

TYPICAL REGIONAL FOOD AND BEVERAGE PRODUCTS AND REGION OF ORIGIN PERCEPTION DIFFERENCES BETWEEN DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN TOURISTS

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Abstract–This research is aimed at determining the differences in the perception of the typical regional products and region of origin between domestic and foreign tourists. Seeing that tourism experts need to know how consumers or potential consumers perceive typical regional products, this research sheds light on whether the perception about typical regional products and region of origin differs between domestic and foreign tourists in relation to familiarity about typical products. The authors of the paper have used the Region of Istria as an illustrative example due to its rich culinary heritage and tradition that can be successfully used as a competitive advantage in the tourist market.

Index Terms–regional products, regional marketing, regional image, perception of regional products.

I. INTRODUCTION

Numerous authors studied themes concerning the influence of the image of the country of origin and the region of origin on the image of products and the consumer's product evaluation. Many authors have concluded that the influence of the image of the country of origin and the region of origin on the image of products and the consumer's product evaluation exists. If the country or region image is perceived positive, the perceived image of products and consumer's product evaluation will be positive as well. On the other hand, consumers with a positive attitude towards products from developed countries at the same time have a positive image towards the country of origin of products. For this reason, there is the need to research and understand needs and desires of potential tourists and their knowledge and perception of products of the region and region of origin.

It is presumed that familiarity with products affects the consumer's perception of the region of origin of products. The term region in this paper refers to geographical area within a country, in this case, the region of Istria in the Republic of Croatia (Istria County in Croatia, Region of Istria, Istrian region). Examples of products marked as regional specialties, traditional regional products, regional

autochthonous products or typical regional food may be found worldwide in both food and non-food sector. Different sorts of wine, cheese, olive oil, fruit, vegetables, spices, meat and dry-cured meat products and alcoholic drinks are examples of products marked as regional typical, traditional or autochthonous products. The image of the region of origin of products is actively used in marketing these products. Marketers attempt to communicate specific qualities of products to target segments, qualities that are, among other things, rooted in human expertise and the natural environment of the region of origin. It is therefore implied that familiarity with regional products and their characteristics affects the perception or image of regional products, which eventually affects the perception or image of the region of origin.

Development of regional product brands is a manner of promoting the region of origin as a tourist destination. The authors of the paper have used the Region of Istria and Istrian regional autochthonous products as an illustrative example due to its rich culinary heritage and tradition that can be successfully used as a competitive advantage in the tourist market.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the scientific literature a significant number of papers can be found about the influence of the image of the country of origin [6], [13], [16], [20] and region of origin [1], [10], [23] on the products image and consumer's evaluation of products [25]. Associations that consumers have with a particular country are related to knowledge of the country of origin [8] and knowledge of the region of origin [23]. But, consumer perception of typical food products seems to be based on regional image rather than on deep knowledge of products [7].

On the other hand, image of a country may also be considered as the consumer's general perception of quality of products from the country of origin and the nature of people from that particular country [8], [19]. It has been accepted by academics that consumers, having positive attitudes toward products from developed countries have at the same time positive image of the country of product and that image is a group of beliefs about dimensions

representing important product features [24]. Presuming that regional autochthonous food products may be used as foundations for the development of regional brand, these products can also assume the role and function of development or strengthening of the brand of the region of origin [17]. Therefore, these products have to meet the consumer desires or needs [15]. Food and beverage products of a particular country, such as pizza (Italy), champagne (Champagne), bordeaux (Bordeaux), oranges (Sicily) or prosciutto (Istria) may be one of its most important culturological expressions (adapted according to [2], [9], [11]). Besides products, the image of a region or country may also be influenced by the manner in which particular products are perceived as ingredients of particular dishes, how they are combined and prepared, which can be an important element of national cultural identity and image as well [3], [5]. In this regard, some authors maintain that local and regional food are important elements that add to the value of a destination [9], [22] and that they can contribute to sustainable competitiveness of a destination [4]. Seeing that the image of a country is created based on the following variables, namely representative products, national characteristics, economic and political characteristics, history and tradition [24], with the objective of acquiring competitive market advantages, there is a need to research and understand the needs and desires of potential tourists and their knowledge, perception of regional products and region of origin. The following comparison shows a number of arrivals and overnight stays of domestic and foreign tourists in Istria (see Table I).

TABLE I: Domestic and foreign tourists arrivals and overnight stays on Istria in year 2011.

