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Social representations of craft food products in three European countries

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing interest in craft food products (CFPs), their social representation remains a conundrum. In light of social representation theory, this study aims to understand the meaning of CFPs in three different countries.

Data were collected in Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom from 458 interviewees between November 2018 and January 2019. Using a free word association approach, participants had to state the first four words that came into their mind using "craft food products" as inductor terms. Afterwards, interviewees had to rank the four evoked words based on their importance and rate the valence of each of them. Data were subjected to textual and prototypical analysis to identify the core and peripheral areas of the concept investigated. The occurrence of associations' frequencies was analysed through correspondence analysis to find possible differences according to age groups.

Results showed that the social representation of the CFPs differs across cultures. The British saw them as *luxury foods* or *gourmet*. Germans equated them to *natural foods* relying more on institutional signals. Italians, instead, conceived of them as *genuine/ authentic foods* in which human intervention does not alter the sensorial aspects of the ingredients. Furthermore, results showed that the mental representation of the CFPs is fragile and substantially exposed to the deceptive marketing practices known as "craftwashing".

Keywords – Craft food products; Social representation; Word association; Italy; Germany; United Kingdom.

Paper type - Full-length articles.

1. Introduction

Craft food products, including drinks (referred to here as CFPs), have attracted widespread interest among consumers during the past few years. Notwithstanding that the term "craft" has dramatically increased in frequency in marketing materials, CFPs still lack a precise and complete definition (The School Of Artisan Food, 2018). For this reason, there is a risk that the term "craft" in the food and beverage sector may appear only to be a fad in the eyes of consumers, thus leading to confusion over the real essence of the term CFP.

The lack of an official "artisan" certification has prompted mass-marketing firms in the food and beverage sector to ride the wave of "craft" products by co-opting terms such as "artisan". For instance, McDonalds introduced the "Artisan Grilled Chicken Sandwich" to keep up with fast-growing competitors like Shake Shack. Domino's has released the "Artisan Pizza", demonstrating that even if they are not artisans, it does not mean that they cannot make artisan pizza or personally sign the "handmade" pizza box. Moving to the drinks sector, PepsiCo released a "craft soda" sold in a glass bottle with the notation "Honor in Craft". Large brewing organisations have purchased many small scale and independent breweries, raising the question of whether these beers can still be defined as craft beers. Grom, an Italian premium ice cream chain that Unilever bought, was banned by the Codacons (one the most active consumer associations in Italy) from using the term "artisanal" to label its products; afterwards, the company relabelled their ice-cream jars with "gelato like it used to be made".

Thus, the risk is that what is labelled as "hand-crafted" is often just "*crafty* marketing" (Morgan et al., 2020), a phenomenon that relies on the use of deceptive marketing practices by industrial firms in the food and beverage sector that introduce "*craft-like*"

brands. These deceptive marketing practices, also known as "*craftwashing*", have induced countries to promulgate specific regulations on CFPs to preserve local small-scale production and processing of high-quality traditional CFPs, as well as to avoid a misunderstanding of the concept of "craft" among consumers and producers. Nevertheless, previous studies suggested that the "patchwork character" of international norms regarding CFPs leads to questions of whether consumers make a conscious choice when they purchase CFPs, and what are the social constructions of meanings attached to CFPs (Rivaroli, Baldi, et al., 2020). According to Lo Monaco & Bonetto (2019), how the collective representations about food are socially constructed and what constitutes these representations are questions that have been little addressed in food market studies. Moreover, how nations' cultures might interact with food's social representation is a crucial question yet underexplored.

Many studies in the field of consumers' behaviour and preferences focus on specific CFPs such as craft beer more than other (see, for example, Carbone & Quici, 2020; Garavaglia, 2020; Garavaglia & Swinnen, 2018; Rivaroli, Lindenmeier, et al., 2020, among others), also because this beverage category is experiencing a significant growth in recent years. Among them, Garavaglia & Mussini (2020) pointed out the relevance of providing evidence on the consumer perception of "craft" food products, including but not limiting to craft beer, and extending the analysis to other countries, highlighting that this is yet an under studied issue.

In light of these considerations, in this study, the rank-frequency method was adopted for conducting the prototypical analysis of the social representations (referred to here as SRs) of CFPs, and conceived as a foodstuffs category in line with the Garavaglia & Mussini's (2020) suggestion. To the best of our knowledge, there is not yet a cross-national analysis

of the SRs of CFPs as here conceived, between European countries, and with a focus on specific age groups. Thus, considering the explorative nature of this study, it tries to fill this gap in the literature by producing knowledge to understand what is behind the term "craft food products" in Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom and whether some generational differences exist. These three countries have been frequently used to interpret the European cross-national differences in the domain of consumers' perceptions of foods (see, for example, Grunert et al., 2001, Onwezen et al., 2012, among others). Notably, considering that each nation has its regional specialities and culinary traditions, and that food from a specific region is a social expression of a specific area (Lupton, 1994; Mason & Brown, 1999), Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom are often considered to explore the differences between northern, central and southern European or Mediterranean countries. Furthermore, the focus on specific age groups such as Boomers, Gen-Xers, Gen-Yers and GenZ-ers has been frequently used in food research to gain a finer-grained vision of the phenomenon investigated and to explore consistent patterns in values, thoughts, attitudes and behaviours among each age group members (see, for example, Fasanelli et al., 2020; Fibri & Frøst, 2020, among others). According to Mannheim (1952), cohorts have a shared memory of significant events that shape their culture, attitudes and behaviours, and these are maintained throughout the lifespan of a generation.

In this study, we anticipated finding within CFPs, social representation differences among Italian, German and British participants, allowing anexploration of cultural and generational differences among northern, central and southern European countries. We assume that the SR of CFPs in Italy is more based on foods' authenticity, here conceived as genuine food reflecting the connectedness with craftsmen's skills and local culinary

traditions, and as food being handmade with natural ingredients (Cohen, 1988). We suppose that this concept of CFPs is particularly pronounced in Italy as a reaction to what Fischler (1999) defines as "*The 'McDonaldization' of culture*" that sparked the *Slow Food* movement in the 1980s in Rome (Petrini et al., 2003). This food movement is mainly dedicated to promoting local and sustainable foodways, regional food specialities, and restaurants that support local producers. Thus, we suppose that these traits (i.e. authenticity and naturalness) are more pronounced in Italians aged above 38 who directly lived this event that shaped their culinary culture and attitudes towards food. Despite the *Slow Food* movement have gained popularity worldwide, we consider that foods' authenticity, as a central attribute of the CFPs, gives way to other aspects when we move towards other countries and cultures. Rössel et al. (2018), focusing on wine journalism evolution in Germany, refers to the food's authenticity as an aspect discernible using criteria focused on the artisanal production techniques and where a product's quality has to be certified by an authority. Thus, we suppose that among Germans' Boomers and Gen-Xers, the concept of CFPs is more associated with aspects related to the artisanal production process and institutional signals that certify it, whereas the concept of CFPs' naturalness is more evident among Gen-Yers and Gen-Zers (Albertsen et al., 2020; Janssen, 2018). Referring to the United Kingdom, Kupiec & Revell (1998) revealed the importance of the uniqueness' characteristics of artisanal cheese as a distinctive character perceived by consumers. In the same vein, Groves (2001), investigating the consumers' perception of authentic British food as reflecting the concept of homemade or handmade product, highlights the desire for individuals' uniqueness and differentness in food choices for escaping from the meaningless of modern life. The author pointed out as the individuals' perception of authenticity is related to the perception of the overall quality

and taste of the food, and for this reason the more expensive the product is, the higher the quality will be. Thus, we suppose that the British conceive the CFPs as a "gourmet" and as a delicatessen in which the costs mirror the overall quality of the artisanal product. Furthermore, the uniqueness of the CFPs offers them the opportunity to live an extraordinary culinary and taste experience.

