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Perceptions and images of ‘typical’ Australian dishes: An exploratory study

Abstract

The research investigates the perceived images that ‘typical’ Australian dishes evoke in the minds of consumers, including words they associate to describe typical Australian dishes. A questionnaire designed and distributed among undergraduate students at various universities yielded 561 usable responses. Three predominant responses, grilled/barbequed meats, steaks, and meat pies associated typical Australian dishes with; in addition, Australian dishes evoked four different images among respondents: positive, related to specific images (e.g., barbequed foods), neutral, negative, and food related. Overall, the findings underline limited knowledge. Consumer education could help broaden understanding, with resulting enhanced images of the country’s culinary attributes.

Keywords: Food identity, typical dishes, images, consumers, Australia.

Introduction

From a cultural perspective, the importance of food goes well beyond being part of day-to-day routines or physical nourishment (Oum, 2005). Food is a fundamental element in social relations, community building, emotional bonding, as well as “a battleground of cultures and politics” (Oum, 2005, p. 109). Indeed, regardless of their roots, some foods are strongly associated with specific cultures, to the point that they can become the dominant aspect of the perception of the culture (Metro-Roland, 2013).

Despite the significant variety of food traditions and the impact of globalisation, which has resulted in speed and volume of knowledge about food, culture and tradition being disseminated, limited academic research has been conducted on various countries’ food cultures and traditions. Recently, a special edition on heritage food (*Journal of Heritage Tourism*) has sought to expand on this under-researched area, collating works from various corners of the world (e.g., Avieli, 2013; Teixeira & Ribeiro, 2013; Staiff & Bushell, 2013). To some extent, the dearth of knowledge also applies to Australia, where, for instance, little is known about consumers’ perceptions of Australian typical foods or dishes. This limitation is the more surprising, as some initiatives, such as South Australian Food and Wine Tourism Strategy 2009-2014 (SAFWTS, 2009) are seeking to position Australian regions on a global scale based on their food and wine products.

Although in a different context, some academic studies have discussed the importance of food and culture in Australia. For example, Duruz (2005) examines culinary biographies of two women, one Australian and one British, and to some extent highlights Australia’s increasing multiculturalism, which has had an impact, for instance, on Sydney’s neighbourhoods and its food offerings. Lupton’s (2000) study examines food habits and preferences in a rural area. In her study, the author also recognises the very limited qualitative research carried out in Australia in relation to these culturally significant aspects. Dyson (2006) reports on the significance of native foods, often referred to as ‘bush tucker’, for Indigenous Australians, and also on the “revival of interest” (p. 18) in these foods among non-Indigenous Australians, since the 1980s.

This exploratory study seeks to delve into the aspects of imagery and perceptions of Australian dishes and foods; to this end, the following research questions are proposed:

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- What images do ‘typical’ Australian dishes evoke among respondents?
- More specifically, what dish/dishes, if any, do respondents associate with ‘typical’ Australian food(s)?
- What word(s) could best describe ‘typical’ Australian dishes?
- Are there any differences in respondents’ perceptions of typical Australian dishes, for instance, based on age or nationality (Australian versus non-Australian)?

Knowledge gained by addressing these questions could be potentially useful to a number of interest groups or stakeholders. First, identifying consumers’ perceptions of typical Australian dishes could inform owners and managers of tourism and hospitality businesses, as well as educational and government entities about the extent of knowledge about Australian cuisine and gastronomy. Second, new and added knowledge could help illuminate the above groups and stakeholders in educating consumers, as well as in contributing to the development a culinary culture based on the country’s very rich and diverse food sectors, including agriculture and aquaculture. More knowledge about consumers’ perceptions of Australian typical foods and dishes could, as reflected in SAFWTS’s (2009) objectives, contribute to integrating food and culinary experiences as additional components of national and international visitors’ traveling experience, helping them make more informed decisions.

Literature Review

Food identities and cuisines: importance, threats, and responses

An emerging body of literature has used food to reflect on history and identity (Sheridan, 2000). Not only can food be a powerful eye-catcher, but also strongly symbolise authenticity, quality of life, status, communication, and cultural identity (Frochot, 2003). Throughout their history, different nations have developed a strong image for their cuisine and culinary traditions. In the case of France, Frochot (2003) reflects on some of the images visitors and consumers associate with the country, namely culinary images, with wines, foods, vineyards, or restaurants being prominent aspects. In the case of Italy, Hjalager and Corigliano (2000) report on the emergence of a ‘national’ cuisine in the late 19th century, and the subsequent rapid spread of Italian cuisine to the entire world in the early 1970s. In a broader context, Guerrero et al. (2010) highlight the importance of traditional foods for Europe’s cultural heritage.