Guests	Arrivals	Nights
Domestic	185.086	1.001.581
Foreign	2.827.118	19.645.147
Total	3.012.204	20.646.728

Source: Istria County Tourist Offices [12]

From the data it is evident that the Istria region is tourism oriented region. Foreign tourists make 93,85 % of total arrivals and achieve 95,14 % of total overnight stays (see Table I).

Tourism experts have to focus not only on the identification of tourists as consumers, but they also have to understand tourist perceptions of various products and services. For this reason, it is very important that marketers in tourism are aware of how tourists perceive their products [14], in the

manner and the extent to which particular products are recognisable (brand) and how they affect the image of a region or country since consumers evaluate products influenced by knowledge they have of the origin of these products and their perception of the country [18].

III. RESEARCH

A. Purpose and the aim of the research

Research of available literature suggests a firm belief the image or perception of regional products affects the image or perception of a region or country of origin and vice versa. These perceptions may be influenced by familiarity with regional products. The paper includes the research of perception of domestic and foreign tourists of representative autochthonous products (olive oil, prosciutto, wine and truffles) and their region of origin using a concrete example of the region of Istria (Republic of Croatia). From the consumer standpoint, traditional food products, specialties, food products manufactured on a farm, local food and sometimes organic food are typical or autochthonous food products that can and may be associated with a region of country of origin (partly according to [21]). Consumers show great interest in typical food products because of their distinctive historical, cultural and physical attributes deep ingrained in the area of production [14]. The aim of the research is to find out whether there are differences in perception of regional autochthonous products, region of origin, use of name of the region of origin in the brand name of typical products, and familiarity with regional autochthonous products. The authors also want to confirm that the group with greater familiarity has a more positive perception of typical regional food and beverages products and more positive perception of the region of origin, in this case Istria, as well as more positive associations with the name of the region (Istria, product of Istria, made in Istria, Istrian, etc.) used in the brand name of typical regional products.

B. Hypothesis

When the country is well-known or when its reputation on food is well established there is a halo effect that lead to a favourable consideration of the given typical food product [7]. Reference [14] shows a moderate satisfaction with the price and

relatively high level of foreign tourists satisfaction with with the quality, promotional activities and availability of typical Istrian regional products. Considering that research, there is a need to explore differences in familiarity with typical Istrian products and perceptions about products, region of origin and brand name between domestic and foreign tourists. Considering the previously defined research problem and subject matter of research, we have deduced the following hypothesis:

H1: Perception of regional autochthonous products is not homogeneous in relation to familiarity of observed groups with Istrian regional autochthonous products,

H2: More familiar group has a more positive perception of regional autochthonous products, region of origin and associations with the name of the region of origin from less familiar group.

C. Methodology

Method used in the survey was questionnaire method. The questionnaires were distributed in Croatian, English, Italian and German language. Survey was conducted on convenient sample of domestic and foreign tourists during the summer season in Istria. The questionnaire was divided into several parts. First part included question about tourists general familiarity with regional autochthonous products. Second part included claims about regional autochthonous products and third part included claims about region of Istria to identify and evaluate general tourist perception about products and region. Fourth part included questions to identify tourist associations with the name of the region of origin, respectively brand name „Istrian..“. In the questionnaire a five point Likert scale was used ranging from 1 to 5, for example 1 = totally disagree, to 5 = totally agree. A total of 324 properly filled out questionnaires were collected. Therefore, the research compares perception differences of Istrian regional autochthonous products, region of origin and the associations with brand name between the two groups, domestic and foreign tourists. The questionnaire results were analyzed using descriptive statistic, independent samples T-test and correlation analysis in order to achieve a general view and confirmation of the hypothesis.

TABLE II: Frequencies of domestic and foreign tourists familiarity expressed in percentages

Tourists	Yes	No
Domestic	100%	0%
Foreign	72,80%	27,20%

Source: author's research, 2012.

D. Results

Research sample includes a total of $N = 324$ respondents, of which 144 domestic and 180 foreign tourists.

Foreign tourists are less familiar with Istrian typical autochthonous products than domestic tourists. High value of Pearson Chi-Square test (Chi-Square: 46,185, $p = 0,000$) at significance level of $p < 0,01$ shows that familiarity with Istrian regional autochthonous products depends on tourist segment. Cramer's V test (Cramer's V: 0,378, $p = 0,000$) indicates that dependence is weak, but nevertheless statistically significant $p < 0,01$ (see Table II).

Comparison of product perception differences shows high T-test values and statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) of mean values for eleven of thirteen measured dimensions between two independent samples. For two dimensions data shows no significant difference between mean values: "healthy" (T: -1.314, $p > 0.05$) and "available for purchase" (T: 1,127, $p > 0.05$) (see Table III).

