Muslim consumer’s motivations towards meat consumption in Belgium: qualitative exploratory insights from means-end chain analysis

Karijn Bonne and Wim Verbeke
Muslim consumer’s motivations towards meat consumption in Belgium: qualitative exploratory insights from means-end chain analysis

Karijn Bonne and Wim Verbeke

Introduction

In recent years consumers have attached increasing importance to food safety, health, naturalness, pleasure, convenience, information and ethical issues like sustainability, animal or environmental friendliness (e.g. Almas, 1999; Dupuis, 2000; Mathijs, 2003, Vermeir and Verbeke, 2005). In the specific case of fresh meat, safety guarantee, quality assurance and trustworthy information, as well as interest in animal welfare and convenience prevail as the most relevant consumer trends (Devine, 2003; Verbeke and Vackier, 2004).

In general, consumer attitude and behaviour towards food are determined by individual and environmental factors, such as marketing, information, situation and food specific properties. The focus in this paper is on the role of religion as one of the potential individual factors shaping consumption decisions. Ample evidence has been provided that religion influences consumer attitude and behaviour in general (Delener, 1994; Pettinger et al., 2004), and food purchasing decisions and eating habits in particular (Mennell et al., 1992; Steenkamp, 1993; Steptoe et al., 1995; Shatenstein and Ghadirian, 1997; Asp, 1999; Mullen et al., 2000; Blackwell et al., 2001). In many societies, religion even plays one of the most influential roles in food choice (Dindyal, 2003; Musaiger, 1993). The impact of religion on food consumption depends on the religion itself and on the extent to which individuals follow the teachings of their religion. Several religions forbid certain foods, for instance pork and not ritually slaughtered meat in Judaism and Islam, or pork and beef in Hinduism and Buddhism,
except for Christianity that has no food taboos (Sack, 2001 : 218). Although religions may impose strict dietary laws, the amount of people following them may vary considerably. For instance, it is estimated that 90% of Buddhist and Hindus (Dindyal, 2003), 75% of Muslims versus only 16% of Jews in the US strictly follow their religious dietary laws (Hussaini, 1993a). Factors explaining differences in adherence to religious dietary prescription pertain among others to social structures, e.g. origin, immigration, and generation differences (Limage, 2000 ; Saint-Blancat, 2004 ; Ababou, 2005).

An important issue remains whether the recent consumer trends in fresh meat like safety and health issues are equally followed by Muslim immigrants. In the present study, we investigate if fresh meat consumption patterns are comparable for immigrant Muslim consumers as for native non-Muslim consumers, and how much impact religion may have in the consumption and motivational patterns discovered.

Islam is a way of life governed by rules and customs built on five pillars, which every Muslim has to observe : shahadah or witnessing ; salat or prayer ; zakah or charity ; sawm or fasting and hajj or pilgrimage. In addition to these, Muslims have to follow a set of dietary laws intended to advance their well being. These laws prohibit the consumption of alcohol, pork, blood, dead meat and meat which has not been slaughtered according to Islamic rulings. In reference to Islam, Halal is an Arabic word meaning lawful or permitted or that what is permitted and allowed by the lawgiver (Allah) and Haram means unlawful or prohibited.

The halal meat chain in Europe has adapted to the newly emerging consumer trends like animal welfare and convenience in cooking and eating, but fails on providing institutionalized quality reassurance beyond personal trust. Furthermore, convenience in the purchasing stage is limited owing to limited availability of halal meat in much country’s retail system (Bonne and Verbeke, 2005). Halal meat in Belgium is available at butcher shops owned by immigrants in cities with an important Muslim population. In some ethnic retail shops, one can find (imported) halal frozen meat. Belgian supermarkets, however, do not offer halal meat.

The objective of this study is to investigate Belgian Muslim’s motivational structure and behaviour towards fresh meat consumption in general and halal meat consumption in particular. This objective will be pursued through a qualitative exploratory approach, more specifically laddering interviews with Muslim meat consumers. In Belgium there are approximately 400,000 Muslims, mainly from North Africa and Turkey, which is 4% of the Belgian population (Bousetta and Maréchal, 2004). As such, the Muslim population constitutes a considerable market segment in many of today’s food markets and emerges as a potential segment to be targeted independently.

We will first outline the means-end chain (MEC) theory and laddering technique, followed by the methodology of the study. Then, the results of the interviews are set forth and discussed. Finally conclusions and implications for further research are provided as well as limitations and directions for future research.

