

6. CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION

AN ANALYSIS OF FOOD PURCHASE AND CHANGE IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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6.1. Introduction

Consumers' decision making and behaviour lie at the heart of market research. However, in the past few years these phenomena have captured the attention of social scientists as well. According to Erasmus *et al.* (2001), market researchers have a long tradition of investigating how consumers make their choices, while the best-known social science models of consumer decision making were developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Most of these models treated decision making as a logical problem-solving exercise, and identified different stages through which consumers would go to arrive at their final decision.

The most influential theoretical approach in research was the rational approach of neoclassical economics, which assumes that consumers, as rational actors, evaluate all the available alternatives and choose the one which maximizes their utility. Although the rational approach still plays a dominant role in the explanation of consumer choice, it came to be heavily criticized in the 1980s. Erasmus *et al.* (2001) distinguishes three main criticisms.

The first is the assumption of rationality. According to its critics, the rational approach overemphasizes the role of external factors in decision making and neglects the actors' emotions. Research has confirmed that not only does the evaluation process involve the flow of cognitive information processing, but emotions are also activated.

The second criticism targeted the generalization of the rational decision-making process. Many argued that the rational approach might result in a biased understanding of behaviour if it is used to explain every kind of decision-making situation, regardless of the specifics of the situation. Frequency and importance of the purchase may also alter the ideal process of rational decision making.

Finally, the decision-making process may not be as complicated as we usually think. Consumers have stored information of past experiences, and this may be activated before the purchase and so make the decision-making process quicker.

From the above, it is easily understandable how there came to be a more intense involvement of "soft" factors, such as emotions, in consumer science research. We must add, however, that the development of sociological theories also provided a tailwind to these changes.

In line with the dominant class-based sociological theory, for many years most social scientists regarded consumption as dependent on an individual's position in society and production. Bourdieu (1984) described extensively the role of consumption in representing and reproducing social classes.

As a reaction to the globalization of production and consumption, critical sociology often targeted mass consumption as dangerously conforming behaviour. The growing interest in lifestyle research, however, rediscovered consumption as a central domain of identity formation, and more space was devoted to values and cultural attributes in the explanation of consumer decisions and behaviour. Alongside con-

sumption, moreover, such phenomena as non-consumption or boycott also sparked some interest as a mode of protest.

Market researchers had to realize, too, that the use of demographic- and status-representing variables only does not yield an effective prediction of consumer choice. New tools (e.g. the Values, Attitudes and Lifestyles Survey (VALS) or the Activities, Interests and Opinions (AIO) method) were developed to identify consumer segments based on personality and lifestyle attributes. The introduction of soft attributes into the research on consumer decisions and behaviour, as well as a growing awareness of certain negative aspects of globalized production, turned researchers' attention towards the ethical elements of consumption.

According to Vitell (2003), market researchers did address the ethical aspects of consumption, though they were more concerned with the seller side, and it is only in the last decade that they have become more interested in consumer ethics. Vitell and Muncy (*ibid.*) developed a Consumer Ethic Scale to analyse the extent to which consumers believe certain behaviour to be ethical or unethical. Vitell and Hunt (*ibid.*) formed the theory of ethical consumption to explain consumers' ethical judgements during the evaluation of alternatives.

While early research into consumer ethics centred on environmental issues, of late there has been a growing interest in socially responsible consumption. The emergence of social responsibility in the context of consumption is largely a result of growing media attention regarding the labour practices of multinational companies.

Social science is not market research, but the 2005 Special Eurobarometer study of food safety gives us an opportunity to look at some basic factors in consumer choice. In the following analysis, we first look at what Europeans consider when they choose food and how they change their consumption behaviour when they learn of unsafe items. Drawing on the second and third rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2004 and 2006, we are also going to show how likely Europeans are to boycott products, and how this behaviour is associated with other forms of protest. Although the data allow us to study mainly the effects of demographic factors, value-related elements are going to be included in the analysis, wherever they are available.

6.2. Factors of food purchase in the EU25 and the old/new member states

The most comprehensive set of factors influencing food choice was given in the 2005 Special Eurobarometer report on food safety. Respondents to the survey were asked to select from a list of 12 factors the two criteria that were most important in their purchase decisions. Since the country and the item-specific distributions have already been published in the report on this survey (European Commission 2006), country comparisons are going to be made with respect to the grouped decision factors. We further decided to look at the differences in the way states divided up according to

whether they were old EU member states (OMS) or new EU member states (NMS). We also created further clusters out of the member states.

As Figure 6.1 shows, the most influential factors in the choices of European consumers are quality and price. These elements were chosen by around 40% or more of the respondents. For about a fifth of the consumers, the appearance of the food is important. This is followed by taste, healthiness and family preferences. All the other elements were mentioned by less than 10% of respondents.

