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BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

- A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF ADDED VALUES OF FOOD PRODUCTS[†]

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Abstract

Much has been written about the strategic importance of added value as a means for achieving competitive advantage, but little attention has been paid to the meaning of the term "added value". Numerous messages about added values of food products are communicated by and to different actors, values such as convenience regarding fast-food, luxury regarding meals, products without chemical additives, health, quality, taste, what the package looks like, exclusiveness, tradition/story-telling/, and many others. Food producers, wholesalers, retailers, and end-consumers constitute some of these actors. However, the concept of added value and the relationships between the different aspects are unclear and illusive. There is a need to explore as well as clarify definitions and dimensions. Therefore, the aim of this article is to develop a conceptual framework which explores definitions and discussions associated with added values of food products. Traditionally, the literature has made strict and categorical distinctions between core values and added values. However, we stress that this traditional view needs to be challenged. For food products we argue that core values cannot be clearly distinguished from added values. We argue that not only the end consumer but all actors involved in the supply chain contribute to the overall realization of the added value, i.e. all actors must perceive, appreciate, value and realize the added value. Only then may the added value result in willingness to purchase the products, increased market share or strengthened position at different markets.

Keywords: Added Values, Core Values, Food Products, Value-Chain, Communication

1. Introduction

De Chernatony *et al.* (2000, p.39) point out that much has been written about the strategic importance of added value as a means for achieving competitive advantage, but little attention has been paid to the meaning of the term "added value". For the concept to realize its purported advantages, the authors continue, a better understanding of added value is crucial.

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Numerous messages about added values of foods are communicated by and to different actors. Food producers, wholesalers, retailers, and end-consumers constitute some of these actors. Added values are constantly being expressed in media, in branch articles, as well as by the companies themselves. In the branch magazine *Livsmedel i fokus* (2009), approximately 20 different added values related to food products are mentioned and discussed – convenience regarding fast-food, luxury regarding meals, products without chemical additives, health, quality, taste, what the package looks like, exclusiveness, tradition/story-telling/, and many others. Producers, wholesalers, retailers, and end-consumers constitute a value chain¹, where all parties participate to create and/or add values. Some companies are, however, not conscious about the added values of their products, which leads to a lack of communication of these values to the potential customers.

The added values of Swedish food products have, during the past few years, been a common theme of the debate about the Swedish food products' sector's competitive advantages (von Schantz, 2007). After the Swedish entry in the European Union in 1995, the competition on the foods market increased for Swedish companies. Foods became less expensive for Swedish consumers, while the producers perceived the competition on the EU market fierce. Swedish products were simply more expensive to produce than comparable products from other EU countries. The Swedish political debate, however, pointed out that there was an added value in the production of agricultural products. Since the food related laws in Sweden were considered stricter than in other EU countries, especially when it came to environment, care for animals, and food product security, the conclusion was drawn that Swedish products were worth more than foreign ones. The added value could, then, lead to a possibility for Swedish food producers to charge their products to a higher price than their foreign competitors, since their products had added values (Gullstrand and Hammarlund, 2007).

The Swedish Board of Agriculture (2008) claims that added values in the Swedish food and agricultural production are often discussed related to price and competition. The agricultural industry wants to get paid for the added values that are created through the production (2008, p.5). As Gullstrand and Hammarlund (2007) point out, the food related laws in Sweden were more strict, and according to The Swedish Board of Agriculture, the added values that are created by the stricter, Swedish requirements and rules, are the most important ones to get paid for (The Swedish Board of Agriculture, 2008).

The concept of added value and the relationships between the different aspects are unclear and illusive, in particular as regards foods. There is a need to explore/clarify definitions and dimensions. Therefore, the aim of this article is to develop a conceptual framework which explores definitions and discussions associated with added values of food products.