However, various threats have been identified, potentially affecting the identification or distinction of countries’ culinary images among consumers. On the one hand, and despite a significant geographic distance separating producers and consumers, an emerging globalised food system has helped connect the two groups together (Murdoch & Miele, 1999). Further, food systems have been strengthened and improved through sophisticated technological developments in storage, packaging, or transportation (Murdoch & Miele, 1999). On the other hand, transnational, very large food businesses have become dominant players, seeking to standardise both production practices and consumer tastes in order for mass production to run “in parallel to mass consumption” (Murdoch & Miele, 1999, p. 480). The pace and magnitude of the globalisation phenomenon has had a substantial impact on food production, with implications for various stakeholders of the food chain. For example, millions of consumers have been introduced to new, more standardised and arguably more convenient ways of preparing or consuming foods, including a large variety of easy-to-prepare meals and fast food alternatives.

Partly in response to the massive standardisation of food production practices, and to help maintain the identity of local food traditions some food ‘stakeholders’ (e.g., producers,

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advocates of local food consumption and production) have reacted in response to what might be considered the slow ‘MacDonaldisation’ of society. Ritzer (1983) uses this term to refer to the advent of speed, convenience, and standardisation of food consumption habits in the United States (U.S.) that, according to the author, are replacing the creation and flair of design in cooking, the variety available in choices, and “the comfort of relationships in serving” (p. 371). Ritzer (1983) argues that the MacDonaldisation phenomenon has become so pervasive that people travelling to any town or city in the U.S. can witness the homogenisation of its life and culture through familiar shops, hotels, or chain-style restaurants.

In 1986, three years after Ritzer’s (1983) work was published, the Slow Food movement was established in Italy (Jones et al., 2003; Miele & Murdoch, 2002), one of the world’s most iconic countries for its variety and popularity of cuisine. As opposed to its antithesis, the fast food movement, the Slow Food initiative “is concerned with promoting typical restaurants, or those establishments serving “regional cuisines based upon typical products” (Miele & Murdoch, 2002, p. 317). Similarly, advocates of other initiatives, including the ‘buy local’ or community supported agriculture (CSA) movements (Weber & Matthews, 2008; Wilkinson, 2001), both popular in the U.S., seek to connect consumers with rural areas and the local food producers.

Food as a tourist draw card

Coinciding with concerns of food safety, preservation of local culinary traditions, and an apparent growing interest among consumer groups to buy local as well as organic foods (Weber and Matthews, 2008), there has been an increase of academic literature focussing on food and wine as tourist draw cards (e.g., Carlsen & Charters, 2006; Croce & Perri, 2010; Hall et al., 2000; Hall and Sharples, 2008). Given the theme and objectives set out in the present study, the work by Hjalager and Corigliano (2000) is particularly important in that it suggests a relationship between food and the image of a tourist destination. This relationship is illustrated in the following ways:

Complementary: Emphasises the growing inclusion of food in tourist management and marketing in recent decades, particularly in television programmes, videos or brochures.

Inventory: Refers to intensive efforts to create new tourist experiences and products, many of which are based on opening visitor centres or food factories. Moreover, together food and wine trails allow tourists to create personalised experiences while they explore agricultural landscapes.

Superficial: Tourism can symbolize entertainment and amusement, and it is also perceived “as a cultural act, a cognitive and participatory moment” (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000, p. 282). Local products and travel can therefore be part of sharing local cultures. However, when the link between food and culture is superficial, evaluating quality becomes marginal, while both the pretext for socialising and the context become important factors.

Disconnected: The argument that eating styles and products have become globalised, and that the fast food industry “does little to connect local cultures and images with the act of eating” (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000, p. 282).

In the context of destination image, earlier studies have identified visitors’ perceptions of specific countries, regions or states (e.g., Chaudhary, 2000; Chen & Hsu, 2000; Elliot et al., 2010), as well as the influence of gastronomy in experiencing destinations (Kivela & Crofts,

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2006). For instance, past research by Chen and Kerstetter (1999) captured the most prevalent images that rural Pennsylvania evoked among international students. Further, from a list of 48 image attributes provided in a questionnaire, students’ images were most strongly associated with Pennsylvania’s fresh air, quiet, peace/tranquil, and lack of crime. Another earlier study (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) explored tourists’ images of Egypt, Greece, Italy, and Turkey, including with regard to perceived good value for money, scenery, climate, and appealing local foods.

