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The use of food quality and prestige-based benefits for consumer segmentation

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify consumer segments based on the importance of food quality and prestige benefits when buying food for a special occasion; dinner party with friends.

Design/methodology/approach – Using cluster analysis, the importance of food quality benefits (quality, taste and health) and prestige benefits (prestige quality, hedonic, uniqueness, price and social) were investigated. The consumer segments were profiled using individual consumer characteristics (involvement in luxury, willingness to pay and socio-demographics).

Findings – Food quality benefits are the most important benefits when buying food for a party with friends and the authors identified four distinct consumer segments based on 20 different food quality and prestige benefits: perfectionists, premium, luxury seeking and value focussed. Three of the four consumer segments (perfectionists, premium and luxury seeking) find conventional food quality benefits important but differ in the importance they attribute to the different prestige benefits. The value focussed segment is not driven by prestige consumption but wants high quality at an affordable price.

Research limitations/implications – This study demonstrates that consumers are driven by different food and prestige benefits when buying food for a special occasion.

Originality/value – This study suggest some important differences between premium consumers, looking for food quality and hedonic benefits, and luxury seeking, with a relatively higher focus on prestige quality, uniqueness and social benefits. This study also identifies a significant distinction between perfectionists and value focussed consumers. Both segments are focussed on food quality benefits but differ in their focus on value and prestige benefits.

Keywords Norway, Consumer segmentation, Food and prestige benefits, Special occasion

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

This study focusses on the use of food quality and prestige-based benefits as the basis of consumer segmentation for buying food for a special occasion, a dinner party with family or friends. Consumer benefits, which are the desires, preferences or expectations that consumers seek to fulfil when purchasing or consuming a product, have been suggested as one of the most important means of identifying different consumer food segments (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012). The importance that consumers attribute to different product benefits is an indication of the motives underlying their product choices. Benefits are suggested to be better predictors of consumer behaviour than personality, value, lifestyle, demographic or geographic measures (Myers, 1996). Despite the theoretical and strategic relevance of benefit segmentation, it is rarely applied in the food domain (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012).

Consumer behaviour literature defines perceived quality as the consumer's judgement about a product's overall excellence or superiority (Zeithaml, 1988). According to Zeithaml (1988) higher standard of quality is an essential part of prestige consumption because superiority or excellence can broadly define quality. In studies on luxury and prestige, perceived quality is defined and measured as the superior quality characteristics



of a product or brand (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004) and, at a higher level, is compared with premium or excellent quality (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). This study defines quality on two levels. The first is the consumer's evaluation of the salient quality benefits of food products (e.g. taste and health), which represent more conventional perspectives on food quality benefits (Brunso *et al.*, 2002). The second includes associations towards superior and luxury quality benefits (e.g. superior and luxurious), focussing on prestige quality benefits.

As a general rule, prestige products have been used as an example of extreme-end high-involvement decision making, where "luxury" can be defined and relating to the extreme-end of the prestige-brand category (Ko *et al.*, 2017). Rather than treating each perceived value of prestige separately (quality, upmarket, premium and quality), this study follows Vigneron and Johnson's (1999) approach and combine the different sets of prestige values into a single framework. Thus, this study defines prestige as consumer subjective evaluative judgement about the unique, rare, exclusive and high status end of a product category (Dubois and Czellar, 2002; Hanzae and Taghipourian, 2012).

Different theories have been developed to identify or assess how consumers develop prestige values for products based on interactions with people (social, prestige, extended self, power or similar benefits), product properties (functional benefits; quality and uniqueness), individual motives (hedonic or emotional benefits) and conspicuousness/price (Brun and Castelli, 2013; O'Cass and Frost, 2002; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2007). Thus, prestige is a subjective and multidimensional construct; however, the number of dimensions and their theoretical and conceptual foundations vary in the literature (see for example, Miller and Mills, 2012). This study adapts two of the main conceptual frameworks (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2007) to assess the underlying benefits or motives for buying prestigious products or brands.

