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PERSONAL VALUES OF DIFFERENT USER SEGMENTS OF ETHICAL FOOD PRODUCTS

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1 Introduction

During recent years an increasing demand for food products with an ethical dimension as e.g. Fair Trade (FT) or organic products can be observed (BÖLW, 2010: 21; DIE VERBRAUCHERINITIATIVE E.V., 2010: 2). Despite of this growing demand for food products with an ethical dimension, organisations selling these products face the same challenges as all other businesses within the market system (DE PELSMACKER et al., 2006: 127). Thereby, these products do not only stand in competition with other products displaying an ethical dimension but also with “non-ethical” product equivalents. Thus, it is vital for the success of such food products to have a deep understanding of their consumers (DORAN, 2008: 550). One possibility to get a deeper understanding of consumers is to look at their personal values. The relationship between personal values and consumer behaviour is documented in different areas (e.g. eco-friendly behaviour, preferences for GM products) and especially for ethical food products in several empirical studies (e.g. BRUNSOE et al., 2004; DORAN, 2008; FERRAN and GRUNERT, 2005; SAHER et al., 2006). There are also some studies analysing differences in personal values between different consumer segments (e.g. DORAN, 2008). But these studies normally concentrate on one specific ethical food product category (e.g. FT products) and do not compare the value profiles of different user segments of different ethical food product categories. Thus, the aim of this work is to analyse the values of different user segments of different ethical food product categories in different regions by means of selective examples.

2 Methodology, survey and description of the sample

To analyse personal values of different user segments SCHWARTZ’s value theory was used (SCHWARTZ, 1992; 1994). The theory includes two aspects of values, namely their content and their structure. The content of a value is connected with its source of motivation while the structure describes the relationship between different values (DORAN, 2008: 550). Overall, SCHWARTZ’S (1992) theory is based on 10 motivational domains of values which can be represented by 57 single values (SCHWARTZ, 1992: 13ff). In many cross-national studies SCHWARTZ could demonstrate that the relationship between the different value domains follows a circumplex structure (SCHWARTZ, 1992: 13ff, 23ff; SCHWARTZ, 1994: 27, 34ff). The order of the different values is thereby determined by how compatible or how opposing the value domains are (LINDEMAN and VERKASALO, 2005: 170; SCHWARTZ, 1992: 13ff). Additionally, SCHWARTZ could identify two higher order dimensions which are *self-transcendence* vs. *self-enhancement* and *openness-to-change* vs. *conservation*.

The data for the paper on hand was collected within the framework of a written survey which was conducted in different regions of Alpine countries in spring 2009. In the present paper results for two regions (Bavaria and Zurich) and products (FT products and organic milk) are presented. In this survey personal values were measured with a shortened version of the Schwartz-Value-Survey, which consisted of 35 items and were chosen according to the work of BRUNSOE et al. (2004: 198). Within the questionnaire respondents were asked to rate the values which were formulated as nouns “as guiding principle in my life” on a 9-point scale from -1 (“opposed to my values”), 0 (“not important”) to 7 (“of supreme importance”).

The paper on hand is based on the answers of 290 respondents from Bavaria and 134 from Zurich. In Bavaria 65.2 % and in Zurich 49.3 % are women. Especially people being younger than 25 years could hardly be reached with this survey.

3 Personal values of different user segments of Fair Trade products and organic milk

To analyse the value profiles of the respondents in a first step a multi-item index of the importance of each motivational domain was constructed (SCHWARTZ and BILSKY, 1990: 889). The determined Cronbach's alphas of these indexes indicated internal consistency¹. Additionally, these indexes showed that in both regions the most important values for the interviewees are *benevolence*, *security* and *universalism*, while the least important value domains for the respondents are *stimulation* and *tradition*. Furthermore, a non-parametric Wilcoxon rank-sum test showed that the importance ratings of all domains (except *achievement*) are different between Bavaria and Zurich.

To analyse personal values of different segments of ethical food products different consumer segments were identified in a second step on the basis of the stated purchase frequency of the product(s). In the case of Fair Trade (FT) products three segments could be differentiated, being regular, sporadic and no consumers. Additionally, a "no consumer" and "consumer" group of organic milk was identified.

In the case of FT products the results indicate the theorised sinusoid pattern of the relationship between the value priorities of the different consumer groups in Zurich, but not in Bavaria. In Zurich the *openness-to-change* value domains as well as *universalism* are more important for regular consumers than for "no consumers". In contrast, "no consumers" of FT products set higher priorities to the *conservation* domains *conformity*, *tradition* and *security* as well as to *power*. In Bavaria, the results suggest that the buying intensity of FT products is connected with the rating of the domain *self-direction*: In each comparison the more intensive user group sets higher priority to this domain. Furthermore, in every case the less intensive user segment sets higher priority to the value domain *conformity* which is located opposite to *self-direction* in the value circuit. When comparing the results from both regions, it is obvious that the consumption intensity of FT products is especially connected to the relative importance respondents attach to *self-direction* and *conformity*. Thus, in both cases especially regular consumers are people for whom aspects like independent thought and action choosing, creating and exploring are very important. In contrast, it is less important to them to subordinate themselves in favour of socially imposed expectations which are displayed by people to whom one is in frequent interaction (SCHWARTZ, 1992: 40). This result is e.g. in line with the work of DORAN (2008) and SHAW et al. (2005).

The personal value profiles of different user groups of organic milk approximate a sinusoid curve in Bavaria and in Zurich. Organic milk consumers from Bavaria and Zurich attach a higher importance to the value domains *self-direction*, *stimulation* and *universalism*. In contrast, the domains being located opposite to these domains in the value circuit (*conservation*, *security*) are more important for non consumers.

4 Summary and conclusions

The findings of this paper show - in line with other empirical work - that different user segments of food products (FT, organic) with an ethical dimension exhibit different value priorities. Moreover, the results show that the consumption (intensity) of the two examined ethical food categories are especially linked to the value domains *self-direction*, *stimulation* and *universalism* being located adjacent in the value circuit. Thus, consumption of these ethical products is driven by the dimension *openness-to-change* as well as the wish for welfare of all people and nature. Furthermore, the results indicate that it is adequate to examine personal values when defining and describing (potential) target groups for such products. A description of target groups by means of their personal values is especially interesting since values are the most abstract type of social cognition helping to understand

¹ All Cronbach's alpha values (except for the domain *self-direction*) are larger than 0.7 (BROSIUS, 2008: 808).

and to know the interpersonal world and therefore are significant for the behaviour of individuals (GRUNERT, 1995: 39f).

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