On these premises, we aimed to address the following research questions: What do Italians, Germans, and the British perceive as "craft" in food and beverage products? Are the content and the structure of the SRs of CFPs the same for Italians, Germans and the British? Might specific cohort membership affect the perception of food product craftsmanship? The relevance to answering these research questions is twofold. Firstly, considering that a "craft" product is frequently conceived as something tailor-made and original, embodying the artisan's skills and personality, and different from a standardised product, these traits might induce consumers to pay more. Thus, knowing what aspects are distinctive for consumers in recognizing the term "craft" in food and beverages is relevant for sustaining the local economies and promoting the food excellences worldwide. Second, considering the explorative nature of this study, findings could contribute to formulating specific research hypotheses that could be tested in future studies.

2. Social representations of craft food products

Exploring the SRs of CFPs is relevant for realigning the concept of "craft" and avoiding confusion over what is and is not a CFP. Considering that culture influences the SR process in the food domain (Delouvée et al., 2016; Lo Monaco & Bonetto, 2019), exploring the mental portrayal of CFPs in different countries is relevant for social psychology and marketing points of view. From a social psychology perspective, it is

useful to examine the impact of culture and traditions on the representation of CFPs, and how others influence the SRs of CFPs, to better explore the communicative aspects of CFPs. From a marketing viewpoint, knowing consumers' understanding of the term CFP, and the values they associate with it, can affect the likelihood of success of a CFP or the introduction of innovations in the CFP. Therefore, it is relevant to understand how the meaning of CFPs is created and the SRs that consumers with different socio-cultural background have towards them.

According to Höijer (2011, p. 4), there is no clear definition of what is a social representation, and Moscovici himself, who first proposed the concept of SRs in 1961, offers different meanings. Moscovici (1973, p. xiii) defines the SR as a system of values, ideas, and practices, to establish an order that will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and make communication possible providing them with a code for social exchange. Moreover, rather than a logical and coherent thought pattern, SRs must be seen as a "network" of ideas, metaphors and images, more or less loosely tied together (Moscovici, 2000, p. 153). Moscovici (2015), conceptualised this representation system as characterised by three dimensions: the knowledge individuals have towards the object, explained by using a set of elements which are functionally articulated; the positive or negative attitude individuals have towards the object; and the field of representation where the elements are arranged and ranked. It should be noted that Moscovici uses the epithet "social" for highlighting that this representation reflects the historical, cultural and economic contexts, circumstances and practices of social groups. According to Moscovici (1981), people discuss and formulate their views in groups characterised by different traditions, compositions and information; thus, different SRs follow.

According to Abric (1994), the SR is a set of cognitions and beliefs collectively shared by a social group and organised around a stable central core that gives structure and meaning to the SR. The central core stands out for non-negotiable aspects that are socially associated with the object and determined by historical, ideological and sociological conditions, making it resistant to change. As pointed out by Abric (1987), these elements establish the collectively shared bases of the object of representation by embodying the meaning of the concept and serve as a framework for interpreting and categorising new information. Around the central core, the so-called "peripheral" elements are organised. Different from the elements of the central core, they are context-specific and stem from a system of cultural beliefs, reflecting the individual experiences and past histories of individuals (Moscovici, 2001). Peripheral elements act as a buffer between the central core concept and the daily reality of a social group (Lo Monaco & Guimelli, 2008), protecting the core concept from new information that potentially can penetrate or challenge it.

During the past decade, Moscovici's theory of social representation has influenced researchers from different disciplines, providing a useful framework for studying the meaning of an ill-defined concept or new products. Among them, research was undertaken in food science, highlighting the relevance of this approach for investigating the interaction between SRs and culture (see, for example, Ares et al., 2020; Lo Monaco & Bonetto, 2019; Rojas-Rivas et al., 2020; Urdapilleta et al., 2021, among others).

Free word association (Colangelo et al., 2003) is a method that has been widely adopted in the domain of food research to explore the SRs of specific food products. This method consists of soliciting participants to spontaneously mention the first words that come to their minds by citing a term, or an object, as a prompt for eliciting ideas in their minds.

As pointed out by Roininen et al. (2006), this is an efficient method for gathering useful information on consumers perception of food products in revealing their mental representation. According to Abric (1994), the frequency and the evocation rank of the element generated during the free word association task are two criteria for defining an element's centrality in the SRs. By this rank-frequency method, Abric (2005) divided the SRs' canvas into four distinct zones: the central core, regrouping elements with high frequency and considered very important; the first periphery, with elements being characterised by higher frequencies and lower ranks; the second periphery, collecting elements with lower frequencies and lower ranks; and finally, the contrasting elements zone, with terms being distinguished by higher ranks and lower frequencies.

In the past decade, studies using this method include Guerrero et al. (2010) with traditional food products, Son et al. (2014) with rice, Rodrigues et al. (2015) with wine, Gómez-Corona et al. (2016) with craft beer, Rodrigues et al. (2017) with edible flowers, Krumreich et al. (2019) with apples, Rojas-Rivas et al. (2019) with amaranth (a Mexican seed characterised by high protein content) and Rocha et al. (2020) with herbal infusions. However, no studies have been done on the SRs of CFPs conceived as a food category to date.

3. Method

3.1. Sampling

The current investigation was based on a non-probabilistic sampling design, and an online survey was conducted to explore the content and the structure of the SRs of CFPs in Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom. A market research company provided access to online consumers panels in all three countries and managed the process of recruiting respondents, ensuring, as far as possible, the socio-demographic comparability. The

219 online survey occurred between November 2018 and January 2019. The experiment was
220 conducted before the Covid-19 pandemic that may have caused people to re-evaluate their
221 views in some way. The cover letter gave instructions on how to complete the survey, and
222 people aged 18 years or above and resident in Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom
223 were eligible to participate. A total of 458 valid responses were collected, and the average
224 rate of valid responses useful for the analysis was 56.6%. The details of the participants'
225 demographic by country are shown in Table 1. The three groups have a similar profile in
226 terms of gender, age and occupational status, whereas a country-specific difference
227 occurred in terms of education level.

228 3.2. Procedure

229 The online consumer interviews were conducted using the country's official language and
230 lasted about five minutes. Responses that were lasted more than five minutes were
231 discarded, thus avoiding participants who may have looked on the internet for a definition
232 of CFPs. They included a free word association task followed by a ranking of the evoked
233 terms. The familiarisation phase with the word association procedure was conducted
234 using a picture containing an example of how to conduct the task, as shown in Figure 1.
235 After this training phase, participants were asked if they had adequately understood the
236 nature and expectations of the task. If not, the task ended, otherwise, adopting the same
237 format that was given in the example, the study started with the following instructions:
238 "*Write the first four words that come to mind when thinking of craft food products,*
239 *maintaining the following order of importance associated with each affirmation. Then,*
240 *specify whether you consider the concept expressed to be positive or negative by marking*
241 *the corresponding check-box*". Thus, participants were asked to write the four words that
242 they associated with the term CFPs, to rank these four evoked words from the most

important (rank 1) to the least important (rank 4), and to evaluate their positive or negative valence to each word related to the inductor expression. Otherwise, the task ended.

3.3. Data analysis

3.3.1. Textual analysis

The corpus produced by the three groups of participants was first subjected to a spelling and typing correction in the original language. Afterwards, in line with the Bécue-Bertaut et al.'s (2008) recommendations, the collected words were grouped. This step was done by deleting all connectors, auxiliary terms and adverbs, and standardising the evoked words in infinitive for verbs, singular for the nouns and masculine-singular for adjectives. In the next step, synonyms were regrouped using a thesaurus, and the terms with the higher frequency of elicitation were adopted to gather all of the associated synonyms under the same word.

The words elicited in each country were subjected to a translation and back-translation process (Brislin, 1970; Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011). The Italian and German to English was conducted by researchers involved in each country. Afterwards, back-translation was performed by a bilingual native English speaker. If the translated word matched precisely the meaning of the original word, it was kept. Otherwise, a consensual version of the translated word was considered after an iterative translation and back-translation process, keeping in mind the need to use a natural language instead of a literal translation.

The corpus of words was then subjected to a grouping process based on the personal interpretation of their meaning, bearing in mind the meaning of the concept that the participant wanted to express based on the co-occurrence of the other terms cited. The different semantic categories were obtained by triangulation, in which each researcher built up their classes independently. Then, after several trials, all authors shared and

agreed on the semantic categories used in the analysis. Following Symoneaux et al.'s (2012, p. 61) suggestions, researchers thoroughly scrutinised the ambiguous words that were difficult to regroup and decided to leave them as independent words or to regroup them, avoiding as far as possible, an over-regrouping or an over-interpretation of the terms. Finally, fourteen different categories were obtained (Table 2), and the relationship between each country and each semantic category was analysed by Pearson's chi-square test. Statistical significance was defined as a *p*-value less than 0.05.

