Consumer activity evaluation in relation to the purchase of food products of a certain regional affiliation

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Abstract. In modern conditions of competition in the food market, a number of factors that have an additional impact on consumer preferences are of particular importance for manufacturers. This issue is particularly relevant for producers of natural food products, where the combination of product characteristics with its regional affiliation will provide an additional competitive advantage and make mutually beneficial relationships with the consumer. At the moment, from the consumer’s point of view, the regional origin of the product is based on the perception of certain parameters, but there is no general opinion on this issue among buyers. This study identifies the main criteria that determine the regional origin of the product from the consumer’s point of view. On the basis of which the analysis of consumer activity in relation to the purchase of food products of a certain regional affiliation in Moscow was made. The results of the study represent the main parameters on the basis of which the consumer’s perception of the regional affiliation of the product occurs. The role of each factor in forming the consumer’s opinion about the regional affiliation of the product is analyzed. The correlation of consumers’ interest in produced regional products of high quality using traditional technologies is noted. The consumer’s perception of the necessary attributes to identify the regional origin of the product is evaluated. The main conclusions regarding the assessment of consumer activity in relation to the purchase of food products of a certain regional affiliation are presented.

1. Introduction

Due to the increasing concentration of forces in the retail food trade, a number of serious problems arise, in particular, obtaining an additional advantage in the market that ensures the competitiveness of products. In conditions of serious competition, the regional origin of the product is of particular importance. At the moment, many consumers have stable preferences for the product category, but the significance of this factor varies greatly between product groups. In particular, regional origin is associated with high quality products, certain taste characteristics, etc. Thus, for many manufacturers to get a certain market share with a special significant quality as a regional affiliation is a fundamental factor in the further development strategy of the organization.

However, at the moment there are a number of problems in the perception of consumers regarding the concept of regional product ownership. For many consumers, a region may be associated with geographical location, economic, political, social, or cultural attributes. Often, consumers also use the climate characteristics of the area as a basis for determining the region. At the moment, many manufacturers that use such a factor as regional origin in the marketing mix focus on socio-economic
aspects mainly. At the same time, a separate region and its development is of particular importance only for consumers living in this area. [2]

Thus, in the EU countries, regional ownership is understood as special characteristics of the product, which are also provided during deep processing using traditional technologies for the region. It should be noted that the policy of regional specialization in the EU is a kind of combination of the spatial borders of the region with the traditional production of a number of products.

So, in this study, we consider it important to focus on the following criteria, presented in table 1.

| Regional affiliation criteria | Factors                                      |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Spatial                       | geographical, political, and climate         |
| Subjective                    | popularity, trust in the manufacturer, depth and degree of product processing; |
| Cultural                      | traditions, special cooking recipes           |
| Connected with product        | product quality indicators (objective and subjective) |

In our opinion, the study of all the specified factors will help to form an idea of the significance of the regional origin of products for potential consumers.

2. Materials and methods

The research used general scientific and special research methods and techniques, including the method of conducting marketing research. The research is based on the survey method. The survey was conducted in the period from mid-September to mid-October 2019 in Moscow. The survey of customers was carried out in supermarkets positioning themselves as stores of products for healthy food. For the purpose of analysis, questionnaires of 230 store users were selected. The peculiarity of forming a sample is to take into account the opinions of only those people who make a decision when purchasing meat and dairy products. In the survey, a special place is given to open questions that form consumers’ perception of the regional affiliation product. The methodological assessment of open questions is based on a multi-stage method of analysis, which is used in conducting qualitative social research. As a result of this approach, responses and statements were compared with the categories of interviewed people.

3. Results

The majority of respondents participated in the survey between the ages of 34 and 44 - 29%; between 45 and 54 years of age - 28% of all respondents. 15% of the total number of respondents belong to the age group from 55 to 64 years. 11% of those aged 25-35 and 7% of those surveyed were under 24 years of age. Additional gender differentiation: 65% women and 35% men of the respondents. On the question of education: 2.8% do not have a full secondary education, 21% - have secondary education, 25% - secondary vocational education, 43% - higher education, 8.2% - have a scientific degree. Also among the respondents, there were people who did not answer this question.