Means-end chain (MEC) theory and laddering technique

The MEC theory holds that product attributes can be linked to more abstract, cognitive elements of consumer behaviour, like consumption specific goals and cultural values. Consumers perceive products and product attributes as means to reach certain desired ends (cultural values) which are in accordance with the values the person holds (Vannoppen, 2002). Rokeach (1968) considers these cultural values as terminal values or the ultimate purchasing goals. Goals are about what consumers want to achieve in
life, whereas values pertain to why they want to do so (Gutman, 1997). Children are instilled with cultural values by key institutions, particularly family, schools, and religious institutions. They are passed on from one generation to the other within the family (Assael, 1998: 462) and are the guiding principles in people’s behaviour. MECs represent consumer’s motivational structures for performing a specific behaviour.

9 MECs are obtained through a process called laddering, referring to an in-depth, one-on-one interviewing method used to develop an understanding of how consumers translate product attributes into meaningful associations (Gutman, 1982). The conventional or ‘soft laddering technique’ as proposed by Reynolds and Gutman (1988) involves an interviewing format using a series of directed probes, typified by the “Why is that important to you?” question to determine sets of linkages between key perceptual elements across the range of attributes (A), consequences (C) and values (V).

10 This interviewing approach facilitates understanding of complex behaviour and it has yet successfully been applied in the case of food in general (Roininen, 2000) and meat (Verbeke et al., 2005; Flight et al., 2003; Westerlund, 2003); organic food consumption (Zanoli and Naspetti, 2002; Makatouni, 2002; Fotopoulos et al., 2003) and genetically modified foods (Bredahl, 1999; Grunert et al., 2001) in particular. A common output of a means-end study is a tree-like network diagram called a Hierarchical Value Map (HVM) representing a set of MECs or an aggregate cognitive structure map (Gengler et al., 1995).

11 In the present study, the MEC theory is used to investigate which attributes of fresh meat are important to Muslim consumers, to depict this motivational structure to buy (halal) meat and to assess whether consumer trends pertaining to safety, health, information, animal welfare and convenience apply for Muslims in the same sense as for non-Muslims.

Methodology

12 Interviews were conducted with 50 Muslim respondents between the age of 19 and 69 living in Gent (Belgium). Respondent recruitment was based on a snowball sampling technique starting from friends and increasing through friends and family of the respondent. According to De Pelsmacker and Van Kenhove (1994: 108) snowball samples are allowed when respondents are difficult to reach, which is the case for Muslim consumers in Belgium. Most of the participants are of Moroccan origin (36), then Tunisian (8) and Algerian (6), representing the North-African population in Gent. The sample was furthermore stratified according to demographic control criteria such as gender, age, generation, number of years in Belgium and origin. As such, 26 females and 24 males were interviewed of whom 24 are without profession and 26 have a job. The number of members in the family varies between 1 and 7 and the number of children between 0 and 5.

13 Half of the respondents belong to the first generation, the other half to the 1.5 and second generation. The first generation consists of immigrants born abroad. Those born in Belgium with at least one parent born abroad form the second generation (de Valk et al., 2001). Immigrants who came to Belgium before or at the age of six are categorized as the one and a half generation since they are officially born abroad but started compulsory school –normally at the age of 6– in Belgium. The number of years that the 1 and 1.5 generation have been living in Belgium varies between one and 40 years. It should be noted that some discussion is on-going about the categorization of the latter group. Neels (2000) includes Turkish and Moroccan immigrants immigrating
before entering the compulsory school into the second generation. In addition, the integration sector in Belgium defines a one and a half generation consisting of immigrants born abroad who came as youngsters or young adults (Van Geertruyen, 1999). For ease of interpretation and to improve readability of the paper, we will refer to “first” and “second” (i.e. 1.5 and second) generation in the remaining parts of this paper.

The interviews took place either, at home or at the workplace of the respondent to make the subject feel comfortable and at ease. The discussions were conducted in Dutch or French, depending on the spoken language of the respondent and the ladders were recorded by the interviewer during the interview. Respondents who only speak Arabic were thus excluded. The interviews were performed during October and November 2004.