3.3.2. Conglomerate analysis

A conglomerate analysis was performed to evaluate the similarities between the semantic categories adopted during the terms' coding activity based on coding data into categories or themes being studied. This conglomerate analysis had the purpose of inspecting the similarities between the SRs of CFPs of Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom and exploring the main dimensions characterising the concept of food craftsmanship. The similarities across semantic categories were done by computing the Jaccard similarity coefficient (Jaccard, 1908), representing the size of the intersection of each semantic category divided by the size of the union of relative label sets. The words' coding process and the conglomerate analysis were carried out using NVIVO 11 software (QSR International, Melbourne, Australia).

3.3.3. Prototypical analysis of the social representation

In line with Abric's (2005) suggestions, the prototypical analysis was done determining the rank-frequency cut-off points of the evoked words in each country. A cut-off point for importance was calculated by averaging the score of each evoked term obtained. The frequency cut-off point was visually determined by inspecting the frequency of occurrence of the evoked words in decreasing order. The cut-off point was chosen

considering the maximal difference between two successive frequencies. Thus, crossing the importance of the evoked words and their frequency, four distinct zones were identified. Zone 1, the Central core, regroups important terms frequently cited by participants. Zone 2, the first periphery, regroups the terms with the highest frequency but less important. Zone 3, collects the contrasting elements, distinguished by high importance and low frequency. Zone 4, the second periphery, collects less important and cited terms.

3.3.4. Polarity index

The polarity index (De Rosa, 2002) of the words elicited was calculated as the ratio of the difference between positive and negative connotation each word has received and the number of times the word was evoked. According to De Rosa (2002, p.185), a value of polarity index (*P*) between -1 and -0.4 indicates a word connotate negatively. If *P* ranges between -0.4 and +0.4 indicate a neutral connotation, whereas a word with a *P* between +0.4 and 1 indicates that participants gave it a positive connotation.

3.3.5. Correspondence analysis

Differences across cohorts were tested by splitting each group (i.e. Italian, Germans and British) into three age groups (i.e. 18-37 years, 38-51 years, and above 52 years; respectively Gen-Zer and Gen-Yers, Gen-Xers, and Boomers); thus nine subsamples with similar composition in terms of age status were considered (Table 1). A cut-off point of 2% of the words' elicited frequency was adopted to define the words kept in the correspondence analysis (referred to here as CA); thus, fifteen terms were considered. Finally, a 9×15 contingency table was built, in which the lines and columns were the participants of each subgroup and the most frequently elicited words, respectively. Pearson's chi-square test was adopted to verify the relationship between nationality, age

group, and the words considered. Statistical significance was defined as a *p*-value less than 0.05. CA was performed with STATA 14.0 (StataCorp, LLC, College Station, Texas, USA).

4. Results

4.1. Textual analysis

As mentioned previously, the textual analysis aimed to identify the words elicited by each group of participants using "craft food products" as the inductor term and investigate the differences among countries, by referring to the categories of words created after the triangulation process. The total number of words was 1,832, as each participant gave four words (Italy N=155; Germany N=153; The United Kingdom N=150), of which 17 stop-words was discarded (e.g. *none, nothing*, or terms that appear not congruent with the topic such as the term *bonej* which might be a standard bone measurement in a novel ImageJ plugin developed by Doube et al., 2010). Afterwards, the valid terms were regrouped into fourteen semantic categories, of which: "unique", "hedonic aspects", "price perception", and "natural" were the most frequently cited (Table 2).

Table 2 illustrates the findings of Pearson's chi-square test performed to compare the words evoked by each country. Italian (18.48% of evoked terms) and German (10.08%) participants reported more than the British participants (3.20%) about the perception of naturalness. In this category, the words more often used were *natural*, *authentic* and *simple*. Similarly, Italians and Germans used more words that fall in the category named "safety and health" (13.29% and 6.28%, respectively); the most common terms used in this category were *beneficial, healthy* and *safe*. Significant differences were found for the categories named "unique" and "production scale", for which the British participants (22.77% and 7.08%) have identified more than Italians (11.51% and 2.76%) and Germans

(10.91% and 2.81%) using words such as *unique*, *different*, *original*, and *small*, *independent*, and *domestic*, respectively. For German participants, distinct differences were found for the categories labelled "production process" (12.23%), "extrinsic attribute" (11.24%) and "ethical" (9.09%) compared to Italian (3.89%, 7.13% and 5.35%) and British participants (10.12%, 7.93% and 2.19%). The words most often used for the category "production process" were *handmade*, *homemade*, and *artisan*, whereas *quality*, *fresh* and *draining* for the category named "extrinsic attributes". Instead, *ecological*, *sustainable* and *ethical* terms are often used for the category denominated as "ethical".

4.2. Conglomerate analysis

Figure 2 illustrates the dendrograms resulting from the conglomerate analysis performed for each country to understand the relationship between the categories of elicited terms and define the main dimensions characterising the concept of food craftsmanship.

In a general view, the conglomerate analysis shows that the dendrograms have different structure and compositions. The first aspect is that categories are divided into different blocks across nations; two for Italy and the United Kingdom and only one for Germany. The second aspect is that the blocks have a different configuration, thus confirming cross-cultural differences in interpreting the concept of CFPs.

For Italians, the first block contains the categories named "local*"*, "ethical", "experience" and "tradition". This points into the direction of a sense of pride related to the cultural heritage and a sense of place as territorial anchorage of a product, with all aspects having a highly symbolic and emotional meaning, being a character of this block. According to Rivaroli et al. (2020), this aspect is one of the multifaceted characters of what the authors have named *local identity*, and that might be related to an affect-based dimension of the concept of food craftsmanship. According to Dubé & Cantin, (2000), the affective

component of the consumers' attitudes towards the food item pertains to the sensations, feelings and emotions one experiences in response to it.

The concept of the *local identity* seems dominant also among the British participants. For British participants, "tradition" and "experience" are distinctive categories of the first block. However, this dimension is enriched with other categories such as "extrinsic attributes", "content and moment of consumption", "ethical", and "safety and health". These aspects would be in line with Autio et al. (2013), who observed that interviewees linked CFPs to local foods that offer them the possibility to live a genuine and authentic food experience in specific contexts and consumption moments.

For Germans participants, the first aspect characterising the CFPs are linked to the category "extrinsic attributes" (i.e. *quality, fresh, draining*). This category might reflect that interviewees rely on some institutional signal (e.g. third-party quality and safety schemes assurance, label information linked to the product expiration date or specific product properties) that they associate with the concept of food craftsmanship. Indeed, in line with Devos et al. (2002), trusting institutional signals involves the perception that institutions as competent, reliable and responsible towards consumers would act according to specific consumer's needs, such as finding and recognising CFPs. Thus, it is possible to assume that this aspect might reflect an institution-based dimension of CFPs' mental representation.

The second block of the dendrograms referred to Italians, the British and Germans participants contain two main categories: "hedonic aspects" and "unique". It is noteworthy that these categories might be related to emotions evoked during consumption, which might be considered components of an affect-based dimension of the concept of food product craftsmanship; Dubé & Cantin (2000), for example, cite the

hedonic tone of consumption as one of the affect-based components in response to the food item. This second block also contains categories such as “production process”, “production scale”, “intrinsic attributes”, and “price perception” for all the participants. These categories might be referred to as the positive or negative attributes and beliefs about the target and, in line with Dubé & Cantin (2000), may be related to a cognitive-based dimension of the concept of food craftsmanship.

4.3. Prototypical analysis

To conduct a prototypical analysis, which aims to visually define the SRs of CFPs, we needed to determine the rank-frequency cut-off points of the evoked words in each country, and for each term, we considered its polarity index. The cut-off citation frequencies were 10 for Italy, 12 for Germany and 9 for the United Kingdom.

