

JULIAN WAWRZYNIAK<sup>1</sup>, KAROLINA JÄDER<sup>1</sup>, GÜNTER SCHADE<sup>2</sup>,  
DETMAR LEITOW<sup>2</sup>

## CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR IN RELATION TO REGIONAL PRODUCTS – RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH IN GERMANY AND POLAND

*From <sup>1</sup>Department of Food Management Economics  
of The August Cieszkowski Agricultural University of Poznań  
and <sup>2</sup>Department of Agricultural Marketing  
of the Humboldt University of Berlin*

**ABSTRACT.** The paper presents the importance of regional origin of food products and its application in offensive strategies. The presumed incompatibility of consumers' attitude and their actual behaviour when purchasing regional products was investigated and also the importance of regional origin of food products for consumers' behaviour in Poznań and Berlin was compared.

**Key words:** theory of attitude, consumers' behaviour, region of origin, regional products, readiness to pay a higher price

### Introduction

The development of the market of food products in Europe is characterised by increasing concentration and saturation as well as competition, whose aim is to drive competitors out of the market. Presumably, as the European Union was extended this competition will be increasing both in the "old" and newly incorporated Member States. On the markets saturated with products, which are overloaded with various information, key information<sup>1</sup> (cues) begins to play crucial functions for consumers' decisions and thus it becomes a significant marketing measure (**Wirthgen** 2003, **Kroeber-Riel** and **Weinberg** 2003). Giving the product's place of origin or manufacture may be such

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<sup>1</sup>Key information is supposed to simplify information processing. Sensibly summarised individual information constitute an entity in replacement of numerous individual pieces of information (**Trommsdorff** 1998).

a cue (**Trommsdorff** 1998). The literature unanimously emphasises the increasing importance of the region and regional origin of food products for consumers' behaviour in the countries of the old European Union<sup>2</sup>. Simultaneously obstacles to the increase in the share of regional food products in the market are observed. Above all, these are higher prices of those products, their insufficient supply and the lack or poorly marked place of origin (**Balling** 1997). In the research conducted so far clients' readiness to pay a higher price for regional products has been found, however, some differences have been observed depending on the analysed region<sup>3</sup>. However, the readiness to pay a higher price for regional products was not confirmed by the empirical research conducted by **Schade** (2001), which analysed clients' behaviour in a purchase place. Therefore, presumably there is a difference between clients' attitudes shown in the research and their actual behaviour in the purchase place or at the purchase moment.

The aim of this research was an attempt to explain this controversial problem whether consumers' behaviour diverges from the declared attitude.

At the beginning of the paper a comparison of the importance of regional origin of products in Poland and Germany was presented. In Poland no research on this problem has been conducted so far, therefore the obtained original results allow comparing them with the papers of international range.

Further parts present the results of the research concerning consumers' attitudes to food products from two different regions of Germany: Brandenburg and Spreewald. Simultaneously, this enabled evaluation of possibilities to use the origin-orientated strategy of sale of food products. Finally, there are results of the research presented, which evaluate the relation of clients' attitude to their behaviour at the moment of purchase.

## The theoretical model of consumers' behaviour

### Neobehaviouristic consumers' behaviour

According to the theory of neobehaviourism consumers' behaviour is the result of effect of two groups of components: active and cognitive. The first group of components influencing people's behaviour includes emotions, motivation and attitudes. The cognitive component, however, includes perception, thinking and learning. All these qualities or components have influence on the reception of information and they influence each other and their effect are people's specific behaviours. The neobehaviouristic model of consumers' behaviour was first used by **Obermiller** and **Spangenberg** (1989) to explain the influence of the product's origin on consumers' behaviour on the market.

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<sup>2</sup>Compare: **Müller** and **Kesselmann** (1996), **Applegate** (1999), **Trognon** (1999), **Bätzing** (2001), **Schade** and **Liedtke** (2000), **van Ittersum** (2003).