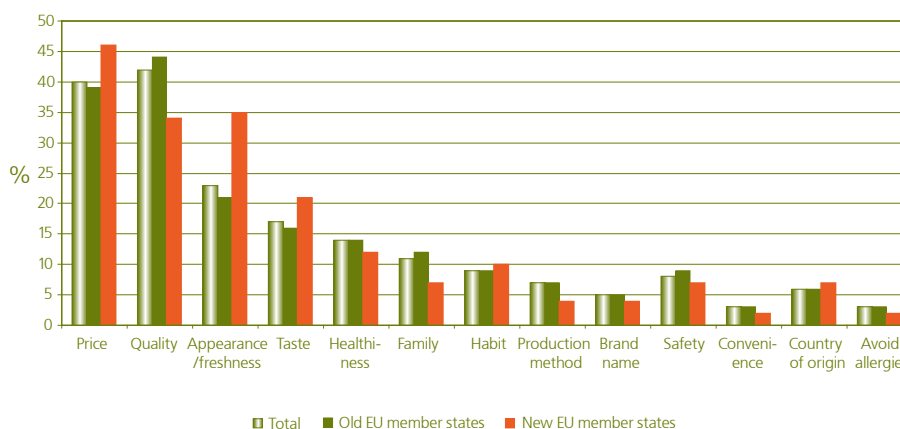
It is also evident from the figure that the pattern of importance for the old member states is almost identical to that for the EU25 as a whole, whereas we can observe certain discrepancies in the pattern of the newcomers. The element that was most frequently chosen by respondents from the new member states was price (46%). Quality was picked by only 34% (roughly the same as appearance). Taste was chosen by a fifth of the respondents, and 12% mentioned healthiness as a decision factor.

Figure 6.1: Factors of food purchase in the EU25, OMS and NMS

Source: Special Eurobarometer survey on food safety (2005).

Notes: None (1%) and Don't know (1%) answers not shown.

N = 24,643 (for EU25); 15,466 (OMS) and 9,177 (NMS).



The noticeably high response rates for the “appearance” element in the NMS may be due to the fact that often consumer product information in these states is not as transparent as it is in many of the OMS.

We must be cautious, however, in interpreting these numbers. As the response categories for this question are not mutually exclusive, we may not be correct in concluding that only 14% of the EU population is health conscious when choosing food. For example, the broad category of “quality” might be related to health and healthiness for many respondents.

To get some impression of the individual countries, one may look at how popular the suggested elements were among the respondents in each. Since the popularity of the individual factors in the member states is also included in the Eurobarometer report, we constructed six groups out of the purchase factors: (1) price; (2) quality; (3) taste and appearance/freshness; (4) healthiness, food safety and avoiding allergy; (5) production method, country of origin, brand name; (6) family, habit, convenience.