Q1

Which foods consumers prefer and eat are highly influenced by the context, situation or occasion (Meiselman, 1996). Recent segmentation studies have emphasised the importance of segmenting consumers in the food domain based on consumers' motives for food choice in everyday contexts or without contextual specification (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012). However, food benefits for special occasions have not received much attention in the literature. Thus, consumers may emphasise the importance of benefits for unique, prestigious or special occasions differently compared with daily or regular occasions (Piqueras-Fiszman and Jaeger, 2015; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).

Few previous studies demonstrate how conventional food quality benefits can be used as the basis for consumer segmentation (Olsen *et al.*, 2009; Verain *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore only one recent study we are aware of includes prestige-based food benefits as a basis for consumer segmentation (Hartmann *et al.*, 2017). Both perceived quality (Brunso *et al.*, 2002; Köster, 2009) and prestige (Dubois and Czellar, 2002; Miller and Mills, 2012) is important for consumer segmentation, expectations, choice and behaviour. This study will contribute to the existing literature on benefit segmentation (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012; Verain *et al.*, 2016) in a high-involvement meal context by identifying segments based on the importance of consumer evaluation of both food quality and prestige benefits and values.

The first goal of the study is to compare how consumers perceive the importance of conventional food quality benefits (i.e. quality, taste and health) with prestige benefits when consumers want to buy food for preparing dinner for a special occasion (dinner party with family or friends). The second goal of the study is to identify segments based on the importance of consumer evaluation of food quality and prestige benefits and values. The third goal of the study is to profile the segments based on involvement in luxury food products, willingness to pay (WTP) for a premium product and on demographics.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Conceptual framework

This study uses perceived benefits as an assessment of consumers' pre-purchase expectations (Smith and Deppa, 2009). Expected attribute performance, values or benefits represent their means linked towards their attitudes, goals and need fulfilment through a set of expectations and consequences made relevant by an underlying value system (Gutman, 1982). In addition, benefit segmentation literature (e.g. Haley, 1984) relies on the notion that although all consumers may like or prefer all benefits, the relative importance they attach to individual benefits is evaluated differently.

Prestige and luxury are often synonymously used in brand marketing literature (Miller and Mills, 2012; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). As multidimensional constructs, there is little agreement regarding how to define, understand and measure prestige or luxury products, brands or services. Two of the most used theoretical frameworks for assessing the underlying benefits or motives for buying prestigious products or brands are Vigneron and Johnson's (2004) brand luxury index scale (BLI) and Wiedmann *et al.* (2007) model of consumers' perceived value. In their review and conceptual framework of prestige-seeking consumer behaviour, Vigneron and Johnson (1999) drew a distinction between three interpersonal values (conspicuousness, uniqueness and social) and two personal values (emotional and quality). These ideas were later developed into a framework for assessing perceptions of brand luxury based on five dimensions of values: conspicuousness, uniqueness, quality, hedonic and extended self. Wiedmann *et al.* (2007) expanded the BLI framework by suggesting four latent dimensions: financial value (price), functional value (usability, quality and uniqueness), individual value (self-identity, hedonic and materialism) and social value (conspicuousness and prestige). This study uses Vigneron and Johnson's (1999) as a general theoretical approach, but include recent literature (see Miller and Mills, 2012, for a review) for the selection of prestige related benefits discussed in the following sections.

Recent research suggests that the dimensionality of prestige and luxury brands is not stable across cultures, segments, products, brands and services (e.g. Christodoulides *et al.*, 2009) and is highly influenced by individual perception and values (Brun and Castelli, 2013). Prestige values or benefits as a theoretical framework for the evaluation or choice of food products are rarely discussed in food science literature (Van der Veen, 2003). This study will not test the dimensionality of prestige and luxury values or benefits *per se*, but it includes five motivational factors and some of their benefits, values or attributes as a basis for consumer segmentation (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009), which we believe are the most relevant for this study context. These benefits are perceived quality benefits, uniqueness benefits, hedonic benefits, price benefits and social benefits. Figure 1 is a visual presentation of our conceptual model for the identification of benefits of overall prestige that we discuss in the following sections.