<sup>3</sup>According to the research by **Wirthgen et al.** (1999) 24% of the respondents are ready to pay more money for products from the region. **Wolfram** (1997) found readiness to pay a higher price in 15% of the respondents. Detailed answers can be found in **Wirthgen** and **Schmidt** (2000) as well as **von Alvensleben** and **Schrader** (1999).

Above all, the literature confirms the *Country of Origin Effect* (von Alvensleben 2000 a)<sup>4</sup>.

In another paper von Alvensleben (2000 b) stresses the particular importance of the emotional attitude to the region among the criteria influencing consumers' preference for products from the region and then he notes that the condition for purchase of regional products is simultaneous occurrence of three qualities: positive image of the region, resulting from it – positive image of the product and positive, accepted by the consumer qualities of the product<sup>5</sup>.

### Consumers' attitude vs. behaviour

Consumers' attitude is defined as: learnt and relatively permanent readiness of a person for regular more or less positive or negative reaction to the encountered object (Trommsdorff 1998, von Rosenstiel and Neumann 2002).

Von Rosenstiel and Neumann (2002) emphasise that consumers' attitude is the result of the neobehaviouristic model of consumers' behaviour and Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg (2003) add that it is characterised by strong cognitive content and it integrates emotions and motivations simultaneously.

The attitude is characterised by stability and relatively easy measurability, therefore it is more and more frequently used in marketing research.

The opinion orientated towards an object should predict the possible behaviour. However, as results from the research, the attitude does not always correspond to the behaviour.

The scientific dispute over the probable difference between the attitude and behaviour was induced by La Piere (1934)<sup>6</sup>.

The research results obtained so far prove dissimilar differences between consumers' attitude and behaviour. The more factors affecting behaviour are taken into consideration the more likely accurate prediction of the behaviour is.

Because of the multitude of the factors and their dissimilar effect in varying conditions of the environment actual behaviour should not be expected to be identical with the attitude<sup>7</sup>. This discrepancy was not sufficiently confirmed in practice and, for example, Six (1992) points the fact that there are no results of the research done with the

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<sup>4</sup>The *Country of Origin Effect* (COE) means the influence of products' country of origin on consumers' behaviour. The *Region of Origin Effect* presents the same type of influence deriving from regional origin. Basically the results of COE research can be transferred to the regional aspect (compare von Alvensleben 2000 a, van Ittersum 2003).

<sup>5</sup>More elaboration on the subject – compare: von Alvensleben (2000), Wirthgen (2002).

<sup>6</sup>La Piere (1934) found negative attitude to the Chinese in the surveys-interviews made in hotels and restaurants in the USA. However, it almost completely contradicts the friendly reception and service given in those hotels and restaurants to a Chinese couple from the government class.

<sup>7</sup>Empirical results explain that the difference between the attitude and behaviour may be affected by various factors (compare Ajzen 1988) quoted in Six (1992), Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg (2003), Trommsdorff (1998), situational factors: shortage of time, price, weather; behaviour-related factors: difficulty to put the intention into action; attitude-related factors: specific and non-specific intentions, attitudes acquired from experience and deriving from communication; person-related factors: subjective standards, self-assurance.

method of market tests, which would best account for the difference between consumers' attitude and their behaviour on the market.

### Material and research methodology

To accomplish the aims of the paper the necessary empirical information was obtained on the basis of interviews. The interviews in Berlin were made in writing by means of a standard questionnaire. Of the 2,500 questionnaires sent to selected consumers  $n = 440$  and  $n = 450$  of complete and reliable questionnaires were obtained, which were qualified for further analysis.

In order to evaluate consumers' behaviour at the place of purchase in Berlin the method of market test was applied. According to **Berekoven et al.** (1996) the main aim of the market test is to find the cause-and-effect relations.

The idea of the research conducted in Berlin was to check the influence of the analysed factors (price and origin) on the decision to purchase in specific market conditions, however, the tested persons were not informed of the manner and conditions of the conducted research. Therefore, the test can be qualified as an experiment in biotic situation<sup>8</sup>.

