THE CONSUMER'S CHOICE OF BRANDED PRODUCTS CONFORMITY TO NATIONAL IDENTITY: CASE OF BALTIC STATES

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Abstract
The aim of the paper is to show the general trend of consumption in the Baltic countries. The member states of the European Union attach great importance to the well-being, health and the promotion of healthy lifestyle. In order to be able to make decisions on the future plan of action, COBEREN (Consumer Behaviour Erasmus Network) carried out a project with an aim of studying the food consumption habits in the European Union countries. The obtained results show the consumer habits of each participating state, although not on the regional level. This study will look at the consumption habits in the Baltic countries and find out the nature of consumption in those three states. The statistical method – analysis of variance – was used to analyse the COBEREN data.
The main conclusion is that consumers of the Baltic countries do not differ greatly in their consumption habits.
Key words: local product, COBEREN, product brand, attention to brands.

Introduction

The European Union has drawn attention to sustainable food consumption issues and sustainable food production in an attempt to prevent the agri-food industry's excessive wastage of resources. In order to find a package of measures for food producers was necessary to ascertain the consumption habits of the population.

The knowledge of consumer behaviour is of great relevance from both the economic and civic point of view. COBEREN research provides an urgently required pool of knowledge on consumer behaviour that allows the firms, other associations and public organisations to take appropriate corporate decisions in the European market. The consumer is offered a wide choice of products – famous brand products or locally produced goods. After that consumer attitudes towards the produce of different manufacturers - locally produced products or brand manufacturers products – were identified. It was also established whether the brand is or is not an important factor influencing the choice of a product. The explanation of concepts - locally produced products and brand products - is provided in the 'Results and Discussion' section.

The authors have set the task to find out whether there are significant differences in the consumption habits in the Baltic countries. COBEREN data analysis of a cross-section of the Baltic States will examine the differences between the consumption in the Baltic countries. The article examines the following four assumptions:

there are no significant differences between the consumers of Baltic states preference for more famous brands; there are no significant differences between the attention the consumers of Baltic states pay to the product brands; there are no significant differences when the consumers of Baltic states choose locally made products; there are no significant difference between consumers of Baltic states on basis of conformity to the national identity.

Materials and Methods

The research methodology consists of two parts. The first part describes how COBEREN collected the research data. The second part describes what kinds of methods were used in the statistical analysis of COBEREN research data.

COBEREN survey

Considering the large number of participants and the heterogeneity of the group, the research methodology of COBEREN has been defined in a very specific way. Researchers have implemented a mixed methodological approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques and used a various range of numerical, verbal and even pictorial measurements. The scope for covering different dimensions of the consumer culture was made as open as possible but had to remain acceptable from the point of view of the survey response process.

A qualitative data collection allows capturing an in-depth description of consumption behaviour and meanings without any specific preconceived rational model. To which extent do the spontaneous evocations of the respondents match or not with some classical references regarding needs, motivations, or habits? On that basis, explanatory research can lead to the definition of inductive clusters based on consumption profiles that can be interpreted in terms of consumption style or culture sub-clusters. To which extent are they global or country-dependent? Are they affected by general attitudes and values towards consumption?

Mixing qualitative and quantitative analyses on a very large data set of 30 European countries will allow the COBEREN team members to investigate the interactions between individual features and preferences, social habits and representations, national

belonging, culture and consumption behaviour and ideology.

1. Internet surveys

The European COBEREN survey was mainly conducted through a common on-line questionnaire from January to March 2011. Final raw total sample collected by the COBEREN survey were 12,608 units. The final size of the "calibrated" sample is 5,250 units.

Researchers decided to design a common Web questionnaire that would be translated into all 23 European languages and then to disseminate the survey through various procedures, according to the more adopted options in each of the countries. Three different Internet data collection protocols were therefore implemented:

- Dissemination through the Web access panels' members in Austria, Sweden and the United Kingdom, for example. Generally speaking, that procedure was possible in the countries located in the centre and north of the continent.
- Snowball procedure, for which the link is sent to some specific target people who are successively requested to circulate the survey to other personal contacts, etc. That specific process was implemented in Greece, for example, where it was really successful.
- 'Pre-recruited' participants enrolled by students or research assistants. Those persons have agreed to give us their email address and to participate specifically in COBEREN research project. This method was successfully used in Iceland, Italy, and Romania, for example. We wrote a common invitation email mentioning the identity of the correspondents, the general objective of the study and some privacy information.

