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**THE TERROIR CONCEPT FOR FOOD PRODUCTS: THE CASE OF THE CHEESE
MARKET IN BRAZIL**

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Article presented to Escola de Administração de
Empresas de São Paulo of Fundação Getulio Var-
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in International Management (MPGI).

Knowledge Field: Management and competitive-
ness in global companies

Adviser: Prof. Dr. Benjamin Rosenthal

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how the concept of terroir applied to the category of cheese is comprehended and valued by consumers. Terroir is French concepts that represents a place designation that encompasses three place dimensions – physical, human and philosophical – and due to the interaction between these dimensions it generates unique products. The objective is to fulfill the academic gap that exists in regarding terroir applied to other food categories rather than wine, as most studies about terroir are focused only on wine because it is the category from where the concept of terroir was first created. To gain insights over the topic, a retailer specialized on artisanal cheese was selected and then a netnography on the brand Instagram page was developed, in addition to interviews with its consumers. Results revealed that also within the cheese category, terroir is an element that can aggregate value to consumers – hence, this depends on the level of consumers involvement and on the knowledge regarding terroir. It was also evidenced that the value-added aura that terroir has on cheese can be transferred to other food products coming from the same specific origin. In sum, terroir is a place designation that if well communicated has the potential to be explored also by food brands of other categories rather than wine.

KEYWORDS: Terroir, Food products, Place, Food marketing

RESUMO (in Portuguese)

Este artigo analisa como o conceito de terroir aplicado a categoria de queijos é compreendido e valorizado pelos consumidores. Terroir é um conceito francês que representa a designação de um lugar englobando três dimensões do mesmo – a física, a humana e a filosófica – que ao interagirem entre si geram produtos únicos. O objetivo deste artigo é preencher a lacuna que existe no mundo acadêmico em relação a como o conceito de terroir se aplica a outras categorias de alimentos além da categoria de vinhos, uma vez que a maioria dos estudos sobre terroir são focados somente no segmento do vinho porque é a categoria da qual o conceito de terroir surgiu. Para gerar mais conhecimento sobre o assunto, um varejista especializado em queijos artesanais foi selecionado, e após isso uma netnografia em sua página do Instagram foi elaborada, além de entrevistas com consumidores. Os resultados revelaram que na categoria de queijos também, terroir é um elemento que pode agregar valor para os consumidores – mas isso depende do nível de envolvimento dos consumidores e do conhecimento que tem em relação a terroir. Também foi evidenciado que a aura de valor agregado que terroir tem em relação ao queijo pode ser transferida para outras categorias de alimentos provenientes do mesmo lugar de origem. Em resumo, terroir é uma designação de lugar que, se bem comunicada, tem o potencial de ser explorada por marcas de alimentos de outras categorias além do vinho.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Terroir, Produtos alimentícios, Lugar, Marketing de alimentos

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1. Introduction

The relation between food and places, the use of different geographic indications by food brands (e.g., country-of-origin (COO)) and the effects of place-based marketing strategies on consumers is extensively present in the literature (Spielmann & Charters, 2013; Van Ittersum, Candel & Meulenbergh 2003). However, recently there has been a renewed interest (Charters, Spielmann & Babin, 2017) in the marketing field for a concept that comes from the 19th century: *terroir* (Barham, 2003). Consequently, different studies and researches about the topic emerged, but most of them are focused on the wine industry (Charters et al., 2017; Martinez-Carrasco, Brugarolas & Martinez-Poveda, 2005). In order to extend the knowledge about consumers' perceptions of *terroir* for food products, we will investigate how value is built and perceived in *terroir* products within the cheese market in Brazil. Specifically, we will investigate how consumer involvement, consumer knowledge and consumer education affect the perception of value for this product and the extendibility of *terroir* value for other products, in line with propositions made by Charters et al. (2017).

This investigation is relevant as *terroir* products respond to several current consumption trends such as the search for authenticity, reliable origins, traceability, and healthy foods (Barham, 2003; Charters et al., 2017; Dimara & Skuras, 2005; Johnson & Bruwer, 2007; Tellström, Gustafsson & Mossberg, 2006) from the consumer side and an interest also important for specialized retailers and producers who sell *terroir* food products, and need to adjust their communication strategies.

This research adopts a qualitative perspective as we investigate the communication strategies of a Brazilian retailer specialized on *terroir*/artisanal cheese made exclusively by small Brazilian producers. Specifically, a netnography (Kozinets, 2010) on the Instagram page of the same retailer was conducted. Also, 14 in-depth interviews with consumers from this retailer were conducted, alongside with in-depth interview with the founder and part of the team members. Data analysis was conducted as per the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006).

Results showed that *terroir* is a concept that aggregates value in the food category (cheese), and the efficacy of its application as a marketing strategy depends on the consumer involvement. Highly involved consumers tend to have a higher level of knowledge regarding *terroir* and its dimensions, to value the origin specificity and to transfer this value to other food products coming from the same place. On the other side, medium involvement consumers usually have less

knowledge on the matter and tend to value broader geographical associations, such as COO and region-of-origin (ROO). The contribution of this article is to extend the academic and managerial knowledge regarding the application of terroir concept to other products besides wine.

This paper is structured as follows: first, a literature review regarding the relation between food and places, the different levels of origin used by food brands and more specifically terroir, its constitutional elements and the consumers perception on it is presented. Then, the methodology is detailed and right after it, results are presented, divided in 5 themes: the value perception of the retailer studied, consumers involvement, knowledge regarding the dimensions of terroir, education about terroir and extendibility of terroir. Subsequently we discuss these findings and conclude the research, also pointing out further research on the topic that might be explored in the future.

2. Literature review

2.1 Food and Place: an Image-Driven Association

Food products are often related to places, when they have a land-based and geographical origin, and over time the food production and consumptions habits in a place were developed according to the its natural resources and socio-cultural factors (Bérard & Marchenay, 1995; Delamont, 1995; Hartley, 1979; Kuznesof, Treagear & Moxey, 1997). For this usual relation between food and places, when judging the quality of food products, place associations can be used by consumers as an extrinsic cue (du Plessis & du Rand, 2012; Sutanonpaiboon & Atkin, 2012) and they can differentiate the product both for its functional benefits (e.g. taste) and for the brand image (Thode & Maskulka, 1998).

