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Is 'Cooperative' a Plus Factor in Market Communication?

A Franco-Swedish Comparative Study of Consumer Perceptions

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To cope with food markets at saturation point and growing requirements from both consumers and distributors, agri-food firms have long engaged in product differentiation strategies. In recent times they have emphasised their products' immaterial dimension and brand management. They try to mobilise values designed to reassure consumers and make claims to which consumers are sensitive such as claims about quality, health, the environment and more recently about good citizenship or ethics.

Most cooperatives pull the same levers as non-cooperative firms. However, they make little or nothing of their specific status. Some cautiously announce particular values but seldom refer directly to their cooperative status. Brands openly proclaiming they belong to cooperatives are quite rare.¹ This situation can be explained by various degrees of reticence, generally based on negative a priori judgements ('consumers couldn't care less', 'cooperatives have a negative image') but is rarely supported by actual studies. And yet some experts believe 'cooperatives should communicate around their own value systems'.²

While what might be termed ethical or 'civic' consumption is no longer reserved to a few isolated eccentrics, the aim of this paper is to set out some first thoughts on the well-foundedness of developing market communication for agricultural cooperatives based on their specific form of organisation.

Based on a consumer survey conducted jointly in France and Sweden,³ it sets out to appraise consumer knowledge of and interest in cooperative firms and their activities and to get a clear picture of the image consumers have of these organisations.

We first describe the general framework for the study (part 1), then the method employed (part 2). We then set out the results (part 3) and interpret them (part 4).

1 – Consumer behaviour and product branding

Research on branding and symbolic values started when Levy (1959) criticised the dominant marketing research which focused on products' material attributes and which took it for granted that consumers are rational and economically-minded agents (Bengtsson, 2002). Since the functional attributes of consumer goods have become increasingly similar from one brand to another, consumers need to find attributes other than functional ones to make their choices easier. Its symbolic value could be said to be the essence of a brand's immaterial values.

Brand identity is what the brand owner wants the branded product or products to stand for and to be communicated to consumers. This concept has stirred up much interest in recent years

¹ This is true in France, for example, of Le Guérandais (salt), Even or Paysan Breton (dairy products). The wine industry seems to be an exception, having taken the initiative some years ago of creating a nationwide signature 'Vignerons coopérateurs de France' with regional variations to be affixed on the bottle together with the wine-cellar's name.

² See the paper by J.P. Braly quoting R. Rochefort, General Manager of *Centre de Recherche pour l'étude et l'observation des conditions de vie* - CREDOC (Agrodistribution, n°126, March 2003).

³ The authors gratefully acknowledge receipt of financial support from the Regional Organisation of Western France Farmers Cooperatives (CCAOF) as well as from Arla Foods amba, Division Sweden. Likewise, the authors are thankful to the two MSc students, Peter Brusvall (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences – SLU, Sweden) and Caroline Hervé (Agrocampus Rennes, France) for their work with the collection of data (Brusvall, 2004; Hervé, 2003).

within the psycho-cognitive paradigm and cognitive chain theory (Valette Florence, 1990 and 1993) and Kapferer (1997) developed the concept of the brand-identity prism in order to identify the factors influencing brand image. Melin (1997) discusses how brand identity can help in building up competitive advantages for brands and how it yields what he calls brand capital.

It is in this context, then, that food firms have engaged for several years now in creating immaterial added value by taking account of changes in consumer behaviour. The days when consumers adapted to firms' products seem to be a thing of the past. Since the early 1990s we have been through a 'silent revolution' where consuming is no longer confined to a simple consumer-product relationship (Filser, 1994). Products' physiological functions are no longer enough to explain consumption of them, which is also an act of belonging to a community and participating in social life (Herpin, 2001). Imaginary and immaterial aspects have grafted themselves to functional needs to the point where consumers are dismissive of non-identifiable modern foods which would spell some loss of control over their bodies (Fischler, 1990).