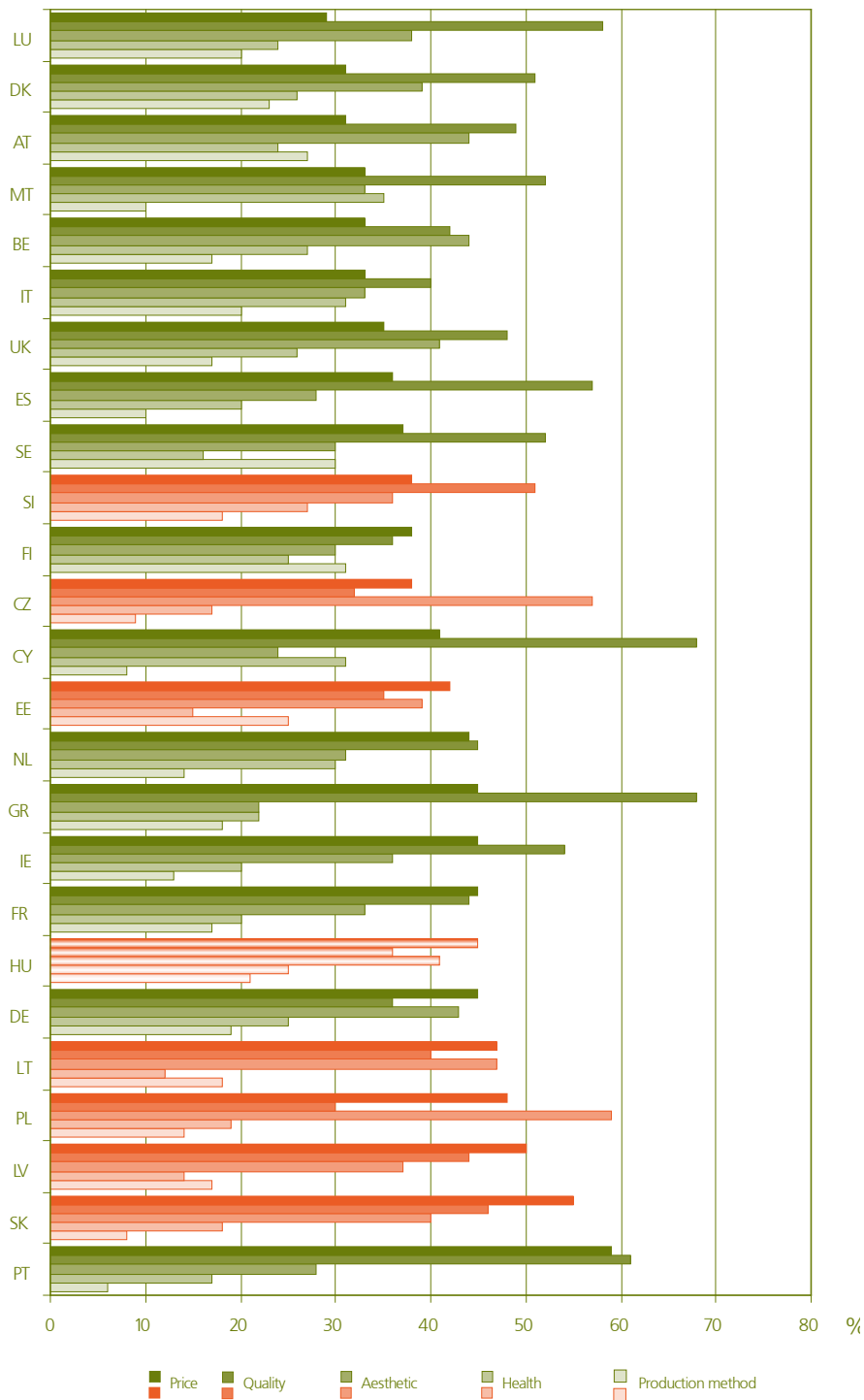


Figure 6.2: Popularity of price, quality, aesthetic, health and production element groups in the member states (%)

Source: Special Eurobarometer survey on food safety (2005).

Note: The "Other" category is not shown.

Taste and appearance were put together, since, to some extent, they both represent an aesthetic dimension of food purchase. The elements of the fourth group are all health related, and the fifth cluster's elements were put together because they all indicate the importance of product signposting. These signposts may represent a specific way of production (organic rather than non-organic), a specific country, region or brand. Family, habit and convenience were grouped into the sixth "other" category, as we did not find them to be closely related to any of the other groups.

Figure 6.2 shows the proportion of respondents in the individual countries who chose elements from these newly constructed factor groups.

a) Price

The graph is arranged by importance of price. It seems at first sight as though the percentage of price-sensitive respondents varies greatly from country to country. Luxembourg has the lowest rate, with less than 30% of respondents picking price as a decision factor in their food purchases. Portugal lies at the other extreme, where almost double the respondents (close to 60%) reported price as a factor in their decisions. Among the Continental states, only Austria and Belgium are at all similar to Luxembourg in terms of price sensitivity, while the three other states in that group (France, Germany and the Netherlands) all show higher rates of around 45%. The countries of the Scandinavian group have rates of 30–40% for price sensitivity. The Mediterranean countries show some discrepancies as well. While Malta, Italy and Spain have figures similar to the Scandinavian group, in Cyprus and Greece we find more than 40% of respondents picking price. The highest rate in this group is to be found in Portugal (almost 60%). In the Anglo-Saxon group, the UK has similar rates to the Scandinavian group, and Ireland seems to be closer to some of the Continental countries in terms of price sensitivity. Finally, in the post-socialist group, only Slovenia and the Czech Republic are at all similar to the Scandinavian countries, whereas all the others have more than 40% of price-sensitive respondents. Slovakia even crosses the 50% threshold.

b) Quality

If we look at quality, the high end seems to be dominated by the Mediterranean group. In three of these countries (Cyprus, Greece and Portugal) more than 60% of the respondents chose this element. Rather lower (but still with above 50%) come two of the Scandinavian states (Sweden and Denmark), some of the Mediterranean countries (Malta and Spain), Luxembourg and Ireland. The only post-socialist state to have this level of quality-sensitive respondents was Slovenia. The 40–50% range is dominated by the Continental states, while the bottom end is mostly populated by the post-socialist countries, which show rates of between 30% and 40%.

c) Aesthetic factor

The aesthetic factor is most popular in some of the post-socialist states (Poland, Czech Republic and Lithuania), but Continental states such as Austria, Belgium and Germany show above 40% interest as well. In the rest of the post-socialist group, more than a third of respondents voted for aesthetic factors, and this rate is similar in the Anglo-Saxon, the remaining Continental states, Malta, Italy and the Scandinavian countries. The bottom end in terms of this factor is exclusively occupied by Mediterranean countries, in which less than 30% of respondents are influenced by any of the aesthetic elements when purchasing food.

d) Healthiness factor

If we look at the healthiness factor, it would seem that this is most important (above 30%) in some of the Mediterranean countries, such as Malta, Italy and Cyprus. The votes for this factor in most countries fall between 20% and 30%. All the Continental states, the Anglo-Saxon countries, the Scandinavian states (with the exception of Sweden), Greece, Spain, Hungary and Slovenia belong to this middle group. The lowest rates were observed in the remaining post-socialist countries, in Sweden and Portugal.

e) Production factor

The countries are distributed most widely in terms of the production factor. This enjoys its highest popularity (above 30%) in Finland and Sweden. In these states about six times as many respondents picked any of the elements in this factor as in Portugal. Around a fifth or more of respondents consider these elements in Austria, Luxembourg, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary and Italy. The lowest interest was expressed in Portugal, Slovakia, Cyprus and the Czech Republic. In the rest of the states, some 10–20% of respondents voted for this factor.

6.3. Factors of food purchase by geographic cluster

To simplify the above picture of individual countries, states were collapsed into five clusters: (1) Scandinavian; (2) Anglo-Saxon; (3) Mediterranean; (4) Post-socialist; and (5) Continental. This classification gives us an opportunity to paint a simpler picture than if we look at individual countries, and also allows us to look at the deviations in a little more detail than the OMS–NMS division.

Figure 6.3: Factor groups by country cluster

Source: Special Eurobarometer survey on food safety (2005).

Notes: Anglo-Saxon – Ireland, UK; Continental – Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands; Mediterranean – Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain; Post-socialist – Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia; Scandinavian – Denmark, Finland, Sweden.