Market tests were conducted from 2000 to 2003 with the use of different products in different parts of Berlin. The products were offered with the mark of origin "Brandenburg" and next to it with the mark of origin "Germany". Fundamentally, the test was characterised by the three-phase structure, where in the first phase the regional product was offered with the biggest price difference, in the second phase – with a slightly smaller difference and in the third phase the product from Brandenburg was offered at the same price as the product "from Germany".

The tests in Berlin concerning the behaviour while purchasing products from Brandenburg were made on the group of  $n = 2848$  people with the use of five products.

The research conducted in Berlin concerned specifying the importance of regional origin of food products for Wielkopolska inhabitants. It had the form of a standard phone survey and it was conducted on a representative group of inhabitants of the city of Poznań. Altogether the survey included 450 people.

For attitude measurement **Trommsdorff's** (1975) model was applied:  
Trommsdorff's model

$$A_{ij} = \sum_{k=1}^n |B_{ijk} - I_{ik}|$$

where:

$A_{ij}$  – the person's  $i$  attitude to the evaluated object  $j$ ,

$B_{ij}$  – the influence of the quality  $k$  on the evaluated object  $j$  perceived by the person  $i$ ,

$I_{ik}$  – the influence of the quality  $k$  on the same class object perceived as ideal by the person  $i$ .

<sup>8</sup>For further explanation concerning the procedures during market tests see **Weis** and **Steinmetz** (1995) and **Berekoven et al.** (1996).

The measurement of attitude consists in defining the difference between the evaluation of the object of the opinion *j* (e.g. food products from Brandenburg) and the ideal price of the comparable product (e.g. food products in general). Besides, the tested people are submitted with the listed qualities characterising the object of the opinion. The ideal evaluation is made by defining the importance of the considered qualities. The smaller the difference between the evaluation of the qualities of the considered food products and the ideal evaluation of food products the better regional food products are evaluated in relation to this quality. For measurement of each quality the evaluation scale ranging from 1 (*I fully agree/very important*) to 6 (*I completely reject/absolutely unimportant*) was applied.

The obtained results were presented in tables and illustrated on diagrams.

## Results

### The purchase criteria for food products in Poznań and Berlin

In order to define consumers' preference concerning regional products the importance of the region of origin of the purchased food products was included into the set of other qualities.

Table 1 presents average values of importance of the individual criteria of purchase of food products in Poznań and Berlin.

**Table 1**  
**The importance of criteria for purchasing food products in Berlin and Poznań**  
**Ważność kryteriów zakupu produktów spożywczych w Berlinie i Poznaniu**

Criterion – Kryterium	Berlin (Leitow 2003, n = 440)	Poznań (Jąder 2002, n = 450)
Taste – Smak	1.3 (1)	1.4 (1)
Freshness – Świeżość	1.4 (2)	1.4 (2)
Price – Cena	2.2 (3)	2.4 (3)
The region of origin/from the closer surrounding Region pochodzenia/z bliższego otoczenia	2.8 (4)	3.7 (6)
The country of origin – Kraj pochodzenia	2.9 (5)	3.1 (4)
A trade mark/well known company Marka/znana firma	3.5 (6)	3.4 (5)

The average values of the scale from 1 – very important to 6 – completely unimportant. The scale in Poznań had reverse values, so they were converted to enable comparison.

Średnie wartości skali od 1 – bardzo ważne do 6 – w ogóle nieważne. Skala w Poznaniu miała odwrotne wartości i dla możliwości porównania zostały one przeliczone.

Of the six presented criteria freshness and taste of the purchased food products were considered the two most important qualities to which clients pay particular attention when purchasing both in Poznań and Berlin. Also the price was of similar importance for consumers of both of the tested cities and respondents listed it as the third most important criterion. The region of origin, country of origin or the knowledge of the brand of the product or the company where it was manufactured were respectively of lesser importance to the respondents.