One recent trend is the emergence of more concerned consumers who are demanding, who sanction certain practices but who also say what they want. These 'active consumers' think about how they shop and so reconsider the values characterising the products they purchase (De Broglie, 2002). In other words, they think about the 'intrinsic' (ingredients, nutritional value, etc.) and 'extrinsic' (packing, services, image, etc.) features of products they use daily.

This being so, the firm's structure, the location of manufacture, the origins of the raw materials, the characteristics of the packing materials all become new purchasing criteria for mass consumption products. This new dimension is explained by the connection the consumer establishes between the product and the environment characterising it: employment, pollution, food safety, etc.

The experts take the view that what is termed a 'post modern' model of consumption has arisen over the last decade (Credoc, 2000) characterised by certain features: what lasts has superseded what is ephemeral, recyclable has replaced throw-away, family values are taking over from individual ones, solidarity is supplanting selfishness. These changes reflect the changing social climate and the harnessing of new values (Rochefort, 1995), particularly societal ones (environment, ethics, etc.). Firms are now perceived as 'moral institutions' where the notion of values is integrated (Lipovestky, 1992). Thus consumers want to know what lies behind the brands they choose. These new 'public-minded consumers' express their choices more through their consumption habits. They try to give meaning to their purchases and readily prefer ethical products, products from fair trade or which are environmentally friendly. For the same reasons, consumers can rule out brands which do not take account of the constraints of our society (employment, purchasing power) or which tend to invade our everyday world. Brands can no longer get by with just promotional patter. Values of caring economics or of social concern have become significant criteria and a survey of French consumers shows that food products are among those most directly concerned by these approaches⁴ (Bigot, 2002).

⁴ More than 45 per cent of respondents think it is important for firms to have civic commitments in the food sector (less than 20 per cent in all other sectors suggested: textiles and clothing, pharmaceuticals, power, automobile industry, etc.).

This is why the advantage given to firms which are respectful of society's values, termed the 'no logo effect' has become a reality. Half of the French population is reportedly ready to buy products from firms which show regard for social or environmental values, and, where need be, to boycott firms failing to uphold these values (Chauveau, 2003).

As affectivity becomes a key factor in marketing products and one to which consumers are increasingly sensitive, firms are looking at these new approaches. Awareness of this has led firms to be more transparent and to provide more information about their products. They now readily speak of 'ethical marketing' as an extension of 'relational marketing' (Gatfaoui and Lavorata, 2001) and the major multinationals in the sector have repositioned their brands in line with more environmentally-friendly and socially engaged approaches.

'Corporate communication' is the new credo of these industries as a positioning instrument which can take advantage of the firm's global image for its products (Raes, 2003). The ethical strategies of these firms become instruments for extending market power and creating added value on the basis of brands.

The study we conducted is part of this general framework and aims to question the impact of these changes on the brand strategies of farmers cooperatives and the possibility they have of utilising their specific form of organisation to bolster their brand identity. This involves answering four questions: do consumer know cooperatives; do they make distinctions with products made by non-cooperative firms; to what extent are they sensitive to this argument; what communication levers would need to be pulled to this end, given their perceptions of cooperatives. In the absence of any recent studies of the topic, a special consumer survey was conducted.

2 – Methodology

A survey was conducted in 2003, comprising interviews with a total of 782 consumers in three different cities. One group (260 consumers) was interviewed in Paris, and two other groups in medium-sized university cities – Rennes in Western France (288 consumers) and Uppsala in Sweden (234 consumers). Rennes lies in a region with a strong agricultural and agri-food tradition mostly for animal production (especially milk and meat). Uppsala is located in densely populated mid-Sweden and surrounded by arable land with crop production and some animal husbandry.

Students interviewed consumers out shopping in supermarkets and shopping malls or waiting at railway stations. Data were processed with SPAD (Signalling Pathway Database) software using multivariate analysis methods mainly (principal components analysis and cluster analysis).

