

A Cultural Hedonic Framework for Increasing the Consumption of Unfamiliar Foods: Soy Acceptance in Russia and Colombia

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It is important to understand how a country's cultural influences may affect introduction of a new or unfamiliar food. In this paper, we present a cultural hedonic framework that uses a cultures' context (low versus high) and its view toward food consumption (hedonic versus utilitarian consumption) to assess the difficulty of introducing an unfamiliar food to this market. This framework is then applied to determine the most effective means to stimulate soy consumption in Russia and Colombia. General guidelines show how the cultural hedonic framework can be used to provide insights into distribution, message positioning, and marketing strategy for other foods and products in a variety of situations.

Food consumption patterns are greatly affected by cultural differences (Mead 1943). How do we encourage people to alter their consumption patterns and consume an unfamiliar food that could eliminate a key nutritional deficiency? Consider eliminating a protein deficiency. During the rationing years of World War II, American citizens were encouraged to incorporate protein-rich organ meats into their protein-deficient diets. Initial attempts to change their consumption behavior were rejected because both the preparation and the taste of organ meats were unfamiliar (Wansink 2002 [1]). Similarly, although today's protein deficiencies throughout the world could be inexpensively reduced with soy protein, Q1

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it is widely rejected because both the preparation and the taste of soy is unfamiliar (Wansink et al.).

The acceptance of an unfamiliar food depends on making it appear consistent with cultural perceptions and consumption patterns. To better understand the process by which food is accepted and integrated into a particular country's culture, we present a cultural hedonic framework based on two critical factors that influence a culture or country's acceptance of an unfamiliar food. The first is the strength of cultural attitudes and traditions in daily life (Lee and Kacen). Cultures whose traditions and practices strongly affect daily life are "higher context." In contrast, cultures are "lower context" when traditions and practices only weakly affect daily life (Hofstede).

The second factor we examine is the general perception of food consumption within a culture (Furst et al.). Some cultures view food exclusively as providing energy and health, while others have a greater sense of appreciation for the complexity of preparation and for the process of savoring food. Based on prior conventions, we refer to the first perspective as utilitarian and the second as hedonic (Chandon, Wansink, and Laurent).

The cultural hedonic framework that emerges from both the theoretical discussion and two specific case studies improves our understanding of how to better integrate new or unfamiliar foods into different cultures. Using this framework, strategies for effectively encouraging the acceptance of any unfamiliar food can be developed. More generally, however, this framework improves our understanding of how culture influences food consumption behavior.

After outlining the components of the cultural hedonic framework, it is applied to examining how soy could be most effectively introduced to Russia and Columbia. Following this, general guidelines will be provided to show how the cultural hedonic framework can be used to provide insights related to distribution, message positioning, and marketing strategy for other foods and products in a variety of situations.

A Framework for Increasing Acceptance of Unfamiliar Foods across Cultures

Most multinational food manufacturers employ customized marketing programs to accommodate individual countries and cultures by modifying product features, such as taste, brand name, package size, and ingredients (Aaker and Maheswaran). Because foods are highly culture bound, our question then becomes how does culture influence behaviors and attitudes toward unfamiliar foods? To answer this question, cultures are examined with respect to having a higher or lower cultural context and whether they view the consumption of food as being more of a utilitarian or hedonic experience.

The Impact of Cultural Context on Food Preference

The cultural context—the characteristics and attitudes of a culture—will shape and mold views about everything in that culture, including food (McCracken). The impact of a culture's "context" can notably affect how people make decisions

(Funakawa; Hall; Mead [2]). For example, “higher context” cultures, such as those often found in Latin America and Asia, focus heavily on personal relationships and social interaction (Passmore). Columbia, for instance, is culturally rich and personally interactive.

In contrast, “lower context” cultures, such as many Western nations, focus on individualism and achievement (Funakawa). Lower context cultures include Anglo-Saxon cultures and those in Eastern Europe (Roberts and Micken). For instance, Russia is generally a much more individualistic culture (despite its historically collectivist government) with a strong emphasis on straightforward communication (Lee). While difficult to analyze (Sobal), table 1 illustrates some of the general themes of lower and higher context cultures.