In today's market many food brands are using place associations in the positioning of the brand to keep being competitive, gaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Thode & Maskulka, 1998). Food brands express these place references by names, official symbols, unofficial symbols and images in different ways: through the label, a stamp, a mark, or any other evident and visible sign on the product, on its package or on the point of sales (Insch & Florek, 2009; Insch & Jackson, 2014). This differentiation strategy is increasing also because of the demand side: consumers are increasingly asking for authenticity, reliable origin and traceable products, as they want to know

the provenience of what they consume (Dimara & Skuras, 2005; Johnson & Bruwer, 2007; Tellström et al., 2006). This consumers' demand is also due to food security and safety issues (Insch & Jackson, 2014).

Food producers that use place associations rely on different levels of geographical qualities, as it happens among place branding researches and studies, in which the understanding of the term “place” varies from neighborhoods to countries (Hanna & Rowley, 2008; Sloan, Aiken & Mikkelsen, 2018). Nevertheless, the use of place associations has become more intricate, as even if consumers are increasingly demanding the provenience of what they eat, the premise of how they consider the origin of the product in everyday food purchase decisions is polemic (Insch & Jackson, 2014; Reardon, Vianelli & Miller, 2017; Tregear & Gorton, 2005). According to Van Ittersum et al. (2003) the effect that the place of origin has on product evaluation is product-specific, and by using it as an indication, “marketers are able to exploit the associations consumers have with a particular area and provide their product with an image” (p. 215).

2.2 Levels of Origin: from Countries to Terroir

In the field of place of origin of food brands, the most basic strategy and also the most studied in the literature is the one of country of origin (COO) (Spielman & Charters, 2013; Van Ittersum et al., 2003). For a product, the COO is an extrinsic cue comparable to the price and the brand name - it can have a direct influence on the consumers' probability of buying the product (Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Tellström et al., 2006). According to Insch and Florek (2009), this influence depends on the consumer involvement with the product category, on the knowledge they have about the country, on the experience in purchase decision making and on patriotism (Ahmed & d'Astous, 1995; Roth & Romeo, 1992; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). While for some brands COO can be an asset for its branding strategy, there are others that prefer to disassociate their brand from their COO either because the image of the country is not relevant or because it is not coherent with the normative values in the product category (Häubl & Elrod, 1999; Lotz & Hu, 2001; Tregear & Gorton, 2005).

Another geographical entity used to influence the quality perception of food brands is the one of region-of-origin (ROO) (Johnson & Bruwer, 2007), which is less studied than the COO, but it has

been increasingly used, specially by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Van Ittersum et al., 2003). The ROO strategy is similar to the COO strategy, with two advantages: it can result in a more consistent image, as smaller geographical regions are more homogeneous than countries, and it provides the opportunity to differentiate the brand also from other domestic ones (Lenglet, 2014; Stefani, Romano & Cavicchi, 2006; Van Ittersum et al., 2003).

For instance, in the wine market the appellation of the region of origin is common in several countries. As Thode and Maskulka (1998) stated, “It would be difficult to find an agricultural product more frequently associated with “place” than fine wine” (p. 382). The geographic origin is a very important external cue when consumers evaluate wine, as they associate the reputation of the place with the quality of the wine (Johnson & Bruwer, 2007; Riviezzo, Garofano, Granata & Kakavand, 2016). In particular, regions of France such as Champagne, Bordeaux, Burgundy are globally linked to fine wines; but the importance of place and the connection between quality and soil for French wines goes further, as the quality of French wines is also associated to the particular vineyard or chateau where grapes come from (Faith, 1992; Rasmussen & Lockshin, 1999; Thode & Maskulka, 1998).

This example of French chateaus represents a further geographical entity that impacts food, which is more specific than ROO as it is a particular designation of place: *terroir*, a term that links a product to a specific place (Spielmann & Charters, 2013; Vaudour, 2002). *Terroir* is a French concept with no direct translation in English that emerged in 19th century from the wine sector (Spielmann & Charters, 2013; Lenglet, 2014; Riviezzo et al., 2016; Spielmann & Gélina-Chebat, 2012). Despite *terroir* being a characteristic mainly associated with wine, it can also be found in many others agricultural products, such as cheese, oils, nuts and herbs (Bérard & Marchenay, 2000; Spielmann & Gélina-Chebat, 2012), which are not as researched as the wine cases. We now describe the constitutional elements of *terroir*.

2.3 The Constitutional Elements of Terroir

According to Charters et al. (2017), “*Terroir* products originate from one place, having characteristics conferred by virtue of that particular geographic space and its unique and irreproducible characteristics” (p. 752). *Terroir* is a multidimensional concept. As explained by Gade (2004),

terroir is not just about the ‘natural’ domain, as it is the aggregation of physical, philosophical and human factors that set the uniqueness of the place, it has technical and social aspects - it can be described as a social construct that derives from interactions and communication flows between various types of users (Ballantyne, 2011; Riviezzo et al., 2016). In the wine segment, for example, Ballantyne (2011) demonstrated that not only suppliers and customers create this promise of terroir, as also other users such as buyers, bloggers and wine writers have a participation on that.

The physical dimension of terroir relies on the geographical and geological attributes of a place (Lacoeuilhe, Louis & Lombart, 2017) – it regards aspects such as the climate (e.g: seasons, rainfall, heat) and the geomorphology, as these elements influence the soil, the fertility, the flora and fauna and therefore determine the local raw material (Thode & Maskulka, 1998; Gustafson, 2001; Kuznesof et al., 1997; Lenglet, 2014;). Essentially, this factor is about all the physical conditions of a place that affect the qualities of the raw materials that later on will be used for the product (Kuznesof et al., 1997).