Anglo-Saxon N = 2,334; Continental N = 6,101; Mediterranean N = 5,018; Post-socialist N = 8,175; Scandinavian N = 3,015.

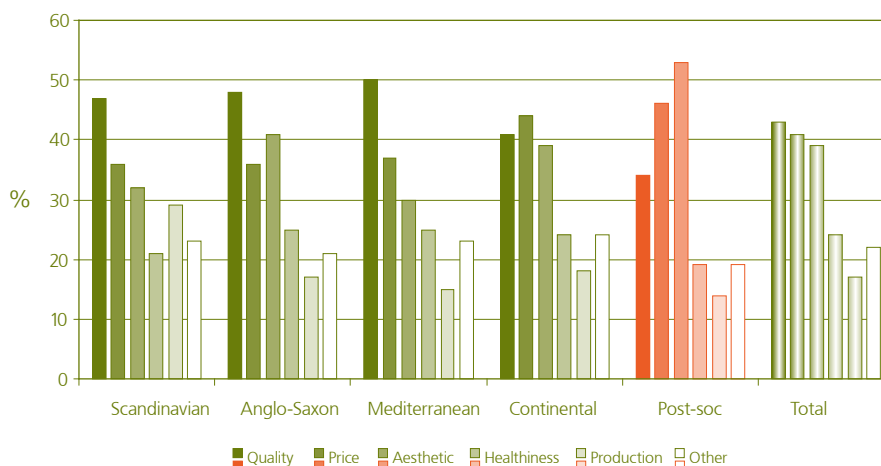


Figure 6.3 shows the distribution of the element clusters for the different country groups. The overall tendencies are the same as in Figure 6.1: the most important elements are quality and price. Third comes the aesthetic factor, followed by the health-related group of elements. While somewhere below 20% of respondents chose production-related elements, rather more than 20% picked either family or convenience or habit (“Other”).

As for the country clusters, it is striking that the post-socialist countries bring up the rear in terms of clusters, and are in front in terms of price sensitivity. Respondents in these countries contribute fundamentally to the overall rate of 41% for this element. It is also evident from the figure that the aesthetic factor is valued a lot more in these states – taste or appearance as factors in a decision are marked by more than 50% of respondents.

The other four clusters, which contain largely the old member states, do not show completely identical patterns of choice. While the Continental graph is most similar to the EU25 distribution, the others are likely to deviate in terms of at least two factors. If we compare these groups, respondents from the Continental states show the lowest rate for the quality element and (like the post-socialist group) high rates for price. It also seems that the overall importance of the aesthetic factor is due not only to the high post-socialist rate, but is partly driven up by the Continental and Anglo-Saxon respondents.

The divergences between country clusters are not so striking when we look at the health-related elements, but when we move onto the production-related factor, the nearly 30% support that is found in the Scandinavian group is seen to be almost double that of the other country clusters. Finally, the rate of those choosing elements in the “other” group is between 19% and 24% in all the country clusters.

6.4. The background to quality consciousness

With the exception of price, most of the other elements can be treated as quality indicators. Based on respondents' choices, we distinguished those who chose an element (or elements) that is/are quality related¹ from those who picked either price only or else a combination that contained price. The members of the former group, by virtue of the fact that they did not name price as the most important factor, all placed greater emphasis on quality, and may be classified as the quality-conscious group.

In order to discover the basic factors behind this consciousness, we ran two binary logistic regressions. The dependent variable of these analyses was a dummy variable with the value of 1 for respondents who chose either one quality-related element only or two elements that were both quality related, and 0 for respondents who picked price only or mentioned a combination that contained price. Therefore our regression estimates the chances of someone choosing only quality-related elements, rather than picking price.

The main explanatory variables included in our model were the available demographic variables, such as gender, age (four categories), economic activity (six categories), and place of living (city or village). Using a dummy variable, we also included the presence of children under 15 in the household. This could have two contradictory effects on the preference for quality: a) living in a household with children could turn the members of the household more towards quality; or b) having children around may suggest the presence of a financial burden, which pushes respondents more towards price-oriented behaviour.

As was mentioned in the introduction, research has shown that soft factors also have a role in shaping consumer preferences. In terms of quality consciousness, we imagined that, of the available value indicators, the importance of health and the importance of identity and culture may turn out to increase consumers' taste for quality. Those who offered culture and identity as important life domains may be more likely than those for whom these domains are not important to express this through their purchases. Finally, we also included a variable indicating whether the respondent had ever learned about unsafe food through the media.

Since information on income was not available in the data set, and since education was not explicitly asked of respondents,² these variables were not included in our analysis.

Two models were applied to our data. The explanatory variables above were included in both, but in the first one we entered additional country dummies, and in the second we entered an OMS–NMS dummy, as well as the interaction of this dummy

¹ We treated as quality related the following items: quality, taste, appearance, healthiness, production, brand, country of origin, avoiding allergy. Convenience, family and habit were omitted from our analysis at this point.

² Respondents were only asked how old they were when they left school.

with the rest of the explanatory variables. While the first model shows differences by country for a respondent with hypothetical characteristics, the second shows us how the old and the new member states differ in terms of quality consciousness.