The same characteristics that influence personal choices also affect food choices, with culture playing an important role. Because cultural traditions and practices

Table 1. Characteristics of higher and lower context cultures

	Characteristics of Higher Context Cultures	Characteristics of Lower Context Cultures
How cultural context impacts personal choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong preference towards cultural traditions and practices • Desire for many close personal relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and clients • Tendency to use multiple forms of communication at once (e.g., tone of voice, timing, facial expressions, and choice of words) • Focus on meaning that is implicit in relationships and situations • Placement of emphasis on the group (e.g., collectivism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong preference towards individual decisions and preferences • Lack of strong cultural pressure to follow tradition • Tendency to use explicit and straightforward communication (e.g. complete, accurate, and appropriate word choice) • Placement of emphasis on the individual • Willingness to change cultural patterns
How cultural context impacts food choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value placed on traditional food dishes • Consider food presentation and texture to be as important as taste • Preference for complex and involved food dishes • Unwillingness to try foreign and not culturally accepted foods • Tendency to favor taste over nutrition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value placed on functional, practical, nutritional foods • Preference for simple, quick food dishes • High willingness to accept new foods and adapt personal eating habits accordingly

are important in higher context cultures, they favor foods and dining rituals that have cultural significance (Hall). Lower context cultures, as a result of their individualism, do not have this same cultural attachment and tend to prefer foods that are inexpensive, simple, and convenient to prepare (Levi-Strauss).

If a person believes that an unfamiliar food can be easily integrated into his or her diet and culture, the food is likely to be accepted (Wansink and Ray). The likelihood of an unfamiliar food being integrated into a culture is dependent upon whether the “context” of a culture is high or low (Mead [2]). For example, in the higher cultural context nation of Columbia, the traditional tortilla (arepa) is favored over foreign-imported tortillas. With its higher context, Columbia has a strong emphasis on cultural foods and complex dishes. Russia, in contrast, deals with more practical food matters and places greater emphasis on individual decision making. Columbia and Russia will be used to highlight the extreme ends of the lower and higher cultural context continuum.

Hedonic and Utilitarian Views of Food Consumption

All cultures do not consume food for the same reasons. Some cultures, generally categorized as utilitarian, view food consumption as necessary to stay healthy (table 2). More hedonic cultures, in contrast, regard food as a highly refined and culturally expressive activity where cultural expression is a central aspect of food consumption (Hirschman and Holbrook). Although these categorizations are only generalities, table 2 outlines key differences to underscore how this hedonic versus utilitarian distinction has been useful in explaining a wide range of behaviors in other contexts (Chandon, Wansink, and Laurent).

This division between utilitarian and hedonic cultures provides an important distinction when looking at cultural perceptions of food. Utilitarian cultures perceive food consumption as more simply related to nutritional and health benefits. In a utilitarian culture like Russia, food is valued primarily as a means to an end (Price et al.). Similarly, in Vietnam, food shortages and civil strife have meant food consumption is focused on providing nutritional and health benefits. As a

Table 2. Characterizing utilitarian and hedonic perceptions of food consumption

A Utilitarian Perception of Food Consumption Involves...	A Hedonic Perception of Food Consumption Involves...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus on functional aspects of food • A preference towards simple cultural foods and dishes • A desire for practicality in food consumption • A focus on the end benefits of eating, such as energy, calories, or nutrition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An emphasis on the taste of food • A preference for cultural eating practices • A desire for complex cultural food dishes or for elaborate and extravagant foods • A focus on the cultural practice of eating food, as well as the end benefits

result, the people of Vietnam view food as primarily instrumental and functional (Hirschman and Holbrook).

Hedonic cultures treat food consumption as a deeply cultural experience involving meaningful, complex preparation and enjoyment. In a hedonic culture like Columbia, the cultural traditions play an integral part in determining a person's diet. Similarly, in Japan, food is viewed as experiential and affective. Food is appreciated for its own sake, with less further regard for practical purpose.

