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Szymon Godyla¹, Stanisław Minta¹⊠, Bożena Tańska-Hus¹

¹Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland

CONSUMER FEEDBACK ABOUT THE REGIONAL PRODUCT KOŁOCZ ŚLĄSKI

Abstract. This study focused on issues experienced in the market for regional and traditional products. The purpose of this paper was to explore consumer feedback about *kołocz śląski*, an example of a Polish regional product labeled as PGI in the EU. Primary and secondary source data was collected using a survey method, a documentation method and a literature study. The surveys were conducted in 2019 with a purposively selected sample of 172 respondents (consumers of *kołocz śląski* interviewed at certified points of sale). The results were explored suing a descriptive method, a comparative method and a chi-squared independence test. The findings suggest that *kołocz śląski* is highly enjoyed by most consumers. Hence, this study corroborates the thesis that consumers of regional products are particularly sensitive to qualitative characteristics and uniqueness, as attested by special labels and certificates. Price was indicated as an important or very important factor for purchasing decisions less frequently than qualitative characteristics such as taste, smell, appearance or traditional production method. The research does not confirm the existence of a statistical relationship between the respondents' gender and opinions on the importance of regional product certification for their purchasing decisions.

Keywords: regional product, PGI, traditional food product, kołocz śląski

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and extensive economic growth, the market offers different kinds of foods with distinctive ingredients and production characteristics. These are mostly highly processed products with poor nutrient content, artificial colorants or preservatives which can be harmful to human health. As a result of growing consumer awareness and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and diet, consumer choices are increasingly driven by product quality. Recently, a consumption trend has emerged which consists in a shift

from the consumption of mass-produced industrial food towards more expensive local products manufactured on a smaller scale. Based on tradition and natural ingredients, they are richer in nutrients which makes them tastier and healthier. When Poland joined the EU, local producers of regional and traditional products faced new opportunities. With some help from European protection and labeling systems which guarantee that the product meets certain quality standards, they were able to get a greater foothold in the food market.

PhD Stanisław Minta, Institute of Economic Sciences, Faculty of Life Sciences and Technology, Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences, pl. Grunwaldzki 24A, 50-363 Wrocław, Poland, e-mail: stanislaw.minta@upwr.edu.pl

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore consumer feedback about kołocz śląski and to determine the importance of selected factors which influence the purchase of this regional product. Additionally, this study was intended to assess whether entering *kołocz śląski* on the list of EU protected regional products and having it certified as Protected Geographical Indication had an impact on the customers' purchasing decisions. Secondary and primary source data was used in this research. A review of national and international publications was also carried out. The documentation method was used in order to retrieve a description of kołocz śląski and collect statistical data on regional and traditional products registered in the EU. A survey method based on a dedicated questionnaire was used as the research tool in gathering primary data. The nominal scale, Likert scale and semantic scale were used to measure the replies. The survey was conducted in January 2019 with a purposive sample of respondents who purchase kołocz śląski at the points of sale of the KŁOS bakery based in Kujakowice Górne, Opolskie voivodeship, a member of the "Konsorcjum Producentów Kołocza Ślaskiego" association who applied for and was granted the right to use the European Commission's Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). Once collected and verified for legibility and completeness, questionnaires from 172 persons were chosen for further analysis. Considering the qualitative nature and local range of this study and the purposive sampling method used, this research sample can be recognized as sufficient. However, note that it was not a random sample and only one regional product was covered. Therefore, these findings cannot be used as a basis for generalized conclusions on the whole population of regional product consumers in Poland. The following methods were used to explore the results: a descriptive method, a comparative method and the chi-squared test for the statistical analysis of independence (Lipiec-Zajchowska, 2003).

STATE OF THE ART

According to the literature, regional products are particularly valuable for today's mobile society who, while being homesick, looks for its own identity. The driver of demand for traditional products lies somewhere between existing habits and changes in lifestyle.

