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Product attributes and consumer attitudes affecting the preferences for infant milk formula in China

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A series of food safety incidents has led to low levels of trust in the safety of domestically produced Chinese infant milk formula. Concerned parents in China increasingly source 'foreign-produced' brands and use a range of authenticity cues as assurance of the safety and authenticity of infant formula products. However, the effectiveness of authenticity cues in providing assurance to Chinese consumers has not been evaluated. The aim of this study is to analyze the importance of various authenticity cues for infant milk product choices.

Methodology and Theoretical Orientation: We conducted an online choice experiment with consumers of European infant formula in China to analyze respondents' preferences for different labels, authenticity cues and price. The choice experiment was combined with a questionnaire including questions on the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents; attitudes towards authenticity; perceptions of food risk and of organic certification. Choice experiments are based on Random Utility Theory, which proposes that goods are not the direct objects of utility but that utility is derived from the properties or characteristics of the goods instead (Lancaster, 1966). Latent class models were used to analyze responses to an online choice experiment.

Findings: We identified two consumer segments, with one preferring lower priced infant formula and the second choosing higher priced products. All authenticity cues appear to serve as indicators of food quality and safety, and all were found to be highly important information sources for the respondents when making purchase

decisions. In general, Chinese consumers are prepared to pay a premium for authenticity assurance. Chinese policy makers and the infant formula industry should continue to improve quality control systems to increase consumers' trust in food value chains. These control systems should comprise the whole food supply chain, from production to marketing, and should focus on building trust and communicating credibility.

Recent Publications

1. Kendall, H., Kuznesof, S., Dean, M., Chan, M. Y., Clark, B., Home, R., Stolz, H., Zhong, Q., Chuan He, L., Brereton, P. & Frewer, L. (2018) Chinese consumer's attitudes, perceptions and behavioral responses towards food fraud, *Food Control*, 95, pp. 339–351
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Biography

Hanna Stolz (Senior Researcher) is working at the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture in Frick, Switzerland, in the Department of Socio-Economics. She is an expert in consumer behavior and marketing research. Her research is focused on sustainable food consumption, consumer willingness to pay for sustainability food attributes and organic food choice. To investigate these topics, she works with qualitative and quantitative methods of marketing research. She has been involved in various EU research projects, such as FOODINTEGRITY, FOODLINKS, SALSA, ECROPOLIS and QLIF and in other research projects..

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