The sample was based on the quota method using three criteria: geographical location, age, and sex (table 1). Allowance was made for the fact that it is mostly women who shop for groceries.

Table 1: Quota distribution in the sample make-up

Location		Age		Sex	
Paris (F)	33%	15 – 30 years	33%	Women	65%
Rennes (F)	33%	31 – 50 years	33%	Men	35%
Uppsala (S)	33%	+ 51 years	33%		
	100%		100%		100%

The questionnaire was divided into three parts:

A. A spontaneous approach to consumers' perception of cooperatives.

Respondents were asked to give from three to five cooperative *names of agricultural cooperative enterprises* and three to five *names of brands* marketed by cooperatives. No aid was given to facilitate the respondents' recall.

In addition, for each country, consumers were asked to indicate which among a list of 14 brand names⁵ are from cooperatives or from non-cooperative firms. The brand names listed belong to a variety of food industries: dairy products, meat, cooked pork meats, eggs, vegetables, etc. For comparative purposes data from France and Sweden were summarised as quantitative indicators.⁶

B. A guided approach to the perception of cooperatives

Consumers were asked 16 questions about their attitudes to cooperatives measured on Likert scales, including questions about 'willingness to pay' (appendix 1).

The questions addressed various facets of cooperatives in contrast to non-cooperative firms. Four domains were covered: cooperative values, regional and local connections, attributes of the processing activity, and product quality. Consumers were also asked to state their opinions about purchasing products made by cooperatives.

Lastly there were four questions about consumers' willingness to pay 20% more for products with specific characteristics in respect of payments to farmer-members, employment, environmental protection, and the geographical location of decision-making power.

C. Respondents' socio-occupational characteristics (age; sex; socio-professional category; home area; urban, rural or farming background).

The overall sample structure complied with the quotas in terms of these characteristics (appendix 2). The population was mostly of town-dwellers (73%) and of urban background for the most part⁷ (54%). Some 16% of the sample was from a farming background and 30% from a rural, non-farming background.

⁵ For France, 7 brands from cooperative firms: Yoplait, Matines, Paysan Breton, D'Aucy, Le Guérandais, Florette, Loué; 7 brands from non cooperative firms: Fleury Michon, Tipiak, Hénaff, Bonduelle, Père Dodu, Président, Danone. For Sweden: 7 brands from cooperative firms: Yoggi, Kronägg, Ostkompaniet, Arla, Skogaholms, Scan, Kungsörnen; 7 brands from non cooperative firms: Kronfågel, Swegro, Carlshamn, Pågens, Finax, Pastejköket, Findus.

⁶ Number of names given, number of correct names given, percentage of correct names given; number of brands given, number of correct brands given, percentage of correct brands given; number of brands known out of the 14, number of brands correctly identified out of the 14, percentage of brands correctly identified.

⁷ More than 5000 inhabitants.

Compared with the French population overall⁸, samples from both French cities contained a far higher proportion of women (quota set), were markedly younger, belonged to higher socio-occupational categories and included more people in the working population. Interviewees in Uppsala consisted of younger persons and somewhat more women, but most of all they were better educated than Swedes in general.

Each subpopulation of respondents had characteristics significantly different from the others (table 2):

- Paris typically had a town-dwelling population, from urban backgrounds, made up more specifically of managerial staff with rather poor unprompted knowledge of agricultural cooperatives. It had significantly fewer students and other occupations than the other two subpopulations.
- The Rennes population typically lived in the country, was from rural or farming backgrounds, of average age, in intermediate occupations. This was without contest the subpopulation with the best spontaneous knowledge of cooperatives (appendix 3).
- The respondent population in Uppsala was mainly of town dwellers with more students, engineering workers and others than in Paris or Rennes. They had a comparatively good knowledge of cooperatives, better than the Parisians but not as good as people from Rennes.

