

KNOWLEDGE AS A KEY CONSUMPTION FACTOR AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY. A CROSSCULTURAL ANALYSIS.

EL CONOCIMIENTO COMO FACTOR CLAVE DEL CONSUMO Y SU IMPORTANCIA EN LA ESTRATEGIA DE COMUNICACIÓN. UN ANÁLISIS CROSSCULTURAL.

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Abstract

Knowledge has been widely studied in the literature as it is a highly influential variable in consumer behaviour. However, this influence can be crucial in certain contexts where the consumption of the product depends on what the consumer specifically knows about it. Many agri-food products are in this situation. Thus, in these cases, effective communication campaigns and the transmission of clear and useful information are key to increasing knowledge and, consequently, consumption. Based on the data collected from 3200 consumers in Spain, Germany, United Kingdom and Denmark, in this work the level of consumer knowledge about olive oils is studied and a series of reflections-recommendations are made to guide the communication strategy in this sector in order to improve knowledge and increase the consumption of high quality oils.

Resumen

El conocimiento ha sido ampliamente estudiado en la literatura por ser una variable muy influyente en el comportamiento del consumidor. No obstante, esta influencia puede resultar crucial en determinados contextos donde el consumo del producto depende de lo que el consumidor específicamente sabe sobre él. Muchos productos agroalimentarios se encuentran en esta situación. Así, en estos casos, las campañas de comunicación eficaces y la transmisión de información clara y útil resultan claves para el incremento del conocimiento y, en consecuencia, del consumo. A partir de los datos recogidos de 3200 consumidores de España, Alemania, Reino Unido y Dinamarca, en este trabajo se estudia el nivel de conocimiento del consumidor sobre aceites de oliva y se hacen una serie de reflexiones-recomendaciones para orientar la estrategia de comunicación en este sector con el fin de mejorar el conocimiento e incrementar el consumo de aceites de alta calidad.

Keywords: Olive oils, knowledge, communication, consumption, consumer behaviour

Palabras clave: aceites de oliva, conocimiento, comunicación, consumo, comportamiento del consumidor

SUMMARY

Introduction

For a few decades, the context of purchase of agri-food products has undergone many changes and increased its complexity. Currently, consumers have access to a large and varied offer of products, which in certain food categories causes, in turn, that people often do not know what are the differences between the different options available and

what product to choose. Although today there is a lot of information about the products (characteristics, types, uses, advantages, etc.) and consumers have easy access to it, the overabundance of it in many cases, the lack of time and the limitations of the people as information processors in others, together with the low level of involvement that, in general, usually exists in many markets such as agri-food, in certain cases leads consumers to find themselves lost in decision-making and to choose products based on, frequently, in their extrinsic characteristics (such as price or brand) rather than in intrinsic characteristics of the products themselves, given their level of ignorance about the latter (Park and Lessig, 1981; Rao and Monroe, 1988; Raju et al., 1995; Cordell, 1997; Veale and Quester, 2009; Rezvani et al., 2012).

In this context, for some food categories, knowledge plays a crucial role in purchase or consumption. Specifically, in those cases in which the image of the generic product is more important than the image of specific brands, where the inclusion of new habits and customs depend on the information; in the case of quality products, with functional advantages; or in cases where there is a certain degree of ignorance or confusion and the demand is conditioned by what the consumer specifically knows; the possession of adequate information (knowledge) is crucial in these scenarios for consumption to occur.

In this sense, this work focuses on the analysis of consumer knowledge, examining what they know and what they don't, as a way to guide the communication strategy and influence the consumption of the product. The chosen product category has been olive oil, as it is a product characterized by the high degree of ignorance and confusion that the consumer has (Parras and Torres, 1996; Krystallis and Ness, 2005; Navarro et al., 2010 ; Torres et al., 2012; Marano et al., 2015; Yanguí et al., 2016), both in traditional markets where the product is deeply rooted in gastronomic culture, and in recent and potential markets. The objective is to examine the knowledge that consumers in four European countries with different levels of consumption have about this product (Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom and Denmark) in order to guide the communication policy in these markets and increase consumption, particularly, of the highest quality olive oils (virgin olive oils). Despite the marketing and communication efforts made in recent years, the degree of consumer awareness of this product category remains very low, indicative of the lack of effectiveness of the campaigns carried out so far.

Method

To achieve the proposed objective, quantitative research has been used. Specifically, 3200 consumers (800 in each country) were interviewed using an online-CAWI questionnaire.

Results

A low degree of knowledge of olive oils is observed, with a majority and global profile of confusion or ignorance in most of the items analyzed in all the countries analyzed, although in Spain the level of knowledge is somewhat higher than in the others cases.

Additionally, significant differences in the level of knowledge has been contrasted among the different countries analyzed.

Conclusions

Although knowledge is important in the choice of any product, in certain contexts such as agri-food and for certain categories of food it can play a crucial role in consumption.

In these cases, an adequate level of knowledge translates, firstly, into an increase in consumption (also in potential markets) and, secondly, that consumers could differentiate between products and make wise and conscious choices. In this sense, effective communication is essential to achieve the improvement of this knowledge and, consequently, increase consumption. In the case of olive oil, one might wonder what the differences are between conventional olive oil and virgin olive oils since it seems clear that the basic characteristics of the different qualities are not known.