Reaffirming tradition makes it easier for the consumer to face modern times (Giraud, 2002). The buyers are increasingly looking for proven, high-quality traditional and regional foods. As a part of its Common Agricultural Policy, the European Union pays special attention to these products. Hence, a special system was developed to promote and protect high-quality regional and traditional products which are a part of cultural heritage (Grębowiec and Czopek, 2011).

In EU member states, in order to distinguish traditional and regional products, a system of European labeling and certification was introduced for products whose characteristics result from the specificity and culture of the region of their origin. These systems include (Komisja Europejska, 2014):

- 1) organic farming: the European certification system for organic farming products,
- a system of European labeling designed to inform consumers about product quality, and an anti-counterfeiting system for the producers,
- 3) a system of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG).

Special labels certifying the high quality of agri-food products of regional origin or traditional production methods are one of the key ways for implementing the quality policy in EU. The system for the protection and promotion of traditional and regional products has an impact on rural and regional sustainability and contributes to the objectives of the 2nd pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The development of the market for regional and traditional products drives the creation of new jobs outside agriculture, increases the income of agricultural producers and reduces rural depopulation, especially in less favored areas (LFAs). Also, it protects cultural heritage of rural areas and makes them more attractive to tourists. The EU quality policy is also beneficial to consumers as they can buy high-quality food with unique properties based on traditional production methods. Special EU labels (PGI, PDO or TSG) clearly designate the quality and origin of a food product, as expected by the buyers (Ministerstwo..., 2019).

The first Polish product registered (as a PDO) in the EU protection system for regional and traditional products was *Bryndza Podhalańska* in 2017. By 2018, a total of as many as 48 Polish products were registered, including 9 PDOs, 23 PGIs and 10 TSGs (Jedynak, 2019). As of

January 2019, there were 1431 registered products in the European Union (including 635 PDOs, 747 PGIs and 59 TSGs) with 6 more Polish products pending registration (DOOR, 2019). Being entered to the EU list of protected regional and traditional products is important not only because of the prestige involved, but most of all for economic reasons. Customers respond well to quality certificates and are eager to buy products designated with proper labels. This leads to a conclusion that the main beneficiaries of regional product certificates are farms and rural companies. Although their competitive advantage is not based on highly advanced technologies, they improve their marketing by making their customers aware that a product originates from a specific region and comes with guaranteed quality. As a result, registering protected labels provides an increase in production volumes, incomes and employment rates due to a stronger marketing force of certified products (Dogan and Gokovali, 2012). Available research findings confirm that labeling products with PGI and PDO has a positive effect on the customers' shopping decisions (Loureiro and McCluskey, 2000; Fandos and Flavián, 2006). Another reason for the increased willingness to purchase regional products even though they are relatively more expensive is a sense of food security (including a reduction in the numbers of counterfeit food products) which plays a key role in making purchasing decisions in the food market. Using proper labeling increases customer trust and makes the buyers believe the product is safe for them (Krysztofiak and Pawlak, 2018). Although the market for regional and traditional products develops in response to growing demand and changing customer trends, the demand is not always addressed. Based on a study conducted in January 2010, when there were 15 Polish products entered to the Community list, the following were concluded to be the most common reasons for not buying regional products: buyers' ignorance; difficulty in finding this type of food; excessive price or poor product range (Grebowiec, 2010).

RESULTS OF INVESTIGATION

This study mainly focused on *kołocz śląski*, a regional product labeled with the EU's Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) since 2011. An example of traditional yeast cake baked in Silesia, *kołocz śląski* is characteristic in its rectangular shape (in other Polish regions, *kołacz* is usually round), the fact that it is baked in three different

