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Short description:
Consumers perceptions (quantitative study) and marketing strategies of producers (qualitative study) in the market of foods for sportspeople in Belgium are compared to identify success factors of marketing strategies.

Long description:
The increasing health awareness and the rise of recreational athletes and lifestyle consumers boosted the development of foods for sportspeople. This market is not only attractive due to its growth, but also because of its competitive and changeable nature.

This paper analyzes perceptions of consumers and marketing strategies of producers in this market in Belgium. By applying a mixed method research approach, a qualitative (producers; in-depth interviews; n=9) and quantitative (consumers; survey; n=3116) study was conducted. While the former focused on market analysis, marketing strategy and implementation of the marketing mix, the latter – building upon the Brand Equity Model – dealt with the evaluation of the industry, and particularly the implemented marketing mix and the underlying brand characteristics. To identify success factors of marketing strategies, both studies were compared. Thereby, three clusters of producers and consumers were distinguished. When looking at cluster differences in the marketing mix, for example, the association between distribution channel and type of users plays an important role. Besides, there are various cases of a mismatch between consumers and producers, e.g. competitors, price perceptions, loyalty. Nevertheless, despite the competition and mismatches, there are still indications of a large, unexploited market, i.e. non-users.

Key words:
Consumer research;
Foods for Sportspeople;
Food Marketing;
Brand Equity;
Match-Mismatch;
Mixed Method.

Hans De Steur (*1983) graduated as a Sociologist and obtained his Diploma of Complementary Studies in Economics and Business Administration at Ghent University, Belgium. In 2011, he successfully finished his PhD in Applied Biological Sciences, which focused on the market potential of biofortification. He currently works as a postdoctoral assistant at the Division of Agri-Food Marketing and Chain Management, Department of Agricultural Economics in Ghent University. Hans was and is involved in various national, international (EU) research projects dealing with healthy and/or genetically modified foods. He is also (co-)author of various scientific publications in peer-reviewed journals, among which 2 articles in Nature Biotechnology, and presented his results at several international conferences.

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