The majority of respondents live in families. Most of the families consisting of 3 people - 35%, households consisting of 2 people occupy 20%, of four people - 16%, 12% - live independently, and the rest in families of 5 or more people.

Regarding income, 18% of respondents refused to give information. Most households are divided into five classes according to the level of income comparable to that of one family member. Less than 20 thousand rubles - 28%, from 21-45 thousand rubles - 30%, from 46-65 thousand rubles - 32%, from 66-85 thousand rubles - 7%, the rest of the respondents had an income of 86 thousand rubles or more.

More than 80% of all respondents are working people, 31% of them are working in managerial positions, and 20% are housewives.
In the course of the study, it was noted that most of the respondents when answering questions tended to certain examples that characterize the regional affiliation of the product, which allowed determining high awareness of this issue. Respondents in the course of the study could choose several factors that characterize a certain criterion of regional affiliation, taking into account objective opinions and examples regarding the chosen priorities. The distribution of responses relative to the priority of selecting criteria that determine the regional affiliation of the product is shown in table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting criteria that determine the regional affiliation of the product.

| Regional affiliation criteria | Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting criteria that determine the regional affiliation of the product (out of 230 respondents). |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Spatial                     | 220                                                                                                                                     |
| Subjective                  | 145                                                                                                                                     |
| Cultural                    | 180                                                                                                                                     |
| Connected with product      | 207                                                                                                                                     |

Analyzing the responses, it should be noted that for the majority of respondents (220 respondents), the regional affiliation of the product is based primarily on spatial criteria. Geographical factors play a special role in this process. Regarding meat and dairy products, respondents (200 respondents) noted a high dependence of the proximity of the production site on the points of sale, and identified this as the main factor in ensuring the freshness and high quality of the product (table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting factors related to the spatial group of criteria for regional affiliation.

| Factors     | Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of choosing factors related to the spatial group of criteria for regional affiliation (out of 220 respondents) |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Geographical| 200                                                                                                                                             |
| Political   | 37                                                                                                                                             |
| Climate     | 13                                                                                                                                             |

During the survey, it was additionally determined that high quality and freshness of the product can be ensured if the production is located from Moscow at a distance of 100 to 200 km (125 respondents). About 70 of respondents consider a distance from 50 km to 100 km acceptable. About 30 respondents were not able to clearly determine the distance, in the objective assessment; they were inclined to believe that the optimal location of production is in the nearest areas bordering the Moscow region.

The next most important criterion, more than 90% of respondents noted parameters related to the product. In the interview with respondents, a total of about 15 parameters were established that allow linking the product and regional affiliation. The distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting the main factors related to the “product-related” group of criteria for regional affiliation is shown in table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting factors related to the “product-related” group of criteria for regional affiliation.

| Factors     | Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting factors related to the “product-related” group of criteria for regional affiliation (out of 207 respondents) |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Appearance  | 200                                                                                                                                             |
| Storage life| 190                                                                                                                                             |
| Freshness   | 168                                                                                                                                             |
The main ones are the parameters that guarantee the quality of the product: they include the appearance of the product, shelf life (most of the respondents believe that high quality meat and dairy products are interconnected with minimal shelf life), freshness. About 50 % of the respondents mentioned one of the important quality parameters - product packaging, but the correlation of the technological properties of product packaging and the regional affiliation of the product in the course of the study could not be established.

