

CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRODUCTS OF REGIONAL MANUFACTURERS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE PURCHASING BEHAVIOR ON THE MARKET FOR DAIRY PRODUCTS

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to present, analyze and evaluate the behavior of buyers on the market for dairy products, including the importance they attach to the origin of the product and to the producers in the buying process. The attitudes towards regional products and producers were associated with other elements of consumer behavior related to the decision-making process on the dairy market, such as: product selection criteria; frequency of purchases in various store types; and basic criteria for store selection. The research part is based on the analysis of the results of surveys conducted in 2015 with a group of 694 students. The study demonstrates the existence of important links between “pro-regional” attitudes and such determinants of the choice of dairy products as the product’s nutritional composition; absence of preservatives; quality certificates; country of origin; and environmental performance. This suggests that dairy products from regional producers are associated with high quality, naturalness and wholesomeness.

Keywords: consumer behavior, dairy products, regional producers

INTRODUCTION

In the food market, the purchasing decision-making is a highly complex process which evolves along with the socio-economic situation, cultural transformations and

development. The ever evolving consumer needs and preferences, the increasing scope and availability of product information, the transformation of the commercial sector and changing lifestyles are the reasons behind the changing perception of, and requirements for, the foods purchased (Czajkowska et al., 2013). Note that foods are a specific product category: while their basic function is mainly to alleviate hunger and improve the consumer’s well-being, they increasingly often address the psychological and socio-cultural needs. Therefore, in addition to the characteristics of the product itself and of its buyer, the purchase of foods is largely influenced by environmental and cultural aspects (Angowski and Domańska, 2015; Dybka, 2015; Frewer et al., 2001).

Among the determinants of food selection, the place of manufacturing (i.e. the regional origin of a product) plays a relatively important role. Each year, more and more consumers prefer regional products (Siemieniako, 2013). The regional origin, next to the nutritional value and naturalness of a product, is the key qualitative differentiator of foodstuffs (Ness et al., 2010). Note however that the product’s regional origin is not equivalent to the “regional product” label. A regional product is defined as agricultural crops and products of a specific quality, strictly related to the conditions of the region concerned (its characteristic climate, soil type, landscape etc.) and characterized by natural production and manufacturing

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methods (Bilska 2008; Grębowiec, 2010; Kawa and Augustyńska-Prejsnar, 2014; Kijak, 2008). In turn, the preferences for products from regional manufacturers cover a broader variety of goods: not only the registered regional products but also each food product manufactured in the region the buyers identify with. Thus, the importance of the regional origin of a product should be considered in the context of the “local patriotism” or “consumer ethnocentrism.” Local patriotism means “love and devotion to one’s own local homeland (referred to as small homeland): the place of residence or birth” (Siemieniako, 2013). In turn, consumer ethnocentrism refers to decisions related to choosing, purchasing and using products of domestic origin (Angowski and Lipowski, 2014; Alsughayir, 2013; Kucharczyk et al., 2015; Szromnik and Wolanin-Jarosz, 2014).

The research on consumer ethnocentrism and patriotism is usually associated with the COO (country-of-origin) concept. Accordingly, the consumers’ belief that a product originates from a specific country or region affects their preferences and purchasing decisions (Kipnis et al., 2012). The product’s country or region of origin may significantly affect consumer loyalty (Siemieniako, 2013). According to studies carried out by many authors, including Ilbery and Kneafsey (2000), Ittersum et al. (2007), Kuznesof et al. (1997), Ness et al. (2010), EU consumers pay more and more attention to the product’s link with the region. Note that increasing the production volumes of such goods is very important as, in addition to providing benefits to consumers and producers, it contributes to increasing the prosperity of rural areas (Loureiro and McCluskey, 2000; Baer-Nawrocka and Suchoń, 2014).

