in relation to the origin of a product. Moreover, gender, age, and product type also seem to have an effect on preferences (Carpio & Isengildina-Massa, 2009; Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2013). In many cases, the origin can be a symbol of quality which will create trust towards the product (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). The expected quality of a product with a known origin may be largely based on trust, and not necessarily based on actual knowledge about the product’s properties.

1.2. Personal values

Values can be defined as desirable goals that motivate actions and serve as guiding principles in our lives (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). They are an abstract concept modifying attitudes and setting the criteria for decision making. Even if there are cultural differences in relation to values, the hierarchical order of values is very similar across cultures (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001). According to Schwartz (2006) for example, socioeconomic, political, and demographic factors induce variation on cultural value dimensions at a national level. The ten basic values (Table 1) are connected to each other forming a circular structure with two dimensions (Fig. 1) (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). The opposite values are in conflict and the adjacent are the most compatible. The first dimension describes the contrast between Conservation and Openness to change. People giving high importance to Conservation are keen on maintaining the status quo and resist change (tradition, security, conformity) and the opposing group is prepared for new experiences and actions. The second dimension represents Self-Transcendence versus Self-Enhancement. Individuals with high Self-Transcendence are concerned with the welfare of other people and those with high Self-Enhancement are more concerned with personal interests, even at the expense of others (Verkasalo, Lönnqvist, Lipsanen, & Helkama, 2009). The Schwartz’s model is used to explain behavior in

Table 1
Description of ten basic values (Sagiv & Schwarz, 1995).

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Benevolence | <i>Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the ‘in-group’).</i> |
| Conformity | <i>Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.</i> |
| Tradition | <i>Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide the self.</i> |
| Security | <i>Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.</i> |
| Power | <i>Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.</i> |
| Achievement | <i>Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.</i> |
| Hedonism | <i>Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself.</i> |
| Stimulation | <i>Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.</i> |
| Self-Direction | <i>Independent thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring.</i> |
| Universalism | <i>Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.</i> |

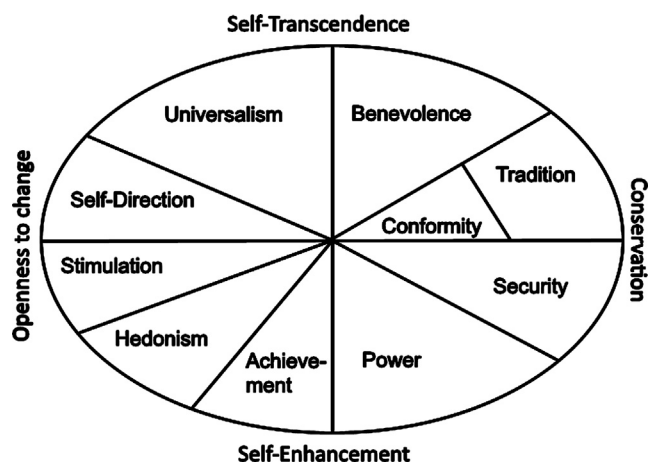


Fig. 1. Schwartz’s theoretical model of relations among motivational types of values.

food contexts from several aspects such as food-related lifestyles (Brunso, Scholderer, & Grunert, 2004), convenience food consumption (Botonaki & Mattas, 2010) and attitudes towards genetically modified and organic foods (Saher, Lindeman, & Hursti, 2006). The same framework has been used extensively in various disciplines varying from voting (Schwartz, Caprara, & Vecchione, 2010) to internet use (Bagchi, Udo, Kirs, & Choden, 2015) and commitment in the workplace (Cohen, 2009). Schwartz’s values also show a significant overlap with personality (Anglim, Knowles, Dunlop, & Marty, 2017). Due to the universal nature, the numerous applications and the previous research, Schwartz’s model was chosen to measure the personal values among respondents.

Individuals may hold several important values concurrently, which may complicate decision making (Dreezens, Martijn, Tenbült, Kok, & De Vries, 2005a). Because of this, it may not be relevant to examine the role of individual values, but the holistic value system of an individual person (Schwartz, 1992).

1.3. Value-based food choices

Our personal values significantly affect the everyday choices we make. They are reflected in the decisions and evaluations we have to make to cope with our routine everyday tasks such as grocery shopping and parenting. In western societies, there is no shortage of food supply and individuals may examine choices from a holistic perspective. In addition to the actual physical properties of food, personal sets of values will also modify decision-making. It may be difficult to differentiate a product from a wide selection possessing similar qualities without any information. When a product is accompanied with additional information, it has the potential to raise expectations towards the product. Not all information will raise positive expectations, positive expectations are based on the trust which is initiated by the information. (Migliore, Schifani, & Cembalo, 2015). The origin of the food and especially locally produced food is associated with other qualities such as fairness, environmental friendliness, and ethical production. If these factors are in line with the personal values of the consumer, it may be the decisive factor determining consumption or purchase. For example, a study conducted by O’Connor, Sims, & White (2017) showed that people who buy Fair Trade products do so because it makes them feel good and reflects their values; this differs significantly from the opposing group who do not buy them.

Several previous studies have found evidence that in the adult population values may have a role as an explanatory factor in attitudes towards food. People with different set of values place different emphases on their choices. These groups react to different cues in very diverse ways, because the reward from a ‘right’ action differs significantly between individuals. For instance, for the group with pro-

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