Chow Mein and Halva in Europe? Consumption Frequency of Different Cuisines in Europe

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Abstract. Due to the globalizing world, nowadays it is not necessary to travel to a given country in order to get acquainted and taste the gastronomic specialties of them. In order to analyze the consumption frequency of different international cuisines and to identify the features of their consumers a questionnaire survey was conducted in seven European countries (Austria, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands and Slovakia). Results of 1731 consumers showed the strong dominance of national cuisines. Italian and Chinese were found to be the most frequently consumed as well as the most admitted ones. Respondents preferring spicy meals chose Chinese, Japanese/Thai or Indian cuisines more frequently. In addition Indian meals are also preferred by respondents showed high willingness to try new or special herbs and spices. Higher consumption frequency of young adults, big city citizens, single households and higher educated participants was found in case of several cuisines. Open-mindedness of young consumers was identified, thus rising popularity and consumption frequency of international cuisines is expected. As appearance and rising consumption popularity of international cuisines will be occurred in the future, nutritional surveys as well as strategies to promote healthy eating and nutritional policies have to take them into consideration.

Keywords: cuisine, consumption frequency, spicy, Italian, Chinese, Europe.

1. Introduction

While in the 1950s the own recipes and distinctive style of cooking characterized the consumption in Europe, in the ‘60s – due to the decreasing unemployment rates in Western Europe – citizens started to flow across the borders for leisure purposes. Thus, newly discovered international dishes appeared on European dinner tables. Furthermore, a large wave of immigration has been started like southern Europeans (e.g. Greeks, Portuguese and Italians) relocating into northern countries like Belgium, Germany and the Netherland, thereby introducing the Mediterranean diet. In addition, Turkish immigrants appeared in Germany, bringing with them their own food traditions, thus the döner kebab was to become one of the nation’s most popular fast food [1]. As a consequence of these, national specialties (like pizza, gyros or Asian dishes) became world-known, and nowadays, due to the globalizing world, other cuisines like Thai, Indian and Mexican captivated Europe, too. Together with the national meals unknown herbs and spices (e.g. saffron, appeared in the national cuisines.

Eating-out is an inseparable inherent of nowadays rushing lifestyle. In the United States around 30% of the consumers eat-out of home several times a week [2], while for example only 27.1% of the British adults consumed their meals not at home [3]. Other studies stated that eating both meals out and take-away meals at home peaked in case of young people [3]-[5]. Spreading of several cuisines like Mexican [6], Thai [7] and also of selected foodstuffs like sushi [8] are summarized by different authors. However, it can be stated that one of the most widespread and worldwide consumed meals are Hamburger – in spite of the fact that it

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appeared first in the 19th or early 20th century – and Italian dishes in Europe. ‘Pizza is both authentically local and universal’ [9].

The aim of the present study was the cognition of the consumption frequency of different international cuisines as well as to try to identify the characteristics of their consumers in Europe.

2. Materials and Methods

In order to achieve our research goal a questionnaire was conducted in seven European countries (Austria, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Netherlands and Slovakia). During the survey seven international cuisines (Chinese, Fast food – referring to the American style foods - Greek, Indian, Italian, Japanese/Thai, Turkish) and also national cuisines consumption frequency were analysed. As Japanese and Thai kitchen is quite rare in Europe these cuisines were asked as a contracted question. Preference of spicy meals and fresh green herbs as well as willingness to try new spices were analysed on a 1-7 Likert scale (1: not typical of me at all; 7: really typical of me). As a result of the data collection 1731 questionnaires were collected in the analysed countries (N_Austria= 262; N_Germany= 263; N_Hungary= 309; N_Ireland= 201; N_Latvia= 242; N_Netherlands= 220; N_Slovakia= 234). In order to avoid the bias of consumers with other nationality than the target country, – presumably having different consumption habits – the questionnaires contained a question regarding the nationality.