The interview consisted of two parts. The objective of the first part was to collect data on meat consumption behaviour, place of purchase and socio-demographics. The second part was based on the MEC theory and on the laddering interviewing technique. Respondents were given a list of 15 attributes of fresh meat including five search (perceivable and useful for deriving quality expectation upon purchase), five experience (mainly sensory, and useful for evaluation of quality performance upon consumption) and five credence attributes. The latter are typical attributes that can not be verified by the individual consumers, though evaluation of such attributes (like quality label, production method, origin or absence of harmful substances) is usually based on trust in the source that provided the information. The attribute list was based on earlier similar research with Belgian consumers (Verbeke et al., 2005) and adapted for Muslim consumers. These attributes served as the starting point for the in-depth interview. Marking attributes from a list is the quickest technique to gather attribute importance and benefits the quality of the data since possible fatigue by the respondents is reduced (Fotopoulos et al., 2003).

Respondents were first asked to indicate on a 5 point Likert scale how important they find each attribute. Then the laddering technique was applied to the most important attributes overall and to the most important one from each of the attribute categories (search, experience and credence). The consequences and values were pursued by getting the respondent reach even more abstract levels of explanation through series of “why is that important to you” questions. We thus chose the soft laddering technique in order to allow the respondent to talk freely.

In the following section, the results of the interviews are presented. First, general results on meat consumption are provided. Next, we used t-tests, cross tabulation and correlation analyses to analyse possible differences in attribute importance for demographic segments and respondents with different places of purchase. The “Laddermap software” (Gengler, 1997) is used to analyse the ladders and create the HVMS, which represent an aggregation of the individual MECs. Furthermore, verbatims translated from Dutch or French directly from the interviews are provided so as to illustrate the uncovered motivational structures.

Results Meat Consumption

With respect to meat consumption, most of the respondents eat one or two times a week beef (31), chicken (37) and lamb (23). The most important place for meat purchase is the Islamic butcher (34), followed by the abattoir (7) and the farm gate (4). Meat purchases from supermarket and Belgian butcher are much lower. Only 5 respondents
indicated to buy meat primarily at the supermarket (3) or a Belgian butcher (2). This means that 5 of the 50 respondents sometimes or always eat non-halal meat since halal meat is not available at the supermarket or Belgian butcher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lean</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little fat</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tender</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy to prepare</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juicy</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaughter method</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of hormones</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production method</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality label</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production region</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Importance attached to fresh meat attributes, mean and standard deviation on 5-point scale (n=50)

Demographic differences in attribute importance

Respondents had to indicate on a 5-point scale from 'not important' (1) to 'very important' (5) how much importance they attached to each attribute. The mean of every attribute as well as the standard deviation is showed in table 1. The attributes are ranked in order of importance for each group of attributes (search, experience and credence). The three most important attributes are freshness; slaughter method; and taste. Respondents find production region least important. Freshness is the most important search attribute, followed by appearance. Taste, tenderness and smell are the most important experience attributes, whereas slaughter method, production method and absence of hormones the most important credence attributes.

With regard to demographic influence on the importance of the features, we found that women attach greater importance to juiciness and slaughter method than men. A possible explanation could be their primary goal to provide their family and especially their children with an attractive (e.g. easier to chew) meal. Many reasons were provided for the importance of slaughter method: following the religious prescriptions, pass on a cultural tradition, animal welfare and health. These will be discussed in more detail with the HVMs.

Furthermore, the first generation tend to attach less importance to appearance, freshness, and juiciness, but more to production region compared to the second generation. Many of the first generation men regularly buy a sheep at the farm in order to have reliable information on the origin, production method, health status, sex and age of the animal. They prefer Belgian sheep for their taste; good health and guarantee from veterinary control in contrast with foreign sheep especially sheep from Great Britain. Other motivations for buying directly at the farm are guarantee of halal slaughter, price and quantity. One respondent said: “The problem when buying at an
Islamic butcher is the lack of quality guarantee. Hence, many Muslims buy sheep or chickens to slaughter themselves to be sure it has been ritually slaughtered.”

The older the respondents and the larger the family, the more importance is attached to little fat to prevent cholesterol and to tenderness in order to make the digestion and chewing easier. The larger the family, the more importance is attached to juiciness and smell compared to families with fewer children. Furthermore, the longer the respondent lives in Belgium the more importance is attached to absence of hormones compared to respondents who more recently moved to Belgium. Most likely, these respondents could be better informed and aware of the food crises and their impact on health than relatively new immigrants. With respect to age, we found a positive correlation between age and importance of production region. No differences were found with respect to attribute importance for respondents from different North-African origins.