versions (without filling or with apple, poppy seed or cheese filling) and a specific kind of topping with a buttery smell (the topping with extra butter is thicker and has thicker texture than other traditional toppings found elsewhere in Poland). In geographical terms, the production region includes the Opolskie voivodeship and some districts of the Śląskie voivodeship (IJHARS, 2012). Two official names of this product are in use. The first one, kołocz śląski, comes from local dialectical terminology used in the region of Opolian Silesia and Upper Silesia, referring to a popular pastry. The other name is kołacz śląski. The manufacturing tradition goes back to as early as 10th century and is related to eating a ritual cake which initially was even believed to have magical properties. There were special traditions for preparing the cake for a wedding as it was a symbol of guaranteed prosperity for the new family. Over time, kołocz śląski has become an everyday cake, and yet it continues to be very important as a ritual baking in Opolian Silesia and Upper Silesia, especially at wedding parties (Konsorcjum..., 2008).

Feedback about kołocz śląski from 172 persons who filled out the entire questionnaire was selected for this study. The first part of the questionnaire included demographic questions to characterize the group of people sampled for the study. Most respondents were women (70.9%), with men making up 29.1% of the population. The age span was between 20 and 90 years old. The age structure of the interviewees was as follows: 32.5% of persons aged 20-39; 44.8% of persons aged 40-59; and 22.7% of persons aged 60 or older. In the test group, 3.5% had a primary or lower secondary education; 27.3% had a vocational education; 41.3% had a secondary education; and 27.9% had a tertiary education. The consumers evaluated five characteristics of kołocz śląski: price, taste, smell, appearance, and traditional ingredients and recipe. The consumers were asked to tell how satisfied they were with each of these characteristics on a 5-point scale (the available answers were: very bad, poor, average, good, very good). The corresponding results are presented in Figure 1.

The results suggest that the characteristics of *kołocz śląski* are rated very high due to its quality and traditional production method (Figure 1). Over 60% of respondents found the taste, smell and appearance to be "very good". More than half of respondents gave the highest rating to traditional ingredients and recipe. The total number of "poor" and "average" ratings was very low (only 1% for taste and smell, 5% for appearance and 11%

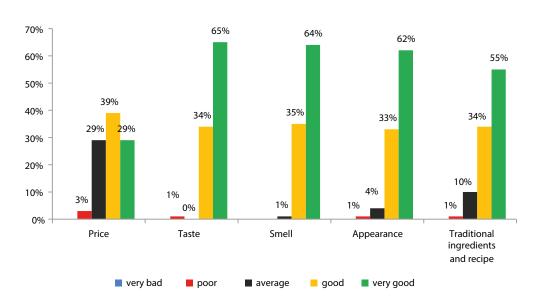


Fig. 1. Evaluation of satisfaction levels for selected characteristics of *kołocz śląski* in the test group of consumers (% of replies)

Source: own elaboration.

for traditional ingredients and recipe). Note that none of the interviewees chose the lowest rating. Although the price factor was not rated as high as the qualitative characteristics of the regional product considered, the purchasers did not complain about it, with 68% of "good" or "very good" ratings. The price was found to be "average" by 29% and "poor" by only 3% of respondents. The respondents were asked to assess the importance of previously evaluated characteristics of *kołocz śląski* which are taken into consideration when making purchasing decisions. A 5-point scale was used to measure this aspect (available responses: completely unimportant, unimportant, rather important, important, very important). The distribution of replies is as shown in Figure 2.

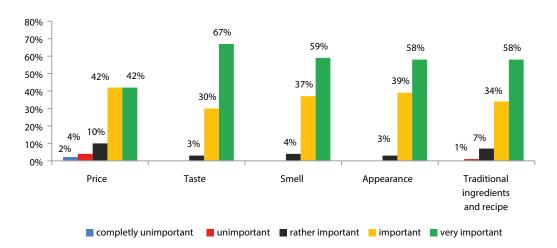


Fig. 2. Evaluating the importance of selected characteristics related to the purchase of *kołocz śląski* in the sample group (% of replies)

Source: own elaboration.

