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# **The 'Good Oil':**

**The role olive oil plays in the lives of  
Western Australian consumers**

**By  
Trudie Michels (*B. Bus*)**

**This thesis is presented in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Business**

**Faculty of Business and Law  
School of Marketing, Tourism and Leisure  
Edith Cowan University  
Perth, Western Australia  
November 2006**

## **USE OF THESIS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Throughout Australia, a great number of resources have been devoted to the burgeoning billion dollar Australian olive industry. Recently a rapid increase in olive oil production has been witnessed. This growth combined with aggressive international competition will see pressure put on Australian producers to supply quality and price-effective olive oil into the Australian market. This will require a detailed understanding of consumers' perceptions of and thoughts about olive oil and a comprehension of how, when, where and why consumers utilise olive oil.

The main purpose of this study was to understand the role that olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian olive oil consumers and to explore how they think and feel about olive oil. Qualitative research methods were adopted, using focus groups, made up of both regular and infrequent olive oil users, to gain insights into how and why consumers use olive oil. A number of factors that influence both the use and purchase of olive oil were uncovered, as were possible motivators and inhibitors that may affect future olive oil purchases and use. The sample consisted of five focus groups each made up of approximately seven participants (n=35), sourced from the Perth metropolitan area, Western Australia, of both genders and varied age groups. Six different consumer profiles are offered, shaped by involvement and usage levels, and these help to facilitate a clearer picture of the Western Australian olive oil consumer under study.

The findings of this study suggest that olive oil has a selection of uses and plays a variety of roles in the lives of participants. It is clear that all participants knew, to one degree or another, about the basic culinary uses of olive oil and its purported health benefits. The health and taste attributes of olive oil were key reasons for regular use, and symbolic factors including self image and the desire for an idealised lifestyle acted

as further rationale for regular users. For infrequent users, the taste and smell of the olive oil acted as deterrents, as did price.

Participants had little 'how to use' olive oil knowledge and even less olive oil 'product' knowledge. However, participants were keen to learn and commented that if they knew how to utilise olive oil, they would use it more often and in greater volumes. This education issue is one of the most significant issues facing olive oil marketers. The findings also suggest that the level of involvement with olive oil may be useful in determining a participant's level of involvement with food in general. Those with a higher level of involvement with extra virgin olive oil indicated that they are generally more highly involved with other specialty foods and beverages like artisanal cheese and premium wine. The findings also propose that although olive oil is described as a single homogenous product by consumers, two applications for olive oil actually exist, one for cooking and one for eating. There appear to be significant differences in the way participants view, use and talk about these applications, highlighting the need to treat each oil separately and as a distinct product with very different pricing tactics, marketing strategies and promotional approaches.

The findings have several practical benefits. First, they will help producers and marketers better understand and know their consumers. Olive oil products can then be created and targeted to meet consumer expectations and needs. Second, the findings provide a foundation on which to undertake further olive oil and consumer research. Lastly, for those interested in consumer behaviour and food choice, this study offers a choice of additional factors and influences that could be used to further investigate food choice, including symbolic and generational influences and the level of knowledge a consumer has about a food product. The findings also suggest that attention should be paid to the actual type of food product under study. What may appear as a homogenous product in the first instance may in fact finish up having a dichotomous existence.

## **DECLARATION**

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I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

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## 1. Introduction to the Olive

The significance of the olive tree and the reverence it has gained since ancient times is widely attested. An abundance of literary references to the olive exists and includes the Bible, the Koran, Greek and Roman mythology and classical literature. For centuries the branch of an olive tree has been deemed a sign of peace and purity (Reichelt & Burr, 1997), and many artists have been intrigued by the olive tree with such famous painters as Derain, Renoir and Van Gogh focusing on it and its branches in their works of art (Davidson, 1999; Dolamore, 1999; IOOC, 2003).

In general, the majority of Australians have used imported olive oil from the Mediterranean Countries of Spain, Italy and Greece (RIRDC, 2002). However, in the last ten years there has been an explosion of Australian olive grove plantings with more than 8.5 million trees being planted (Sweeney, 2002). When these trees are in full production in 2010 they will have the ability to produce over 40 million litres of olive oil per year (Miller, 2005b)<sup>1</sup>. The mass of oil being produced currently is marketed in more than 100 different Australian olive oil brands which occupy the shelves of supermarkets and specialty gourmet stores both across Australian and internationally. With the potential to become a billion dollar industry, how well does the Australian olive industry (including producers and marketers) really know the customer buying its oil? An exploratory study using focus groups and visual stimuli was identified as the most appropriate way to obtain an understanding of this Australian olive oil consumer.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to a lack of cohesiveness of the Australian olive oil industry and a very fragmented structure, there are discrepancies between varying sources of statistical data on olive oil production, processing and consumption. This has led to confusing and, in many cases, contradictory data being produced. See Appendix one for a further explanation.

This chapter will firstly, give some insight into the background of the study and a description of the purpose of the study. The research question and the resulting sub questions will then be addressed. Subsequently, the theoretical significance of the study is discussed, followed by the significance for the consumer and the Australian olive oil industry. A brief explanation of olive oil terms is then offered.

## **2. Setting the Background**

### **2.1 Consumer Behaviour and Food Choice**

Not only do the choices consumers make about food and beverages determine what nutrients and minerals the body receives, these choices also have an important impact on food production which is driven by consumer demand (Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, & Falk, 1996). How people perceive, view and select food, as well as their understanding and knowledge of it, affects their process of acquisition, place of purchase, method of preparation and manner of consumption (Furst et al., 1996). Furthermore:

The food choice process incorporates not only decisions based on conscious reflection, but also those that are automatic, habitual and subconscious (Furst et al., 1996 p. 247).

By understanding the complexities of the food choice process and related food consumption patterns, primary producers, manufacturers, packaging specialists, nutritionalists, marketers and government policy makers can benefit by developing and delivering products in line with consumers' needs and preferences.

### **2.2 Olive Oil**

In Davidson's (1999) *'The Oxford Companion to Food'*, olives and olive oil have been defined as: "The fruit of the olive tree, *Olea europaea*, and the oil which it yields". There are many different forms of olive oil on the



market today, ranging from extra virgin olive oils to pomace oil. The International Olive Oil Council (IOOC, 2006) has classified these oils into varying styles both organoleptically<sup>2</sup> (aroma and taste) and analytically (the degree of acidity, which refers to the proportion of free fatty acids).

Olive oil competes with many other fats (butter, margarine) and oils (canola, soybean, vegetable, sunflower, peanut, macadamia, avocado) for space on the Australian kitchen shelf. Figures from the Centre for Innovation Business and Manufacturing (2003) indicate that only 5% of the fats and oils consumed in Australia are from the olive, and that olive oil is the most expensive member of the fats and oils group, often being more than three times the price of canola oil in supermarkets, and up to ten times more expensive than canola in specialty food outlets.

### **2.3 Olive Oil in Australia**

Olive trees were first planted in Australia in 1800 (Reichelt & Burr, 1997), and although a relatively youthful industry when compared to those of the Mediterranean olive oil producing countries, the Australian industry is showing signs of immense potential. The comment by Sweeney and Davies (1997, p. 406) encapsulates this view:

The economies of scale and modern production techniques based on world's best varieties and practices has the potential to place Australian olive oil in a very competitive position both domestically and internationally.

Australia only commercially produces olive oil of extra virgin quality. Alternative grades of olive oils including virgin, light, extra light, pure and pomace olive oil are furnished by imported product. In the 2005 season, Australia produced over 4.5 million litres of olive oil of extra virgin quality, a 94% increase on production from the 2004 harvest of 2.5 million litres

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<sup>2</sup> Organoleptic is a word used to describe something "involving the use of the sensory organs" (Yallop et al., 2005) for example taste and smell. The term is often used to describe a method of analysis for olive oil when taste and smell attributes are measured.

(IOOC, 2005a). The harvest period of 2006 is expected to reach up to 10 million litres and, weather allowing, production could possibly double again in 2007 to 20 million litres. The forecast annual production figures based on current tree plantings is expected to reach 40 million litres of extra virgin olive oil by 2010 (Miller, 2005b).

At the same time that Australia is improving production, so are many other 'new' olive oil countries including Argentina, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States of America. The increased volumes from these countries combined with the continuing production from the traditional olive oil producing Mediterranean nations of Spain, Italy, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey indicate the very real possibility of a global olive oil glut within the next 5-10 years. This will lead to aggressive competition which will put pressure on Australian producers to provide quality and price-effective oil to Australian markets as well as locating new export markets, such as Asia, China and India (Miller, 2005b).

The most current consumption figures available (2004/2005) for all olive oil types (from extra virgin to pomace oil)<sup>3</sup> indicate that Australia has the highest consumption of olive oil per capita outside the Mediterranean olive oil producing countries (IOOC, 2005d). This has increased from 400 milliliters per person per year in the mid 1980s (Joiner, 1998) to an average of over 1.53 litres per year in 2005 (Sweeney, 2006). The most recent IOOC (2005a) figures indicate that in 2005 Australians consumed over 37.8 million litres of olive oil, of which over 92% consisted of imported product. The net value, without retail margins, of these olive oil imports into Australia has been estimated by the IOOC (2005c) at over 146 million Australian dollars.

It is expected that the recent plantings of olive groves throughout Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Southern

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<sup>3</sup> Definitions for the range of olive oils can be found in section 6 of this chapter.

Queensland will begin to substantially replace the need for imported extra virgin olive oil (RIRDC, 2002; Sweeney & Davies, 1997). Evidence of this trend can be seen in current figures where import volumes have started to show a decreasing growth trend since 2004 (IOOC, 2005c). Retail analysts have also suggested that Australian production could replace approximately 50% of the imported extra virgin olive oil requirements by the year 2010 (Field, 2002).

In the last decade the demand for olive oils both internationally and throughout Australia has increased. The Australian increase has been attributed to four factors (Centre for Innovation Business & Manufacturing, 2003). First, there has been an increasing concern for health and nutrition, especially in countries with a high gross domestic product (GDP). Second, increased consumption has occurred as people are becoming more educated about different cuisines and food cultures. Third, there has been a growing interest in the concept and practices of the Mediterranean diet. Fourth, an increasing concern about alternative growing and production technologies, for example genetically modified products, has seen consumers become more vigilant about what they consume.

Thus, the Australian olive oil industry looks to be in a good position to be able to supply the Australian market with up to 50% of its extra virgin olive oil requirements by 2010. It should also have residual oil for export either in bulk or in packaged form. However, until Australia has the refining resources to process pure, light and pomace olive oil, the demand for these other grades of olive oils will still have to be met by the imported product. Field (2002) suggests that in order to survive and maintain a stable viable industry over the next 15 years, Australian olive oil producers need to: focus on promoting and increasing Australian domestic retail sales, limit extra virgin olive oil imports into Australia, use 100% Australian product to satisfy any new growth within the Australian market and sustain steady, but realistic, Australian market growth.

### **3. The Purpose of the Study**

Throughout Australia, millions of dollars have been devoted to an escalating Australian olive industry. Immense investment and capital outlay in land, irrigation and trees, plus production and storage facilities have seen an infrastructure boom (Miller, 2005b; RIRDC, 2002). Olive trees are reaching maturity and there has been a rapid increase in oil production. Evidence of this can be seen by the 94% increase in production between the 2004 and 2005 harvest (IOOC, 2005a) mentioned earlier. The key factor imperative to both the current and future survival of this industry is being able to market and sell this olive oil efficiently and profitably.

Recent academic and proprietary research has focused on global markets, olive growing, production and grove management aspects (Joiner, 1998; McEvoy, Gomez, McCarrol, & Sevil, 1998; McEvoy & Gomez, 1999; Ravetti, 2005; RIRDC, 2002; Sweeney, 2000, 2006). This has provided very practical information for the industry on international markets, olive oil economics, olive agronomy<sup>4</sup>, olive harvesting and oil processing. However, academic and industry research and information focusing on understanding Australian olive oil consumers and their needs, appears to be limited and often not readily available to the industry. This may suggest that the industry may not know its consumers as well as they would like. Interestingly, this trend appears to have been replicated in the Australian wine industry where an abundance of viticultural and agronomic studies overshadow research on wine marketing and consumer behaviour (Lockshin, 2006).

This study had a number of purposes. The main aim was to explore consumers' views and thoughts about olive oil and how they felt about the

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4 In reference to olives, agronomy is used to explain the characteristics that are important during the growth and development phase of the olive tree and the olive fruit. It focuses on managing the soil, cultivating the land and olive crop production (Encarta, 2006; Yallop et al., 2005).

product. This study sought to generate an awareness and insight that cannot be attained through quantitative statistical measures. The intention was to obtain an understanding about how and why Western Australian consumers use olive oil and what influenced their decisions to both purchase and consume it.

The study also specifically addressed issues that could have important marketing ramifications. These included past motivators for, and barriers to, olive oil use and potential motivators for increased future use. Thus this study attempts to make the literature gap between olive oil consumption and consumer behaviour smaller, and provide a better understanding of the role olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian consumers. This information will help producers and marketers better comprehend and know their consumers and aid in the successful marketing and selling of their products.

This study was also undertaken in order to discover possible valuable topics for further investigation within the olive industry as well as other food choice areas. Subsequent qualitative and quantitative research will contribute to a more in-depth and extensive understanding of the olive oil consumer.

#### **4. The Research Question**

The primary research question is:

**What role does olive oil play in the lives of Western Australian olive oil consumers?**

In an effort to uncover the answer to this question, a number of sub questions were addressed throughout the data collection, analysis and write up stages. These helped to keep the research focused on the key areas of exploration. The questions were:

- How do olive oil consumers view cooking oils, especially olive oil, and what thoughts and feelings do they have about all of these oils?
- From where do these thoughts and feelings come?
- What do olive oil consumers understand about olive oil?
- How is olive oil used, and what influences this use?
- What motivates the current use of olive oil?
- Why do consumers choose olive oil?
- Why do some consumers use olive oil only infrequently?
- What influences these purchasing decisions?
- What are the possible future motivators and barriers to olive oil purchase and consumption?

## **5. The Significance of the Study**

This exploratory research has a number of significant implications for a varied selection of stakeholders. From a theoretical point of view, it is relevant because it extends the current literature and it provides a framework for further qualitative and quantitative research. The study is important for the Australian olive oil consumer and is particularly valuable to the Australian olive oil industry. These three areas of significance are discussed more closely below.

### **5.1 Theoretical Significance**

As noted earlier, very little research, either international or Australian, has studied the relationship between consumer behaviour, food choice and olive oil usage. However, there appears to be an abundance of (primarily) quantitative, statistical and scientific literature related to olive growing and oil production, world import and export market data, and the nutritional and health benefits of olive oil. Most of this research has been conducted internationally and to a much lesser degree in Australia. For this reason, a qualitative exploration into Western Australian consumers' consumption

behaviour and food choice was necessary to develop a better understanding and gain a more detailed insight than preceding research had offered.

Several theoretical implications evolved from this research. Theoretically, this study significantly expands on the existing limited olive oil and consumer behaviour research. It contributes to the research gap on olive oil consumption and food choice in Australia, by providing a valuable understanding of olive oil consumers and their thoughts and feelings toward olive oil. This has created several themes, concepts, and ideas that can be further investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings are relevant to parties interested in olive oil (marketers, producers) as well as those concerned with alternative avenues of food choice research.

The study also provides a methodological process that could be replicated in other research where the intention is to gain both a deeper explanation of consumption, as well as a theoretical description of the varied relationships between consumption and consumer behaviour.

The study explores the role of an individual food product (olive oil) in one particular culture. This substantive account provides insight into several consumer behaviour and food choice theories that are considered in the discussion chapter. It contributes to the understanding of food choice practices, and the relationships between particular food-related behaviours and the greater food system as a whole.

## **5.2 Significance for the Consumer**

This research has important benefits for the Australian olive oil consumer and potential new users. By creating a greater appreciation and awareness of consumers' thoughts and feelings about olive oil and resulting consumption behaviour, the end user will be better understood. Product attributes including packaging size and shape, pricing strategies

and communication decisions are all important to the end user. If consumers can understand olive oil, they can make an informed decision about purchasing and using it. It may also contribute to consumers' own education and understanding of food choice and the reasons why they purchase and use the products and foods they do.

### **5.3 Significance for the Olive Oil Industry**

Several significant factors are proving challenging for the Australian olive industry. A very youthful industry in combination with a potential over-supply of Australian produced olive oil (Department of Agriculture, 2000) and strong imported olive oil sales (IOOC, 2004) highlights the dynamic and potentially volatile environment of the Australian olive industry. Field (2002) recognises that several of the major issues for this industry's stable and viable survival are that Australian olive oil producers need to focus on promoting and increasing Australian domestic retail sales and sustaining steady but realistic Australian consumer market growth.

A key to the successful management of these issues is to know the market, especially the consumer. To be both pro-active and opportunistic in the olive oil industry, it is imperative that the marketing paradigm of knowing, understanding and meeting consumer needs be adhered to. As a result, olive oil products can be created and targeted to meet consumer expectations. This research provides a much needed insight into the olive oil consumer and it provides a significant foundation on which to undertake further research in understanding customer needs, wants and olive oil consumption patterns.

This research is also significant because, with a greater understanding of olive oil consumers, the Australian olive industry will be able to focus its resources on planning and designing more appropriate and effective production systems, packaging, products, pricing strategies and educational programmes. It may also prove beneficial for marketers in aligning marketing strategies with different olive oil products. This could



then lead to an increase in consumer olive oil purchasing and usage opportunities.

## **6. Olive Oil Terminology**

This study is concerned with olive oil and consumer behaviour. It is important to define the types of olive oils available on the marketplace in Australia. A key term when discussing olive oil is the word “*virgin*”. Based on the International Olive Oil Council (IOOC, 2006), the classifying term ‘virgin’ means that the oil must be obtained from the fruit of the olive tree (olive), using solely mechanical or other physical means which do not alter the oil in any way. Virgin olive oil can also be classified as a natural product. It excludes oils obtained through the use of solvents and or heat and those mixed with oils from other sources (nuts, seeds). When virgin olive oil meets the specific characteristics specified for a particular growing region, it can also have a designation of geographical origin (IOOC, 2006).

The following is a breakdown of olive oil terminology gained from the ‘Designations and definitions of olive oils’ (IOOC, 2006) and the Codex Alimentarius (2003). These designations and definitions are based on organoleptic and analytic characteristics:

### **Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO):**

Virgin olive oil with an impeccable taste and aroma, fruity and the acidity expressed in oleic acid may not exceed 0.8%.

### **Virgin Olive Oil (VOO)**

Virgin olive oil with an impeccable taste and aroma, fruity, and the acidity expressed in oleic acid may not exceed 2%.

### **Ordinary Virgin Olive Oil (OVOO):**

Virgin olive oil with a good taste and acceptable aroma, whose acidity does not exceed 3.3%.

**Refined, Pure, and Extra Light Olive Oil (POO):**

This is obtained by refining virgin olive oils that have a high acidity level, and/or organoleptic defects, which are eliminated after refining. Their oleic acid acidity may not exceed 0.3%.<sup>5</sup>

**Olive Oil (OO):**

This is a mixture of refined olive oil and virgin olive oil fit for consumption as they are. Its acidity may not exceed 1%.

**Olive-Pomace Oil (OPO):**

This is oil also derived from the olive. It is a blend of the oil extracted from olive pomace (the pulp, skins and stones of the olive) left behind after virgin olive oil has been pressed, and virgin olive oils. It requires solvents to extract the oils from the pomace and it is then refined and blended with virgin olive oil. At no stage can the degree of acidity exceed 1%.

**7. Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research undertaken on the role that olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian olive oil consumers. It has established the background for the study, and outlined consumer behaviour and food choice, olive oil in general and the position of olive oil in Australia. The purpose of the study was then addressed and in order to provide focus for the study, the research questions were highlighted. This research has significance from a theoretical point of view as well as for the consumer and the olive oil industry. These significances were explored and then the definition of key terms used throughout the study was documented.

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<sup>5</sup> It has also been noted by The Olive Oil Source (2006) that they are very light in colour, aroma and flavour.

The next chapter examines: the relevant literature associated with olive oil in Australia, approaches to consumer behaviour and food choice, more specific food choice research and a detailed account of olive oil and consumer behaviour focused research. This is followed by an explanation of the methodological research process adopted for this study and an acknowledgement of the research limitations in chapter 2. The next two chapters discuss the research findings. The key findings are then analysed in the discussion, and this is followed by an examination of the marketing implications and possible topics for further research stemming from the study, before the conclusion is reached.

