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Perceived Product Value as a Determinant of the Purchase of Traditional Food Products

Postrzegana wartość produktu jako determinanta zakupu tradycyjnych produktów żywnościowych

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The article identifies the key determinants of the value of traditional food products and the factors involved in consumers' decisions to purchase them.

Research Design & Methods: Marketing research was conducted via indirect interviews with the use of an Internet questionnaire (CAWI). The research population ($N = 294$) consisted of people aged 18–30 who purchase and consume traditional products from various categories.

Findings: The results of the research showed that the perceived value of traditional food products is the sum of the values offered to buyers. The values include: identity value, economic value, functional value, informative value.

Implications/Recommendations: It was found that traditional food products are both a carrier and a provider of value. Food producers should know their customers' expectations, particularly as real value is brought by loyal buyers, i.e. those who are satisfied with the cooperation and repeat purchases of the product.

Contribution: The research adds to the knowledge base on young consumers' perception of product value as a determinant of the decision to purchase traditional food products.

Article type: original article.

Keywords: perceived value of the product, purchase decision, consumer perception, behaviour, product attributes.

JEL Classification: D12, D19, D91, O39.

STRESZCZENIE

Cel: Celem artykułu była identyfikacja kluczowych wyznaczników wartości tradycyjnych produktów żywnościowych, które determinują ich nabywanie przez konsumentów.

Metodyka badań: Aby osiągnąć cel badań, przeprowadzono badanie marketingowe techniką wywiadów pośrednich z wykorzystaniem kwestionariusza ankiety internetowej (CAWI). Populację badawczą ($N = 294$) stanowiły osoby w wieku 18–30 lat, deklarujące dokonywanie zakupu i spożywanie produktów tradycyjnych z różnych kategorii.

Wyniki badań: Wyniki badań wykazały, że postrzegana wartość tradycyjnych produktów żywnościowych jest sumą użyteczności oferowanych nabywcom, na którą składają się: wartość identyfikacyjna, wartość ekonomiczna, wartość funkcjonalna oraz wartość informacyjna.

Wnioski: Na podstawie wyników przeprowadzonych badań stwierdzono, że tradycyjne produkty żywnościowe są zarówno nośnikiem, jak i dostarczycielem wartości. Producenci żywności powinni znać oczekiwania swoich klientów, ponieważ rzeczywistą wartość przynoszą nabywcy lojalni, czyli klienci usatysfakcjonowani ze współpracy i powtarzający zakup produktu.

Wkład w rozwój dyscypliny: Przeprowadzone badania wzbogacają wiedzę na temat postrzeganej wartości produktu jako determinanty zakupu tradycyjnych produktów żywnościowych.

Typ artykułu: oryginalny artykuł naukowy.

Słowa kluczowe: postrzegana wartość produktu, decyzje nabywcze, percepcja konsumenta, zachowanie, atrybuty produktu.

1. Introduction

The contemporary consumer is characterised by multiculturalism. This is manifested by a tendency to follow global trends, on the one hand, and striving to maintain a regional, cultural identity on the other. That identity is manifested by an increased interest in traditional food. The legally binding definition of traditional food at the European level was adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in Regulation No. 1151/2012 indicating products “documented as being used on the domestic market for a period that enables their transmission from generation to generation; this period shall be at least 30 years”. The quality and identity of traditional products reflect the relationship between the specificity of the place of production (i.e. origin) and the inhabitants of that region. The production

of traditional food is the result of many years of effort exerted by producers located in a specific area, who care about the quality of these products, and also pass this knowledge on to consumers (Silvestri *et al.* 2020).

Traditional food products must contain traditional ingredients and be processed in a traditional way following a traditional recipe. Many consumers perceive these products as linked to both territory and tradition, as well as being of high-quality, pure and naturally processed (Salgado & Camarena 2022, Fernández-Ferrín *et al.* 2018). Traditional food products are sought after by informed consumers who, in response to information about dubious food quality and the functioning of the so-called “mass-produced foods”, look for traditional, unique products that come from ecologically clean regions or are produced locally. It can therefore be concluded that traditional food products are characterised by both historical and geographic dimensions. Consumption of this food category is seen to represent a higher quality of life. If consumers are aware of the benefits of these products, they are more likely to pay higher prices for the benefits they promise. The perceived value of high-quality food is strongly tied to the consumer’s willingness to pay a certain price (Medeiros, Ribeiro & Cortimiglia 2016). Despite consumer interest in food quality, environmental protection and healthcare, the market share of traditional products is small. This suggests that environmental and traditional aspects of manufacturing still play a minor role in purchasing decisions.