Attribute importance and preferred place of purchase

Slaughter method is a very important attribute of meat to almost all respondents, but is however significantly more important to those buying meat at an Islamic butcher, the farm or the slaughterhouse. These three distribution channels solely offer halal meat. Hence, it is quite logical that respondents finding slaughter method very important always buy their meat at these points of purchase which merit most trust in their opinions.

The attributes quality label and availability, however, were not always understood since a quality label for halal meat does not (yet) exists in Belgium. Nevertheless, some interviewees said they lack information when buying meat at an Islamic butcher. They therefore express doubts about the halal status; the slaughter date and the origin of the meat. This information is now passed on through the butcher and is thus based on personal trust rather than being an institutionalized quality assurance. Two respondents gave this reason as motivation to buy non-halal meat at a supermarket instead. One female respondent of 41 years old from the first generation said: “I lack information when buying meat from an Islamic butcher: where does it come from, when has it been slaughtered... So I buy meat from the supermarket, but I find it hard when other Moroccans are in the shop. When my mother comes, I do buy halal meat.”

Some respondents, mainly from the second generation are strongly in favour of a halal quality label certified by a trusted official institution. One young male respondent of second generation said: “there should be a halal label controlled by an official institution in order to prevent fraud which is probably the case now.” Nevertheless, some of the interviewees were sceptical about buying halal meat at the supermarket. Some participants were aware that foreign supermarkets, for example in France, already offer halal labelled meat, but respondents do not dare to buy it because of lack of confidence. One female respondent of the second generation proposed to make a halal shop in the supermarket. “Even if halal meat should be offered at the supermarket, I would not trust it. I have heard from people working in meat factories that it is not really halal meat. They should really have to convince me that the meat is halal, perhaps by putting a Muslim butcher behind the meat counter in the supermarket.” Others would be prepared to buy halal meat from the supermarket to benefit from one-stop-shopping, again conditional on the meat bearing a reliable quality label. Apparently, the attribute quality label is significant for Muslim consumers, especially second generation, despite the rather low mean ranking.
Convenience in shopping is, next to need for information, the main reason for some respondents to buy at the supermarket or a Belgian butcher. These respondents find slaughter method somewhat important, but they either seek for information, find the Islamic butchers not hygienic or find one-stop-shopping more important. Two respondents buying at a Belgian butcher are married to a non-Muslim wife who is responsible for the meat purchase. “My wife buys meat at the Belgian butcher because it is easy and she does not have to go to the baker shop for bread, to an Islamic butcher for meat and to a supermarket for the rest.”

Furthermore, respondents perceive halal meat as being easily available although they have to make an effort to purchase it: “I do not bother to drive far in order to buy halal meat.” Respondents buying meat at the slaughterhouse have to drive 35 km at least and some respondents said to buy meat at Islamic butchers in Brussels (60 km) because of their diversified and large offer in halal meat. During summer, many Islamic butchers are closed because being on visit to their homeland. In result, halal meat availability becomes a problem in specific periods of the year. At these moments, consumers have to buy meat from another Islamic butcher, notwithstanding the lack of personal trust. “During summer when the butcher goes on holiday, availability is a problem. I am then obliged to buy meat at that one butcher who is open, even if I know the meat is not fresh and hygienic conditions are unacceptable.” Many respondents always buying halal meat said not to eat non-halal meat if halal meat was not available. “If I do not find halal meat, I simply do not eat meat that day.” Availability was sometimes interpreted as availability of halal meat at home, for example in the freezer. For these respondents, always having halal meat at home is extremely important in order to serve a proper halal meal to unexpected guests.

Muslim consumer’s motivational structures

After coding the ladders in the Laddermap software, an implication matrix was derived. The implication matrix indicates how often the concepts have been mentioned and linked to each other. Direct as well as indirect relations are recorded. An indirect relation means that two codes are mentioned in the same ladder but not directly after each other. The implication matrix is then graphically presented through the hierarchical value map.