Table 2: Main significant* features of each respondent population

Positively correlated characteristics (+)	Negatively correlated characteristics (-)
Paris (F)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - town dwellers - managerial staff - urban background 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - country dwellers - students, other occupations - rural and farming backgrounds
Cooperative knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No names of cooperatives and cooperative brands given 	Cooperative knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - percentage of correct cooperative names given - percentage of correct cooperative brands given
Rennes (F)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - country dwellers - administrative staff, manual workers - rural and farming backgrounds - 31 – 50 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - town dwellers - other occupations - urban background - + 51 years
Cooperative knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - percentage of correct cooperative names given - percentage of correct cooperative brands given - larger number of correct cooperative names given - larger number of cooperative brands given (correct or incorrect) - larger number of the 14 brands correctly identified 	Cooperative knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No names of cooperatives and cooperative brands given
Uppsala (F)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - town dwellers - students, engineers, other occupations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - country dwellers - managerial, teachers, clerical, factory workers - 31 – 50 years old
Cooperative knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - percentage of correct brands given - larger number of cooperative names given (correct or incorrect) 	Cooperative knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - percentage of 14 brands correctly identified - no cooperative brands given

* p-value < 5%

⁸ French work survey, March 2001: INSEE Résultats n°177-178, July 2001.

3 – Findings

Three points are analysed more closely. First we investigate consumer conceptions of agricultural cooperatives in order to identify any regional differences. We next try to identify different categories within the population to determine potentially worthwhile marketing targets. Finally we see to what extent behaviour varies according to the various socio-occupational characteristics.

3.1 - Consumer representations of cooperatives (table 3)

All three samples have an overall positive attitude to products from cooperative firms. The respondents think that these are of better quality (Q1) (80% positive responses – 5% negative responses) and they are no more expensive than other products (Q6) (50/24). The Parisian response is, however, less clear-cut. These two questions are the only ones where the responses from all three samples converge. Despite their positive perception consumers do not have specific preferences for such products, particularly in Uppsala (where there is a majority opinion 51/23) and to a lesser extent in Rennes (40/25). Parisians are more inclined to be persuaded (28/39) even if this is not a majority opinion.

Most consumers in France (Paris and Rennes) think cooperatives make products that are typical of their region (Q5) (Paris: 77/9 – Rennes: 71/18) while the opposite opinion prevails in Uppsala (24/51). Likewise, most French respondents believe cooperatives provide lasting job security in their home regions (Q4) (Paris: 67/13 – Rennes: 63/15) while consumers in Uppsala are doubtful or even disagree (32/30/39). The position is comparable in respect of cooperatives' ability to protect small farmers (Q9) although there is greater indecision among Swedish respondents on this point (34/22/34). Opinions are less clear cut, however, on cooperatives' ability to pay farmers more: 37% of respondents disagree that cooperatives do not pay farmers more (26 % agree).

In Uppsala (11/73) and to a lesser extent in Rennes (21/51), the majority of consumers disagree that cooperatives produce handmade products (Q 10) whereas Parisians tend to agree with this assertion (45/32). For a range of other questions consumers' responses remain favourable but are not majority views in the population.

Thus, except for Paris where it is a majority opinion (57/17), consumers think cooperatives are concerned about environmental issues (Q 12), in Rennes (42/27) and in Uppsala, although a fraction of this population expresses some doubt (36/38/26). Likewise, French respondents tend to trust products made by cooperatives (Q7) (Paris: 49/17 – Rennes: 45/25) while Swedish respondents are uncertain (38/25/37). While Swedish respondents are in doubt (34/33/32), French respondents and especially those in Rennes think working conditions and pay are not better in cooperatives (Rennes: 50/21 – Paris 39/45/16). Finally, French and particularly Parisian respondents (Paris: 52/25 – Rennes: 41/34) think cooperatives make products that are not significantly processed, for example few value-added products (Q 3) whereas Swedish respondents disagree (21/44).