1.1. Values and Added Values – General Aspects

Several authors consider value as a multi-faceted construct (e. g. Porter; 1985; Sweeney and Soutar, 2001; de Chernatony *et al.* 2000; Sheth *et al.*, 1991, Sweeney & Soutar, 2001) proposed a four dimensional model for the explanation of attitudes and behaviour of purchase at brand level. The dimensions identified were denoted emotional, social, quality/performance and price/value for money.

Sheth *et al.* (1991) present five consumption values influencing consumer choice, based on a great number of previous literature/sources: i) functional value, ii) social value, iii) emotional value, iv) epistemic value, and v) conditional value. The authors also propose that consumer choice is a function of multiple consumption values and that these values are independent of each other.

Grönroos (1997) was one of few to distinguish between *core value* and *added value*. He defined an offering's core value as the core solution and its added value as additional services that the consumers pay extra money to enjoy (p.413). In this article, however, the concept of

¹ Michael E. Porter introduced the concept of value chain in the book *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance* (1985)

added values is only discussed meaning added values that are included in the prize of the product carrying the core value(s).

Kaspersson *et al.* (2004, p.55), on the other hand, mean that there are not only added values, but also “potential added values”. These can include, among others, a product’s environmental or ethical characteristics. It is, say the authors, not until the product is launched on the market, that it can be said if the characteristics (i.e. the potential added values) really imply added values, i.e. if customers are willing to pay for them.

1.2. Added Values Related to Food Products

Food products constitute products that all consumers can relate to. The Swedish food sector, including its different actors, has identified numerous types of added values related to food products. However, these have not yet been systematically classified. Being more conscious about the added values of products would increase the possibilities to communicate them, to the next actor, and finally to the end-consumer. However, the perceptions of added values often vary among and between the actors in the value-chain. Further, the communication of the added values can change depending on how many actors there were before the last – and analysed - communication was written.

Table 1. Examples of types of added values that may be associated to food products

Added value	Reference(s)
Convenience	Brown and McEnally, (1993), Coughlan <i>et al.</i> , (2006)
Health	Mark-Herbert (2004), Maynard and Franklin (2003), Zaripheh and Miller (2009), Divine and Lepisto, 2005, Rozin <i>et al.</i> , (1999)
Environment, ecology	Solér (1996; 1999; 2001), Solér <i>et al.</i> (2005), Aronsson (2006), Biel <i>et al.</i> (2006); Stern (2007), Wright and Mc Crea (2007)
Ethics	Young & Welford (2002)
Aesthetics	Jönsson (2006)
Culture, including traditions and heritage	Daugstad <i>et al.</i> (2006); The Council of The European Union (2006); European Commission (2007); Tellström, R. <i>et al.</i> (2006)
Justice	Wright and Mc Crea (2007)
Status	Worsley and Scott (2000)
Authenticity	European Commission (2007); Sims (2009), Lagerberg Fogelberg and Fogelberg (2011)

Gullstrand and Hammarlund (2007) believe that many of the characteristics related to added values of Swedish food products mentioned in the debate possess so-called “credence characteristics” (p. 10), i.e. characteristics that consumers cannot discover before nor after a purchase (see also Benner, 2005). A consumer may, for instance, decide whether an apple is red and tastes good, but have a harder time deciding what amounts of biocides it contains. The harder it is perceived by a consumer to connect a certain characteristic to a certain product, the harder it will be for the consumer to take into account the characteristic in question when deciding on purchasing the product (p.10). Gullstrand and Hammarlund (2007) further describe “credence characteristics” as characteristics that are related to the production, such as healthy animals and consideration for the environment or characteristics that are associated with the product yet not easy to discover.

