

## **New Consumer Approach: Understanding Emotions and Involvement in Beef Consumption**

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## **Introduction**

Consumer behavior is one of the most stimulating areas in marketing studies. In first place, because understanding how and why consumers behave is a great challenge. Besides it, there are so many variables involved in the consumption process, that it is not an easy task to establish models to understand it. Human behavior is based not only on personal characteristics, but also on the psychological, environmental, social and cultural environment that they are submitted.

Consumer behavior has assumed a strategic role in organizational studies, since research results indicate that the more satisfied the consumers are, the more time and resources they tend to spent with companies that better assist them.

The development as a discipline, however, is recent, and started in the 50's. The first theoretical approaches assumed that a single model or a "great theory" could be enough to understand the theme. The complexity of the consumption act and the great psychological involvement in the process, however, didn't allow that a single model or theory could serve as explanation for the whole process.

The study of involvement and emotions has been presenting a significant growth, and particularly the role of emotions in food consumption is endowed with special interest for the academics and professionals of the agribusiness sector.

In the last 50 years, in developed countries, the typical agricultural “commodity” production lost space and importance for the industrial goods and services. This situation contributed for the migration of marketing studies to other areas, what justifies, partly, the very few expressive results in food research. In spite of it, biotechnology, branding, labeling and other quality certifications became differentiating attributes for food products, aggregating value and sometimes even creating doubts for the consumers, indicating new opportunities to understand and study consumer behavior. The new global dynamics also stimulates the study of alimentary habits and consumption. The discovery of new cultures, the easy access to transports and to telecommunications, the changes on income and on consumers' domestic situation, besides the environment issues, interfere in a significant way on the eating behavior.

Specifically in relation to animal origin products, these issues become even more pertinent. Beef consumption is not just affected by physiologic (and ancestral) aspects, but also by cultural, symbolic and psychosomatic influences.

The motivations for the beef consumption experience are varied, but little is known about the involvement degree and about the emotions that are experienced in this activity. To understand the singularities of the food consumption in different countries becomes an interesting analytical factor, since it can contribute with the effective food chain management of beef.

### **Objectives and Procedures**

The main objective of the research is to propose and to test a theoretical model that relates involvement and emotions in beef consumption, analyzing the influence of the culture among consumers from different countries.

In this paper we analyze experts' perceptions about involvement and emotions in beef consumption, as the initial stage of the thesis research described synthetically above. This initial stage had an exploratory purpose (Churchill, 1999) and it was accomplished by a qualitative approach through personnel in-depth interviews with beef chain experts. The objective of this initial group of interviews was to validate the variables described in the literature as constituent of the constructs. The intention was also to find some other descriptors that the respondents' judged appropriated in their national context. Twenty (20) interviews were conducted to validate the current indicators and to add new ones.

The questionnaire was based on the involvement scale “New Involvement Profile (NIP)”, from Jain and Srinivasan (1990) and the emotion scale used was based on the structure proposed by Laros and Steenkamp (2004), previously developed and refined by Shaver et al. (1987), Storm and Storm (1987) and Richins (1997).

The thesis next stages will be constituted by the development of a measuring model with Structural Equation Modeling and will be presented in publications to come.

## **Results and Conclusions**

Experts recognized the important role of involvement and emotions in beef consumption and validated the questionnaire that is going to be applied in the next stage of this research. Culture plays an important role in understanding consumer behavior and it is going to be explored in the full paper results.

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