
Importance of Regional and Traditional EU Quality Schemes in Young Consumer Food Purchasing Decisions

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Abstract:

Purpose: The general objective of this paper was to evaluate the significance of EU designations such as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) in the food purchasing decisions made by consumers. Specific objectives include: determining familiarity with products bearing EU designations, identifying factors affecting the purchase, determining the type of most frequently purchased products and identifying their purchase locations.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The evaluation was carried out using PAPI and CAWI surveys (survey questionnaire). The surveys were carried out in 2016 among 1.364 students from four countries: Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Findings: The results of the surveys point to a relatively small significance of EU designations in the purchasing decisions made by young consumers of food products. The surveys made it possible to identify the most important determinants of the choice of food products, including: product price, freshness and best before date. Analysing the behaviours of buyers from respective countries it can be observed that the evaluations of the significance of factors determining the choice of a product are not much different, which can be explained by progressing globalization and unification of consumer behaviours. In addition, it can be noted that the surveyed buyers are not very fluent in differentiating between respective types of designations such as PDO, PGI and TSG.

Practical Implications: The survey made it possible to evaluate the behaviour of young consumers on the food market to the extent of the choice of products with EU designations and to formulate recommendations for producers and sellers as well as identify the directions of further research.

Originality/Value: The added value of this paper is cross-sectional analysis of multiple factors shaping decisions on the choice of EU-certified food products by young consumers using the example of selected EU member states in comparison to a non-EU country – Ukraine.

Keywords: PDO, PGI, TSG, traditional, regional and local products, consumer behaviour

JEL Codes: D12, F14.

Paper Type: Research Paper.

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1. Introduction

The European Union runs a policy of product quality and standardisation due to consumer care and protection of consumer interests. This policy involves measures such as protection of names and places of origin of traditional regional products. Traditional products are products that are often consumed or are associated with specific celebrations, whose recipes are usually transmitted from generation to generation, made in an accurately specified manner according to gastronomic heritage, involve very little processing, distinguished and recognised for their sensory characteristics. However, it should be remembered that no tradition can exist without a region and it is often linked with a specific ethnic group (Pieniak *et al.*, 2009; Guerrero *et al.*, 2010; Vanhonacker *et al.*, 2010; Almli *et al.*, 2011; Newerli-Guz, and Rybowska, 2015; Balogh *et al.*, 2016). In turn, regional products mean agricultural crops, products and processed products strictly linked to the conditions of a specific area, the type of used raw materials specific to a given area, terrain relief, characteristic climate, type of soil etc. The name of a regional product can contain a geographical name and often is a showcase of the region it originated from. Apart from regional product, the term local product is often used. Sometimes these terms are used alternately but they should not be considered equivalent. The understanding of location is narrower for a local product than for a regional product (Aprile *et al.*, 2016; Richardson and Stähler, 2016; Fernández-Ferrín *et al.*, 2017; Hempel and Hamm, 2016; Lombart *et al.*, 2018).

The authors of this paper focus on a system of EU quality signs identifying agricultural and food products grown and produced according to strict specifications. The system is governed by relevant EU regulations [No 510/2006; No 1151/2012] and includes the following designations: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). The designations can be assigned to agricultural and food products such as, for instance, cheeses, meat products, fruits, vegetables, oils (rules governing the designation of wine and spirits are slightly different, which is due to the joint organisation of the market of such products).

There are certain differences between respective EU quality signs. PDO refers to agricultural and food products produced, prepared and processed in a specific geographical area using know-how recognised for generations. PGI indicates a link to the geographical area and at least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation. TSG emphasizes the traditional nature of the product, both in terms of its composition and production methods. The link between the product and the region is the strongest in the case of PDO, while PGI and TSG designations are associated with more flexible regulations. The whole process of managing the production of PDO, PGI and TSG is regulated by very restrictive rules. The system of EU designations is a guarantee of high quality, unique and genuine nature of products and provides legal protection for their manufacturing method (Chudy and Gierałowska, 2013; Grębowiec, 2010).

Protection of regional and traditional food of EU origin using PDO, PGI, and TSG designations helps preserve cultural and national tradition, and the wealth of rural culture. It satisfies three fundamental objectives: protects the manufacturer, protects the consumer, and fosters the development of rural areas. The policy of EU quality signs for agricultural products should provide manufacturers with adequate tools ensuring better promotion and identifiability of traditional and regional agricultural products to consumers and protect them against unfair practices of the competition.