A product’s value as perceived by consumers is often defined as the overall assessment of its usefulness, based on the perception of what the consumer receives and what the product gives (Nguyen *et al.* 2015). The authors’ (Nguyen *et al.* 2015) deliberations do not include food products, and there is still no consensus in the literature on an unambiguous interpretation of this concept. To date, little information is available on the perceived value of different categories of food products by buyers. Published research has focused mainly on identifying specific types of value for customers – including functional, emotional, social, conditional and economic values. The value delivered to the consumer is the difference between the total value of the product and the cost that the buyer must incur in acquiring that product (Ratajczyk 2009). This approach assumes that the value of a product for the consumer is the sum of the benefits they expect from a given product, i.e. the product’s ability to satisfy one’s individual needs. Thus, it is a compromise between the benefits the buyer receives and the costs they incur. The costs of obtaining a product, borne by the buyer, include financial costs, as well as behavioural costs related to the purchase (e.g. effort and time spent on obtaining information about the product or reaching the point of sale) (Ostrowska 2010).

The price of the product, as a market parameter, determines the exchange value of the product, so it is a measure of economic size, not value in itself (Kozłowski & Rutkowska 2021). In economic theory, the use-value of a good determines the

consumer's subjective satisfaction with consuming it. It is therefore the overall value that buyers perceive in the purchasing process. Nevertheless, some researchers argue that the identification of perceived value as a one-dimensional construct is too narrow, so they develop multi-value structures or models that help to better understand consumer choices (Kotler & Keller 2009). Bearing in mind the diversity of definitions of value for the customer, it is worth turning to Kaplan and Norton (2001), who presented three basic categories that make up value for the customer: product attributes (functionality, price, quality, time spent on purchasing); image and reputation (the value that the customer subjectively assigns to the product, which goes beyond its objective value); relations with customers (subjective feelings of the customer and his emotional relationship with the company).

In summary, the value a given product has for the buyer is mainly based on the individual's expectations regarding the benefits obtained from the possession or use of the given product. No product has the same value in itself, but it is bestowed by an individual who functions in a specific social reality (Kozłowski & Rutkowska 2021). The marketing approach to creating the value of a product offered to customers on the market assumes that when choosing a product, the consumer chooses the one that presents the greatest benefit for him. At the same time, the greater the benefit of the product to the consumer, the greater the value of the product will be for the enterprise (Ratajczyk 2009). It is therefore crucial for the company to understand the customer's needs and identify what will be of value for him. The development of effective and efficient strategies to create value for the customer is widely recognised as a source of competitive advantage for companies (Nguyen *et al.* 2015).

In this study, an original approach to the value of traditional food products was adopted. Such products were considered to be both a carrier and supplier of value. This division is based on the assumption of the product's impact on market participants (value carrier) and product consumption (value delivery). Knowledge of the values that buyers want for traditional food products is important for producers of this category of food because creating the value that consumers want affects their satisfaction and loyalty. On the other hand, effective value management requires the identification and concentration of the key factors that shape this value. Bearing in mind the above considerations, the aim of the article was to present the results of the authors' own research on the identification of key determinants of the value of traditional food products that determine their purchase by consumers (in this case, "young adult" consumers).

To achieve the main goal, two detailed research goals were defined: first, to identify information influencing the decision to purchase traditional food; and second, to identify key determinants of the value of traditional food products.

The paper is structured as follows: the first part includes an overview of the recent literature on the value of a product perceived by consumers. The research method and the results of the empirical studies are then presented. The final section provides concluding remarks.

2. Methodology

The main purpose of the study was to diagnose the perception of information about traditional food products analysed in the purchasing process by young adult consumers. Furthermore, the research procedure allowed for the isolation and evaluation of the key determinants of the value of traditional food products that influence the decision to purchase these products.

