Choice of Sweet Peppers: Investigating Factors Affecting Taiwanese Consumers' Purchase Decision Using Best-worst Scaling Methodology

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Abstract

Consumers' food purchase decision is rarely formed by a single product or process attribute. Rather, consumers' choice is determined by a combination of different characteristics - search, experience and credence attributes – as well as by particular features of the decision-making environment such as the shopping location or recommendations given by significant others.

This study accounts for this complexity of consumers' food choice by applying best-worst scaling (BWS) methodology in a street-intercept web survey in Taiwan for fresh sweet peppers. Nine very different factors able to influence consumers' decision making for sweet peppers were tested in an experimental setting. The nine attributes (country-of-origin; production methods; chemi-residue test; price; shopping location; visual appearance; sense-of-touch; package size and recommendations given by an important person) included in the analysis had been identified in a pre-study. Overall, 481 respondents participated in the study. Respondents faced four choice tasks, each with five attributes.

A mixed logit model was applied to quantify the importance of the attributes for consumers' purchasing behaviour. Latent class analysis allowed uncovering heterogeneity inherent in the food preferences among Taiwanese consumers. Three segments emerged from the analysis: the largest group of health-perceptive buyers (51.9 %) represents consumers that reveal a strong focus on the displayed information regarding production methods and chemi-residue test (credence attribute), but care less for price. The exterior seekers (27.9 %) show a strong importance for the tactile sense and visual appearance of the sweet peppers (search attribute), with price being as well an important attribute for them. The origin-orientated buyers (20.2 %) perceived the country-of-origin information (credence attribute) to be most relevant.

This study sheds light on the importance of different product and process attributes as well as environmental factors on consumers' purchase decision for sweet peppers. Results show the high relevance of origin- and health-oriented cues, and thus of credence attributes, for consumers' food choice. However, there are also some consumers placing a strong emphasis on sensory-oriented cues of a product. The preference heterogeneity detected in the study can be used in customized marketing and trading, in order to offer differentiated products in line with consumer preferences.

Keywords: Best-worst scaling, consumer preference, latent class analysis

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