While a large body of research has studied the cultural and traditional significance of local or national foods, there is a dearth of knowledge studying imagery and perceptions of dishes and foods among consumers. Among the very few studies conducted in recent years on these themes, Duarte Alonso (2011) explored imagery of stereotypical Southern foods in the U.S. as well as consumption of those foods among Southern residents. Duarte Alonso’s (2011) findings suggest that Southern respondents perceived the aspect of indulgence, or enjoyment of ‘comfort’ foods, particularly the taste, as very important. Further, when asked about the images that stereotypical Southern foods evoked, many respondents associated these foods with those cooked through deep frying, such as fried chicken. Not surprisingly, the majority considered some stereotypical Southern foods as high calorie. At the same time, Duarte Alonso (2011) noticed very little evidence that stereotypical Southern foods were part of family gatherings or part of the region’s tradition. This finding led the author to suggest that despite the Southern region’s very vast and rich food culture, many of its residents appear to become detached from those very important aspects of Southern food culture and tradition.

The present study seeks to shed more light into the under-researched area of consumers’ perceived images of typical dishes, gathering data from a group of university students attending Australian universities.

Methodology

The study predominantly focussed on three areas related to consumers’ perceptions of Australian dishes: a) images evoked when thinking of typical Australian dishes, b) dishes associated with typical Australian foods, and c) words that could best describe typical Australian dishes. The study also investigated potential differences between various participant groups, for instance, based on their age or nationality (Australian versus non-Australian).

A decision was made to gather data from a selective group of consumers, that is, university students. This decision was based on the research team’s working environment at the time of the study, which allowed for targeting a sufficiently large number of respondents using the limited time, human, and financial resources available. These constraints prevented the research team from traveling to various environments where other groups of consumers frequent, and investing time to gather data. Targeting only university students is considered a limitation of the present study. Despite this limitation, given the exploratory nature of the study, the student group was believed to provide valuable information for the research team to build a foundation, which could be extended in future research.

Further, to gather the insights of as many individuals as possible, a questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire was divided in various sections, the first to record demographic information of respondents, as well as their frequency of and motivations for eating out. A second section sought to learn about the three areas above (a, b, and c). These sections were designed in line with existing research which examined food images among consumers in the

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Southern region of the United States (Duarte Alonso, 2011; Duarte Alonso & O’Neill, 2012). Specifically, these studies gathered the images that stereotypical Southern foods evoked among participants, as well as their general knowledge of these foods.

In further sections, the questionnaire investigated additional consumption related aspects; however, these are not part of the scope of this study, and might be presented in future research. Between July of 2012 and March of 2013, data were collected from students completing a degree at various Australian universities; the research team had access to these cohorts of students during teaching activities. Students were asked to complete the one-page questionnaire at the end of the lecture; to avoid any issues of identification, the researcher team member left the classroom and allowed students to complete the questionnaires on their own. This process was repeated in the coming semesters, with different cohort of students and at various universities, thus, avoiding the potential of repetition in the completion of the questionnaires. In all, 650 questionnaires were distributed; in 89 cases, either the questionnaires were left blank (32 cases) or some of the sections (a, b, and c) were incomplete (57). Thus, the responses of 561 individuals are considered in the study, representing 86.3 per cent response rate.

The content of the questionnaires was entered into Microsoft Excel; subsequently, the quantitative data were exported into the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) to run descriptive analysis. In addition, Pearson’s Chi-square was run to identify potentially significant inter-group differences between some of the groups investigated (e.g., gender, age) and non-scaled items. To group the different words and comments emerging from the questionnaire data, word association was used. This methodology or procure is often found in social representations studies (Wagner et al., 1996). In word association, “subjects are given a stimulus word and asked to produce the first response which comes to mind” (Schmitt, 1998, p. 390). This procedure allows for less restricted mental representations (Wagner et al., 1996). Moreover, the ideas or words evoked through such representations tend to be spontaneous, and subject to fewer restrictions (Wagner et al., 1996). With regard to food related research, Guerrero et al. (2010) used free word association when they studied consumers from six European regions, specifically, the words that ‘traditional’ evoked in their minds. The authors argue that, while proven to be useful and simple, “very few studies have been published based on word associations in the food area” (p. 226). Some of the verbatim comments appearing in the following sections are labelled as R1 (Respondent1), R2 (Respondent 2), and so forth.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