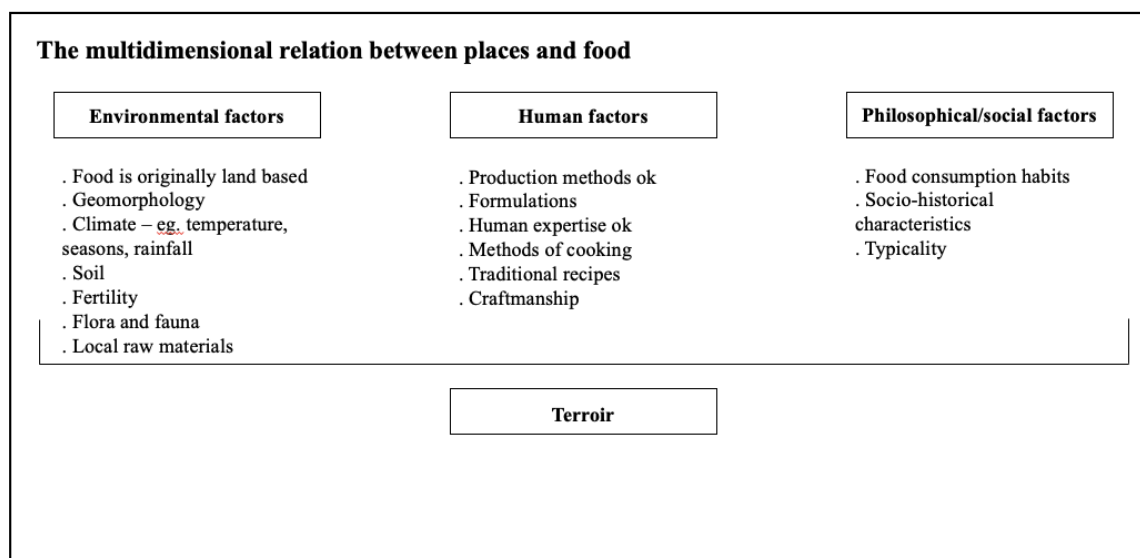
However, the environment by itself does not produce terroir products: human intervention is necessary, as humans are responsible for shaping the value potential of terroir products (Barham, 2003; Charters et al., 2017). Indeed, terroir incorporates the idea of signature, which represents the interaction between people and place (Barham, 2003). The human dimension is about the human expertise of the place on the production process, the craftsmanship, the traditional and unique recipes and methods of cooking (Kuznesof et al., 1997; Lenglet, 2014; Shimp, Samiee & Madden, 1993; Van Ittersum et al., 2003; Waldron, 1978). It is basically about the skills and the human know-how with regard to the production process necessary to make the food, which is either acquired or passed on by generations of families and artisans (Charters et al., 2017; Spielmann & Charters, 2013; Kuznesof et al., 1997).

Finally, terroir also has a philosophical dimension, which is about hedonic, semiotic and symbolic qualities of a products that emerge because of its specific origin (Charters et al., 2017; Lacoeuilhe et al., 2017). This dimension is a historical view of terroir and it is about the strong relation that food can have with culture: local food can communicate the culture identity of a place and symbolize it, developing the local heritage (Barthes, 1975; Bell & Valentine, 1997; Douglas, 1982; Frochot, 2003; Povey, 2005; Salomonsson, 1984; Seo & Yun, 2015; Sims, 2009; Tellström et al.,

2006). This leads to the typicality and style of a terroir product, which is an intangible and irreproducible characteristic, an organoleptic signature of the place (Spielmann & Charters, 2013). In sum, this dimension refers to heritage and to typicality, to a co-constitutive element between food and place, as illustrated by Charters et al. (2017) “The place marks the product, but the product likewise marks the place” (p.753). So, terroir can be used to promote food products, but food products also have the power to promote a geographical area (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 1995; Tellström et al., 2006).

Figure 1:

The multidimensional relation between places and food



This figure was created based on the concepts defended by Waldron (1978), Shimp et al. (1993), Kuznesof et al. (1997), Thode & Maskulka (1998), Gustafson (2001), Van Ittersum et al. (2003), Lenglet (2014), Charters et al. (2017)

The multidimensionality of terroir (Figure 1) makes terroir products unique, constituting the stronger competitive advantage that a product can have related to its geographical origin (Charters et al., 2017), because when the environmental and socio-historical characteristics of a place are used and interpreted by producers, they have the opportunity to create unique, and non-replicable products (Riviezzo et al., 2016). As Barham (2003) stated, “Terroir products resulted from long occupation of the same area and represented the interplay of human ingenuity and curiosity with the natural givens of place” (p.131).

2.4 Consumer Perception of Terroir Products

The concept of terroir food products grew significantly and met renewed academic interest during the past 25 years, especially in France and Europe (Barham, 2003; Lenglet, 2014). The term is present in different disciplines, such as history, geography, sociology and economy (Lenglet, 2014). Terroir products are from specific origins, are made from raw materials with limited supply and are made with archaic artisanal methods, resulting in a limited distribution and higher prices (Charters et al, 2017; Spielmann, Jolly & Parisot, 2014). So, consumers perceive value in terroir. Indeed, for wine and artisanal products origin indicators are perceived as a cue for higher quality and consequently to higher prices (Spielmann & Charters, 2013; Kupiec & Revell, 1998; Livat & Vaillant, 2006; Schamel, 2006; Spielmann & Gelinas-Chebat, 2012).

Consumers also consider terroir products as more natural, traditional and authentic (Aurier, Fort & Siriex, 2004; Lacoeyllhe et al., 2017). In fact, agri-foods that rely on place of origin for its branding are perceived as authentic by consumers when they are produced in small-scale, the land use pattern is extensive and low scale, the method of production is artisanal and it reflects the local culture and traditions (Tregear & Gorton, 2005; Tregear, Kuznesof & Moxey, 1998). For terroir products, authenticity has been positively related to satisfaction, quality perceptions and purchase intent (Lacoeyllhe et al., 2017; Spielmann & Charters, 2013).

The perception of terroir as a quality indicator depends on the consumer knowledge and involvement (Spielmann & Gelinas-Chebat, 2012; Santos, Blanco & Fernandez, 2006). Although some research has indicated that both novice and expert consumers use origin as a cue for product evaluation (Charters & Pettigrew, 2006; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran), specifically for low involvement products broader representations of place such as COO are more meaningful, while a very specific origin such as terroir might not be fully understood (Charters et al., 2017).