The hierarchical value map for the total sample of respondents is presented in figure 1. A cut-off level of 4 was chosen meaning that a link is drawn between two concepts if at least four respondents have mentioned it as a direct or indirect link. Choosing a cut-off level involves a trade-off between the amount of data represented by the map and the transparency of the map. It is suggested that a minimum of 70% of the relationships on the map should be represented (Gengler, 1997). Here, the HVM in figure 1 includes between 61% (cut-off = 8) and 82% (cut-off = 4) of all direct links mentioned by the respondents. Figure 2 depicts the HVM of the first generation and figure 3 the second generation. For these two subgroups a cut-off level of 3 was chosen representing between 61% (cut-off = 4) and 85% (cut-off = 2) for the first generation and between 69% (cut-off = 4) and 87% (cut-off = 2) of the links for the second generation. Furthermore, figure 4 represents the HVM of the male respondents and figure 5 of the female respondents. For both groups a cut-off level of 3 was chosen representing between 62% (cut-off = 4) and 85% (cut-off = 2) for the male respondents and between 68% (cut-off = 4) and 87% (cut-off = 2) of the links for the female respondents. The three consecutive levels of the map represent attributes (at the bottom), consequences (in the middle)
and values (at the top). The lines represent the MECs or the associations, with the thickness indicating the strength of the associations. Hence, a very thick line between two concepts means that many respondents made this association during the interview. The figures should be interpreted as follows: for example the attribute 'slaughter method' leads to the consequence 'animal welfare' leading to the value 'respect for animals'. In the following paragraphs, the hierarchical value maps are analysed and discussed.

Figure 1 Hierarchical value map for all respondents

The overall HVM indicates four motivational structures of ladders with respect to meat consumption: sensory, health, faith and respect (for animals). The major concern, and the most central factor, for Muslim meat consumers is the perceived effect that meat has on their health and that of their family members, especially the children. All attributes, except for juiciness, lead indirectly to the value “health”. Since most respondents buy meat at the Islamic butcher where meat has not been pre-packaged, hence without labelling information, colour is used as an indicator of freshness in the shop and smell at home. Several respondents said to throw the meat away immediately when a bad smell was observed before or during cooking. Most respondents reported to know what day of the week each butcher is supplied with meat and take that in account when shopping. Colour, however, was not spontaneously mentioned as a key information cue indicating slaughter method as suggested by Bergeaud (2000). One male respondent who immigrated only one year ago remarked that Belgian meat is more reddish as compared to Tunisian meat. As the author interpreted, though, colour differences are rather to be explained through breeding, sex and age differences of the local animals. The attributes production method and absence of hormones are used as an indicator for the naturalness of meat. Many respondents find meat in their home country more natural than in Europe resulting in tastier meat with an attractive smell during cooking. An older woman said: “In Algeria, I can really smell the meat. Here, I don’t smell it and we do not know what we are eating.” On other respondent, male from
the first generation, said that in Morocco, even fat has a good taste. Hence, the attribute production method with regard to meat in their home country is used as hedonistic characteristic in stead of a health factor. Lean meat is perceived as a way to prevent illness in general, and avoid cholesterol in particular, and to maintain bodyweight. Furthermore, slaughter method, here the Islamic slaughter method, is also an indicator of healthy meat since most respondents are convinced that this meat contains less blood and thus prevents bacterial contamination. The strongest links leading to health are from the attribute production method via the consequence naturalness, and from the attribute label via the consequence guarantee.

Next to the health factor, sensory characteristics of meat are important. Most respondents want to enjoy their meal and want other members of the family to like the meal. These aspects are linked to the values “enjoy life” and “taking care of the family”. Attributes leading to these values are tenderness, leanness and freshness through the consequence taste, and availability through the consequence convenient. Juiciness is perceived as an attribute that directly contributes to enjoyment of the meal. The strong link from tenderness through convenience to save time can be explained by tender meat needing less cooking or boiling time which is also used as an indicator of freshness of the meat. One young, male respondent said: “Eating meat is a total experience: smell, taste and appearance.”

The HVM, furthermore, indicates a very strong direct link from slaughter method to the value “faith” as halal meat or Islamic slaughtered meat is prescribed by the Quran. Another motive for buying halal meat is maintaining (cultural) tradition and, as we will see later, was mainly reported by second generation. Thirdly, Islamic slaughter method is perceived as respecting animal welfare with respondents being convinced that animals suffer less during ritual slaughter. One young respondent from the second generation stated: “Despite the Islamic prescriptions for humane handling before and during slaughter, the Islamic slaughter has a reputation as being cruel. The media gives a bad representation of Islamic slaughter.”