Figure 3.a illustrates the findings of the prototypical analysis referred to the Italian participants. The central core regroups important terms frequently cited by participants, reflecting a stable status of evidence helpful to interpret and categorise new information (Abric, 1987). It contains two words that refer to the semantic category named “natural” (*authentic* and *natural*) and one word that falls in the category “hedonic aspects” (*tasty*). All these words have positive connotations according to their polarity index. Instead, the first periphery contains two words with different connotations: *beneficial*, with a positive connotation, and *expensive*, with a neutral connotation. In the contrasting elements, all the terms have a positive meaning and fall into different categories. As for all other peripherical elements (identified by their low frequency and, or, low level of importance), these terms reflect particular and contextualised experiences that participants associate with the specific object they have in minds; and are susceptible to change. Among them, *quality* and *ecological* refer to the extrinsic attributes and the ethical aspects relating to

411 CFPs. In the second periphery, all words have a positive valence and refer to the hedonic
412 aspects *attractive*, the extrinsic attribute *fresh*, and the perception of uniqueness
413 (*different*), safety and healthiness (*safe* and *healthy*).
414 The results from German participants can be seen in Figure 3.b. The top-left cell
415 corresponds with the social representation's central core zone and includes shared and
416 consensual elements with positive valence. For Germans, this area includes aspects
417 related to the production process (*handmade*), the perception of the naturalness of CFPs
418 (*natural*) and their extrinsic attributes (*quality*). The first periphery contains only one
419 word characterised by neutral connotation that falls in the category "price perception"
420 (*expensive*). All the contrasting elements in the bottom-left cell of the representation has
421 a positive connotation and includes terms that refer to ethical (*ecological*), health
422 (*beneficial*) and extrinsic attributes (*fresh*) of the CFPs, as well as to aspects related to the
423 concept of local (*local*), tradition (*traditional*) and uniqueness (*different*). In the bottom-
424 right cell of the representation, all words are positive and highlight the hedonic aspects
425 (*tasty* and *attractive*) and the ethical aspects (*sustainable*) of the CFPs.
426 For the British participants (Figure 3.c), the central core zone contains words with
427 different polarity index. *Expensive*, which falls in the "price perception" semantic
428 category, have a negative connotation, whereas extrinsic attributes (*quality*) and the
429 perception of uniqueness (*unique*) have a positive connotation. Unlike other countries,
430 the first periphery does not include secondary elements of the social representation of
431 CFPs. In the bottom-left cell of the representation, all the contrasting elements have
432 positive connotations. Among them, the perception of local (*local*) and uniqueness
433 (*exclusive*) are categories more closed to the stable, shared and consensual elements that
434 distinguish the central core concept. The bottom-right cell of Figure 3.c includes

435 secondary elements with a positive connotation that fall in the category "hedonic aspects"
436 (*tasty*), "uniqueness" (*different*) and "production scale" (*small*).
437 In light of the conglomerate analysis results, the prototypical analysis shows that the
438 content and the structure of the SRs of CFPs are not the same for Italians, Germans and
439 the British. For Italians, the central core has a robust affect-based nature; in fact, all the
440 terms (i.e. *authentic*, *tasty* and *natural*) evoke emotional responses towards the stimulus
441 that respondents were subjected (i.e. "craft food products" as inductor terms). For
442 Germans, the central core concept of CFPs roots in affective, cognitive and institution-
443 based elements. The word *natural* refers to participants' emotional responses towards the
444 CFPs based on hedonic expectations, highlighting the affect-based nature of the SRs.
445 Instead, the word *handmade* rather than an emotional memory based on past experiences
446 reflects the cognitive association triggered by the inductor term towards the production
447 process of this category of foods. Differently, the word *quality* here can be conceived as
448 the cognitive intention of participants in interpreting the concept of CFPs using
449 institutional signals, thus reflecting an institution-based dimension of CFPs's mental
450 representation. Also, for the British, the central core zone of the SRs of CFPs has
451 affective, cognitive and institution-based roots. The term *unique* reflects participants'
452 emotional response based on their expectation to live a memorable and unique moment
453 of pleasure, emphasising craft food's uniqueness as a distinctive quality that justifies its
454 higher price. Although the word *expensive* reinforces the above mentioned, it reflects a
455 cognitive evaluation of the product, rather than a hedonic evaluation. In addition, for the
456 British, the term *quality* reflects the institution-based dimension that characterises the
457 central core zone of the SRs of CFPs.

458 4.4. Correspondence analysis

459 CA was performed to create an identification mapping of the concept of CFPs referred to
460 nine groups of participants resulting from splitting each sample (i.e. Italians, Germans,
461 the British) into three sub-samples based on the age of participants (i.e. 18-37 years, 38-
462 51 years, and above 52 years). The chi-square test of independence showed that there was
463 a significant association between participants' country affiliation and the named words
464 ($\chi^2(28, N=1,166)=342.64$, $p<.005$), confirming that differences between northern, central
465 and European countries exist. Instead, no significant association between age groups and
466 named words was found ($\chi^2(28, N=1,166)= 38.24$, $p=.094$); thus, cohort membership does
467 not significantly affect the meaning participants gave to the concept of food
468 craftsmanship, evoking a common and shared vision of how CFPs are perceived.

469 Figure 4 shows the CA plot of the most important elicited words and groups of
470 participants based on the first two axes associated with the inductor terms "craft food
471 products". The first two dimensions account for 83.5% of the variability. The first axis
472 (55.2% of inertia) captures an essential portion of information. It progressively separates
473 Italians (in the bottom-left cell of the CA plot) from the Germans (in the top-central area
474 of the CA plot) and the British participants (in the bottom-right cell of the CA plot), thus
475 reflecting that the concept of food craftsmanship is country-specific. The second axis
476 accounts for 28.3% of the variability and split Germans participants (at the top of figure
477 4), from Italians and the British, thus highlighting commonalities.

478 Figure 5 illustrates words and age groups' projection for each dimension resulting from
479 the CA for better interpreting the meaning of each of them. The first dimension highlights
480 that terms such as *natural*, *beneficial* and *attractive* reflect Italians' mental representation
481 of CFPs. Germans were more inclined to describe CFPs using terms such as *ecological*,

traditional, *tasty,* and have in common with the British terms such as *quality, expensive, local* and *handmade.* Instead, the British were more inclined than Germans to identify CFPs as *unique, homemade* and *different.* The simultaneous projection of the age groups and words for the first dimension seems to reflect the cultural manifestation of the common sense associated with the concept of CFPs in each country (Figure 5). The second dimension highlights that Germans, more than others, associate to CFPs terms such as *ecological, traditional, natural* and *quality,* whereas both Italians and the British associate terms such as *exclusive, unique, attractive, expensive, and different*. Thus, this finding seems to reflect the desired social effects linked to the purchase of CFPs; this signifies that the purchasing and consuming artisanal foodstuffs represents a factor influencing how individuals perceive others and themselves.

Although no significant association was found between age groups and the cited terms, exploring figure 4, certain words seem to distinguish some cohorts. Italians of both 18-37 and 38-51 are closer to terms that refer to the concepts of CFPs' healthiness (*beneficial*) and hedonic aspects (*taste*). The German participants of both 18-37 and 38-51 years link the CFPs with the concept of tradition (*traditional*), ethic (*ecological*), and natural (*natural*), whereas Germans over 52 years of age relate more the CFPs with the production process (*handmade*). The younger British participants (18-37 years), associate the concept of uniqueness of the CFPs (*unique*, *exclusive*) with the production process (*homemade*) adopted for obtaining them, whereas British participants of both 38-51 and +52 years associate the concept of uniqueness (*different*) with local (*local*). Also, looking at figure 4, the price perception of the CFPs (*expensive*) and the extrinsic attribute, such as the *quality* perception, seems to be two common aspects among Germans and the British. Overall, the CA revealed that the common sense conferred on the attribute

"artisanal" reflects society's cultural aspects (Dimension 1) and individuals' desired social effects (Dimension 2) by purchasing the CFPs. Thus, these two aspects should be considered by scholars in future researches.