## **Chapter 2. Review of the Literature**

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### **1. Introduction**

Although international research on food choice and olive oil exists, there appears to have been very little exploration undertaken that focuses directly on Australian consumers' thoughts and feelings about olive oil. The following pages will review a selection of literature that may prove helpful in gaining a better understanding of Australians' perceptions and use of olive oil. The history of the olive in Australia is documented, and this is followed by both an analysis of the current Australian olive oil industry and an overview of olive oil's proven health benefits. Approaches to consumer behaviour concerning food choice are also discussed. The existing 'olive oil specific' consumer behaviour research is then addressed from both an international and an Australian perspective.

### **2. Australia and Olive Oil**

#### **2.1 Australian History of Olives and Olive Oil**

It is believed that the first olive tree was planted in Australia in 1800 by George Sutter at the Sydney Botanic Gardens (Reichelt & Burr, 1997). Records indicate that in 1829 Governor Stirling planted olive trees in the gardens at Perth's Parliament House and in 1836 Governor Hindmarsh introduced them into South Australia. This was followed by original plantings in Victoria in 1870 and Queensland in 1877 (Reichelt & Burr, 1997). However, it was several years later that the first commercial olive press was commissioned and used at the Adelaide Gaol (Hill, 1998).

South Australian olive historian, Craig Hill (1999), claims that the benefits of the "Mediterranean Diet" were known in the 1800's and the benefits of olive oil in particular were recognised by 1870. Nevertheless, there was no promotion of the product by growers, manufacturers or producers as alternatives to the much-used lard, butter and other animal fats of the day.

Santich (cited in Hill, 1998) suggested that the earliest mention of using olive oil in an Australian cookbook was in 1890 and in fact it was not until recently that olive oil's culinary use was extended past just a 'salad oil' or 'frying fish' oil. Conversely, it should be noted that the culinary promotion of olive oil and its nutritional value did occur in a number of newspapers around Australia ((Agricola, 1910; Anon., 1875, 1898, cited in Hill (2001)).

Hill's (2001) research indicates there was a solid rise and then a stabilisation in both the number of plantings and the volume of production of olive oil from 1870 to the mid 1920's. Two thirds of the oil was consumed for culinary use with the other third being used industrially (light lubricants, the textile trade for wool scouring and general purpose oil). However, from this boom period of the 1920's to the 1960's, production of olive oil declined rapidly and the remaining olive oil companies ceased to produce. As a result, all commercial and most of the domestic olive oil needed to be imported.

Hill (1999; 2001) suggests that such factors as the adulteration of imported olive oil with cottonseed and canola oils; poor bottling techniques and storage, high levels of pungent oil rancidity, seasonal variation and unreliable supply were key factors in the decrease in olive oil consumption. Other factors including its unfamiliar foreign flavour, expense and price, an abundance of alternatives and a perception of luxury, also had a considerable negative effect on the demand for olive oil

“Paradoxically, the colonial olive industry 'failed' just at a time when waves of Southern European immigration and the slow tide of culinary multiculturalism could have been its salvation” (Hill, 1998, p. 4).

It was not until the late 1960's and 1970's that production in the Australian olive oil industry began to regain strength. Immigration from Greece, Italy and other Mediterranean countries had a marked influence on the Australian industry (Symons, 1984). These migrants privately produced

their own olive oil and many planted or replanted olive groves (Reichelt & Burr, 1997). In the 1980's and 1990's boutique olive oil labels were developed and were being seen more regularly on gourmet store shelves.

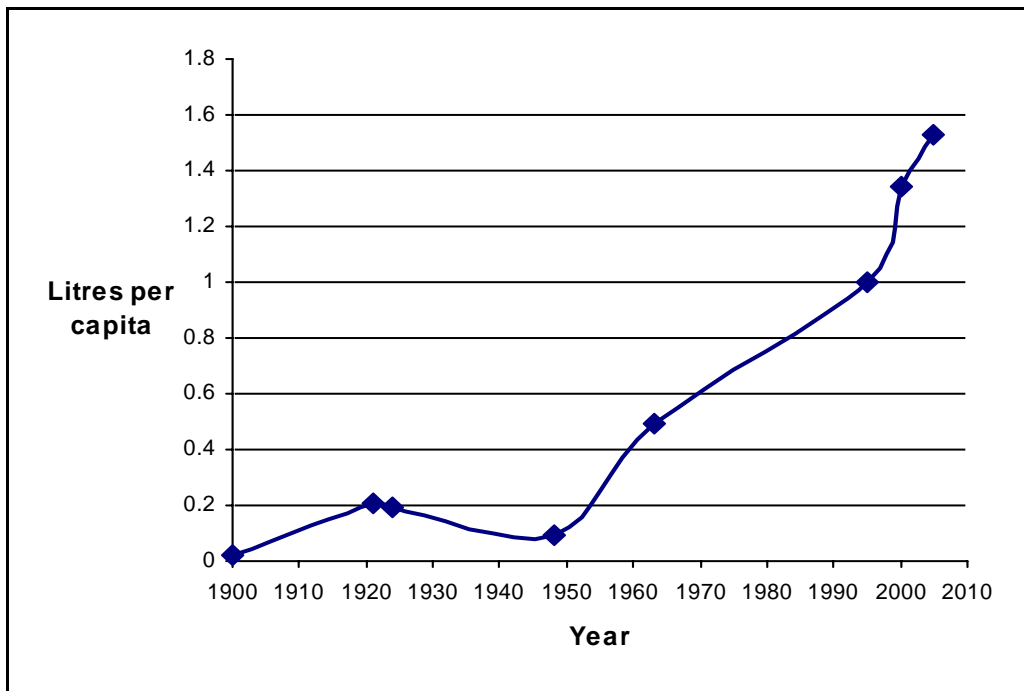
Literature concerning the effect that immigration has had on the evolution of Australian culture and cuisine has been substantial (Bannerman, 1998; Hill, 2001; Hunkin, 1999; Reichelt & Burr, 1997; Santich, 1996, 2000; Symons, 1984), and Hunkin (1999) suggests that as a consequence of increased immigration, the ethnic makeup of Australia has changed substantially. The effect of this can be seen by an increase in the awareness and availability of international cuisine and ingredients, which in turn has led to a significant change in the general eating and consumption habits of the Australian population.

## **2.2 The Australian Olive Oil Industry Today**

The key organisation in the Australian olive oil industry is the Australian Olive Association (AOA). It was created in 1999 and its main role is to sustain the development of the current and potential Australian olive industry (Australian Olive Association., 2003). Research undertaken by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) has also encouraged the development and growth of the Australian Olive industry (McEvoy et al., 1998; O'Sullivan, 2003; RIRDC, 2002). South Australia, New South Wales, Western Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland have their own state-based olive associations and within each state, various regional bodies exist to promote, manage and provide information to members (Sweeney, 2006).

Recent statistics (Australian Olive Association, 2005) in combination with Hill's (2001) statistical register of the period 1870 – 1960 and Sweeney's SA Olive Industry Situational Analysis (2006) indicate that culinary olive oil consumption has increased significantly. As mentioned earlier, there has been an increase from 400 milliliters per person per year in the mid 1980s to an average of over 1.53 litres per year in 2005 (Joiner, 1998; Sweeney,

2006). Figure 2.1 highlights the growth in consumption by showing how many litres per capita Australians have consumed over the past 100 years. When only considering olive oil users, the average figure increases to approximately 14.4 litres a year (Sweeney, 2006). These figures represent domestic production combined with imported oils, less exported oils.



**Figure 2.1 Olive Oil Consumption in Australia 1900-2005.**

As a result of the recent marketing and promotional strategies of the International Olive Oil Council (IOOC), Australia's olive oil consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the merits of olive oil and its purported health benefits (IOOC, 1996). These IOOC strategies include the participation in Australian food fairs and events, producing information material, conducting promotional campaigns in print media and providing information on the health properties of olive oil. These factors combined with the increased popularity of 'Mediterranean' cuisine have led to greater consumption of both olive oil and other olive products (table olives, tapenades) among non-traditional consumers (Sweeney, 2006).

In the 2004/2005 season, Australian olive oil consumption was estimated at 32,000 tonnes<sup>6</sup>, which equated to approximately 1% of the world use. Current Australian Bureau of Statistics data (cited in Australian Olive Association, 2005) indicates that approximately 75% of olive oils consumed within Australia are 'refined', 'pure' or 'light' oils, with the remaining 25% consumed being of virgin and extra virgin olive oil grade.

Growth in the Australian olive industry and olive grove plantings has also increased significantly. Although there is a lack of reliable statistics on actual olive plantings and yields, olive tree orders and sales data from nurseries have been used to conservatively forecast future olive production as demonstrated in figure 2.2 (IOOC, 2005d; RIRDC, 2002; Sweeney, 2002). Taylor (2002) estimates that by 2010 more than 30,000 tonnes of olive oil will be available for both the Australian domestic market and export opportunities. Miller (2005b) agrees with this and suggests that Australian production could even reach in excess of 40,000 tonnes of olive oil by 2015 before production levels out.

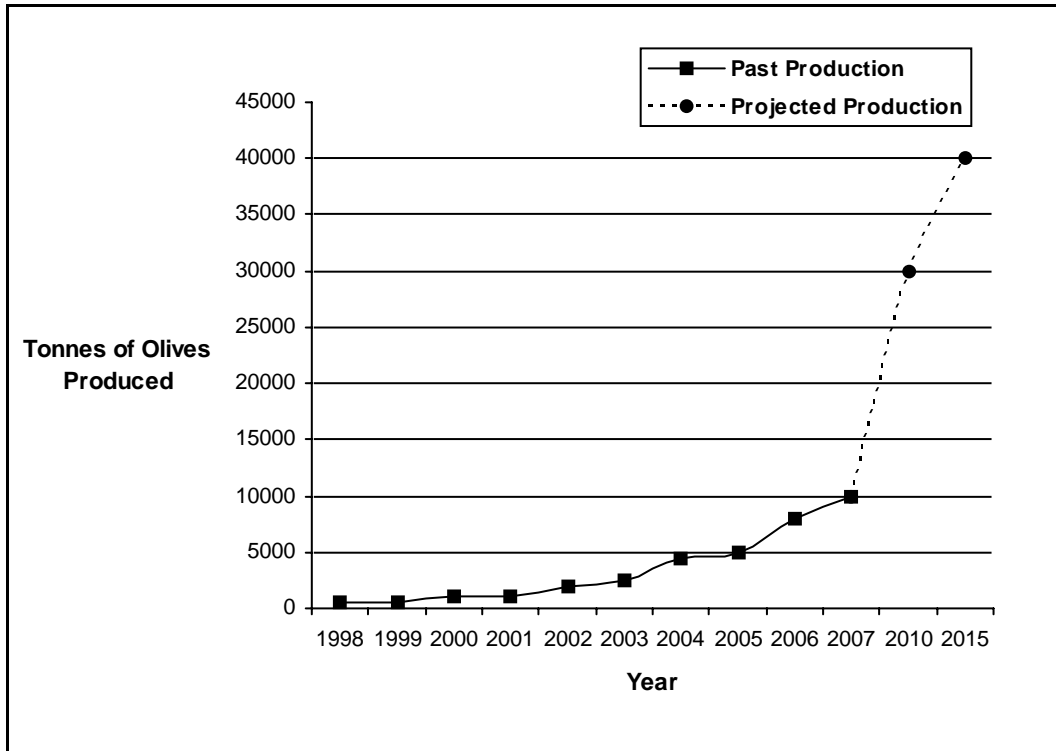
The two Mediterranean countries of Spain and Italy are undoubtedly the most significant olive oil producing countries, producing 41.7% and 37.4% respectively of the total world olive oil supplies in 2004/2005 season (IOOC, 2005e). In the same period Australia contributed just 0.3% of the world's olive oil supplies. However, only 15-20% of all olive oil is of extra virgin quality. Australia produces only extra virgin grade olive oil, so in effect, Australia's share in the extra virgin olive oil market is closer to 5% (Miller, 2005b).

Not only are there domestic demand and markets for Australian olive oil producers to supply and target, there is also enormous export potential for both bulk and packaged product. The increasing value of olive oil exports

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<sup>6</sup> Olive Oil is measured and sold in tonnes, not litres. Due to different specific gravities, one tonne of olive oil is equal to 1090 litres.





**Figure 2.2. Actual and estimated olive production in Australia**

to international markets (estimated at approximately A\$2.4 million in 2005 (IOOC, 2005b)) indicates that olive oil production and the sales and marketing of it are beginning to be a key focus in Australia (McEvoy et al., 1998; Miller, 2005b). The important export markets for Australian olive oil over the past five years have been Spain, Italy<sup>7</sup>, Northern America (USA and Canada), the United Kingdom, Japan, China and Singapore (Barbaro, 2006; IOOC, 2005b).

### 2.3 The Health Benefits of Olive Oil

The first long term study that started to trace the eating habits of the Mediterranean people was published in 1980 (Keys). This dietary tracking concluded in a landmark research project known as the Seven Countries

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<sup>7</sup> Over the past few years, Spain and Italy have had poor olive harvests. Therefore, to keep up with demand, the Spanish and Italians have replenished their stocks with oil produced in non-European countries (e.g. Australia, Argentina and Tunisia) (McEvoy et al., 1998).

Study (Keys, 1980). This study was the first international study focusing on the health-related benefits of olive oil and the Mediterranean Diet (IOOC, 2001). The results of this study have led to an abundance of further research which has both investigated and confirmed the nutritional, medicinal and disease-related benefits of olive oil<sup>8</sup>. The following is a brief overview of the research results. Whilst many of these findings have been repeatedly proven, some of the more recent research is in the process of undertaking further trials to substantiate findings.

Olive oil plays a biological role in extending life expectancy, whilst reducing the risk and effects of chronic diseases and age-related illness (Owen et al., 2000). Olive oil lowers the levels of total blood cholesterol, low-density lipoproteins (known as LDL-cholesterol), and triglycerides. At the same time, it aids in maintaining and even raising the levels of high-density lipoproteins (known as HDL-cholesterol) (IOOC, 2001; Thomsen, Storm, Holst, & Kjeld, 2003). Consumption of olive oil has been demonstrated to reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease (primary prevention), and in secondary prevention where it prevents recurrence after a first coronary event (Ramirez-Tortosa et al., 1999). It has also been proven to have a preventative effect on the formation of blood clots and platelet aggregation that can lead to arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) (Ambring et al., 2006).

Olive oil's antioxidant properties, including Vitamin E, carotenoids and phenolic compounds, play an important part in the prevention of specific disease and cancers (Carluccio et al., 2003; IOOC, 2001). It exerts a protective effect against certain malignant tumours including breast (Trichopoulou et al., 1995), lung (Fortes et al., 2003), prostate (Tzonou et al., 1998), digestive tract, stomach, bowel and colon (Stoneham, Goldacre, Seagroatt, & Gill, 2000), ovarian (Bosetti et al., 2002) and

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<sup>8</sup> For a more scientific documentation of this research see the Nutrition and Biological Value in Chapter 9 of the World Olive Encyclopaedia (2003) and Stark & Madar (2002).

against childhood leukaemia (Fabiani et al., 2006). Olive Oil's squalene compound is also believed to aid in reducing the incidence of melanomas (Ichihashi et al., 2003).

Regular consumption of olive oil has been proven to have a decreasing effect on both systolic (maximum) and diastolic (minimum) blood pressure (Alonso, Ruiz-Gutierrez, & Martínez-González, 2006). An olive oil-rich diet is not only a good addition to the treatment of insulin dependent diabetes, but it may also help to prevent or delay the onset of the disease (Thomsen et al., 2003). The antioxidant qualities of olive oil, when regularly consumed, may reduce the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis (Darlington & Stone, 2001), and the compound 'oleacanthol' found in olive oil has an anti-inflammatory action similar to that of the popular painkiller, ibuprofen (Beauchamp et al., 2005).

Olive oil provides important vitamin E for foetal growth and breastfeeding (IOOC, 2001). It supplies essential fatty acids for the development of the new-born child and oleic acid has a positive influence on growth, bone mineralisation and bone development during infancy (Herrera, 2002; IOOC, 2001). In later years, olive oil also appears to have a favourable effect on bone calcification and the prevention of osteoporosis (Trichopoulou et al., 1997). A diet rich in olive oil may also prevent memory loss in healthy elderly people, and research indicates it has had an inverse effect on age-related cognitive decline, memory loss, dementia and Alzheimer's disease (Solfrizz et al., 2005).

### **3. Approaches to Consumer Behaviour and Food Choice**

In the past, research has explored numerous aspects of food choice. Food choice refers to how people choose the food they do, and what influences their decisions. These studies have come from a wide selection of disciplines and perspectives.

### **3.1 A Multi Disciplinary Approach to the Subject**

Sociologists have studied the relationship between food and society; for example, social class, religion and food culture (Axelson & Brinberg, 1989; Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Mennell, Murcott, & van Otterloo, 1992; Murcott, 1983; Rozin, 1996). Anthropologists have attempted to analyse the importance of food as a central part of social rituals and culture (Arnott, 1975; Douglas, 1972; Douglas & Isherwood, 1980; Mintz, 1985; Wilson, 2002). Economists are primarily interested in price and incomes at market level in order to assess the possible effects of government policies like taxes and subsidies on food choice (Economic Research Service, 2002; Traill, 1999). Psychologists have been interested in the individual food choice decision (Booth, 1994) and governments have used this information for health promotion, whilst businesses have used it for new product development (Booth, 1994; DPI, 2003). Consumer researchers have been interested in searching for groups of similar food consumers (Glanz, Basil, Maibach, Goldberg, & Snyder, 1998) and this research has often been used to identify market segments in order to focus on the targeting, design, distribution, and promotion of products (Traill, 1999).

Nevertheless, it has been suggested that a lack of empirical data on food choice signifies that further research studies need to be developed in order to gain a deeper understanding of food choice and food consumption (European Food Information Council, 2005; Furst et al., 1996; Marshall, 1995).

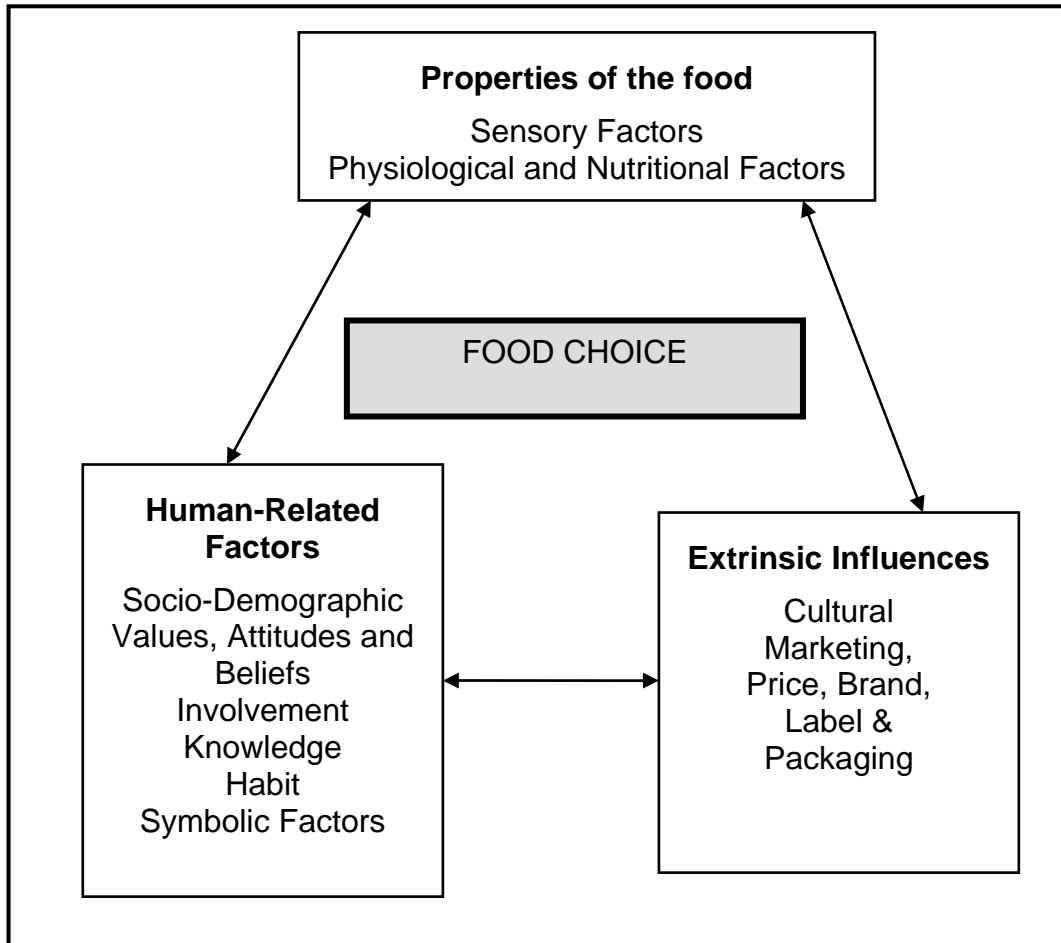
### **3.2 Food Choice Research**

There are numerous factors, with varying degrees of importance, which influence food choice. Several models and theories have been used to explain food choice in the past (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Furst et al., 1996; Maslow, 1970; Traill, 1999). Although these offer frameworks that can be used to explain food choice, Traill's (1999) *Conceptual model for consumer behaviour with respect to food* is a more comprehensive model.