When interpreting the $Exp(B)$ coefficients, one must take 1 as the reference point, meaning that the groups compared are not significantly different from each other. Coefficients of below 1 mean that the members of the given category are less likely to pick one or two quality-related elements than are people from the reference group; coefficients in excess of 1 indicate that the group members are more likely to be quality conscious than are the reference group members.

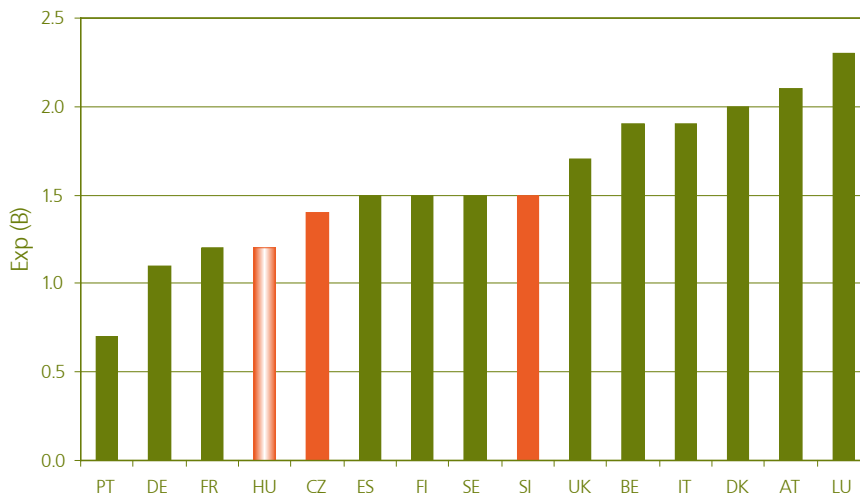
a) An illustration of country differences through the example of a hypothetical respondent – Model 1

When interpreting the results of our first model, we turn our attention to the significance of the country dummies. The way we have set up this model, the reference category is as follows: Polish, female, aged under 20, unemployed, lives in a village, comes from a household where no young child is present, never learned about food safety issues through the media, considers neither health nor identity and culture to be important life domains. The significant country differences are presented in Figure 6.4.

Figure 6.4: The extent to which reference respondents from different nations are more/less likely to be quality conscious than the Polish reference respondent [$Exp(B)$]

Source: Special Eurobarometer survey on food safety (2005).

Note: $Exp(B)$ (Intercept) for the reference Polish respondent: 0.564.



On the basis of the results of our regression, a person with the same characteristics is more likely than the Polish respondent to be quality conscious if he/she is French, Belgian, German, Italian, Danish, Hungarian, Slovenian, Luxembourg³, British, Spanish, Finnish, Swedish, Austrian or Czech.

³ The dummies representing Hungary, Slovenia and Luxembourg are significant at the 0.10 level.

The same hypothetical person is less likely than the Polish respondent to be quality oriented if he/she is from Portugal. The specified reference respondent does not differ in terms of quality orientation from respondents with the same characteristics but who come from the rest of the countries, i.e. the Netherlands, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia.

b) Differences between the OMS and the NMS – Model 2

Because of the way our second model is set up, the non-interacting variables' coefficients show the differences between the groups compared in the OMS, and the interacting coefficients show additional effects that are present in the NMS. The significant results of our analysis are shown in Figure 6.5.

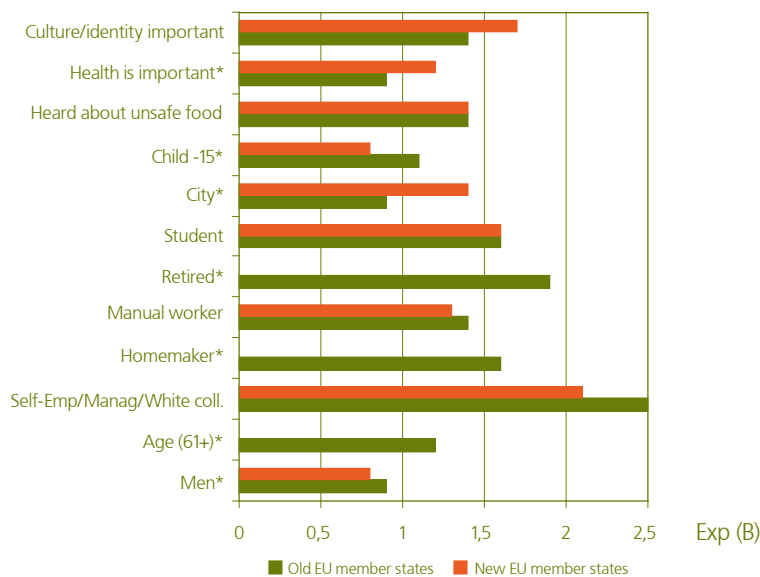


Figure 6.5: Factors of quality consciousness (significant Exp(B) coefficients of the binary logistic regression)

Source: Special Eurobarometer survey on food safety (2005).

Note: *The differences between the groups compared deviate significantly in the OMS and the NMS – e.g. the difference between city and village resident respondents is significantly bigger in the NMS than in the OMS.

Among the demographic variables, gender, age, economic activity and place of living yield significant differences between respondents in the OMS. As may be seen from the coefficients, men in the OMS are less likely than women to be quality conscious, and the same holds true for those who live in cities, compared with those who live in villages. Looking at the age variable, respondents over the age of 60 in the OMS are a little more likely to be quality oriented than the reference group of respondents below the age of 20.

