

# **CHARACTERISTICS OF NATIONAL CULINARY PREPARATIONS: IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS A NATIONAL CULTURE**

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*This paper is a contribution to the research area of cultural behavior and consumption. In order to test our research hypotheses, research on cuisines, their role in the development of consumer identities and cultural meaning is undertaken. A sample consisting of 220 national culinary dishes is examined. Key characteristics of the national culinary preparations is made based on social, utilitarian, commercial, political, cultural and geographic characteristics. The descriptive study leads to results that have implications for food and culture product and services marketers. Factors that contribute to the evolution of a national culture are identified.*

**Keywords:** *marketing, culture, cuisine, choice and preference models*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Models of consumer choice and preference formation make up the bulk of the literature in consumer behavior. Several models combine internal perceptual and attitudinal variables; others examine external or cultural and locational or geographic variables. Depending on the complexity of the task variables, models are either complex or simple, stochastic or deterministic. Utilizing theories of consumer behavior and empirical testing, several models exist for managers to choose from. Four types of choice models based on behavioral learning, personality research, information processing (Bettman, James R., H. H. Kassarian & Richard Lutz 1978) and attitude models (Belk, Russell W., Kenneth H. Bahn, Robert N. Mayer, 1986), are frequently referenced in the marketing literature.

Consumer learning based theories lead to models in which prior experience is a primary determinant of future consumption activity. Skinner and Pavlovian models use a stimulus response approach in which consumers exercise their choices based on stimuli and learned behaviors. Personality theories (Saranson 1979) have been used to explain types of consumer preference that may be subconsciously or unconsciously motivated. Models that combine personal and social attitudes and beliefs (Kassarjian, Harold H. and Mary Jane Sheffet, 1981) are based on attribution theories. The individual consumer resolves personal preferences taking the state of the environment and the behavior of other consumers into consideration. How consumers change their behavior based on processing new information and integrating it is based on the work of Bettman (1979). Ajzen and Fishbein's work on attitude research focused on choice behavior as a function of beliefs about both social norms and social consequences of the choice. Social attributes of products (Hirschman, Elizabeth C., 1981) would be critical in driving consumer choice in attitude driven models. A contemporary theoretical approach to modeling consumer choice is emerging in behavioral marketing. The assumptions are that consumers make choices based on heuristics or rules of thumb and therefore do not make optimal rational decisions. The final decisions may be based on how the decision situation is framed. Since the decision is limited to a single choice, there can be mistakes, limited awareness, mimicry versus variety seeking choice and suboptimal satisfaction or satisficing behavior.

There is a shift in more research focusing on broad non-problem solving consumer choice and situations from the rational problem solving approach. There is more recognition that social and cultural groups make choices and individual level models cannot explain such behaviors. There is greater self-generation of marketing constructs in the research stream than there was earlier when borrowing from food science, nutrition, medicine, psychology, physiology, psychophysics, sociology, economics, marketing, and anthropology influenced construct choice. Yet contributions to the field have been more managerial than helping develop the discipline of marketing. This is evident as more research is aimed at predicting brand choice behaviors than consumer choices of broad classes of products. The integrative consumer model conceptualized in this paper is based on a set of assumptions such as the

heterogeneity of consumers as per their prior experiences and current behaviors, differences in levels of involvement, innovativeness, technical expertise and the extent of problem solving involved.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Cuisine is a national expression of consumers' social identities at a group level. At the individual level it affirms a positive sense of self. Using a database of national cuisines and the anchoring national dish one can ask: how do millions of consumers over centuries (in some instances) choose a national dish as representative of their cuisine? The choice is most often informal and based on a cultural consensus. Rarely is there a political effort to select a national dish. In some cuisines there are regional contenders but they have not achieved national status. An example is the Brazilian Feijoada versus moquecas or churrasco gauchos. What is the nature of this cultural choice? Can consumer behavior theory explain the choice of a national dish? At a time of intense globalization and technological advances, these national dishes seem to be holding their own. Is the affirmation of self-identity a result of 'cuisinary' homogenization due to globalization of markets versus preservation of local differentiation? Is it a matter of time that the national dish classics fall in the face of a global onslaught from global brands and casual cuisines? Or will they retain their national meaning as have national flags, monuments and anthems?

## PROPOSED WORK

The process of consumption of a cuisine and especially a national dish includes search behavior, learning the recipe, planning the menu, shopping, preparing, cooking, plating, eating and disposing or reprocessing leftovers such as the Thanksgiving meal in the United States and other countries where Thanksgiving is traditionally celebrated with home cooking. Dining, food sharing and eating habits are strongly influenced by social and cultural determinants whether in private homes or in public places such as a restaurant. Economic constraints that affect choice of dish may be affordability based on income and prices. Commercial availability of seasonings, components, complementary foods (e.g. Argentinian Asado, chimichuri sauce and Malbec), secondary and peripheral foods may also influence the choice process. National cuisines may well be an alignment between food production systems and consumer ethnocentricities. Immigrants bring their preformed preferences with them but adapt to local food production systems. Like immigrants therefore cuisines cross national and geopolitical borders.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Alternative models of choice of national dish are constructed. Two experiments in choice behavior are conducted. Results are deliberated. Future directions and preliminary conclusions are discussed.

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