

WHAT DO POLISH AND DUTCH CONSUMERS THINK ABOUT
DRIED FRUIT AND PRODUCTS WITH THEM - CREAIVE
GROUP DISCUSSIONS AS A MEANS OF RECOGNITION
CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS

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A b s t r a c t

The main aim of the study was to get insight into consumers' perception towards dried fruit and products with them, thus the exploratory study designed as a group discussion took place. While group discussions association (as one of the projective technique) and Kelly repertory grid were used to make the discussions more creative and lively. The discussions were held in Poland and in the Netherlands. It was found that Polish consumers perceive dried fruits mainly as convenient product while according to Dutch consumers dried fruit are old - fashioned. If it comes to the products with dried fruits, Polish consumers seem appreciate the presence of fruits in the product as the source of better taste and diversity. Both Polish and Dutch consumers seem pay attention to the nutritional value of the products but they are not convinced whether information on the package is true.

JAK POLSCY I HOLENDERSCY KONSUMENTY POSTRZEGAJĄ SUSZONE
OWOCE I PRODUKTY JE ZAWIERAJĄCE? - WYKORZYSTANIE METODY
KREATYWNYCH GRUP DYSKUSYJNYCH

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A b s t r a k t

Badano wymagania i oczekiwania konsumentów wobec owoców suszonych oraz produktów je zawierających. W doświadczeniu wykorzystano metodę kreatywnych grup dyskusyjnych. Porównaniu stosunku konsumentów z różnych rejonów Europy do suszonych owoców i odbioru przez nich tego typu produktów służyły badania przeprowadzone w dwóch odmiennych kulturowo krajach — w Polsce i w Holandii. W dyskusjach wykorzystywano metodę skojarzeń jako technikę projekcyjną oraz technikę Kelly repertory grid.

Zarówno polscy, jak i holenderscy respondenci nie mieli zdania na temat wartości odżywczych i kalorycznych suszu owocowego, nie byli też przekonani o jego naturalności. Holendrzy nie widzieli powodu, dla którego mieliby kupować owoce suszone, skoro na rynku dostępne są świeże. W większości postrzegali je jako produkt staromodny, mało przydatny zarówno do bezpośredniej konsumpcji, jak i jako półprodukt. Polscy ankietowani owoce suszone uważali za produkty wygodne, tzn. łatwe do przechowywania, o długim okresie trwałości, ale jednocześnie rzeczy luksusowe. Zarówno polscy, jak i holenderscy respondenci zwracali zaś uwagę na wartość odżywczą i kaloryczność artykułów spożywczych zawierających susz owocowy, deklarowaną na opakowaniu, ale nie do końca ufali zawartym tam informacjom. Polscy respondenci uważali, że dodatek suszonych owoców do produktów polepsza ich smak oraz daje urozmaicenie. Opinie tej nie podzielali konsumenci holenderscy.

Na podstawie danych zebranych w kreatywnych grupach dyskusyjnych można powiedzieć, że produkty zawierające owoce suszone mogą mieć szansę powodzenia, o ile ich walory prozdrowotne zostaną odpowiednio wypromowane.

Introduction

Nowadays food products should not only be in accordance with nutritional guidelines but also satisfy the needs of consumers who more often are interested in convenience (MERMELSTEIN 2001, JAEGER 2006). Thus snack products with dried fruit, characterized with high retention of biologically active compounds, seem fulfill these requirements. The consumers' needs should be taken as a starting point for the new product development process (VAN TRUP and STEENKAMP 1998), because it can enhance the success of the product on the market (VAN KLEEF et al. 2002).

The presented study are part of ISAFRUIT project, which main aim is to increase fruit consumption among European citizens through a trans disciplinary approach. Therefore, in developing new attractive products with dried fruit, consumer research were undertaken to support technologist in their decisions. A quantitative research designed as a questionnaire was planned. However, the initial studies of literature revealed that there is no data about consumers' perception of dried fruits and products with them. Thus, it was decided to perform firstly qualitative research which is more exploratory and diagnostic than quantitative approach and involves small number of people (SAMPSON 1986). The group discussions were chosen over individual interviews because of their interactive effect (statements of one participant can trigger comments by others) (VAN KLEEF et al. 2005). They provide a potentially higher chance of getting new ideas or uncovering opinions than individual interviews (COSTA 2003). However, the projective

techniques (association) and Kelly repertory grid were included into research, because they are useful to discover feelings, beliefs or attitudes difficult to articulate (COSTA 2003, DONOGHUE 2000, VAN KLEEF et al., 2005).