The added value of a product is determined by the products physical properties, distribution (Bergström and Hedlund, 2004) as well as by the receivers’/consumers’ associations and evaluations of the feelings the concept transmits. Generic grounds for added value are displayed in Table 1. Social values may involve components such as those of status, context, shared interests, exclusivity and authenticity (van Ittersum *et al.*, 2007; Lagerberg Fogelberg

and Fogelberg, 2011). Origin is sometimes put forward as an added value. However, the added value is not carried by the origin itself but by the associations to the origin. These associations involve e.g. health, comfort, environment, exclusivity, ethics and social values, i.e. all of the above mentioned added values. Consequently, whether the origin represents an added value or not is determined by the types of properties (above) the receiver associate to. Therefore, the origin in itself is not regarded as an added value but is of a different character than the added values mentioned.

The senders' level of involvement, that is enthusiasm and engagement as well as lack of enthusiasm and engagement affect the receivers' perception and appreciation of potential added values. Moreover, the valuation of potential added values are modified by aspects such as context (e.g. whether in a positive social environment or under stress) or shared interests creating a sense of belonging and comfort from sharing views, perceptions, and appreciations.

The potential added value becomes actual upon realisation on the market in terms of increased demand and/or higher price. It is not only about adding values to products but also to prevent negative associations which may lead to subtracted values. This would occur in a situation such as when the product/offer loses in exclusivity when the product is sold in major common stores and the accessibility increases.

1.3. Added Values Transforming into Core Values

Traditionally, the literature has made strict and categorical distinctions between core values and added values. However, we stress that this traditional view needs to be challenged/nuanced. For food products we argue that core values cannot be clearly distinguished from added values. Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between core values and added values. Some core values associated to food include nutrition, taste, fullness, hygienic and chemical properties associated to food safety.

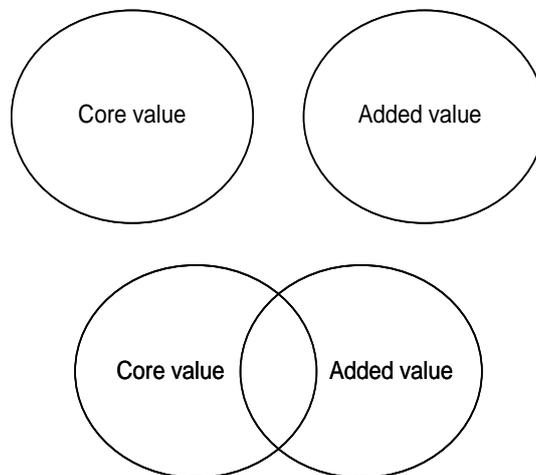


Figure 1. From separated core value and added value to overlapping core values and added values

Added values may become more important than core values. This implies that the added value adopts the function/characteristic of a core value. For instance, during the process of a person becoming a vegetarian for ethical reasons, the added value of ethics transforms into a core value over time. Simultaneously, in the case of the same person perceiving meat to be more tasteful than vegetarian substitutes, the tastes of these alternatives compete in being (remain or become) the core value. We thus argue that there exists a threshold where the preference of meat taste loses its dominant status as a core value while the preference of taste

of vegetarian substitutes gain enough core characteristics to overthrow the meat taste as core value.

Taste is an example of a value possessing characteristics of both a core value in accordance with some basic minimum level of taste, and an added value, i.e. related to the degree of taste above the minimum level. We stress that the customer require a minimum level of satisfaction regarding the value in question for an added value to be perceived to be a core value. There are thus individual thresholds between added values and core values. Core values as well as added values change in accordance with the associations of senders and receivers. There are thus individual thresholds between added values and core values.

1.4. Dimensions of Added Values Related to Food Products

Our analysis emanated in seven dimensions of added values regarding foods. The dimensions constitute attributes of the added values. The dimensions are illustrated as continuum, where an added value can be perceived by different actors in different places of the respective continuum. For instance, for different receivers/customers the added value "tradition" can be more or less concrete, depending on their knowledge of the tradition. Furthermore, the consumers who perceive a product's origin as an added value are those who are willing to pay the extra costs that the added value may have caused the company in order for a potential added value to become an actual added value. The identified dimensions of food-related added values are presented in Figure 2.