An almost equal percentage of male and female respondents participated in the study (Table 1). In contrast, the majority (59.9%) are between the ages of 18 and 21 years, while the smallest group is of ages 26 and above. A slight majority of respondents indicated being Australian citizens (52.6%), and almost an equal percentage (51.3%) have lived in Australia all their lives. As many as 59.5 per cent eat out at least once a week; socialising appears to be their main motive for doing so.

Table 1 Here

Findings

Images typical Australian dishes evoke among respondents

The descriptive analysis (Table 2) relates to the three research questions under investigation. The largest group (40.3%) identified three or more dishes as being typical Australian, followed by those who indicated only one dish (40.6%). As the following examples illustrate,

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one element that emerged in many of the comments related to the social context of experiencing Australian foods. A second related element is linked to leisure, in that the foods are consumed in a relaxed environment.

Table 2 Here

Furthermore, the intrinsic meaning of sharing food and the occasion on which typical Australian foods were prepared and consumed emerged as meaningful images of Australian dishes:

R1, male, Australian: *Barbeques on a sunny day with a few beers with family and friends. Not just the food, but the whole ‘package’.*

R2, male, Australian: *A meal with a large family or big group of friends.*

R3, male, Australian: *An Aussie barbeque with family in the backyard.*

R5, female, non-Australian: *Barbeque, sausages, meat pie, lamingtons. The image of families together over a barbeque serving mostly meat.*

Several researchers have investigated the importance of food sharing among humans, particularly from an anthropological view (Belk, 2010). Morrison (1996), for instance, states that “both in terms of their social construction and the social rules which govern behaviour, [food sharing] is thought to be the essence of our sociality” (p. 648). Lupton (1996) reflects on the importance of food sharing in bringing “people into the same community” (p. 25). These individuals, according to Lupton (1996), might also share a similar food culture; in this cultural context, food can be influential in helping reinforce group identity, as well as in “marking differences between cultures” (p. 25).

While numerous comments identified the apparent ‘homogeneity’ of Australian dishes, with only few foods and ingredients being referred to, especially images of barbeques, meat pies, and steaks, a further element mentioned in various comments relates to respondents’ perceived multiculturalism of Australian dishes and cooked foods. These perceptions were part of the comments from both Australian and non-Australian respondents, many of whom, however, have lived in Australia for many years:

R7, male, non-Australian: *A blend of cuisines from different cultures, like heavy Italian and Thai influence through multiculturalism.*

R8, male, non-Australian: *Australia is a multicultural country, therefore there should be a lot of different choices to eat, for example, Asian food, European, middle-eastern food.*

R9, male, Australian: *I think of a steak, sausages, etc., especially if cooked on a barbeque. Possibly even a steak burger. However, in my opinion, this is very hard to define as Australia is incredibly diverse and full of different cultures.*

R10, female, Australian: *I think of things you can eat on the go, such as pies and sausage rolls, but I feel Australian food/dishes have expanded to encompass various cultures.*

The comments above appear to reflect Australia’s multicultural society (Flight et al., 2003), which is also demonstrated in the growing variety of foods and dishes featured at in a multitude of ethnic restaurants in all major cities. A report by the Australian Government (2008) notes the significant influence of early 20th century European migrants, including French, German, and Italian citizens on Australia’s wine industry, as well as on its

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gastronomy. Almost a century later, other gastronomic influences, predominantly stemming from China, India, Greece, Italy and Vietnam, made their mark (Australian Government, 2008). More recently, and because of the interest of many immigrants living in Australia, the report highlights the growing popularity of drinks and foods from a wide range of continents and regions (Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East). Some of these developments also mirror the increasing 'gastronomic multiculturalism' experienced elsewhere, with Panayi (2008), for instance, explaining important changes in Britain's society in the 21st century, whereby long term foreign influences have resulted in multicultural foods becoming the norm. Indeed, a recent report (Taylor, 2013) underlines the status of Curry dishes in the UK, not only becoming a favourite food among British consumers, but also being adopted as a 'national dish.'