Table 3: Breakdown of responses (in %) to the 18 questions (overall population) (see appendix 1)

Questions	Disagree entirely (-)	Disagree rather (-)	Largely agree	Agree rather (+)	Agree entirely (+)	Total	Significant* differences from average
Q1	46	34	15	4	1	100	
Q2	18	22	31	23	6	100	Paris +; Uppsala (-)
Q3	14	20	24	34	8	100	Paris +; Uppsala (-)
Q5	9	15	16	41	19	100	Paris +; Rennes +; Uppsala -
Q6	17	33	26	20	4	100	Paris +
Q7	6	20	26	36	12	100	Paris +; Uppsala (-)
Q8	7	15	36	29	13	100	Rennes +; Uppsala (-)
Q9	8	11	17	44	20	100	Paris +; Uppsala (-)
Q10	25	26	21	22	6	100	Paris +; Uppsala (-)
Q11	10	27	37	21	5	100	
Q12	9	14	31	32	13	100	Rennes (-); Paris +
Willingness to pay 20 % more:							
Q13	14	20	24	34	8	100	
Q14	10	15	21	33	21	100	Rennes +; Uppsala (-)
Q15	6	12	19	38	25	100	Uppsala (-)
Q16	12	20	25	29	14	100	

* p-value < 5%.

On the questions about willingness to pay 20% more for a product made by a firm observing certain social values, it appears that only environmental issues (Q15) motivate the majority of the population in the three cities, even if a significant percentage (28%) of Uppsala respondents are against. Except for the final question (Q16), the majority of French respondents are generally prepared to pay more for products (Q14: Rennes: 63/18 – Paris: 58/20 – Uppsala: 38/39) (Q13: Rennes: 53/27 – Paris: 50/29 – Uppsala: 21/45). Swedish respondents are less attentive to employment and farmers' interests. While there is a hierarchy of criteria in France in favour of the environment, employment, farmers and local interests, this is markedly different in Uppsala where local interests seem more important (second position) and farmers' interests come last.

3.2 – Identification of various target groups

To go beyond an analysis of the average overall population and to take account of the complexity of the study sample, a cluster analysis was conducted for responses to some questions (Q1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11), the others being considered illustrative variables (as with socio-occupational characteristics).

A division into four categories was examined with the following characteristics (table 4):

Category 1: Idealists (279 respondents, 35.5% of the total population)

This is the category of *idealistic consumers* who have a positive vision of cooperatives in all respects and who agreed with the questions asked. This is a French population (92% of respondents in this category) which does not have good unprompted knowledge of cooperatives (e.g. more than half of respondents failed to identify correct cooperative names and brands). They consider cooperatives make products that are not significantly processed,

are handmade, typical of their region of origin, of better quality, which they can trust and which they are prepared to buy preferentially even if they think they are more expensive. Cost is not an issue and overall they are willing to pay more if manufacturers give them certain guarantees (environment, employment, local decision-making). They think cooperatives are particularly alert to environmental issues, provide guarantees for regional employment and better protect small farmers. The only negative point is that they do not think cooperatives provide any better pay and working conditions for their employees.

Category 2: Assenters (151 respondents, 19.3% of the total population)

This category of consumers does not have any specific socio-occupational characteristics. Overall they are *trusting* of cooperatives. Products made by cooperatives are better quality, typical of the region and involve some degree of processing (difference with category 1). Respondents trust these products and are ready to buy them. Cooperatives protect small producers, pay them better and are concerned about the environment. Similarly they guarantee regional employment and this population is ready to pay more to this end.

Category 3: Detractors (165 respondents, 21.1% of the total population)

This third category, which includes more men, groups consumers with a *negative view* of cooperatives. They see cooperatives as making products of inferior quality, in which they place no trust, and which they are not prepared to buy preferentially. These products are neither handmade nor typical of a region. Cooperatives do not pay farmers more nor protect them any better. They are not specially attentive to environmental issues and do not guarantee regional employment. These consumers are not prepared to pay more for products made by firms which guarantee regional employment and keep decision-making power in the local area.