The subject of the study was information on traditional food products, contained on the packaging and product labels, as well as those derived from the purchase context. The study was carried out using indirect interviews involving an Internet questionnaire (CAWI) that was prepared and verified in a pilot study. The research population ($N = 294$) consisted of people aged 18–30 who purchased and consumed traditional products from various categories. This age range was chosen because the people in it have demonstrated growing market activity, they have begun to operate independently and fully responsibly on the market, and they have noteworthy purchasing power (Su & Tong 2018). This group has a large impact on the structure of consumption and the choices made, including when they still live with their parents (Dąbrowska & Janoś-Kresło 2017). For many companies, it is a group that arouses particular interest as young adults begin to shape their consumer habits and tastes (Azimi, Andonova & Schewe 2022). Because the respondents used in the study (Internet users) were chosen specifically, the results and conclusions obtained do not provide a basis for generalisation to the entire population. However, they do make an interesting contribution to further research.

The raw data obtained as a result of CAWI quantitative research were encoded, tabulated, and processed, and the resulting data sets were processed with STATISTICA 13.3. The starting point for the analytical activities was exploratory factor analysis, in which the following algorithm was adopted:

- checking the suitability of selected variables by the Bartlett sphericity tests and KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) statistics (*Statystyczna analiza...* 2009), the KMO value obtained was above 0.5, thus confirming the validity of the analysis,
- determining the linear correlation matrix between standardised primary features,
- identifying the number of factors participating in further analyses using the following criteria: eigenvalues and explained variance,
- factor rotation – application of the standardised Varimax method (Stanisz 2007, Poczta-Wajda 2010).

The research results obtained were analysed in two areas: first, in identifying information influencing the decision to purchase traditional food, and second, in identifying key determinants of the value of traditional food products.

3. Results and Discussion

In the first area of quantitative research on the perceived value of traditional food products, consumers assessed the importance of 13 categories of information contained in the packaging of these products and resulting from the purchasing context. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of the information they were looking for in the traditional food purchase process, measured using the Likert scale. The average values as well as the percentage of indications are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Information Sought in the Traditional Food Purchasing Process

Specification	Values		Percentage of indications				
	average ^a	standard deviation	decisive	important	I do not have an opinion	not very important	irrelevant
Manufacturer's name (brand)	3.42	0.93	6.80	51.70	20.07	20.07	1.36
Product composition	4.61	0.58	65.65	30.61	3.06	0.68	0.00
Use-by date	4.29	0.63	37.76	55.78	4.76	1.70	0.00
Nutritional value	4.15	0.76	33.67	51.70	10.54	4.08	0.00
Place of production	3.55	0.97	12.59	50.34	17.69	18.03	1.36
Price	3.62	0.86	12.24	50.34	24.83	12.24	0.34
Packaging (information)	3.11	1.06	5.44	38.78	24.49	23.81	7.48
Place of sale	3.61	0.97	14.63	50.34	17.69	15.99	1.36
Product availability	3.21	0.97	7.48	34.01	33.67	21.77	3.06
The external appearance of the product	3.7	0.95	16.67	52.72	15.65	13.61	1.36
Direct contact with the manufacturer	3.17	1.11	9.18	36.73	22.79	24.49	6.80
Website, FB of the manufacturer	2.86	1.08	3.74	28.23	30.61	24.83	12.59
Quality markings	3.95	0.86	26.53	50.00	16.67	6.12	0.68

^a Scale 1–5, where 1 – irrelevant, 5 – decisive.

Source: the authors, based on their own research.

The results obtained showed that the composition of the product (4.61 ± 0.58) was the most important information sought when purchasing traditional food products. More than 50% of the respondents indicated that this information is important in the purchase process. The use-by date (4.29 ± 0.58), nutritional value (4.15 ± 0.76), quality labels (3.95 ± 0.86) and the product's external appearance (3.70 ± 0.95) were also of great importance. These considerations were important for over 55%, 51%, 50% and 52% of the respondents, respectively. The name of the product was important information for over 50% of respondents, as were the price (50.34%) and the place where the product was sold (50.34%).

Surprisingly, less than 6% of the respondents declared that product packaging (3.11 ± 1.06) was decisive. This stands in contrast to research done by Ankiel, Sojkin and Grzybowska-Brzezińska (2020), who found that properly designed food packaging plays an important role in consumer purchasing decisions. Based on the information placed on unit packages, the consumer decides to either purchase or refrain from purchasing a specific food product. Buyers of traditional food can therefore be seen to pay attention to certain information pertaining to traditional products when purchasing, but information placed on packaging is not the most important.