Dishes associated with typical Australian foods

Similar to the images Australian dishes evoked in their minds, respondents predominantly associated their perceptions of typical Australian foods with a limited range of dishes (Table 3). In fact dishes such as barbeque, steak, fish and chips, and meat pies were the most prominent associations.

Table 3 Here

Selected comments further underline respondents' lack of agreement regarding which dishes can be specifically associated with typical Australian foods. For example, one group tended to associate Australian dishes with a very limited repertoire of food options and the undefined nature of these dishes:

R11, male, Australian: *Stereotypically 'damper' [type of Australian bread], typically 'seafood', anything barbequed.*

R12, male, Australian: *Barbeque, sausages, steak, onions, lack of clear identity.*

R13, female, non-Australian: *Steak... I don't really know; I think food in Australia is more like fusion...*

R14, male, Australian: *Any [dishes] with particular Australian lingo, e.g., bangers and mashed [potatoes], throw a shrimp on the barby [barbeque], or any outback related dish.*

Another group associated typical Australian dishes with the hedonistic or pleasurable aspect of food consumption in Australia, with its simplicity and casual ways of purchasing and consuming those foods. In addition and as previously noted, the aspect of socialisation emerged once again as an integral component of food consumption.

R15, female, non-Australian: *The simplest foods that represent the easy going culture, e.g., sausages, steak, pork.*

R16, male, non-Australian: *Delicious foods at an affordable price, at a convenient and comfortable place to eat.*

R17, male, Australian: *[Memories of] small outlet shops serving burgers and seafood off the side of a main road.*

R18, female, non-Australian: *Images that come to mind are family and friends gathering around a park or beach, enjoying a picnic or barbeque.*

Words describing typical Australian dishes

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A third section of the study gathered participants' words they used to describe typical Australian dishes (Table 4). When analysing the different responses using word association, five different groups emerged. First, those whose words suggested positive elements of Australian dishes predominantly referred to the taste. The second group chose words associated with specific images, such as the cases when Australian dishes were perceived as being barbecued or Western foods. Among other results, almost 20 per cent of participants' words indicated negative views towards Australian dishes, with the largest among the three sub-groups in this category using the words 'bland, boring and flavourless.' The following selection of comments provides a demonstration of the variety of responses related to the five groups.

R19, male, Australian: *Something that is tasteful to eat.*

R20, male, non-Australian: *Older generation style food, e.g., fancy meat and three veggies [vegetables].*

R21, male, non-Australian: *Cheap and not particularly complex. Very few ingredients.*

R22: male, Australian: *Easy comfort food.*

R23: male, Australian: *Meaty, easy to make, doesn't require a lot of maintenance (e.g., utensils).*

R24: female, Australian: *What you see is what you get.*

These comments, and the overall results of this section demonstrate to a great extent a perceived stereotype of homogeneous foods/dishes, and are in stark contrast to the apparent 'food multiculturalism' taking place in Australia and elsewhere discussed in earlier studies (Australian Government, 2008; Duruz, 2005; Panayi, 2008).

Table 4 Here

Differences identified among various participant groups

Several statistically significant differences were noticed corresponding to respondents' perceived images of Australian dishes, with the first being based on respondents' age groups ($\chi^2_{(4,n=559)} = 13.640$, ($p < 0.01$)). For instance, the largest group (45.5%) among the 'youngest' respondents (ages 18-21) indicated three or more images associated with Australian foods, followed by the more 'mature' students (ages 26 and above, 42.6%). Closer analysis revealed that the large majority (64.5%) of the 'younger' group were born in Australia, followed by the more mature group (41.8%) and the second group (32.9%) whose members were mainly born outside Australia (67.1%). Therefore, it could be assumed that the first and third groups of respondents may be more knowledgeable about Australian foods.

Another statistically significant difference ($\chi^2_{(4,n=559)} = 40.523$, ($p < 0.001$)) was identified when comparing Australian/non-Australian respondents versus their perceived images of Australian dishes. In fact, half (50.8%) of respondents who indicated being from Australia wrote three or more images corresponding to Australian foods, as compared to only 28.4% those who acknowledged being born overseas.

A third statistically significant difference ($\chi^2_{(4,n=557)} = 55.640$, ($p < 0.001$)) emerged when time living in Australia versus images of Australian dishes were compared. As many as 51.4 per cent of respondents who indicated living in Australia all their lives wrote three or more different images of Australian dishes. In contrast only 15.6 per cent of those living in Australia for less than a year, and 35.8 per cent of those living a year or longer did so.