Applying the Cultural Hedonic Framework

The matrix of lower versus higher cultural context and utilitarian versus hedonic perceptions of food comprises the cultural framework that can help us better understand that food preferences vary among countries. The framework also can help us predict the size of the market for new foods. In addition, the framework can be used to determine how to best encourage the adoption of soy into the diets of Russians and Columbians. Soy is being examined because it is a healthy, inexpensive, versatile, and unfamiliar food in many parts of the world. Russia and Columbia were selected as case studies because Russia represents a relatively lower cultural context and utilitarian perception of food, while Columbia has a relatively higher cultural context and hedonic perception of food.

Introducing Soy-fortified Foods to Russia

Introducing an unfamiliar food into Russia needs to take into account both the lower cultural context and utilitarian cultural perception of food. Because Russians regard food as practical and functional, it is less important to encourage them to culturally desire soy than it is to introduce it as a cost-effective, nutritious, functional means of fortifying existing foods.

Although many foods can be fortified with soy, some products will be accepted more easily than others. Factors such as the nutritional value are critically important when making the decision about which products should be fortified first. Meat may be the best candidate for soy fortification because it will increase nutritional value and decrease price. Soy flour, however, is a far less promising candidate because fortification adds to the cost of dough and influences its consistency, density, and baking properties. The result would be a loss of practicality and functionality in the dough's usefulness and versatility. These findings suggest that while some products are immediately ready for soy fortification, others will require a careful integration process.

Table 3 breaks down the use of soy fortification among different foods, summarizes overall demand for the food, and recommends the likelihood for societal integration of various soy-fortified products. Different variables (volume of food consumed, percentage of soy fortification, public acceptance, etc.) were used to derive these final recommendations for each type of food. These recommendations take into account different tastes, as well as unfamiliar cooking performance of goods like soy-fortified dough and ground beef for pelmeni. A public awareness campaign highlighting the benefits of soy is required to overcome these unfamiliar characteristics of soy-fortified foods. This will encourage utilitarian consumers to realize the functional and practical aspects of soy (nutrients and

Table 3. Introducing soy-fortified foods in Russia

	Ease of Soy Fortification	Volume Food Consumed/Year (mil mt, except eggs)	Potential % of Soy Fortification	Potential Volume of Soy Used (mil mt)	Likelihood of Soy Acceptance	Likelihood of Successful Integration
Staple foods						
Meat	High	6,000	30%	1,800	High	Excellent
Potatoes (mashed)	Medium	13,650	20%	2,730	Medium	Good
Milk (soy)	High	Unknown	100%	—	Low	Fair
Cheese	High	8,587	50%	4,293	Medium	Good
Butter	Low	945	5%	47	Medium	Good
Soy oil	High	Unknown	100%	180	High	Good
Bread (flour)	High	17,700	13%	2,301	Medium	Good
Ethnic dishes						
Pelmeni meat	High	3,120	30%	936	High	Excellent
Pelmeni dough	Medium	1,170	20%	234	Medium	Good
Vareniki dough	Medium	1,170	20%	234	Medium	Good
Sausages	High	1,950	30%	585	High	Excellent
Kielbasa	High	2,340	30%	702	High	Excellent
Crapes flour	Medium	1,170	20%	234	Medium	Good

low cost) through acceptance of soy-fortified products like ground beef, sausage, milk, and cheese. Such a shift should not be difficult because it is done in a lower context environment where changes in food preference are possible when done in straightforward manner that underscores the relative benefits compared with the substituted products (Wansink [3]).

Q3

Introducing Soy-Fortified Foods to Colombia

As with Russia, the integration of a new food into Columbia must account for their cultural context and cultural perception of food. However, unlike Russia, Columbia is a higher context/hedonic culture with deep, rich cultural traditions characterized by a history of more complex and extravagant foods. To encourage Columbians to accept an unfamiliar food, more care needs to be given to their cultural practices. Unlike Russia, a benefit-oriented communication strategy would be too intrusive in the beginning. Instead, the basic approach of soy fortification will be the most unobtrusive way to quietly introduce soy.

In Colombia, meat is the best candidate for soy fortification because it can be fortified without having to sacrifice any taste or flavor. Specifically, soy-fortified sausages are recommended because not only is some soy fortification currently being done, but also mass fortification will not affect the highly valued taste or texture of food. Flour is an unacceptable candidate for fortification because adding soy will change the taste of traditional dishes made with flour, such as the arepa. Only after soy has become integrated into Columbian culture and been accepted as a standard ingredient would chefs be willing to experiment with other soy products like flour. Since integration of a new food product in a higher context and hedonic culture can only come about as a result of working within the culture, a product that made familiar products unfamiliar would be undesirable.