For instance, Spielmann and Gelinas-Chebat (2012) show that in France low involvement wine consumers do not value technical information about terroir, valuing more macro-environmental and regional references. On the other side, high involvement consumers usually are more knowledgeable, valuing technical information and using origin indicators frequently. For these consumers, terroir can provide value when details about its dimensions are communicated (Atkin & Johnson, 2010; Charters et al., 2017; Spielmann & Gelinas-Chebat, 2012).

The communication of terroir may depend on intermediaries, such as retailers and the media (Charters et al., 2017). Cultural tourism (e.g., visiting producers) is another communication tool, as consumers who value terroir products may seek for more information and experience, as many of these places are beautiful touristic spots (Charters et al., 2017). Tourism to terroir areas can also boost other products from the same region, as consumers might transfer the aggregate value of one product to another (Charters et al., 2017; F. Fort & Fort, 2006). Terroir products also have the potential to reconnect people with their roots, being related to ethnocentrism, which is the tendency of viewing your own culture as superior (Barham, 2003; Charters et al., 2017).

Within the marketing field terroir has been extensively studied only in terms of the product origin as a source of differentiation (Charters et al., 2017). The consumer's perception and involvement with terroir products is still an area that needs further investigation. Most of the research so far has been with wine (Charters et al., 2017; Martinez-Carrasco et al., 2005). According to Aurier and Fort (2007), findings on terroir can differ according to the type of product, suggesting that additional research in other product categories apart from wine is necessary.

Charters et al. (2017) is the first work to address the full concept of terroir in the marketing field. The authors elaborated a model of antecedents and consequences of terroir perceptions and suggested the need for further studies with this concept, such as the extendibility of qualities of a place of origin from one product to another and about consumer perception with other products rather than wine. To fulfill this gap we explore in this paper three of the propositions presented in Charters et al. (2017) regarding terroir:

- "The more knowledge consumers have of terroir features, the more influential terroir as a product cue is on the resulting marketing value of the product." (p.757);
- "The degree of consumer involvement moderates the value perceptions derived from origin specificity such that (a) highly involved consumers perceive more value from terroir and (b) less involved consumers perceive less value." (p.760);
- "The more specific the place-based designation, terroir being the most specific, the higher the probability of extending the value-added aura to other products originating within the same terroir, resulting in higher marketing value." (p.761).

Now we explain the methodological procedures used to explore these three propositions in the context of cheese in Brazil.

3. Methodology

To study the phenomenon, a qualitative approach was undertaken. All the data collected was based on a brand called A Queijaria – a food retailer with some units in the city of São Paulo which is specialized in artisanal cheese made exclusively by small Brazilian producers. This retailer was chosen because it sells only Brazilian food products, artisanal and made from small producers, with many of the cheese sold there having a terroir component.

3.1 Data collection

First, the authors conducted a netnography (Kozinets, 2010) on the Instagram page of A Queijaria, collected and analyzed the content posted by the brand to understand what the brand communicated and how it communicated terroir elements of their cheeses. The content was collected during three months (from July 2019 to September 2019), as after that period thematic saturation was achieved. In total, the content and the comments of 87 brand posts were collected.

After that, the first author conducted semi-structured (see the script in Appendix) interviews with 14 consumers of A Queijaria. The recruitment of these consumers was done by contacting users that made comments on the Instagram account of A Queijaria – from the 88 consumers contacted through this channel, 41 of them answered and from these group, 25 of them were found not to be regular clients. The remaining 17 respondents were consumers, but we were able to run the interviews with 9 of them – the other 5 came from snowball sampling. These 14 interviews occurred in November 2019 through video call or call, and all of them were recorded (resulting in 462 minutes of recorded audio) and transcribed verbatim (resulting 232 pages of transcriptions) in order to guarantee reliability on data analysis (Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, Foroundi & Nguyen, 2016).

Socio-demographic questions were made to collect information such as gender, age, work situation, place of birth and current place of residence. Half of the sample was composed by women

and the other half by man. They were all Brazilian (except from one Italian) and the age of the interviewees varied from 23 to 62 years old. They frequented different units of the store – although the majority of them were clients of the original unit, in the fancy neighborhood of Vila Madalena (Sao Paulo).

In November 2019 the first author also conducted an in-depth interview of 60 minutes with the founder A Queijaria and three members of his staff. This interview was unstructured, as our objective was to make a deep dive on the brand and on its history, to hear from experts about the market of artisanal cheese in Brazil and terroir areas known for it, and to gather the perceptions they had about consumers.

3.2 Data analysis

To codify – which means organizing all the data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005) - and analyze data, the methodology chosen was thematic analysis, that according to Braun and Clarke (2006) it is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). Thematic analysis was chosen because it is a flexible and useful research method, that has the capacity of providing a rich, detailed and complex description of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of data analysis was iterative, as it involved a frequent moving between the data set (Instagram posts and transcribed interviews), the codes extracted from this data set and the analysis that resulted from that (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To build the codes and themes – that differ from codes, as they are broader units of analysis that are more related to the phenomenon that is being analyzed (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clark, 2006) - we followed predominantly an inductive approach, meaning that most of them emerged from data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, there were three categories - the representations of terroir dimensions – that were theoretically driven, a usual procedure in thematic analysis. The process of coding – which was made separately for netnography and for interviews – resulted in more than 200 codes emerged from the netnography, and more than 300 emerged from the interviews. After that, a first revision was made: some codes were eliminated as they were considered irrelevant to the scope of the research and some others were unified, as they represented the exact same concept. The following step consisted in researching for themes across the codes – basically

all codes were analyzed to consider how they could be combined between them to form macro themes (Braun & Clark, 2006). This step resulted in 18 themes to represent the netnography and 22 to represent the data from the interviews. Then, these themes were reviewed considering their relevancy and connection to the scope of the research. Some were merged and others were discarded as they did not contain relevant information for the study. Finally themes were defined: the netnography is represented by 13 themes (Table 1) and 15 other themes represent the data from the interviews (Table 2).

