Marketing approach of typicality seems far away from analytical one. Producers, agronomists and policy makers are often convinced about the original traits of typical food products. However distributors and consumers are less involved within the supply chain process of such products and are not skilled about the intrinsic value of typical food products. In this way marketing approach of typicality needs to focus on perceived typicality, not necessarily on objective typicality. In marketing science, typicality deals with the several attributes of a given product and fits with segmentation strategy in order to increase product’s added value by reaching consumer expectations.

1. WHAT IS TYPICALITY?

As a concept, typicality is born in the French vineyard. A typical food product is producer-oriented and is poorly exportable out of its region of origin. For consumer and marketing scientists typicality has a twofold meaning.

First, a typical product is an archetype, produced in a traditional manner with a high level of authenticity. It is an on-farm or craft processed product with a clear and identified traceability, sometimes certified. An archetype is very different from its category. It has singular attributes, it is atypical and its market positioning is based on difference face to other competing products. Among consumers, those who appreciate archetypal product are often connoisseur, sometimes they can be expert, with a deep knowledge of the given product. This first understanding of typical product as an archetype is farmers’ and small producers' approach. In this way, a food product that is typical can reach niche and regional-oriented markets.

The second understanding of typicality is based on resemblance. In this way, a typical product is a stereotype. It is sometimes an industrial and often a branded product. It is representative of its category (Ladwein, 1995). In this way, a stereotype is designed or displayed in order to be salient. To be representative of its category, such a typical product must be perceived in a central position by means of attributes of similarity (Loken & Ward, 1990). Among consumers, those who appreciate stereotypical products are often brand prone and have a broad or fuzzy knowledge of the given product. Such consumers can be found mainly in mass marketing distribution and also within tourists who are curious but not necessarily connoisseur. This second understanding of typicality is very different from the previous one. But the two are not opposite, they are complementary.

These terms are new in marketing literature. For the French speaking researchers, two words exist: typicité and typicalité, the last one is neologism. There is only one English word for the two meanings: typicality. Scientists use the word typicality alone in order to describe typical products complying with difference and variety seeking fulfilment. The expression judgement of typicality is used by consumers scientists in order to better explain what is the decision-making process of consumer when he/she does not know the product but needs to choose by means of quality cues and labels.

2. TYPICALITY AND CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

During decision-making process to choose a product, consumer is looking for quality cues, specifically for brand and other guarantee signals. In this way, consumer can prioritise difference or resemblance. The choice of difference leads to archetype, a unique product with distinctive traits. The choice of resemblance leads to stereotype, a product with traits easily acknowledged by most of people.

In case of difference-based choice, the archetype’s attributes must satisfy consumers’ expectations of distinction and variety seeking. For instance, the cheeses chosen for a dinner with friends are often traditional cheeses with PDO label. The measurement of such archetypicality is based on
characterisation of product’s attributes.

In case of resemblance-based choice, the stereotype’s attributes must satisfy consumers’ expectations of reassurance and risk minimisation. For instance, in case of sensory preference discrepancy within household members, strong branded products are often bought as compromise product instead of purchase of two dedicated items (for example: young or mature cheese). The measurement of such stereotypicality is based on unaided recall among consumers.

In typicality judgement situation, the objective is not to highlight the product. A simple evocation of a specific need must lead to choose the product representative of the referent category linked to the need. Advertising campaigns of major companies work in this way with a remanence effect that sustains unaided recall of strong brands. This choice could avoid bad surprise in case of high involvement in purchasing process and also in case of routine-driven behaviour. But these two traits are both characteristics of food buying behaviour.

Typicality judgement is linked to exposure frequency. Typicality judgement works on brand choice. It is proved that the choice of strong brands can decrease transaction costs for consumer. It reduces both the numbers of halts in front of shelves and the time devoted to grip the commodities, during decision-making process (Ladwein & Bensa, 1996). Contrariwise, the choice of less known brands is more exploratory, more under control. It implies a higher number of stops in front of shelves, and several gripping gestures.