When we turn to the economic activity variables (for which “unemployed” was our reference category), it seems that, in the OMS, all the other groups are more likely than the reference category to display quality-conscious behaviour when picking food. The self-employed, managers and other white-collar workers are 2.5 times more likely than the unemployed to be quality oriented rather than price oriented;

retired respondents are almost twice as likely; and homemakers, manual workers and students are about 1.5 times more likely.

Having at least one child below the age of 15 in the household makes respondents in the OMS slightly more likely to be quality oriented than those who do not have children in the household.

Learning about unsafe food through the media also makes respondents 1.3 times more likely to consider quality rather than price, compared to people who have never heard about safety issues.

The value-related soft factors had different effects among OMS respondents. Interestingly, those who mentioned health as an important life domain were *less* likely than those who did not regard health as an important issue in their lives to be concerned with quality when choosing food. On the other hand, those who said that identity and culture were important elements in their lives are almost 1.5 times more likely to be quality sensitive than are those for whom this domain is not important.

The asterisks (*) in Figure 6.5 show the variables for which the interaction terms with the OMS–NMS dummy proved significant. In these cases, deviations between the categories of the given variable in terms of quality consciousness differ in the NMS from those measured in the OMS. The differences between men and women, between respondents above 60 and respondents under 20, between homemakers and the unemployed, between homemakers and retired people, between respondents living in cities and villages, between respondents valuing health and respondents not mentioning it as an important life domain, between respondents from households with children younger than 15 and respondents from households without young children in the NMS deviate significantly from those differences measured in the OMS.

For the rest of the interaction terms, which are insignificant, our conclusion is that, in these instances, the differences in the NMS between the categories of the variables do not vary significantly in their magnitude from those measured in the OMS. To give an example, in the NMS the difference in terms of quality orientation between the unemployed and the self-employed, managerial or other white-collar group does not vary considerably from that measured in the case of the OMS (which was around 2.5).

It is important to note that the significant interaction terms do not indicate that the given differences between the categories of the variables are significant at the same time in the NMS. From Figure 6.5, one can see which differences are actually significant in the NMS. Our analysis reveals that the difference in the NMS is significant between the following groups of respondents: men and women; the youngest and the oldest cohort; the unemployed and the self-employed, managerial and other white-collar workers; the unemployed and manual workers; the unemployed and students; city residents and village residents; respondents from households with children below 15 and respondents from households with no young children; those who had heard about unsafe food and those who had never heard about such issues in the media; those who pick health as an important life domain and those who do not;

and, finally, between those who say that identity and culture are important and those who do not.

Gender in the NMS has an effect on quality consciousness that is similar to its effect in the OMS – i.e. men are less likely than women to be quality conscious. In terms of age, no significant difference was detected in the NMS, indicating that there is no significant difference in the likelihood of quality-oriented behaviour across the different age groups. Just as in the OMS, being self-employed, a manager or some other white-collar worker, a manual worker or a student is positively associated with considering quality over price in food purchases in the NMS. Being retired or a homemaker in the NMS, on the other hand, makes no difference, compared to being unemployed.

While, in the OMS, we observed that city residents are less likely to display quality-oriented behaviour when choosing food, in the NMS this is true of respondents living in villages. By contrast with the OMS, in the NMS having young children in the household is associated with a lower likelihood of quality-oriented behaviour. Being health conscious⁴ in the NMS, on the other hand, makes respondents more likely to consider factors of quality when purchasing food.

Learning about unsafe food or mentioning identity and culture as an important life domain have similarly positive effects in the NMS as well.

To summarize the results of our Model 2, demographic and soft factors have considerable effects on quality consciousness in both the old and the new member states of the EU. On the other hand, it is important to note that these differences do not always point in the same direction.

Quality orientation is definitely more likely to be present among the self-employed, managers and other white-collar staff, among students and manual workers in both groups of the member states than it is among the unemployed population. Whereas in the OMS the retired group, together with homemakers, is also more likely to be quality oriented in its choices, in the NMS there is no difference in terms of quality sensitivity between the group of homemakers, unemployed and retired.

In the OMS, the presence of young children in the household made the respondents *more* quality oriented, whereas it made people from the NMS *less* likely than those who live in childless households to pick non-price factors when making decisions.

Soft factors, which were expected to be supportive of quality, did generally turn out to have a positive effect; however, the importance to respondents of culture and identity is more likely than the importance to them of health to prompt them to vote for quality elements. Moreover, health-conscious respondents in the OMS were (surprisingly) rather less likely to be quality conscious in their food choices than those who did not report health as an important domain in their lives.

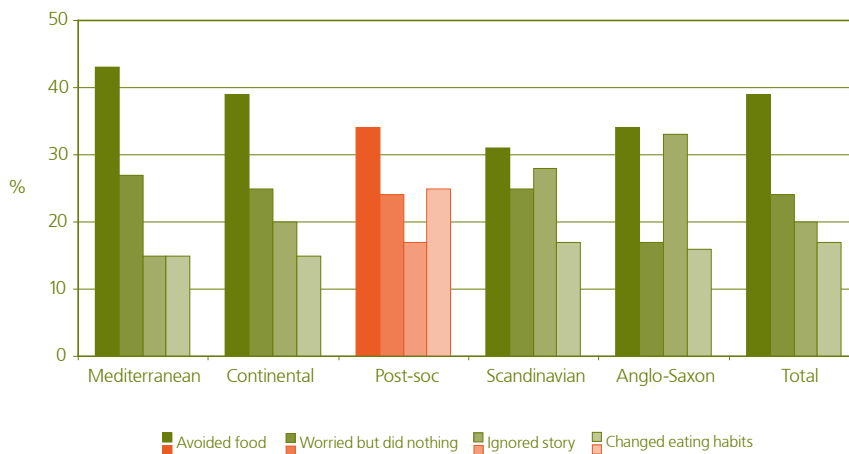
⁴ Significant at the 0.10 level.