In the case of most of the considered purchase criteria their importance for consumers from Poznań and Berlin was similar. The only exception was the importance of the information about the region of the product's origin. As the conducted research proved consumers from the city of Berlin showed clearly bigger interest in the region from which the food product they purchase comes (average evaluation 2.8) than Poznań inhabitants, who listed this criterion as the least important for selection of the purchase products (average evaluation 3.7). This difference might be explained by the fact that in the case of Poznań inhabitants regional awareness, which manifests itself in the willingness to purchase products originating from the nearest surroundings, has not been so strongly developed yet as in German consumers, whose interest in the regional origin of the purchased products was confirmed before in numerous empirical research.

Analysing the results of the research conducted on the German market in recent years, which confirms a clear increase in consumers' interest in the home origin of the purchased products, it seems that in the future a similar phenomenon might be observed also in the case of Polish consumers.

The evaluation of the discussed criteria is of primary importance for those offering regional products. This means that they must meet the primary criteria affecting the decision about purchase, which were proved in the research, such as *freshness* and *taste*, at least so well or even better than competitive enterprises. Clients' decisions concerning the purchase of a product may also be affected by providing the information about the region from which the product originates, however, simultaneously the primary criteria indicated in the research must be met. Besides, in the longer period of time the region of origin may become an indicator of the product's quality.

### Results of the measurement of attitude

Figure 1 presents the structure of consumers' attitude to food products in three regions subjected to the research. For comparison, the measurements of attitude obtained in the research were referred to **Janßen's** (2002) results, who analysed consumers' opinions concerning the products defined as "German food products".

The surveyed consumers were supposed to evaluate the importance of 14 qualities characterising products coming from the analysed regions. For comparison Figure 1 also presents the ideal evaluation of food products defined on the basis of the importance of the analysed qualities.

In the case of vast majority of the qualities the evaluation of "food products from Spreewald" and "food products from Brandenburg" is closer to the ideal than that of "food products from Germany". Above all this concerns the quality of the product and the character (specificity) of the production process (e.g. *freshness*, *taste*, *healthy*, *ecologically produced*). Products from Brandenburg and especially products from Spreewald also have advantage over the category "food products from Germany" when it comes to

