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Nur für persönlichen Gebrauch

# Image of Foods - in Regard to Origin and some Quality Components

Keywords: food image, food origin, countries of food origin, food quality, empirical research on food image

BFE  
Nr. 1138

## Introduction - Theoretical and Methodological Background of the Study

The image concept in social psychology is related to the attitude approach (FISHBEIN & AJZEN 1975), but it is beyond this aspect. Image includes the totality of cognitions, attitudes and feelings which one person has in respect to a specific object, like a person, a political party, a product etc. Images are not stable, they will change with perceived new information. There is a substantial discussion about the interlinkages between images, attitudes and human behaviour (MEINEFELD 1977; MEIER & HAGEDORN 1993).

In Germany, food from all over the world is available. According to their experience and other factors, consumers ascribe to food from different countries special images (FROHN 1992). The image components are mainly represented by food quality, trading characteristics and price.

After the dramatic political changes in Germany - starting with opening the "iron

curtain" in October 1989 - consumers in East and West Germany were confronted with important changes of the food market sector. In order to collect specific information on the image of foods of different geographical origin and their possible changes, two representative surveys in Germany were carried out. The first was started in 1991 with a sample size of n = 2000, followed by a second one in 1992 with a sample size of n = 2500, incl. 500 in East Germany. The fieldwork was conducted by GFM-GETAS, Hamburg.

## Results

Between two thirds and three quarters of the respondents and the same proportion of the East Germans believe that indigenous foods provide "very high quality", that they are "worth the money" and that they are "really wholesome" (Tab. 1).

Two fifths of the respondents regard food from none of the countries or regions as "natural/less processed or containing less additives". Whereas the majority of

all respondents rather accept this quality label of food for their own country: These are 36% of all West German respondents and 43% of all East German respondents.

Consumers of both parts agree that just the foods of the western part of the country are dedicated by labels providing good food information to the consumer. In comparison to the results given above all these characteristics of food quality are less ascribed to the foods from Western Europe and - if ever known - from North America.

Considering the foods from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Australia this tendency becomes much more visible: Foods from these countries provided with those quality characteristics are mentioned only by 10% or less of the respondents. But one should consider that in East Germany up to 75% of the respondents hardly know foods from overseas at this time.

In comparing the results of the surveys in 1991 and 1992 the West German consumers appear to be rather stable in their judgements, but there is one exception: all dimensions of East German foods are higher rated in 1992 as before.

Table 1: Question: For what countries or regions you feel these statements are especially true? (Percent of the whole sample)

Food from ...	... is of high quality				... is worth the money				... is really wholesome				... provides precise information on the package				... is natural/less treated/contains less additives				... I do not know food from this country			
	'91		1992		'91		1992		'91		1992		'91		1992		'91		1992		'91		1992	
	T	W	E		T	W	E		T	W	E		T	W	E		T	W	E	T	W	E		
West Germany	77	71	73	63	69	59	64	38	64	58	60	49	65	67	67	68	36	32	38	7	4	4	4	1
East Germany	16	31	24	61	18	31	25	59	20	33	26	60	9	22	20	32	10	20	14	43	34	23	28	2
Western Europe	37	34	35	33	29	27	29	18	28	28	29	25	19	23	23	24	9	10	11	2	12	12	11	14
Eastern Europe	4	4	5	4	7	8	8	11	6	6	5	9	2	2	3	1	4	7	4	17	44	41	42	38
Africa	4	4	4	3	9	9	9	10	5	4	4	5	2	2	2	-	10	8	8	11	49	49	46	60
North America	15	14	15	8	12	12	13	4	14	13	14	7	9	8	9	3	4	4	4	2	35	36	30	61
South America	6	6	6	5	8	9	9	9	5	6	7	3	3	2	2	1	7	5	5	5	46	43	39	60
Asia	5	4	4	5	9	8	8	8	5	5	5	6	2	2	2	1	8	7	7	6	50	49	46	58
Australia	8	7	8	3	8	7	9	2	8	8	9	3	2	3	3	-	4	4	5	3	59	56	51	77
For none	2	14	14	13	17	21	21	19	-	31	31	27	22	21	21	22	42	40	42	32	-	-	-	-

T - Total W - West German respondents E - East German respondents

Additionally to these quality aspects of food images the respondents were asked about the package extravagance of foods from these countries or regions (Tab. 2). Only foods of West Germany, Western Europe, and North America are ascribed as "packed especially expensive", but in 1992 (total sample) foods from East Germany reached the amount of North America.

### Practical Implications of the Results

Industry and trade try to use the advantages of familiarity in selling the products and services (TROMMSDORF 1989). This is a general observation in developed and industrialized countries. The consumers are willing apparently to recognize that in accepting higher prizes for them, and they show brand loyalty (SCHUTZ, JUDGE & GENTRY 1986). There are important potentials for products from East Germany by selling them to the consumers of those regions. A Ger-

man agricultural marketing board (CMA) implements currently in a campaign a regional food quality label ("We have to give food products a home.").

But simultaneously there is a trend moving in an opposite direction based on the background of increasing interlinking of European food markets. Consumers, who become more acquainted with foreign foods, decrease their preferences for foods from their close neighbourhood. Own real experience of food changes images; a preliminary, more diffuse and vague image will be coined into a more real and distinct one.

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Table 2: Question: For what countries or regions food is packed especially?

Food from	Year			
	'91	1992		
	T	W	E	
West Germany	73	69	66	82
East Germany	10	18	19	13
Western Europe	34	35	34	37
Eastern Europe	3	5	5	3
Africa	3	4	4	1
North America	22	19	22	8
South America	5	6	7	2
Asia	4	5	5	3
Australia	5	7	8	2
For none	9	12	13	8

T-Total W-West German respondents

E - East German respondents

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