

The importance of the country-of-origin effect and consumer ethnocentrism on the market of food products

The project aims to determine how appeals to the country-of-origin provided through claims, symbols, labels and quality signs can affect consumer attitudes and food purchase intentions as well as to contextualise the consumer behaviour issues in the broader picture of the entire system of food production and distribution. In this research project, we plan to provide evidence on how Polish consumers form opinions about the importance of the country of origin of food products and how they interpret country-of-origin information in this regard. We will examine differences in consumer motivation and ability to process country-of-origin claims and symbols (i.e. consumer wants) as well as differences in consumers' preference for home country products (i.e. consumer ethnocentrism). We will explore the role of Internet, especially company websites and social media, in communicating with the public and assisting consumers in making informed food choices. This will lead to the identification of new communication tools for information provision on country-of-origin of food products. Based on our research findings, best practices for the provision of country-of-origin information in food marketing will be identified.

We begin with a thorough and comprehensive literature review, which will serve us to design survey questionnaires. We analyse official documents and legal acts referring to the appeals to the country of origin in food marketing. We have identified 3 key categories of respondents: managers of food-processing enterprises, distributors (wholesalers and retailers) and consumers. The results obtained in quantitative analyses will be used to select and fine-tune questions to be asked in individual in-depth interviews. Information obtained from food processors and distributors will help us to design the questionnaire to be addressed to Polish consumers. The results stemming from the qualitative parts of our research in conjunction with an analysis of selected company websites will be used to construct a series of case studies aiming to present the best practices (benchmarking). In our research, we plan to use selected measurement scales used in the global literature of the subject concerning the country-of-origin effect and consumer ethnocentrism.

Our research project is characterised by a high level of innovativeness because 1) it undertakes a relatively new field of studies with a novel methodological approach (a systemic research of the whole distribution channel: processors, wholesalers, retailers and consumers, triangulation of quantitative and qualitative research methods); 2) our analyses will disaggregate the market of food products into narrower product categories, which is a novel approach compared to previous studies of consumer ethnocentrism; 3) we will analyse 3 types of company strategies related to the country-of-origin effect, including an underresearched one based on creating an impression of a false country of origin (e.g. a Polish company struggling to appear Italian or an American company trying to appear Polish). The research results stemming from this project will contribute to the development of the disciplines of food marketing and consumer behaviour (management and business studies).