2.2 Perceived quality benefits

As an attitudinal construct, the perceived quality of food is particularly associated with sensory benefits or attributes such as taste, odour, texture and visual appearance (Aikman *et al.*, 2006; Grunert *et al.*, 2000). Several studies have found that taste is most important for consumers' choice of food products (Cardello and Schutz, 2003; Roininen *et al.*, 1999). Taste is also important in establishing both consumer attitudes and preferences towards luxury products (Laurent *et al.*, 2011; Van der Veen, 2003). Perception of taste is also influenced by the eating context such as eating a main meal at home compared with eating and snacking outside one's home (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012). While taste is considered to be the most important experienced quality benefit of food choice (Ophuis and Van Trijp, 1995), health and nutrition are probably the most important credence quality attributes, values or

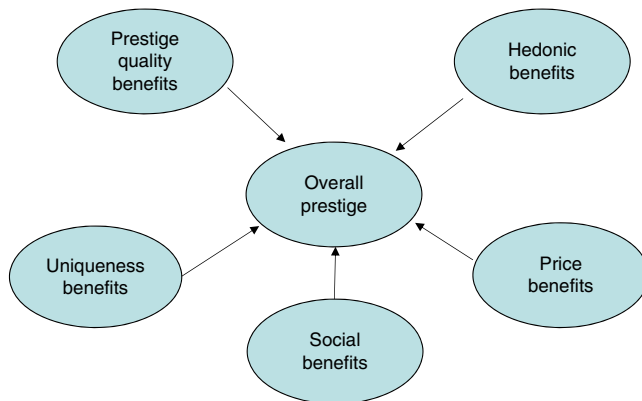


Figure 1.
The conceptual model
for the identification
of benefits of
overall prestige

benefits (Ares and Gámbaro, 2007; Roininen *et al.*, 1999). Health has also been found to be one of the most important benefits for consumer segmentation of food (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012).

Thus, this study uses quality, taste, health and nutrition as specific indicators of perceived food quality benefits when buying food for special occasions. In addition, and in accordance with definitions and assessment of perceived quality of luxury and perceived prestige products or brands, we include superior, sophisticated and luxurious as perceived prestige quality benefits (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004).

2.3 Hedonic benefits

Hedonic consumption can be defined as products that generate emotional arousal (Mano and Oliver, 1993) and with benefits that are evaluated primarily on aesthetics, taste, symbolic meaning and sensory experience (Holbrook and Moore, 1981). Hedonic, affective and emotional benefits are gaining importance for differential advantage in food markets because most products are similar with respect to quality, convenience and price (Schifferstein *et al.*, 2013; den Uijl *et al.*, 2014). Research in the field of prestige consumption has revealed that prestige products are likely to provide such subjective hedonic benefits as fun, enjoyment, pleasure, gratification or similar emotions (Dubois and Laurent, 1994).

It has been suggested that the consumption context influences consumers' feelings of affect, mood and emotion (Desmet and Schifferstein, 2008) and affects their food choices (Hartwell *et al.*, 2013). For example, consumers evaluate their hedonic feelings for food differently depending on whether it is consumed as breakfast on a weekend morning, afternoon break snack on a weekday or after a dinner at home in good company (Piqueras-Fiszman and Jaeger, 2014a, b). Affective or emotional food benefits have also been used as a basis for identifying consumer food segments (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012; Verhoef, 2005), as well as for providing segments of prestige consumption in general (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that consumer expectations of hedonism in the form of fun and excitement can be important for understanding consumers' motivation to buy products for a special meal occasion.

2.4 Perceived uniqueness

Uniqueness is an important benefit or value of prestige and perceived luxury (Miller and Mills, 2012; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2007). Uniqueness can be defined as an individual's need for pursuing products or services that differentiate them from others by enhancing self-image and social status (Tian *et al.*, 2001). In prestige literature, uniqueness is based on the assumption that perceptions of exclusivity and rareness of the product increase a

consumer's desire or preference for it (Verhallen, 1982; Lynn, 1991). Uniqueness is also important for special occasion products, in contrast to everyday products (Pocheptsova *et al.*, 2010). Thus, one important motivation when buying products for special occasions can be to look for unique and exclusive products that enhance the prestige motives of the individual.