Degree of Belonging to the physical product	
Intrinsic _____	X _____
Extrinsic	
Degree of Materialism	
Physical _____	X _____
Immaterial	
Degree of Concreteness	
Concrete _____	X _____
Abstract	
Degree of Objectivity	
Objective _____	X _____
Subjective	
Degree of Dynamism	
Static _____	X _____
Dynamic	
Degree of Directness	
Direct _____	X _____
Indirect	
Degree of Segmentation	
Related to target market _____	X _____
market	Unrelated to target market

Figure 2. Dimensions of added values associated to food products

Note: The X signs represent *examples* how an added value may be located on the scale of each dimension. N. B. the scale of any dimension is independent of the scales of other dimensions.

The scale of any dimension is independent of the other dimensions, i.e. the positions of different added values may only be compared to each other *within* each dimension and not *between* dimensions.

Some of the dimensions are partly overlapping, however, a future challenge will be to divide the overlapping or interrelated dimensions into subgroups. In the following, explanations are given regarding all of the dimensions. In order to illustrate the different dimensions in a concrete way, examples are given below.

- ✓ **Intrinsic and extrinsic:** Intrinsic added values imply that the values are a part of the product, whereas extrinsic added values are *outside* the product. (Baughn and Yaprak, 1993). An example of an added value that is intrinsic is when ingredients, such as probiotics, are included in the product. An example of an extrinsic added value is the geographical origin of the product.
- ✓ **Physical and immaterial:** Physical added values resemble intrinsic values, since they both make part of the product and are not outside the product, such as immaterial added values can be. The two dimensions (intrinsic/extrinsic and physical/immaterial) partly overlap. However, it can e.g. be discussed if the package of a product is material, however not *extrinsic*, as an example.
- ✓ **Concrete and abstract:** The value added of a product that is promoted as being from Gotland (the Swedish largest island) may be more concrete than the value added of Swedish products in general. The reason would be that Sweden is a larger geographical entity.
- ✓ **Objective and subjective:** An added value may be objective in the sense that different customers would not have different opinions about it. A company can, for instance, claim that there are no chemical additives in a product. In that case, the added value is objective.
- ✓ **Static and dynamic:** An added value can change more or less over time in the eyes of consumers or other parties, or its importance can remain static. One example is consumers' interest in ecology and climate. Some years ago, the interest was much lower for these values. Some added values, such as if the product tastes good, are static (although subjective as well, see above).
- ✓ **Direct and indirect:** A product's origin may be an added value that a consumer appreciates. However, the added value that the consumer really searches for is an *exclusive* food product to show friends and family. In this example, the added value "origin" would be the direct one, and exclusiveness the indirect added value.
- ✓ **Related to target market – unrelated to target market:** An added value may interest a certain segment of consumers, while other added values may be more or less "universally" appreciated (i.e. among all types of consumers).

Some added values such as health and environment may be considered synergistic in that the experience of some health components are associated with enhanced environmental values and vice versa. Thus spinoff or cascading effects may be generated from such associated added values.

Added values may contradict each other. Accessibility may have positive and/or negative influences on purchase behaviour depending on whether the product is perceived to possess exclusive attributes or is a necessary every day food product. For instance in a situation where a consumer wishes to purchase an exclusive farm made cheese in the regular supermarket where the cheese loses some of its exclusivity, the consumer may decide not to purchase it. In this case, accessibility and exclusivity may be considered antagonistic. This may

be seen as an example of negative cascading where one added value will have negative impact on another added value.