The main purpose of this paper is to present and assess the purchasers’ behavior and attitudes on the market for dairy products, taking into consideration the importance of the products’ regional origin in the purchasing process. The attitudes towards the products’ regional origin were associated with other elements of consumer behavior related to the decision-making process during the purchase of dairy products, such as: product selection criteria; frequency of purchases in various store types; and basic criteria for store selection.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY OF STUDIES

The research part is based on the analysis of the results of surveys conducted in 2015 with a group 694 students

selected using purposive sampling. Two age groups were covered by the analysis: the younger group were students of first-cycle programs; the older one were students of second-cycle programs. The two groups differ by their experience, market awareness, and knowledge of products and their quality. Also, the older respondents are much more frequently employed and earn their own incomes. Some of them already have a family.

The survey was based on a standardized questionnaire. The interview was supported by a web survey powered by Google Drive. The respondents were provided with a link to the dedicated web page. The questionnaire included 28 problem questions with complex score scales to assess the buyer’s behavior and attitudes on the market for dairy products, such as: determinants of the product selection process; purchasing volumes and methods; opinion on brands and producers; and 6 personal data questions to characterize the respondent. The results were calculated with the SPSS Statistics 22 suite. The statistical analysis included the frequency analysis, cross tabulation, mean values and bilateral correlation coefficients.

The majority (58.1%) of respondents were women. Due to the type and specifics of sampling, most of the respondents were people aged below 22 (students enrolled in first-degree programs; 61.8%) and people aged 23–25 (students enrolled in second-degree programs; 29.1%). The group under consideration was dominated by members of families of four or more (66.0%). More than a half (50.3%) of respondents originated from the smallest towns (with a population of up to 15,000). The respondents usually believed their economic situation to be average (48.1%) or favorable (34.7%).

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In the surveyed group of dairy consumers, pro-regional attitudes were demonstrated by 25.5% of the respondents (“Pro-regional”) while 35.0% of the respondents declared not to be interested in the regional origin of products (“Non-regional”). A neutral attitude towards the regional production of dairy products was demonstrated by 39.5% of the respondents¹. See Table 1 for

¹ Attitude towards regional products/features, rated on a 1 to 5 scale: “Pro-regional” – 4-5; neutral – 3; “Non-regional” – 1. In further analyses, the authors will compare the attitudes and

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents by their attitude towards the regional origin of products

Specification		Attitude toward a regional producer (%)		Regionalism ratio***
		A*	B**	
Total		39.9	26.0	3.17
Gender	Man	43.0	23.7	3.26
	Woman	38.0	28.5	3.10
Age	up to 22	36.7	28.8	3.08
	23–25	46.0	22.3	3.33
	over 25	42.9	25.4	3.25
Place of residence	Town with a population of up to 15,000	43.3	22.1	3.32
	Town with a population ranging from 16,000 to 50,000	45.0	25.2	3.20
	Town with a population over 50,000	31.8	34.6	2.91
Number of family members	1	31.8	45.5	2.70
	2	42.9	30.0	3.07
	3	36.9	27.0	3.12
	4	36.3	25.0	3.14
	over 4	46.8	22.9	3.35
Financial situation	very unfavorable	42.1	42.1	3.00
	unfavorable	51.1	24.4	3.47
	average	34.7	26.9	3.08
	favorable	44.8	25.3	3.22
	very favorable	41.8	25.5	3.25

*A – “Pro-regional”; **B – “Non-regional”; ***Mean value (5-point scale, from 1 ‘definitely not important’ to 5 ‘definitely important’)

Source: own elaboration based on research.

detailed characteristics of the respondents by their attitude towards the regional origin of products.

Based on the results, it may be concluded that in the groups of students surveyed, pro-regional attitudes were more characteristic of men (the average rating of the importance of the product’s regional origin was 3.26),

behaviors between “Pro-regional” (A) and “Non-regional” (B) purchasers.

of respondents aged 23–25 (an average rating of 3.33), residing in small towns (an average rating of 3.32), having families larger than four (an average rating of 3.35), considering their economic situation to be unfavorable (an average rating of 3,47) or very favorable (3.25%).