2.5 Price exclusivity benefits

Exclusive price is an important benefit, attribute or value of prestige products and services (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2007). A high price gives products the value of conspicuousness, power, status and uniqueness because not all consumers can afford it even though they desire the product (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). Many authors have demonstrated that the high or exclusive price of a product also works as a signal for consumer perception of high and exclusive quality or prestige (Erickson and Johansson, 1985). For example, one of the most important consumer associations with luxury restaurants is the high price of food (Lee and Hwang, 2011).

Consumers' perceptions and concerns regarding price are also important for consumer segmentation of prestige products and services in general (Dubois *et al.*, 2005) as well as for food (Olsen *et al.*, 2009). Special occasions such as parties, weddings and birthdays are typical contexts of high-end food consumption where more expensive food is used either to enhance or to establish social relations (Van der Veen, 2003) and to express social status or power (Dietler and Hayden, 2001). Thus, this study includes expensive in addition to the regular ("fair") price as a basis for assessing premium price benefits as a motive for buying products for special meal occasions.

2.6 Social benefits

Consumption of prestige products appears to have a strong social dimension, as consumers often acquire products to impress others, to be popular or to be a member of their social reference groups (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2007). Findings reveal that luxury products consumed in public are more likely to be perceived as prestigious and conspicuous than privately consumed luxury goods (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). For example, the nature of the social occasion can be of major importance for wine choice (Hall *et al.*, 2001). In addition, buying high-priced luxury products can influence individuals' feelings of guilt (Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2016).

In prestige segmentation research, previous research suggests that some consumer segments focus on social prestige benefits as the most important for luxury consumption (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). Thus, this study expects that social benefits in the form of achieving popularity, prestige, status and showing who they are can explain consumers' motivation to buy meals consumed in the presence of other people at a special occasion (Rozin, 1996; Herman *et al.*, 2003). In addition, we included one social disadvantage by assessing the importance of guilt when buying such food.

2.7 Individual characteristics to profile segments

In accordance with previous research in the area of prestige consumption, this study includes involvement in luxury (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999) and WTP (Breidert *et al.*, 2006) as profiling variables. Involvement in luxury is defined and measured in this study as personal relevance and importance attached to luxury (food) products based on inherent needs, values and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1985). This study uses a direct survey approach to measure WTP (Miller *et al.*, 2011; Sattler and Hensel-Börner, 2003). Finally, socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender and income) are used as additional profiling variables (Husic and Cicic, 2009).

3. Methodology

3.1 Design and subjects

Data collection used a cross-national, web-based survey of a representative sample of 1,000 adults (18–80 years of age). Norwegian respondents were selected randomly from a pool of pre-recruited respondents by a professional research agency. However, an effective sample size of 851 was used in this study after deleting the cases with missing values and answers of “don’t know”.

A summary analysis of the main socio-demographic characteristics of the sample is presented in Table I. In total, 53 per cent of the respondents were female. The average age was 46 years, and approximately 43 per cent of the respondents had a household income level of 400K–1,000 K NOK per year (middle class).

3.2 Questionnaire and variables

Each respondent was asked to rate the importance of 20 benefits for buying food for a dinner party with family or friends. These items were assessed on a nine-point scale from not important (1) to extremely important (9). A similar scale has previously been used to assess food benefits (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012).

Four items were used to measure the food quality benefits (Onwezen *et al.*, 2012; Pieniak *et al.*, 2008). Prestige quality benefits (three items), hedonic benefits (three items), uniqueness benefits (three items), price benefits (two items) and social benefits (five items) were measured based on previous prestige literature including items from the BLI scale (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009) items are presented in Tables I and II.