Consumption frequency of the selected cuisines was evaluated by the frequency data. Furthermore for the identification of country features one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey HSD post hoc test (p< 0.05 or 0.001) and Chi-squared test (p< 0.05 or 0.001) with the analysis of Cramer’s V (> 0.200) data were done [10]. For the data analysis IBM SPSS Statistics 24. was used.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents by country in percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Austria</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
<th>Latvia</th>
<th>the Netherlands</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 years</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 years</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>31.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 years</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>26.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-59 years</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60 years</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place of residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big city</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small city</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village, other settlements</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of household</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with my partner</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living with my family</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. colleague, sublet)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The highest qualification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>67.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the socio-demographic distribution the majority of the respondents were female in the analysed countries which can be due to the fact that food preparation is more typical of them than of males. More elder (‘45-59 years’) respondents participated in the Austrian and Irish survey, while in the other countries (Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Slovakia and the Netherlands) younger ones.
Inhabitants of big cities dominated in the samples, however in Ireland the majority of the participants were from ‘village or other supplements’ and in the Netherlands from ‘small cities’. Food preparation is less typical in single households, thus more respondents ‘living with a partner/family’ were in the analysed countries’ samples. Members participating in the survey were mainly higher (‘BSc, MSc degree’) and less middle educated (secondary/industrial school/ school leaving examination) (Table 1).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Consumption Frequency of the Analysed Cuisines

Based on the results it can be stated that national cuisines remained the most frequently consumed ones in the analysed countries in spite of the spreading of international cuisines. National dishes are consumed by an outstanding rate of the Dutch participants (91.4%). Beyond that, more than three-quarter of them answered that national meals were consumed more than once a week. Furthermore, high level of Latvian (67.8%), Hungarian (65.3%), Slovakian (65.0%) and Irish (59.2) respondents reported high level of weekly consumption, too. The lowest rates were found in case of Austria (39.3%) and Germany (38.0%).

Even fast foods (e.g. burgers) are one of the most widely spread meals in the world, their consumption frequency was not high in the analysed European countries. The highest weekly consumption rate was identified in Hungary (16.2%), the Netherlands (12.8%), Ireland (11.5%) and in Germany (11.4%), while lower in Austria (6.1%), Latvia (5.0%) and Slovakia (4.3%).

High rate of Dutch participants consumed Italian dishes weekly (72.8%) (37.3% more than once per week), while only 38.8% of the Irish, 33.1% of the Hungarian and 31.1% of the German respondents reported the same. Popularity of the Italian cuisine was the lowest in Austria (20.3%), Latvia (16.5%) and Slovakia (15.4%). Furthermore, it is important to note that only between 7.5% (Ireland) and 0.5% (the Netherlands) of the respondents reported that they had never consumed Italian dishes. High popularity of the Italian cuisine can be due to their easy preparation (e.g. available ingredients) and the variation of the tastes (e.g. pizza). In addition, the rising number of Italian restaurants and take away shops (e.g. pizza slices) as well as the easy availability of the great variety of ready-to-eat meals like chilled or frozen pizza also contribute to the high consumption frequency of Italian dishes. Around a quarter of the Dutch (25.0%) and Irish (24.4%) participants answered that they had consumed weekly Chinese dishes, while this rate was much lower in Latvia (6.6%) and in Slovakia (5.5%).

Turkish dishes were found to be the most frequently consumed in Germany (12.2%), probably due to the high rate of Turkish population [1]. While around three-quarter of the Irish (74.1%) and more than half of the Slovakian participants (58.5%) answered that they had never consumed Turkish meals.

Due to high availability of Greek dishes (e.g. gyros) 12.5% of the Hungarian participants consumed them several times a week, while less than 2% of German and Austrian respondents reported the same. The Greek cuisine was less popular in Ireland where 68.2% of the participants answered that they had never consumed them.

Japanese and Thai dishes were consumed by 17.7% of the Dutch and 11.8% of the German participants. In contrast to them 58.9% of the Hungarian and 56.8% of the Slovakian respondents answered that they had never consume Japanese and Thai meals (Fig. 1).