Table 4 breaks down the use of soy fortification among different foods, summarizes overall demand, and recommends the likelihood and the frame of societal integration of soy-fortified products. Different variables (such as the volume of food consumed, percentage of soy fortification, public acceptance) were used to develop the final recommendations for each type of food. As with Russia, potential problems with soy-fortified foods include an unusual taste and unfamiliar characteristics of foods that may pose problems during meal preparation.

Discussion

If we examine a higher cultural context and hedonic culture such as Columbia, we find that its cultural traditions play an important role in dictating food consumption behavior. In such a case, soy-fortified meat products would be the best medium to increase soy consumption. In Russia, fortification is also the best initial means to introduce soy. With a lower cultural context and a utilitarian culture, soy fortification offers the best way to inexpensively improve the nutritional value of Russian foods.

Both countries use soy in their sausage production and conditions are favorable for a successful integration. If another, less popular product were to be introduced first (such as soy flour), the negative response would make any further soy introductions difficult. If first experiences with new products are negative, introducing

Table 4. Introducing soy-fortified foods in Columbia

	Ease of Soy Fortification	Volume Food Consumed per Year (mil mt)	Potential % of Soy Fortification	Potential Volume of Soy Used (mil mt)	Likelihood of Soy Acceptance	Likelihood of Successful Integration
Staple foods						
Meat	High	342	30%	102	High	Excellent
Vegetables	Low	1,925	—	—	Low	Fair
Milk & cheese	High	3,850	75%	2,887	Medium	Good
Oil	High	308	100%	308	Medium	Good
Bread	High	3,657	13%	457	Medium	Good
Ethnic dishes						
Bandeja paisa	High (meat)	200	30%	60	High	Good
Arroz atollado	High	80.8	30%	24.2	High	Excellent
Sancocho	Low	100.1	30%	30.3	High	Excellent
Arepa	High	2,695	13%	350.3	Medium	Good

Table 5. Suggested programs for increasing soy consumption in Russia and Colombia

	Russia (Lower Context—Utilitarian)	Colombia (Higher Context—Hedonic)
Education and advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use direct consumer product advertising, preferably driven by the government, an international agency, or a trusted food organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use indirect product promotions involving publicity • Facilitate word-of-mouth communication beginning with opinion leaders
Product modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate soybeans with traditional Russian foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find variety of soy food menu items that can provide consumers joy of preparation
Message strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize the benefits of eating soy (nutrition, cost, flexibility, convenience) • Use factual quantitative advertising • Position soy foods as ordinary, low price foods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize the premium and quality aspects of soy foods • Utilize indirect advertising campaigns (e.g., publicity, product placement ads) • Use implicit, dialogue-driven qualitative advertising • Position soy foods as culturally normal, premium foods

other new foods will be difficult because people will be considerably less receptive to additional introductions.

Table 5 summarizes suggested programs for increasing soy consumption in Russia and Colombia. In general, these suggestions reflect cultural communication contexts, information needs, and food perception concerns. For the Russian market, we suggest an explicit promotional campaign that highlights the functional and practical aspects of soy—specifically its health and costs benefits. In promoting individual products, care should be taken to position soy foods as simple, efficient, and practical Russian foods normally consumed. In the short run, fortifying practical and functional foods (like ground beef) would allow producers to get a foothold in the market. In the long run, these changes will be widely accepted if they are perceived to increase the utilitarian value of the foods at little cost and little inconvenience.

In contrast to Russia, the recommendations for introducing soy into Colombia reflect its culture’s higher context and hedonic perception of food. In the Colombian market, we suggest a more indirect promotional campaign, built on publicity, general consumer education programs, and on word-of-mouth recommendations from opinion leaders. These methods will be more effective in a higher context culture where massive social bonds and relationships dictate behavior far more profoundly than mass advertising or promotional campaigns. However, unlike the Russian approach (which merely requires a benefit-focused strategy),

care needs to be taken in Columbia to demonstrate that soy can be used in traditional Columbian foods (like sausages) while maintaining the traditional rich taste, texture, and integrity.