It is suited to exploring the role that olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australians because it groups together both intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect food choice. Traill's (1999) model also proves helpful as an analytical tool with which to dissect the subdivisions of olive oil consumption, especially such issues that are hedonic and symbolic in nature.

Traill's (1999) model is a four-part framework designed for evaluating food consumption and it incorporates a combination of the key disciplines used by previous food consumption models (such as psychology, economics, sociology, anthropology, geography and marketing). A central box illustrates the individual's food choice decision process (needs recognition, information search, evaluation and then choice) and feeding into this decision process are three key categories of influences. The first category contains the physiological and sensory properties of foods which affect an individual's choice. The second category encompasses the individual and person-related factors which have an important impact on why people select different foods. The last category consists of environmental factors including economic, marketing and cultural influences. For a diagrammatic version of Traill's model see appendix eight.

For this study, Traill's (1999) model has been revised into a tripartite model and re-labelled to include several other factors that have been suggested in the literature that may influence olive oil choice and use. The *Decision Process* section of Traill's (1999) model has been omitted as the actual process of choosing olive oil was not within the framework of this study.



**Figure 2.3** The modified representation of Traill's (1999) *Conceptual model for consumer behaviour with respect to food*.

Figure 2.3 highlights Traill's three overarching dimensions that influence food choice. The three revised categories are person-related factors (referred to as human factors from now on); environmental factors (referred to as extrinsic influences) and food properties. Each of these factors has sub-categories which impact on food choice in more specific ways. These are addressed above.

Although these factors are considered independently for the purpose of this literature review, they rarely work exclusively alone in influencing food choice. It is the combination and interaction between these factors that significantly affect the decision to choose and consume different foods.

### **3.2.1 Properties of the Food**

The 'properties of the food' dimension comprises the sensory and aesthetic characteristics of the food including appearance, taste, texture and aroma and the nutritional effects and benefits of food. It also encompasses the relationship and interaction between food and the actual person consuming the food. For example, some people have a physiologically higher tolerance for bitterness, whereas some others have a very low tolerance of bitterness (Bartoshuk, 2000). Relevant research on the influence of the properties of the food on food choice and purchasing is addressed below.

#### **3.2.1.1 Physiological and Nutritional Factors**

People's physiological needs and wants are the fundamental cause of food choice and consumption. Energy and nutrients are required by the body to both survive and satisfy hunger and cravings (European Food Information Council, 2005). These choices can affect general body well-being, weight control and potential disease prevention or management (Furst et al., 1996). According to a large European Union study, gaining the correct nutrients and being healthy was one of the most important factors mentioned by European consumers that affect their food choice (Lappalainen, Kearney, & Gibney, 1998). Further more, the recent research of Urala and Lähteenmäki (2003), confirms these factors and also suggests that nutrition and health-related reasons for food choice were often two sided. One reason for choosing certain foods was for general well being, whilst the other reason was for disease prevention.

#### **3.2.1.2 Sensory Factors**

Although the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Kant (1951) claimed that the 'lower' senses of smell and taste could not rate in an aesthetic experience, numerous studies have suggested otherwise (Charters & Pettigrew, 2005; Glanz et al., 1998; Grunert, 1997; Kupiec & Revell, 1998; Monteiro & Lucas, 2001). These studies propose that the effect of

aesthetic and taste properties on food and beverage choice is an important guide when making the food choice decision.

From a very early age, food choice and food consumption behaviour is strongly influenced by the effects of smell, taste and flavour (Clarke, 1998). A fondness for sweet foods and an aversion to bitter foods are considered instinctive human characteristics present from birth (Steiner, 1977). The development of taste preferences and food dislikes occurs throughout life, and eating experiences are strongly influenced by one's beliefs, attitudes and expectations (Clarke, 1998).

'Taste' as a culinary term, has been defined as "the sum of all sensory stimulation that is produced by the ingestion of food" (European Food Information Council, 2005, p. 2). However, it not only consists of 'taste' per se, but also the appearance, the smell, aroma, and the texture of food. These sensory attributes are known to impact on the overall acceptance and perception of food products and it has been acknowledged by Cardello (1994) that the concentration of food-related sensory characteristics have a strong influence on the level of likeability or unpleasantness of a food product.

It has also been recognised that human physiological factors including taste buds and taste papillae have a major impact on the acceptance of food products (Bartoshuk, 2000; Tepper & Nurse, 1997). Some humans have more than the normal volume of taste papillae (and taste buds) and are known as 'supertasters' (Bartoshuk, 2000). The physical structure of the taste buds and fungiform papillae differ between people and because of this certain people can be very sensitive, or very insensitive, to various chemical compounds. For example, it is suggested that approximately 25% of the population are supertasters (of which more are women than men) and they tend not to like green vegetables and fatty foods because of the existence of bitter compounds in these foods (Bartoshuk, 2000). Texture and flavour have also been proven to have a significant effect on



the perception and acceptability of food products (Szczesniak, 1972) and more recent research also suggests that those people who differ in taste sensitivity also have different levels of tactile perception and acceptance levels for certain foods (Essick, Chopr, Guest, & McGlone, 2003).

The significance of sensory factors as predictors of food choice was acknowledged in 1970 (Moskowitz & Arabie). This research indicated that consumers acknowledged that their food choices were mostly driven by taste, and not concern for food safety or nutrition. This appears to contradict the research by Lappalainen, Kearney, and Gibney (1998) which found that nutrition and health was the key reason for food choice. Such factors as changes in food and its production, the increase in diet-related illness and disease and changes in the general eating culture over the past 28 years may help to explain this inconsistency.

More specific food category research by Mcllveen and Buchanan (2001) classifies aesthetic and sensory properties (appearance, flavour and texture) as 'intrinsic cues' and suggests that consumers use these at the time of food purchase to predict freshness, safety and overall eating quality in meat. Consumers continue to use these cues to evaluate quality throughout storage, preparation and consumption. Mcllveen and Buchanan's (2001) study also acknowledges that these cues work in combination with such extrinsic cues as packaging, price and place of purchase to predict meat quality. The existence of these quality cues had a positive influence on purchase and consumption. More recent research on meat products also found that appearance was rated highly as an important determinant of choice for chicken (Kennedy, Stewart-Knox, Mitchell, & Thurnham, 2004).

Flavour, taste, texture and appearance were also considered to drive spontaneous and unplanned food choice decisions (European Food Information Council, 2005). These studies are also consistent with the research of Kupiec and Revell (1998) where sensory and organoleptic

qualities of artisanal cheese were the most recognised attributes affecting the purchase decision, whilst functional aspects rated the lowest in importance.

For all of the reviewed studies, taste appeared to work collectively with other factors in influencing food choice. Several of these have been mentioned earlier and others include convenience (Bech-Larsen, Grunert, & Poulsen, 2001; Glanz et al., 1998; Kennedy et al., 2004) ethical aspects (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001), healthiness of the food and family preferences (Lappalainen et al., 1998), security, family values, fun and social recognition (Traill, 1999) and physical surroundings, time pressures and usage goals (Kyriakopoulos & Ophuis, 1997).

The sensory role of taste has also revealed itself as a key predictor of food choice in numerous diet-related studies (Glanz et al., 1998; Morreale & Schwartz, 1995; Nguyen, Otis, & Potvin, 1996; Roeninen, 2001; Shannon, Story, Fulkerson, & French, 2002; Snoek, Linda, van Gemert, de Graaf, & Weenen, 2004). These studies have found that the tastes of specific foods that may be low or high in fat, salt and or sugar, have played an important role in influencing the decision to choose such foods over others.

### **3.2.2 Human-Related Factors**

The second dimension of the model is related to the individual. It encapsulates demographic and socio-demographic aspects, values, attitudes and beliefs of the individual, symbolic factors that influence food choice and the level of involvement with a product. The consumer's personal level of knowledge about a food product and the construct of habit are also important parts of the person-related dimension. Literature on the influence of these human-related factors on food choice is documented below.

### 3.2.2.1 Socio-Demographic Factors

Socio-demographic factors, including gender, age, level of income and education, family and marital status, employment and region of residence (geographical location) all influence food choice. These play a role in forming choices, beliefs, attitudes, and motivators and barriers to consume food (Blades, 2001; Economic Research Service, 2002; Mitsostergios & Skiadis, 1994; Traill, 1999). Research into the impact of these factors on food choice is varied and comprehensive (Glanz et al., 1998; Lea & Worsley, 2005 ; Lutz, Blaylock, & Smallwood, 1993; Naska et al., 2006; Nayga, Tepper, & Rosenzweig, 1999; Ricciuto, Tarasuk, & Yatchew, 2006). A number of studies examining the role of socio-demographic factors on food choice are discussed below.

Recent research by Guenther, Jensen, Batres-Marquez, and Chen (2005) found that socio-demographic factors like household income, level of education and region of residence were strong predictors of the probability of choosing particular types of meat. In addition these factors had an impact on the volume of meat eaten. This study also confirmed that education about and attitudes towards meat products (pork, beef and chicken) and diet also influenced consumers' food choice decision. Other research supports the importance of level of education on food choice, with more vegetables, fruit and high fibre foods and less meat chosen by university degree households when compared to households with the lowest education level (Ricciuto et al., 2006). This study also found that males with an education appear to have a stronger impact on household food choice than do females with an education. The authors suggest that although women make most of the food choice decisions and are the "primary food shoppers"; their choices are strongly influenced by the preferences of their spouses, husbands or male partners.

Additional research suggests that higher incomes are linked to the increased purchase of recommended foods (especially fruit and vegetables and high fibre foods) (Billson, Pryer, & Nichols, 1999;

Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2003; Trichopoulou, Naska, & Costacou, 2002). However, alternative research suggests that not all demographic influences have this same effect on food choice. Both Nayga, Tepper, and Rosenzweig (1999) and Smith and Baghurst (1992) propose that income and education have different effects on the choice and consumption of certain food groups, especially with grains and milk products.

Research also suggests that being married and or being married with children can be associated with an increased consumption of fruit and vegetables and a greater observance of recommended dietary guidelines (although the strength of these relationships varied with gender) (Billson et al., 1999; Martikainen, Brunner, & Marmot, 2003; Roos, Lahelma, Virtanen, Prattala, & Pietinen, 1998). Although this research is not Australian, it offers insight into the influence of marital status and family ranking on food choice, and this may have some relevance in Australia.

The research into different generations and segmentation and target markets and demographics is wide and varied (Morgan, 1998; Wellner, 1999; Wolburg & Pokrywczynski, 2001). The key generations most relevant to this study are the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y because these are the main grocery buyers.

The Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 and account for approximately 25% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) cited in McCrindle, 2005). There is substantial wealth in this group, and this will continue to increase as they work into their later years instead of retiring at 55 to 60 (Wilkins, 2004). This generation makes purchase decisions based on facts and data and their values are based on respect for authority, financial safeguards, hard work, commitment and loyalty and deferred gratification (McCrindle, 2005). They are proud of their contact with a varied range of 'multicultural' foods and of their awareness and understanding of the ingredients used (Mackay, 1997). As consumers age they tend to be interested in looking after their health

(Mackay, 1997). Their food choice is strongly influenced by the purported health benefits of foods (for example, foods are preferred because they may be high in antioxidants, low in salt and cholesterol or high in omega 3's) (Anonymous, 2005b). American market research in 2005 suggests that as a result of this group's higher disposable incomes, many can also afford to buy healthier foods (Anonymous, 2005b). However, taste also appears to be a key driver for food choice (Stephenson, 1996).

Generation X was born between 1965 and 1981 and represents approximately 26% of the Australian population (ABS cited in McCrindle, 2005). Wilkins (2004) highlights that this generation is very independent, flexible, well educated and has an ability to adapt easily. The demographics of this group have an impact on food choice. A large proportion of this group are married, yet singles still rate as a significant segment. Fewer are having children so there are fewer people to feed in the household. American market research indicates that most adults work, so therefore there is less time to spend on food purchase and preparation (Anonymous, 2001). Generation X is not as health conscious as the Baby Boomer generation. Hoffichter, Wildes, and Park's (1999) examination of food and Generation X indicated that price, convenience and taste for fast food are more important than the dish's ingredients and its preparation. They suggest that these factors have played an important part in the popularity of 'fast food' and 'take away' meals.

Generation Y was born between 1982 and 2000 (McCrindle, 2005) and accounts for approximately 28% of the Australian population (ABS cited in 2005). Those Generation Y members most important to this review are the adults born between 1982 and 1988 and aged between 18 and 23. This segment is choosy about what they eat. They require a variety of flavours and food types and dislike bland and boring food. They eat out on average 2.4 times a week, the highest of any age group, but they have less money and income to spend on doing so (Brooks, 2005). Until their incomes increase, price is an important influence on food choice. They are

comfortable with technology and like to be able to 'plug in' or 'wire up' which allows them to play and listen whilst they eat. This group often chooses his or her eating destination by the amount of time available for eating. This has influenced the rate of off-premise dining (Brooks, 2005). Generation Y is not so affected by the eating patterns and food preferences of the family (Wilkins, 2004) and due to their varied ethnic backgrounds, they are very willing to try new foods, flavours and cuisines. Generation Y people also value efficient but friendly service (Garber, 2005). McCrindle's (2005) analysis of Generation Y suggested that the impact of peers, especially their core group of 3-8 friends and the strong impact of television, music and movies are key influences which affect their behaviour and thinking.

#### 3.2.2.2 Perceptions, Attitudes and Beliefs

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) suggest that people's actions are typically rational and founded on a systematic evaluation of the total information available to them. It was concluded that people think about the implications of their actions and choices and act as a result of logically weighing up these implications. There are two significant factors influencing this behaviour. Firstly the attitude towards behaviour (consumers' favourable or unfavourable feelings towards a certain food) and secondly the subjective norms ( a consumer's perception of others as supportive or non-supportive of a particular food choice) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). More recent empirical research has included factors such as intention to consume and habit, in combination with Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) theory of reasoned action (TRA) as determinants of food choice. This has aimed to increase the predictive ability of the TRA theory (Saba, Vassallo, & Turrini, 2000).

People build their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and values about foods on a basis of cultural values (Nestle et al., 1998). One way to change a person's food choices and consumption patterns is to change their attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The TRA developed by Ajzen and

Fishbein (1980) has been used extensively in research on food choice and has successfully established many relationships between beliefs, attitudes and food choice (Shepherd, 1990; Shepherd, Sparks, Bellier, & Raata, 1991/1992; Thompson, Haziris, & Alekos, 1994; Towler & Shepherd, 1991/1992).

It should be noted that the TRA is a very positivist theory and it assumes that consumers are 'rational' when making decisions. It could be argued that consumers are not so ordered and logical in their approach to choosing food. It may be a suitable explanation for particular types of food products, for example milk and other everyday functional foods, but not for others, such as the spontaneous purchase of a specialty cheese after it has been tasted in a store. Hedonic and sensory factors may be more important than TRA as a predictor of food choice in such instances. Therefore, it would be dangerous to imply that the TRA is a suitable tool for explaining all food choice behaviours.

### 3.2.2.3 Involvement and Innovativeness

The role of 'innovativeness' and 'involvement' have been explored by researchers seeking to gain a greater understanding of food choice and consumption behaviour (Candel, 2001; Foxhall & Bhate, 1993; McCarthy, O'Reilly, & Cronin, 2001). Zaichkowsky (1985, p. 342) defines involvement as "a person's perceived relevance of the [consumption] object based on their inherent needs, values and interests". The term 'object' refers to a product or brand. Innovativeness has been defined as "the degree to which an individual makes innovative decisions independently of the communicated experience of others" (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971, p. 27).

Involvement as an influence on food and beverage choice has received much attention (Bell & Marshall, 2003; Candel, 2001; Charters & Pettigrew, 2006; Juhl & Poulsen, 2000; Kupiec & Revell, 1998; McCarthy et al., 2001; Olsen, 2001). Olsen's (2001) theoretical model of involvement with the consumption of seafood, found that attitudes, moral obligations,

negative feelings and social norms were important experiences affecting involvement. In the consumption of fish as a product group, the symbolic value and a product's utility was also found to contribute to consumer's involvement (Juhl & Poulsen, 2000). Candel's (2001) study into consumers' convenience orientation towards meal preparation, suggests that convenience orientation was found to be negatively related to involvement with food products.

More recent research by Bell and Marshall (2003) has used involvement levels to explore the consumer's ability to distinguish between a set of food samples, whilst Charters and Pettigrew (2006) have utilised the involvement construct to assist the understanding of consumer's evaluation of wine quality. It is also suggested that different levels of involvement can exist for a category of similar product. A study by Hughes, et al. (1998) on the effect of purchase involvement on three types of cheese, found that Greek consumers had higher levels of 'purchase' involvement with feta and hard cheeses but not as high levels with soft cheeses. The findings indicate that consumers perceive a distinction between different cheeses.

Research on innovativeness as a predictor of food choice behaviour has indicated that the consumer's willingness to try new foods and seek variety in their purchasing patterns can be used to predict food choice and consumption (Huutilainen, Pirttilä-backman, & Tuorila, 2006; Van Trijp, Lähteenmäki, & Tuorila, 1992). However, both of these studies, as well as much non-food research (including electronic goods (Im, Bayus, & Mason, 2003) and internet shopping (Goldsmith, 2002; Ha & Stoel, 2004)) indicate that innovativeness does not act independently of other constructs. In fact Huutilainen et al, (2006) explored Moscovici's (1981) idea of 'social



representations'<sup>9</sup> to help forecast the willingness to choose new foods. It was transformed into food-related constructs including “eating because it is enjoying”, “eating because it’s necessary”, “suspicion of new foods” and “adherence to natural foods”. The resultant findings suggested that innovativeness, when combined with the aforementioned ‘social representations’ construct, were a more significant predictor of food choice behaviour than innovativeness alone (Huotilainen et al., 2006) and that innovativeness interacts with other symbolic and hedonic purposes.

#### 3.2.2.4 Knowledge

Research has assessed how a person’s knowledge about particular foods and food attributes affects their food choice and purchasing behaviour. The most popular and widespread studies have researched the effect of ‘nutritional knowledge’ on food choice. The most common consumers under study have been children, adolescents and the elderly (Douglas, 1998; Lytle, Varnell, Murray, Story, & Al, 2003; Pirouzina, 2001; Story & Resnick, 1986).

The importance of knowledge on food choice is difficult to assess and there is no doubt that knowledge is one of many aspects affecting eating behaviour. There appears to be a general lack of empirical research focusing on the specific effect that a consumer’s level of knowledge about a food product has on food choice. As noted above, most of the existing data on this knowledge and food choice relationship has been in the field of nutrition. Literature on the effect of people’s nutritional knowledge on food choice has shown conflicting results (Lytle et al., 2003). Some studies have indicated a positive relationship between purchase and nutritional awareness (Pirouzina, 2001; Saegert & Young, 1983), whilst others have

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<sup>9</sup> Moscovici’s (1982) defined social representations as “‘systems’ of preconceptions, images and values, which have their own cultural meaning and persist independently of individual experiences”.

found no correlation between knowledge and actual choices of healthy food (Douglas, 1998 Story & Resnick, 1986).