There is a visible sensitivity to a product's natural and health values, as well as a focus on its organoleptic characteristics, quality markings, and point of sale. The manufacturers of food products use a range of marketing tricks to boost sales and convince consumers to link their products with Polish traditions (Pyrzyńska, Halagarda & Kędzior 2018). This can make it confusing for the average consumer to distinguish original traditional food products from conventional ones whose labels merely suggest a connections to the country's traditions (Krzywiński & Tokarczyk 2012, Żakowska-Biemans 2012). It also suggests there is a need for proper product naming to dispel such confusion.

In the case of quality labels, consumer knowledge is key. For those unfamiliar with a given product marked with a quality certificate, the appearance of the product is often more important than the quality marking. With products known to the consumer and bearing quality labels, positive associations with a given label increase consumer confidence and make its quality obvious (Bryła 2015). Most consumers trust quality labels and are willing to shell out more for them. At the same time, awareness of these labels and knowledge about their meaning remains low (Jakubowska 2021, Sadílek 2019, 2020). The information consumers look for when purchasing traditional food products suggests possible fields of influence in the marketing communications behind these products. These are mainly activities related to increasing consumer knowledge and awareness, but also include product design and management activities.

The second area of research done for this article was on identifying key determinants of the value of traditional food products. The categories of information

consumers of traditional foods look at includes numerous elements. To reduce this number, as well as to grasp the most important determinants of a product value, principal component analysis (also known as factor analysis) was used. To ensure that principal components analysis was the appropriate method to use, Bartlett sphericity tests were carried out and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index was calculated (Table 2).

Table 2. KMO Index and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	0.784	
Bartlett's sphericity test	approximate Chi-square value	668.517
	degrees of freedom (<i>df</i>)	91
	relevance	0.0000

Source: the authors, based on their own research.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistic measures sampling adequacy. Kaiser and Rice (1974) recommended that accepting values greater than 0.5 is acceptable. KMO values between 0.7 to 0.79 are middling. Bartlett's test indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large to proceed with the factor analysis (Shrestha 2021).

In this study, two techniques are used to help determine the number of factors that should be retained: Kaiser's Criterion (Table 3) and Scree Test (Shrestha 2021). Both indicate the presence of four dimensions of structural variables.

Table 3. Eigenvalues of Common Factors and Their Contribution to Explaining the Observed Variability

Factor	Eigenvalue	Percentage of the total variance explained	Cumulative eigenvalue	The cumulative percentage of the variance explained
1	2.83	21.82	2.83	21.82
2	1.78	13.75	4.62	35.57
3	1.32	10.19	5.94	45.76
4	1.06	8.19	7.01	53.95

Source: the authors, based on their own research.

On this basis, a rotation was performed using the Varimax method, which distinguishes the principal components with the indication of factor loadings with a value greater than 0.5. As the analysis shows (Table 4), the most important values for buyers of traditional food products that affect the decision to purchase include those

which characterise the product's origin (place of production, direct contact with the producer, information on the producer's website).

Table 4. Key Determinants of the Value of Traditional Food Products for Consumers – Factor Loadings Obtained by Factor Analysis

Specification	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Product composition			0.635	
Use-by date			0.672	
Nutritional value			0.575	
Quality markings			0.604	
The product's external appearance				0.796
Packaging (information)				0.675
Price		0.647		
Place of sale		0.684		
Product availability		0.639		
Place of production	0.711			
Direct contact with the manufacturer	0.830			
Website, FB of the manufacturer	0.666			

Source: the authors, based on their own research.

The next group is information relating to the buyer's subjective assessment of the ease or difficulty of controlling the purchase (price, place of sale, availability). The key determinants of the value of traditional food products also include functional benefits (product composition, use-by date, nutritional value, quality labels) and information benefits (product appearance, packaging). It can therefore be assumed that the perceived value of traditional food products (Fig. 1) is the sum of utilities offered to buyers, which consists of:

- factor 1 – identity value (place of production, direct contact with manufacturer, information on the manufacturer's website),
- factor 2 – economic value (price, place of sale, availability),
- factor 3 – functional value (product composition, use-by date, nutritional value, quality labels),
- factor 4 – informational value (external appearance, packaging).