2. From Potential Added Value to Intentions to Purchase

In order for the existence of a potential added value to lead to intentions to purchase we propose that certain conditions must be met (Figure 3). The added value must be perceived or understood/interpreted by the customer. Moreover the customer needs to appreciate the added value in order to assign value to it. All these conditions must be met in order for the customer to respond by realizing the added value in his or her purchase, or by spreading positive word of mouth enhancing purchase. Not only the end consumer but all actors involved in the supply chain contribute to the overall realization of the added value, i.e. all actors must *perceive*, *appreciate*, *value* and *realize* the added value. Only then may the added value result in added pay or other advantages such as increased market share or strengthened market position at different markets. If any of these conditions are not met the added value will not be realized at/on the market.

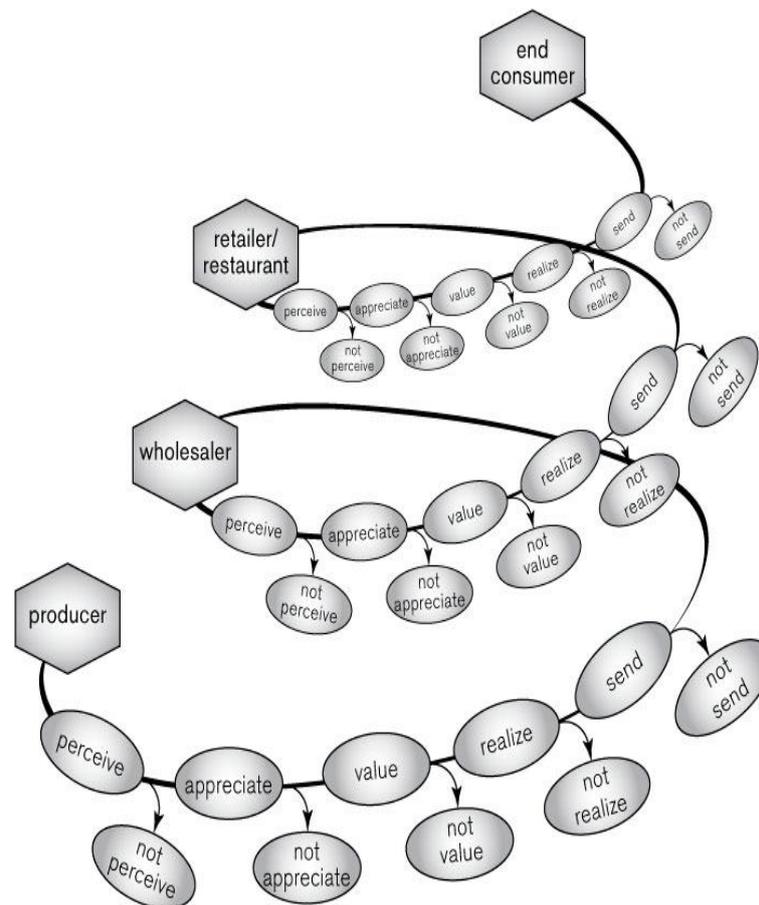


Figure 3. Conditions for an added value to lead to intentions to purchase while transforming the potential added value to an actual added value realized on the market

Figure 3 was inspired by the model of the perceptual process by Solomon *et al.* (2006, p.37), which describes the process by which the consumer responds to the basic stimuli sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. Our model above rather explains how the perception of

added value may lead to a strengthened position of the agent supplying an offer with added value. During this process the potential added value is interacting with the knowledge and emotions of the customer whereby it is transformed into an actual added value upon realization on the market.

Potential added values may be picked up and added to the original product including original associated potential added values along the actor chain (Figure 3).

We also propose that there is a specific type of added value generated by a group's consumption pattern, i.e. when the consumption of individuals complement each other in such a pattern that the overall consumption of the group results in advantages for the individual. This is the case for values involving environmental effects and is a burning issue to central authorities and governments. For instance consuming all parts of an animal (cow, pig, sheep) within a limited region, however any single individual living in the region does not need to eat all parts of the animal, generates environmental advantages, that is added value, for all the individuals in the region. This type of added value is thus generated by the individuals' choices relative to the group's overall choices, i. e. it is created at group level, but is harvested at individual level. It may be argued that this type of added value is difficult to realise on the market, especially by the individual. However the effects of such group behaviour adding value may result in avoided costs such as for restoring environmental functions/values when/if possible, medical care etc. which also generates benefit to the individuals' economy. The work in progress by the Swedish National Food Administration to aid/trigger the Swedish population to eat more environmentally clever may be seen as an effort to create such added value where the groups changed behaviour create added value at the individual level (Lagerberg Fogelberg, 2008; National Food Administration, 2009a; b).