Consumer knowledge has also been the focus of food choice research relating to 'green' environmentally friendly and organic foods (Tadajewski & Wagner-Tsukamoto, 2006). Several studies have researched the effect of having, or not having, information and knowledge about organic foods on organic food consumption (Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2001). These studies suggest that a lack of knowledge about organic food acts as a significant deterrent to organic food purchase and consumption.

It should be noted that very little research appears to exist that expands on the effect of 'product knowledge', (which encapsulates information about a particular food's origins, growing and production techniques, flavour profiles and culinary applications) and the result that this knowledge may have on food choice.

#### 3.2.2.5 Food Consumption as Habit

Food consumption research has explored the construct of habit and confirmed the important role that it has in changing food choice behaviour (Devine, Sobal, Bisogni, & Connors, 1999; Gustafsson & Sidenvall, 2002; Khare & Inman, 2006). Habit has been found to be a valuable predictor of food choice. This is particularly relevant when the food choice decision is made frequently and the consumption is performed often (Naik & Moore, 1996; Towler & Shepherd, 1991/1992; Tuorila & Pangborn, 1988). Habit can be explained both as a regular repeated former behaviour (Triandis, 1977) or a repeated behaviour that occurs automatically or because of an awareness of the subject (Ronis, Yates, & Kirscht, 1989). Research by Saba, Vassallo, and Turrini (2000) suggested that habit was rated as the most significant predictor of actual consumption of each type of food under study (skimmed and whole milk, cheese, preserved meat, butter and olive oil, and red and white meat). Alternative research on the construct of habit

used 'out of habit' type questions to discover the existence of a strong relationship between habit and the frequency of sweet, salty and fatty food consumption (Tuorila & Pangborn, 1988).

#### 3.2.2.6 Willingness to Try Something New

Consumers' acceptance of and willingness to choose and consume new and unfamiliar foods has been researched solidly in recent times. Neophobia was defined by Pliner and Hobden (1992) as a "reluctance to eat and/or avoidance of novel foods". Pliner and Hobden's (1992) 'food neophobia scale' has been used to assess the predictability of the willingness of consumers to try unfamiliar and foreign foods in a variety of studies (Bäckström, Pirttilä-Backman, & Tuorila, 2004; Eertmans, Victoir, Vansant, & Van den Bergh, 2005; Rigal et al., 2006). Raudenbush and Frank's (1999) neophobia research found that one's familiarity with a certain food could be a significant reason for liking that food. It was concluded that neophobics have varying expectancies about unfamiliar foods, and these expectations influence food choice. Reasons for food-neophobia have included being suspicious of new and unfamiliar foods and or their ethnic source, technology and food safety concerns (for example genetically modified produce) and the need to consume natural foods (Bäckström et al., 2004).

#### 3.2.2.7 Symbolic Factors

Products have more than a commercial value. They provide not only a functional meaning, but they also provide symbolic meaning. Products serve as a stimuli to define one's individual or conformist character (Belk, 1988), to convey a character or role to others (Solomon, 2002) and or to communicate a general understanding in a socially built market (McCracken, 1986). The choice of a particular food can symbolise many things, including social status (Mennell, 1985; Mennell et al., 1992), self image (Belk, 1988; Mick, 1986), and actual and desired lifestyles (Featherstone, 1991).

### **3.2.2.7.1 Status**

Food products can be purchased, displayed and consumed to indicate or signal membership into one's desired social position or class (Bourdieu, 1984). The key components most commonly associated with social class are occupation, income and education. Allen (2005) suggests that status values have been applied for the seven basic food groups for many years by numerous anthropologists and sociologists (Caplan, 1987; Douglas, 1972; Fieldhouse, 1995; Levi-Strauss, 1986; Lupton, 1996; Twigg, 1983). These food groups include red meat, white meat, fish and seafood, eggs and dairy, fruit, vegetables and cereals (Allen, 2005). One widespread view is that red meat has the highest status level, followed by white meat and then fish and seafood. Cereals, fruit and vegetables are on the bottom of the symbolic 'status hierarchy', whilst the 'less strong' animal products including eggs and milk, are in the medium category. There is no doubt that many consumers make food choices based, to a certain degree, on the perceived status value of that food. According to Eastman, Goldsmith and Flynn (1999, p. 42) this status seeking behaviour can be defined as:

The motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through the conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer and symbolise status both for the individual and surrounding significant others.

Thus, the more an individual is motivated by wanting to reach a certain status level, the more that consumer will choose particular foods that they believe and rate as having that status value. At the same time they will also reject certain foods that contradict the desired status level (Allen, 2005). For example, an individual aspiring to be viewed as having high social status may choose beef fillet to serve at a dinner party and decline the idea of having chicken or pork.

### **3.2.2.7.2 Self Image**

A self image, also known as self-concept, refers to “the beliefs a person holds about his or her own attributes, and how he or she evaluates those qualities” (Solomon, 2002, p. 132). Self esteem is the level of positiveness or negativeness of an individual’s self image. A consumer’s self image can be created, managed and built on through the food products they purchase and use (Graeff, 1996). Consumers use food products, as well as all other products, to influence other people’s perceptions. The same products can be used to develop one’s own self image and social identity. Thus, self image can be both intrinsically directed (Belk, 1988) and or, a symbolic portrayal of one’s self image externally projected to others (Mick, 1986).

### **3.2.2.7.3 Lifestyle**

The destruction of traditional class-based social structures which held the persuasive ability and power to influence social customs and practices has had an immense impact on an individual’s ability to create their own identity (Sloan, 2004). As social class and status become less prevalent, lifestyles can be chosen by consumers which are not connected to, or affected by, traditional class groups (Tomlinson, 2003). This individualism encourages a freedom of belief that social authenticity is created from personal achievement and ambition (Beck, 1992). The breakdown of formal class structures has also required that individuals construct and maintain different forms of social relationships. This has been principally done through the creation and application of desired lifestyles (Sloan, 2004).

Within modern consumer culture, the term ‘lifestyle’ signifies one’s “individuality, self-expression, and a stylistic self-consciousness” (Featherstone, 1991, p. 83). Featherstone (1991) suggests that consumption contributes to the symbolic representation of one’s self and the subsequent development of an idealised lifestyle:

The modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his furnishings, decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste (1991, p. 86).

Everyday material goods, including food products, are no longer consumed as straightforward utilities. They are consumed as 'communicators' to portray and indicate one's taste, image and lifestyle (Featherstone, 1991). Sloan (2004) builds on Featherstone's work and suggests that the desire for culinary taste (the flavour, aroma, texture, visual appeal of a food) and related consumer behaviours (for example, dining out, food shopping, food preparation and entertaining) need to be considered as key factors that contribute to both an 'ideal' existence and an 'aestheticised' lifestyle where one has the capacity to be open to the range of sensations that are linked to particular objects and experiences (Featherstone, 1991).

### **3.2.3 Extrinsic Influences**

Many extrinsic factors affect food choice. These include cultural factors, the price of food and marketing factors. Cultural influences comprise ethnicity, country of birth, religion and the impact of friends and family, whilst marketing influences include branding, packaging, labelling and the origin of the product. Each of these is examined in turn.

#### **3.2.3.1 Cultural Factors**

People use the rules and understandings of their particular cultures, sub-cultures and ethnicity to represent what they believe to be acceptable and preferable foods (Nestle et al., 1998). Nestle et al. (1998) suggest that these cultural elements also help to frame the volume, frequency and the combination of foods people choose, as well as the foods they consider suitable or unacceptable, for instance the exclusions of dairy or meats from a diet.

Various studies have assessed the important impact of culture on food choice and consumption patterns (Askegaard & Madsen, 2005; Gil, Gracia, & Perez y Perez, 1995), with 'food culture' being found to relate to family, country, regions, social class and religion. Douglas (1982) also proposed that food products are valuable 'cultural modes' of expression that have important communication functions. The presence of others, including friends, family, peers and associates, have important impacts on food choice and consumption. Research has clearly demonstrated that sociability influences food choice. It has been suggested that the level of consumption varies depending on the social setting. Lower volumes of consumption occur when eating alone, and higher levels occur when eating within a group, especially if the group members are familiar (De Castro, 1995).

### 3.2.3.2 Marketing Factors

#### **3.2.3.2.1 Price**

The impact of a product's price on food choice is fundamental. When looking from a consumer's point of view, price is what is forgone or sacrificed in order to obtain a product or service (Zeithaml, 1988) and this concept of sacrifice has been the focus of past research (Monroe & Krishnan, 1985). Zeithaml (1988) talks furthermore about value in terms of a trade off between salient 'give' and 'get' components.

Price may reflect the quality of a good and or the perceived value of a good, and the relationship between these has proven complex and multifaceted (Rao & Monroe, 1988, 1989; Sweeney, Soutar, & Johnson, 1999; Teas & Agarwal, 2000; Zeithaml, 1988). It is claimed by Brucks, Zeithaml and Naylor (2000) that the link between price and quality has been researched extensively over the last 30 years, with over 90 studies providing an array of varied and diverse results. For example many consumer reports suggest that the relationship between price and perceived quality is weak and therefore insignificant (Hjorth-Anderson,

1984), whilst others suggests that the relationship is meaningful and valid (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991; Monroe & Krishman, 1985; Sweeney et al., 1999).

Consumer knowledge of a product has shown to have an impact on price acceptability (Cordell, 1997; Rao & Monroe, 1988; Rao & Sieben, 1992). The linkage of price to a consumer's knowledge of a product and their level of involvement with it has also been considered (Cordell, 1997; Graeff, 1997; Zaichkowsky, 1988). Such studies suggest that the more knowledge about and involvement with a product a consumer has, the less price acts as a cue to quality. Rao and Monroe's (1988) clothing study suggested that the inclination to use price as a cue of product quality decreases and then increases with familiarity with the product (a U shaped curve). Thus, for those least highly involved and most highly involved consumers, price rated as a cue for quality. However, the authors do stipulate that this result would only be relevant for products that are known to have a large quality variance in the market place.

The function of price as a cue for quality also appears to be dependent on the type of product being consumed (Brucks et al., 2000; Cordell, 1997; Zeithaml, 1988). Peterson and Wilson's (1985) study indicated that price played a different role as a cue for quality depending on whether the products were consumer durables or non durables. The findings suggested a stronger link between price and quality perceptions when they were related to consumer durables. It has also been established that the presence of other cues such as brand name, packaging and store information can have a limiting effect on price as an influence (Dodds et al., 1991; Monroe & Krishman, 1985; Zeithaml, 1988). As the number of other cues increases, price has less impact.

Price has also been used as a 'signal' for quality (Tellis, 1986). Alpert, Wilson and Elliott (1993, p. 4) define this as "a conscious effort by manufacturers to use price as a 'surrogate indicator' of superior quality



when relative quality is not commensurate with the price”. This means that the price of a product can be increased in order to indicate a higher than actual quality level. The effect of price ‘signalling’ can be found in research on wine (Lockshin & Rhodus, 1993) and on perceptions of restaurants (Parikh & Weseley, 2005).

Apart from price being used as an indicator of quality, it appears to work in two other distinct ways. Price can act as a prompt for sacrifice, (Dodds et al., 1991; Rao & Monroe, 1988; Teas & Agarwal, 2000; Zeithaml, 1988) reflecting the amount a consumer has to give up to obtain a product or service. The other way in which price works is by setting limits for purchase. Dodds, Monroe and Grewal (1991, p. 308) explain that “buyers generally have a set of prices that are acceptable to pay for a considered purchase, rather than a single price”. Therefore it has been suggested by Cooper (cited in Dodds et al., 1991, p. 308) that consumers might both abstain from purchasing a product because they perceive the price is too high, whilst they might also be wary of the quality of a product if the price is much lower than they believe the product’s price should be.

When considering more food focused research, there have been a number of studies that have investigated the effect of price (as one of several factors) and healthy food choice on various consumer groups. The research on youth by Epstein et al., (2006) found that increasing the price of healthy or unhealthy foods resulted in a reduction in the actual purchases of those particular foods. Thus the replacement of more healthy foods with unhealthy food was directly related to the consumer’s available money and income. Recent research by French, Jeffery, Story, Hannan, and Snyder (1997) corroborates Epstein’s et al., (2006) findings, which suggested that if pricing strategies were employed that made healthier and low-fat foods less expensive, it would undoubtedly have a positive effect on encouraging and increasing the purchase and consumption of low-fat foods.

Price, availability and lack of 'organic knowledge' have been found to be the key deterrents for the purchase of organic product (Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002). A recent survey of Irish consumers alluded to the fact that over 66% of non organic food buyers would not choose organic food because of its perceived 'expensive' price point (Cowan, Ghraith, & Henchion, 2002). However, food safety, ethics, environmental health issues and quality appear to be important attributes that continue to motivate consumers to overcome the price hurdle (Lockie, Mummery, Lyons, & Lawrence, 2001; McEachern & McClean, 2002; O'Donovan & McCarthy, 2002).

Studies on the impact of price and product promotions on food choice indicate that the way a sales deal is 'pitched' to the consumer significantly affects what the consumer chooses (Das, 1992; Smith & Sinha, 2000). Such deals as 'get 50% off', 'buy one get one free' and 'buy 2, get 50% off' all have varying success rates in creating the sale even though all of the deals were comparable on a unit cost basis.

#### **3.2.3.2.2 Brand**

Brand names influence customer's attitudes to, beliefs about, and perceptions of a particular product, and therefore can strongly influence the purchase decision (McIlveen & Semple, 2002). Various studies on the impact of branding on food choice exist. Research into the effect of brand on the perceived quality of food products indicates that consumers do not value foods based wholly on physical attributes. When in food choice mode, brand will initially be used to indicate a certain quality, followed by the use of alternative evaluation criteria (physical appearance and packaging, price, the reputation of the retail network) to complete the purchase decision (Vranešević & Stancec, 2003).

Private labels brands, also known as home and store brands, are becoming more popular than ever before on supermarket shelves. This is particularly true in Europe, where home brands have a significantly larger

market share compared to Australia (Van Ossel & Versteyleen, 2002). A recent study suggests that quality perceptions between home/store brands and national brands were the same and that consumers felt that the home/store brands performed as well and tasted as good as the national brands (De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, Goedertier, & Van Ossel, 2005). These findings back up previous research on consumer preferences for national brands versus private home brands, which found that private home label products can offer similar or even superior quality to that provided by national brands, but at a lower price (Fitzell, 1992). However, the researchers do acknowledge that the study based in Belgium may produce different results if it was undertaken in other countries.

It would be unwise to generalise these findings to Australia because home brand market share varies from country to country. For example, in Britain the market share percentage for grocery home brands sales is 31%, yet in Australia, the figure is only 12 percent (De Wulf et al., 2005). Nonetheless, the increase in home brands throughout Australia in the last decade has gained media attention (Lee, 2004). It has been suggested that four in five Australian consumers believe that home or private label products are a good alternative to national brands and it was also found that home brands offered good value for money (Anonymous, 2005a; Lee, 2004; Rabobank, 2005).

Having said that, there appears to be some unwillingness to choose home brands in Australia. Many Australian consumers still have concerns with the quality of some home brand products (Anonymous, 2005a; Choice, 2006) and are therefore less concerned with the quality of low involvement staple products like sugar, milk and butter, but more concerned when buying higher involvement groceries, for example cosmetics, ready meals and baby food. For these products, consumers may prefer to purchase a well known and trusted national brand (Choice, 2006). Other reasons for Australian consumer reluctance to use home brand products also include; a lack of knowledge about the quality level and where the ingredients

come from, a feeling that there is less choice available on the shelf and that consumers feel pressured into buying foreign-owned products when they want to buy and support Australian producers (Choice, 2006).

### **3.2.3.2.3 Labelling and Packaging**

Recent research has highlighted the influence of packaging on the purchase decisions for food and wine (Charters, Lockshin, & Unwin, 2000; Dimara & Skuras, 2005; McIlveen & Semple, 2002; Wansink, 2003). In the same way that a brand name influences customers, a food product's label and packaging can affect the attitude of consumers towards a product and inevitably their food choice. Packaging has also been proven to influence usage long after that good has been purchased (Underwood, Klein, & Burke, 2001).

Government policies and regulatory bodies regulate much of what appears on a food label. Nutritional panels, weights and volumes, additives, country of origin, manufacturer's details, ingredients and use-by dates are some of the many requirements necessary on all packaged Australian food (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). Other comments and details including producer stories, product tasting notes, recipes, health and quality claims (such as the heart foundation tick or 'low GI <sup>10</sup>') and general product particulars, all provide information that the consumer uses, in varying degrees, to make food choice decisions.

A significant number of labelling and food choice studies have investigated how much the consumer understands about food product labelling and what consumers want on food labels (Chan, Patch, & Williams, 2005; Higginson, Rayner, Draper, & Kirk, 2002; Kozup, Creyer, & Burton, 2003; Shannon, 1994; Wansink, 2003). Much of this has focused on the suitability, relevance and comprehensibility of the label and the corresponding information.

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10 Refers to foods with a low Glycemic Index

Research into the understanding of health claims on labels is numerous (Chan et al., 2005; Higginson et al., 2002; Kozup et al., 2003; Shannon, 1994; Wansink, 2003). Many of these studies have concluded that although many consumers look at nutritional information, few actually 'take it in' and process the information further, even when aiming to choose a healthier version of a product. The results of Higginson, Rayner, Draper, and Kirk (2002) agree with these results and, in addition, claim that given the limited nutritional skills and knowledge the majority of consumers have, they will use label nutritional information to the best of their ability, often comparing between products, and making the available information as meaningful as possible. Consumers do not read labels thoroughly, and this is most often because the quantity and/or complexity of the information is too challenging to understand, or the nutritional content was not the main priority when choosing foods (McIlveen & Semple, 2002). The participants of this study that did read the nutritional information did so as a necessity, because of dietary needs or food allergies. These authors also propose that these consumers were in effect forced to learn about and understand the information needed to make these particular food choices (McIlveen & Semple, 2002).

"Packaging is of fundamental importance to both the purchase, use, and disposal of food products" (Bech-Larsen, 1996, p. 340). Similar to the packaging of all products, the packaging of food and beverage products inspires and motivates food choice and purchasing behaviour. It can be used as a means of providing product, health and ingredient information, a way of portraying quality, a method of gaining consumer's attention, and an avenue for showcasing aesthetic product attributes (Bech-Larsen, 1996).

There appears to be little research that has focused on the effect of packaging shape, container and size on food choice. The use of nature friendly and 'green' packaging on food choice has warranted some recent attention (Reyes, 2006; Winder, Ridgway, Nelson, & Baldwin, 2002) with

environmentally friendly packaging positively influencing consumers' decision to purchase such products. Research on consumers' ethical perceptions towards packaging has been undertaken (Bone & Corey, 1992, 2000) and indicates that many consumers take a personal concern in the consequences of ecological packaging. This has shown potential for creating preferences for sustainable and recyclable packaging (Bech-Larsen, 1996).

New technologies for food packaging have also been shown to influence food choice. Eastwood's (1994) research into consumer perception of vacuum packed meats suggested that food shoppers have a significant aversion to this method of packaging for meat products. This dislike appears to be due to customers' quality and colour expectations of fresh meat which are different to the presentation of vacuum sealed meats (a brownish red). Consumers have limited knowledge as to why there is a variance in colour and they are also unaware that this colouring does not affect the quality, flavour or texture of the meat.

Although not a food per se, numerous studies have assessed how the packaging and labels on wine bottles influence the decision to purchase and consume wine (Charters et al., 2000; Dimara & Skuras, 2005; Jennings & Wood, 1994; Thomas & Pickering, 2003). These studies confirmed the importance of the front and back labels, and packaging material in assisting consumers in making their purchase decision. Wine information on labels, including grape variety, bottle colour, the year the wine was made (vintage) and the region and or origin that the wine has come from have proven significant in guiding the wine drinker's purchase decision. The 'parentage' of the wine (what winery and winemaker made the wine) has also proved significant as a predictor of wine choice (Shaw, Keeghan, & Hall, 1999). Other wine label studies have also suggested that wine awards and trophy stickers on labels have had an endorsing impact and acted as a cue for wine quality (Orth & Krska, 2002; Shaw et al., 1999; Thomas & Pickering, 2003).