Leveraging the Cultural Hedonic Framework in Other Contexts

Countries with different cultural contexts accept unfamiliar foods in different ways for different reasons. This must be reflected in how marketers coordinate product development, promotion campaigns, distribution, and pricing. Table 6 summarizes suggested courses of actions according to the cultural hedonic framework. In applying this framework, a country's perception of food (as either hedonic or utilitarian) and cultural context (low or high) needs to be assessed. While our study makes broad generalities about country cultures, different cultural groups or segments coexist in a single country and our framework needs to be applied differently to each segment. Once a segment's food perceptions and cultural context have been identified, a marketing campaign should be constructed and executed in line with the suggestions in table 6. For example, for countries with low-context culture and utilitarian perceptions of food, we recommend that marketers emphasize soy health benefits in a data-driven manner, differentiate soy foods as healthy-premium foods, and emphasize personalized benefits of eating soy through direct promotional campaigns (Wansink and Chan).

As noted previously, the cultural hedonic framework represents a generalization of a population's behavior within a particular culture or country. That is, in every higher context country, there are lower context subsegments; in every country with a generally hedonic view toward food consumption, there are subsegments with utilitarian views.

The objective of this paper is not to provide absolute measures for cross-cultural generalizations, but to describe a tool that can provide better understanding and insights to help encourage the acceptance of healthy, unfamiliar foods.

While the scenarios are hypothetical, there are many universal ideas that can be applied to real-life scenarios. Most central is the notion that successful marketing campaigns not only take culture into consideration, but also use it as a starting point for integrating a new or unfamiliar product. In Colombia and Russia, fortification of meat offers a culturally consistent use of soy that would lend credence to the soy products that would follow and offer the best prospects for long-term growth in soy consumption.

The focus of the paper has centered on increasing food consumption in Columbia and Russia. However, for the purposes of illustration, figure 1 expands the cultural hedonic framework to include a larger sample of countries based on ratings from over 227 international consumers (see Pennings, Wansink, and Meulenberg for details). To illustrate within-country variance, the placement of the United States varies depending on whether lower income or higher income consumers are considered.

Because this framework utilizes broad cultural themes and is not uniquely tied to a country-level analysis, the insights can be applied to other areas in which culture has a significant effect on behavior. With respect to food consumption,

Table 6. Increasing soy consumption using the cultural hedonic framework

Cultural Perception of Food Consumption	Cultural Context	
	Lower Cultural Context	Higher Cultural Context
Hedonic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize soy health-premium food benefits in a data driven and quantitative way • Move to differentiate soy foods as healthy premium foods • Provide accurate, detailed, and complete messages • Use direct consumer product advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize soy as a culturally normal, premium food in an implicit, dialogue-driven, and qualitative way • Implement an indirect approach, such as word-of-mouth effects from opinion leaders • Move to differentiate soy foods as premium foods • Use an indirect campaign (e.g., publicity, product placement ads) and facilitate interaction with others • Use general consumer education programs
Utilitarian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize the benefits of eating soy foods (e.g., flexibility, convenience) in a data driven and quantitative way • Move to position soy foods as ordinary, low-price foods • Emphasize personalized benefits of eating soy • Provide accurate, detailed, and complete message • Use direct consumer product advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize the benefits of eating soy foods (e.g., flexibility, convenience) in an implicit, dialogue-driven, and qualitative way • Move to position soy foods as ordinary low-price foods • Implement an indirect approach, such as word-of-mouth effects from opinion leaders or authorized personnel • Use an indirect campaign (e.g., publicity, product placement ads) and facilitate interaction with others • Use general consumer education programs

possible focal points could include ethnic divisions, social/economic distinctions, geographic boundaries, and psychographic market segments. An ethnic division study, for instance, could use this framework to determine how to best increase the consumption of tofu among Orthodox Jews or Lent-observing Catholics.

In a more general sense, this research shows us that the cultural context and the utilitarian and hedonic perceptions of food consumption greatly affect the