Category 4: Doubters (187 respondents, 23.9% of the total population)

This final category includes for more than 60% respondents from Uppsala and it has significantly more engineering workers and fewer managerial staff than the others. It includes individuals with a *divided view* of cooperatives and they tend to disagree with the questions asked. They consider the products to be of better quality even if paradoxically they are not ready to trust them and the products are not more expensive. Similarly they think pay and working conditions for employees and farmers are somewhat better.

However, they are not prepared to buy cooperative products preferentially. They do not believe that cooperatives produce handmade products, which are typical of a region or not significantly processed. For these respondents, cooperatives do not protect small producers any better, are not particularly concerned about environmental issues and do not guarantee local employment. Likewise they are not willing to pay more to encourage firms, which take account of environmental issues or maintain decision-making power locally.

Table 4: Main features of the four target populations

	Idealists	Assenters	Detractors	Doubters
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
	%	%	%	%
Significant questions*				
Q1	-	-	+	-
Q2	+	+	-	-
Q3	+	-		-
Q4	+	+	-	-
Q5	+	+	-	-
Q6	+			-
Q7	+	+	-	-
Q8	+			-
Q9	+	+	-	-
Q10	+		-	-
Q11		-	+	-
Q12	+	+	-	-
Q13				
Q14	+	+	-	-
Q15	+			-
Q16	+		-	-
Coop knowledge	No cooperative names or brands given + Percentage of correct cooperative brands given (-)		No correct cooperative brands given (-)	No cooperative names or brands given (-)
City	Paris + Rennes + Uppsala (-)			Uppsala + Paris (-) Rennes (-)
Sex			Male + Female (-)	
Occupation				Engineering workers + Managerial staff (-)

* p-value < 5%

3.3 – Consumer attitudes by socio-occupational category

Table 5 shows the significant questions for each socio-occupational category studied. Analysis of the table shows that perception of cooperatives is not determined by simple socio-occupational category. Unlike the home city (see above), most of these characters do not significantly affect the responses. The questions which appear most dependent on these parameters are the perception of employees' pay and working conditions (Q8) (effects of sex, age, home area, family background, occupation), the cost of products made by cooperatives (Q6) (age, home area, family background and occupation), whether a cooperative guarantees employment (Q4) (sex, family background, occupation), and willingness to pay for job security (Q14) (home area, family background, occupation).

Conversely characteristics related to the perception of the product and the act of purchasing do not seem to be significantly affected by these simple factors (individually considered).

Table 5: Main significant* questions for each socio-occupational category

	Positive link (+)	Negative link (-)
Sex (%):		
- male	Q8	Q4, Q9, Q12
- female	Q4, Q9, Q12	Q8
Age (%):		
- 15-30 years		Q2, Q8
- 31-50 years		Q12
- + 50 years	Q7, Q8, Q12	Q6
Home area (%):		
- town	Q6, Q10	Q8, Q14
- country	Q8, Q14	Q6, Q10
Family background (%):		
- urban	Q9	Q3, Q5, Q8
- rural	Q4, Q14	
- farming	Q3, Q5, Q6, Q8	
Occupation (%):		
- Farmer	-	-
- Engineering workers	-	Q4, Q5, Q9, Q10, Q11
- Shopkeeper and trades people	-	-
- Managerial staff	Q8, Q9	-
- Administrative staff	Q4, Q6, Q14	-
- Teacher	Q1, Q13, Q14	-
- Student	-	Q2, Q4, Q8, Q14
- Manual worker	-	Q12, Q13, Q14, Q16
- Homemaker with children	Q1	-
- Liberal professions	-	Q3, Q4, Q16
- Retired	Q4, Q12	Q1, Q6, Q11
- Unemployed	Q7	-
- Other	Q15, Q16	Q5

* p-value < 5%

4 – Interpretation of the findings

The purpose of this study was to appraise the image consumers have of farmers cooperatives and provide grounds for thinking about whether there is scope to turn to account any reference to their specific status in their communication policy.