2. Face-to-face interviews

In order to complement the main data collection method and be able to reach some of the target respondents, especially in the older age categories, we agreed on conducting some face-to-face interviews, in the countries where senior people could not be easily contacted through Internet questionnaires, for example, in Lithuania or in Portugal. Printed versions of the COBEREN questionnaire were produced for that particular usage.

In most of the COBEREN partner countries where an Internet access panel was not available or not chosen (17 cases/30 countries), a multi-channel data collection method was conducted for a proper reaching of all the pre-defined targets from all the different age groups (Santos et al., 2013).

The COBEREN survey responses were used in connection with non-alcoholic drinks. The authors sought to determine whether the product users pay attention to the local product or not, the importance of local production, the importance of product brands, and whether this product is associated with the national identity.

Statistical methods

The COBEREN research database data relating to consumers' choice of products and answers on the principles of national identity were analysed by statistical methods. The studied variables were coded. A respondent, according to gender, was assigned a code 'Male' = '1', 'Female' = '2'. Respondent's answers were coded 'I totally disagree' = '1', 'I rather disagree'='2', 'I do not know'='3', 'I agree rather'='4', 'I totally agree'= '5'; and A) 'Far apart' = '1', B) 'Small overlap' = ' 2', C) 'Moderate overlap' = '3', D) 'Large overlap' = '4', E) 'Complete overlap' = '5'. The authors of the study were using analysis of variance with Scheffe test to find out if there are significant differences between the groups - the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian consumer choice of brand product. The analysis of variance was used to test the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian male and female attitude to the more well-known brands, their focus on brand products, locally made product selection and compliance with national identity.

Results and Discussion

Consumer choice is not always rational. An important role is played by the product quality and visibility. Food can be recognized by its producer, production location and by the brand. Product branding has existed for centuries as a way of distinguishing items from one another, while the modern concept of branding has its roots in the 19th century. According to this concept, a brand can be perceived as a legal instrument, logo, company, system identification, character, personality, relationships, or the added significance (Konecnik et al., 2007).

Thus, consumer and brand's identification associates with a consumer and brand's unity that is true and impressive expression of our identity search (Stokburger-Saueret et al., 2012). There are several brand classifications: national brands, store brands, and discount brands (Batte et al., 2010).

A brand is a particular product visibility in the eyes of consumers. It is considered that consumers tend to buy famous brands out of habit or because of loyalty, and they may be willing to pay more for branded products than non-branded generic products when they see the positive effects of the use of the brand (Paasovaara, 2012). Brands tend to result in a significant premium, and thus their applications are

considered to promote value-added agriculture (Jin et al., 2008).

Brands were also ranked according to a three-point scale of programmed informational benefits, which was based on an analysis of brand positioning, such as good-value-for-money own brands, higher-level own and lower-level national brands, and higher-level national brands (Oliveira-Castro, 2008). Some scientists believe that the ethnic-based subcultures established agents could build community brands. A brand community is a community of people brought together by the emotional attachment to the product or brands. There is a close relationship between brands, individuals and cultures (Veloutsou et al., 2009). The literature suggests that branded products are more valuable because consumers associate them with a better performance in three key areas: quality/reliability, design and prestige (Jin et al., 2008).

Local brands have traditionally benefited from a high level of awareness and close relationships with consumers in their countries (Özsomer, 2012).

Terms such as 'local food' and 'local food system' are often used interchangeably to refer to food produced near its point of consumption in relation to the modern or mainstream food system. The concept 'local food' has been expanded and fulfilled several political projects. The organic project has avoided co-optation. International solidarity movements have helped develop new paradigms of global consumption (Starr, 2010). Regional products and local foods are, by definition, geographical phenomena (Parrott et al., 2002). By the definition of U.S. Congress, local food is a product, which is created locally and distance that a product can be transported and still be considered a 'locally or regionally produced agricultural food product' is less than 400 miles from its origin, or within the State in which it is produced (Martinez et al., 2010). Fritz and authors found that consumers can identify local food if the distance between local food producer and consumer is less than 30 miles (Fritz et al., 2009). According to this definition, both terms – 'local food' and 'regional foods' are similar.

Results and Discussion

This section of paper consists of four parts that summarize the principles of consumption existing in the Baltic countries. The first part analysed consumer attitudes towards the more famous brand products. The second part reflects information about attention to brands. The third part looks at consumer attitudes towards locally made products. The fourth part shows consumer attitudes to national identity.