6.5. Changing consumer behaviour – reaction to media information and boycotts

The subject of consumer behaviour covers not just the choice of products, but is also about *changes* in this behaviour. Certain factors may alter the way people consume the goods they have, and may even lead them to resolve not to consume certain products any more. When it comes to food, such factors could range from life events (such as serious illness) to media coverage. The 2005 special Eurobarometer survey gives us some opportunity to look at the way in which respondents react to information about unsafe food.

Figure 6.6: Reaction to information about unsafe food

Source: Special Eurobarometer survey on food safety (2005).



Not surprisingly, most Europeans did take action in response to such news. Most of them decided to avoid the food; however, among Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon respondents, almost as many people ignored the information about the unsafe product as decided to avoid it. This means that nearly twice as many respondents in these groups paid no attention to such information as in the post-socialist or the Mediterranean groups.

In the Mediterranean, Continental, Scandinavian and post-socialist clusters, about a quarter of respondents took no action, even though they were worried about the threat. Leaving aside the post-socialist group, respondents from the other clusters were less likely to change their eating habits.

The decision not to purchase or consume certain goods may, in many instances, be for reasons other than a threat to safety. Ethical considerations may also play a role, and in such cases the decision not to consume is tantamount to a protest. Consumers may be expressing their disquiet over the methods of production (non-organic production, child labour, etc.), but a desire to save the environment can also lead to boycotts.

The ESS⁵ data offer us the opportunity to look at differences between country groups⁶ in terms of the protest behaviour of consumers through product boycott. Although the exact reasons for the boycott were not explored in the ESS, we can gain some idea of the popularity of such behaviour and some of the basic factors behind it in Europe.

As Figure 6.7 shows, respondents from the Scandinavian countries are the most active in boycotting, with almost 30% of them deciding not to buy or use certain products. Of the Anglo-Saxon and Continental respondents, about a fifth had engaged in such activities in the 12 months prior to the survey, while the post-socialist and Mediterranean countries lag behind, with boycott rates of just 5–6%.

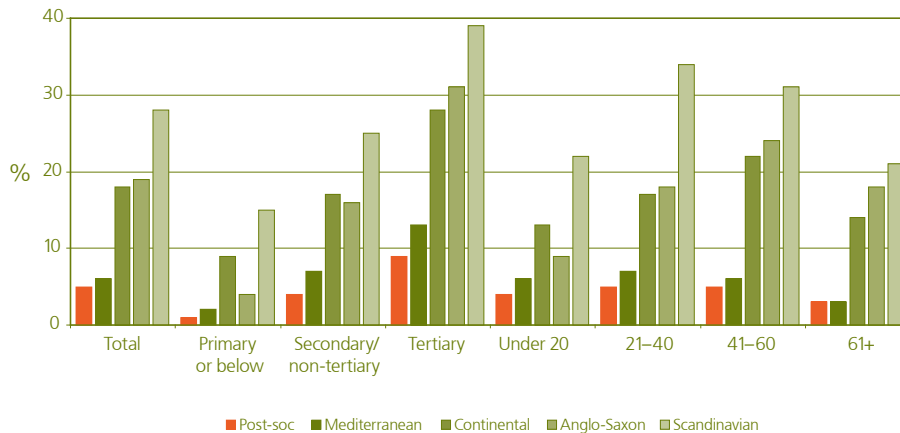


Figure 6.7: Boycotting of certain products, by education and age

Source: ESS, rounds 2 and 3.

If we look at the main demographic variables, we can see identical patterns in terms of education. Respondents with only primary (or even lower) education are the least likely to protest through boycott, while considerably higher rates may be observed among respondents with secondary or tertiary-level education.

With respect to age, there are two different patterns that emerge. In the Mediterranean and the post-socialist clusters, the low rate of boycotting respondents is likely to stay about the same across age categories; meanwhile Continental, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries show an inverted U-shape pattern. In these clusters, the

⁵ The following ESS countries were included in our analysis: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK from the third round. Even though some of these countries became members of the EU only years after the ESS survey, we decided to include them as they were not presented at all in the analysed Eurobarometer. For the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg, only data from the second round were available. Design weight was not available for Latvia and Romania.