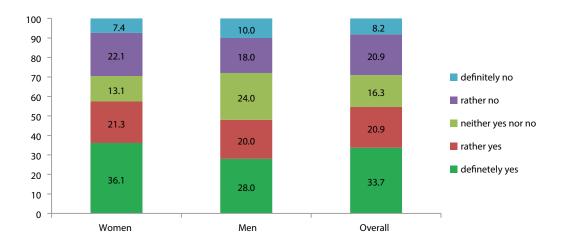


Fig. 3. Replies to the question if entering *kołocz śląski* on the list of products protected by the European Union and having it certified had an impact on the purchasing decisions (% of replies) Source: own elaboration.

As shown by the results, the largest group found taste to be "very important" (67% of replies). This was also the most frequent rating for smell (59% of replies) and appearance, as well as for traditional ingredients and recipe (58% of replies each). Price was not often regarded as a "very important" factor for shopping decisions (42% of replies). None of the interviewees found taste, smell or appearance of *kołocz śląski* to be unimportant or completely unimportant (however, 6% did so with respect to price; see Figure 2).

The survey also included a question if entering *kolocz śląski* on the list of products protected by the European Union and having it certified had an impact on the purchasing decisions. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure consumer feedback (available replies: definitely yes, rather yes, neither yes nor no, rather no, definitely no). The results are presented in Figure 3.

Most respondents admitted that having *kołocz śląski* certified as a unique regional product protected by the EU had a significant impact on their purchasing decisions. 54.6% of interviewees replied "definitely yes" or "rather yes". Almost one third of respondents picked "definitely no" or "rather no" (29.1%). In turn, 16.3% did not have a definitely positive or negative opinion on this issue. A detailed analysis of replies broken down by gender suggests that women and men somehow differ in their views (Figure 3). Therefore, an attempt was made to verify the hypothesis that no significant correlation exists between the respondents' gender and the opinions

on whether the EU certification for *kołocz śląski* influences their purchasing decisions. A chi-squared test of independence was chosen for that purpose. The results are shown in Table 1.

For 4 degrees of freedom and at $\alpha = 0.05$, the critical value was $\chi^2_{\alpha} = 9.49$, whereas the calculated value was

Table 1. Results of the analysis of independence between the respondents' gender and opinions on whether entering *kołocz śląski* to the list of protected regional products and having it certified influences their purchasing decisions (n = 172)

Specification	Women	Men		Women	Men
	empirical distribu- tion of replies		Total	expected distribu- tion of replies	
Definitely yes	44	14	58	41.14	16.86
Rather yes	26	10	36	25.53	10.47
Neither yes nor no	16	12	28	19.86	8.14
Rather no	27	9	36	25.53	10.47
Definitely no	9	5	14	9.93	4.07
TOTAL	122	50	172	122.00	50.00
Calculated value of chi-squared test of independence (df = 4, α = 0.05)					3.88
Theoretical value of chi-squared test of independence (df = 4, α = 0.05)					9.49

Source: own elaboration.

 $\chi^2 = 3.88$ (Table 1). This confirms that the respondents' gender does not have any significant influence on how they perceive the registration and labeling of *kołocz śląski* as PGI when making purchasing decisions (the calculated value of chi-squared is smaller than the critical value, and therefore the null hypothesis on the independence of characteristics is confirmed).