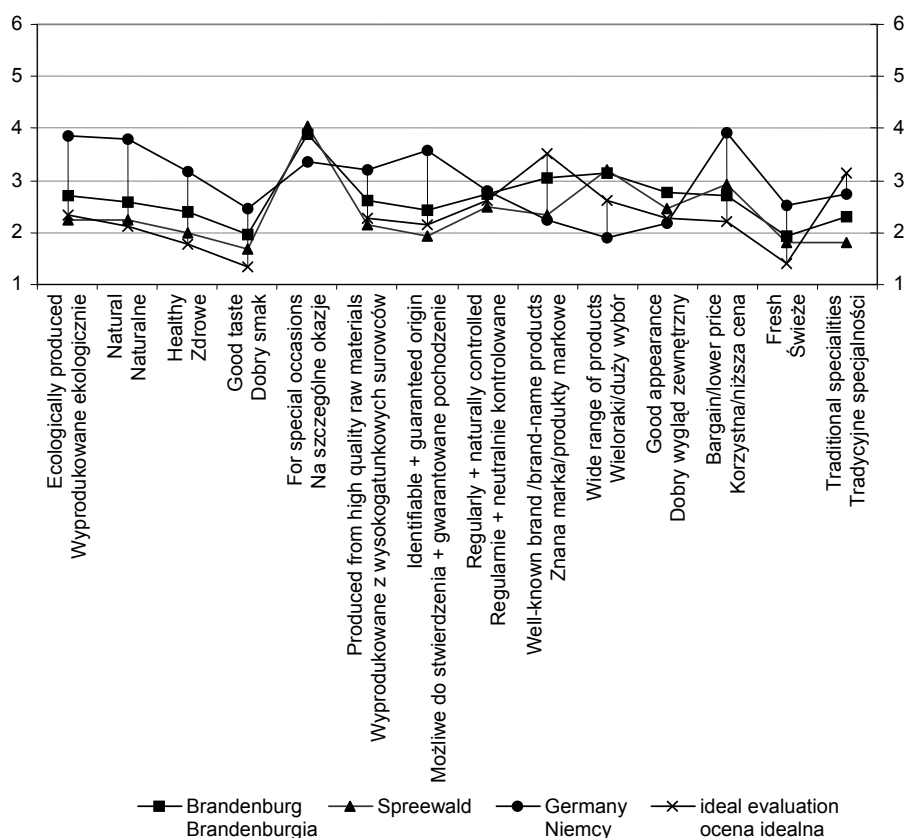


Fig. 1. The attitude to food products from three different geographical regions (evaluated from 1 – I completely agree, to 6 – I definitely reject, and the ideal evaluation of qualities of food products) (on the basis of the investigations by Leitow 2003: n = 440, n = 450, Janßen 2002: n = 295)

Ryc. 1. Nastawienie do produktów spożywczych pochodzących z trzech różnych obszarów geograficznych (ocena od 1 – w pełni się zgadzam do 6 – całkowicie odrzucam oraz ocena idealna cech produktów spożywczych) (na podstawie badań Leitowa 2003: n = 440, n = 450, Janßen 2002: n = 295)

the quality *identifiable and guaranteed origin*. However, products from Brandenburg and Spreewald were evaluated lower than “food products from Germany” in respect of their appearance and sufficient supply (compare *multiple/wide choice, good appearance*). The perception of prices was presented by means of the term *bargain/lower price*. It is noticeable that regional food products are evaluated as better-priced than food products from Germany. In this situation it might seem (presumably) that it might have negative consequences to force through the strategy of high prices for regional products. However, when predicting consumers' behaviour at a sale place it is necessary to simultaneously take into account other factors decisive for purchase.

In Figure 1 next to the actual evaluation of qualities there is also the ideal evaluation of the considered qualities presented, which was used to make differences according to

Trommsdorff's model. Table 2 shows the total of the absolute values of differences for respective geographical regions. Consumers from Berlin display more positive attitude to food products from Spreewald than to what is generally understood by German food products. Also the attitude to products from Brandenburg proved in the research is much more positive than to products from Germany.

**Table 2**

**The evaluation of qualities of food products from different regions of Germany according to Trommsdorff's model (positive differences – 0)**  
**Ocena cech produktów spożywczych pochodzących z różnych regionów Niemiec według modelu Trommsdorffa (pozytywne różnice – 0)**

	Spreewald (Leitow 2003, n = 440)	Brandenburg Brandenburgia (Leitow 2003, n = 440)	Germany Niemcy (Janßen 2002, n = 295)
Evaluation – Ocena	6.63	8.83	14.49
Rang – Miejsce	1	2	3

**Readiness to pay the specified price for regional products vs. actual behaviour when purchasing them**

Figure 2 shows the results evaluating the relations between consumers' readiness for purchase proved in the survey-interview and their behaviour at a purchase place of apples from Brandenburg with different price relations.

The comparison of the survey results and market test, during which the actual behaviour was evaluated, shows that the expected difference between consumers' attitudes and their behaviour was not confirmed. The proved readiness to purchase products from Brandenburg with the price difference was clearly bigger in the market test than in the survey-interview. In the situation when the products' prices were equal in the market test the share of the purchased regional products in the market test was lower than the readiness to purchase products from the region declared in the interview.

However, it must be emphasised that although differences between the attitude and actual behaviour were observed in each of the separate groups differing in price relations, the overall evaluation of the "market test", i.e. calculation of averages of the whole experiment, proved that consumers' actual behaviour does not diverge considerably from the purchase intention indicated in the survey-interview.