Table 1:

Themes from the netnography

Theme	Definition
Human capital	elements of the human dimension of terroir
Physical	elements of the physical dimension of terroir
Philosophical	elements of the philosophical dimension of terroir
Raw material	references to animal source and ingredients used in the cheese making
Authenticity	elements that evidence that the brand is authentic
Intrinsic attributes	intrinsic characteristics of the cheese
Social responsibility	references to the impact of the brand on the society
Country of origin	elements that refer to the Brazilian characteristics of the brand and its products
Extension	references to other products/services of the brand rather than cheese
Medium level of specificity	indication of the State of origin of cheese
High level of specificity	indication of the specific of origin of cheese
Very high level of specificity	indication of the farm of origin of cheese
Consumers involvement	comments of consumers that evidence high involvement

Table 2:

Themes from the interviews

Theme	Definition
Human capital	elements of the human dimension of terroir
Physical	elements of the physical dimension of terroir
Philosophical	elements of the philosophical dimension of terroir
High involvement	indications that the consumer is highly involved with the cheese category
Medium involvement	indications that the consumer has a medium involvement with the cheese category
A Queijaria characteristics	references to characteristics of the retailer
Product characteristics	references to characteristics of certain cheeses
High level of specificity	indication of the specific place of origin of a certain cheese
Medium level of specificity	indication of a broader level of place of origin of a certain cheese
Country of origin	references to Brazil in relation to cheese and to the Brazilian premise of A Queijaria
Terroir	references to concepts that express the concept of terroir
Raw material	references to animal source or ingredients present in a certain cheese
Relevance of origin	indications about the relevance or irrelevance of the place of origin of cheese
Other categories	references about the other categories of food sold at A Queijaria besides cheese

Furthermore, through codification consumers were segmented according to their involvement within the cheese category. This individual level of involvement was based on some issues such as being a lover of cheese and demonstrating knowledge regarding cheese – but the two most important criteria were if the interviewee had the habit of spending some extra time and money when buying cheese in the daily routine. Table 3 exhibits the gender, age and involvement of each interviewee.

Table 3:

Level of individual involvement within the category

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Level of involvement with the category
I1	Male	36	High
I2	Female	23	High
I3	Female	23	Medium
I4	Female	57	High
I5	Female	33	Medium
I6	Male	42	Medium
I7	Male	62	High
I8	Female	43	High
I9	Female	27	Medium
I10	Male	37	High
I11	Male	34	High
I12	Male	59	High
I13	Female	30	High
I14	Male	52	High

4. Findings

4.1 Value Perception in “A Queijaria”

The interviewees’ perception of the brand is formed by expressions such as “Brazilian”, “quality”, “roots”, “valorization and promotion of Brazilian cheese”, “valorization and promotion of small producers”, “a different place”, “artisanal”, “cozy”, “Brazilian taste”, “unique”, and “a reference”, as the words of I2 illustrate “When I started to talk about artisanal Brazilian cheese, it is the first place, I believe it is the first reference”.

These words reveal that a place-based factor – the premise that all products are from Brazil – is the main source of value for the interviewees. Actually, some of them even value more the COO factor than the specific place of origin factor when choosing a cheese, not preferring one region over another inside the store. In Brazil, where foreign products (food included) are very valued by the population, this is a recent trend, as illustrated by the words of I9, “We are valuing a national product, not a French cheese, we have a universe of cheese here in Brazil that until then was not explored”.

Some interviewees described A Queijaria as “innovative”, “disruptive”, “pioneer”, and “trail-blazer” as mentioned by I10: “Fernando (the founder) was very innovative with A Queijaria, he opened the doors to Brazilian cheese, he made a rescue, he opened the doors to many people, both producers and consumers”. Interviewees perceive the value for the market of A Queijaria, which is developing the market of artisanal Brazilian cheese, valuing the Brazilian terroir, and helping Brazilian producers to be valued in the market. Consumers perceive this positioning as genuine, not a simple marketing strategy. One of the interviewees (I14) gave an example of this effect: “The producer Evain charged R\$ 12,50 for his cheese, today I believe he is selling it for something around R\$ 75,00”.

Interviewees also value the store role of intermediary, as they realize that they are able to eat cheese from different Brazilian states that would not be available in São Paulo otherwise, as interviewee I12 commented: “I think it is worth it for their work of bringing the product to us, researching, searching, travelling around Brazil, so I believe it is worth to remunerate this kind of service”. In short, consumers see a value in the place of origin premise of A Queijaria, as they value the COO, the origins from many regions of the country, and the intermediary role that the store plays while developing this market and helping the producers.

Now, it will be described how the terroir value is formed. Specifically, we argue that product involvement, knowledge of terroir dimensions, and education (and the active role of A Queijaria in educating its consumers) collectively form the value perception of terroir through the products sold at A Queijaria. Also, we argue that is possible to extend the value-of terroir from one product category to another. In this sense, the case of A Queijaria is in consonance to the literature (Charters et al., 2017).

4.2 Consumer Involvement

All consumers interviewed had a considerable level of involvement with cheese – which makes sense considering that the products at the specialized are sold at a premium price, compared to the supermarket. High involvement consumers emphasized the importance of food quality, health benefits, the valorization of the local and artisanal attribute, and the time and money spent on cheese. As interviewee 12 said, “It’s a type of food that is worth the investment, the study, the tasting... it is a special food”. Some individuals in this group also wanted to become cheese producers, to participate in cheese courses promoted by the store, and even to go to thematic trips to get to know cheese farms, producers and regions. Medium involvement consumers, on the other hand, consumed more expensive cheeses just on special occasions (not on the daily routine), as Interviewee 3 illustrates: “In my daily routine I don't usually “waste” time thinking about it”.

The level of consumer involvement with the category has an influence on the value perceived from terroir, meaning that highly involved consumers tend to value more origin specificity, in line with the first proposition that emerged from the literature. This can be noticed, for example, on the words of Interviewee 4: “I like to know where it comes from, actually, I always ask it”. On the other side, medium involvement consumers seemed not to perceive so much value on origin specificity and origin attributes, as illustrated by the comment of Interviewee 3: “No, actually I care for the taste, and a bit for the amount of mould of the cheese”. Medium involvement consumers also value the place of origin, but they did so in a less refined manner, e.g., valuing more mainstream and well-known places, such as the state of Minas Gerais and the region of Serra da Canastra: “What comes from Minas is much more delicious” (I9). When asked about the cheese from some very specific regions in Brazil, individuals in this group perceive them as less relevant: “Only if that micro region makes sense to me, if is ‘too micro’ I don’t even know where this place is.” (I5).

