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Customer loyalty towards traditional products – Polish market experience

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to analyse key determinants of Polish consumers' loyalty, identified through the analysis of relationship marketing literature, with reference to traditional foodstuffs.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper's approach is a systematic review of the Web of Science, Ebsco and Pro-Quest electronic databases, from 1990 to 2014 as well as research results run by Polish and international research centres, groups and institutes. The paper focuses on two main aspects. One is connected with the development of traditional foodstuffs being a consequence of growing prosperity of the Polish society, and the emergence of consumers who rate quality, national/regional identity and own cultural values higher than the price. The other one is connected with key determinants of consumer loyalty towards traditional products. The paper uses secondary data, and presents research results run between Polish consumers of traditional food products. Attitudes and behaviour of Polish consumers of traditional products in relation to key determinants of loyalty, such as attitude towards the product, the level of satisfaction, trust, price sensitivity and frequency of purchase and willingness to do repeat purchase are identified in the paper.

Findings – According to the analysed research, almost 90 percent of the respondents positively perceive traditional products. The results of the research confirm positive and emotional attitudes of consumers towards traditional products. This emotional attachment, which is very important in creating loyalty among consumers, makes them buy traditional food. Polish consumers are satisfied with the taste of traditional products, which are also perceived as fresh and natural. Consumers rate the quality of traditional products highly and underline their positive influence on their and their families' health. According to the research, Polish consumers pay little attention to geographical and quality indications, which are designed to build a trustworthy image of the products. Traditional products are perceived as expensive, which makes it difficult to build loyalty and affects the frequency of purchase. Almost 40 percent of the respondents buy traditional products once a month.

Practical implications – The research results presented in the paper have significant implications for management, that is producers and retailers of local food, in particular with regard to their future marketing effort. Producers and entrepreneurs should monitor behaviour of consumers of traditional food to adapt their offer to changing trends in order to create their loyalty. Consumers expect the products to be made of appropriate ingredients and production methods in order to keep their original taste and character. They also expect some product innovations and proper communication to become loyal.

Social implications – The paper has significant implications for society. The process of building customer loyalty towards traditional products is important in the context of their quality of life and public attitude. Traditional foods are a part of culture and the identity of the population where they are produced. Therefore they carry a strong symbolic value for the customers. They are also perceived as healthy and nutritious products, containing a lot of vitamins and minerals. Creating loyal attitude towards them may improve the quality of customers' life.

Originality/value – The paper provides interesting insights about loyalty for traditional products. Based on the determinants of loyalty identified by the author in relationship marketing literature the analysis of these variables was conducted in relation to traditional products. Due to the best author knowledge this is one of the first attempts, if not the first, where loyalty determinants were described in relation to traditional products. The literature lacks comprehensive research on particular aspects of loyal behaviour in the market of traditional products.

Keywords Loyalty, Poland, Traditional food products

Paper type Literature review



Introduction

In the competitive market of foodstuffs, consumer preferences play a vital role, since their satisfaction and loyalty determine producers' successes. An analysis of relationship marketing literature indicates that consumer loyalty is manifested by the degree of satisfaction with the product, trust in the brand, price sensitivity during purchase, and willingness to repeat purchase. Increased consumer expectations towards food, which on one hand results from contact with competitors and other cultures, and on the other hand from aspirations for preserving a national/regional identity and cultural values, both enhance interest in traditional food products. The positive attitude of Polish consumers towards traditional food, resulting from the quality of raw materials, production processes and places of origin, open up possibilities for the development of traditional foodstuffs in Poland. This development however is determined, among others, by the loyal behaviour of Polish consumers. Since the concept of customer loyalty towards traditional food products has not previously been comprehensively tested, this paper aims at describing the key determinants of Polish consumer loyalty, identified through the analysis of relationship marketing literature, with reference to traditional foodstuffs. To achieve this goal a detailed analysis of research results run so far by Polish and international research centres, groups and institutes has been conducted. This research with regard to different aspects of Poles' behaviour in the traditional food market, has been the base for conclusions on loyalty behaviours.