A regional product gives a chance for improving the economic situation in the region, at the same time ensuring positive social and environmental effects. Thus, it is a regional method for implementing sustainable development (Sieczko, 2008; Grębowiec, 2010; Pilone *et al.*, 2015; Kuźnar, 2016). The largest number of products registered as PDO, PGI and TSG are registered in Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and Greece, where great importance is attached to traditional regional products (Velčovska and Sadilek, 2014). Interest in this type of designation is also increasing in other countries since many surveys indicate a growing consumer interest in high-quality food products - not in industrial, highly-processed mass products, but in those made using methods and recipes known and proven for decades, which determines their unique flavour and very good effect on health. Therefore, undertaking studies into behaviours of consumers on the market of products bearing EU designations is essential and current.

The food market is characterised by high variability and unpredictability. Knowledge of factors which determine purchasing behaviours, and especially the choice of food products and their buying location, becomes a key element shaping the competition strategy of entities operating on the food market. The present-day consumer is more and more open to trying different products on a regional, national, European or global scale.

Thus, factors connected with consumer awareness and attitudes regarding not only local and regional products and brands but also foreign ones have become increasingly significant in competing for customers on the food market (Borowska, 2008; Domański and Baryła, 2013; Angowski and Lipowski, 2014; Angowski and Jarosz-Angowska, 2019). So far there has been extensive research concerning EU systems of designations of food products, which is confirmed by bibliometric studies emphasizing the importance of this topic (Grunert and Achmann, 2016; Dias and Mendes, 2018).

According to surveys, the main drives to purchasing traditional and regional products include: consumers searching for high-quality products distinct from other food products, with unique appearance, characterised by delicious and peculiar taste and offering high nutritive value and benefits to health. In addition, another important factor is consumers' search for their own distinctness and an attempt to preserve their identity (Borowska, 2008; Jeżewska-Zychowicz, 2009; Grzybowska-Brzezińska and Klepacka, 2015). Many surveys suggest that consumers are willing

to pay a higher price for traditional and regional products since they associate them with better quality (Aprile *et al.*, 2012; Resano *et al.*, 2012). With reference to previous surveys, a research gap can be identified in the recognisability to and familiarity of the young consumer with products bearing EU designations. Studies regarding this aspect are very significant since in the near future young consumers will be the most valuable sector of the market and knowledge of their attitudes, behaviours and opinions can contribute to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of food certification policy. In addition, previous research focused primarily on finding factors which determined the purchasing behaviours using the example of a single country (Festila *et al.*, 2014; Košičiarová *et al.*, 2016; Meixner and Haas, 2016; Riivits-Arkonsuo *et al.*, 2016; Kumpulainen *et al.*, 2018). This paper is significant and innovative because it compares consumer behaviours in more than one country, including a comparison of EU consumers (Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia) with non-EU consumers (Ukraine).

2. Materials and Methods

The objective of this work is to evaluate the significance of EU designations such as PDO, PGI and TSG in the purchasing decisions made by consumers on the food market. The main research problems were: determining familiarity with products bearing EU designations and identification of factors contributing to their purchase. In addition, the most often purchased types of products and buying locations were investigated. The results were compared taking into account the EU designation type and the country of origin of respondents.

The paper makes use of the results of questionnaire surveys concerning the purchasing behaviours on the food market. The surveys were carried out in 2016 among 1364 students from four countries: Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Slovakia. The scope of the survey included the type and volume of purchase, buying locations and factors affecting the purchasing behaviour on the food market, as well as consumer perceptions of EU-certified products and foreign products. The surveys were carried out using a traditional method (PAPI) and an online survey (CAWI). The results of surveys were processed using the SPSS Statistic 25 statistics package. Table 1 presents the research group according to demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1. *The characteristics of sample*