Various conclusions have been brought out:

- Consumers overall have a rather positive perception of cooperatives. However, this conclusion must be tempered in three respects. As generally confirmed in other studies on food, consumers are a heterogeneous group. Moreover, a non-negligible fraction of them have a negative perception of cooperatives. The people who are most sensitive to the 'cooperative' argument are not those who know most about them and their interest in this type of organisation often stems from an idealised vision which is not necessarily attuned to what these firms are really like. Lastly, while the positive perception mainly concerns products (price, quality), it is not reflected by any special propensity to purchase this type of product. This attitude is probably to be related to consumers' only slight involvement in the act of

purchasing most foodstuffs, a behaviour which is particularly difficult to manage for a brand (Bozzo et al., 2003).

- While some points of convergence arise between the three samples, the Uppsala population generally expresses less clear cut opinions and is less sure of its judgements. Its position is significantly more marked on the lack of preference when purchasing, on the fact that products do not cost more, and on a generally more industrial vision of cooperatives. A plausible explanation may be the structural attributes that many Swedish agricultural cooperatives adopted as a result of the former national agricultural policy – market dominating firms are often looked upon with scepticism by consumers. Parisians, by contrast, seem more sensitive to the cooperative argument and generally have a more positive vision, even if these opinions are based on more debatable perception and knowledge of what cooperatives are really like (handmade products, typical of a region, etc.).

- Cooperatives' specific values (mutualism, solidarity, equity, equality, promotion of people) do not seem decisive in consumers' perception of this type of organisation. Consumers put little emphasis on these factors when characterising these firms. These values therefore do not seem to contribute significantly to customer-based brand equity in the sense of Aaker (1996). Consumers seem more sensitive to more generic societal values which are not specific to this kind of organisation (quality, environmental protection, etc.) and which are part of the relationship of trust established with the product. However, these dimensions cannot be the source of any specific distinct advantage, even if cooperatives may be well placed to put these arguments forward, insofar as IOFs can also develop comparable strategies.

- The determinants of consumer behaviour are complex and cannot be brought down to simple criteria like age, sex or socio-occupational category. These parameters are generally only significantly involved in explaining certain economic dimensions⁹ requiring some form of knowledge or expertise before any judgment can be made on the matter. Conversely, the marked significance of the survey city in explaining behaviour shows that consumers' experience and local reference framework is important in the way they perceive cooperatives. These various factors confirm the interest of recent studies on marketing which place the emphasis on lifestyle, values or consumers' temperament (Capelli, 2002) and their necessary transposition in terms of the operational segmentation of markets (Salles, 2003).

In conclusion, this study confirms consumers' interest in certain product characteristics (local area, quality, etc.) and the well-foundedness of cooperatives in turning to account their specific relations with the farming sector (e.g. in terms of traceability). However, consumer involvement with brands making use of the cooperative image remains to be built up. The idea of making use of cooperatives' specific values in constructing firm-based brand equity is not to be ruled out but must be considered with caution.

Such a strategy presupposes taking the risk of de-idealising or disappointing some a priori favourable categories of consumers. It would also mean making efforts in terms of developing specific awareness (probably in a framework of collective promotion) of values and forms of governance of cooperatives which consumers do not seem to spontaneously take into account. Moreover, it has been shown in the case of butter that the argument about the type of manufacturer is not a major determinant in the purchasing act and that the consumer remains

⁹ Survey questions Q4, Q6, Q8 and Q14.

sensitive above all to more classical criteria of price or geographical provenance (Ruffio et al., 2004).

Lastly it is undoubtedly necessary too to make allowance for the diversity in cooperatives themselves, in the type of activities they are involved in, in their size or their local and territorial integration. Product differentiation strategies cannot be the same for industrial groups with strong national or international brands and an extended range of industrial products and for local cooperatives whose products are highly typical and even handmade. In the first instance, the cooperative reference can probably be no more than a supplementary factor in building up the brand's identity whereas it may be a major feature in the second instance, as is confirmed for that matter by the recent communication efforts made by some small French cooperatives.