Figure 3 shows the share of the decision to purchase all of the tested products from Brandenburg in all of the purchase decisions taken during the market tests depending on the percentage price difference in relation to the non-regional product. Divergence in the regression model can be explained by the type of product and different sale places, where the market tests were made. Besides, other factors may have decided about the purchase, which could not be excluded at the moment the tests were being conducted (e.g. weather-dependent differences in the purchase decision, weather-dependent quality fluctuations).



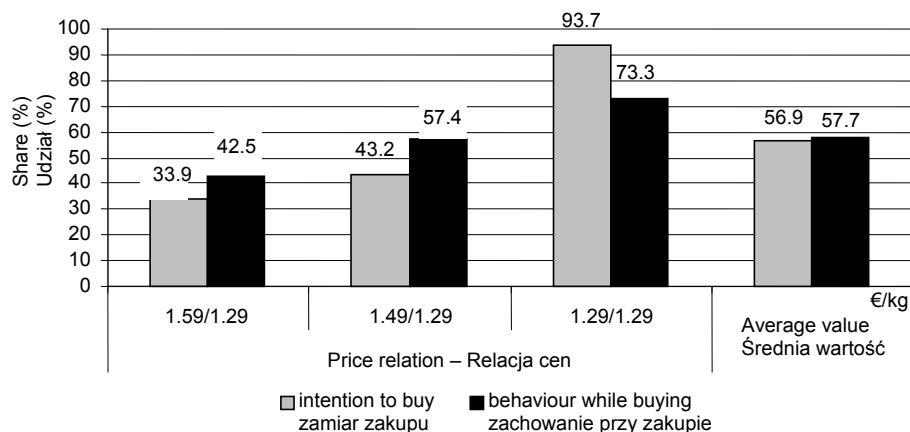


Fig. 2. The share of intention to buy and decision to buy apples from Brandenburg in the total sum of decisions at different price levels in relation to the German product unmarked as regional product in the survey-interview and in the market test at the place of sale (on the basis of the investigations by Leitow 2003: questionnaire-interview, n = 440, Leitow 2002: market test, n = 310)

Ryc. 2. Udział zamiaru zakupu i decyzji zakupu jabłek pochodzących z Brandenburgii w ogólnej sumie decyzji przy różnych stopniach cen w stosunku do niemieckiego produktu nieoznaczonego jako produkt regionalny w ankiecie-wywiadzie i w teście rynkowym na miejscu sprzedaży (na podstawie badań Leitowa 2003: ankieta-wywiad, n = 440, Leitowa 2002: test rynkowy, n = 310)

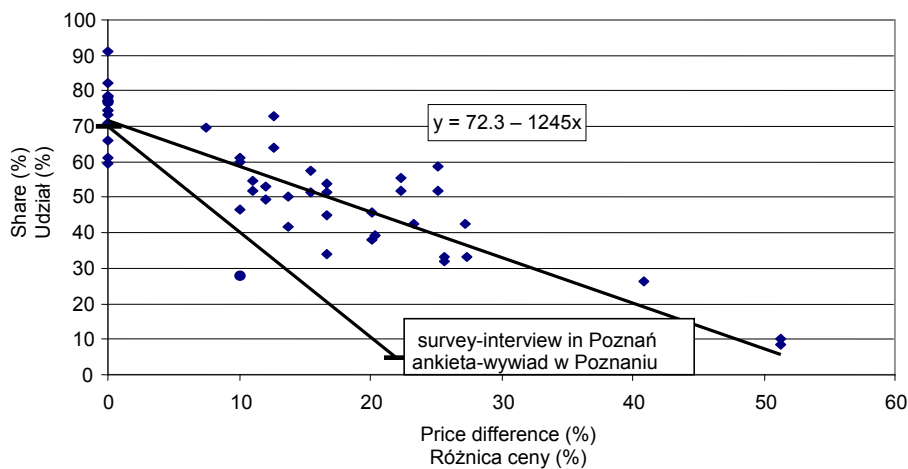


Fig. 3. The share of products from Brandenburg in the total sum of purchase decisions in dependence to the price difference in relation to non-regional German products in comparison with the results of the survey made in Poznań on products from Wielkopolska region (on the basis of the investigations by Leitow 2000-2003: n = 2848, Jäder 2002: n = 450)