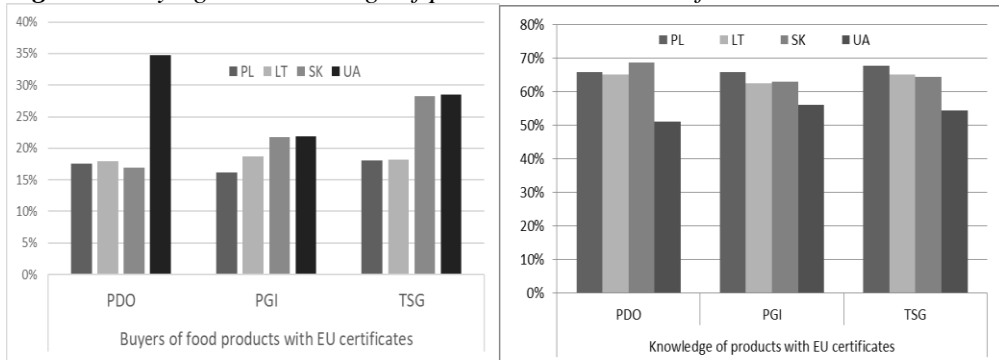
	Poland	Lithuania	Slovakia	Ukraine
Origin of respondents (%)	30.8	25.8	23.3	20.1
Gender (%) Male/Female	41.0/59.0	15.6/84.8	23.9/76.1	43.80/56.2
Age (%)				
to 18	3.8	0.6	0.0	10.2
19-22	63.8	45.7	31.8	76.6
23-25	25.7	19.9	64.2	5.8
over 25	6.7	33.8	4.1	7.3

Source: *Own calculation.*

3. Results and Discussion

Among the respondents, consumers from Poland and Slovakia declare having the most extensive knowledge of EU-certified products, while the least knowledgeable in that respect are consumers from Ukraine (Figure 1). Knowledge, or rather a lack of it, with reference to respective types of EU designations is similar in all the surveyed countries. Answers provided by respondents regarding purchase of EU-certified products in comparison to their knowledge about such products are interesting. Certified products were most frequently purchased by the surveyed respondents from Ukraine who declared having the poorest knowledge of EU designations such as PDO, PGI and TSG. It can be supposed that for non-EU buyers products originating in the European Union are attractive, especially if such products are certified. These products may be perceived as unique, luxury and prestigious and, in addition, safe.

Figure 1. Buying and knowledge of products with EU certificates



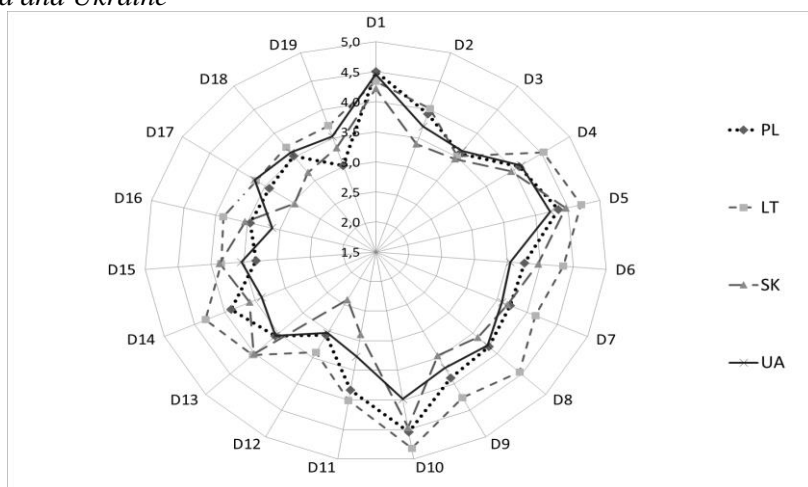
Source: Own calculation.

In order to search for answers regarding factors determining the choice of the product, respondents were requested to assess which criteria govern their purchasing decisions. The following product choice drivers were taken into account: D1-product prices, D2-product brand, D3-package size, D4-best before date, D5-taste, D6-product composition, D7-nutritional values, D8-smell, D9-product image, D10-product freshness, D11-commercial promotions, D12-advertising, D13-recommendations, D14-habit, D15-country of product origin, D16-lack of artificial preservatives, D17-attractive image of packaging, D18-quality certificates, D19-ecological brands. The significance of respective factors in the purchasing process was evaluated according to the five-point Likert scale.

Figure 2 shows the significance of respective factors for the consumer's choice of EU-certified product. One of the most significant factors determining the choice of the product is product price, especially for consumers from Poland and Ukraine. Consumers from Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia consider product freshness, its best before date and taste the most important things in choosing the product. Advertising

is the least important to consumers from all countries and consumers from Slovakia and Ukraine in addition consider commercial promotions insignificant. Quality certificates, in comparison to other determinants, are less significant in EU member states, which can be due to a belief that all products manufactured and sold in the territory of the EU meet specific requirements and EU standards. Therefore, for buyers from EU countries designations such as PDO, PGI and TSG are not something which makes the product particularly distinct from the available range of other products.