The consumers’ market behavior is determined by multiple factors. The key determinants of dairy products selection are shown in Figure 1. Note that both respondent groups (classed by their attitude towards the regional

origin of products) indicated the price as one of the key selection criteria of dairy products. Its average importance, both for “Pro-regional” and “Non-regional” respondents, reached a similar, relatively high level. What is also noticeable is that when buying dairy products, the purchasers from both groups paid most attention to the product’s freshness, taste, type, best-before date and habits. The importance of freshness and taste for the purchase of local foods is conformed in a study by Gradziuk (2015).

However, in the case of attitudes demonstrated by “Pro-regional” respondents, other determinants analyzed in this study were relatively important, too. In turn, as regards respondents who do not pay special importance to the regional origin of a product, the differences in the importance of specific selection criteria were relatively greater. The groups under consideration also differ in terms of factors with the lowest

significance for the purchase of dairy products: while “Pro-regional” respondents pay the least attention to advertising and to the package attractiveness, “Non-regional” respondents believe the product’s organic nature and country of origin to be the least important features. Therefore, it may be concluded that when purchasing dairy products, “Pro-regional” buyers consider multiple different factors, both economic and related to the product’s characteristics and origin. Meanwhile, “Non-regional” respondents pay attention to several specific selection criteria with a relatively high importance for them.

The largest differences existed between the “Pro-regional” and “Non-regional” respondents when it comes to taking into consideration the product’s organic nature, country of origin, quality certificates, absence of preservatives, package attractiveness, composition and nutritional values. To the “Pro-regional” purchasers, the