Changes in the food market in Europe and Poland itself

The European Research on Traditional Foods (2007) stated that the European (EU-25) food and drink industry had an annual turnover of €836 billion in 2005 and is the largest manufacturing sector in the EU ahead of the automobile and chemical industries. It employed 3.8 million people. The sector is a net exporter with a trade surplus in 2005 for the EU-25 of €4.5 billion representing 20 percent of the global export market. SMEs made up 99 percent of the approximately 282,600 Food and Drink companies operating in the EU-25. These small companies produced 90 percent of the EU's food and drink product lines. In fact, European food companies are mostly micro (78.9 percent) employing nine people or less, or small (16.6 percent) with between 10 and 39 employees.

The food market in Poland has changed significantly over the last 20 years. The economic transformations in the 1990s and the opening of the Polish market have contributed to an inflow of foreign capital and global companies. Globalisation of economic activity was connected with the introduction of new technologies, products, management methods, free flows of knowledge, experience and capital. These processes intensified after the accession of Poland to the European Union, which caused the food market to adapt to European standards. These processes significantly influenced the food industry in Poland. Most global food companies invested capital in Poland with an estimated share in the food industry of almost 40 percent (Chechelski, 2010). Szwacka-Mokrzycka (2009) points out that the food industry is now one of the most modern and innovative sectors in Poland's economy. This resulted from the availability of EU financial resources to be used to improve technological levels. Modern technologies enabled higher quality foodstuffs to be produced. Pro-innovative activities included the introduction of new technologies and techniques in production, increasing the nutritive value and improving the packaging of products. It is also underlined that companies had become more competitive if they implemented modern systems of management and marketing.

On the basis of observations of the foodstuffs market in Poland over the last years, it can be concluded that changes stemming from globalisation, growing competition (Banterle and Carraresi, 2007; Banterle *et al.*, 2009; Borowska, 2007; Chechelski, 2010; Gellynck *et al.*, 2012), as well as customer awareness and knowledge of food, have given rise to two trends. One is connected with the development of traditional food products in Poland, the other with the necessity of creating consumer loyalty towards brands and suppliers.

The development of traditional food

Traditional foods are a significant element of the cultural heritage every European Member State, and production and sale are critical economic inputs to many regions. There is a wide-ranging agreement on the rise in significance of the local food sector over the past decade. Mintel's research estimates the local food market to be worth more than £5 billion in 2010, having grown by 27 percent over the past five years. It is also forecast that this will approach nearly £6 billion by 2015 (Megicks *et al.*, 2012). Guerrero *et al.* (2009) underline that Europe cannot be regarded as a homogeneous food culture, because noticeable differences exist not only at a national level but also at a more regional/local level in terms of food preferences, habits, food-related behaviour, and attitudes.

As far as the development of traditional food is concerned, the level of a country's development and purchasing power differentiates the behaviour of food consumers. In countries with lower indicators of economic development, including Poland, the prices of food are significantly important. Hence, cheap mass-produced products are of great interest. In Poland however, an opposing trend is emerging due to the stratification of society and the emergence of consumers who value quality more than price.

An interest in traditional food fits into new trends in consumer behaviour in the food market, triggered by a strong wish to preserve and emphasise cultural heritage (Żakowska-Biemans, 2012), and the appreciation of quality and trust. These latter values are created by the certainty of production technology, product freshness, naturalness and geographical origin. Gorton and Tregear (2008) state that consumer interest in traditional food products is increasing, not only in relation to healthier and safer products, but also in association with particular geographic areas. In fact, the origin and production methods are very important, as consumers tend to associate better quality with traditional products, derived from to a sort of "nostalgia" that takes them back to their roots (Gellynck *et al.*, 2012). Also, O'Reilly and Haines (2004) indicate that traditional food, together with gastronomic heritage and geographical origin of the product, might take on a significant role in the market and are being increasingly requested by consumers. Traditional food is an expression of culture, identity, history and lifestyle, as Trichopoulou *et al.* (2007) and Kuhne *et al.* (2010) have reported. This fact opens new growth opportunities for the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that mainly constitute the sector of traditional food products (Guerrero *et al.*, 2012), if they adopt appropriate marketing strategies (Gellynck *et al.*, 2012). A recent survey by SME-Net, a network of SMEs working in the European food industry, shows that smaller companies were more likely to be innovative both in terms of product and market development than very large companies. Although often lacking the research capacity of larger enterprises, SMEs can be skilled "informal" innovators with a high motivation to invest and a strong ability to react swiftly to new opportunities in their market (European Research on Traditional Foods, 2007). As has been noticed above, over the past few years the competition among firms has increased because of the globalisation process, and the EU food market has become