Choice of more famous brands

Consumers choose products for themselves of certain characteristics. The authors of COBEREN research wanted to determine whether the consumer chooses more famous brand products, or there is an alternative choice. The Baltic consumers choose products not only by more famous brand attributes.

Baltic states males' choice of more famous brand products

The result of analysis of variance calculation obtained - p-value = 0.270 with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ - suggests that the groups have the same variance. The calculation results indicate that $p = 0.005 < \alpha = 0.05$, so the null hypothesis is rejected, the entire group averages are the same, and the adoption of alternative hypothesis - the whole group averages are different.

After comparing the three Baltic COBEREN data and performing statistical calculations, the authors have come to the conclusion that in Estonia and Lithuania, the male consumer choice of more famous brand products differs significantly. For Lithuania and

Table 1

Choice of more famous brands

Gender	Country	I totally disagree	I rather disagree	I don't know	I rather agree	I totally agree
Male	Estonia	22.7	39.8	3.4	28.4	5.7
	Latvia	20.7	26.4	3.4	40.2	9.2
	Lithuania	14.7	21.3	4.0	46.7	13.3
Female	Estonia	23.3	40.7	3.5	30.2	2.3
	Latvia	24.1	43.7	4.6	17.2	10.3
	Lithuania	25.6	17.4	2.3	41.9	12.8

Source: made by the authors, based on COBEREN research data (the percentage of respondent answers).

Estonia, the group dispersion parameter p = 0.005 < α = 0.05, and the authors adopted the alternative hypothesis that there are significant differences between the groups - Estonia and Lithuania averages.

Latvian and Estonian group variance ratio p = 0.197 > α = 0.05, so it was not rejecting the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean values of the graduation class. However, it should be noted that the Latvian and Lithuanian graduation class mean values are not significantly different - the resulting pointer p = 0.314 > α = 0.05. These results lead to the conclusion that the Estonian and Lithuanian males in connection with the selection of the more famous brand choices are more radical, but Latvian males are more moderate in their choice, compared to the neighbouring country males (Table 1).

Baltic states females' choice of more famous brand products

Results of analysis of variance results obtained p-value = 0.003 with a significance level of α = 0.05 suggests that the female group averages are different, thus rejecting the null hypothesis that all group averages are the same, and the adoption of alternative hypothesis - the whole group averages are different.

The authors have come to the conclusion that in Estonia and Lithuania the female consumer preferences related to a more famous brand products differ significantly. For Lithuania and Estonia, the group dispersion parameter p = 0.044 <α = 0.05, and the authors adopted the alternative hypothesis that there are significant differences between the groups - Estonia and Lithuania averages.

Latvian and Estonian group variance ratio p = 0.997 > α = 0.05, so it was not rejecting the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean values of the graduation class. Latvian and Lithuanian graduation class mean values have significant differences, as evidenced by the resulting pointer

p = 0.035> α = 0.05. The results obtained suggest that the Estonian and Latvian females in their choice of famous brand products are similar to the Lithuanian females (Table 1).

Attention to Brands

Research of COBEREN tried to find out whether consumers pay attention to brands. Baltic consumers pay attention to brands, but most of the respondents claim that they do not pay attention to particular brands or do not pay attention to brands at all. This section explores the answer to the question whether a brand is an important factor when choosing a product.

Baltic males and attention to brands

Analysis of variance obtained p-value = 0.545 with a significance level α = 0.05 suggests that the groups have the same group averages.

The tests of analysis of variances obtained p-value = 0.545 with a significance level α = 0.05 suggests that the groups have the same variance. The calculation results indicate that p = 0.025 <α = 0.05, thus the null hypothesis that all group averages are the same is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is adopted - the whole group averages are different.

The authors have come to the conclusion that in Estonia and Lithuania the male consumer preferences relating to the focus on brand products differ significantly. For Lithuania and Estonia, the group dispersion parameter p = 0.566> α = 0.05, and the authors adopted the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the groups - Estonia and Lithuania averages. Latvian and Estonian group variance ratio p = 0.026 <α = 0.05, so an alternative hypothesis was adopted that 'there is a significant difference between the mean values of the graduation class'.

