ANALYZING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES OF CHEESE FOR THE CONSUMER IN CLUJ COUNTY

ANALIZA IMPORTANȚEI ATRIBUTELOR INTRINSECI ALE CAŞCAVALULUI PENTRU CONSUMATORUL CLUJEAN

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Abstract: *The aim of this article is to analyze the importance of the intrinsic attributes for cheese at the purchasing moment for the consumer in Cluj County. A survey has been conducted and data were interpreted. Results indicate that the most important intrinsic attribute for cheese is taste followed by natural ingredients. The least important intrinsic attribute is the low fat content. Therefore, dairy companies must permanently observe the changes in consumer's attitudes and adapt their products appropriately.*

Key words*: intrinsic attributes, credence, taste*

INTRODUCTION

For every agro food company it is useful to obtain information about the consumer's preferences regarding the intrinsic attributes of their products in order to improve or highlight on the label more specific aspects. Ulaga & Chacour (2001) established that the value perceived by customers is a function depending of price and quality. The quality is composed of three main components like: product-related quality (product characteristics), service-related quality and promotion-related quality. Becker (2000) distinguishes three categories of quality attributes such as:

- Search attributes – they are available at the time of shopping being a mix of intrinsic (colour, shape) and extrinsic (price, place of purchase, county of origin) attributes,
- Experience attributes or eating quality refer to the attributes available at the consumption time being intrinsic attributes like smell, taste, flavour, texture,
- Credence attributes refer to attributes of main concern for the consumer but not available to him not at the moment of purchasing nor in the eating moment- both intrinsic (hormones, fat) and extrinsic attributes (organically produced, milk origin, health, safety).

In the case of food and mostly dairy products, the quality dimensions refer to hedonic, health-related, convenience-related and process-related (Grunert et al., 2000).

Fandos & Flavian (2006) establish the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic attributes. The intrinsic attributes are related to the own nature of the product and its' physical aspect but they disappear after the consumption moment. The extrinsic attributes are also related to the product but they are not physically a part of it. Even if they differ from the product itself they are deeply associated with it and they are also called image variable because they refer to brand or price. Therefore, the main aim of this article is to highlight the importance of intrinsic attributes for cheese on the Cluj County market.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey has been conducted on a sample of 166 respondents from Cluj-Napoca. The general scope of the questionnaire developed was to study the consumer behaviour for cheese products and his attitudes related to cheese brands. In order to perform this survey a specific question had to be related to the intrinsic attributes: "On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means "not important at all" and 10 means "the most important", to what extent the following attributes for cheese are important to you at the purchasing moment?" The scale from 0 to 10 is used because respondents are asked to rate each attribute by giving a mark.

The attributes were chosen using the scientific literature (table 1) but after pre testing the questionnaire a limited number of attributes were used, considered by the respondents as being mostly relevant such as: taste, texture, special flavour, natural colour, aspect, low fat content, no additives, made from natural ingredients, high nutritional value and no artificial ingredients.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Consumers were asked to rate each attribute on a scale from 0 to 10 and mean values were calculated. Results indicated that consumers from Cluj County consider that the most important attribute for cheese products is taste with a 9.39 score followed by the attribute "produced from natural ingredients" with a total score of 8.84. With a total score of 8.50 consumers appreciate the lack of artificial ingredients. The aspect is scored with 8.33 (figure 1)

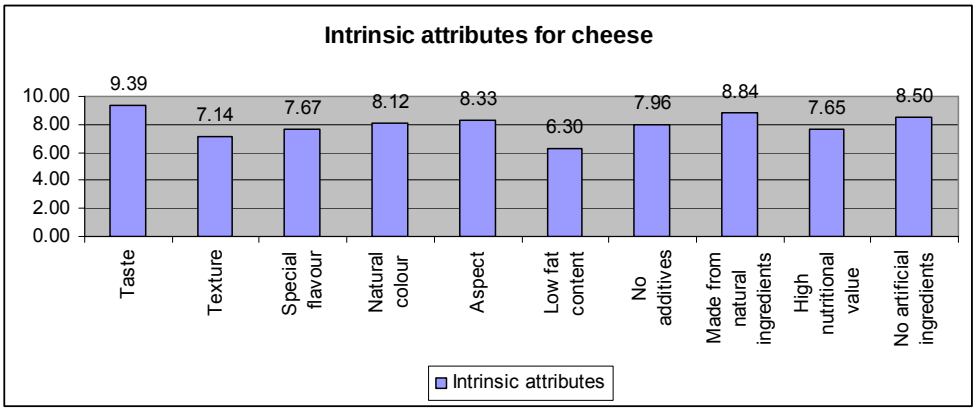


Fig. no.1 Importance of the intrinsic attributes for cheese in Cluj County

Consumers are almost not interested at all in the low fat content of cheese, the score for this attribute is just 0.30

Dairy companies will have to take into consideration the importance given by the consumer to different intrinsic attributes for cheese in order to highlight them appropriately. For example if taste is an important attribute

dairy companies will have to focus both on the ingredients used to obtain the taste desired by the consumers but also on the extrinsic attributes related to taste such as the label where taste could be expressed with the appropriate words in order to determine the purchase.

CONCLUSIONS

The study conducted in Cluj-Napoca offered results regarding the importance of different intrinsic attributes for cheese products, results that are useful for dairy companies when developing their products or improving the ones already existing on the market. Because of the important role played by the intrinsic attributes in the total quality perceived by the consumers, companies must maintain a permanent contact with their credences. Similar surveys must be conducted frequently because consumers can change their credences as a result of different food trends or social factors such as reference groups or family.

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