less protected, making it very difficult for SMEs to adapt their strategies to market changes and create a competitive advantage in markets dominated by large food companies. In this situation a continuous evolvement of consumer preferences towards interest in traditional food products could be a big chance for them. SMEs constitute the majority of firms in the EU as well as in Poland. SMEs represent 99.8 percent of all companies operating in Poland and play a particularly relevant role in the food industry. They are characterised by flexibility and agility, which make them able to quickly shift marketing strategies towards new and more effective methods in order to profit by the new opportunities raised in the market. There is evidence in literature of successful cases regarding SMEs applying a market oriented strategy and showing a direct link between a proper marketing strategy and superior business performance (Kara *et al.*, 2005; Spillan and Parnell, 2006). Also in the current increasingly globalised food market, innovation is an essential strategic tool for SMEs to achieve competitive advantage (Kuhne *et al.*, 2010). In order to succeed in the future, SMEs must extend their skills in promoting those aspects of their products that relate to nutrition and health that can drive consumer demand, as well as in marketing, modern production techniques and management to be able to create customer loyalty.

The essence of traditional food products

Vanhonacker *et al.* (2010) stress that traditional food products retain their market share and are even experiencing increased interest and demand from both researchers and consumers. Although many studies have discussed the underlying dimensions of the concept of traditional food, still the consumers and researchers have quite a broad and diverse conceptualisation as to what constitutes traditional food, varying between countries, cultures and even individuals. It is this reason that it is often intentionally or unintentionally misused. Defining traditional foods is not as easy as it might be presumed. There are very few definitions available, and most have developed relatively recently. In most, this is food that has been consumed regionally or locally for an extensive period of time (Trichopoulou *et al.*, 2007). Apart from being one of the vehicles of culture, traditional food is also perceived as possessing healthy qualities, as tradition rarely honours any food that is not palatable or healthy. Guerrero *et al.* (2009) defines them as a “product frequently consumed or associated with specific celebrations and/or seasons, normally transmitted from one generation to another, made accurately to a specific recipe according to gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing/manipulation, being distinguished and known from its sensory properties and associated with a certain local area, region or country”. In Europe the first formal definition came from the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, who defined traditional food products as agrifood products whose methods of processing, storage and ripening are consolidated with time according to uniform and constant local use (Pieniak *et al.*, 2009). Quite an extensive definition of traditional food was also provided by The European Food Information Resource Network (EuroFIR), an organisation that aims to provide comparable or harmonised data on the nutritional composition of traditional foods across selected European countries. The EuroFIR scientific working group recognised the lack of a precise definition for traditional food at both the EU and national levels. In this situation in order to create databases for this category of products, the EuroFIR Scientific Management Board agreed in 2006 on the following definition: “Traditional food is a food of a specific feature or features, which distinguishes it clearly from other similar products of the same category in terms of the use of traditional ingredients or traditional composition or traditional type of

production and/or processing method” (Costa *et al.*, 2010). Traditional ingredients mean that they have been used in identifiable geographical areas and remain in use today, while traditional composition means a uniquely identifiable composition that was first established prior to the Second World War and had been passed down through the generations by oral or other means. Finally, the traditional type of production means that it had been transmitted from generation to generation through oral traditions or other means and applied prior to Second World War and remains in use despite its adjustment to different regulations (Trichopoulou *et al.*, 2007). They also indicated that traditional means conforming to established practice or specifications prior to the Second World War, which implies prior to the era of mass food production and delineates the period when populations still applied simple and time-honoured approaches, before the introduction of technological innovation.

According to the European Commission definition of traditional food, the word “traditional” refers to food which has been in the European market for at least 25 years, and that had been handed down from generation to generation (Żakowska-Biemans, 2012). Gąsiorowski (2006) defines traditional food as “products and preparations closely associated with a particular area, which are characterised by natural production and processing.”