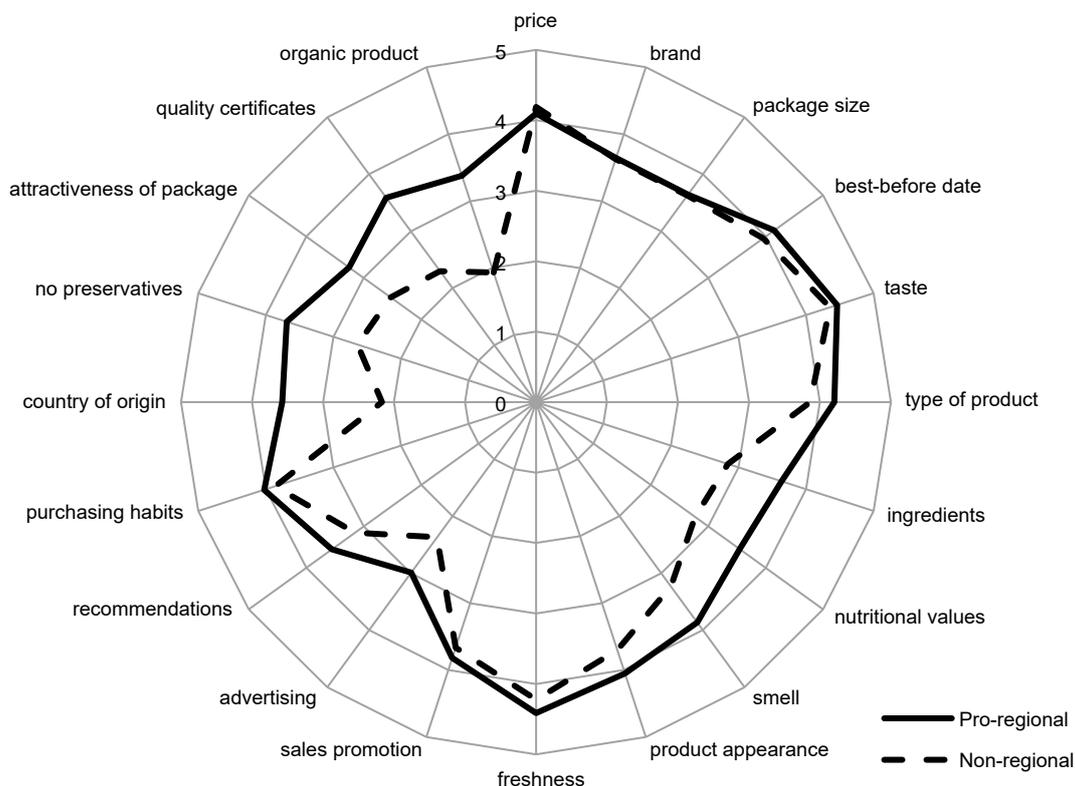


Fig. 1. Selection criteria of dairy products in function of attitudes towards regional products*
 *The purchasers’ attitudes were assessed based on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1, ‘strongly disagree’ to 5, ‘strongly agree’).
 Source: own elaboration based on the research.

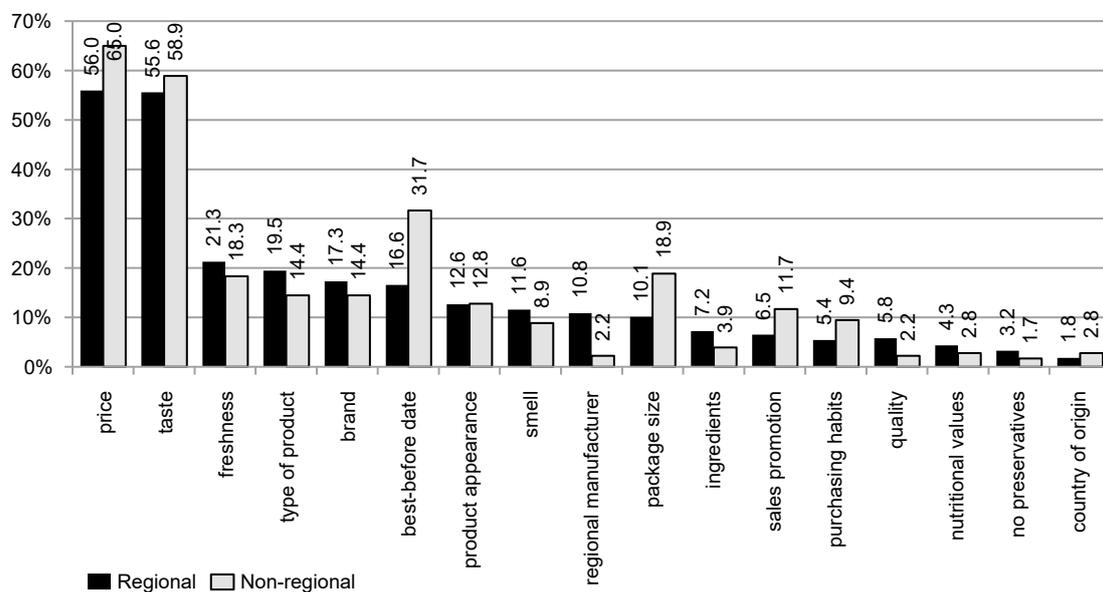


Fig. 2. Ranking of selection criteria for dairy products* (%)

*The respondents could select up to 3 factors.

Source: own elaboration based on the research.

above was much more important than to those who did not pay attention to the product's regional origin.

Additional information on the product selection criteria is revealed by the analysis of the ranking of key criteria used by the respondents when choosing dairy products (Fig. 2).