2.1. Co-Creation of Added Values of Foods

It has been shown that experiences surrounding the original offer may be co-created (co-produced) with the consumer, thus creating an added value (see e.g. Sogn-Grundvåg *et al.*, 2009). However, while many consumers seem to gain satisfaction by taking active part in the production of added value, others may be more indifferent regarding this aspect (Johansson *et al.*, 2010). In one previous study a small scale bakery emphasizes that adaption of the offer/product to the customers' desires is an important part of the added value of their offer (unpublished, Mark-Herbert and Lagerberg Fogelberg, 2007). In the same study a small-scale fruit industry emphasized its cooperation with customers to develop products and surrounding services fitted to the customers' needs. Both of these illustrate active co-creation of (added) values as a strategy to market success. Sogn-Grundvåg *et al.* (2009) examined customer relation strategies of eight Norwegian seafood retailers. They found that co-creation was possible in a short-term interaction of retailing. Considerable effort was also devoted to co-creation of experiences while making use of different strategies to involve customers.

It thus seems too simplistic to view the customer as a passive recipient of potential added values. Instead the customer often contributes to the creation of added values in several ways. For instance: active, knowledgeable and involved customers may contribute to the development of improved products, for instance by suggesting to extend of the assortment of products (Johansson *et al.*, 2010). The added value experience of eating the exclusive artisan bread Upplandskubb is co-created by customers, producers and other actors jointly creating an environment of exclusivity.

3. Conclusion and Managerial Implications

In this article, the term added value regarding food products has been discussed as a contribution to previous literature, where added value has not been related to these products. Since the concept of added value was unclear, as well as its dimensions, the discussion in this article could clarify and explore definitions as well as dimensions more thoroughly. In the beginning of the article, a discussion on core values and added values as two totally separate

types of values came to be considered somewhat overlapping, this being the case if an added value is perceived more important than a core value to target consumers.

The article identifies major challenges for food product producers – both what regards their consciousness of the added values of their own products' and how communicate them to the other actors in the value chain, and - finally – to the end-consumer.

This, then, implies that food producers will have to identify and classify their core, added and subtracted values respectively, depending on what consumer segment they are targeting with their products, and by what market channels they are selling and communicating the values of their products. A particular challenge lies in communicating products with credence characteristics, since the information on the added value is difficult to identify by the consumer even after consumption.

Also, companies should ask themselves if they should add value as a part of a long-term strategy/marketing plan or to let customers in any step of the value chain find the added values. These, however, are two "extremes", and most companies ought to prefer a mix of these two ways of adding values. In any case, the adoption of a strategy implies a more active construction of added values. Furthermore, based on inspiration of this article, companies should be able to identify and classify their added and subtracted values respectively in relation to their target groups and the marketing channels used to communicate the added values.

Furthermore, companies should identify where the added values of their products are located along the scales of dimensions presented in Figure 2, reflect on the consequences of those results, e.g. relate their position on the scales to their target group(s). Doing so, companies may more easily figure out whether they are targeting the right consumer segments.

Decisions for food companies to make are facilitated if companies have access to or, if they, themselves, conduct market research including the target consumers. Certain answers to why consumers would purchase companies' products will be given by such research. The issue of added values being perceived as core values for some consumers may be a result of such market research as well.

The conceptual framework was developed focusing on food products, but it could also be used as an inspiration source regarding how a conceptual framework could be discussed and developed for other types of products.

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