#### **3.2.3.2.4 Origin of Product**

The country or region of origin of a product is internationally understood to be the country of manufacture, production or assembly (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). Since globalisation has enabled food products to be transported and sold around the world, country of origin as a construct can be an important cue for the evaluation of a product (Ahmed et al., 2004; Hoffmann, 2000; Skaggs, Falk, Almonte, & Cardenas, 1996).

Extensive global research on country of origin and region of origin has indicated that country of origin plays an important role in the purchasing process. More specific country of origin research on wine has indicated that this attribute plays an important function in purchase. Consumers from two wine regions in Spain assigned more importance to region of origin than they did price, grape variety and vintage year (Gil & Sanchez, 1997). Skuras and Vakrou's (2002) research in Greece proposed that region of origin was also important. It was found that if a wine that provided a guarantee of the place of origin was available, consumers would pay almost double the price of a non-origin labelled basic quality wine. Monteiro and Lucas's (2001) research into the importance of protected designation of origin (PDO) on cheese, found that recognition and PDO is the most important attribute for choosing traditional cheeses, followed by price and texture. Cheese consumers in Portugal value PDO certification as it aids in their purchasing decision.

Although the findings of these studies indicate the importance of region of origin on food and beverage choice, it should be noted that this may not be relevant in Australia. The European research mentioned above has been undertaken in countries that have a long history of producing those food products under study. The intertwining of these products into each of these country's cultures and consumption practices over centuries would have had a very profound impact on consumers' food and beverage preferences, choices and usage. When one compares this to the relatively 'recent' existence of the Australia commercial winemaking industry

(Beeston, 1994; Iland & Gago, 2002) and cheese industry (Studd, 1999) it becomes evident that it would be troublesome to replicate many of these studies in Australia.

Skaggs et al. (1996) draws attention to the significance of one's overall impressions of a country, and the impact these imprints have on the perceptions of food products originating from that country. An example might be that if a consumer perceives Australia and New Zealand as having a 'clean and green' (Short, 1997) image, this perception will influence the idea that food products from these countries will have the same 'clean and green' attributes. In Juric and Worsley's (1998) study, it was found that for New Zealand consumers, the perceived national image of a country appeared to act as a halo effect on the evaluation of foreign and or unknown foods and beverages. Ratings of Australian and American foods by New Zealand consumers in this study showed that knowledge about these countries contributed to a positive perception of Australian and American food products, whereas products from less-developed countries were negatively affected by the country of origin. Further evidence supporting the importance of a 'products country image' on food choice can be found in Pecher and Tregear's (2001) cheese study.

## **4. Olive Oil Consumer Behaviour Research**

### **4.1 International Consumer Research**

A number of comparative studies exist which have investigated olive oil in combination with a selection of other fats and oils. These studies have researched the situational and attitudinal influences on a selection of oils including virgin olive oil, rapeseed (canola), sunflower, grape seed and corn oil (Bech-Larsen, Nielsen, Grunert, & Sorensen, 1996; Nielsen, Bech-Larsen, & Grunert, 1998; Saba & Di Natale, 1998).

Nielsen, Bech-Larsen, and Grunert's (1998) cross cultural study found that there were large differences in the perceptions of virgin olive oils across



the three countries under focus (England, Denmark, France). Taste and good aroma were key attributes for the French and these were associated with good cooking, enjoyment and ultimately feeling good about oneself. These are potential indicators for high involvement with a product, which makes sense considering that olive oil has been part of the traditional diet in parts of France for many years. On the contrary, the English consumers were much more divided in their feelings about olive oil. Some had similar views to the French where taste and enjoyment were important, but others linked virgin olive oil to poor taste, poor cooking experiences and less enjoyment with food. The Danish consumers had mostly positive feelings about virgin olive oil. They enjoyed the taste and enjoyed using it because it led to good results in the kitchen. However, there were some Danish consumers who also linked the strong characteristics of virgin olive oil to poor cooking results in the kitchen. Nonetheless, olive oil users from all three countries agreed on the health benefits of virgin olive oil which led to the feeling of having good health and a long life. Thus the hedonic and sensory aspects of the virgin olive oil appeared to cause the most variance between countries.

Other research saw an exploration of the most significant predictors of actual consumption of edible fats (olive oil, seed oil and butter) in Italy. Saba and Di Natale (1998) surveyed 909 Italians in order to assess their attitudes towards fats and food choice. The researchers used Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) TRA combined with a measure of 'habit' as a theoretical framework. The findings suggested that in Italy, habit might predict intention to consume fats and oils better than TRA. More recent Italian research by Saba et al. (2000) re-confirmed this attitudinal TRA model. With the large number of Italian and Greek communities living in Australia, this research may prove useful in helping to understand Australian olive oil consumers.

Research into quality cues on consumer purchasing behaviour for organic olive oil was undertaken in Greece (Sandalidou, Baourakis, & Siskos,

2002). Health was considered the most significant quality cue for organic olive oil in Greece and this was found to be organic olive oil's best competitive advantage. The price of the organic oil and its packaging was also significant, whilst a lack of promotion about the meaning of 'organic' and the need for greater accessibility to the product appeared to be its biggest limitations. This study verifies the importance of health attributes as a predictor of food choice.

More recent olive oil specific research has studied Italian consumer's expectations of the sensory attributes of virgin olive oils (Caporale, Policastro, Carlucci, & Monteleone, 2006). This study assessed the effect of information about origin on consumer expectations for virgin olive oil in respect to specific sensory properties (level of bitterness and pungency) of typical oils. It revealed that information which reminds a consumer about the origin of an olive oil will generally create a favourable hedonic expectation of it. This in turn will affect the acceptability of that oil.

In the UK, Martinez, Aragonés, and Poole (2002) utilised focus groups and conjoint analysis to analyse the product attribute trade-offs that consumers make when choosing olive oil products. Product attributes can be explained as characteristics or components of a particular product. One key finding was that UK consumers continue to regard olive oil as a set of individual attributes (packaging, size, taste, price, and health) instead of a product that is seen as encapsulating all of these attributes. Martinez, Aragonés, and Poole (2002, p. 178) used the term, "everyday cooking oil" to categorise the entire number of olive oil attributes. This study specifically differentiated between olive oil and extra virgin olive oil. It was found that price was the most influential factor on consumers' preferences for basic olive oil followed by size of container, whereas for the premium extra virgin olive oil, its higher price was not as important in the purchase decision.

Thompson et al. (1994) also successfully used Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) TRA as a means of identifying the major issues influencing olive oil

choice in the UK. It was found that attitudes were strongly related to the use or non-use of olive oil. The most significant attitude related to the flavour-improving attributes of olive oil (such as improving the taste of salads and cooked meals). Perceived health attributes of olive oil were also found to be a notable predictor of olive oil usage but to a lesser degree compared to flavour. Price and the use of olive oil for special occasions proved to be far less important as factors in the decision to use olive oil. These UK findings differ slightly from the Australian findings of McEvoy et al. (1999), where health benefits were found to be more significant than flavour attributes in influencing the decision to purchase olive oil. The four-year time difference and local cultures of these countries may explain some of this discrepancy. It is important to mention that Thompson et al. (1994) did disclose that the results would have been more thorough had a measure of involvement been used.

#### **4.2 Consumer Research in Australia**

Of the available Australian olive oil and consumer behaviour specific literature, the consumer research of McEvoy and Gomez (1999), McEvoy, Gomez, McCarrol, and Sevil (1998) and The Loyalty Factor (2003) appear to be most comprehensive and relevant. Other research by the Centre for Innovation Business and Marketing (2003) has contributed to our current understanding of olive oil consumption in Australia.

McEvoy and Gomez (1999) were the first to use primary and secondary data to identify possible target markets, establish actual market size and discover consumers' attitudes to and perceptions about both Australian and international olive products (oil and table olives). This was a dual approach using qualitative focus group data (McEvoy et al., 1998) and quantitative survey data (McEvoy & Gomez, 1999) to examine four overarching segments of olive product users. These segments were the food service sector, importers and exporters, the food-manufacturing trade and the general consumer segment. Of interest to this study were the consumer segment findings. The data were collected from South Australia,

Victoria and Queensland and the main consumer segment findings were gained from 12 focus groups which used ethnic background and level of awareness of Australian olive products (aware and not aware) as guides and 1000 surveys.

Although the research is over six years old and many advances have been made in the Australian olive industry since 1999, the research of McEvoy et al. (1999) suggests that South Australian, Victorian and Queensland consumers were becoming more aware of olive oil and Australian olive products. The findings indicated that Australian consumers have been steadily replacing lard and animal fats with vegetable oils and fats and that respondents perceive olive oil to be healthiest of all oils available. Canola and sunflower oils were most commonly used for cooking and olive oils classified as 'specialty oils' were being used predominantly for special occasions.

McEvoy and Gomez (1999) also suggest that awareness of olive oil in the market place is near 100%, nonetheless awareness of the different grades of olive oil is considerably less. The study suggests that the two main factors influencing use were olive oil's health benefits and its distinguishing taste. Earlier qualitative research by McEvoy et al.,(1998) suggested that these two factors are linked, and in fact, consumers who buy olive oil for health reasons, later become accepting of its flavour. This 1998 research also suggested that although the health benefits of olive oil were a key reason for use, few consumers could explain why. They struggled with explaining the distinction between poly-unsaturated and mono-unsaturated fats and why certain types of fats were more damaging to their health and wellbeing than others. Some consumers were also aware of 'cold pressed' olive oil, but no-one fully understood the process and the quality implications it had on olive oil. Alternative research using nutritional benefits as a predictor of intention to consume olive oil can be found in the previous mentioned empirical studies of Saba and Di Natale (1998) and Thompson, Haziris et al. (1994).

McEvoy and Gomez (1999) also found that the main issues when purchasing fats and oils were price, quality, the quantity used, the perceived health benefits and the effect of education and promotion. However, it appeared that no brand loyalty to any one particular olive oil exists. From this research, McEvoy and Gomez (1999) were the first market researchers to propose a very basic profile of the typical Australian olive oil consumer. According to their research the characteristics of this market segment include: being aged between 22 and 55, being highly educated with a skilled profession, and having a household income of more than \$45,000 per year. This research has provided the foundation of what subsequent Australian olive oil consumer research has been built on.

More recently, an industry report commissioned by Olives SA<sup>11</sup> (The Loyalty Factor, 2003) investigated the market for Australian olive products. The results of this phone interview survey of 250 eastern state consumers indicated that approximately 75% of Australian household's consider olive oil to be a day-to-day food product.

It was revealed in this 2003 study that the Australian olive oil consumer is relatively uneducated about olive oil and that the Australian olive oil market is not homogenous with several market segments appearing to exist (The Loyalty Factor). A level of involvement and frequency of olive oil use were used as constructs to classify consumers. The highest level of involvement was shown by consumers who placed a great deal of importance on sensory attributes and or who were 'emotionally engaged' in the choice to use olive oil (for example they used it because of health or wanting to offer the best to their family). The lowest level was assigned to those consumers who use it 'out of habit' and are not particularly engaged by it or in it. These two constructs revealed five segments in the Australian Market place (see figure 2.4). The five segments were described as:

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11 Olives SA is the peak industry body representing olive growers in South Australia.

Confident Gourmets, Recipe Followers, Traditionalists, Health Driven and Indifferents.

It is proposed by the Loyalty Factor (2003) that a large number of consumers are aware of, but not necessarily knowledgeable about, the different grades of oil (such as extra virgin, light, pure, olive and extra light) and they consider that extra virgin is the best quality and therefore are accepting of it having a higher price tag. When comparing between the different grades of olive oil, extra virgin was revealed as the healthiest and more versatile of the oils, and it was also the most natural and flavoursome. However, although these consumers were aware of the different grades, the majority tended to keep only one type in the kitchen.

Health was a significant influence on olive oil choice in the Loyalty Factors' research and this confirms the olive oil consumer behaviour of Bech-Larsen et al. (1996), Martinez et al. (2002), McEvoy et al. (1999), Nielsen et al. (1998), and Thompson et al. (1994). The Loyalty Factor (2003) study suggests that when health was considered, there was very limited knowledge as to how and why olive oil was healthy. The two benefits that were addressed by consumers focused on olive oil's effect on cholesterol and heart attacks. Consumers believed that sensory factors (smell and taste) were key cues for quality, and to a lesser degree, price was also mentioned. Cost was a significant barrier to use for non-olive oil users, and not liking the smell or taste of olive oil also rated several mentions, confirming the views of many of the English and Danish participants in Nielsen, Bech-Larsen, and Grunert's (1998) study. Supermarkets appeared to be the main place of purchase for olive oil, whilst special occasion oil and oils for gifts were more than likely purchased at specialty stores. Those with Mediterranean backgrounds tended to purchase their everyday oil from delicatessens that catered to the nationality of that consumer. The research also suggested that country of origin rarely played a role in the choice of olive oil.

There are several criticisms of The Loyalty Factor's (2003) research. Firstly, the findings are somewhat brief in detail and broad. They also appear to generalise too much. Secondly, the authors often fail to clearly differentiate between extra virgin olive oil and other grades of olive oil in their findings. They apply the generic term 'olive oil' to all segments and findings and this makes it difficult to assess exactly which grade of olive oil the different segments purchase, use, and talk about. The author also fails to clearly outline how and at what stage of the research, levels of involvement were allocated in the study. This makes it difficult to understand the importance of involvement as a construct. For example, the research claims that the recipe follower consumer segment is a high involvement group. Yet, having assessed the segment's characteristics, there is little evidence of regular high involvement activity. The Loyalty Factor's research also suggests that 81% of all consumers have high involvement or very high levels of involvement with olive oil. Given the diverse findings of other Australian and international olive oil consumer research, as well as food choice research in general, these figures should be treated with extreme caution.

Other more statistical consumer research by the Centre for Innovation Business and Marketing (2003) suggests that half of the total olive oil consumed in Australia is purchased in supermarkets. Home brands and country brands dominate sales, and research indicates that there is no loyalty to any one particular brand of the many available. The findings also suggested that unlike other premium food categories (cheese, small goods and wine), country of origin has not been a factor involved with olive oil purchase.

McEvoy and Gomez (1999) and The Loyalty Factor's (2003) profiles of the Australian olive oil and olive consumer combined with an understanding of factors that influence consumer demand for olive products could provide invaluable insights for future study. However, further research in other olive oil producing states such as Western Australia, combined with a

more in depth study of the views, beliefs and perceptions of olive oil by both non-users and users will extend our understanding.

## **5. Research Design and the Literature**

Both the Australian and international literature on olive oil consumption is very limited and fragmented. It also tended to specialise in certain areas, for example the effect of habit (Saba & Di Natale, 1998) and attitudes (Thompson et al., 1994) on olive oil use. This made it difficult to gain a comprehensive understanding of how olive oil fits into the lives of olive oil users. Therefore a qualitative research design using focus groups was chosen so that a wide-ranging exploration of the role of olive oil could be made, and an overview of all factors affecting olive oil consumption could be investigated.

The preliminary literature review on food choice and olive oil use alluded to the fact that consumers view, choose and use food in different ways. From the food choice literature a number of themes evolved that helped to shape this study's focus and its research questions. These included assessing reasons why foods are consumed (health, flavour, hedonics and sensory needs) and how consumers view these foods. The importance of exploring the factors that act as motivators and barriers to food choice, purchase and consumption was also gained from this preliminary literature review. Other areas of interest gained from this literature shaped the research focus. These included the need to identify with what consumers understand about the food they choose or do not choose (knowledge and awareness), the varying influences that affect the purchase decision (price, packaging, country of origin) and how foods are used by consumers.

The construct of involvement also proved to be important within the food choice literature and was therefore adapted to be used in this study's design. This information helped to give structure to the research design and the focus group questioning. It also provided a broad range of topics that was initially used in the data analysis phase.



Segment	Involvement	Use Level	Characteristics
<b>Confident Gourmets (26% of Australian olive oil users)</b>	Very high involvement	Very regular usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensory factors are extremely important and they are looking for a taste experience.</li> <li>• Cooking with a variety of oils makes them feel 'adventurous'. Frequent entertainers.</li> <li>• They use extra virgin olive oil only and canola.</li> <li>• They buy from specialty gourmet stores and supermarkets, mostly 500ml bottles.</li> <li>• Not fooled by 'pretty' packaging.</li> <li>• 30-50 year olds, very high income and education. Concerned with health.</li> </ul>
<b>Recipe Followers (15% of Australian olive oil users)</b>	High involvement	Very irregular usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special occasion user if the recipe calls for it only. Regular entertainers.</li> <li>• Speciality oils viewed as a luxury but flavour is worth the price.</li> <li>• They use different oil for different recipes (olive, vegetable and canola)</li> <li>• They believe olive oil enhances the flavour of their 'Mediterranean' cooking.</li> <li>• Buy from specialty gourmet stores and supermarkets in fancy 375ml bottles.</li> <li>• 20-40 year olds, high income and education. Quality cues = Price and packaging.</li> </ul>
<b>Traditionalists (19% of Australian olive oil users)</b>	Moderately high involvement	Very regular usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Olive oil is part of their heritage. Family used it rather than vegetable oil.</li> <li>• Never think about the oil they use, they just use what they have always used.</li> <li>• They believe oils should enhance that flavour of food – if it does its worth the price.</li> <li>• They shift between extra virgin and virgin, never use light olive oil or canola.</li> <li>• They buy from specialty delicatessens or direct from growers in bulk 4 litre tins.</li> <li>• Mid income and education, under 30 or over 50 years old.</li> </ul>
<b>Health Driven (21% of Australian olive oil users)</b>	High involvement	Regular usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Want nutritional benefits and taste, motivated by providing healthy oils / food for their families.</li> <li>• They use olive oil because they believe it to be the healthiest oil. Nutritional panel readers.</li> <li>• They shift between extra virgin and virgin. Buy in supermarkets in 2-3 litre volumes.</li> <li>• Price is viewed secondary to health.</li> <li>• 60+ years, working / retired older couples / singles. Baby Boomers.</li> </ul>
<b>Indifferents (19% of Australian olive oil users)</b>	Very low involvement	Irregular usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not fussed about what oil they use.</li> <li>• No interest in health issues related to food (fat content, cholesterol).</li> <li>• Buy from supermarkets and are very price conscious.</li> <li>• Less affluent and tend to have larger households.</li> </ul>

**Figure 2.4 An overview of The Loyalty Factor's (2003) classification and segmentation of the Australian olive oil market place.**

## **6. Conclusion**

As stated earlier, there has been little research in Australia directly related to Australian consumers and their views on, beliefs about and motivation towards olive oil. Nonetheless, it is important to document a number of issues from the literature that frame what we know about food choice and olive oil consumption. Apart from the physiological and biological factors of hunger and nutrition, the literature indicates that extrinsic factors such as one's culture, the product's packaging and the product's country of origin influence food choice, as do the intrinsic factors of self image, habit and sensory needs. The literature also shows that the properties of food, the human-related factors and the environmental factors have had a significant impact on food choice and consumption.

A large proportion of the available olive oil and consumer behaviour research has been undertaken in the traditional Mediterranean olive oil producing countries of Greece and Italy. Therefore these results may be difficult to replicate and generalise to a non Mediterranean culture like Australia. However, the methodologies and findings of these studies may offer ideas and concepts that could be relevant and usable in Australian olive oil research.

The Australian olive oil literature indicates that olive oil production and consumption is increasing. As a result, lard and animal fats are being substituted with olive and vegetable oils. Canola and sunflower oils are used most commonly for cooking and olive oil is used predominantly for special occasions and salad dressings, however this trend appears to be changing. Australians perceive olive oil to be the healthiest of all oils available and this combined with the flavour and taste of olive oil and the oil's price have been shown to be the most important influences, (both positive and negative) on the consumer's choice of olive oil.

## **Chapter 3. The Research process**

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### **1. Introduction**

This chapter documents the methodological process for the study. It assesses the chosen approach for the research and the reasons behind selecting a qualitative design to explore the role that olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian consumers. Following this is a detailed explanation of the various materials and methods used to undertake the research. The chapter ten provides an outline of the target and sample populations, the instruments, equipment and materials used to accumulate the data, and the procedures used by the researcher to collect and analyse data. Finally the methodological limitations of this research are acknowledged.