5. Discussion

Prior works have documented that the SRs of CFPs remain a conundrum; Rivaroli et al. (2020), for example, in light of the patchwork character of the international norms regarding CFPs, report the relevance of an understanding of what CFPs are for consumers. Knowing that this study's findings may not be generalised, this research wants to be the first approach to explore the building blocks of the social representations of craft food products by answering two research questions: Are the content and the structure of the SRs of CFPs the same for northern, central and Mediterranean countries? Might specific cohort membership affect the perception of food craftsmanship? A free word association and conglomerate analysis tasks were conducted to explore how cultural differences can affect the social construction of meanings attached to CFPs in three European countries. Instead, a correspondence analysis to verify whether specific cohort membership can affect the SRs of CFPs, and explore the main drivers shaping the mental representation of CFPs, was done.

Concerning our first research question, we observed that the content and structure of the SRs of CFPs are different for Italians, Germans, and the British; a diverse mix of categories characterised each country's central core. This result is consistent with the idea that differences in SR content are a function of individuals' culture and are deeply rooted in their historical background (Mouret et al., 2013).

In the present study, it is evident from the prototypical analysis that Italians have a stronger (central core and first periphery) representation of CFPs than Germans and the

British. The Italians' central core is based on the idea that CFPs are authentic, natural and tasty; thus, these perception of CFPs are well-established in their memory. This result suggests that the SRs of CFPs for Italians are anchored to the idea of *natural foods* with a distinctive *taste*. According to Rumiati & Foroni (2016), the concept of *natural food*, such as raw food, would be best characterised by sensory information (e.g. taste) rather than by functional information (e.g. context and moment of consumption or the procedures followed for its preparation). Considering that food represents a complex multi-attribute stimulus with different intensity (Hare et al., 2011), the sensorial aspects that Italians associate with CFPs should be interpreted as their idea of CFPs as food in which human intervention (e.g. cooking, aggregations and preservation procedures) does not substantially alter the sensorial attributes of the ingredients. This concept seems to be reinforced by the presence in the Italians' core zone of the term *authentic*.

The central core of Germans' representation includes a common element with the previous group; the idea that CFPs are *natural foods*. What differentiates the Germans from the Italians is the mental representation of CFPs as a *handmade quality* product. In line with Rumiati & Foroni (2016), these aspects point out that the mental representation of Germans participants is anchored to useful information (referred to here as third-party information about the way CFPs are produced) that characterises concept about transformed foods such as noodles, for example, due to the characteristic of being handmade. Thus, differently from Italians who emphasised food's sensorial aspects, for Germans, information about the production process and extrinsic attributes are fundamental discriminant aspects.

As well as for Germans, in the imagery of the British participants, CFPs are *quality* food and drink products. What is more, their concept of CFPs is anchored to the idea of a

554 *unique* and *expensive* product. For the British, the core zone has dominated by categories
555 like “uniqueness”, “price perception”, and “extrinsic attributes”. This finding allows us
556 to suppose that the British mental representation of the CFPs is that of *luxury food*. In line
557 with Berry's (1994) definition of “luxury”, we must interpret these attributes as a
558 refinement or specific quality of a need, e.g., craft beer instead of just beer, for satisfying
559 the desire for uniqueness. According to van der Veen (2003), there are no specific *luxury*
560 *foods*, but this designation depends on a place, time and society. For example, in complex
561 societies, the need for uniqueness and exclusivity can be gained by emphasising the
562 *quality* of food and its *price,* as in the case of the British participants. Focusing on the
563 peripheral zones of the three SRs, the first periphery, which protects and consolidates the
564 central system, is practically empty. This aspect suggests that the mental representation
565 of CFPs is fragile and substantially exposed to the influence of all the aspects of the
566 second periphery and contrasting elements’ zone; this means that in the absence of a clear
567 and shared definition of CFPs, these participants are particularly exposed to possible
568 deceptive marketing practices known as “*craftwashing*”.
569 Moreover, the contrasting-element zone indicates a small group of participants with
570 different representation from most members. Mainly, terms such as *traditional*, *local* and
571 *homemade* are terms with a positive connotation that populate the contrasting-element
572 zone of the SRs of CFPs in the three European countries. This aspect highlights some
573 participants historicised more than others regarding food craftsmanship through *local*,
574 *traditional* and *homemade* production. Thus, these interviewees conceptualise more than
575 other the CFPs as food rooted in their personal and social histories, pointing out as the
576 meaning associated with CFPs is also connected to the local food heritage and food
577 traditions. In line with Lo Monaco & Bonetto (2019), these findings confirm that the way

578 participants represent now the CFPs is deeply anchored in the meaning attributed to this
579 foods' category in the past.
580 Conglomerate analysis performed for evaluating similarities between Italian, German and
581 British participants confirms the existence of cross-cultural differences in interpreting the
582 concept of CFPs because dendrograms have different structure and composition.
583 Furthermore, findings highlight that affective, cognitive and institutional aspects shape
584 the participants' mental representation of what is conceived as food craftsmanship. As
585 has been reported by Gentile et al. (2007), individuals' experience is activated by
586 sensorial and emotional aspects (i.e. affective dimension), and those cognitive aspects
587 that involve the mental aspects associated with information processes (i.e. cognitive
588 dimension). Moreover, the same authors stated as the affective dimension linked to the
589 concept of food craftsmanship is not only shaped by the emotions rooted in their sense of
590 identity raised by the CFPs participants have in their minds, but also by the hedonic
591 aspects related to them and the positive connotation associated to the desirability of the
592 CFPs (i.e. uniqueness). What is more, individuals' perception of food craftsmanship is
593 also rooted in the elaboration of information related to the production process, the
594 intrinsic attributes of the CFPs, the scale of production and the price of the CFPs they
595 have in mind (i.e. cognitive dimension). According to Bachmann & Inkpen (2011),
596 institution-based trust relates to a bundle of formal and informal rules that positively
597 influence how people evaluate the risks during the purchasing process. In line with the
598 authors, we found that individuals rely on institutional signals to define what CFPs are
599 and the meaning of "artisanal" in the food sector.
600 Concerning our second research question, we observed a different shared vision of CFPs
601 in each country; in fact, the perception of food's craftsmanship in our study was unrelated

to age groups. We found that the common understanding of the concept "artisanal" in the food sector is rooted in each country's cultural traditions. This finding extends those of Lo Monaco & Bonetto (2019), confirming that national cultural and culinary heritage influences the present social representation of CFPs; thus, the way to represent CFPs is never disconnected from previous meaning attributed to it. Furthermore, this study confirms that food consumption is essential not only for nourishing oneself but fulfils the social function to reinforce our identity. Thus, CFPs' choice is a signifier of group culture and social identity (Lo Monaco & Bonetto, 2019, p.476), representing a key factor influencing how individuals perceive others and themselves. In this light, foods and food choices contribute to the definition of groups' and cultural identities.

6. Conclusions

This study unveils the role of SR in the formation of beliefs about CFP. Findings reveal that the SRs of CFPs differs between northern, central and Mediterranean European countries. In the United Kingdom, CFPs are conceived as *luxury* or *gourmet food*; the price is perceived as an index of the overall quality of the food craftsmanship, and the attribute "luxury" mirrors the consumer's expectation of living a unique and extraordinary culinary and taste experience. For Germans, CFPs are equated with *natural foods* in which the authenticity of the food's craftsmanship and the food's naturalness attributes are certified by an authority. Instead, in Italy, CFPs are conceived of as *genuine foods* reflecting the connectedness with craftsmen's skills and local culinary traditions, in which human intervention does not substantially alter the ingredients' sensorial properties.

In sum, this study shows that the SRs of CFPs are shaped by culture and shared across age groups within each country, highlighting that SR constructs appear to be universal

and anchored in the meaning attached to CFPs in the past. Moreover, this research underscores the importance of considering the complex interaction between food products and cultural identity, that is, the way food choice and consumption may represent important signals influencing the way individuals perceive others and themselves.

This study has limitations that result in avenues for future research. First, the findings need to be confirmed and validated based on larger and more representative samples for each country. Second, future research is needed to verify if these results can be generalised to other European countries. Although our research suggests that free word association and the prototypical analysis are a practical approach to gather information about consumers' perception of CFPs, therefore and third, the development of standardised measurement instruments for assessing the perception of food craftsmanship could be of interest for future research in the field of consumers behaviour. Finally, developing a scale for artisanal food choice motivation that captures the interrelationships between cultural identity and food choices could help explore consumers' perceptions about "artisanal" food.