The group of cultural factors, according to respondents, is the third most important parameter for determining the regional affiliation of a product. The distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting the main factors related to the “cultural” group of criteria for regional affiliation is shown in table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting factors related to the “cultural” group of criteria for regional affiliation.

| Factors                   | Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting factors related to the “cultural” group of criteria for regional affiliation (out of 180 respondents) |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Traditions                | 150                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Special cooking recipes   | 105                                                                                                                                                                                            |

It should be noted that respondents have special preferences for the presentation of products due to religious affiliation or special cooking technology, which is traditional for a certain area. In the course of the study, it was found that the respondents (139 respondents), when evaluating traditional components, showed a willingness to trial purchase products produced using traditional technologies specific to a particular area.

Subjective factors, according to the majority of respondents, do not significantly affect the understanding of the regional affiliation of the product. The distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting the main factors related to the “subjective” group of criteria for regional affiliation is shown in table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of selecting factors related to the “subjective” group of criteria for regional affiliation.

| Factors                       | Distribution of respondents’ responses regarding the priority of choosing factors related to the “subjective” group of criteria for regional affiliation (out of 145 respondents) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Popularity                    | 100                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Trust in the manufacturer     | 115                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Depth and degree of product processing | 10                                                                                                                                                                                            |

However, for the majority of respondents, the manufacturer’s reputation and popularity are important. When evaluating these factors, respondents tended to believe that the manufacturers themselves should emphasize the regional origin of the product in the name or using certain symbols. About 60 of the respondents noted the effectiveness of this event using examples: Vologda butter and Mozhaysk milk.
When assessing the answers to additional questions, whether regional affiliation can confirm the natural origin of dairy and meat products, about 65% of respondents from the general population answered in the affirmative, while the majority believes that this confirmation should be further certified by regional authorities. 21% of respondents believe that additional assurances from the manufacturer are necessary to assess the naturalness of the product. 14% of respondents do not see a direct relationship between the naturalness of the product and its regional origin.

Answer to the open question “How would you describe the regional origin of the product?” showed an ambiguous view of the majority of respondents as to what is meant by the regional origin of the product. This once again underlines the possibility of effective use of this factor in the competition from the manufacturer’s point of view.

4. Summary

Thus, the results of the study confirm the importance of this parameter when choosing food, in particular dairy and meat products. Assessing the high level of competition in the food market, this factor can act as a significant element in creating a model of marketing relations with consumers. It should be noted that from the point of view of respondents, there is a need for state support in the face of regional authorities regarding the identification of the regional affiliation of the product. At the same time, this identification must be combined with the high quality of the product produced, including using certain technologies and traditions characteristic of the region.

In our opinion, the basis for such identification should be a brand that allows consumers to determine the regional origin of the product and make a certain opinion about its quality. It should also be taken into account that the quality guarantees, compliance with regional technologies or cooking traditions placed on the packaging should be improved according to the opinion of consumers.

For example, on the level of strategic branding development in a number of EU countries, this policy is materially supplemented by special regional positioning of the brand, pointing to a regional origin and quality organization products. As a rule, this brand is used in conjunction with regional attributes, such as the coat of arms, flag, etc. allowing the consumer to easily identify it on the shelves of the store. This representation allows agribusiness organizations to save investment in branding significantly, due to the influence of such factors as the volume factor and the factor of insurance against economic risks.

This state of things helps develop the following marketing assets of the organization as consumer loyalty, allowing through the use of regional brand to build effectively a model of the marketing relations with consumers and to develop the relationship of trust toward the brand acts as a guarantor of high product quality. In turn, this is possible due to the formation in the consumer’s mind of an image of products associated with high quality, traditions and production technologies and compliance with all requirements. And due to the constant development of communication with consumers, namely: holding exhibitions, organizing regional holidays, publishing literature that is distributed, including through state structures, it allows managing relationships with consumers in the long term.

At the same time, special emphasis should be placed on the territorial location of the district when developing a regional brand. Other parameters, such as: product-related parameters, technologies, and manufacturing traditions should be considered as secondary ones.

In our opinion, products manufactured under a brand that characterizes regional origin should use the names of the area where the products were produced in their names. As the research has shown, it is the name that most allows fixing certain characteristics of the product in the consumer’s mind, including those related to its quality.

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