Figure 2. Determinants of choosing EU-certified products in Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Ukraine



Note: scale: 1- I definitely do not agree, 2- I do not agree, 3- It is difficult to say, 4- I agree, 5- I definitely agree.

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2 contains a deeper analysis of factors determining product choices according to respective types of EU designations such as PDO, PGI and TSG, considering the answers of all respondents without the division into countries. Looking at respective types of EU certificates, little difference can be observed in factors determining the purchasing choices of respondents. The evaluations of criteria for choosing products with specific EU certificates are similar, which can testify to the fact that the respondents do not identify specific EU designations. This may be generally connected with having little knowledge about EU certificates, as suggested by the results presented in Figure 1.

Another research problem was to see which categories of products bearing EU designations are purchased by consumers (Figure 3). The most popular products purchased in all the analysed countries include fruits and processed fruits. In Poland the most popular products are, in addition, regional bread and ham. Lithuanian consumers most eagerly purchase olive oil and vegetables. As regards consumers

from Slovakia – they most often buy cheese and vegetables. Respondents from Ukraine chose olive oil and cheese.

Table 2. Factors determining the choice of products with PDO, PGI, and TSG certificates

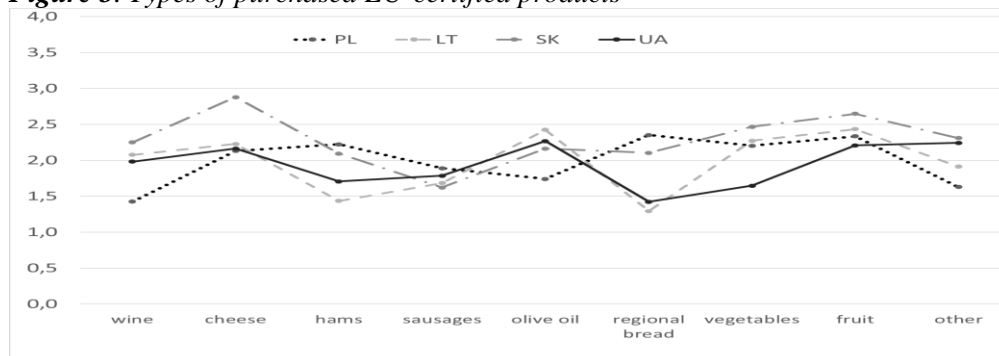
Factors	PDO		PGI		TSG	
	average*	rank**	average*	rank**	average*	rank**
D1	4.34	2	4.31	3	4.38	3
D2	3.80	8	3.74	11	3.77	11
D3	3.55	14	3.48	15	3.56	15
D4	4.18	4	4.21	4	4.16	4
D5	4.34	3	4.41	1	4.46	1
D6	3.92	5	3.97	5	3.91	6
D7	3.77	9	3.79	10	3.84	9
D8	3.90	7	3.87	7	3.99	5
D9	3.91	6	3.79	9	3.88	8
D10	4.40	1	4.39	2	4.46	2
D11	3.55	16	3.52	14	3.51	16
D12	3.10	19	2.99	19	2.95	19
D13	3.71	10	3.88	6	3.91	7
D14	3.69	11	3.83	8	3.78	10
D15	3.67	12	3.64	12	3.76	12
D16	3.53	17	3.47	16	3.58	14
D17	3.56	15	3.43	17	3.49	18
D18	3.57	13	3.54	13	3.58	13
D19	3.45	18	3.40	18	3.50	17

Note: *scale: 1- I definitely do not agree. 2- I do not agree. 3- It is difficult to say. 4- I agree. 5- I definitely agree, **rank - ranking of the factor in the product selection process

Source: Own calculation

A very important research problem is identifying where products with EU quality certificates are purchased, which is illustrated in Figure 4. The respondents' answers lead to an observation that they most frequently buy EU-certified products in discount stores (except respondents from Slovakia) and in delicatessen (except Poles). Slovak consumers prefer small shops that, at the same time, are the least frequent choice of respondents from other countries. Poles prefer large stores such as hypermarkets.