However, some high involvement interviewees revealed that being a high involvement consumers does not mean an automatic attraction to products that have a more specific origin - it is a factor that has an influence on them, but there also other elements of food that conjointly with origin specificity form the value of cheese for this consumer. This can be evidenced by I10 (HI), who said the following when discussing about origin specificity of cheese: “I think is good to know, but actually it is not a determinant [...] if you go there and taste 10 cheeses, you will not know that

the first is from Santa Catarina, where it comes from. It is important for some specific cheeses, but in general I do not think it is so important”. It is appropriate to deduce from data collected and from previous literature that this probably happens because origin is an extrinsic attribute that is used by consumers specially when they have limited access to intrinsic cues such as taste (Cadima Ribeiro & Freitas Santos, 2008; Johansson, 1993) – however, at the stores of A Queijaria, all cheeses can be tasted, meaning that consumers can have full access to intrinsic cues and this can lead to a lower importance of extrinsic attributes such as origin specificity, even for high involvement consumers. A Queijaria staff also affirmed this, saying that consumers look for the texture, taste and visual of cheese, and then in second place it comes the history and the terroir.

Another connection that was already expected and that was confirmed through the data was the one between consumer involvement and consumer knowledge regarding terroir: in general, high involvement consumers had a higher knowledge regarding terroir and its dimensions than medium involvement ones, as we explain next.

4.3 The knowledge regarding terroir dimensions

The three dimensions of terroir - physical, philosophical, and human - fomented the perception of value in the products sold by A Queijaria. Most of the high involvement interviewees and half of the medium involvement ones perceived value and understood physical elements of the place such as ‘climate’, ‘environment’, ‘grass’, and ‘water’, which impacted their perception of process quality and product quality, as expressed by I6: “I believe the climate influences a lot in the production of cheese, right? Not only in the production itself, but also ingredients. For example, the milk used to make cheese, the soil, the kind of grass the cattle eat, the climate, everything...it is a chain, right?”.

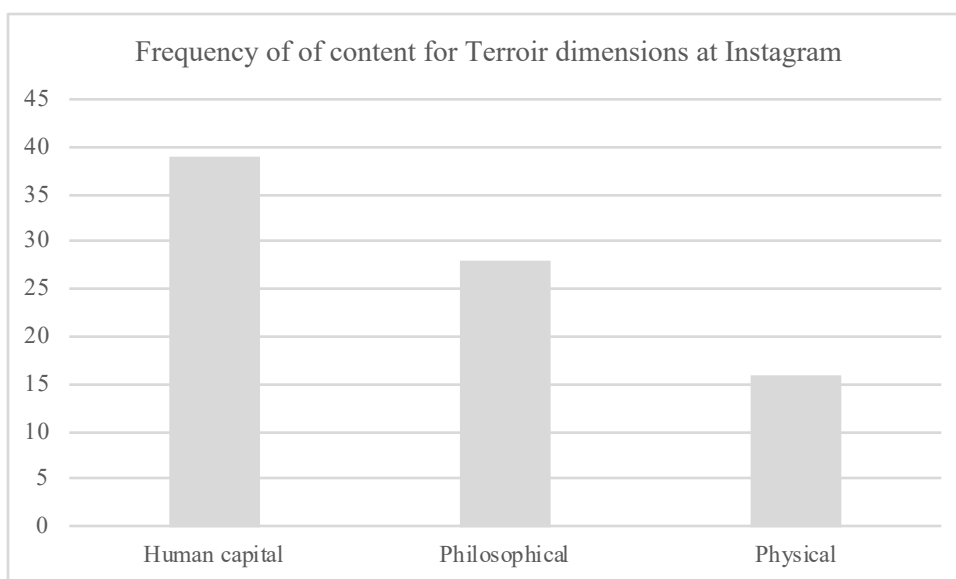
Regarding the human capital dimension, all the interviewees converged in that there is value in techniques of production, family traditions, producer care and uniqueness, as illustrated by the words of Interviewee 9 “I believe it aggregates value to the cheese when you tell the story from where it came from, who is the small producer...I think this has a huge aggregate value”. So, the presentation of information about the producers instigate curiosity and valorization for the human side of terroir. As said by Interviewee 2, “I believe that when you 'put a face', you generate more

value for the product”. This perception of value explains why the higher prices are accepted. They understand that a small scale of production signals higher quality: “Small producers usually have a price a bit higher because they do not have a gain with scale, but we need to value them because they value much, much more the quality than the scale [...] the taste is different, the taste has a complexity” (I11).

The human capital dimension was also connected to a social responsibility value, as they understand that they are paying higher prices because the money goes to small producers. The human factor also increases the perception of value because of all the storytelling involved in the conversations about cheese that takes place in A Queijaria. These stories humanize the product and enhance the engagement, as emotions arise through stories of producers and family traditions. For instance, when exposed to a cheese called Grana dos Laura, with a recipe picked from the founder’s Italian grandmother, Interviewee 9 said “I think it gives an aggregate value, it humanizes it even more, brings it closer, after all it is like it was my grandmother”. The Instagram of A Queijaria has many stories such as this - indeed, the human dimension is the most present one in the Instagram of the store (see Figure 2, a way to communicate this dimension to consumers, showing what the brand stands for.

Figure 2:

Frequency of content for Terroir dimensions at Instagram



Regarding the philosophical dimension, more than half of the sample understood it and perceived value in it, citing elements such as ‘respect for traditions’, ‘place signature’ and ‘cultural legacy’. This terroir dimension is more abstract and complex than the others and it was understood and valued mostly by the highly involved interviewees. References to this dimension occurred specially when discussing cheeses from well-known places such as Serra da Canastra, a Brazilian region well-known for the production of its homonym cheese type, and as Minas Gerais, a Brazilian State. As I2 said: “When you go to Minas Gerais, you perceive that it is a State that a tradition of years over cheese”.