Typicality judgement works when uncertainty is high. Uncertainty is exogenous when it comes from a broad choice with a lot of items. Overabundance of choice generates too much information (cognitive saturation). Uncertainty is endogenous when it comes from a low level of consumer familiarity with the product or the category. Gaps in knowledge and absence of experience create a need of information. In both cases, uncertainty leads to typicality judgement (Ladwein, 1998). The more representative the brand will be, the more often it will be chosen.

Typicality judgement makes consumer choice easier. Typicality judgement is used as expedient of information in case of low familiarity with the product, as well as low-cognitive processing in case of high familiarity with product category. It also works when attributes are not comparable and compel consumers to an overall appreciation. This last situation needs a holistic information processing.

3. TYPICALITY JUDGEMENT AND TYPICAL FOOD PRODUCTS

Uncertainty is high in the food domain because the product cannot be experienced before purchase and retail distribution offers a huge number of commodities. Sometimes uncertainty increases due to consumers’ exposure to food scares introduced by BSE, Dioxin or Listeria crises. Strong brands play a key role by leading consumer choice in a positive feeling of reassurance. Brands give a guarantee cue to consumers. In this perspective, we have to pay attention to the role of PDO / PGI labels. As official labels they give a guarantee, as identifiable signals they are collective brands. PDO / PGI labels work as an umbrella brand.

They are many criteria used by consumers to identify high quality food product. When analysing the role of product attributes in consumer choice, consumer scientists frequently find a major unexplained variance. This important result implies that consumer attitude towards food items is often broad and cannot be explained by factorisation. This phenomenon is called halo or blurring effect. Halo effect can modify sensory perception of product (Alvensleben in Padberg, 1997). There is a positive halo effect for organic and origin labelled food products and a negative one for more conventional products.

It was measured that consumer attitude towards an unknown product varies depending on halo effect of the country of origin. Attitude is more hesitant and based on stereotype in case of less known country. Attitude is more positive when the country of origin is known by and close the consumer’s country (on an economical or cultural standpoint) (Juric & Worsley, 1997).

These works point out an interesting result: archetype is often perceived on the basis of typicality judgement and stereotype. This is why we consider that typicality as archetypicality and typicality as stereotypicality are complementary. Archetypicality is narrower than stereotypicality, and we
think that the first is a subset of the second. We have had several opportunities to confirm this statement.

4. EXPORTATION OF TYPICAL FOOD PRODUCTS

Out of its production area and far away from its main national urban market where it makes sense, a typical food product does not mean any thing more than a fuzzy representation of its country of origin. On this side of the borderline, a typical food product is an archetype, beyond the line it becomes a stereotype.

At a European level, typicality is a small cluster, considered as very close exotic and ethnic segmentation, according to a distance gradient. Products from European regions are representative of typicality, while exoticism refers to products coming far away from European area (Siani, 1998).

Out of its borderline, a typical product must undergo a kind of hybridisation in order to be acceptable by foreign consumers. To be exportable, a typical food product needs to comply with crossbreeding process. Typical cuisine prepared for foreign tourists is not authentic cuisine. It is adapted to the acceptability level of the targeted market. Sometimes this transformation leads far away from native tangs. For instance it is not sure that Spanish people could like *paella* served in Germany, and *baked Brie*, regarded as a typical French cheese in USA (Balhoul, 1993), is not at all typical in France.

Few are typical food products with a global market as Champagne, Porto, Cognac, Roquefort cheese or Parma ham. Typicality as it is cannot be exportable, except for an elite very sensitive to luxury and gastronomy. But this is a niche market, with high price acceptability but small turn over.

Given these observations, we assume that there is a kind of topology for typicality where archetypal components of a product are very important close its production area, and the importance of stereotypical attributes increase with distance from the origin location of the product. There is an expertise effect close the region of origin and a halo effect far away from this origin. Archetype and stereotype are on the same ladder. We just have to precise where is the cursor position for each product.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY


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