The main aim of this study was to recognize perception of dried fruit and products with them in two different culturally countries by performing creative group discussion. The associations and Kelly repertory grid method were used to make the discussions more lively and creative.

Materials and Methods

The group discussions were held in Poland and in the Netherlands. Because they were treated as a preliminary study of a quantitative research, the number of respondents was not so high (16 in Poland and 12 in the Netherlands). The interviewees represented men and women, mostly highly educated, single or married. Among them were persons with children in their households, Some of them were responsible for the everyday purchase of fruits and vegetables.

The discussions lasted always 2 hours, and was conducted by a panel leader. The whole session was recorded. In the Table 1 the detailed instruction according to which each group discussion was performed is displayed.

The first part of discussion was the association with application of postcards. After the introduction, the range of postcards were presented to the interviewees. The postcards displaying foods were purposely excluded to make the discussion more creative. The respondents had to chose these postcards which they associate with fresh fruit. Then they had to explain the motives of their choice. On the base of this discussion a few questions concerning fresh fruit perception and consumption were asked.

The next part of the discussion was devoted to consumers' perception of different products with dried fruit, which where demonstrated in assortment groups (Kelly repertory grid method). Firstly, the set of breakfast cereals was presented. The products differed in the content (especially presence of fruits), package and presence of nutritional or health claims. The interviewees could look at the products or even touch them if necessary. Then the discussion leader asked the participants to group the products. The participants decided themselves how many groups they want to form, according to criteria relevant to them. The same procedure was applied with bars and sweets containing dried fruit. At the end of the session the postcards were once more presented. This time respondents were choosing postcards which they associate with dried fruit. They were also asked about few issues concerning dried fruit perception and consumption. The whole session was finished by rewarding the interviewees for their participation and explaining the aim of the research.

Some opinions concerning dried fruit expressed during group discussions were ordered and group into thematic categories (Table 2).

Table 1

The detailed instruction (for the panel leader) according to which the group discussion were held

<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A few words about the ISAFRUIT project and the explanation that discussion concerns perception of different food products - Introduction of the discussion's participants - Questions about breakfast cereals and cereal bars consumption and preferences (to make the respondents more relaxed) - The statement that every answer is correct and every reaction is more than welcome
<p>A. Fruit perception (accessories - post cards)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respondents are choosing postcard which they associate with fresh fruit - The interviewees explain why they choose the particular postcard - On the base of the discussion with postcards respondents answers the following questions: How often do you eat fruit? When you do not eat fruit? Which type of fruit do you prefer and why these? What do you think are advantages and disadvantages of eating fruits? Can you tell something about how you feel while eating fruit or after eating fruit?
<p>B. Breakfast cereals perception (accessories - a set of breakfast cereals) - application of Kelly repertory grid method</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different versions of a product are placed on the table Everybody can look at the products or even touch them if necessary, if participants don't know the products for example. Then the discussion leader will ask the participants to group the products. The participants can decide themselves how many groups they want to form. Participants make the groups according to the criteria which are relevant to them. - Different questions about the chosen criteria are possible: Can you tell more about this? What does it mean to you and your family? Is it important for you? Do you look at healthy ingredients? Do you look at to what extent the product is convenient for you? - When it is not specifically mentioned the following questions can be asked: Which product do you prefer: with or without dried fruit in it? Can you explain why? What is it that makes the dried fruit product more or less attractive? Is the product with dried fruit in it healthier than products that have no dried fruit in it?
<p>C. Muesli bars perception (accessories - a set of muesli bars) - the methodology the same as for breakfast cereals</p>
<p>D. Perception of sweets with dried fruit (accessories - a set of sweets with dried fruit) - the methodology the same as for breakfast cereals</p>
<p>E. Dried fruit perception (accessories - postcards) - the methodology the same as for breakfast cereals</p>
<p>F. Termination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The detailed explanation of the discussion aim - The deliver of reward for the participation in the discussion

Table 2

The opinions concerning dried fruit expressed during group discussions by Polish and Dutch consumers