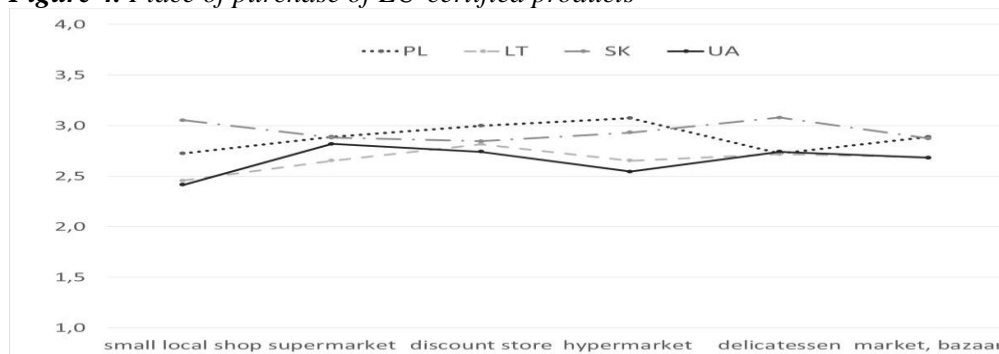
Figure 3. Types of purchased EU-certified products



Note: scale of frequency: 0- I do not buy, 1 - I buy very rarely, 2 - I rarely buy, 3, I buy often, 4 - I buy very often.

Source: Own calculation.

Figure 4. Place of purchase of EU-certified products



Note: Evaluated according to a 7-point scale, where 1 means “I do not buy”, and 7 - “I buy very often”

Source: Own calculation.

4. Conclusions

Changes occurring on the food market, mostly connected with the evolution of the needs and expectations of present-day consumers and with very strong competition both among manufacturers and distributors, force undertaking adequate market activities to reach consumers more effectively. One of the strategies of being distinct on the market is reinforcing the market value of the product with attributes connected with designations such as PDO, PGI and TSG certificates. The function of designations is to emphasize the exceptional quality and uniqueness of the certified products.

Products bearing EU designations are an important element of increasing the competitiveness of the region and protecting the tradition and promoting the culture of Europe, so they are subject to special legal regulations at EU level and

manufacturers can receive grants for implementing such designations. However, the surveys showed that few young consumers knew about such products. The lack of such knowledge becomes clear when analysing the factors determining product choices among which EU designation is one of the least important criteria of choice, especially in EU member states – Poland, Lithuania and Slovakia. EU designation is more significant in the purchasing decisions of the surveyed consumers in Ukraine, which is a non-EU country.

Generally, the surveys showed that in food product purchasing choices cost factors prevailed over quality. The recognisability of and identification of differences between respective types of EU designations such as PDO, PGI and TSG is much worse. Respondents perceive them as identical, which is testified by the lack of differences in answers concerning the choice of products with respective designations.

An important distribution channel for the surveyed buyers of products bearing EU designations was discount stores and delicatessen. This may mean that large selling chains whose capital is mostly “European” recognise the significance of products bearing EU designations and put them on sale. On the other hand, irrespective of the country of origin, consumers indicated fruits, olive oil and cheese as the most often bought products. In connection with the fact that surveys were carried out in a group of young buyers, similar consumer behaviour and product buying locations can be a result of progressing globalisation and unification of consumer behaviours.

The surveys may lead to a conclusion that the main problem is the lack of or insufficient knowledge about food products bearing EU designations among young consumers. The results of surveys suggest that advertising and commercial promotions are not very significant factors in choosing products bearing PDO, PGI, and TSG designations, but it seems that there is no knowledge about benefits related to purchasing EU-certified products both to the consumer and regions in which such products originate. It is justified to strengthen the communication increasing consumer awareness. Therefore, information strategies, apart from commercial marketing objectives that reinforce product sales, should also pursue educational objectives that increase consumer knowledge about EU-certified products.

The presented surveys can form a basis for deeper research exploring the behaviours of young consumer in which the reasons for the lack of knowledge about products bearing EU designations will be analysed and effective information strategies sought. In view of lower, as shown by the surveys, interest in products bearing EU designations among consumers from EU countries compared to non-EU consumers, it could be considered to investigate the justification of building European identity in marketing strategies of European enterprises by developing the consumers' attachment to products from a specific region, area of the European Union in contrast to the pending processes of globalisation and mass consumption.

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