Spearman’s rank-order correlation showed a strong, positive correlation between the national and the Italian cuisine (p < 0.05), thus consumption of Italian meals is admitted in the analysed countries. The same tendency was identified in case of Chinese cuisine in Austria (r = 0.276, p = 0.000), Germany (r = 0.184, p = 0.003) and Ireland (r = 0.233, p = 0.001). As Dutch participants were found to have the highest preference of national meals, consumption frequency of the analysed cuisines showed negative correlation (the higher the national meals’ consumption, the less the international and vica versa). Statistically significant positive correlation was found between the national and the Turkish meals’ consumption in Germany (r = 0.155, p = 0.012) and between the national and the Fast food consumption frequency in Hungary (r = 0.206, p = 0.000). Further analysis of the correlation data showed that consumers preferring Chinese cuisine liked the meals of Japanese/Thai kitchen, too and vice versa (p< 0.05).
Fig. 1: Consumption frequency of the analysed countries.
3.2. Characterization of the Different Cuisines’ Consumers

As a common feature ANOVA showed that participants who preferred spice meals consumed Chinese, Japanese/Thai and Indian dishes more frequently (Fig. 2). Furthermore, higher consumption frequency of Indian dishes was found in case of consumers who liked trying new spices (Fig. 3). Statistical analysis showed significant connection between the preference of fresh green herbs and the consumption frequency of Italian dishes only in Latvia and in the Netherlands. Thus it can be stated that consumption of Italian dishes is not in line with the preference of fresh green herbs.

Crosstab analysis with the help of socio-demographic features showed (p< 0.05) that consumption frequency of the analysed cuisines was higher in case of participants between the age of 18 and 34 years, mainly in case of Italian dishes. Furthermore, it can be highlighted that consumption of fast food meals was the most typical in case of young respondents (18-24 years).

According to the results consumption frequency of several cuisines was significantly (p< 0.05) higher in big cities (e.g. Chinese in Austria and Latvia; Japanese/Thai: in Austria, Germany and Latvia; Turkish: in Austria, the Netherlands; Indian: in Austria, Germany and the Netherlands). This can be due to the fact that the number and variety of international restaurants are higher in big cities. Higher consumption preference was found in case of single households regarding cuisines like Chinese in Austria, Japanese and Thai kitchen
in Austria, Latvia and Germany as well as Indian and Turkish in the Netherlands. In addition, less frequently consumed cuisines’ dishes was found to be more popular amongst higher educated participants in some cases (Japanese/Thai: Austria and Ireland; Indian: Germany and the Netherlands; Turkish: Austria and Hungary).

4. Conclusion

In spite of the intensive spreading of national cuisines, results of the present study confirmed the undiminished importance of national kitchens. Regarding the international cuisines Italian and Chinese were found to be as the most popular and admitted, while Japanese and Thai as the less ones. According to the results it is clear that consumers preferring spicy dishes consume Chinese, Japanese/Thai and Indian dishes more frequently. International cuisines are consumed by young adults, big city citizens, single households and higher educated respondents. Furthermore, frequent consumption of fast foods was typical in case of young respondents. Open-mindedness of young consumers was identified by the study, thus consumption frequency of the international cuisines will expectedly increase.

In addition results showed that European cuisines are more accepted in Europe; however, consumers of other countries’ cuisines can be identified, too. This progress is supported by the rising number of international kitchen restaurants and by the increasing availability of ready-to-eat foods (e.g. chilled or frozen). As appearance and rising consumption popularity of international cuisines will be occurred in the future, nutritional surveys as well as strategies to promote healthy eating and nutritional policies have to take them into consideration.

However, it is important to note, that even the meals of different countries can be tasted in local restaurants, these dishes are produced according to the ‘tooth’ of the given nation. Thus, the ‘real tastes’ of the nations can be tasted just in the country of origin.

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6. References


