

Culture and communication for a wellbeing-oriented food marketing strategy

Lenardo Riaño Hernández¹, Felipe Reinoso-Carvalho¹,
Raffaele Campo², & Andres Barrios-Fajardo¹

¹Universidad de los Andes, School of Management; ²University of Bari

Theoretical Background

Altering current food consumption patterns is one of the greatest society challenges in the quest for countervail individual (e.g. obesity; Witkowski, 2007) or societal (e.g., environmental degradation; Sitarz, 1994) problems. Most marketing studies concerning this topic have either focused on individual consumers decision making (Lee et al., 2010), or on the macro-structural level factor that could shape such decision-making process (Thøgersen, 2010), separately. This study aims to link these two levels by analyzing how individuals' macro-cultural factors can affect a consumer's individual micro-hedonic and sensory ones, and thus, the intention to consume a particular product.

To better understand how culture and marketing framing can influence consumers' hedonic and sensory food perceptions, we started by hypothesizing that a cultural traditional food product can be perceived differently between local vs foreign consumers, and this is based on their cultural differences and/or knowledge on the local product/culture itself (*H1. Local consumers hold hedonic and sensory aspects of a local/traditional snack in higher regard, when compared to foreigners*). In this study, we also asked ourselves how marketing communication can frame a consumers' hedonic and sensory perception on traditional food product, according to individual's cultural value system (*H2. A well-informed local consumer hold the same local/traditional product in higher regard, when compared to a not so well-informed – but similar type of – local consumer*).

In summary, we believe that both hypotheses combined prove that, a generally well-informed consumer will have a more guided, less uncertain and, therefore, a better food experience.

Methodology

Two experiments were designed. In the first experiment, a comparison between local/Colombians (A), and foreign consumers (B) was conducted, in order to identify differences in the way each group of consumers judge specific characteristics of a local food product. Achira, a Colombian and traditional biscuit/snack was the selected product due to its strong cultural tradition embedded around the country, while not being necessarily associated to any specific brand.

Based on a focus group it was uncovered that local Colombian consumers know Achira, consume it regularly, but are not aware of the tradition and formulations behind Achira. Hence, the second experiment was conducted in order to compare the behavior of local 'uninformed' consumers (as those in A) vs. local 'well-informed' ones (local consumers under the influence of a propaganda stimulus, which was produced with the objective of better communicating the traditional elements and formula of Achira; namely C). The methodology was similar in both experiments (controlled pre/post tasting Likert-based evaluative self-report on Achira and packaging relevant hedonic, sensory and purchasing attributes).

In total, 245 participants were part of this study (43% women, mean age of 21 years; and 57% men, average age of 22 years; SD=3 for both). Approximately 80% of the sample were Colombian locals, and the rest foreigners ($N_A = 97$; $N_B = 51$; $N_C = 97$).

Preliminary results and discussion

In general, the preliminary results suggest that local culture and communication positively condition the customer evaluative process, while diminishing the uncertainty about a product's features. First, there were several significant differences in the way a local and foreigner evaluated Achira in Experiment 1, while comparing the individual before-and-after ratings, and when comparing the ratings across both group of participants (locals vs foreigners). Second, Experiment 2 suggests that communication further improved the hedonic and satisfaction evaluations of local Colombian consumers, with particularly surprising effects concerning the changes in willingness to pay. Overall, we see a progressive improvement of the customer's experience across both experiments, where the worst experience is reported by the foreigners in Experiment 1 (least informed and unfamiliar with local culture, and the product itself), and the best experience is reported by the well-informed local consumers in Experiment 2.

These results also have interesting and practical implication on healthy promotion choices, as tradition tend to increase perceived quality/satisfaction. In fact, a well-informed consumer (C) seems to have perceived saltiness differently when compared to a least informed one – A, and salt can have an impact on blood pressure. In addition, well-informed local participants (C) in Experiment 2 were willing to pay around 300 Colombian pesos (COP) more for the same product, when compared to the local uniformed participants (A). Considering the average street-market price of a 17g package of Achira (around \$1000 COP), a striking difference of approximately 30% in price judgment was detected between the local participants that were influenced by the propaganda, and those who weren't.

Finally, Achira does not seem to have strong marketing associated to its value proposition, yet. As a matter of fact, the effectiveness of the propaganda that was here provided to one part of the local consumers (C), shows the potential to be explored concerning marketing strategies for Achira (cf. Riaño & Reinoso-Carvalho, forthcoming, where a similar case was assessed with a Colombian chocolate cake). Actually, this report tells us much about how marketing is key while building differences among consumers with, e.g., similar profiles. Marketing, therefore, is a key element in order to communicate and build culture, which then may be useful to differentiate consumers.

References

- Lee J.Y., Kim K.J., Park Y.H., Kim H.R. (2010). Preference and Perception of Korean Foods of Foreign Consumers by Nationality, *Journal of the Korean Society of Food Culture*, 25(1), 9-16.
- Sitarz, D. (1993). Agenda 21: The earth summit strategy to save our planet. New York, USA: Nova Science Publishers.
- Riaño, L., & Reinoso-Carvalho, F. (forthcoming) The role of culture in the experience of traditional food products. II encuentro internacional de experiencias empresariales y de investigación en ciencias administrativas de la Universidad del Rosario. 17/18 September, 2020. Bogotá, Colombia.
- Thøgersen, J. (2010). Country differences in sustainable consumption: The case of organic food. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 30(2), 171-185.
- Witkowski, T. H. (2007). Food marketing and obesity in developing countries: analysis, ethics, and public policy. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 27(2), 126-137.