Finally, four of the fourteen respondents understood terroir fully, mentioning the impact and the importance of all the dimensions of terroir and their synergy, as can be seen in the words of Interviewee 2: “It's the union of everything, you know? The producer draws on specific characteristics of the region and based on that he elaborates his cheese, incorporating part of the characteristics of the local”. Two of them, I4 and I14, even mentioned the term “terroir” itself: “it's an assembly, as the French say, it's terroir, it's everything, it's the environment, it's the way it is done, it's how the animal is fed, everything... everything influences cheese” (I4).

In general, knowledge and involvement were connected. The interviewees which were more knowledgeable on the topic were the ones more involved with the product. However, there were also interviewees highly involved that had a limited understanding of element of terroir (I7, I8, and I13). The apparent conundrum is explained by understanding knowledge as a process, which takes time, but can only be pursued by those involved with the topic. Knowledge on complex matters, such as taste, is an ongoing process of refinement (Arsel & Bean, 2013). Knowledge is acquired through education, as Interviewee 8 said: “I think the person has to explain, it is the same thing as wine”, therefore the importance of the store in educating consumers so they can perceive more value in the products.

4.4 Education about terroir

A Queijaria has an active role in educating consumers about cheese and the terroir dimensions. In fact, the educational mission is seen by the staff of A Queijaria as one of the main purposes of the

brand, being executed through formal courses, in-store explanations, experiential events connecting consumers and small producers, organizing trips to regions where cheese is produced, and the Instagram account of the store, which has more than 75.000 followers in January 2020.

A Queijaria educates consumers about the cheese market through Instagram, with posts that contains elements such as ‘Brazilian origin’, ‘animal origin’, ‘ingredients’, ‘producer’, and also different levels of place of origin such as ‘state’, ‘region’, ‘city’ and ‘farm’. However, according to the staff of A Queijaria the offline communication (in-store) is more efficient for education than the online communication (Instagram): “We have a huge difficulty of communicating and making people enter in the store to then try to exchange and educate, because we are sure that through the virtual world we educate very little”.

This perception is also based on the interviewees comments: “The magic happens in the store” (I2). This is possibly due to the fact that in the store the consumer has access to extrinsic attributes of the cheese (e.g., human and philosophical dimensions), and to intrinsic ones (the physical dimension). Overall, the interviewees perceived and valued the educational role of A Queijaria, as illustrated by Interviewee 13: “I go there because it is the store with the most different and special cheeses and because they always explain [...] from where the taste came from, this is very interesting”.

Education happens through "the story behind a cheese". Many interviewees stated that these stories are especially important for A Queijaria, as their cheeses are different – for instance, having a stronger taste and smell – and their prices are higher, which needs an explanation. As Interviewee 2 mentioned, “when you buy one of these products, you do not buy it only for the taste, you buy all the story behind it. So, the richer and more connected this story is, the higher is the value that you aggregate”.

Now we turn to the topic of how this education, knowledge, and perception of terroir dimensions can be extended or not to other products sold by A Queijaria.

4.5 Extendibility

A Queijaria does not sell only cheese – about 10% of the store products are part of other categories of food and beverage, such as jams, wines and beers, all Brazilian, artisanal and coming from small producers. Eight out of the fourteen interviewees had already bought at least once one of these other products, and two of them - both high involvement consumers - remembered the origin of at least one of the products bought, as illustrated by Interviewee 12: “The wine was from Minas Gerais, an artisanal wine, they call it organic wine, and the salami I think it was from Rio Grande do Sul”.

When we discussed more directly about the extendibility, if the fact of other products coming from the same producer or farm would aggregate value, the majority of respondents affirmed that it would be something valued by them, that it would make a difference. Interviewee 13, for instance, was asked about a jam coming from the same farm that produces a cheese she likes: “Yes, for sure, if they explained to me where it’s from, I would taste it and if I had to buy a jam I would buy that one for sure”.

Most of the interviewees who extended the terroir value between categories had a high level of involvement with cheese. All but one (I9) of the medium involvement consumers said it did not matter, or it was not worth the price, as illustrated by Interviewee 3: “It would influence me, but the price would influence me more. The ideal is Canastra, but it is too expensive, so it doesn't mind”. A high involvement respondent (I1) also did not agree about the extendibility issue as he perceived it as a negative signal: “I appreciate a lot the core business logic, so if a farm is more focused on the production of cheese this does not mean that it will make great jams”.

As a whole, our data suggests that the terroir aura aggregates value to other products beyond cheese, specially to high involvement respondents. The main reasons to value products from the same place of origin are: the belief that these two products would make a great combination, as stated by Interviewee 2: “for me, if they are from the same place, they kind of belong together. You know? They shall make a good combination”; the credibility of the place, as illustrated by Interviewee 7: “Because if I like a cheese and it has a good quality, other ingredients from the same place will have quality too, it is an advantage”; and the credibility of a common producer, as put by Interviewee 10: “Yes, it would influence me, there are some producers I admire a lot and for sure I would like to try all of their products”. The producer as a quality signal evidences the importance of the human capital dimension of terroir. In addition, it also allows to infer that the

value of terroir depends on the specificity of terroir, as interviewees value common sources in terms of places - geographies, farms, and producers, which are very specific levels of terroir.

5. Discussion

This research extends the current literature regarding the consumer perception of terroir products - which has been mainly based on the wine category - to food products (cheese). This is important as findings on terroir might vary depending on the product type (Aurier & Fort, 2007) and the same dimensions of terroir may apply differently among product types.

In general, we sustain that the three dimension of terroir – physical, human and philosophical – contributed to form the value perception of terroir for cheese, but the understanding of each one varied among medium involvement and high involvement consumers. Almost all medium involvement consumers did not perceive the philosophical factor to be relevant, but all of them perceived value on the human dimension, which was easier to understand. The human dimension forms an emotional connection with medium and high involvement consumers, apparently being also associated with social responsibility, although further research on this topic is necessary. As in the wine category (Spielmann & Gelinas-Chebat, 2012), for cheese it is also possible to infer that knowledge and involvement are related.