### **2. The Research Approach**

A grounded approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to explore the role of olive oil in Western Australian olive oil consumers' lives. By definition, a grounded approach involves allowing the findings to emerge from the data rather than the study output being structured around a pre-specified theoretical framework. The grounded approach adopted in this study resulted in the generation of a thematic analysis of the role of olive oil, which is somewhat at variance with grounded theory as originally conceptualised by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Traditional grounded theory involves expressing the findings as theoretical categories and properties, while a grounded approach ceases at the point of thematic analysis. The use of a grounded approach in this research is in line with the form of grounded theory most commonly employed in consumer research (Pettigrew, 1999). The intention was to obtain a thick description of consumption and a theoretical account of the form of consumption, both of which have been accommodated in the thematic analysis generated.

The key characteristic of this research that demonstrates its grounded nature is the timing of the literature review. A preliminary literature review prior to data collection provided a basic understanding of food choice and olive oil research (suggested by Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This aided in guiding the study. The advantages of undertaking a preliminary literature review were varied. Firstly, the review of the literature directed sampling as well as being used at the end of theory development as additional substantiation of the accuracy of the findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Secondly, the preliminary literature review assisted in the formation of topics that were used both for the focus groups and throughout the study. Thirdly, literature on existing theories helped to provide effective techniques for approaching and interpreting information and data. Fourthly, the literature was used to stimulate theoretical sensitivity by offering ideas and relationships that were found in the actual data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A further detailed literature review was completed after data analysis and in light of the findings in order to ground them.

### **3. Research Design**

A large selection of quantitative research on food choice and consumption exists (Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; Juric & Worsley, 1998; Marquis & Shatenstein, 2005; Roeninen, 2001; Saba & Di Natale, 1998). This research has successfully studied the frequency and distribution of food choice, purchase, use and consumption and the majority of these studies have focused on food choice and purchase behaviour. Many food choice and consumption studies have also used a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research designs to study these phenomenon in depth (Martinez et al., 2002; Mitsostergios & Skiadis, 1994; Thompson et al., 1994).

Qualitative methodological techniques have been used for research on food choice, consumption, and eating habits, as they provide in-depth experiential and personal accounts that have been difficult for quantitative

research to achieve (Beardsworth & Keil, 1993; Falk, Bisogni, & Sobal, 1996; Furst et al., 1996; Gustafsson & Sidenvall, 2002; Makatourni, 2002; Thompson et al., 1994).

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) imply that qualitative research is best suited to exploratory studies, as it enables the researcher to gain a breadth and depth of understanding of the topic being studied. The resulting information and data comes in the form of words and not numbers as quantitative data does. The intention of this study was to examine the role that olive oil played in the lives of both regular and infrequent users of olive oil in Western Australia. Thus, in essence, this was an exploratory study that aimed to facilitate a detailed understanding of Western Australian olive oil consumers and their thoughts about and feelings toward olive oil. This study was aimed at investigating the phenomenon of olive oil and the Australian consumer and not 'how many' were used or 'how often' (Basch, 1987, p. 411). Therefore a qualitative approach was most appropriate.

Several research tools exist for qualitative research. These include interviews, observation and visual methods, introspection and focus groups methods (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Gould, 1995). Focus group research has played a significant role in exploring food choice in the past (Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002; Martinez et al., 2002; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Perry, & Casey, 1999). The focus group method was chosen for this study because it would provide an environment where different participants' perspectives could be explored, attitudes and perceptions discussed, and complex behaviours about olive oil use and consumption examined.

The advantages of using focus groups were that focus groups allowed for relaxed interaction between participants, which created an environment that encouraged and stimulated thought generation (Basch, 1987). This often provided the researcher with more in-depth data than anticipated. It

was also likely that participants felt less pressure to answer every question than they would feel obliged to in a one on one interview (Basch, 1987; Calder, 1977; Fontana & Frey, 2000). The focus group format also allowed the participants to develop their ideas and concerns about olive oil by 'piggy backing' off the responses of other group members which reminded them of issues and ideas which may not have initially come to mind (Goldman & McDonald, 1987; Krueger, 2000). This 'piggy backing' was a common and successful method used by participants to disclose in-depth information on their olive oil use and purchasing patterns.

Focus groups are not without possible disadvantages. Apart from the organisational difficulties in arranging and overseeing focus groups (Calder, 1977), other such limitations include single group members dominating the group, peer or group pressure having a destructive effect on participant involvement, and participant responses being hindered because of discussion topics with delicate and sensitive information (Fontana & Frey, 1994). When planning the research groups these negative concerns were addressed. The focus groups followed a semi-structured questioning guide which assisted in giving organisation to the group by providing a guideline with which to follow and refer back to. It also helped to neutralise any potential group, peer or individual pressure or dominance (Fontana & Frey, 1994; , 2000). These guides also aided in increasing the reliability of the findings and providing flexibility for exploring the evolving issues. The researcher actively encouraged participation by all group members and sensitively drew out more reticent participants.

In all instances the focus group proved a valuable tool for data collection. Generally participants were comfortable and relaxed and there was no evidence to the contrary in comments or body language. By using their names, the researcher regularly drew the quieter and less confident participants into discussions and there was very little evidence of any one particular participant, or collection of participants, dominating focus group

discussions. The volume and depth of information sourced from all groups was excellent and provided the researcher with an abundance of information and data to analyse.

Due to the non-challenging research topic, the sharing of sensitive information was irrelevant in this study. The pre-interview explanation of the focus group process, combined with the provision of refreshments, encouraged participants to be comfortable, relaxed and happy to contribute to discussions.

An initial pilot focus group of six olive oil users was conducted at the researcher's office. The outcomes of this pilot focus group aided in identifying and examining certain ideas and issues that helped to develop the topics for the primary focus groups (Furst et al., 1996) as well as assessing possible group dynamic issues. The data collected in this pilot group were not used as part of the overall data for the study. It only acted as a tool for the development of focus groups questions and approaches.

Ethics clearance for the research was granted by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee for data collection for the period of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2004 to the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2005. After this clearance was received the data collection phase of the research began and all data were collected well before the 31<sup>st</sup> December cessation date.

#### **4. Materials and Methods**

The following section discusses the target and sample populations of the study, the procurement of focus group participants and the instruments, equipment and materials used to collect the data. This is followed by an explanation of the procedure for data collection and then a break down of the method of data analysis.

#### **4.1 Target and Sample Populations**

The sampling frame for this research was the entire population of Western Australia who use olive oil. The unit of analysis for this study was individual consumers. Participants were recruited using a non-probability sampling method (Glesne, 1999). To increase the trustworthiness of the research, the participants were purposively sampled in order to gain a selection of consumers with similar olive oil usage behaviours. Therefore, participants who used olive oil once or more a week (regular users) were allocated to the same focus groups, and those who used olive oil less than once a week (infrequent users) were allocated to separate focus groups.

The researcher appointed two recruitment assistants to source Western Australian consumers to participate in the study. The intended process was to obtain regular users (RU) and infrequent users (IU). The inclusion of both regular olive oil users and infrequent users was important as it provided valuable insights into the purchasing behaviour and use of olive oil across a large spectrum of consumers. The involvement of infrequent users enabled many usage issues, and barriers to use, to be investigated and many regular user presuppositions to be uncovered.

There were five focus groups run in total. Three regular user groups were run because this set of consumers had more to say about olive oil and they provided more detailed in-depth information about olive oil usage with more data nuances than the infrequent users. The infrequent users did not provide as much detailed and descriptive information, and therefore only two of these focus groups were undertaken. Sourcing participants for the regular user groups was unproblematic. However, finding participants who used olive oil less than once a week, or not at all, proved exceedingly challenging. Therefore it was decided to employ a professional research consultancy company to source people who did not use olive oil or who used it infrequently. This company was engaged to recruit participants and to provide the location and facilities for these infrequent user focus groups.



The researcher executed and ran the groups. Interestingly this company also struggled with finding non-users.

The recruiting assistants were given a brief of the study and a set of guidelines with which to source possible participants (See Appendix two). This provided a clear breakdown of participant prerequisites. These helpers were asked to sign a confidentiality declaration to ensure that participant identities and information would remain confidential and protected.

Initial contact with potential participants was made either in person or by telephone. Participation in the focus group interviews was framed as an invitation to "tell me how you feel about olive oil". It was emphasised by the researcher and assistants that this was not about what people knew about olive oil, but how they used it and what they thought about it. Those willing and available to participate were sent or emailed a letter (see Appendix three) explaining the researcher's interest in olive oil, the focus group process, and the amount of time required for each group (between one and one and a half hours). If these potential participants were happy to participate they contacted the researcher and or researcher's assistant to confirm their placement. They were also informed about the confidentiality of their participation in the research.

Participants were sourced who exhibited a variety of ages, gender, household status and nationalities. These were not recruitment criteria, but the variety and balance of different participants contributed to richness of data gained.

Each respondent was telephoned by the researcher or assistants two days prior to the focus group to confirm their participation, confirm the location and time for the focus group and answer any questions or queries that they may have had.

When recruiting participants it was intended to have a minimum of six people per group. Due to the risk of participant no-shows, especially for the infrequent user groups, a minimum of nine participants was initially sourced for each group (Krueger, 2000). This proved beneficial as several participants (both regular and infrequent users) did not show for their allocated focus groups. All except one group had equal to or greater than the allocated six persons per group when it was conducted as shown in figure 3.1.

<b>Group Number</b>	<b>Focus Group 1</b>	<b>Focus Group 2</b>	<b>Focus Group 3</b>	<b>Focus Group 4</b>	<b>Focus Group 5</b>
<b>User Type</b>	Regular Users	Regular Users	Regular Users	Infrequent Users	Infrequent Users
<b>Number of Participants</b>	7	9	6	8	5

**Figure 3.1 Matrix of focus group participants.**

The sample comprised 35 participants, nine of whom were male and 26 were female. When rating usage, 23 participants were regular users of olive oil and 12 were infrequent users. All age groups were represented with seven participants in the 18-25 age group, 18 in the 26-38 years group, six in the 39-50 years group and four participants who were 51 years or older.

The majority of participants claimed their nationality to be Australian and/or New Zealand. Only one participant had an alternative nationality and that was Northern European (UK). However, the nationality of

participants' parents was more diverse. Nineteen declared that their parents' nationality was Australian and/or New Zealand, whilst nine claimed their parents were from the UK and North European and Scandinavian countries. Western Europe / Mediterranean were stated three times, Asia once and the 'Other' category were used four times. The key 'other' countries were South Africa and North America. A breakdown of the demographic data of participants can be seen in Appendix four.

## **4.2 Involvement**

Previous food involvement studies have used a variety of involvement scales (Bell & Marshall, 2003; Foxhall & Bhatte, 1993; Olsen, 2001) to collect data based on people's innate concern for and interests in food (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Generally, these studies ask participants to consider their own involvement level by rating specified items. These items related to the level of enjoyment of a certain food, the level of interest in a food or the level of importance the food has for the respondent (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

Prior to the commencement of data collection for this study the researcher was aware that participants' level of involvement with olive oil may play a role in the way it was perceived and used. However, as this was an exploratory study it was not intended to focus on any particular construct, but to undertake broader research into all factors that may contribute to the role of olive oil in the lives of Western Australians olive oil consumers. Therefore participants were purposely not asked to partake in any involvement assessment during the study.

Nonetheless, throughout the data collection phase it became more evident that participants had different levels of interest in and knowledge about

olive oil. As a result it was decided to assign a level of product <sup>12</sup> involvement (low, medium and high) to each participant after the data had been collected. These judgements were made for each participant by analysing individual thoughts and feelings about olive oil offered in the focus groups as well as their consumption behaviour. The following factors were used to determine an involvement rating for each participant:

- The level of olive oil knowledge.
- Sensitivity to price.
- The extent of brand purchasing.
- Level of interest in olive oil and food in general.
- Supermarket vs. specialty store shopper.
- The degree of enjoyment in food and cooking.

While there was some variation across the factors, it was possible to ascertain an overall involvement level for each participant. A classification of these factors and corresponding involvement levels can be seen in figure 3.2. Level one was rated as the lowest level of involvement and encapsulated those who had no interest in or knowledge of olive oil and no desire to learn about it. Level four was reserved for participants who were passionate about olive oil, knowledgeable and interested. One might classify this group in colloquial terms as 'foodies' <sup>13</sup>. The remainder of participants slotted in between level one and four. Six of the infrequent users were assigned low involvement status, six minor involvement and one medium involvement. With the regular users seven were assigned

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12 Product Involvement is specifically related to the level of involvement a person has with a product, in this case olive oil. In this study it does not encapsulate brand involvement, purchase decision involvement or situation involvement (Solomon, 2002).

13 A colloquial noun used to describe someone who is both devoted and a connoisseur of "refined sensuous enjoyment (especially good food and drink)" (Miller, 2005a). It is also known as an epicurean, bon vivant and gourmet.

minor involvement, eleven medium involvement and four high involvement.

After creating the factors with which participants could be categorised, the information and data they offered could be analysed by using the usage category (regular or infrequent) and/or their level of involvement with olive oil. The level of involvement proved an interesting and valuable tool with which to examine the data and the relevant findings are discussed at greater length in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **4.3 Instruments, Equipment, Materials**

A pre-written list of semi-structured but modifiable topics and questions was developed from the pilot focus group and was used in the subsequent focus groups. A primarily open style of questioning was employed. Semi-structured interviews combined the advantage of open-ended questions with enough structure to ensure that data across groups will be comparable (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Although similar to the regular user group topics, a separate set of questions was used for the infrequent user focus groups. It was important in these groups to explore why participants did not use as much olive oil as the regular groups as well as what barriers existed towards using more olive oil. Both sets of question guides can be found in Appendix five.

The focus groups were audio and video recorded. A key advantage of using both data recording methods is that they act as validity checks because raw data is available for comparison and analysis (Polgar & Thomas, 1995). The video recorder was stationary and situated towards the rear of the room. The primary recording device was an audiotape and was placed in the centre of the circle of participants. The video recording was made as a back up in the event that there were problems with the sound quality on the audio tape and if there were periods where the audio tape was not functioning (turning over or replacing of tape). The video

	Involvement level	Number of Participants in Involvement Category	Categorising Factors
<b>Low Involvement</b>	1	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No knowledge or understanding</li> <li>• Non or rare user</li> <li>• No interest in olive oil and food in general</li> <li>• Very price sensitive</li> <li>• Unfamiliar with how to use</li> </ul>
<b>Minor Involvement</b>	2	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nil to little knowledge</li> <li>• Price sensitive and supermarket shopper</li> <li>• Buy same brand</li> <li>• Unfamiliar with how to use</li> <li>• Confidence lacking - recipe follower</li> </ul>
<b>Medium Involvement</b>	3	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keen to be educated about use</li> <li>• Some correct knowledge – with inaccuracies</li> <li>• Driven by image, status and lifestyle motives</li> <li>• Enjoy cooking, but still a recipe follower</li> <li>• Mainly supermarket purchases</li> <li>• Price sensitive with brand preferences</li> <li>• Predominantly cooking oil users</li> </ul>
<b>High involvement</b>	4	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keen to be educated about use</li> <li>• Sound level of knowledge</li> <li>• Enjoy cooking and experimenting</li> <li>• Buy from a variety of outlets</li> <li>• New product sourcing</li> <li>• Familiarisation with product and its use</li> </ul>

**Figure 3.2 Matrix of involvement factors**

recordings also proved beneficial for the observation of the body language of the participants throughout the group interviews (Polgar & Thomas, 1995). Further, they allowed the researcher to repeatedly refer back to the recordings when there were areas of concern or issues to verify (Bottorff, 1994).

Visual projective techniques were used to guide and stimulate discussions with participants. Four full, 500ml single brand, identical shaped bottles of olive oil were placed in the centre of the circle of respondents and were used successfully to stimulate discussion. The four different oils were extra virgin olive oil, pure olive oil, light olive oil and 'Traditional' extra virgin olive oil. This technique also assisted in accessing thoughts, perceived images and ideas that did not immediately come to mind in initial olive oil discussions (as per DeLorme & Reid, 1999) and they aided in providing a consistent format between all user groups.

Refreshments including non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks were served with nibbles and sandwiches at each focus group. A token offer of a bottle of olive oil to the value of \$30.00 was used as a 'thankyou' for participants in the regular user groups. The research consultant company that recruited infrequent users required a cash incentive of \$50.00 per person as an inducement, so participants in these groups received this in lieu of the oil gift.

#### **4.4 Data Collection Procedure**

The groups took place over four evenings and one Sunday afternoon. The average time taken for each focus group was one-and-a-half hours. These groups also took place at a variety of locations including the researcher's office, the research consultant's facility, and the offices of the recruiting assistants. The variety of locations were needed to accommodate participant participation from wide spread suburbs of Perth.

The researcher moderated all focus groups. As participants arrived they were welcomed, given a name tag, offered a seat and encouraged to enjoy the refreshments provided. Whilst waiting for all participants to arrive the researcher encouraged chatting amongst group members. This facilitated relaxation and helped to put group members at ease. Once everyone had arrived the researcher welcomed everyone again, gave

them a brief explanation of the research and the format that the focus group would take, and notified participants of the location of the amenities. A conscious effort was made to ensure the atmosphere of all focus groups was relaxed and informal.

Prior to the focus groups starting, the participants were also briefed that this research project had conformed to the Edith Cowan University Ethics policy. As part of this policy, each participant was then asked to sign a written consent form that confirmed that they had agreed to partake in the study and had agreed to be video and audio taped during the interview (see Appendix 4). Participant anonymity was guaranteed by the researcher and a quick explanation of the planned use of pseudonyms for identity protection was undertaken. Participants were also made aware that if they felt uncomfortable or compromised they were welcome to withdraw from the focus group at any stage.

The focus groups took the form of informal chatting using a set of pre-selected topics and projective techniques as a framework for conversation. A general discussion on fats and oils was encouraged at the beginning of the focus group in order to relax the participants and make them feel comfortable. This further encouraged the development of trust, empathy and an understanding between all focus group members and the researcher (Dilley, 2000). This was then followed by more specific and detailed discussions on olive oil. When it appeared the discussion was slowing down and becoming a little 'exhausted', the researcher used the olive oil bottle projective technique to further encourage richer discussion and in-depth talks on product attributes. This proved successful because by having something to pick up and look at participants openly commented on and discussed areas that had not previously been suggested. These included oil names, bottle shape, oil colour, labelling and packaging.



Throughout all focus groups, many participants asked technical and knowledge-based questions of the researcher. The researcher explained that this study intended to explore the role olive oil played in the lives of these participants and that what they knew or did not know about olive oil was not important for the research. However, for those interested, participants were invited to remain after the completion of the focus group for the researcher to answer these more technical questions. Interestingly, after the focus group every participant except one (who left due to time restrictions) stayed an extra fifteen minutes to learn more about olive oil and the differences between the grades and varieties. Many participants from both user groups commented on the value of these discussions and that they now knew more about olive oil and felt more comfortable and enthusiastic about using it. This post group discussion was not video recorded or audio taped and the information discussed was not used as part of the findings. However, the fact that people were enthusiastic about wanting to know more about olive oil raises an interesting point and the significance of this is further discussed in Chapter 4.

At the end of the focus groups each participant was asked to fill in a simple demographic and olive oil usage questionnaire (see Appendix 5). The participants were told how the questionnaire information was going to be used and this aided in reducing the risk of the participants' feeling that the questions were too interfering and invasive (Cavana, Delahaye, & Sekaran, 2001, p. 236). It was decided to do this at the end in order to limit participant bias caused by annoyance at being asked about personal information. In order to protect the identity of participants, a number was allocated to each participant and this was marked on each questionnaire so that demographic information could be referred back to each participant's pseudonym.

At the completion of the focus groups the participants were thanked for their participation and confidentiality was again guaranteed. Participants

were asked if they had any research-related questions and if so these were answered by the researcher. Participants were also offered the opportunity to receive a report of the findings at the conclusion of the study, but no participants requested this.

#### **4.5 Data Analysis**

The first stage of data analysis involved the transcription of recordings. At the completion of each focus group the audio-taped material was transcribed onto a Microsoft Word document and all verbalisations and vocalisations were included in the transcripts where possible. This aided in later reminding and re-immersing the researcher during analysis. The video recording was then watched and used to compare and correct participant comments where necessary. The transcriptions were further edited and revised with this information.

The video recording was then watched again to ascertain relevant body language issues. Body language was documented in text boxes and call outs next to the Microsoft Word text transcription and used for analysis. The developing themes and ideas were documented in a workbook. The video recording also acted as a cross check for picking up on and correcting unclear dialogue found on the audio tape, and for finding any discrepancies between verbal and non-verbal language.