However, it should be noted that the Latvian and Lithuanian graduation class mean values are without significant differences - the resulting pointer

Table 2

Consumers' Attention to Brands

Gender	Country	I totally disagree	I rather disagree	I don't know	I rather agree	I totally agree
Male	Estonia	14.8	40.9	2.3	34.1	8.0
	Latvia	11.2	22.5	3.4	48.3	14.6
	Lithuania	14.9	31.1	1.4	43.2	9.5
Female	Estonia	12.6	36.8	4.6	33.3	12.6
	Latvia	18.2	30.7	2.3	35.2	13.6
	Lithuania	30.2	24.4	1.2	34.9	9.3

Source: made by the authors, based on COBEREN research data (percentage of respondent answers).

p = 0.310 > α = 0.05. These results lead to the conclusion that the Latvian and Lithuanian males regarding the selection of the best-known brands behave similarly, but the Estonian males pay attention to brand products differently than Latvian and Lithuanian males (Table 2).

Baltic females and attention to brands

Analysis of variance results obtained p-value = 0.003 with a significance level α = 0.05 suggests that the group averages are different.

The calculation results indicate that p = 0.152> α = 0.05, so the null hypothesis is retained, the entire group averages are the same. The authors have come to the conclusion that Estonian and Lithuanian female consumer preferences related to a well-known brand products do not differ. For Lithuania and Estonia, the group dispersion parameter p = 0.418> α = 0.05, and the authors retained the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the female groups - Estonia and Lithuania averages.

Latvian and Estonian group variance ratio p = 0.997> α = 0.05, so it was not rejecting the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean values of the graduation class. Latvian and Lithuanian graduation class mean values have no significant differences, as evidenced by the resulting pointer p = 0.444 > α = 0.05. The results obtained suggest that in the Baltic countries, females pay attention to brand products similarly (Table 2)

Locally made products

Brand product offering has an alternative offer - locally made products. COBEREN research found what the consumer's choice is when they are prompted to buy locally made products. The consumer of Baltic countries chooses locally made products. This section examines whether the consumer prefers locally made products.

Baltic males and locally made production

Analysis of variance results obtained p-value = 0.00 with a significance level α = 0.05 suggests that the group averages are different.

The results indicate that p = 0.006 <α = 0.05, thus rejecting the null hypothesis that all group averages are the same, and the adoption of alternative hypothesis - the whole group averages are different. There were insignificant differences between Estonian and Lithuanian male consumer preferences relating to the focus on locally made products.

The Lithuanian and Estonian group class graduation parameter p = 0.151 > α = 0.05, and the authors adopted the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the groups - Estonia and Lithuania averages. Latvian and Estonian group variance ratio p = 0.411 > α = 0.05, so the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the mean values of the graduation class was not accepted. However, it should be noted that the Latvian and Lithuanian graduation class mean values have significant differences - the resulting pointer p = 0.006 > α = 0.05. These results lead to the conclusion that the Latvian and Lithuanian males in their the selection of locally made products are not similar, but Latvian males pay attention to locally made products differently than males in Estonia and Lithuania (Table 3).

Baltic females and locally made production

Analysis of variance result p-value = 0.04 with a significance level of α = 0.05 suggests that the group averages are different.

The calculation results indicate that p = 0.150 > α = 0.05, so the null hypothesis is retained, the entire group averages are the same. The authors have come to the conclusion that there are no differences between the Estonian and Lithuanian female consumer preferences regarding the locally made products.

Table 3

Choice of locally made products

Gender	Country	I totally disagree	I rather disagree	I don't know	I rather agree	I totally agree
Male	Estonia	5.6	23.6	3.4	44.9	22.5
	Latvia	2.3	18.2	2.3	52.3	25.0
	Lithuania	14.9	24.3	2.7	44.6	13.5
Female	Estonia	5.7	13.6	4.5	52.3	23.9
	Latvia	0.0	20.2	0.0	47.2	32.6
	Lithuania	11.6	16.3	2.3	43.0	26.7

Source: made by the authors, based on COBEREN research data (percentage of respondent answers).

Table 4

Conformity to national identity

Gender	Country	Far appart	Small overlap	Moderate overlap	Large overlap	Complete overlap
Male	Estonia	1.2	11.6	44.2	39.5	3.5
	Latvia	2.3	13.6	40.9	35.2	8.0
	Lithuania	8.2	11.0	45.2	21.9	13.7
Female	Estonia	1.2	8.5	57.3	26.8	6.1
	Latvia	1.1	11.5	41.4	35.6	10.3
	Lithuania	5.1	16.7	44.9	29.5	3.8

Source: made by the authors, based on COBEREN research data (percentage of respondent answers).