Definitions of traditional foods may not necessarily reflect the opinions of consumers. The TRUEFOOD[1] study revealed that European consumers seemed to define traditional foods as well-known foods that one can eat often and that were eaten by grandparents (Weischelbaum *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, attributes such as natural and low-processed were less strongly associated with traditional foods. The least cross-country differences were found for statements related to the common character of the product and its long existence; these are the statements most strongly associated with traditional foods. The highest between-country discrepancies were found for specific characters of the product such as specific sensory properties. These were strongly associated with traditional foods among Polish consumers, and were associated to a lesser degree in Italy, France and Spain. The weakest associations between specific sensory properties and traditional foods were found in Belgium and Norway. The same trend was found for the association of traditional foods with special occasions and those that contain a story (Weischelbaum *et al.*, 2009).

Polish people, compared with other European consumers, mostly identify traditional food products with those that were consumed by grandparents, have authentic recipes, have specific sensory properties, have an authentic origin of raw materials, were produced in “grandmother’s way”, contain a story and are connected with special occasions and celebrations (see Table I).

It should be stressed that these products were perceived similarly in the six European countries analysed (Guerrero *et al.*, 2009). Also research results show that the validity of the eight motives for food choice in these countries (weight control, price, ethical concern, convenience, natural content, health, sensory appeal, and familiarity) have a similar meaning and similar structural characteristics across the cultures within Europe (Pieniak *et al.*, 2009).

Poland’s traditional food market has been developing dynamically. This development was marked in 2005 when the List of Traditional Products was made to distinguish high quality Polish products, which had been manufactured for over 25 years, and to enable producers to apply for registration of the traditional speciality name in the European Union. As of September 15, 2013, 1,216 products had been registered in this list (Figure 1).

Item	BE	FR	IT	NO	PL	ES
When I think about traditional food, I think about food products that my parents and grandparents already ate	5.84	5.75	5.67	6.10	6.14	6.05
I consider traditional food as well-known food	5.58	5.46	5.59	5.79	5.74	5.84
The availability of traditional food is strongly dependent on the season	5.49	5.90	5.68	5.11	5.19	5.65
According to me, traditional food is typically something one can eat very often	5.37	5.53	5.18	4.98	4.79	5.45
Traditional food has an authentic recipe	5.07	5.49	5.78	5.26	5.84	5.80
To me, a traditional food product is associated with specific sensory properties	4.93	5.57	5.71	5.17	5.95	5.73
Traditional food has an authentic origin of raw material	4.80	5.36	5.44	5.24	5.61	5.39
A traditional food product is typically produced "in grandmother's way"	4.70	5.39	5.36	5.17	5.87	5.55
Traditional food has an authentic production process	4.65	5.04	5.39	4.98	5.39	5.21
The key steps of the production of traditional food must be done locally	4.45	5.05	5.20	4.10	4.90	5.31
When it comes to food products, for me traditional food means natural, low processed	4.40	4.82	4.41	4.24	4.84	5.17
A traditional food product must contain a story	3.90	4.98	5.51	4.53	6.16	5.37
When I think about traditional food, I think about special occasions and/or celebrations	3.89	4.71	4.86	5.07	5.30	4.38

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Notes: BE, Belgium; FR, France; IT, Italy; NO, Norway; PL, Poland; ES, Spain
Source: Weischelbaum *et al.* (2009)

Table I.
 Consumer perception of traditional food products in selected European countries



Figure 1.
 A sum of traditional products by province in Poland

Source: Available at: www.minrol.gov.pl (accessed September 15, 2013)

The list has ten product groups: dairy, meat, fish, vegetables and fruit, pastry goods and confectionery, edible fats and oils, honey, prepared meals and dishes, beverages, and other products. The greatest number of products was registered in the podkarpackie, ślaskie and pomorskie provinces. The fewest number of products were registered in the lubuskie, zachodniopomorskie and warmińsko-mazurskie provinces. Traditional products are well recognised in Poland. In total, 96 percent of the respondents were familiar with them (Żakowska-Biemans and Kuc, 2009). Consumers typically learn of traditional products from TV programs, from their families and friends, bazaars and food fairs. According to research, traditional food is designated by its prevalence in the culture and frequency of consumption (Gutkowska *et al.*, 2009). Polish people thus enumerate bread, potatoes and butter as traditional specialties. Cheeses, especially “oscypek” and “bryndza” are the best known traditional products (Żakowska-Biemans and Kuc, 2009; Borowska, 2008). Polish people also recognise sausages called “kindziuk” and “lisiecka”, pastry goods and confectionery, traditional baker’s goods and “sękacz”, as well as ready meals: pierogi (dumplings), kartacze (potato dumplings filled with meat) and babka ziemniaczana (potato cake).