The second phase of analysis was the registration of demographic information. Participant demographics collected in the written questionnaires were then aligned with pseudonyms and the numbers allocated to each participant at focus groups stage. Therefore each focus group participant's demographic data were linked with the correct pseudonyms. This protected their identity and confidentiality. These data were analysed with the use of a Microsoft Excel spread sheet.

The third step of analysis was concerned with getting to know each participant through the data collected. The researcher considered each

participant's comments throughout the focus group individually in order to concentrate on them discretely. A level of involvement with olive oil was assigned to each participant once a general feel for them had been obtained. The researcher then studied each complete transcription to get a further sense of themes and ideas which were used for codes in the next stage of data analysis.

The fourth stage of the analysis process was refining the data via coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The themes and ideas generated during stage three of the data analysis provided a list of very broad topics with which coding commenced. Some of these topics included: how olive oil is utilised; influences on olive oil use; reasons for using olive oil; purchasing patterns and knowledge. The final transcription drafts were transported into the data analysis software package NUD\*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Information Searching Indexing and Theorising) which was used to assist data analysis and coding. The coding ability of NUD\*IST is conducive to exploratory qualitative research methods (Carroll, 1997). Designated codes were stored in the NUD\*IST program in the form of nodes.

Coding was a painstaking but significant part of the analysis stage. It is the process of taking apart the data gained through qualitative research methods and rebuilding them into more theoretically meaningful units (Goulding, 1998). This building process started with the first focus group transcription and was ongoing throughout the entire data collection process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This enabled the researcher to refine upcoming data as it was collected in future focus groups.

A number of initial nodes were created in NUD\*IST when data collection had finished. These nodes encapsulated the participants' demographic facts as well as basic concept categories that arose from the data collection and, to a certain degree, the literature review. These included 17

free nodes based on key olive oil themes derived from the original research question and included how is olive oil perceived, why use olive oil, how is olive oil used, and what the key influences are on usage. A further 29 tree nodes describing demographics, usage level and involvement level were also created. As the investigation of the data continued, new codes were created and amended. The analysis phase finished with 272 nodes that were used for categorising the data.

All focus groups were demographically coded both at document and participant paragraph level. This was then followed by open coding of the data. It was *in vivo* in nature meaning it was based on the terminology of the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This made it easier to identify and comprehend the data. The aim was to start bringing together similar comments, meanings, feelings and events that participants expressed about olive oil, and to gain some insight into which factors were contributing to the Western Australian olive oil consumers' thoughts about and feelings towards olive oil (Locke, 1996; Sarantakos, 1998). This refining occurred at several different levels with the focus group transcripts being coded at paragraph and line level (Glaser, 1992).

Due to the highly descriptive nature of the initial open coding it was necessary to further refine the open codes. Axial coding was used to bring together both the *in vivo* and theoretical codes in order to start establishing relationships between the data (Locke, 1996). This gave further in-depth structure and meaning back to the initial open codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It was at this stage that the coding started to take on a hierarchical shape formation (Goulding, 1998). For example, the axial code of Health had four second tier open codes including Heart, Cholesterol, Poly and Monounsaturated Fats and Heart Tick.

This led to the final stage of coding. Selective coding used theoretical labels to link the axial codes. These codes were created by the researcher

to group together specific areas and codes of commonality. This resulted in ten major overarching codes that encapsulated the key relationships between the open codes and axial code categories revealed earlier (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As a result, a three-tiered ranking of codes emerged and this enabled a clearer and more in-depth understanding and interpretation of the data. As codes and themes started to emerge, relevant and important quotes were highlighted and copied to a Microsoft Word document to be used in the write up stage of the study. The software enabled frequency of referral reports to be created. These indicated how often throughout all groups a specified code was referred to or mentioned. These frequency figures proved helpful in rating the importance of the varying codes and this aided in the write up of findings.

One phase that transcended all analysis steps was an ongoing review of the literature. Throughout the data analysis stage, further literature was reviewed to provide material that could be contrasted and compared to the research findings. Regular consultation occurred with the researcher's thesis supervisor to discuss emerging themes and ideas, and also to contribute to the level of trustworthiness as described below (Annells, 1993).

## **5. Trustworthiness**

In reference to qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined trustworthiness as the credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability of the data collected and the ensuing interpretation of that data. Wallendorf and Belk (1989) explained credibility as creating a believable description of the topic under study whilst transferability was the generalisability of the research findings. Confirmability was described as the ability to follow the interpretation and the theory building process through records, whilst minimum instability in the interpretation of data were also important (dependability). Due to the qualitative nature of this research, elements of trustworthiness were challenging to ascertain.

The researcher acknowledges the problem of trustworthiness related to the non-probability participant recruitment method (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). It is accepted that with most qualitative research, generalisability is sacrificed when using purposive sampling of participants from populations of interest. However, to gain an element of confirmability the researcher regularly kept a journal documenting the research process, ideas, thoughts and methods used to collect and analyse data.

Due to the time requirements of this project, the research design utilised only one qualitative research technique, the focus group. For more credible, transferable and trustworthy findings, methodological triangulation of the findings would have been enhanced by using more than one qualitative research method (for example, a combination of focus groups, individual interviews and observations). However a number of specific triangulation techniques were able to be used in this study. These include:

- Continual discussions about the research, analysis and interpretation processes with the researcher's primary supervisor.
- Two different reference groups (regular and infrequent users) to capitalise on varying participant perspectives. These participants were deliberately sourced to reveal two different olive oil usage patterns.
- Two methods of data capture - audio and video recording.

These triangulation techniques and the keeping of a research journal enhanced the level of trustworthiness in the research.

## 6. Limitations

Apart from the trustworthiness limitations examined above there were a number of other limitations that need to be addressed. The method of sampling (non-probability) combined with the small sample size (n=35) severely restricts the generalisability of the findings. However it is not the intention of this research to generalise the findings to the Western Australian population; rather it aimed to provide potential areas of interest on which further qualitative and quantitative research could be based. The trustworthiness dilemma caused by the convenient and limited recruitment techniques of participants must also be acknowledged.

Another question of data generalisability emerged with the varied question structure and sequence of questioning during focus groups. Trustworthiness of the research through controlled and systematic questioning did not occur due to the informal, variable and spontaneous nature of the group discussions (Goldman & McDonald, 1987). Whilst the interviewer attempted to use the semi-structured list of focus group questions as a solid framework for the focus groups, the spontaneous and unprompted nature of the participants made it difficult to maintain consistent questioning between all groups. Nonetheless richer data was gained because of the use of flexible questioning. The semi-structured focus group questions covered key topics and themes that were directed across all groups. This semi-structured approach allowed for a successful comparison of the data between all user groups.

The inexperience of the interviewer in running the focus groups could have proven a limitation. By being aware of this potential limitation the interviewer liaised as often as possible with supervisors and other postgraduate students to assess questioning techniques, topics, and focus group approaches. The pilot focus group also assisted in increasing researcher confidence and ability. A lack of experience may also have affected the researcher's coding ability. This may have impacted on the

depth of coding reached as well as the effective development of interpretations. To overcome this, the researcher met with the primary supervisor regularly to confirm the most appropriate and practical coding processes and methods of data interpretation.

It is acknowledged that the researcher is very interested and knowledgeable in the subject of olive oil. This undoubtedly created a certain element of researcher bias. However, it also allowed the researcher to have an instant comprehension of what participants were discussing and their thoughts about and feelings towards olive oil. The researcher's disclosure of this pertinent personal information at the beginning of the focus group may have acted to intimidate some participants and this may have resulted in poor quality data being collected. The researcher chose to disclose this information because of ethical considerations and to encourage trust between the researcher and the participants. The researcher attempted to approach the topic of olive oil with "new eyes" and "new ears" (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989) so that the researcher's thoughts and feelings did not cloud or taint those of the participants. The researcher reduced this bias by asking very neutral questions and limiting any expression of personal views and beliefs during the data collection phase (as per Krueger, 2000). The researcher went to great lengths to put participants at ease and to reinforce that there were no 'wrong' answers.

It became evident that more demographic data could have been collected in the participant questionnaire collected at the focus group. The preliminary literature review did not reveal such factors as being necessarily important. This information would have provided a stronger line of reasoning for the roles of restaurants and the frequency of eating out on influencing olive oil use and consumption, but given the exploratory nature of this study, these points have been highlighted for further research.

Time and resources have limited this research to people living only in the metropolitan area of Perth, Western Australia. It is possible that the



findings could have been more diverse had the participants come from different Australian locations and cultures.

The researcher also acknowledges the challenge involved with running a focus group with mothers and babies. Distractions caused by babies may have unsettled the flow of the group discussions and negatively influenced participant input. These interruptions also clearly disadvantaged the parent's involvement and discussions in the focus groups. This challenge could have been minimised by asking that participants do not bring children or babies to the group. Although the researcher has experienced a significant learning curve as a result of this research, it is hoped that the results of this study prove both valuable and significant.

## **7. Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the research methodology used to address the research questions discussed in chapter 1. Firstly it explained the reasoning behind undertaking a grounded approach and the motivation behind selecting a qualitative design incorporating focus groups. This was followed by a detailed assessment of the various methods used to undertake the research. It explains the target and sample populations, the assignment of a level of involvement to participants and the instruments, equipment and materials used to accumulate the data. This was followed by a detailed documentation of the data collection procedure and the data analysis method used by the researcher. The concept of trustworthiness was then addressed and a number of methodological limitations were then offered.

This comprehensive research process has enabled a thick description of the role that olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian olive oil users. The following two chapters consider these findings, and document how and why olive oil is used, what influences olive oil consumption, what purchasing patterns are present and what are the barriers and motivators to current and future use.

## **Chapter 4. The Use of Olive Oil**

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### **1. Introduction**

The focus of this study is to explore the role that olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian olive oil consumers. To do this it is important to gain a fundamental insight into consumers' general views about the usage of olive oil. This chapter begins with a discussion on involvement as a construct for olive oil use. It then documents how olive oil is utilised in the homes of participants. This is followed by an exploration of what influences affect participant's olive oil usage and what perceptions about olive oil exist. Initial discussions indicated that the types and ways of using olive oil were diverse and wide-ranging.

The exploration of influences on olive oil use is followed by a discussion on why participants use olive oil and a review of the key motives for using it. An exploration of participants' use of fats and oils in general (including butter, margarine, canola oil and vegetable oil) can be found in Appendix nine.

Figure 4.1 on the following page has been created to highlight and simplify the overarching relationships and findings between the different user groups, their level of involvement with olive oil, their consumption behaviour, and the influences on and motives for olive oil use.

### **2. Involvement with Olive Oil**

After data collection, a score was assigned to each participant in order to frame the level of involvement with olive oil of each participant (see chapter 3, section 4.2). It was found that participants did have a level of involvement with olive oil as a single product.

Olive oil Involvement Level	Olive Oil Usage	Consumption Behaviour			Influences on Olive Oil Use			Motives for Use			
		Culinary	Non Culinary	Self Imposed Restrictions	Changing Social Trends	Impact of Family and Friends	Media Television Magazines Books	Aesthetic	Functional	Habitual	Symbolic
<b>High-involvement</b>	Regular use	Both cooking and eating oil used regularly	Medicinal, cosmetic and gift giving	Important.  Related to healthy eating, watching amount of fat consumed	Very important. Increased awareness, acceptance and exposure to olive oil. Multi-culturalism	Very important. Endorsement. Share 'product' and 'how to use' knowledge. Ethnic friends (Italian) - increase exposure	Some importance	Very important. Flavour & aroma. Hedonic driven (especially eating oil)	Cooking oil - important but eating oil - not important	Very important , Upbringing and influence of friends and family - always used olive oil, travel	Some importance - especially eating oil
<b>Medium-involvement</b>		Mostly cooking oil and some eating oils					Very important - endorsement and information tool				Moderate importance - flavour
<b>Low-involvement</b>	Infrequent use	Cooking oil only	Medicinal some cosmetic		Little importance	Some importance - many friends also don't use	Moderate to increasing importance	Not important	Very important. Functional use. Health Benefits. Easy to use.	Not important	Not important

Figure 4.1 A proposed relationship between level of food involvement, olive oil usage and marketing implications.

However it also became evident that a distinct level of involvement with food in general was also shown. Many participants of all age groups talked about olive oil in a similar vein and at the same time that they talked of other food products including pasta, wine, bread and vinegars. It became clear that the scores assigned to a level of olive oil involvement could be directly transferred to a level of involvement with food.

For example, the high-involvement regular users who enjoyed and commented on the importance of flavour and taste of olive oil, also talked about the importance of having flavoursome cheese and good bread. Throughout the focus groups and findings it was clear that, for these participants, the same measure of involvement could be allocated both to olive oil specifically and to food generally. Thus, where the term involvement is used after this it is referring to olive oil and food.

### **3. Changes in Food and Eating Culture**

As will be discussed later, the data suggest that social and eating habits, including eating out, changes in cuisine, and the ability to sample oils before purchasing, may play an important role in influencing olive oil use. Other factors such as an increase in people's interest in food and their willingness to experiment, as well as the positive effect of travel, may also play a role in influencing olive oil use.

A key contributing factor in encouraging participants to start using and to continue using olive oil has been a change in eating practices. In the last ten years, regular-use and some infrequent-use participants have changed both the way and environment in which they consume food. Participants indicated that the triggers to this change included; an increase in the availability of a larger and more diverse selection of foods types, ingredients and cuisines, food providers being open seven days a week, the affordability of eating out and the cosmopolitan culture and climate of Western Australia. Steve talked about the factors that have both

influenced his olive oil consumption over the last five years, and his views on how it 'fits in' with his lifestyle:

Steve (RU) [Regular User]: I think it's been a thing of trends. It became the trendy thing for oil dipping...it's more accepted. It's like a fashion issue almost, like the cuisine that we eat is more conducive to olive oil, being a bit more Mediterranean in WA. It suits the lifestyle of Perth, myself as well, what I'm eating and what's going on at the same time. I don't see it as being special oil, but it fits everything well. Like salad and seafood and stuff like that - pastas and that sort of stuff.

Not only did Steve talk about olive oil but he also talked about food in the same manner. So, crucially, one could argue that olive oil cannot be viewed discreetly, but as part of a wider approach to food.

All of these catalysts have led to a greater awareness and recognition of olive oil both outside and inside of the home. Many regular medium-involvement and high-involvement participants commented on how olive oil is now acknowledged as an acceptable and healthier oil (discussed later) and how it had become part of their regular ingredient list. One participant stressed how her usage of olive oil had increased because olive oil was becoming more acceptable:

Emily (RU): We've been brought up to believe that oil is not healthy for us. That's the way everyone thinks...I suppose too that in the last few years - things have changed in how we eat, and so olive oil has become acceptable. It's just been in your face really that you can use olive oil today, and these are the things you can do with it. And it's probably been [the] last six to eight years. And I probably started to use it more because it was all right, all of a sudden, to use it. It wasn't sort of like a taboo thing.

The increasing frequency in eating out has had a marked influence on both the awareness of olive oil and its use in participants' homes. For many participants, experiencing olive oil for the first time had been whilst dining at restaurants and cafes. As expected, in the beginning most were a little surprised and sceptical about the yellow-green, oily liquid on the table, but over time it had become regularly accepted by these diners. Regular-user participants talked freely about experiencing olive oil and bread on tables, in pastas and poured over foods. In many instances the olive oil brand was also printed on menus. In a similar vein to endorsement by television chefs (discussed later in this chapter), a number of regular users made comments that they used certain brands because the chefs and restaurants used them:

Christine (RU): If you see a chef using it, you'll try it...You know if [the chef] is going to use it, it has to be good quality as well and that may persuade you a bit.

Another influence on usage was the ability to try the oils before purchase. Many participants, both regular and infrequent users, commented on having tasted or seen olive oil for tasting at food markets, wineries, supermarkets, olive grove cellar doors, and at special events and exhibitions. By tasting and talking about the oils with sales staff they were able to determine what oils they liked and disliked. This allowed their knowledge and confidence in the product to grow and resulted in an increase in use.

A number of the higher involvement regular user participants mentioned that their interest in food and confidence in both olive oil and food in general had spurred them to use more olive oil. They were inquisitive about food and enjoyed trying it out in lots of different ways. They felt comfortable with olive oil and were willing to experiment with it. A number of participants explained that they liked getting ideas and experimented through trial and error in their own kitchens. This experimentation included the use of different oils for different dishes, changing recipes in baking,

dipping with bread, and for cooking foods not traditionally associated with olive oil (eggs and bacon). These participants also talked about and showed the same enthusiasm for food, eating and wine in the same way as olive oil.

It is important to note here that only the medium to high-involvement participants made comments on having an increased interest in food, and that they were willing to try out new things and experiment. A small number of infrequent user participants talked in the future tense about using it more, and they hoped to experiment with it more once they knew more about it. Some displayed an interest in food as a whole and were keen to hear about olive oil from the other focus group members. However, generally speaking, the majority of infrequent users exhibited little enthusiasm for olive oil.

For some participants, experiencing olive oil in different environments and cultures has influenced their usage. One participant recollected her time in Italy when travelling. She remembered olive oil being used on everything. It was just a natural thing for her to use when she returned home and began cooking. Several others recalled their travels to Melbourne where they experienced an abundance of olive oil in the Italian and Mediterranean cafes and restaurants. An interesting comment made by Craig, a regular user, clarifies that he first gained his desire for olive oil by travelling from New Zealand to Australia:

Craig (RU): I was brought up in New Zealand where butter was cheap, and it was ground into you at a very young age that [butter] was all you used. It wasn't until I came to Australia 20 odd years ago where I saw olive oil as a product of interest, and then used it on an escalating basis from there.

## **4. How Olive Oil is Used**

The following analysis explores how olive oil is used in the domestic household. Data from the focus groups indicated that olive oil was utilised in many applications including both culinary and non-culinary uses. The different grades of olive oil mentioned by participants are addressed and then the culinary applications of olive oil are examined. This is followed by a discussion about non-culinary applications. Insights into the ways in which participants limited their use of olive oil are then discussed.

### **4.1 The Different Grades of Olive Oil Used**

Throughout the focus groups, participants referred to a variety of different grades of olive oils that they use, for example extra virgin olive oil, pure oil and light olive oil. A hierarchical table showing different perceived quality levels of olive oil and the associated prices was created by the researcher using participant comments in combination with current bottle prices. Figure 4.2 below categorises the oils from the perceived highest quality to lowest quality. This was designed to help in the understanding of how different groups of participants classify the varied quality levels of olive oil. Price was the quality cue most discussed by participants. Therefore different prices have been used to highlight the varying quality levels of olive oil. Country of origin and place of purchase have been included to provide a slightly more detailed description of the grades of oils used. Different participants used these oils for diverse applications and for varied reasons, and these are discussed at length throughout the remaining of this chapter.

### **4.2 The Two Oils**

The findings pointed toward a bilateral approach to culinary olive oil usage. A number of comments (mostly by regular users) indicated that having one type of olive oil was not always suitable for every kind of culinary application. Although not all participants practised this dual use at home, it was significant to note that a small number of infrequent users



and a large number of regular users commented about being aware that there were different oils for different purposes. The following remarks of Richard and Dave typified this bilateral idea:

Dave (RU): Anything I buy from the supermarket, it's definitely something I'm going to cook with. If it's going to be from a gourmet store, which I have done before, and wineries for instance, it's something that I will dip the bread in.

Richard (RU): Straight olive oil [supermarket cooking oil] - usually that's all that I need, we cook with one lot of olive oil; we have another better quality for salad dressing and things like that.

Thus, the main theme evolving from the many regular user participants' comments was that olive oil use needed to be divided into two types. The first type was more utilitarian, functional and practical in nature and involved using olive oil as a medium in food preparation and cooking. For example one might employ olive oil for cooking, frying or baking. The majority of this type of olive oil tended to be cheap, bought 'on special' and usually purchased in supermarkets (see figure 4.2). For the infrequent-users, this functional style of olive oil usage appeared to be the most significant. Although the regular users also used olive oil in the same utilitarian way, an additional type of usage emerged from the data.