Cod, besides salmon, is the most popular species in Norway in the high-end seafood category and was used to measure WTP. WTP was assessed using three items. Consumers were shown a photo of pre-packed fresh cod and asked, “What is the highest price you are willing to pay in NOK for this product” under three different freshness conditions: 12 h, 48 h and 4 days after catching. Fresh seafood costs more than, for example, frozen seafood in Norway (Østli *et al.*, 2013). It is also considered to be more exclusive and to have higher

Category	(%)
<i>Age</i>	
18–25	11.6
16–35	15.2
36–45	22.4
46–55	19.4
56–65	19.2
65+	12.2
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	46.6
Female	53.5
<i>Household income (yearly Norwegian krone)</i>	
< 100 K	3.3
100–399K	21.4
400–699K	24.4
700–999K	18.8
> 1,000 K	11.9
Don't want to report	16.9
Don't know	3.5

Note: $n = 851$

Table I.
Sample characteristics

Construct	Specific items	Mean rank	Mean
Food quality	Good taste	16.87a	7.99
Food quality	Good quality	16.18b	7.55
Food quality	Healthy	13.74c	6.42
Food quality	Nutritionally right	13.67c	6.35
Price	Fair price	12.74d	6.02
Hedonic	Exciting	12.64d	5.88
Hedonic	Wonderful	12.45d	5.89
Hedonic	Fun to eat	11.67e	5.49
Social	Popular	10.06f	4.71
Social	Shows who I am	8.90g	4.25
Social	No feeling of guilt	8.84g	4.37
Uniqueness	Unique	8.81g	4.24
Uniqueness	Exclusive	8.74g	4.17
Prestige quality	Luxurious	8.46h	4.05
Prestige quality	Superior	8.35h	4.04
Prestige quality	Sophisticated	8.21h	4.03
Social	Gives me prestige	7.94i	3.78
Social	Gives me status	7.57j	3.68
Uniqueness	Rare	7.37j	3.75
Price	Expensive	6.78k	3.39

Note: Different letters within the same column indicate significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$)

Table II.
Benefits, importance
and mean ranks of
food for a dinner
party with family
and friends

prestige among consumers (Carlucci *et al.*, 2015). Different freshness conditions, from extremely fresh (12 h) to a high but more commonly found freshness in Norwegian supermarkets (4 days), were used in this study as products that could be associated with different prestige levels. All respondents were given a reference price of 150 NOK for products like this when sold in a supermarket. The assessment of this construct is adapted from Breidert *et al.* (2006).

Consumers' involvement in luxury food were measured on a seven-point Likert scale based on three items from Zaichkowsky (1985) such as "Luxury food [...] (a) means a lot to me [...] (b) is very important for me".

3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis was performed in three steps. First, Friedman and Wilcoxon tests were used to determine significant rank differences in perceived benefits. Second, two-step cluster analysis of the benefits for dinner party with family and friends was utilised to identify specific clusters or segments with similar responses to the measured variables. This method allows the stability and the validity of the cluster solution to be generated (Hair *et al.*, 2010). According to this method, the log likelihood option is chosen as the distance measure and the Schwarz's Bayesian Criterion (BIC) as the determinant of the number of clusters. Third, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to profile the different consumer clusters. SPSS 24.0 software was used for clustering and conducting ANOVA.

4. Results

The analytical result of the descriptive statistics and ranking order for the 20 benefits are shown in Table I. There was a big gap between the most important benefit "quality" (mean score of 8.0) and the least important benefit "expensive" (mean score of 3.4). Conventional food quality benefits were, in general, the most important benefits and significantly more important ($p \leq 0.05$) than the prestige quality benefits. The food quality benefit "taste" was most important ($p \leq 0.05$), followed by "quality", "health" and "nutritionally right".

Of the prestige benefits, hedonic benefits (e.g. exciting) were most important followed by social benefits (e.g. popular). Hedonic benefits were of a medium level of importance and significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) more important than social benefits, uniqueness benefits (e.g. unique) and prestige quality benefits (e.g. luxurious), which had medium to low levels of importance. The price benefit “expensive” was the significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) least important benefit.