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Expectedly, these findings clearly demonstrate that length of time lived in Australia, whether being born, or living for more than one year, is a significant factor which appears to have an impact on respondents’ images, even on their knowledge of Australian dishes. However, no statistically significant differences were noticed when the same three groups were compared versus a) specific dishes they associated with Australian foods, and b) versus their descriptions of typical Australian foods. Similarly, no differences emerged when further analysis was conducted using frequency of eating out in Australia, or motivational factors for eating out in Australia versus the three areas described in Table 2.

Conclusions and Implications

Different countries have earned a name and image for their cuisine and food production. For instance, the case of Italy (Hjalager & Corigliano, 2000) symbolises the rise to prominence based on a range of locally and regionally produced foods (e.g., vegetables, charcuterie, and cheeses). Many other countries, however are either still developing their own culinary image or have yet to start this process. Clearly, research studies could contribute to the awareness and increased knowledge of other countries’ foods and culinary traditions. Despite the importance of researchers in dissemination of knowledge, little has been reported on many countries’ foods and cuisine. The present exploratory study sought to contribute to this under-researched area, gathering the perceptions among university students residing in Australia about the dishes and foods of this nation.

Overall, the words and statements provided by respondents demonstrate very limited perceptions of Australian dishes, with meat related products (barbeques, steaks, meat pies) being the predominant elements respondents associated Australian dishes with. The very homogenous nature of the indicated perceptions, in that very few dishes are associated with Australian foods also suggests a lack of knowledge of the true range and variety of Australian foods. For example, existing research highlights the aspect of multiculturalism in Australia (Flight et al., 2003), including its influence on Australians’ eating habits (Australian Government, 2008). However, few participants’ comments (31) associated Australian dishes with the word ‘multicultural’ or with similar words emphasising Australia’s growing diversity of cultures, which might contribute to the emergence of culinary trends. Although very limited in number (15), extended comments associated the leisure dimension of consuming foods in Australia, for instance preparing barbeques and other foods surrounded by friends and families, as well as sharing those foods. This aspect has also been discussed in previous studies as a key component in society (Morrison, 1996), and within communities, including in maintaining group identity (Lupton, 1996).

These findings underline the importance of disseminating knowledge about the immense variety and potential combinations from foods grown and produced in Australia. For many years, television programs such as Landline have extensively reported on Australia’s agriculture, and on emerging trends in the country’s food industry, including aspects related to ‘from the paddock to the plate’ initiatives to grow consumer awareness about the quality and traceability of foods. More consumer awareness could contribute to more knowledge among the millions of visitors travelling to Australia each year, many of whom might be looking to indulge themselves in gastronomic experiences.

With Australia’s wines today renowned the world over, the importance of developing culinary images could have many positive implications for Australia’s economy and society. Over the decades, Australia’s reputation for the quality of many of its foods has grown throughout the world; thus, the potential exists to also build a culinary culture. Furthermore, both with the

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existence of a rich cattle and agricultural industry and with Australia increasingly becoming very multicultural, opportunities abound to develop a cuisine based on these valuable elements. The quality of Australia's foods, added to the skills, and the creativity of chefs and kitchen staff could lead to recognition and future success, positioning the country in the world's culinary map.

Limitations and Future research

Even though the study constituted a first exploration into an under-researched aspect of food and culture, it is acknowledged that the selection of cohorts of university students presents clear limitation, which also limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research could broaden the sample of respondents to include different age groups, as well as consumers from different walks of life (e.g., different occupations, income level, etc.). these future investigations could be very useful in a) confirming/disconfirming the validity of the findings in this study, b) expanding the scope and the potential usefulness of new findings, and c) identifying if overtime consumers' perceptions and images of 'typical' Australian dishes vary or become broader. New information in these areas could further contribute toward the strengthening of a national food and gastronomic culture.

Finally, future studies could also examine perceptions and perceived images of Australian foods among international consumers. Information gathered from this group of consumers could also prove very invaluable, particularly in addressing the needs and desires of this group of consumers in case they visit Australia. An already burgeoning wine industry is attempting to position Australia in the wine world map even more distinctively (e.g., SAFWTS, 2009) and benefit from on-site visits and sales from both national and international visitors. The development of a culinary culture based on many of the unique and valuable aspects of Australian food production, and on the knowledge and skills of its people could not only strategically complement the wine and other food industries, but also provide significant socio-economic benefits to the country.

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