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***Theme 3***

***PERCEPTION, KNOWLEDGE AND BUYING HABITS OF GOURMET PRODUCTS BY URBAN CONSUMERS FROM BRAGANÇA CITY, PORTUGAL***

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**Theoretical framework and contextualization**

More and more, brands are very relevant assets for companies. The main objectives for the use of brands in food products are: to allocate a name that allows their differentiation from competitors; to facilitate the identification of the product among competing products; to increase the appeal of the product, based on creative communication; and to ensure the consumer a certain level of product quality (Barroso & Madureira, 2005).

Distributor brand is the brand name owned by a retailer, wholesaler or other distributor rather than by a producer. The distributor brand allows producers to channel resources for production and give them some assurance of product distribution (Mello & Marreiros, 2009). So, rural producers may use this solution and focus on what they know, that is, to produce high quality products. This marketing strategy may benefit rural producers because, traditionally, these producers had major difficulties in what concerns marketing their products. Also, this strategy can help rural producers to increase their income. In fact, luxury is associated with a premium price (Barroso & Madureira, 2005). So, consumers are willing

to pay more for certain products if they perceive a high level of quality. In Marketing, luxury is seen as the main differentiating factor of a brand in a product category. In fact, the consumer decides on the price/quality ratio that matters most for him/her and for which he/she is willing to spend a certain amount of money.

We can say that gourmet products are luxury goods since we can define gourmet products as high-quality products that can be certified by external entities with specific origin and characteristics, produced in small quantities with high quality raw materials using differentiated production processes. The gourmet culture is present in the daily lives of urban consumers and creates demand. It is the growing trend of consumer life styles that is connected to a different and exclusive world. This trend, as noted before, can and should have an impact in rural areas. The production of gourmet products with distributor brand can and should allow rural actors to create added value and, simultaneously, solve the problem of scarce financial resources mentioned above.

Several food retail chains operating in Portugal launched gourmet and organic products with their own brand (distributor brand), namely, chocolates, jellies, fruits, vegetables, meat, sausages, milk, cheese, olive oil, among others. These products are aimed at customers who demand better products, with better quality but who are, simultaneously, sensitive to price (Ferreira, Reis & Santos, 2011).

### **Research main aims and methodology**

This study aims to analyse the perception, knowledge and buying habits of gourmet products in Bragança city, Portugal. In order to achieve these objectives it was developed a cross-sectional, quantitative, observational and descriptive study.

To carry out this study, an accidental sample constituted by 1101 individuals was surveyed in distribution or retailing stores located in Bragança city. In 2011, according to INE (2012), Bragança city population was constituted by 19991 inhabitants. So, the sample collected was a representative one because it was constituted by much more than 1% of the population from Bragança city. Effectively, in market research, a sample is representative as long as it involves, at least, 1% of the population that you want to study (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007). Nevertheless, these authors consider that larger samples provide more credible results.

To collect the data, it was used a questionnaire adapted from Nunes (2011). The questionnaire was directly applied to the Bragança city population, Portugal during June

2014. The questionnaire had two parts. The first one was about the respondent's characteristic which will allow to define a profile of urban consumers of gourmet products with distributor brand. The second one was about urban consumer perception and knowledge about gourmet products and buying habits of these products. Prior to the questionnaire's application, an authorization was requested to the directors of the distribution stores located in Bragança city. The questionnaire didn't take more than ten minutes to be completed and it didn't require personal identification which ensured the anonymity of the respondent.

Later, the data was treated with SPSS 22.0 (*Statistical Package for Social Sciences*). Since this is a descriptive study, the statistical data treatment involved the use of descriptive statistics, namely, frequencies and percentages calculation since variables were qualitative nominal or ordinal (Maroco, 2007; Pestana & Gageiro, 2002).

From a global sample constituted by 1101 respondents, 59.2% were female and 40.8% were male. The respondents' age was between 18 and 96 years old. The average age was 36.14 with a standard deviation of 15.786. Regarding marital status, only 1096 individuals responded. From these, 46.7% were single, 42.3% were married, 6.7% were divorced or separated and 4.3% were widowed.

## **Findings**

The respondents' perception about the gourmet product based on the results show a quality product made with good ingredients (59.5%), an expensive product (52.5%) and an exquisite product (42,7%). Others characteristics like authenticity (21.2%), exclusivity (20.6%) are less important features when consumers think about gourmet products. Only 15.3% of the respondents associated a differentiated product and a product resulting from a special cooking method with the gourmet product. Finally, only 10.4% of the respondents considered that gourmet product must be handmade (10.4%).

Most respondents (60.0%) had bought a gourmet product in the 12 months prior to the survey. For these, the frequency of purchase was as follows: Less than once per month (28.7%), once per month (11.4%), more than once per month (7.8%) and 12.1% said they didn't know or don't remember.

The great majority (93.1%) bought gourmet products on the hypermarket, 21.2% on gourmet stores, 6.4% on the super or mini market, 5.8% on the internet, 2.5% on the grocery store and 1.5% didn't know or don't remember.

Most gourmet products (86.8%) were distributor brand. Besides that, 57.6% didn't know Auchan gourmet brand, 46.9% didn't know Intermarché gourmet brand, 35.8% didn't know Pingo Doce brand 20.1% didn't know Deluxe brand from Lidl distributor and 15.2% didn't know Gourmet Continente brand. The results about Auchan gourmet brand are normal because the Auchan retailer isn't operating in Bragança city.

Gourmet Continente was the best known distributor brand. In fact, 84.8% of the respondents knew this brand. However, only 60.9% of the respondents had already bought gourmet products with this brand. This brand is leader in all products considered, namely, frozen products (48.2); jams, jellies and marmalades (42.0%); cookies (37.9%); pates (35.1%); and, cheeses (45.6%).

## **Conclusion**

This study's objectives were to analyse the perception, knowledge and buying habits of gourmet products by urban consumers from Bragança city, Portugal. In order to achieve these objectives it was collected an accidental sample constituted by 1101 individuals from which 59.2% were female and 40.8% were male with ages between 18 and 96 years old. Most respondents were single (46.7%) or married (42.3%).

Results show that, according to the surveyed consumers, gourmet products are quality products made with good ingredients and, consequently, are expensive and exquisite products. Most respondents (60.0%) had bought a gourmet product in the year prior to the survey in a hypermarket (93.1%). However, they purchased gourmet products less than once per month (28.7%). The purchased gourmet products were mainly distributor brand (86.8%). The major identified distributor brand was Gourmet Continente. In fact, 84.8% of the respondents knew this brand but only 60.9% had already bought Gourmet Continente products.

The results suggest that gourmet culture is present in the daily lives of urban consumers from Bragança city. However, these consumers aren't willing to pay so much more for a high quality product. In fact, these urban consumers are buying gourmet products with distributor brand in order to purchase high quality products at the lowest price possible. This trend can be seen as an opportunity to rural producers because they know how to produce high quality products but they don't know how to sell. So, this strategy could ensure sales at a premium price. This way, added value is generated and retained in rural areas.

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