As Borowska (2007) emphasises, the development of Poland’s traditional food market is determined by the initiative and involvement of many people, government and non-government institutions, social organisations and local leaders. Informational and financial support from the media and EU is also important. Administrative, legal, institutional, economic and social activities undertaken in Poland ought to contribute to the development of this product group to enable Poland to obtain profits from its traditional products, as in Italy.

Determinants of consumer loyalty towards traditional products

The necessity to build loyal consumer behaviour

Creating a loyal customer has become one of the priorities of modern business in view of the higher profitability associated with loyal consumers (Espejel *et al.*, 2007). The most important definition of loyalty, as proposed by Oliver (1999), says that it is a “deeply held commitment to rebuy or re-patronise a preferred product consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand purchasing, despite any situational influences or marketing efforts having the potential to cause a switch in behaviour.” The peculiar complexity of the concept means loyalty has been linked with multiple variables. Loyalty is a multi-dimensional construct. A review of relationship marketing literature allows indicating that the key determinants of loyalty are: customer attitude towards the brand (Cater and Cater, 2009; Griffin, 1997; Pedersen and Nysveen, 2001), satisfaction (Tuu and Olsen, 2010; Hunt *et al.*, 2006), trust (Sahin *et al.*, 2011; Palmatier *et al.*, 2009; Cater and Cater, 2009; Pedersen and Nysveen, 2001), lower price sensitivity (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2010; Griffin, 1997) and frequency of buying (Paul *et al.*, 2009; Griffin, 1997). It is assumed that these factors determine the choice of traditional products by Polish consumers, and influence their future loyal behaviours.

1. *Attitude of Polish people towards traditional products.* The concept of attitude towards a product is often described in literature (Belaid, 2011; Cater and Cater, 2009; Sanzo *et al.*, 2003). It is underlined that an attitude may be positive, negative or indifferent. Attitude may be understood as the learned predisposition to respond in a way consistently favourable or unfavourable with respect to certain object (Sanzo *et al.*, 2003). It is often stressed that attitude consists of three components: cognitive, affective and behavioural. The former refers to the beliefs, associations or bonds a person establishes between the object and several attributes. The next consists of

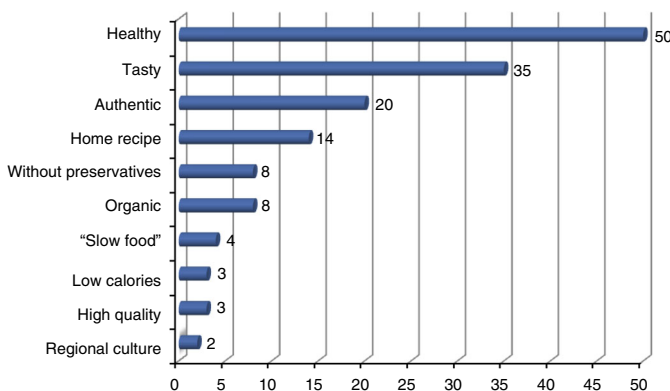
feelings, states of mind, emotions and nervous activity a person experiences in relations to the object. The final component consists of the actions a person performs with respect to the object (Sanzo *et al.*, 2003). Von Alvensleben (1997) argues that specifically, in the field of agro-food products, attitudes may even effect the perception of the taste of food. A consumer attitude towards a type of product can also determine the level of satisfaction one reaches in a specific situation of consumption of the product.

According to research Polish consumers have positive attitudes towards traditional products. According to the research conducted by Jeżewska-Zych (2009), almost 90 percent of respondents hold rather positive, positive or definitely positive opinions about traditional products. In total, 12 percent of the respondents expressed negative or vague opinions. Most consumers equate traditional products with health and good taste (Figure 2). Polish consumers also appreciate the authenticity of products (originality), which come from original recipes, and the origin of products and the association with tradition transferred from generation to generation.