DISCUSSION

An important issue in discussing these findings is that many scientific studies fail to make a strict reference to regional products while there is a significant difference between products certified at EU and national level, and those commonly known as local and traditional. This can be illustrated by the example of the *żur* soup: without an additional specification, it can mean e.g. a Krakow style żurek from Lesser Poland or żur with herbs from the Lubuskie voivodeship (Korzeniowska-Ginter, 2010). Also, many respondents understand "local food" as food bought from a farmer (Zepeda and Li, 2006). Although customers are price sensitive (Rejman et al., 2015), Diakun (2017) believes that a higher price for regional products is justified. As demonstrated in previous studies, buyers pay more attention to quality than to price of regional products; price is not the most important criterion when considering the purchase of these products (Minta, 2015; Minta and Cempiel, 2017). The consumers give high ratings to and are willing to buy PGI, PDO and TSG certified products. The above is corroborated by the results of a consumer perception study carried out in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The clients are eager to buy products carrying special labels, especially organic and traditional foods (Muresan et al., 2018). A preliminary study was conducted in 2014 which showed a possible correlation between the EU certification process and the production volume of kołocz śląski. This implies that the production scale was much smaller before the product was labeled Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) by the EU. Once the certification process was completed and the permission to use the PGI label was granted, the production volume went up sharply (Godyla, 2014). However, note that the market offers many different types of commercial certificates or food quality systems which are often confused with those implemented by the EU. One of the effects of the multitude of logos which supposedly testify to the quality of a product is that the customers are unable to correctly interpret information provided on the packaging. Imitation is harmful to consumers and to the whole European system of guaranteed food quality (Vecchio and Annunziata, 2011). The problem is that the customers are poorly aware of what regional and traditional products really are and how to distinguish them from other products available in the market (Minta et al., 2014). Therefore, it is extremely important to educate the society and to ensure a better distribution of regional products so that everyone interested could access it more easily (Grębowiec, 2017).

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides a basis for concluding that the respondents give high ratings to kołocz śląski, a regional product they purchase. Most respondents were satisfied with the cake's unique qualitative characteristics, with "very good" or "good" ratings given to taste and smell (99% or replies), appearance (95%), and traditional ingredients and recipe (89%). The respondents also confirmed that the above four qualitative characteristics are of key importance when making purchasing decisions. "Very important" or "important" ratings were given to taste (97% of interviewees), smell (96%), appearance (97%) and traditional ingredients and recipe (92%). The findings also confirm that although customers are price sensitive, price was found to be an important or very important determinant of purchasing decisions less frequently than the qualitative characteristics of kołocz śląski. These findings confirmed that most consumers of kołocz śląski respond well to the PGI label and to the EU certificate of uniqueness. The above shows that when making their purchasing decisions, consumers take into account the labeling and certification, especially in niche food markets where product quality and uniqueness matter, as is it the case for regional and traditional products.

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OPINIE KONSUMENTÓW NA TEMAT PRODUKTU REGIONALNEGO "KOŁOCZ ŚLĄSKI"

Abstrakt. W opracowaniu skupiono się na zagadnieniach dotyczących rynku produktów regionalnych i tradycyjnych. Celem artykułu było poznanie opinii konsumentów na temat kołocza śląskiego, który jest przykładem polskiego produktu regionalnego chronionego na poziomie UE w ramach oznaczenia ChOG. Pierwotne i wtórne dane źródłowe zebrano dzięki metodom: ankietowej, dokumentacyjnej i studium literatury. Badania ankietowe wykonano w 2019 roku na celowo wybranej grupie 172 osób (konsumenci kołocza śląskiego podczas zakupu w certyfikowanych punktach sprzedaży). Do opracowania wyników użyto metod: opisowej, porównawczej i statystyczny test niezależności chi kwadrat. Wyniki wskazały, że konsumenci w zdecydowanej większości wysoko ocenili kołocza śląskiego. Badania potwierdzają tezę, że dla konsumentów produktów regionalnych duże znaczenie mają cechy jakościowe wyrobów i potwierdzona unikatowość dzięki stosowaniu specjalnych oznaczeń i certyfikatów. Czynnik ceny był rzadziej wskazywany jako ważny lub bardzo ważny przy podejmowaniu decyzji zakupowych niż cechy jakościowe takie jak smak, zapach, wygląd czy tradycyjny sposób wytwarzania. Przeprowadzone badania nie potwierdziły statystycznego związku między płcią respondentów a ich wskazaniami dotyczącymi znaczenia certyfikacji produktu regionalnego przy podejmowaniu decyzji zakupowych.

Słowa kluczowe: produkt regionalny, ChOG, produkt tradycyjny, kołocz śląski