As shown by the analysis of statistically significant relationships between pro-regional attitudes and determinants of purchasing decisions on dairy products, strong and medium relationships exist between pro-regional attitudes and some of the selection criteria for dairy products². Based on the calculations, medium correlation was observed with such factors as: smell (0.238), advertising (0.239), package attractiveness (0.301), nutritional values (0.314) and product composition (0.318). Also, these attitudes were found to be strongly correlated with the role of the following factors in the purchasing process: absence

of preservatives, (0.415), quality certificates (0.511), country of origin (0.525) and organic nature of the product (0.577). This suggests that “Pro-regional” respondents associate dairy products from regional producers with high quality, naturalness and wholesomeness. Note that the selection determinants of dairy products strongly linked to pro-regional attitudes include the EU labels for agricultural products related to the region and traditions. The importance of this factor in the purchasing process for the “Pro-regional” respondents is confirmed by the share of purchased certified products (Table 2). In this group, 18.3%, 13.7% and 16.9% of respondents declared to purchase products with PDO, PGI and TSG status, respectively. Meanwhile, in the “Non-regional” group, the respective shares were only 4.3%, 3.3% and 4.3%.

As shown by the study, certain differences also exist between the intensity of pro-regional attitudes and the frequency and place of purchase (Fig. 3).

Both the “Pro-regional” and “Non-regional” purchasers choose various purchasing locations. However, the “Pro-regional” group is more willing to use various store types: the share of people who do not purchase in a specific store type is smaller (except for

² The correlation between the attitude towards the product's regional origin and the purchasing selection criteria (Pearson correlation coefficient) is significant at 0.05. The factors and purchasers' attitudes were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1, 'strongly disagree' to 5, 'strongly agree').

Table 2. Purchases of products with the EU quality certificates

Certificates	Pro-regional			Non-regional		
	Yes	No	I don't know	Yes	No	I don't know
PDO (Protected Designation of Origin)	18.3%	12.2%	69.4%	4.3%	16.3%	79.3%
PGI (Protected Geographical Indication)	13.7%	14.0%	72.3%	3.3%	16.8%	79.9%
TSG (Traditional Specialities Guaranteed)	16.9%	12.9%	70.1%	4.3%	15.2%	80.4%

Source: own elaboration based on research.



Fig. 3. Frequency and place of purchase of dairy products in relation to the intensity of pro-regional attitudes*

* The purchasers' attitudes were assessed based on a 5-point Likert scale from 1, 'strongly disagree' to 5, 'strongly agree'.

Source: own elaboration based on research.

hypermarkets) that in the case of the "Non-regional" group. "Pro-regional" purchasers also declared to shop more frequently, visiting such facilities as small local

shops, supermarkets, delicatessen or marketplaces. Note however that the two latter are the least popular with both the "Pro-regional" and "Non-regional" group.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research, it was concluded as follows:

1. The regional aspect was more frequently of interest to relatively older people in the group considered (i.e. those more aware of the importance of supporting the regional entrepreneurship).

2. The group who places great value on regional products also includes people from larger families and smaller towns. It may be supposed that the local communities where they grew up taught them to value regional products, and therefore they identify more with such products and are more willing to purchase them.

3. When choosing dairy products, both the “Pro-regional” and “Non-regional” groups are mostly guided by similar factors. Note that the price is relatively important to both groups when making their purchasing decisions. This illustrates the consumers’ increasingly more reasonable approach to shopping. Whatever their selection criteria may be, they want to pay a “fair” price for a good quality product with offers features of importance to them.

4. Significant relations exist between pro-regional approaches and such determinants of dairy products selection as nutritional values, product composition, absence of preservatives, quality certificates, country of origin and organic nature of the product. This suggests that the “Pro-regional” group associates dairy products from regional producers with high quality, naturalness and wholesomeness. Also, large discrepancies exist between the “Pro-regional” and “Non-regional” groups as regards purchasing certified products and the related knowledge, suggesting that “Pro-regional” respondents demonstrate greater consumer awareness.

5. “Pro-regional” purchasers shop more frequently than “Non-regional” respondents. Also, they more often visit such facilities as small local shops, supermarkets, delicatessen or marketplaces. However, the two latter are the least popular with both the “Pro-regional” and “Non-regional” group. The reason for more frequent shopping may be because regional products usually have shorter best-before dates due to more traditional manufacturing methods.

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