



26

FACULTEIT
LANDBOUWKUNDIGE EN
TOEGEPASTE BIOLOGISCHE
WETENSCHAPPEN

VAKGROEP
LANDBOUWECONOMIE

Coupure Links 653
B-9000 Gent

Tel. (09) 264 59 25
Fax (09) 264 62 46

Consumption of light products in Belgium

Discussion Paper Presented at:

**IUNS-AGEV-BFE-Workshop
Freising-Weihenstephan
21-22 October 1995**

**Impact of Changing Food Choice &
Habits on Nutritional Status in European Countries**

ir. Wim VERBEKE
lic. X. GELLYNCK
Prof. Dr. ir. J. VIAENE

Division Agro-Marketing
University of Ghent, Belgium

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUNDS

Given the current European welfare and medical status, major objectives in the field of public health no longer concern extending life. Nowadays, public health focuses on improving the quality of life. This arising dimension stresses on the relationship between nutrition and health.

A major task of the Belgian Federal **Ministry of Public Health** lies in promoting health education by means of national communication and information campaigns. For many years, attempts have been made to convince people of the importance of healthy food and eating habits. Research towards measuring the impact of former campaigns has just recently been programmed.

One of the recent research programs deals with "Consumption of light products in Belgium." The research is executed by the Universities of Ghent and Liège. **Division Agro-Marketing** of Ghent University took up responsibility for carrying out the **qualitative** part of the research program.

This paper discusses in brief the research objectives, methodology and analysis schedule. Since analysis and reporting are still going on, some considerations about research in the field of public health, food and nutrition are presented as possible subjects for discussion.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The **overall objective** of the research lies in describing and understanding Belgian consumer buying and consuming behaviour towards food and nutrition in general and light products in particular. Following questions arose to answer:

1. Who is the light product buyer?
2. Who is the light product consumer?
3. Which light products are frequently bought and consumed?
4. Which factors influence buyers' decision and choice making process?

The objectives of the **qualitative** research deal more essentially with the fourth question; detecting influencing factors on people's decision making process towards food and nutrition in general and light products in particular. As a consequence, topics emerge as life styles, social values, ethical aspects, present habits, behavioural control and the role of advertising, packaging and labelling. The qualitative research aims to collect statements through interviewing respondents as being light product advocates or adversaries.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Field Work Planning

During the qualitative research, data were collected through **depth interviews**. The depth interviews contained a set of probing question to the subject of nutrition in general and light products in particular.

The depth interviews were conducted by experienced field workers, using an **interview guide**. This interview guide was a semi-structured topic list, built up according to the funnel approach. Starting with topics about food and nutrition, the focus was gradually narrowed towards food-health relationships and light product consumption.

The **sample population** was defined as households who were former members of the consumer panel of the Agricultural Economic Institute (A.E.I.) from the Ministry of Agriculture. This consumer panel was established in 1972, but, due to budgetary constraints, abandoned in 1992. The **sample size** for the qualitative research was established at 40 respondents, equally divided between the Dutch and French speaking part of Belgium. Quota were put forward according to:

- age,
- sex and
- consumption rate: light product users versus non-users.

These quota intended to cover relevant and measurable demographic distributions, rather than to obtain statistical representativeness.

The **recruitment** of the respondents was conducted in two steps. Potential respondents were sent a contact letter, introducing the study and announcing a telephone call for making an eventual appointment. During the subsequent telephone contact, appointments were made for an **in house** depth interview. Each interview took about one and a half hour and was registered on audio-cassette.

3.2 Analysis Schedule

In analysing the results of the qualitative research, the TRIANDIS-model is applied. The model, dating from 1980, is graphically presented in figure 1. It aims to explain health-related behaviour through analysing seven basic 'behaviour-influencers' or components:

1. **Cognitive** components indicate consumer knowledge, information sources and information processing. According to light products, topics as consumers' definition of the term 'light' and rational objectives by consuming light products are involved.

2. **Affective** components represent people's feelings, emotions and moods. In the research under consideration, it represents feelings, emotions and moods according to eating and their impact on the nutritional status.
3. **Social** components refer to the impact of the cultural environment and social control: reference groups, sub-cultures, family. A major role is played by the overall 'big picture' about food, nutrition and health: the threat of fat to the good figure.
4. **Moral** or ethical components deal with people's personal way of life and the rules imposed to oneself.
5. **Behavioural control** components indicate the possibilities and difficulties to manage ones personal behaviour. It refers to the ability of influencing or not food and nutrition by means of e.g. shopping oneself or oftenly having to dine out.
6. Facilitating **conditions** refer to environmental stimuli as product availability, persuasive advertising and pricing, medical and dietetic advices.
7. The importance of **habits** and the experienced difficulties to change them make up for the seventh behaviour-influencer.

The **willingness** to change behaviour refers to attitude formation. **Demographics** determine considerably the individual behaviour formation process.

