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MUTTON DRESSED UP AS LAMB: A MARKETING AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper investigates the issue of the disappearance of mutton in the supply chain in Australia. The research question centres around a proposition that misrepresentation of mutton as lamb may lead to this disappearance. The ethical and moral perspective of this issue is examined through a review of literature and an analysis of primary data that were collected through personal interviews. The personal interviews were conducted with persons associated with the food service industry, particularly buyers for non-institutional food service sector establishments. The findings suggest that there is a tendency at the supply chain level to conceal correct information relating to the identity of mutton. Since, it is not always legally mandatory to disclose the specifications of meat to buyers, marketers appear to have bypassed the issue. By doing this marketers have 'done things right' but failed to 'do the right things', as this practice of withholding correct information, though legally tenable, is immoral. The conclusion of the paper is that meat marketers have moral obligations to tell the truth to customers. Failure to do so may result in consumer discontent and imposition of regulation requiring mandatory disclosure of the type of meat being marketed.

Introduction

The right to be informed is one of the four internationally recognised consumer rights: the others being the right to safety, the right to be heard and the right to choose (Aaker and Day, 1982; Bloom and Smith, 1986). The right to be informed provides a privilege to consumers to make informed buying decisions in the market place. This right implies that consumers receive correct and sufficient information regarding a product or service for sale in the market. The information must not be misleading and deceptive in nature (Day and Aaker, 1997). The Bill of Consumer Rights was initiated by President John F. Kennedy and was passed at Congress in the USA in 1962. Eventually this charter of consumer rights became the basis of a worldwide consumer movement called 'Consumerism'. Consumerism is an organised movement aimed at augmenting the rights and powers of consumers/users in relation to sellers (Kotler et al, 2001). The movement put enormous pressure on governments to enact legislation towards protecting consumer interests in a wide range of areas and led to a plethora of legislation to protect consumer interests. In Australia public consumer protection agencies are in operation at both state and federal levels, and there are specific provisions in the Trade Practices Act of 1974 (sections 51-53) with regard to protection of consumers from misleading and deceptive corporate practices (Neal et al, 1999; Goldring et al.,1993). Consumerism has been institutionalised in the socio-political environments of many countries (Quazi, 2002; Craig-Lees, 1991), however, some practices are still apparent in terms of misleading product offerings. The phrase 'mutton dressed up as lamb' has been part of the Australian vernacular for many years, but there may be real substance to these words.

Mutton dressed up as lamb in a real sense would raise important issues regarding consumer rights, the ethical conduct of businesses and the marketing of products, like sheep meat that may be presented as either lamb or mutton. A particular difficulty in marketing sheep meat is

that the distinction between lamb and mutton is only whether or not the animal had any permanent teeth when it was slaughtered, and therefore in some circumstances the distinction between lamb and mutton is not detectable post slaughter.

Literature Review

Literature with regard to mutton dressed up as lamb in the Australian market is minimal in corporate reports, consumer association's publications and in academic research. Some authors have, however, referred to the issue in the results of related research that they have conducted. In research on the non-institutional food service sector in Australia, Coghlan (1997) noted that although mutton accounts for 12.9 per cent of consumption of red meat in Australia, there is little evidence in the literature as to where mutton disappears. This finding corroborates the results of another study which found that "Australia produces around 327,000 tonnes of mutton each year but few people have any idea where this goes" (Schuster, 2001). These research findings point to the fact that there may be a gap between what consumers consume as lamb and what marketers offer them. The disappearance of mutton in the Australian market may suggest that it is being sold under another identity and that is likely to be lamb. It may also suggest that the mutton has been used as an input to other processed food items and eventually cease to exist as mutton. While there is no satisfactory explanation for the disappearance of mutton in the supply chain, the question remains whether mutton is being sold as lamb.

Ethical and Moral Dimensions

The right to be informed is important in the context of consumer rights, legal and ethical aspects of marketing and consumer perception. Consumers should know what they are paying for and consuming and whether the quality and specifications of products are being presented to the market in a correct form. It is also important to identify whether marketers have any ill intentions that lead to deceptive and misleading behaviour. From a legal point of view, any such practice may result in businesses being prosecuted. From an ethical perspective, all businesses in the supply chain for mutton have a moral obligation to correctly identify the products they are selling. The Australian Marketing Institute's Code of Professional Conduct states that "members shall not intentionally disseminate false or misleading information, whether written, spoken or implied or conceal any relevant fact. They have a duty to maintain truth, accuracy and good taste in advertising, sales promotion and all other aspects of marketing". People and institutions associated with marketing mutton, therefore have ethical and moral obligations to their customers in relation to product descriptions.

Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the research was to establish whether mutton is 'dressed up as lamb', and thus misrepresented as lamb in the food service industry. Any misrepresentation of product in the supply chain contravenes the implicit and/or explicit right of consumers to be informed.

The objectives of the research were to ascertain the quantity of mutton that is claimed to be used by non-institutional food service sector, and to establish where that mutton is procured.

With that information it is possible to establish whether there is a discrepancy between expected use and reported use of mutton by the food service industry.

Research Method

The research was conducted in two phases comprising exploratory research followed by descriptive research. The exploratory research involved in-depth interviews with management of the Australian Meat and Livestock Corporation and people who had conducted research into the food service industry. Buyers and suppliers for the food service industry, representatives of food service industry associations and other persons who were servicing the food service industry were also interviewed. In-depth interviews with persons who had conducted research into the food service industry, revealed that the limiting factor with regard to surveying the industry was the difficulty of obtaining a representative sample of such a disparate industry. In particular, independent fast food establishments were an unknown quantum and no accurate sampling frame of them was available.

In the descriptive research the research population comprised all non-institutional food service sector establishments, except franchised/chain fast food establishments, located in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistical districts of Melbourne and Sydney. Franchised fast food establishments were not included in the research population because of the confidentiality requirements of managers of these establishments. A two stage sampling technique was used and it comprised a disproportionate stratified sample of restaurants, hotels, accommodation providers and clubs, and a one-stage cluster sample of independent fast food establishments. In-depth personal interviews were carried out with 775 buyers of fresh meat for establishments of the non-institutional food service sector. In line with the proportions of people living in Sydney and Melbourne, 46% of establishments were in Melbourne and 54% were in Sydney. Appointments were made for all interviews and as a control on data collection, a telephone audit was conducted on 10% of the interviewees. One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the level of differences between the use of mutton and other fresh red meats. A Chi-square analysis was performed to ascertain if there was any significant linkages between the locations of mutton procurement.

Results and Discussion

Mutton is reported to account for 12.9 per cent of apparent consumption of red meat in Australia (ABS 1996, Cat. 4315.0, p.4). However, little is known about where this meat disappears to. It is conceivably used by the manufacturing industry, the food service industry and resellers (wholesalers and retailers) before it is ultimately consumed by households. The issue is whether the disappearance of mutton can be accounted for and if not, whether households are aware that they may be buying and consuming mutton and not another meat such as lamb or beef. The food service industry accounted for 33.0 per cent of household expenditure on food in 1995 (BIS Shrapnel, 1996). Further, within the food service industry the major non-institutional sector accounted for 90.0 per cent of food service industry purchases of fresh red meat in Australia in 1991 (BIS Shrapnel, 1992). However, despite the importance of the non-institutional sector its use of mutton was reported to be negligible.

The mean scores in Table 1 were calculated from the mid-points of ordinally scaled intervals, nevertheless they are consistent with the author's expectations regarding the relative reported

use of beef, veal, lamb and mutton in the non-institutional food service sector. To test for differences in the use of these meats, an ANOVA was conducted on the mean scores, with the 11 types of establishment used as replication to produce a Randomised Complete Block design. Routine diagnostics following the ANOVA revealed a lack of homogeneity in the residuals, therefore the data were transformed, using natural logarithms, and then re-analysed. From the re-analysis it was apparent that there were significant differences ($p < 0.05$) for all types of establishment in the usage of beef and veal, beef and lamb, beef and mutton, veal and mutton, and lamb and mutton. The use of mutton was minimal in all types of non-institutional food service sector establishment. The minimal use of mutton in the non-institutional food service sector may be explained by one or more of the possibilities reported after Table 1.