TABLE III: Regional autochthonous product perception differences between domestic and foreign tourists

Istrian regional products are:	Domestic	Foreign	T-test	p
High quality	4,6597	4,0167	7,348	0,000
Healthy	3,8194	3,9778	-1,314	0,190
Recognisable	4,5417	4,0000	5,733	0,000
Expensive	3,8056	3,0000	6,501	0,000
Available for purchase	3,6944	3,5667	1,127	0,261
Ideal	4,3542	3,8167	5,102	0,000
I get value for money	4,6528	3,7556	9,805	0,000
Element of regional recognition	4,8542	4,0667	10,318	0,000
Better than other	4,2639	3,5944	5,938	0,000
Motive of arrival	4,0417	3,4833	4,249	0,000
Part of cultural heritage	4,7986	4,1056	8,291	0,000
Closely related to the region	4,7778	4,0889	7,552	0,000
Best way to promote the region	4,7708	4,0222	8,508	0,000

Source: author's research, 2012.

TABLE IV: Region of origin perception differences between domestic and foreign tourists

Region of Istria is:	Domestic	Foreign	T-test	p
Closely related to tradition	4,5417	4,1056	4,892	0,000
Region with preserved nature	4,1736	4,1833	-0,121	0,903
Known for traditional products	4,7847	3,7556	12,034	0,000
Wine region	4,6667	3,8167	9,586	0,000
Region with rich cultural heritage	4,6042	4,1722	5,058	0,000
Region of specific enogastronomy	4,6528	3,9500	7,732	0,000
Known for olive oil	4,8681	4,0278	9,196	0,000
Known for truffles	4,6667	3,7444	9,989	0,000
Known for prosciutto	4,5208	3,7778	7,023	0,000

Source: author's research, 2012.

Analysis of region of origin perception differences reveals high T-test values and statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) of mean values for seven of eight measured dimensions between domestic and foreign tourists. High positive T-test values lead to the conclusion that domestic tourists have a more positive perception of the region of origin than foreign tourists in all dimensions, except for one dimension "region of preserved nature" in which there is no difference in mean values ($T: -0.121$ $p > 0.05$) (see Table IV).

Analysis of association differences shows high T-test values and statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) in mean values for each dimension between domestic and foreign tourists. Domestic tourists have mainly more positive associations with brand name "Istrian..", but brand name associates domestic tourists more on expensiveness ($T: 3,605$, $p < 0,001$) and foreign tourists more on happiness ($T: -5,843$, $p < 0,001$) (see Table V).

TABLE V: Brand name association differences

Brand name "Istrian.." reminds me of:	Domestic	Foreign	T-test	p
Quality	4,5764	4,1000	5,470	0,000
Prestige	4,4306	3,5500	9,242	0,000
Uniqueness	4,8194	4,1056	8,721	0,000
Expensiveness	3,5139	3,0333	3,605	0,000
Tradition	4,5764	4,3056	3,503	0,001
Reliability	4,4097	3,8556	6,277	0,000
Happiness	3,4306	4,0556	-5,843	0,000
Safety	4,3681	3,7667	6,883	0,000

Source: author's research, 2012.

E. Limitations and further research

Although the research provides an important insight into perception differences for regional autochthonous products, region of origin and the use of the name of the region of origin in the name of the product, there are several research limitations that we need to point out in relation to familiarity of domestic and foreign tourists with regional autochthonous products. The main research limitation comes from relatively small research sample that is divided in two groups – domestic and foreign tourists. Research would ideally be made with a larger number of respondents, which would make results generalisation possible. Respondents should be divided based on the tourist country of origin and the level of familiarity, which would produce more precise and more concrete data. By the same token, it would be desirable to make product classification to conduct the research for each individual product. This would make the research considerably more profound and provide an insight into the extent to which each product overlaps with the region of origin and into the influence of each individual product and familiarity about the product on the perception or the image of the region.

IV. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this research was to gain an insight into perception differences of regional autochthonous products, region of origin, and region name used in regional autochthonous brand name between domestic and foreign tourists in relation to their familiarity with regional autochthonous products. Tables II and III confirms hypothesis H1 that perception of regional autochthonous products is not homogeneous in relation to familiarity of observed groups with listed products. Hypothesis H2 that the group with higher level of familiarity has a more positive perception of typical regional products, region of origin and associations with the name of the region of origin used in typical product brand name can be confirmed by the result of analysis shown in Tables II, III, IV and V. Analyses reveal that domestic tourists who are more familiar with typical Istrian products have a more positive perception in all measured categories than foreign tourists, who are less familiar with Istrian regional autochthonous products.

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