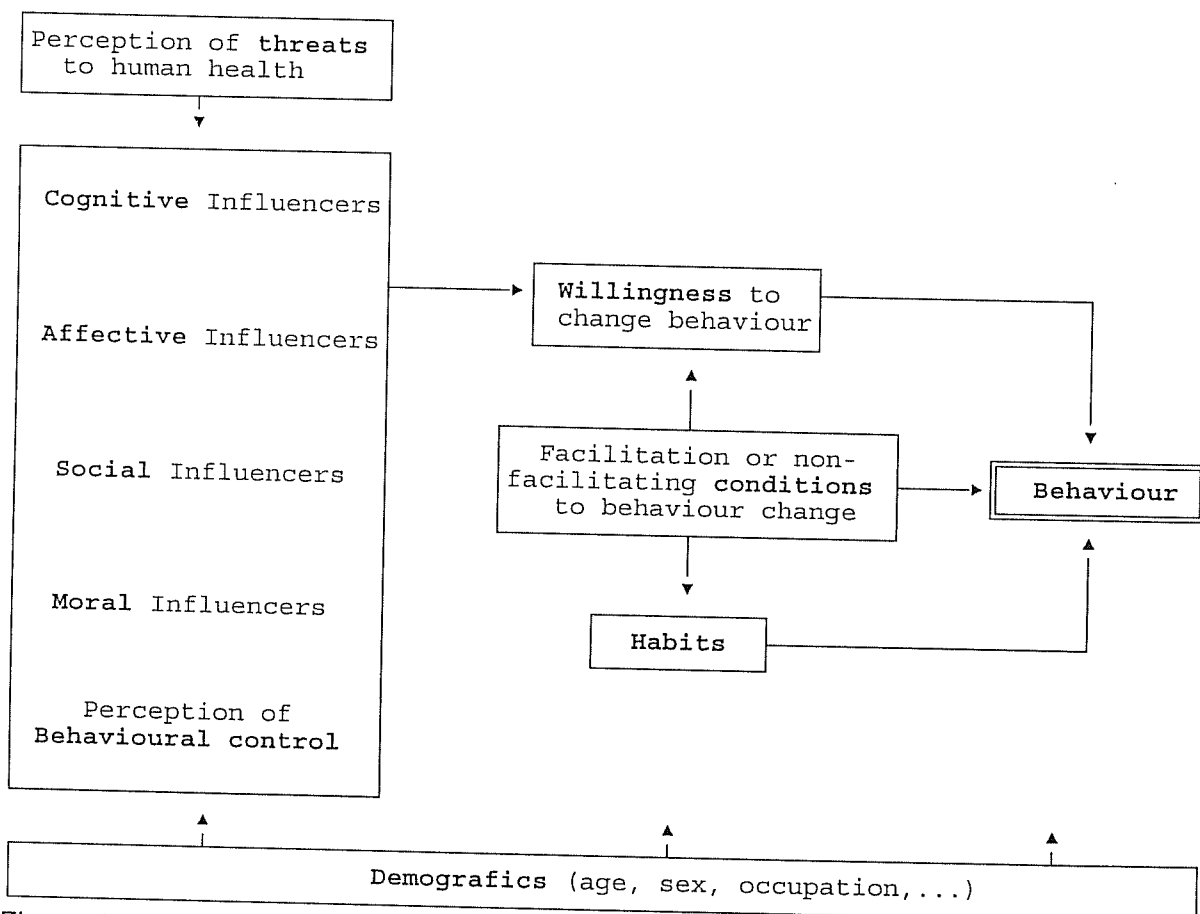


Figure 1. TRIANDIS-model (1980).

4. SOME CONSIDERATIONS

Market Research towards Health & Nutrition

Consumer market research towards health and nutrition is often hampered because of their making part of people's personal way of living. This causes people, in qualitative research, to reveal and hesitate to relate their true opinions, motivations and feelings. Projective techniques are appropriate in such situations, but success mainly depends on the experience of the interviewer and the character of the respondent.

Light products & Government Regulation

Agreeing upon defining light products was a major pitfall in conducting the research under consideration. The regulatory environment provides no outlining of the nature of a light product. Through this, a lot of confusion is perceived at consumer level. Definitions ranged from 'just marked on the label' to 'reduced energy content'. Law and regulation is heavily needed, as well from a nutritional viewpoint as from the viewpoint of consumerism. The already damaged image of 'light' by consumerism evokes the thought that government impact has completely fallen by the wayside.

Getting consumption figures

Discussing the impact of changing food choice and habits seems useless unless changes are quantified through objective, relevant and accessible measurements. The abolition of the A.E.I.-consumer panel scrubbed basic information to scientific researchers engaged in nutrition, consumer behaviour and marketing. Although experts state a decline of the 'light-trend', objective figures lack to scientific researchers. The costs for obtaining secondary data from data-providers as Nielsen or Gfk make scientists underprivileged of quantifying nutrition and food habit changes.

Triandis-model adaptation

In the study under consideration, the Triandis-model has been applied to understand and describe consumer behaviour towards light products. The relevance of the constructs differs according to the nature and type of the subject of research. Through interpreting and translating the model, it can be made fitting to most nutrition and health related behavioural research.