Findings from this study are not without policy implications. The use of the term "craft" is continuously rising and is being used by food and beverage marketers to differentiate their products. Thus, the profuse use of the term "craft", the disconnection between consumer and industry definitions of craft food products, and the lack of a shared understanding of craft food concept may lead to consumer confusion. This study shows that the SRs of CFPs is fragile, and individuals are therefore exposed to deceptive marketing practices known as "craftwashing". This study does not aim at providing a prescriptive CFP definition; instead, it emphasizes that a legal definition of "artisanal

649 food" that considers differing cultural identities is a question that national ministries of
650 consumer affairs should address.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Social representations of craft food products in three European countries

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants by country.

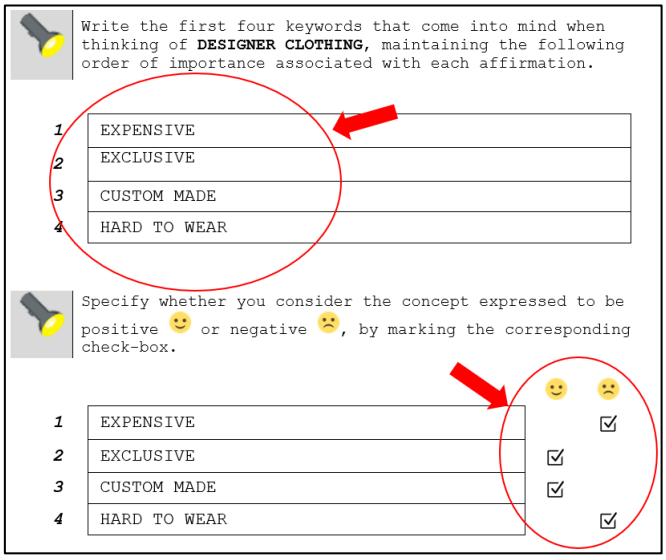
		Country		
		Italy (N=155)	Germany (N=153)	United Kingdom (N=150)
Gender, % (p=0.128) [a]	Male	48.39	49.02	38.67
	Female	51.61	50.98	61.33
Age, % (N) (p=0.176) [a]	18-37 years	35.48 (55)	28.76 (44)	36.00 (54)
	38-51 years	44.52 (69)	41.83 (64)	45.33 (68)
	≥52 years	20.00 (31)	29.41 (45)	18.67 (28)
Education level, % (p=0.001) [a]	University	36.77	28.10	32.67
	High school	48.39	30.72	60.67
	Middle School	14.19	40.52	5.33
	Primary school	0.65	0.00	0.67
	None	0.00	0.65	0.67
Occupational status, % (p=0.076) [a]	Student	7.73	5.23	6.00
	Unemployed	8.39	11.11	10.66
	Looking for work	9.68	1.96	6.67
	Employed	67.10	66.01	66.00
	Retired	7.10	15.69	10.67

Notes. [a] Significance level of Pearson's Chi-square test. A p-value <0.05 indicates statistical significance.

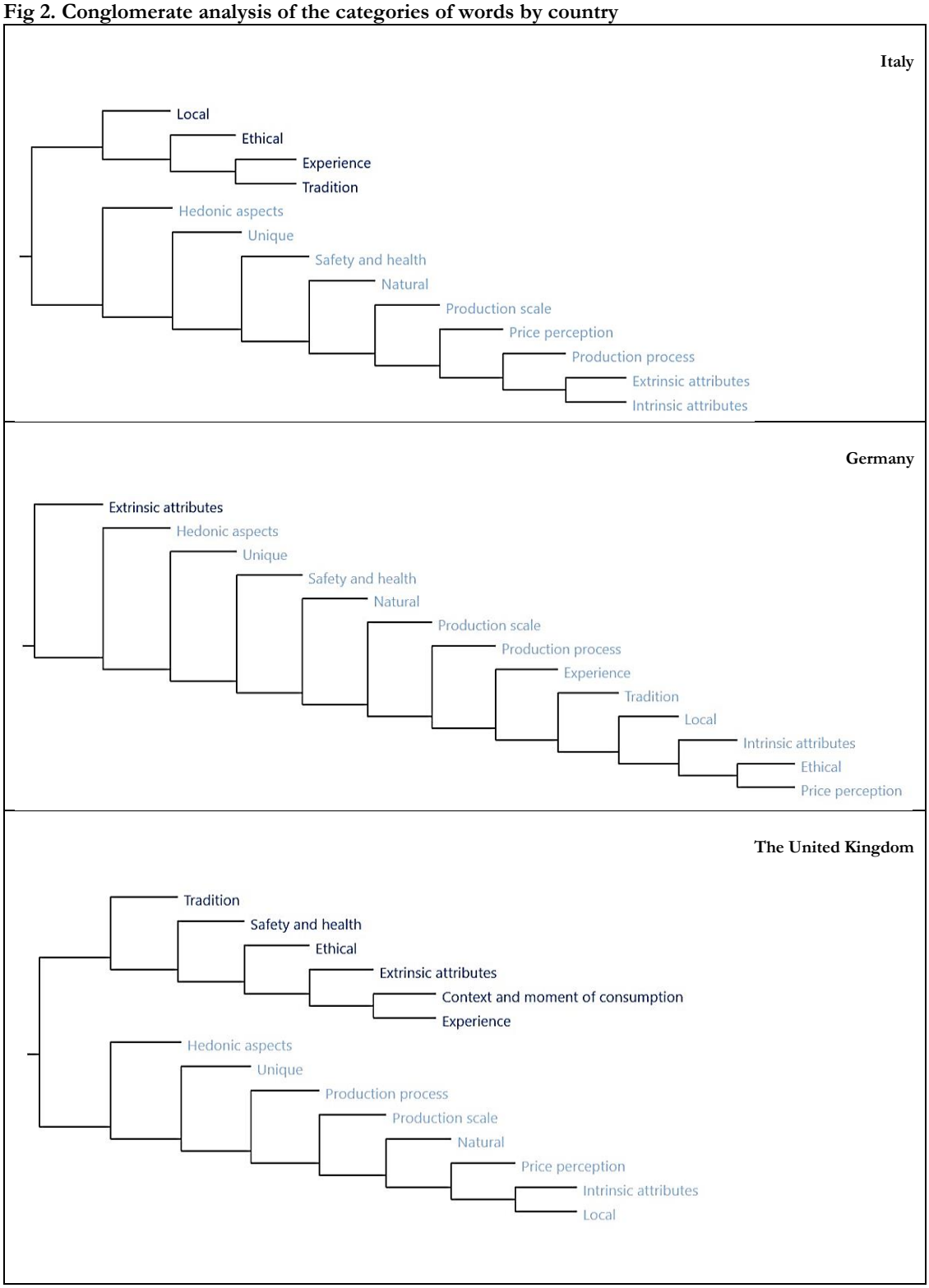
863

Categories	Example of words used by participants	Country			*p*-value
		Italy	Germany	United Kingdom	
Hedonic aspects	*Tasty, attractive, exclusive*	18.80	15.87	19.90	0.260
Natural	*Natural, authentic, simple*	18.48	10.08	3.20	**0.000**
Safety and health	*Beneficial, healthy, safe*	13.29	6.28	1.52	**0.000**
Unique	*Unique, different, original*	11.51	10.91	22.77	**0.000**
Price perception	*Expensive, cheap, value*	10.21	12.07	14.84	0.120
Extrinsic attributes	*Quality, fresh, draining*	7.13	11.24	7.93	**0.040**
Ethical	*Ecological, sustainable, ethical*	5.35	9.09	2.19	**0.000**
Local	*Local, national, origin*	4.70	4.13	5.40	0.650
Production process	*Handmade, homemade, artisan*	3.89	12.23	10.12	**0.000**
Tradition	*Traditional, experience, skillful*	2.92	3.47	2.36	0.498
Production scale	*Small, independent, domestic*	2.76	2.81	7.08	**0.000**
Intrinsic attributes	*Bitter, color, delicate*	0.81	0.66	1.18	0.646
Experience	*Food, personal, refreshing*	0.15	1.16	0.84	0.091
Context and moment of consumption	*Brewhouse, foreign*	0.00	0.00	0.67	**0.018**
Total		100.00	100.00	100.00	

Fig 1. The example used during the training phase of participants



872 **Fig 2. Conglomerate analysis of the categories of words by country**



873 Notes. Categories with the same colour are characterised by higher similarity based on a Jaccard index. The web version of this article can
874 provide the interpretation of the colour in this figure.