Research conducted by Grzybek (2009) confirmed that the health aspect of traditional products is essential for consumers. This attribute ascribed to traditional food is ranked second after high quality. Research results conducted in six European countries including Poland by Lengard *et al.* (2011), indicates that the most important attributes ascribed to traditional food are quality and taste.

The results of research confirm the positive and emotional attitudes of consumers to traditional products. The emotional attachment, which is very important in creating consumer loyalty, drives them to buy traditional food. Almost 89 percent of respondents buy traditional products because they like to taste local specialities, they appreciate the taste and smell of traditional food which diversifies their eating habits (Zakowska-Biemans and Kuc, 2009). According to the comparative research cited above and that conducted in Spain, Italy, France, Poland, Belgium and Norway, Polish people call themselves consumers of traditional products more than Belgians or Norwegians, but less than other nationalities which participated in the research (Lengard *et al.*, 2011).

2. *The level of Polish consumer satisfaction with traditional products.* The problem of customer satisfaction constitutes an especially important and interesting issue as far as customer loyalty is concerned. It was proved in many research studies that customer



Source: Zakowska-Biemans and Kuc (2009)

Figure 2.
Attributes ascribed to
traditional and regional
food in the opinion
of Polish consumers
(in percent)

satisfaction played a decisive role in customer attitude towards a company or brand, post-purchase patterns of behaviour such as spreading positive word-of-mouth, and repeat purchases (Sahin *et al.*, 2011; Tuu and Olsen, 2010; Kassim and Abdullah, 2010; Yang and Peterson, 2004; Lai *et al.*, 2009; Deng *et al.*, 2010; Oliver, 1999). A satisfied customer develops strong relations not only in a behavioural dimension but also in an emotional dimension. Quality, which mostly determines customer satisfaction, may either be an objective attribute, subject to an external verification, measurement and control, or a subjective attribute, which is a consequence of individual experience and situations.

Product quality is an ever growing aspect for manufacturers of traditional food. Using quality related to the place of origin to differentiate a product can be understood as a particular brand strategy. The notion of traditional product quality is understood differently. On one hand, quality can be perceived through food standards and safety requirements, like nutritive value, taste, freshness etc. On the other hand, it can be seen as the unique and specific character of a product guaranteed by its place of origin (Kurpacz, 2007).

In literature, it is emphasised that the nutritive value of traditional food is greater than food artificially fortified with vitamins and minerals. Polish consumers are satisfied with the taste of traditional products, finding them fresh and natural. They value traditional products highly, and find them helpful in looking after family health (Borowska, 2008). However, to satisfy Polish consumers fully, traditional products need to become more diversified. According to Żakowska-Biemans and Kuc (2009), variety is lacking for Polish consumers. For more than 70 percent of the respondents, variety was insufficient, while only 5 percent were satisfied with the level. The results of these studies are consistent with the research by Kuhne *et al.* (2010) among Polish, Italian and Belgian customers, as well as research by Vanhonacker *et al.* (2013) among Polish, Italian, French, Norwegian, Spanish and Belgian customers. They confirm the need for increased variety and innovation in traditional food products.

3. *Trust in traditional products brand.* According to current opinions, the significance of trust as a basis for generating loyalty is underlined (Sahin *et al.*, 2011; Kassim and Abdullah, 2010; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Trust, which reduces uncertainty, is recognised as an incentive to keep and develop investment in relations through close cooperation among partners. Trust stops partners from taking advantage of short-term incentives from competitors, and promises them long-term benefits. Moreover, trust makes partners perceive risky activities as prudent because they believe that their partners do not act opportunistically.

Activities aimed at building trust include attention to quality and appropriate labelling. An important source of trust for customers of traditional products is the possibility to track the sources of product origin and ingredients. Hence, in order to build trust, both producers and managers of traditional product points of sale use the following labels: Protected Designation of Origin, Protected Geographical Indication, Traditional Speciality Guaranteed. Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) denotes the name of a region or a particular place, where the quality and features of the products are mainly or solely associated with this particular geographic area, as well as natural and human characteristics. Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) is open to products whose name indicates the name of the region or a particular place where the product is produced. Traditional Speciality Guaranteed is open to products, which have a set of features that distinguish them from other similar products. The name of the product must be characteristic and reflect its traditional composition, method of production or

processing (Borowska, 2008). Although these marks are intended to guarantee the quality of traditional products and create consumer trust (Costa *et al.*, 2010), research indicates that Polish consumers rarely take this element into account when making purchase decisions. 70 percent of respondents took no consideration of these labels when buying traditional products (Borowska, 2008).