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Appendix 1: List of guided questions

	Questions
1	Products made by cooperatives are of inferior quality
2	If there is a product from a cooperative available, I prefer to buy that product
3	Cooperatives mainly produce food that is not significantly processed (sugar, milk, flour)
4	Cooperatives guarantee long-term job security in the community
5	Cooperatives mainly produce food that is typically from the community
6	Food products from cooperatives are more expensive for consumers
7	I trust food products from cooperatives more (food safety)
8	Working conditions and wages are not better in cooperatives
9	Cooperatives protect small farmers better
10	Cooperatives produce mainly handmade products
11	Cooperatives do not pay higher prices to farmer members for their output
12	Cooperatives do not pay special care to environmental issues
	Are you willing to pay 20% more if the company making the product:
13	- pays a higher price to farmers and protects small producers
14	- secures jobs in the community in the long run
15	- particularly cares about environmental issues
16	- is a firm where decision-making power is anchored locally.

Appendix 2: Main features of the consumer samples

	Paris	Rennes	Uppsala	Total
Number of consumers	260	288	234	782
Sex (%):				
- male	35	35	39	36
- female	65	65	61	64
Age (%):				
- 15-30 years	28	32	37	32
- 31-50 years	36	41*	31*	37
- + 50 years	36	27*	32	31
Home area (%):				
- town	87*	56*	78*	73
- country	13*	44*	22*	27
Family background (%):				
- urban	66*	38*	59	54
- rural	25*	37*	27	30
- farming	9*	25*	14	16
Occupation (%):				
- Farmer	0	2	3	2
- Engineering worker	5	5	12*	7
- Shopkeeper and trades person	5	3	2	4
- Managerial staff	19*	8	1*	9
- Administrative staff	18	32*	12*	21
- Teacher	6	6	2*	5
- Student	13*	16	28*	18
- Manual worker	3	7*	0*	4
- Homemaker with children	3	3	2	3
- Liberal profession	4	3	5	4
- Retired	13	10	10	11
- Unemployed	5	2	3	3
- Other	6*	3*	20*	9
Cooperative knowledge:				
- percentage of correct cooperative names given	11.7*	62.8*	39.1	38.7
- percentage of correct cooperative brands given	9.4*	41.6*	43.5*	31.5
- percentage of the 14 brands correctly identified	65.6	66.0	62.8*	64.9

* p-value < 5%

Appendix 3: Spontaneous knowledge of the cooperatives (some empirical results)

Number of correct answers to the question 'give 3-5 names of cooperative firms'

	Rennes	Paris	Uppsala
No answer	26%*	73%	16%
No correct answer	4%	13%	17%
1 correct coop name	24%	10%	40%
2 correct coop names	20%	3%	20%
3 correct coop names	14%	1%	7%
4 correct coop names	7%	0%	0%
5 correct coop names	5%	0%	0%
	100%	100%	100%

*26% of the Rennes sample did not give any coop name at all.

Number of correct answers to the question 'give 3-5 names of cooperative brands'

	Rennes	Paris	Uppsala
No answer	36%	71%	30%
No correct answer	8%	16%	11%
1 correct coop brand name	29%	9%	24%
2 correct coop brand names	18%	3%	23%
3 correct coop brand names	7%	1%	12%
4 correct coop brand names	1%	0%	0%
5 correct coop brand names	0%	0%	0%
	100%	100%	100%

*36% of the Rennes sample did not give any brand name at all.

Recognition of the 14 brands: breakdown (%) of correct answers

	Number of correct answers														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
Rennes	0	0	0	1	5	5	11*	17	20	20	12	8	1	0	100
Paris	0	0	1	2	6	6	11	14	23	20	12	4	1	0	100
Uppsala	1	2	5	5	20	20	19	7	10	6	4	1	0	0	100

* 11% of the Rennes sample correctly identified 7 brands (coop and non-coop brands)