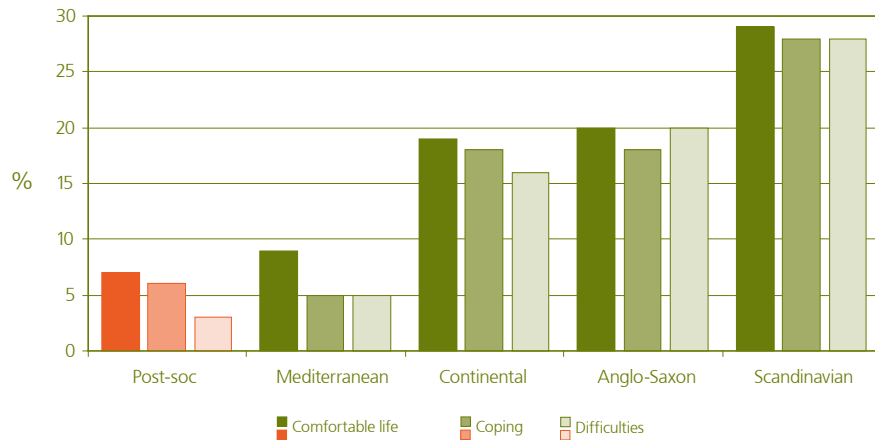
⁶ Anglo-Saxon N = 4,194; Continental N = 12,629; Mediterranean N = 9,028; Post-socialist N = 16,523; Scandinavian N = 5,328.

youngest and the oldest respondents are less likely to boycott products than are respondents in the middle age categories.

Figure 6.8: Boycotting of certain products, by perception of financial situation

Source: ESS, rounds 2 and 3.

Note: *Significant differences at 0.05 level.



In Figure 6.8, we represent boycotting behaviour together with respondents' perceptions of their financial situation. In the post-socialist, Mediterranean and Continental clusters, respondents who live with difficulty on their present income are significantly less likely to indulge in boycotts than are respondents who live comfortably; however, there is no such difference across income groups in the Anglo-Saxon or the Scandinavian countries, where the percentage of respondents who boycotted any product in the 12 months prior to the survey stays the same across the categories of this subjective income variable.

Our final graph (Figure 6.9) shows that boycotting behaviour is strongly related to other forms of protest, such as participation in lawful public demonstrations or signing petitions. Those who took part in such actions were also more likely to report having boycotted a product. Apart from in the post-socialist cluster, boycotting behaviour is also more likely to manifest itself among those who believe environmental protection to be very important. This indicates that boycotting a product does not simply mean not purchasing that product: it is embedded in a set of democratic forms of expression.

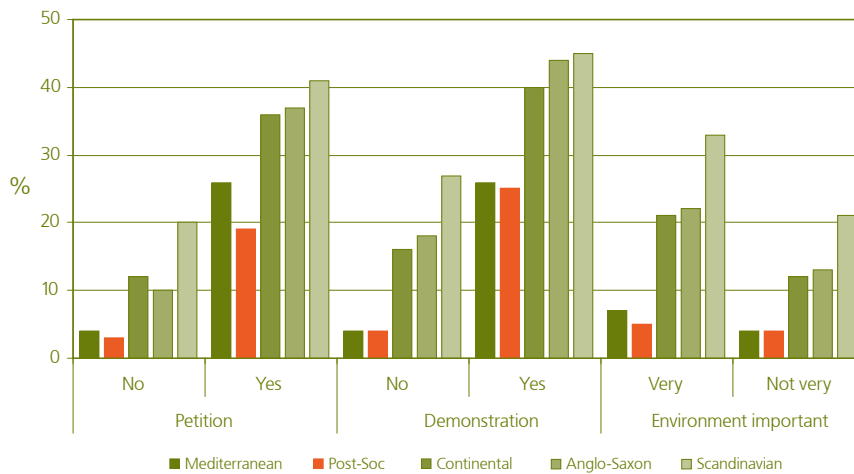


Figure 6.9: Boycott and other forms of protest

Source: ESS, rounds 2 and 3.

6.6. Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis has been to analyse certain aspects of consumer behaviour in the EU, by using data from the special Eurobarometer survey on food safety and the ESS. On the one hand, we drew comparisons based on the usual OMS–NMS division; on the other hand, we went some way beyond this “traditional” approach by collapsing the member states into further clusters and comparing five country groups.

First of all, we looked at the main factors underlying consumer decisions. We not only confirmed that there is a fundamental difference between the old and the new member states in terms of price sensitivity, but also highlighted some differences between individual OMS countries and clusters. Most notably, we saw that Continental states revealed certain similarities to the post-socialist group in terms of price sensitivity, and that they have higher rates for the aesthetic factor in the purchase of food than the other clusters of the OMS. Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon and Mediterranean respondents show similarly high rates for quality, while Continental respondents are somewhere in the middle – between the other OMS clusters and the post-socialist group. Scandinavians also expressed more intense interest in production-related factors than the average.

We looked for factors that make consumers more likely to be quality oriented in their decisions. We drew comparisons between countries and also at the NMS–OMS level. In our first model, we showed how a hypothetical respondent with certain characteristics can differ from others across the EU countries; in the second model, we compared the old and the new member states of the EU. Our results revealed that both demographic and value-related factors play a role; however, the directions may vary in the new and the old member states. In the demographic-variable group, the most notable effect stemmed from indicators of economic activity. The presence of

young children in the household also had an effect, but whereas it was positive in the OMS, it turned out to be slightly negative in the NMS. The importance of health and of identity was also positively related to quality-oriented purchase behaviour.

In the final section of our study, we looked at the boycotting behaviour of Europeans. Even though we were unable to test the exact reasons for such behaviour, we did show its relationship to education, age and the subjective financial situation of respondents, and we also presented its connection to other democratic expressions of protest.

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