4. *Price sensitivity of traditional product consumers in Poland.* Loyal customers accept higher prices more easily (Goldsmith *et al.*, 2010; Ramirez and Goldsmith, 2009; Santonen, 2007). According to research conducted by the Institute of Strategic Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, regular customers accept increased prices more easily than new customers. A regular customer very rarely avoids a product when the price difference is 5 percent and is satisfied with the service (Rudawska, 2005). Moreover, a lot of customers are willing to pay more if they know and trust the company, instead of switching to a cheaper but uncertain competitor.

Most research described in the literature on marketing confirms that loyal customers are less sensitive to price and more easily accept higher prices. On the basis of the analysis of research conducted in the Polish traditional food market, one can conclude that prices are too high, and make it difficult to create loyal consumers. This is confirmed by research conducted by Lengard *et al.* (2011) and Żakowska-Biemans and Kuc (2009). According to the latter research, nearly 60 percent of respondents considered prices of traditional products high or very high (Table II).

The fact that according to Polish consumers, prices of traditional products are high probably stems from the conviction that traditional production methods are costly and time-consuming. The high price of these products limits any increase and makes consumers more sensitive to this aspect of marketing activities. However, as Vanhonacker *et al.* (2010) emphasise, Polish consumers of traditional foods are strongly ethnocentric in their support for local, regional and national products, which makes them buy these products despite the high price.

The high prices of traditional products may be easier accepted if they are labelled with quality logos. Polish consumers have a positive attitude towards indications of the region of origin and production methods. These aspects are perceived as value added to the product. This positive attitude makes consumers more willing to accept higher prices.

5. *Frequency of purchase of traditional products and willingness of Polish consumers to repeat purchase.* A lot of literature is devoted to the behavioural aspect of loyalty (Paul *et al.*, 2009; Liu, 2007; Waarden-Meyer and Benavent, 2006; Griffin, 1997). It has been proven in this context that loyal customers take advantage of a company offer more often and are more willing to repeat purchase the same product. This is confirmed by, among others, research conducted by Ulaga and Eggert (2006), which shows that loyal customers are more willing to repeat purchase from a particular supplier, and are less likely to avoid buying.

Respondent opinion	Percentage
Prices of traditional products are high or very high	58
Prices of traditional products are average	39
Prices of traditional products are low	2

Source: Żakowska-Biemans and Kuc (2009, p. 111)

Table II.
Prices according to
respondents

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The limited availability of traditional food, relatively low level of satisfaction from the current range of products, as well as high prices are reflected in the frequency of purchase (Figure 3).

A third of respondents buy traditional products once a week, 40 percent of respondents buy them once a month, 23 percent buy traditional products once in six months, 5 percent buy them more rarely. The limited frequency of purchase of traditional products might also be seen in the fact that almost 40 percent of the respondents do not buy such products for everyday consumption, but only for family feasts and holidays.

Traditional products are becoming increasingly popular, and this has been shown in research conducted a year after the cited data, in which 65 percent of the respondents declared that they often buy traditional products, while one-third of the respondents buy them from time to time. Only 3 percent of the respondents did not buy traditional foodstuffs (Żakowska-Biemans, 2012).

The profile of Polish consumer of traditional food

Polish consumers of traditional products are traditionalists who are unwilling to accept innovation. For them the concept of “traditional product” and “innovative product” are mutually exclusive (Gutkowska *et al.*, 2009). Such an attitude is especially common among country dwellers, who emphasised that recipe and composition are attributed to traditional products. Another attribute of a traditional product indicated by the respondents was “the Polish character of the product”, i.e. polish name, labelling, and the fact that it had been produced in a Polish production plant. The average consumer of traditional products is aged 30-39, has a good degree of education (mainly salaried employees) and a good financial situation. According to research conducted by Vanhonacker *et al.* (2010), in six countries including Poland, consumers of traditional food care about health, plan and prepare their meals, and are looking after their families. They are creative cooks and want to impress others with their cooking skills. Polish consumers are ethnocentric in their choice of traditional foodstuffs. They buy them in grocers, supermarkets, market places, and organic shops. They prefer foodstuffs, which they already know, and are generally long-term consumers of traditional food.