Table 1: Mean use of fresh red meats per non-institutional food service establishment per week

Establishments	Sample	Beef Kg	Veal Kg	Lamb Kg	Mutton Kg %		Total (in Kg)
Fast food independents	140	38.8	5.6	7.8	0.6	1.1	52.8
Restaurants							
Traditional	117	79.7	9.4	19.9	1.8	1.6	110.8
Ethnic	198	45.0	6.4	19.9	1.4	1.9	72.7
Hotels							
Local	65	70.2	12.1	13.7	1.5	1.5	97.5
Accommodation							
Hotels	21	305.2	67.6	95.5	2.4	0.5	470.7
Motels	55	47.8	9.9	11.0	0.5	0.7	69.2
Reception centres	20	66.3	17.5	23.0	2.5	2.3	109.3
Clubs (licensed)							
General	91	79.9	17.7	23.3	0.2	0.2	121.1
Golf	22	37.7	5.5	8.6	0.7	1.3	52.5
Football	10	363.0	39.0	140.0	0.0	0.0	542.0
RSL/workers	36	161.1	15.5	39.3	0.7	0.3	216.6

- Mutton may be substantially used in manufacturing industry for pet foods and processed meats. According to Meat and Livestock Australia (FIS, 2000), industrial markets account for 77% of the usage of mutton; however, “pie manufacturers are ‘shy’ about their mutton usage largely as a consequence of the perceived poor quality image of the product in relation to beef”. It is noted that in relation to mutton in pies, labelling requirements only need ‘meat’ to be mentioned in order of total product percentage.
- Mutton may be used extensively in households. However, in 1984 mutton accounted for only 0.5% of the quantity of fresh red meat purchased by households in Sydney and a “negligible amount” in Melbourne (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, 1988),.

- Some mutton, particularly hogget, may be sold by wholesalers and butchers as lamb. Hogget is marginally older than lamb, in that when a lamb's first permanent teeth emerge it becomes a hogget. Hogget is more mature than lamb, but it may not be distinguishable from lamb after it has been processed.
- Food service industry research respondents may have been reluctant to divulge the quantities of mutton that they were using.

The sources from which mutton was procured for establishments in the non-institutional food service sector were overwhelmingly wholesalers and independent butchers. Wholesalers supplied 66 percent of establishments and independent butchers supplied 31.9 percent but, interestingly, only 47 of the 775 establishments that were sampled reported procuring mutton from anywhere. In recent research, FIS (2000) sent survey forms regarding mutton “to twenty organisations in the HRI sector (hotels, restaurants and institutions) with a nil response rate”.

According to FIS (2000), “discussions with academics in the HRI industry, and contacts within the wholesale meat industry, confirmed the view that when the subject of mutton usage in this sector is broached, respondents are negative due to various types of misrepresentation of mutton as lamb within the distribution chain. This is evident from the fact that telephone calls to six Melbourne-based HRI meat suppliers resulted in either ‘no comment’ or very vague answers as to the usage of mutton in the HRI sector”.

Conclusion

This study indicates that there is a discrepancy between the domestic disappearance (usage) of mutton in Australia and the quantity that is reported to be used by either, or a combination of, the manufacturing industry, the food service industry and households. Conclusions emerging from this research suggest that if mutton is dressed up as lamb, participants in the supply chain knowingly misrepresent the product and so mislead their customers. The research has ethical and marketing implications for the sheep meat industry. It is not legally mandatory to disclose the specific types of meat on some products and so some marketers may argue that they are not breaking any law. In that case they may be ‘doing things right’ but, equally, they may not have done the right thing and that is morally wrong. Perhaps some participants in the supply chain for mutton are guided by legal ethics rather than moral ethics.

To provide a balanced viewpoint, it may be argued by processors and resellers that, after slaughter, mutton may not be distinguishable from lamb. This can be the case because of differences in the dentition (Belschner, 1953) and diet of particular animals, so in some cases a mutton product will be preferable to a lamb product

Limitations and further research

The research did not directly test the proposition that mutton is being dressed up as lamb. It would be difficult to test this delicate issue because, despite all the evidence in favour of the proposition, respondents may be reluctant to disclose any malpractice. So, there is a scope for further research into ethical implications of the likely misrepresentation of mutton as lamb. Further, with the distinction between mutton and lamb being only based on whether the animal has any permanent teeth, research could be conducted to test whether supplier

measures of quality relate to consumer measures of quality and, if not, how should the product be redefined. Further research of the issue of how meat products should be defined is also relevant to beef and veal. While this paper particularly focused on the issue of misrepresentation of mutton as lamb, other related issues such as consumer protection became evident in the discussion and could be addressed in future research.

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