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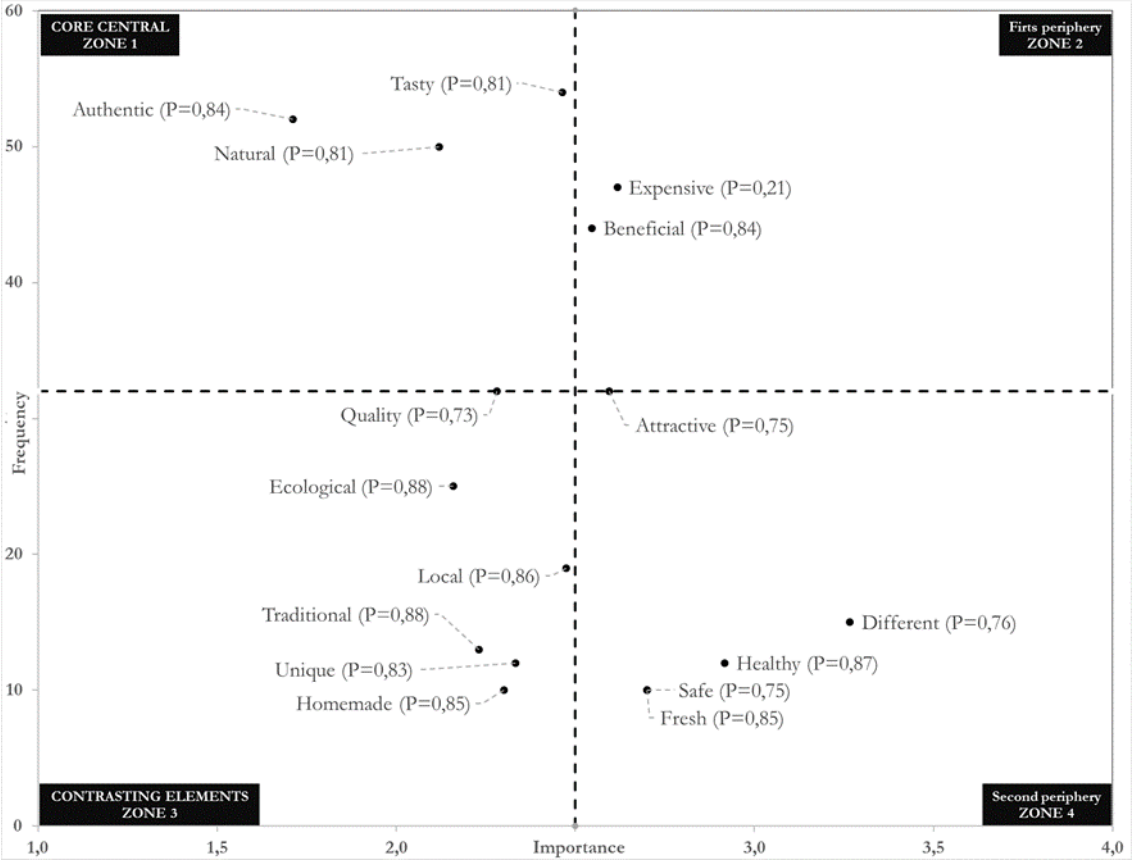
877 **Fig 3.a. Prototypical analysis of the SRs of CFPs in Italy (n= 155)**

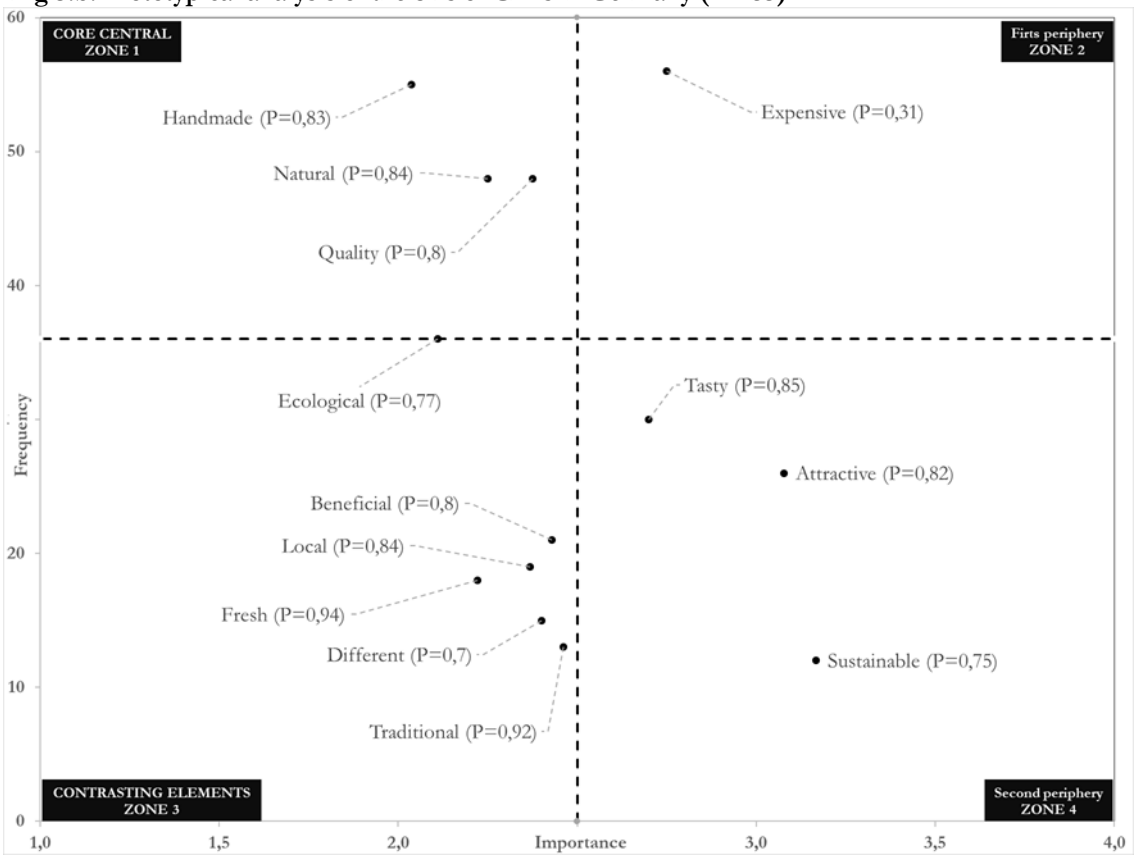


878

879 Notes. P=Polarity index; -1≤P≤-0.4 negatively connotation; -0.4≤P≤0.4 neutral connotation; 0.4≤P≤1 positive connotation (De Rosa,
880 2002)