Category	Polish interviewees	Dutch interviewees
Healthiness/naturalness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I think that raisins can be used against heartburn - I think that dried fruit have positive influence on health but in less degree than fresh fruit - I have health association with gut function - Dried fruit have preservatives, otherwise they would be spoiled - Dried fruit does not have such nutritional value as fresh ones - I think that they are healthy because of presence of dietary fibre and vitamins - I think that dried fruit are healthy snack for children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am positive about dried fruit, although it is old fashioned way of fruits storage but dried fruit are healthy - I think that dried fruit are unhealthy because it is produced in a way that all vitamins are out of it - I have no idea whether dried fruit are healthy but probably they are not complete unhealthy - Dried fruit are more healthy than crisps
Convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dried fruit have a long shelf - life - I can take easily dried fruit when I go out - Dried fruit are available at any moment and they are not susceptible to spoilage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drying from former days is a method to store fruit for a long time - Dates, figs, apricots and plums are sticky
Certain dried fruits mentioned by respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raisins - Plums - Apples Apricots - Dried apples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dried bananas - Dried raisins - Plums - Apricot - Pieces of apples - Pieces of bananas
Certain product with dried fruits mentioned by respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cakes (for example keks) - Muesli - Christmas Eve compote - Dried raisins/plums in chocolate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tutti-frutti - Turkish fruits - Muesli/crueli - Student mix
Consumption moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I eat dried fruit as a snack between meals - I eat dried fruit during watching TV - Dried fruit are at hand in my house and I eat them when I prepare cake - I eat dried fruit with alcohol or coffee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I eat dried fruit in my parents house - I eat dried fruit with wine or beer - I eat dried fruit as a dessert
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dried fruit are available in the winter when fresh fruit are not so available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dried fruit are no longer necessary in this these times - Why should we dry apples? - Drying is an old fashioned method to conserve

Results and Discussion

Dried fruit in Poland are mostly associated with dried raisins, dried plums and raisins in chocolate as well as Christmas Eve compote. They are often added to cakes and meat, what is in consistency with Euromonitor (2006), which indicated that dried fruit in Poland are mostly added to cakes and breads. The Dutch consumers mostly associated dried fruit with such products as raisins, bananas, muesli and student mix. Although Polish consumers mentioned many positive influences which dried fruit have on human health (presence of vitamins, influence the digestion), in the discussions they were not sure that dried fruit are wholesome and doubted whether dried fruit are as healthy as fresh ones. The same was observed for the Dutch consumers. Moreover, Dutch respondents perceived drying as an old-fashioned method of fruit preservation and dried fruit as products which are not so important nowadays, when fresh fruit are easy available. On the contrary, in the opinion of Polish consumers dried fruit are convenient, easy to store product with long shelf-life. It occurred that dried fruit are at hand in Polish houses but simultaneously they are perceived as luxury.

The great difference was observed between perception of fresh and dried fruit in both countries. Fresh fruits were associated with bright, vivid colours and nature, whereas postcards selected in connection with dried fruit were rather in dull colours.

If it concerns products with dried fruit, the taste of it seemed to be important for Polish as well as Dutch respondents. According to BOBICZ-ZIELIŃSKA (1999) Polish students indicated taste as one of the most important factors influencing choice of fruit. In this research healthiness of fruit also was rated very high. If it comes to the products with dried fruit, Polish and Dutch consumers paid attention to the content of calories and nutritional ingredients, however, truthfulness of information placed on the packages was not so obvious in both countries. According to most of Polish interviewees, addition of dried fruit to the products make them more tasteful and diversified. This opinion did not prevail among Dutch consumers. Polish respondents were particularly interested in apple crisps but they were curious about naturalness of such products. Some of Dutch respondents paid attention to the raisins packed in small boxes which resembled them their childhood.

The perceptions, attitudes and expectations towards evaluated products identified within creative group discussions indicated that irrespectively of nationality and cultural differences, the interviewees paid attention to nutritional value of purchased products. It means that wholesomeness of newly designed product should be taken into consideration during technology development. It should be also emphasised within novel product promotion, preferably by using health claims, to strengthen the consumer confidence in positive influence of such products on health.

Conclusions

Although association concerning dried fruit are similar in Poland and in the Netherlands, the perception of them is totally different. Polish consumers perceive dried fruit mainly as convenient product while according to Dutch consumers dried fruits are old - fashioned. On the base of results from the creative group discussions it can be stated that products with dried fruit can succeed on the market, however their wholesomeness must be properly promoted.

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