The maps of the two generation subgroups show an important difference in the complexity of the ladders with the one from the first generation being more complex. Since the same cut-off value was used and no difference is observed in the total number of the ladders for both subgroups (207 for the first generation and 209 for the second generation), the complexity of the first generation HVM could be due to the number of different ladders. Indeed, the first generation is a heterogeneous group consisting of both older, less educated immigrants from agricultural regions who immigrated in the sixties or seventies, and as well as some younger, well trained immigrants originating mainly from cities. Furthermore, age is significantly different between the group of first and second generation. Hence, differences seen in their motivational structures could be due either to age or to generation effects. Next to generation and age, gender might also explain differences in the motivational structures. Therefore, separate HVMs for generation and for gender will be discussed in the next paragraphs.
Figure 2 Hierarchical value map for first generation

Anthropology of food, 5 | May 2006
The main ends (values) to consume meat are the same for both generations. However, obedience and tradition are two values only mentioned by the second generation. Some respondents, especially of the second generation, said that buying halal meat has
become a habit, not knowing why exactly they buy it, or stating that it has become part of their traditions, something they have learned from their parents and continue to do for their own children. One respondent of the first generation said: “Our slaughter method is also a matter of habit”. Obedience is a value only mentioned by female respondents. One young female respondent from the second generation stated: “I find it very important to follow the dietary rules of Islam, although I do not follow the other religious prescriptions.” This statement was shared by another young mother born in Belgium who said trying to follow the Islamic rules as good as possible, and claimed never to have bought non-halal meat in her life.

Furthermore, health factors in general are more present for the first generation. The importance attached to consequences relating to digestion and avoidance of cholesterol could be due rather to age effects within the first generation. Or as one older man said: “Everything we consume is for our health.” Moreover, the strong link between tenderness and taste is presumably rather an age than a generation effect, with older consumers attaching more importance to tenderness (easy to chew) as a precursor of taste experience (Heath, 2002). Older consumers tend in general to attach more importance to hedonistic characteristics and health, whereas for younger respondents naturalness is strongly linked to health (Olsen, 2003; Verbeke, 2005).

Figure 2 confirms that, for the first generation and especially for male respondents, the attribute production region is an additional guarantee for healthy meat, next to label. One young, male respondent of the second generation said that their fathers continue to buy sheep at the farm, where production region is an important attribute, in contrast with second generation who generally buys at the Islamic butcher. For the second generation, however, and for female respondents in particular a label can be either a guarantee for their health or for the slaughter method. As we mentioned before, especially this generation is in favour of institutionalized quality assurance resulting in halal labelled meat.

For female respondents, very strong sensory links are observed either for the pleasure of their own meal or for others, especially the children. The consequence “liking,” leading to the value “care for family”, is only mentioned by women. Furthermore, women prefer tender meat for convenience during cooking and express their preference for easily available meat for convenience in shopping, both resulting in more free time and thus enjoyment of life. A young female respondent of the second generation stated “to want both: tradition and convenience in shopping” meaning the availability of halal labelled meat in supermarkets.

Only first generation and male respondents use colour as an indicator for freshness of the meat. Moreover, a very strong ladder leading from slaughter method directly to faith on the one hand and to respect for animals on the other hand is observed for male respondents.

Discussion and conclusion

The present study reports insights from exploratory research focusing on the motivational structure of Muslim consumers about meat in Gent (Belgium). Next to freshness and taste, slaughter method is one of the most important attributes of fresh meat explaining why most respondents buy (halal) meat at an Islamic butcher. Overall, health, faith, respect (for animals), enjoying life, and care for family, are the main goals Muslim consumers strive for when buying meat. The resulting motivational structures for Muslim consumers facing meat purchasing decisions are more complex and richer...
than for non-Muslim Belgians as described in the study by Verbeke et al. (2005). Obviously, the higher value “faith” does not emerge in Belgian consumer’s motivational structures, but the same goes for “respect” and “tradition”, which are not part of non-Muslim Belgian’s motivational structures when buying meat. Nevertheless, when comparing the motivational structures within the Muslim population, it is clear that differences can be explained by generation, age or gender effects, which corroborates among others Flight et al. (2003) who reported that gender and age determine motivations to buy fresh meat.

