

# LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT OF SPANIARDS IN THE CONSUMPTION OF IBERIAN DRY-CURED HAM

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Consumer experience can be directly related to material objects or purchased goods, while food and beverages are associated with consumption experiences. The fundamental principle of experiential consumption is based on the idea that value is not limited to purchase objects (products and services) and their utilitarian and functional benefits, but also to the consumption experience itself, including the interaction with the product and service. These elements can influence the consumer's perception of value [1]. The selection of food for consumption is a multifactorial process influenced by extrinsic (non-sensory), intrinsic (sensory), physiological and psychological factors [2,3]. Iberian dry-cured ham is known for its unique characteristics and for providing a special consumption experience due to its high quality and its sensory characteristics [4]. Spain is the world's main producer and consumer country of dry-cured ham. According to national food consumption data, in 2021 the purchase of Iberian ham intensified by 9.3%, reflecting that pleasure is one of the main conditioning factors for the consumer. The wide customer base and the long tradition in production have built the reputation of specific regions as more suitable to produce quality hams [5], for example, Extremadura. Therefore, the main objective of this work is to reveal the consumption levels of Iberian dry-cured ham by Spanish consumers and to determine the profile of these consumers considering different levels of involvement.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To establish the different groups of Iberian ham consumers according to their degree of involvement with the product and level of consumption, an online survey was disseminated through different media and powerful social networks (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn). The survey was carried out on the Google Forms platform, composed of questions related to sociodemographic characteristics (sex, age, nationality) and frequency of consumption using a 5-points scale (1=never to 5= every day). A total of 231 Spaniards participated in this study with ages between 17 and 68 years balanced between men and women. To know the level of involvement of the participants, the habits and opinions regarding Iberian ham were asked with 28 items considering dimensions of interest, conduct, ritual, pleasure, and risk. This same questionnaire was also applied to experts. Finally, considering the scores of the responses, the respondents were divided into three groups: low; moderate; high. Participants with low and high involvement will present average scores below the 33rd percentile and above the 67th percentile, respectively. A Pearson correlation test ( $P < 0.05$ ) was performed between the dimensions.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The average consumption level obtained among all participants was  $3.41 \pm 0.76$ , representing consumption greater than once a month. Higher consumption levels are recorded as the higher the level of involvement. Level of involvement (LI) scores ranged from 1.96 to 4.66 with a mean of  $3.41 \pm 0.60$  among all participants. To stratify the data matrix scores at different levels of involvement, the percentile scale was applied separating into three groups of consumers. The group with a low level of involvement (33%  $LI \leq 2.93$ ), medium level of involvement ( $LI 2.94-3.35$ ), and high level of involvement (67%  $LI \geq 3.35$ ). To ensure that there were only two concise and distinct levels of engagement, thus

eliminating the possibility of possible overlap, respondents in the moderate category were excluded, leaving only respondents in the low and high levels. A group of experts also answered the questionnaire. These had between 3 and 34 years of experience with Iberian ham. Within the evaluated dimensions, the groups differed significantly from each other, as shown in Table 1. Clearly, the main differences found are between the levels of involvement Low when compared to High and experts. Among the High and Experts group, only the interest dimension was significantly higher for the Experts group.

Table 1. Level of involvement of the focus group participants

Dimension	Low	High	Expert	P
Interest	1.75±0.75 <sup>c</sup>	3.03±1.17 <sup>b</sup>	3.63±1.17 <sup>a</sup>	< 0.0001
Conduct	2.45±1.20 <sup>b</sup>	3.77±1.13 <sup>a</sup>	3.59±1.31 <sup>a</sup>	< 0.0001
Ritual	2.92±0.99 <sup>b</sup>	4.10±0.96 <sup>a</sup>	4.04±1.01 <sup>a</sup>	< 0.0001
Pleasure	2.67±1.27 <sup>b</sup>	3.81±1.13 <sup>a</sup>	3.67±1.30 <sup>a</sup>	< 0.0001
Risk	2.68±1.00 <sup>b</sup>	4.03±0.77 <sup>a</sup>	3.83±1.09 <sup>a</sup>	< 0.0001

Different letters indicate significant differences ( $P < 0.05$ ) according to the ANOVA and Tukey pair-wise post-hoc tests.

Significantly positive correlations ( $P < 0.05$ ) were found between the dimension pleasure with conduct, ritual, and risk, and between risk and conduct. This scenario gives evidence that the higher the level of pleasure associated with the consumption of Iberian dry-cured ham, the greater the conduct related to the product, the more requirements are adopted in the purchase and consumption of the product, and the greater the concerns with the quality and experience of consumption.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The present work confirms that the experience of consuming Iberic dry-cured ham involves the interaction of different dimensions. Iberian dry-cured ham, a traditional product in Spain, has high consumption levels among the population. However, Spanish consumers show different levels of involvement related to this product. High levels of involvement, as well as a high level of experience, are associated with greater involvement related to the dimensions of interest, conduct, ritual, pleasure, and risk. The opposite is associated with low levels of involvement. Thus, the similarities and differences between the levels of involvement confirm that the construction of the experience of eating Iberic dry-cured ham among consumers with different levels of involvement and specialization.

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