Ryc. 3. Udział produktów z Brandenburgii w ogólnej sumie decyzji zakupu w zależności od różnicy ceny w stosunku do nierregionalnych niemieckich produktów w porównaniu z wynikami ankiety przeprowadzonej w Poznaniu na temat produktów z regionu Wielkopolski (na podstawie badań Leitowa 2000-2003: n = 2848, Jäder 2002: n = 450)

The paper proves that among other qualities *the price* is perceived as a very important criterion and the readiness to pay a higher price for products from the region, which was found in the research, turned out to be limited in practice. However, what may significantly contribute to the increase in the share of regional products in the market is meeting the purchase motives, i.e. *freshness* and *quality* of the offered food products, which are expected by consumers. Presumably another equally significant factor influencing clients' decision to purchase regional products may be consequent announcing of the regional origin of food products by the people offering those products at the sale place. However, this factor was not confirmed by the results of the conducted market tests as they were based on the sellers' neutral behaviour.

On the basis of the results of the survey-interview concerning the readiness to pay a higher price for regional products, which was conducted in Poznań and submitted for comparison, it may be found that the readiness of consumers in Poznań to pay a higher price for regional products lies below the price values from the market tests conducted in Berlin.

### Conclusions

1. The fundamental of the strategy of sale of regional products must be their consequent quality orientation. This is confirmed both by the results of the research conducted in Poznań and Berlin. The consumer must be informed of the benefit resulting from the purchase of regional products by means of an appropriate USP<sup>9</sup>.

2. The condition for a successful strategy related with the product's origin is the positive image of the region, which is transferred to the product, and positive qualities of the product.

3. Products originating from different regions are differently perceived by consumers. Food products from the regions of Spreewald and Brandenburg were clearly better evaluated than the products of the "food products from Germany" category, which was also reflected in the decisions at the moment of purchase.

4. There is a divergence between consumers' attitude and their actual behaviour at the moment of purchase. However, the amount of the expected difference was not confirmed by a conducted empirical research.

5. Consumers show readiness to pay a higher price for regional products, which in practice is limited, however. Thus there is freedom of action related to the policy and price, which may be used in the origin-orientated sale strategies of food products.

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<sup>9</sup>Unique selling proposition.

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NASTAWIENIA I ZACHOWANIA KONSUMENTÓW WOBEC PRODUKTÓW  
REGIONALNYCH – WYNIKI BADAŃ EMPIRYCZNYCH W NIEMCZACH  
I W POLSCE

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W pracy przedstawiono znaczenie regionalnego pochodzenia artykułów spożywczych oraz jego wykorzystanie w ofensywnych strategiach.

Na podstawie otrzymanych wyników stwierdzono, iż pierwszorzędnymi kryteriami uwzględnianymi przez konsumentów przy zakupie artykułów spożywczych są smak i świeżość tych produktów, dlatego też podstawą strategii sprzedaży produktów regionalnych musi być konsekwentna orientacja na jakość. Ponadto niezbędnym warunkiem powodzenia owej strategii jest istnienie pozytywnego wizerunku regionu przenoszonego w dalszej kolejności na oferowane produkty.

Oprócz tego w pracy wykazano, że produkty pochodzące z różnych regionów są różnie postrzegane przez konsumentów, a także stwierdzono istniejącą rozbieżność między nastawieniem klientów a ich faktycznym zachowaniem przy zakupie.

Poza tym ustalono, iż konsumenci wykazują gotowość zapłacenia wyższej ceny za produkty regionalne, która w praktyce jest jednak ograniczona, ale która może zostać wykorzystana w strategiach sprzedaży produktów spożywczych zorientowanych na pochodzenie.