The above values are key in the process of purchasing traditional food products and influence consumers' purchasing decisions in this category of products. When assessing the identified determinants of the perceived value of traditional food products, it can be concluded that the identity value is the key value for consumers. It shows the product's distinctiveness and its unique place among other food products. The unit packages on food products carry a great deal of information,

both obligatory and optional (Ankiel & Grzybowska-Brzezińska 2020). However, the purchasing context can also influence the consumer's purchasing decisions. This makes it essential to know the information that consumers consider important, which can be gleaned from an understanding of what they perceive and analyse when purchasing traditional food. It also helps producers and entities introducing these products to the market to select the appropriate categories of information and address information asymmetry in the producer-consumer relationship.

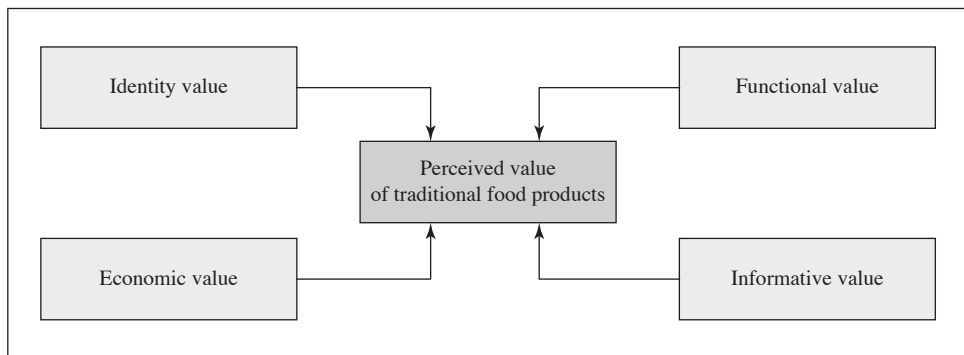


Fig. 1. The Value of Traditional Food Products from the Consumer's Point of View

Source: the authors, based on their own research.

The specific attributes of traditional food products also influence consumer perceptions of the value of these products. Consumers use such attributes as product composition, use-by date, nutritional value, and quality labels to evaluate products (Grzybowska-Brzezińska 2013). Highlighting the traditional origin and traditional methods of food production is becoming an increasingly interesting alternative to the labeling used in the mass production and consumption model. Consumers expect better labelling of traditional food products, so they are not confused with the mass-produced ones (Halagarda, Suwała & Popek 2018). Today's consumers are more often prioritising the health benefits of some foods, leading them to look closely at quality, nutritional value, and health benefits, even if some of them are difficult to assess before buying (Pieniak *et al.* 2009). Consumers are increasingly interested in traditional food products and appreciate traditional flavours. However, some find the prices prohibitive and availability insufficient (Grębowiec 2010, Kowalczyk 2011, Pyrzyńska, Halagarda & Kędzior 2018).

It stands to reason that the perceived value of traditional food products is created by both the producer and the buyer and results from the relationship that arises between them. The buyer provides information about his needs and expectations, and the manufacturer can then offer the appropriate product. Consumers will

perceive the higher value of these products if they are aware of their unique attributes, how and where they are produced, and are willing to trust manufacturers' labels and declarations. They will buy a product if it was produced by a company they know and trust, it is available in the store where they usually shop, and its consumption does not require them to change their habits (Lewicka-Strzańska 2015).

4. Conclusions

Traditional food products are perceived as high-quality products, making consumers willing to pay higher prices for them. The value of traditional food products should be shaped at every stage of product management and should be derived from the designing, manufacturing, delivering and maintaining of market relations. The determinants of the value of these products as buyers perceive it should be parameterised on elements including identity value, economic/control value, functional value, and informational value. Traditional food products are both carriers and providers of values known to buyers, whether from their own experience, from friends' descriptions, or from information provided by the manufacturer. The perceived value of these products allows the expectations of buyers to be met on many levels – from identification and trust in the manufacturer, to appropriate functional features, and the subjective assessment of the buyer as to the ease or difficulty of controlling the purchase they are making. This, in turn, may increase the satisfaction of buyers when they receive more value in relation to the costs associated with obtaining this category of food. Food producers should know their customers' expectations, which change over time and with changes in the market. For them, the real value is brought by loyal buyers, i.e. those who are satisfied with the cooperation and purchase the product repeatedly for this reason.

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