A two-step cluster analysis performed on the different benefits for a dinner party with friends presented below provided four clusters with different patterns (Table II). The segments were named on the basis of the benefits with the highest importance for each cluster for a party dinner: perfectionists, premium, luxury seeking and value focussed.

The first segment ($n = 158$; 20.4 per cent) was called the perfectionists. Compared with the other segments, members of this segment had significantly higher ($p \leq 0.05$) scores for the prestige benefits price, hedonic, uniqueness and social. For the food quality benefit “taste”, this segment’s score was similar to that of the premium and value focussed, and for “quality”, the score was similar to that of the premium segment. For the food quality benefits “health” and “nutrition”, this segment scored the highest. In general, almost all benefits are of vital importance for the perfectionists when buying food for a special occasion.

The second segment was named premium ($n = 291$; 37.6 per cent). Food quality benefits (e.g. quality and health) and hedonic benefits (e.g. exiting) are important to this segment. Price benefits were of above average importance for this segment and of significantly higher importance ($p \leq 0.05$) than for the luxury and value seeking segments. Uniqueness benefits (e.g. unique and rare) were less important for this segment compared with the perfectionists and luxury seeking; in other words, these segments are definitely not looking for status when they buy food for a special occasion.

The third segment was luxury seeking ($n = 104$; 13.5 per cent). This segment differs from the premium segment with lower evaluations of conventional food quality benefits (e.g. taste and health) but higher evaluations of prestige quality benefits (e.g. superior and sophisticated). Another reason to term this segment luxury seeking is that they also have significantly higher scores on uniqueness (unique, exclusive and rare) and social benefits (e.g. prestige and status) compared with the premium segment. Almost all benefits were of average importance for this segment but not at the same level as for the perfectionists.

The final segment was the value focussed ($n = 220$; 28.5 per cent). Food quality benefits “quality” and “taste” were of high importance for this segment, whereas health benefits were of medium importance. The remaining benefits were of below average or low importance. In particular, this segment evaluated prestige benefits (prestige quality, hedonic, uniqueness, price and social) as of extremely low importance compared with the three other segments. The reason we term this segment value focussed is that it has high benefit expectations towards food quality but is not willing to pay a high price for products compared with, for example, the premium segment.

The results of profiling the clusters on involvement in luxury, WTP and demographics are presented in Table III. The perfectionists and luxury-seeking segments scored highest on involvement in luxury foods, followed by the premium segment. The value focussed scored the lowest of all the segments on involvement in luxury. There was no significant difference in WTP between the perfectionists, the premium and the luxury seeking; however, the premium segment had a tendency to a slightly higher WTP than the perfectionists and the luxury seeking. The value focussed had the lowest WTP for the different freshness of cod products.

Luxury-seeking consumers were significantly younger than the rest of the segments. This segment also comprised more men compared with the other segments, whereas the premium and value seekers had more female consumers. The perfectionists segment had an even distribution of men and women. No significant difference between the segments in household income was found (Table IV).

Construct	Specific items	Perfectionists	Premium	Segment	
				Luxury seeking	Value focussed
Food quality	Good taste	8.27a	8.35a	5.40b	8.10a
Food quality	Good quality	8.14a	7.90a	5.33c	7.45b
Food quality	Healthy	7.57a	6.78b	5.23c	5.65c
Food quality	Nutritionally right	7.56a	6.74b	5.17c	5.54c
Prestige quality	Luxurious	7.12a	4.07c	5.21b	1.62d
Prestige quality	Superior	6.99a	4.11c	5.28b	1.59d
Prestige quality	Sophisticated	6.92a	4.19c	5.21b	1.54d
Hedonic	Exciting	7.51a	6.42b	5.35c	4.08d
Hedonic	Wonderful	7.62a	6.19b	5.30c	4.40d
Hedonic	Fun to eat	7.32a	5.96b	5.15c	3.60d
Uniqueness	Unique	7.18a	4.53c	5.10b	1.77d
Uniqueness	Exclusive	7.13a	4.34c	5.19b	1.60d
Uniqueness	Rare	6.63a	3.63c	5.09b	1.58d
Price	Fair price	7.25a	6.21b	5.34c	5.10c
Price	Expensive	5.99a	5.15b	3.16c	1.60d
Social	Popular	7.21a	5.06b	5.38b	2.22c
Social	No feeling of guilt	6.56a	4.50c	5.13b	2.49d
Social	Gives me prestige	6.91a	3.83c	5.24b	1.42d
Social	Shows who I am	6.93a	4.51c	5.06b	2.06d
Social	Gives me status	6.82a	3.46c	5.40b	1.48d
	<i>n</i> (% of sample)	158 (20.4%)	291 (37.6%)	104 (13.5%)	220 (28.5%)