881

882 **Fig 3.b. Prototypical analysis of the SRs of CFPs in Germany (n=153)**

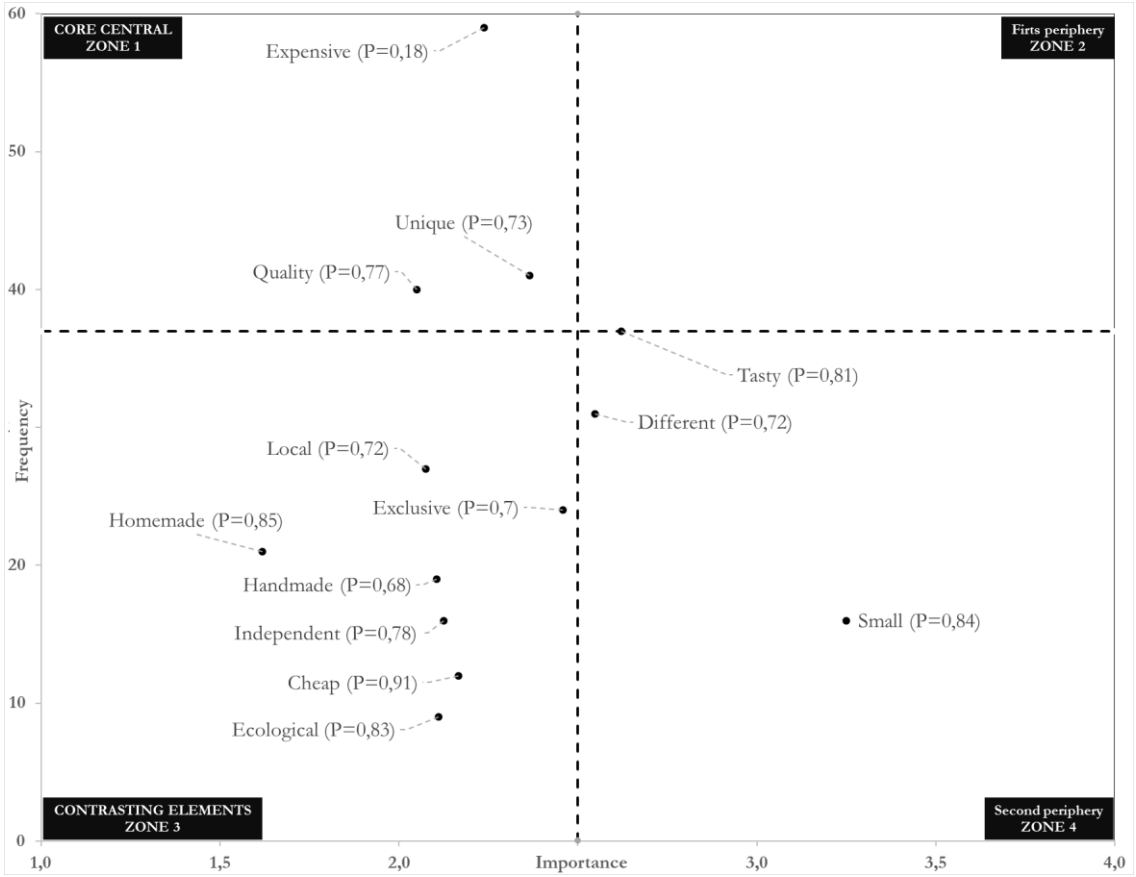


883

884 Notes. P=Polarity index; -1≤P≤-0.4 negatively connotation; -0.4≤P≤0.4 neutral connotation; 0.4≤P≤1 positive connotation (De Rosa,
885 2002)

886

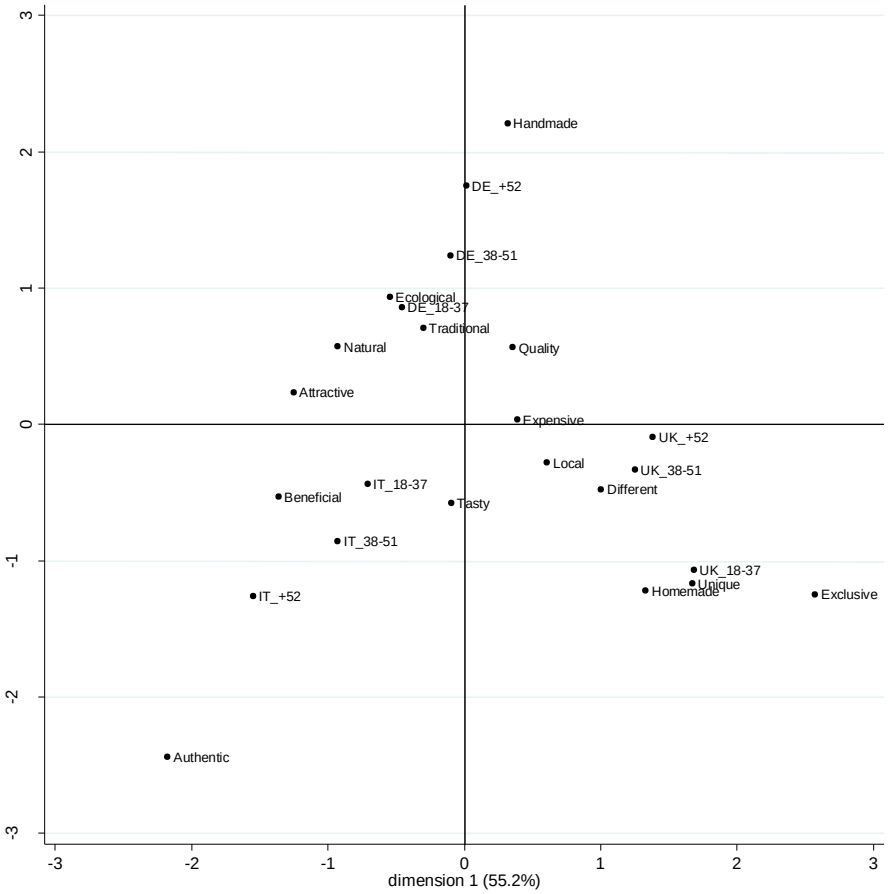
887 **Fig 3.c. Prototypical analysis of the SRs of CFPs in the United Kingdom (n=150)**



888
889 Notes. P=Polarity index; -1≤P≤-0.5 negatively connotation; -0.4≤P≤0.4 neutral connotation; 0.4≤P≤1 positive connotation (De Rosa,
890 2002)
891

892

893 **Fig 4. Correspondence analysis of words and age groups of participants.**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DE_+52
DE_38-51
Ecological
DE_18-37
Traditional
Natural
Quality
Attractive
Expensive
UK_+52
Local
UK_38-51
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Authentic
dimension 1 (55.2%)
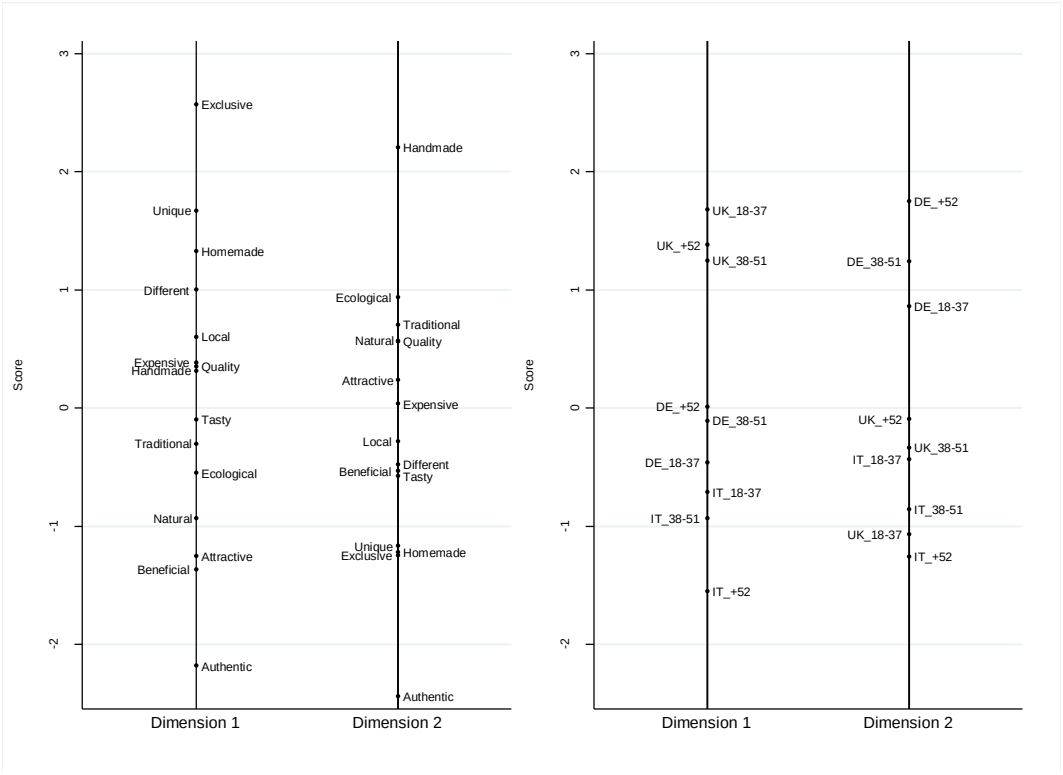
Fig 5. CA dimension projection plot.