Conclusions

Changes which have been present in Poland’s food market over the last years and have been caused by the market globalisation, growing competition and increased consumer

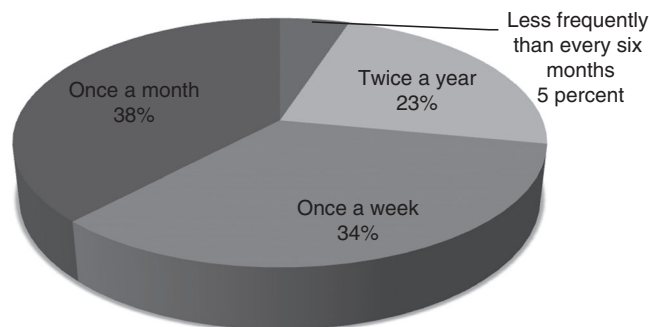


Figure 3.
Frequency of purchase
of traditional products

Source: On the basis of Żakowska-Biemans and Kuc (2009, p. 110)

knowledge about food, have created two main trends. One is connected with the continuous evolvement of consumer preferences towards the interest in traditional food products, the other refers to the necessity of creating loyal customers in contemporary markets. In this paper changes in the traditional food market in Poland have been discussed, the essence of traditional food products, components of consumer loyalty towards traditional foods as well as the profile of the traditional foods consumer.

The research results presented in this paper reveal that traditional food products are very well known to Poles. In total, 96 percent of respondents were familiar with them and perceived them positively. Almost 90 percent of the respondents had a positive attitude towards traditional products. Polish consumers were satisfied with the taste of the products, which were seen as fresh and natural. As high quality is attributed to traditional products, consumers may look after their and their families' health. According to the analysed research, Polish people do not pay attention to geographical and quality indications, which are intended to build trust towards traditional products. Price are considered high, which can make it difficult to generate customer loyalty, however Poles are ethnocentric consumers and buy these products despite the high price. Analysis of the last indicator of loyalty – frequency of purchase – shows that Polish consumers buy these products occasionally. Almost 40 percent of the respondents bought traditional products once a month.

Implications for management and society

The research results presented in this paper have significant implications for management, namely producers and retailers of local food, in particular with regard to their future marketing effort. As the modern consumer has become multicultural, there are two tendencies in behaviour. On one hand, the modern consumer is willing to copy and follow activities undertaken by global corporations. On the other hand, the consumer is a local patriot who wants to preserve and support the cultural identity. The modern consumer considers the origin of products. Therefore, demand for traditional food is likely to grow. Hence, producers and entrepreneurs should monitor the behaviour of consumers of traditional food to adapt strategies to the changing trends in order to enhance loyalty. Consumers expect the products to be made of appropriate ingredients according to traditional recipes and production methods in order to keep their original taste and natural character. However, they also expect some innovations, such as a prolonged expiry date, more convenient packaging and storing. Producers of traditional foodstuffs should also widen the range of traditional products by, for example, modifying existing products and introducing new ones.

Proper communication with customers is very important for creating loyal consumers of traditional products. Producers and entrepreneurs should develop and introduce strategies of informing customers about traditional products and their exceptional features, and communicate directly with consumers to build their loyalty for a given brand. Traditional products should also be made more available.

This paper has significant implications for society too. The process of building customer loyalty towards traditional products is important in the context of their quality of life and public attitude. Traditional foods are a part of culture and the identity of the population where they are produced. Therefore they carry a strong symbolic value for the customers. They are also perceived as healthy and nutritious products, containing a lot of vitamins and minerals. Creating loyal attitude towards these products may improve the quality of customer life.

Note

1. TRUEFOOD is an integrated project aiming to introduce suitable innovations into the traditional food industry. Its survey examining the perception of traditional foods among consumers was carried out in six European countries: Belgium, Italy, France, Spain, Poland and Norway. In each country, around 800 participants aged 20-70 years were interviewed.

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