For Lithuania and Estonia, the group dispersions of Lithuanian and Estonia parameter is p = 0.608 > α = 0.05, and the authors retained the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the groups - Estonia and Lithuania averages.

Latvian and Estonian group variance ratio p = 0.632 > α = 0.05, so it was not rejecting the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean values of the graduation class. Latvian and Lithuanian graduation class mean values are not significantly different, as evidenced by the resulting index p = 0.15 > α = 0.05. The results obtained suggest that in the Baltic countries, females pay attention to the locally made products similarly (Table 3).

This study confirms the results of a study by S. Dzene. Dzene wrote in her doctoral dissertation that Latvian consumers attach a greater importance to local products – compared with the average in Europe, 19% more of the population of Latvia prefer locally produced food (Dzene, 2014).

Conformity to national identity

The authors of COBEREN wanted to find out the principles of consumer choice by their association with a national identity. In the Baltic countries consumers believe that the principles of their consumption are only partially influenced by their national identity.

Males of the Baltic States and national identity

Test of analysis of variance results obtained p-value = 0.110 with a significance level α = 0.05 suggests that the group dispersion is similar. The calculation results indicate that p = 0.698 > α = 0.05, so the null hypothesis is retained and the entire group averages are the same. Minor different Estonian and Lithuanian male consumer preferences conform to national identity.

The study showed insignificantly different Estonian and Lithuanian male consumers' self-identification with a national identity. Lithuania and Estonia, the group dispersion parameter p = 0.766 > α = 0.05, and the authors adopted the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the groups - Estonia and Lithuania averages. Latvian and Estonian group dispersion parameter p = 1.00 > α = 0.05, so the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the mean values of the graduation class was not accepted. However, it should be noted that the Latvian and Lithuanian graduation class mean values are not significantly different - the resulting pointer p = 0.749 > α = 0.05. These results lead to the conclusion that the Baltic males' conformity to national identity is similar.

Females of the Baltic States and national identity

One factor analysis of variance results obtained p-value = 0.206 with significance level α = 0.05 suggests that the group averages are different.

The calculation results indicate that p = 0.052 > α = 0.05, so the null hypothesis is retained, the entire group averages are the same. The authors have come to the conclusion that there does not exist any differences between the formation of self-identity by Estonian and Lithuanian female consumers.

For Lithuania and Estonia the group dispersion parameter p = 0.415 > α = 0.05, and the authors retained the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the groups - Estonia and Lithuania averages. Latvian and Estonian group variance ratio p = 0.540 > α = 0.05, so it was not rejecting the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the mean values of the graduation class.

Latvian and Lithuanian graduation class mean values are not significantly different, as evidenced by the resulting pointer p = 0.520 > α = 0.05. The results obtained suggest that in the Baltic countries the women conform to the national identity similarly.

Conclusions

Baltic consumers prefer locally made products. It means that locally made products are and will be in high demand. Consumers will choose products of local brands. Latvian males and females more often

choose locally made products compared to other Baltic countries. It can be concluded that the Latvian market is open to locally made products and producers of local brands.

Customers of the Baltic States do not pay special attention to brand names and the preference for the most famous brand products is not significant. The consumers of these countries differ in their choice for famous brands. Latvian males choose famous brand products more than Estonian and Lithuanian men. However, there is a difference between the Estonian and Lithuanian male choice of famous brands. Lithuanian males more often choose famous brand products. Likewise, it is Lithuanian women who more often prefer famous brand products. Thus, it can be concluded that the Lithuanian food market is more responsive to the most famous brand product manufacturers.

Consumer attention to brands in each Baltic country is different, so it can be concluded that the product that is required in one state may not be required in another. Latvian males and females more often pay attention to brands compared to other Baltic countries. It can be concluded that the Latvian people have more trust in brand products. Locally made product manufacturers, considering Latvian consumers' attention to brands and choice of locally made products, can successfully create local brand products.

Consumer conformity to national identity suggests that the consumer of Baltic States will consume the products, which are associated with their national identity. Baltic food producers are able to create local brand products have been associated with a sense of national identity.

Results from this study are useful for the food industry in the Baltic States and the European Union.

The obtained findings may help to understand the principles based on which the consumers in the Baltic States choose the products.

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