Differences attributed to age effects are mainly the high importance of health characteristics for older respondents. With respect to generation effects, the first generation buys halal meat for reasons of faith, health and respect for animal welfare, whereas the second generation tend to buy halal meat in order to continue a (cultural) tradition. Furthermore, male respondents of the first generation use colour as an indicator of freshness and the attribute production region as a guarantee for health, next to a quality label. Women of the second generation, however, see a quality label not only as a guarantee for health but as an assurance of the halal status of the meat. The question arises whether the traditional role pattern in Muslim families where especially men are responsible for meat purchases, are changing through generations. Young women are strongly in favour of a quality label for halal meat not only for reassurance of the slaughter method, but also for reasons of convenience in shopping. Bernués et al. (2003) confirm that young consumers attach greater importance to the label as a source of information. If the label verifies the credence quality of the slaughter method, then it becomes a search quality attribute in the shop (Becker, 2000). Nevertheless, credibility of the information source is one of the main factors determining the perception of credence quality attributes (Grunert, 2001) and therefore, a credible institutionalised reassurance system should be put in place for halal meat.

Further research, using quantitative methods, will be implemented in order to validate the findings of this study with larger consumer samples. The main hypothesis is that religion plays a major role in the consumption of (halal) meat for Muslim consumers. For second generation, habits and faith are important motivations for halal meat consumption. Another hypothesis is that barriers, such as availability and trust, as well as the influence of others like family, friends, and the Muslim community in general, add to the explanation of halal meat consumption patterns. Finally, exploratory insights in Muslim consumer’s interest in meat labelling, as described in this paper, will be further validated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


BREDHIL, L., 1999, “Consumers’ cognitions with regard to genetically modified foods. Results of a qualitative study in four countries.” Appetite, 33, 3, 343-360.


DE VALK, H., LIEFBROER, A. C., ESVELDT, I., 2001, "De één is de ander niet : patronen van gezinsvorming onder allochtonen in Nederland." Bevolking en gezin, 30(3), 67-96.


DINDYAL, S., 2003, “How personal factors, including culture and ethnicity, affect the choices and selection of food we make.” Internet Journal of Third World Medicine, 1 (2), 27-33.


MULLEN, K., WILLIAMS, R., HUNT, K., 2000, “Irish descent, religion and food consumption in the west of Scotland.” Appetite 34, 47-54.


NEELS, K., 2000, “Education and the transition to employment: young Turkish and Moroccan adults in Belgium.” In R. Lesthaeghe (eds.) Communities and generations. Turkish and Moroccan populations in Belgium (pp. 243-278). Brussels: VUB University Press.


NOTES

1. The standard deviation is a measure of dispersion around the mean.

ABSTRACTS

In this study, the means-end chain (MEC) theory is used to investigate which attributes of fresh meat are important to Muslim consumers, to depict their motivations to buy (halal) meat and to assess whether meat consumer trends apply for Muslims in the same sense as for non-Muslims. A total of 50 in-depth laddering interviews about meat consumption have been performed with first- and second-generation Muslims living in Belgium. A common output of a means-end study is a Hierarchical Value Map (HVM) representing an aggregate cognitive or motivational structure. Overall, health, faith, respect for animal welfare, enjoying life, and care for family are the main goals Muslim consumers strive for when buying meat. Differences in motivational structures are explained by generation, age or gender effects.

Dans cette étude, la théorie du Means-End chain (MEC) a été utilisée afin d’examiner quelles caractéristiques de la viande fraîche sont importantes pour les consommateurs musulmans, quelles sont les motivations pour l’achat de viande (halal) et dans quelle mesure les tendances en consommation de viande sont applicables aux consommateurs musulmans. Au total 50 interviews, sur base de la technique laddering, concernant la consommation de la viande ont été effectuées auprès de la première et deuxième génération de musulmans en Belgique. Les résultats sont repris dans une carte de valeurs hiérarchiques (HVM) représentant une carte de structures cognitives agrégées. De manière générale, les consommateurs musulmans achètent de la viande pour atteindre les valeurs suivantes : la santé, la foi, le respect pour le bien-être des animaux mais également pour jouir de la vie et prendre soin de la famille. Les différences observées dans la comparaison des HVM pourraient être expliquées par des effets de génération, l’âge ou le sexe.

AUTHORS

KARIJN BONNE
Hogeschool Gent, Department of Business Studies and Public Administration,
Voskenslaan 270, B-9000 Gent, Belgium
karijn[point]bonne(at)hogent[point]be

WIM VERBEKE
Ghent University, Department of Agricultural Economics, Coupure links 653, B-9000 Gent, Belgium
wim[point]verbeke(at)UGent[point]be