Note: Different letters within the same row indicate significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$)

Table III.
Cluster differences of benefit importance

	Perfectionists	Premium	Segment	
			Luxury seeking	Value focussed
Involvement in luxury foods	4.25a	2.47b	3.87a	1.63c
Willingness to pay 12 h	109.9a	115.5a	105.3a	83.0b
Willingness to pay 48 h	93.2a	98.0a	88.9ab	74.8b
Willingness to pay 4 days	76.0a	77.3a	67.9ab	59.1b
Age	47.38a	45.13a	39.99b	48.05a
Gender	1.51ab	1.45b	1.62a	1.45b
Income	600–700 K NOK	600–700 K NOK	600–700 K NOK	600–700 K NOK

Note: Different letters within the same row indicate significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$)

Table IV.
Profiling of the segments by involvement, willingness to pay and demographics

5. Discussion

Our study expands on previous research (Hartmann *et al.*, 2017; Onwezen *et al.*, 2012) by comparing the importance of conventional food quality benefits with the importance of prestige benefits. In general, conventional food benefits were found to be more important than prestige benefits for a special occasion (dinner party with family and friends). This was expected as conventional food quality benefits, such as taste and health, are often found to be most important for consumers' choice of food products (Ophuis and Van Trijp, 1995; Roininen *et al.*, 1999).

Another contribution of this study is consumer segmentation of benefits by measuring food quality and prestige benefits for a special occasion, and profiling the segments based on individual characteristics. This study identified four distinct consumer segments (perfectionists, premium, luxury seeking and value focussed) based on food quality and prestige benefits. Conventional food quality benefits were important for all

segments; however, three of the four consumer segments differ in the importance they attribute to the remaining prestige benefits. Furthermore, some differences were found in the segment profiles.

The first segment, perfectionists, is similar to the perfectionist in Vigneron and Johnson's (1999) prestige-seeking framework. According to this framework, perfectionists are more interested in hedonic benefits (e.g. exciting and fun to eat) derived from the use of luxury products and less interested in the price than prestige quality benefits. The perfectionists in this study follow a similar pattern, i.e. the price benefit "expensive" receives the lowest mean score of all benefits in this segment and a much lower score than the prestige quality benefits. Cross-cultural research on prestige (Hennigs *et al.*, 2012) has found similar characteristics of prestige-seeking consumers.

The second segment, premium, focusses on food quality (e.g. quality, taste, nutrition and health), price and hedonic benefits (i.e. exciting and wonderful). This segment could also be called the "gourmet" segment as these consumers want the sensuous enjoyment of high-quality food products. Literature on situational price sensitivity finds similar results, suggesting that consumers are less sensitive to price when purchasing for hedonic benefits (Maehle *et al.*, 2015; Wakefield and Inman, 2003). The premium segment has a high WTP for a prestige product, which is on a slightly, but not significantly higher level compared with the perfectionists and luxury-seeking segments. This segment also contained more women consumers, which supports previous studies suggesting that women emphasise hedonism more closely with prestige consumption (Roux *et al.*, 2017). The premium segment has less positive attitudes towards luxury food compared with the perfectionists and luxury-seeking segments.