Besides, high involvement consumers revealed to have a higher knowledge regarding terroir and to make bridges between the three dimensions. All consumers of these category understood at least two dimensions of terroir and some of them even mentioned the impact and the importance of these dimensions and their synergy – in specific, the relation between the producers and the physical space of their farms was seen by a few consumers as a factor that generates uniqueness to the cheese.

In addition, we can also infer that consumer involvement with the category has an influence on the value perceived from terroir: for medium involvement consumers broad representations of the product place such as COO is sufficiently meaningful (Charters & Pettigrew, 2006; Charters et al., 2017; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000; Santos et al., 2006; Spielmann & Gelinas-Chebat, 2012), while for high involvement consumers specific representations are necessary hence all the

information provided in the three dimensions of terroir conjointly communicate value (Atkin & Johnson, 2010; Charters et al., 2017; Spielmann & Gelinias-Chebat, 2012).

Overall, this research concurs with the literature on terroir for wine products. In the same manner of highly involved wine consumers, many high involvement cheese consumers showed interest for cultural tourism and experiences within cheese production places (Charters et al., 2017), a consumer experience tool extensively used by the retailer studied. In this way, A Queijaria has an important role in communicating terroir, confirming the importance of intermediaries in the communication of terroir described by Ballantyne (2011) and by Charters et al. (2017). These experiences put consumers in the place where the human dimension of terroir can be fully enjoyed and understood. Besides that, this dimension was the most common in A Queijaria communication.

Furthermore, we believe A Queijaria has a central role in developing the Brazilian terroir cheese market. This issue – the role of retailers in the development and creation of terroir product markets – is something that deserves further research.

Another topic analyzed in this research was the one of the extendibility of the valued-added aura of terroir to other products. The data collected revealed that most consumers would value the fact of having different products from the same cheese producer or farm – the fact of being from the same specific place aggregates value to them, confirming the proposition of extendibility made by Charters et al. (2017). In addition, the extendibility property of terroir was stronger for high involvement consumers, indicating that terroir is a concept with economic implications for places, beyond a single product category.

In sum, the findings of this paper confirm what terroir literature focused on the wine industry has found until now, bringing some new details and extending the results to categories other than wines and evidencing the role of specialized retailers on that market. Another contribute of this research lies on the fact that the sample of consumers was made of Brazilians, a nationality that has not been specially studied in literature regarding terroir.

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Appendix

A. Script for semi-structured interviews with A Queijaria consumers

Start telling the interviewee about the scope of the research (the case of A Queijaria), that the conversation will be recorded and that it will be confidential.

Presentation

1. Tell me a bit about you (age, profession, where you were born, since when you live in São Paulo).
2. Tell me about your “relationship” with cheese: it is a food that you have always liked? With what frequency do you consume it? In what moments do you consume it? It is a type of food that you spend some time to buy, that you enjoy the moment of buying, that you spend some money on it?
Note: these questions will not be made all at once, they will be explored as the interviewee tells its experience.

About A Queijaria

1. When did you met A Queijaria? When did you became a client? Do you follow the brand on social medias?
2. Have you taken any course or trip promoted by A Queijaria? If so, tell me a bit about this experience.
3. What is your favorite cheese from A Queijaria? Is there any cheese sold in the store that you particularly like or identify with because it is from a place of origin to which you have an emotional attachment? If so, what cheese is that?
4. With what frequency do you go to A Queijaria? Tell me about the last time you went there.
5. How would you describe what is A Queijaria in a single sentence? And what are its three main characteristics?

Note: the characteristics described in this answer must open several paths that might deserve a better understanding, especially when they touch the research problem. When they touch on subjects like this, make inroads and deepen the conversation further. If points on the list of attributes (see below) do not appear spontaneously, stimulate them (eg. do you consider A Queijaria as a genuine brand?)

List of attributes: close (to producers and consumers), respects/values traditions, respects/values nature, respects/values people, only from small producers, transparent, authentic/genuine, 100% Brazilian, handmade, values the origins, has know-how, has collective (and not capitalist) thinking, it is an intermediary, it has an educational and revolutionary role.

6. What about the origin of the cheeses that A Queijaria sells? Have you ever bought or felt like buying a cheese because it was from a certain region/place? How was that? Do you think that being from a specific place adds value to the product? Do you think selling products from specific places adds value to A Queijaria? When you see that a cheese was made in a certain place, what comes to your mind, why would it be a different cheese?

Note: These questions will not be asked all of these at once. The interviewer will understand the direction of what the interviewee is telling and create hooks to address these issues based on their experience.

7. (Questions below will be asked to understand what issues interviewees value. During the conversation, the interviewer will send to the interviewees the following pictures on Whatsapp).

- A. What do you think about the role and protagonism of small producers? For example, the post just sent, shows who is the producer and his qualities.





- B. What do you think about the place of origin of cheese? Is it a factor that has a value to you? For example, this same post tackles the place of origin of Grana dos Laura.
- C. What about the tradition involved in the cheese production? For example, Grana dos Laura comes from a family recipe.



- D. What do you think about the production techniques used to make the cheeses? In the post just sent, for example, some techniques used are specified.



- E. What do you think about the natural elements of the place where cheese is produced? Do you think they affect cheese? For example, in the two posts just sent, the first addresses the issue of the land and the respect to the chaos of nature, while the other tackles the issue about caves and natural elements.
- F. What do you think about the stories behind the cheese mentioned in the last post? Have you ever experienced listening to this storytelling in the stores of A Queijaria?
- G. What do you think about the rarity of cheese which is also covered in the last post (A Queijaria refers to its cheeses as rare jewels)?

8. Two two other pictures were just sent. The first one is a picture of Queijo do Bau and the other is a picture of Queijo Minas Canastra. Can you comment a little on both, with your perceptions about these products?



9. Have you ever bought any products beyond cheese at A Queijaria? If so, do you remember where it came from? Was it from the same place of origin as some cheese you bought? The fact of being from the same place of origin of a certain cheese would influence your purchase decision?