LITERATURE

Aaker, D., Kumar, V. & Day, G. (1995). *Marketing Research*. New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Burns, A.C. & Bush, R.F. (1995). *Marketing Research*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Mowen, J.C. (1993). *Consumer Behavior*. New York, MacMillan Publishing Company.

Tones, K. & Tilford, S. (1993). *Health Education. Effectiveness, efficiency and equity*. London: Chapman & Hall.

Triandis, H.C. (1980). Values, attitudes and interpersonal behavior. In: *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1980*, (ed. Howe, M.E.). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

1. Research Background

Quality of life: nutrition & health

Ministry of Public Health

Division Agro-Marketing, U.G.

Qualitative Research:

- Objectives**
- Methodology**
- Considerations**

2. Research Objectives

Overall objectives:

- Light product buyer**
- Light product consumer**
- Types of products**

Qualitative Research Objectives:

- Decision and choice making**
- Behaviour Influencers**

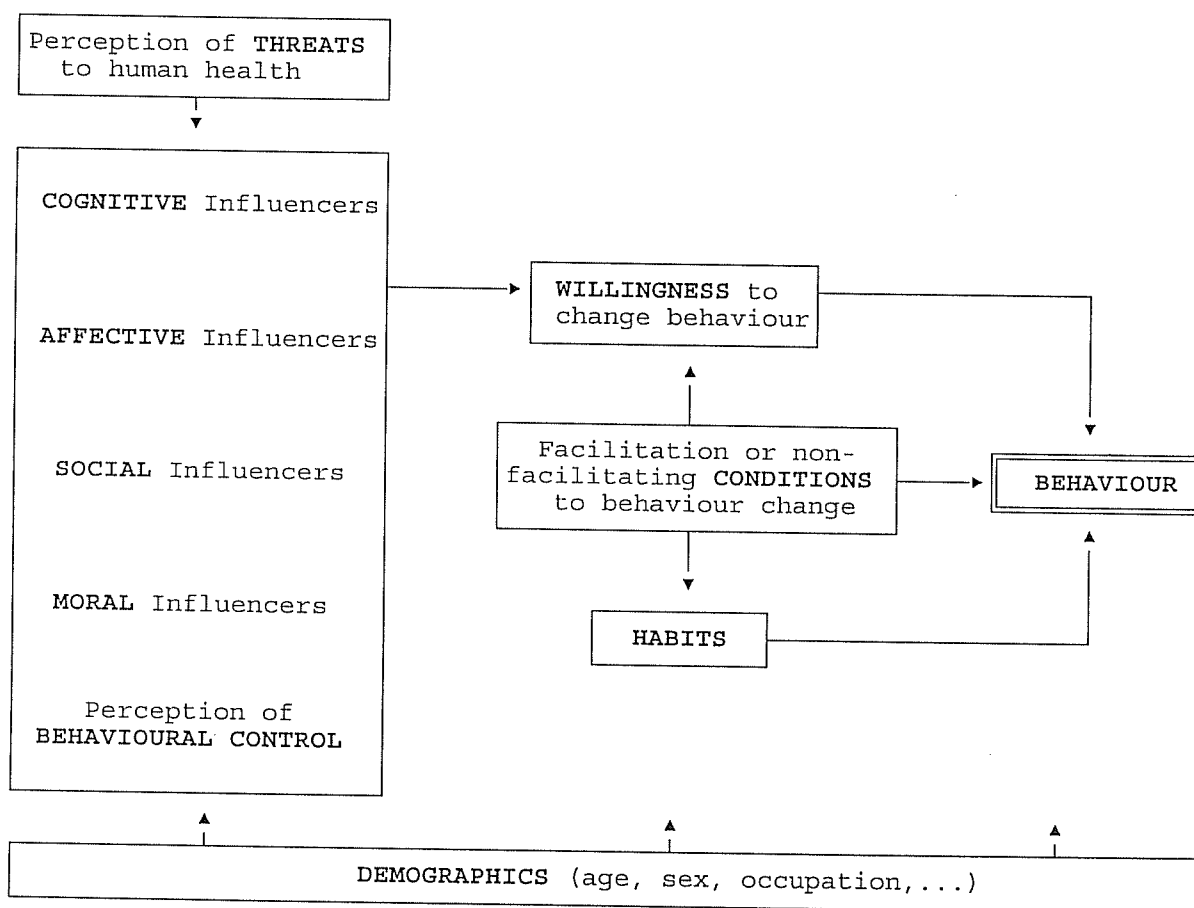
3. Research Methodology

3.1 Field Work Planning

- 40 Depth Interviews**
- Semi-Structured Topic List**
- Two Step Recruitment**
- In house**

3.2 Analysis Schedule

Triandis model



4. Considerations

- Market Research Health & Nutrition**
- Definitions & Regulation**
- Consumption Figures**
- Triandis-model Adaptation**