Luxury-seeking consumers prefer products with high prestige quality (e.g. superior and sophisticated) and uniqueness (e.g. exclusive and rare). Social benefits (i.e. popular and status) are also quite important. Conventional food quality benefits (e.g. taste and healthiness) are not as important for this segment compared with the other segments. In contrast to the premium segment, this segment is not concerned about eating high-quality food for its sensuous enjoyment but rather wants to eat food that is perceived as luxurious and that enhances social status. The distinctive profile between the premium and the luxury-seeking segments is clear and interesting. It is reasonable to expect that in a special context (a party with friends), the benefits sought are both more unique and more socially prestigious than for an everyday meal (Belk, 1988; Shukla, 2010). Parties have two principal characteristics: the communal consumption of food (including drink) and the social component of display (Dietler and Hayden, 2001). The communal consumption of food usually includes foods that are different from everyday practice (Dietler and Hayden, 2001). Thus, luxury-seeking consumers might seek unique products because this is what is expected by their guests. This segment consisted of younger consumers and more men. Younger consumers and men are suggested to be generally more concerned about uniqueness and luxury (Roux *et al.*, 2017).

The final segment, value focussed, is not driven by prestige consumption. This segment wants high food quality and taste at an affordable price and is similar to the distance segment of Dubois *et al.* (2005), which considered prestige products as expensive and useless. Thus, this study identified a significant distinction between perfectionists and value focussed consumers. Both segments are focussed on food quality benefits but differ in their focus on value and prestige benefits. This is not always confirmed in the consumer decision making or shopping orientation literature (Rezaei, 2015).

5.1 Marketing implications

This paper can serve as a base for developing group-oriented marketing strategies in food markets, especially for premium and luxury food products. The study confirms that

food quality benefits, such as taste and health, are the foremost perceived benefits across consumer segments (Carlucci *et al.*, 2015) and that such benefits are important and necessary for all consumers. In a competitive seafood market, quality is the bottom line for every supplier. Thus, the industry must identify and use other food attributes or consumer benefits. The prestigious and luxury market is growing and many consumers are willing to pay more for products and services with superior quality, uniqueness, exclusivity and status (Ko *et al.*, 2017). The industry must use those benefit in their product and brand development, in their packaging and distribution strategy and in how they communicate product benefits to the different consumer segments. This study identifies differences between segments on their perceived benefits and gives the industry ideas for possible product positioning or differentiation strategies. Thus, it is difficult to differentiate food for special occasions on those benefits. Similarly, it is hard to satisfy perfectionists if you do not provide high value on all benefits.

However, this study suggests some important differences between premium consumers looking for food quality and hedonic benefits and luxury seeking, with a relatively higher focus on prestige quality, uniqueness and social benefits. These two segments give the food industry the opportunity to develop different products and/or different forms of communicating the different benefits for these segments. For example, it would be effective to promote status self-prestige for the luxury seekers but not for the premium segment. The premium segment might give higher relative profitability because of its higher acceptance of exclusive price and because of its size: 2.8 times larger than the luxury seekers.

The value focussed segment wants good quality and taste, but it does not want to pay a premium price for it and will look for non-prestige products that offer these benefits.

5.2 Limitations and extensions

Even though this is a representative survey of Norwegian consumers and framed towards food products, studies in other countries and of specific prestige food products are encouraged. This study tested 20 expected benefits, and the list of benefits is not exhaustive. For example, brand, packaging, convenience, usability, sustainability, risk, self-identity and materialistic benefits can be considered for future research (e.g. Husic and Cacic, 2009; Köster, 2009; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2009). This study examines which benefits are most important when buying food for a special meal occasion, a party with friends. Other eating occasions (Jaeger *et al.*, 2011), such as eating out at restaurants, weekends/holidays and special events, are relevant as well. Furthermore, research on specific food products or other kinds of products can be considered in future research. This study introduces a few profiling constructs, such as WTP and attitudes towards luxury. Relevant motivational variables not included in this study are, for example, involvement, convenience orientation, impulse buying, social norms, moral obligation, personality, variety seeking or personal values (Brunso *et al.*, 2004; Carlucci *et al.*, 2015; Olsen, 2001).

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