The second type of practice was more aesthetic and sensory in character. Participants used olive oil when they desired flavour, colour, and taste. This olive oil was always extra virgin quality and was seen as more of an independent ingredient that could be used to enhance foods and flavour, and not just something to cook with. The primary objective with this type of usage was to enjoy the raw olive flavour and aroma of the oil. One participant made the distinction between cooking and eating oil based on the taste required. She used the example of deep-frying potatoes where

she would not use the more expensive olive oil, whereas when making simple pasta with fresh herbs and garlic she would want to use eating oil for the flavour and aromas.

Olive oil used in this way was either eaten (for example dipping with bread), used to finish a meal before serving it (pouring it over grilled fish and vegetables) or as a dressing for salads and pasta. All of these uses are driven by being able to taste and enjoy the freshness and flavours of the olive oil.

This style of usage was more evident among the regular users of olive oil and also the medium to high-involvement participants. For ease of comprehension the two types of usage will be referred to as cooking oil and eating oil.

#### **4.2.1 The 'Cooking Oil'**

The first type of usage was functional in nature and involved using olive oil as a cooking and food preparation ingredient. This cooking oil category incorporated a variety of different oil qualities including pure olive oil, light and extra light olive oil, and virgin and extra virgin olive oil quality (see figure 4.2). The notion of using olive oil to cook with was familiar to all participants. Throughout all of the focus groups there tended to be a generic reference to using olive oil to 'cook' with. It appeared to be a very common term used by all participants to explain what they did with it and how they used it. The following dialogue shows the immediate responses of participants from one regular user focus group after being asked how often they use olive oil. This conversation highlighted how the generic word 'cook' was used and the level of frequency with which olive oil is used:

Highest Quality	Olive oil Type	Oil Origin	Type of Usage Cooking versus Eating		Place of Purchase	Average Price for a 500ml bottle
			Infrequent Users Application	Regular Users Application		
	Premium Extra Virgin Olive Oil	Australian and Imported <sup>1</sup>	Not used	Used for eating only	Specialty and Gourmet Outlets	\$22.00 + <sup>2</sup>
	Extra Virgin Olive Oil	Australian		Used for eating and some cooking	Supermarket	\$8.35 <sup>3</sup>
		Imported	Small amounts used for medicinal and specific recipes. No eating.	Eating and cooking		\$6.75
	Virgin Olive Oil		Used for cooking only and salad dressings	Used for cooking only		\$6.00
	Olive Oil		Used for cooking only			\$5.90
	Light Olive Oil					\$5.85
	Extra Light Olive Oil		Used for cooking only and salad dressings	\$5.85		
	Pure Olive Oil		Rarely used for cooking	Rarely used for cooking		\$5.48
	Extra Virgin Olive Oil – Home Brand					\$4.90
Lowest Quality						

Figure 4.2 The relationship between different types of olive oil, their applications and their quality levels.

<sup>1</sup> Imported refers to olive oil imported from European and Mediterranean producing countries.

<sup>2</sup> This price is an average based on the author's own experience with dealing with specialty and gourmet outlets.

<sup>3</sup> These supermarket oil prices are an average price for each oil grade gained from supermarket sales scan data.

Interviewer: How often do you use olive oil?

Annabel (RU): Every time I cook. Most days.

Amanda (RU): Yeah. Often.

Steve (RU): Every time I cook. Every day.

Both regular and infrequent users at all involvement levels suggested certain specific functional uses for cooking oil. The most significant were those where heat was used for cooking and included frying and baking. Those participants who referred to frying with olive oil, used words like fry, pan fry and shallow fry and the most common food types discussed using these methods included eggs, bacon, fish, onions and other vegetables. Deep-frying was a term used in reference to other oils including canola and vegetable. This may be due to the cost involved with buying the volumes of oil required for deep-frying. Although it was used in a small number of instances for Asian cookery, olive oil was not commonly used for stir-fries and Asian frying. There were other infrequent references to using olive oil and these included barbecuing, marinating, and grilling.

Although butter and margarine were probably used most for baking, many recalled sometimes using olive oil for the same purpose. Participants had used cooking oil in both sweet (cakes, muffins) and savoury (bread) applications. Below Alison talks about her experiences with olive oil and baking:

Alison (RU): I have encountered people who think it's really odd to use olive oil in cakes or in cooking... I've even done it [use olive oil] in what they call a light chocolate cake, and I thought "Oh here we go, it's probably just going to go flop if it's olive oil". It didn't. Delicious and no one who tried it said they got a funny taste. I thought 'I'm sure I'll taste this, because I know how much I poured into it'. I couldn't taste it.

A large number of participants did not know that olive oil could be used for baking, or how they would go about using it in this manner. Both regular user and infrequent-user participants shared this thinking:

Dave (RU): I didn't even know that people used it in baking because I don't bake. I love cooking, but I never thought you'd substitute it in a cake.

Amy (IU) [Infrequent User]: I use it for savoury cooking. I'd like to do the cross over thing into sweets because I'd like to make my cakes with it, but I don't know how to. I still haven't worked out the conversion on that either. I'm a bit slow.

There were a number of regular users who used olive oil in this way, but it became evident from infrequent-users that they were not confident or knowledgeable about how to make these substitutions. After hearing about other participants' experiences with baking, Amy and Dave (as well as others) showed an interest in experimenting and using olive oil for baking in the future.

Cooking oils were also used to stop food from sticking to pans, frypans and other cooking utensils. Olive oils used in this manner were in either liquid or aerosol spray form. Many referred to using it to specifically line baking tins and to stop crumbed food sticking to pans.

#### **4.2.2 The 'Eating Oil'**

It was only the regular users of olive oil who talked about using different olive oils for cooking and for eating. The discussions suggested that having separate oils for varied uses was a relatively recent practice. Only in the last five to ten years had most participants made this differentiation. On many occasions this oil was also referred to as 'special' oil, the 'top notch stuff' and the 'good stuff'. Eating oils were always discussed as being of extra virgin quality.

There were a number of ways in which participants used olive oil as 'eating oil'. The practice of using it in salad dressings was very common among the regular and higher involvement users, but not among the infrequent-users. The low-to medium-involvement participants used lesser quality cooking olive oils to make salad dressings and these tended to be from the generic olive and virgin olive oil grade (see figure 4.2). Many of the infrequent-users had never made a salad dressing. These participants buy ready-made dressings from supermarkets. However, interest was shown by these consumers in learning how to make them:

Amy (IU): I buy [salad dressings]. I've always wanted to know [how to make one], you see I don't know how to use olive oils. I'm more of a supermarket buyer – I'll buy whatever. I wouldn't know which one to buy, but I love doing that cooking thing because I feel clever when I make things that taste good. But I don't know how to make them [salad dressings]. I buy all my salad dressings and pretend I made them.

Many regular users utilised eating oil to dip bread into and often balsamic vinegar was added to the oil for extra flavour. On several occasions the Middle Eastern spice mix called dukkah was mentioned as an additional dipping ingredient, and it was common for people to dip bread into both the olive oil and dukkah. A number of infrequent users appeared quite shocked at the idea of dipping bread into oil and eating it. When asked about sampling complimentary olive oil in supermarkets, Pru's intense facial expressions and tone of voice further indicated that the idea of tasting and eating olive oil with bread was revolting:

Pru (IU): I bypass them. [Uninterested look on face].

Chris (IU): I've never seen them in supermarkets.

Pru: No, but I've seen them [bread and oils] at the grower's market down in Midland and the oils are all different.

Interviewer: Pru, I saw you screw your face up at that sort of concept. Do you see olive oil as a fat or as a negative kind of thing?

Pru: A negative kind of thing. I mean dipping your bread into fat. [*Facial expression indicating disgust*].

As noted earlier, another way in which olive oil was used was pouring over foods. Participants talked about dripping olive oil on food at home, experiencing food that had been sprinkled with oil in restaurants and seeing it used in this manner on television. Several participants also used their hands and body language to indicate drizzling and splashing oil over food. A small number of high-involvement regular-use participants talked about using olive oil with seafood and shellfish. It should be noted that when participants talked about using eating olive oil with seafood they invariably added pasta and salads to the same sentence. Olive oil usage with seafood in particular was not explicitly explored, but there were mentions of drizzling it over fish and tossing it with seafood.

A number of references were made to eating oils being used as a liquid for marinating fetta cheeses, sun dried tomatoes and other vegetables. Many participants had also used infused olive oils. These had either been purchased, received as a gift or were made by the participants with such flavourings as chilli, herbs and garlic. In some cases a small number of regular use participants also suggested that they had used cooking oil for marinating and infusing. It is worth noting that a number of participants declared that if they were given such oils they were always a little sceptical of the product. Jacquie's apprehension was obvious:

Jacquie (RU): It takes me a while to use something like that [infused oil] and I don't really trust them...You just never know what's in it, how long it's been there or who's bottled it. The actual amount of flavouring they always have, the actual

pieces of flavouring floating inside, I guess you don't want those impeding the flavour of the food.

Both eating and cooking oils were also referred to when participants talked about pasta. Cooking oil was referred to by both regular-users and infrequent-users for adding to the water in which the pasta cooked as well as being used to prepare the pasta sauce. However it was only the regular users who discussed the idea of adding eating oil after the pasta was cooked and who used it as a dressing, sauce or flavouring ingredient. The comments below document two regular users' thoughts on olive oil with pasta:

Dave (RU): Five years ago - I enjoy my cooking but I would never have thought of just a plain pasta dish with some fetta, and just drizzle some olive oil on. I would never in my life have thought I would call that a meal, but now I do.

Anne (RU): When you are tossing it through pasta with sun dried tomatoes, I think I look at that, and feel like it does take out that starchy feel of your pasta, and you think - WOW – this feels good [excited tone].

### **4.3 Non-Culinary Uses**

Alternative non-culinary uses were mentioned by both regular user and infrequent-user groups. These included medicinal, cosmetic and gift giving uses. There were a number of references made specifically to drinking and eating raw olive oil regularly for its health benefits and the oil most commonly used was a cooking oil or an olive oil purchased from a health food shop. Alison talks about the effect that drinking olive oil has had on her sister:

Alison (RU): I watched my sister drink it, and I just couldn't understand why she didn't put on a lot of weight. And her skin and her hair is just exceptional. She's the proof that [olive oil] definitely helped her.



Several references were also made concerning how olive oil had been used at home to condition the skin and hair and how it had been used to treat excessively dry skin and cradle cap. These uses for olive oil were both by ingestion and topical application. One participant commented on the effectiveness of olive oil as a preventative for stretch marks during and after pregnancy while another used olive oil for both massage and to stop earaches.

The giving and receiving of olive oil as a gift was also discussed by the regular users of olive oil. It was interesting that infrequent-users did not raise the idea of olive oil for gift giving. Many regular-use participants had received and or given eating oils as gifts. Data collected indicated that this was a significant way in which people sourced eating oils. Alison, a regular user, noted the positive aspect of this ritual:

And I've also encountered it as very trendy in gift giving at dinners, and it's nice to personally take advantage of that...It's a really favourably accepted gift – it's not seen as some daggy present.

#### **4.4 Restricted Use**

On many occasions a level of restraint in the use of both cooking and eating oil was observed in both regular and infrequent user groups. This restraint applied to both olive oil and other oils. Although olive oil is used in quite a variety of ways, many participants talked about limiting, reducing or controlling the amount of oil they used. The main reason for reducing the usage of oils appeared to be health oriented and will be discussed later in this chapter. Both regular-users and infrequent users talked about the methods that they utilised to reduce their oil intake:

Lucy (IU): You don't need a lot of oil for cooking. With bacon you don't need oil at all because it just gives off fat and when you move it to one side and then put the eggs in and cook the eggs in the bacon fat it's fine. You don't need more fat.

Linda (RU): I think, “Do I really need to use this? Or can I get away with cooking without it?” If it’s a roast or something like that I don’t add it. If it is a roast I’ll put water on the base and use the fat off the roasting meat to cook, and then just add veggies. But if I’m just cooking veggies on my own then I’ll drizzle a little over, but generally I always feel that I don’t need it.

There appeared to be a general consensus that although olive oil is seen as a ‘good fat’, it was still regularly viewed as an ingredient for which consumption and usage needed to be controlled.

## **5. Influences on Current Usage**

When participants were asked to talk about what influenced their olive oil use, a number of significant suggestions emerged. The most commonly cited influences affecting the changing usage of olive oil (in reference to the number of participant responses) related to the change in Australian food and eating culture as discussed earlier. This was followed by the role and impact of family and friends and the influence of the media, television, advertising, recipes and magazine publications. Even among the infrequent user group with limited olive oil use, these issues were reported to affect their usage patterns. These issues are discussed below.

### **5.1 The Role and Impact of Family and Friends**

Family and friends provide a foundation of shaping and creating an array of consumption patterns for different foods. This includes both trying new foods and changing to different styles of food (De Castro, 1995). Apart from changing culture and cuisine, the most highly discussed and noted influence on participants’ olive oil usage was the effect of family and friends. This was a theme familiar to both user groups and across all levels of involvement. The data indicated that family and friends influence olive oil usage in a number of ways. Family personal history and upbringing had an influence on olive oil use as did friends and relatives.

Friends and family were responsible for showing and recommending to others how to use olive oil and for educating people about it.

### **5.1.1 Personal History and Upbringing**

Most regular-use participants talked about how friends and family were an important motivating factor in both starting to use these products, and the continued use of olive oil. Many talked about olive oil being part of their own personal history and upbringing. As is often the case, people who are exposed to certain products as children more readily accept their use of them in their adult lives (Laroche, Chankon, & Tomiuk, 1998). Joanne, a regular user of olive oil, talked about how her family and her upbringing has affected the way she uses olive oil:

[Olive oil] is the way I have always known from when I was little. My grandparents always used olive oil. I probably wouldn't think to use something else; it's automatically the olive oil I use.

For these participants it seemed that the normal thing to do was to continue purchasing olive oil and using it in the same manner as their parents had. This may be because they wished to continue using olive oil to sustain links with their traditional heritage or because it was a familiar and trusted product to use. Interestingly, there appeared to be no evidence of using eating oil due to upbringing. A generic reference was made only to 'olive oil' in this manner.

For those participants bought up in a Mediterranean family context, cooking oil was the type automatically used. The decision to use eating oil appeared to have been influenced more recently (in the last five to ten years) by other stimuli including TV Chefs, restaurants and friends. This may suggest that eating oil consumption does not have its origins in Mediterranean cuisine as many participants seemed to imply. However, it was not only those participants with Mediterranean backgrounds who commented on using cooking oil in this way. Steve was one of a number

of participants with Australian parentage and his comments highlighted the effect of family on his olive oil usage:

Steve (RU): I think [it was] family - that was the thing, we always used to have big tubs of oil. And I still buy oil like that, from habit I suppose.

Participants like Steve talked about using eating olive oil with bread, using it to dress pasta and tomatoes but the rest of the olive oil he used was cooking oil. It is interesting to note that this positive relationship was not always the case. One infrequent-user had been exposed to olive oil his entire life, but he had never liked it, and rarely used it because of the strong flavour he felt it had.

A number of infrequent user participants disclosed that because olive oil was not part of their upbringing, they were not knowledgeable about it or great users of it. For some it was perceived as something 'foreign' and for others it was nothing of interest. Several had been told by their parents and older friends and family to stay away from olive oil and it was therefore never really understood. The effect of this lack of olive oil exposure had a notable effect on several infrequent-users of the product:

Betty (IU): Growing up in a very conservative family you don't get exposed to all these different European cooking and tastes.

Pru (IU): We didn't grow up on olive oil at all. We had lard on the farm. Animal fat, which is really gross now...I didn't grow up on olive oil, didn't know much about it; still don't know a lot about it.

Although several infrequent-user's consumption of olive oil was still minimal, these participants talked about this negative effect in the past tense. Their consumption behaviour had changed and they talked about how they had slowly increased their usage from nothing to occasionally.

This was due to seeing others (friends and media) use it, and for its perceived health benefits.

### **5.1.2 Friends and Family as Demonstrators, Advocates and Educators**

Generally, most regular and non regular-use participants talked about the way in which family and friends acted as information providers about olive oil. By spending time with people who both understood and regularly used olive oil, participants started to learn how, when and why to use it. The idea of using different oils for different applications was often introduced to users by their friends and family.

Several regular-use participants talked of learning about olive oil whilst partaking in celebrations, meals and events with family and friends. Others started to use olive oil when they lived with friends or partners who were regular olive oil users. It was also established that many participant's usage stemmed from both tasting and watching olive oil being used in the kitchens, on barbecues, and in food at the houses of friends and family.

In particular, many participants spoke about the influence of their friends of Italian and Mediterranean ethnic origin. Many comments referred to the value of these people and their influence on olive oil use. Sam, a regular user, talked about this:

I remember my earliest experience was actually at a friend's house, an Italian who made this amazing tomato and Spanish onion salad just in a flat dish. It had olive oil all over it, and it was just 'WOW'. It was an amazing experience. I remember thinking, "It's covered in oil and how can it taste so good?" That's probably my first real experience of good oil.

Directly related to being shown how to use olive oil was the education theme. Sam goes on to tell how her Australian mother's knowledge impacted on her own use:

I most probably started five or six years ago when I first started to have friends over for parties on my own, and remember making Turkish bread and dips. I used vegetable oil and my mum said "What you are doing – NO". We tried both oils and I thought, "Oh, it does taste better." So that's when I first started, and then she started telling me more about the differences between the oils.

In addition to older family members teaching the younger generation about olive oil, there were also instances of the younger generation teaching the more senior members. A number of infrequent-user participants in the 51+ age group mentioned that their use was as a result of their children. Although they could not be classified as regular users, these participants' usage is on the increase. For Gretta, the influence of her daughters was an important issue:

My girls are 23 and 20 years old. They've got older and they've got interested in cooking. They experiment with things that I wouldn't have made, probably, and they've started using it [olive oil], so we've all started.

The power of recommendations by friends, family and acquaintances had a strong influence on olive oil use for regular and infrequent users. Even during the focus groups, participants gained ideas from other group members on how to use oil:

Ruby (IU): I would never have thought to even make a dressing, but now that these ladies have said they use it in dressings I will go home now and probably try it.

However, there was not a direct association between the influence of friends and family and usage across all user groups. Although the infrequent users discussed being influenced by friends and family, their

usage remained limited compared to that of the frequent users. This may be because of their low-involvement with olive oil and food in general, combined with a lack of olive oil knowledge and a lack of wanting to use it.

## **5.2 Media and Publications**

For many people, the media, publications and advertising are important sources for information about food, beverage, nutrition and eating (Nestle et al., 1998). Participants suggested that the media and written publications such as magazines and cook books have had a significant influence on their olive oil usage. Both regular users and the infrequent users appeared to be influenced by these factors to some degree or another.

The impact of television cooking shows on olive oil usage was noted by a great number of participants of both user groups, all involvement levels and both genders. However the effect of these shows appeared most significant for the medium-involvement regular users who talked about the effect that people like Jamie Oliver, Jeff Janz, Ian Hewitson, Rick Stein and other TV personality chefs had on both their initial olive oil use as well as their current use:

Nicky (RU): And those cooking shows, whenever I watched them, I wanted to do what they did and drizzle olive oil over everything. I still do want to do that.

Although some comments and body language indicated embarrassment when talking about watching such programmes (especially by the male participants), they still acknowledged that they had enjoyed the shows and had learnt from them. Participants alluded to a number of ways in which these influences impacted on their views about and use of olive oil. For many, seeing chefs use olive oil on television created an awareness of the product and re-affirmed that it was acceptable to use it in the kitchen.

It appeared that the impact of seeing these chefs ‘splash’ and ‘drizzle’ olive oil over everything gave many participants enough confidence to start utilising olive oil and to be more experimental with it. Participants also indicated that by seeing how easily it could be used and what food combinations it could be applied to, they had increased the volume and frequency of their olive oil consumption. Although Cheryl was an infrequent user, these cooking shows had an impact on her use:

Lifestyle programmes are getting me to use more...I’m just more experimental now. I keep thinking, ‘How the hell do they make that?’ and ‘Oh – it’s not that hard’. So when you can see them doing it once, I will do it myself.

Apart from cooking shows, a number of other media and publications played a role in influencing olive oil usage. Participants talked about the value of olive oil recipes in aspirational specialty magazines like House and Garden and Australian Gourmet Traveller. It is worthy of note that it was the regular users who found more benefit from this type of publication. A number of the infrequent users talked of reading a selection of more generic household magazines (New Idea, Women’s Weekly) in relation to olive oil. However, with the aspirational magazines being substantially more expensive than these generic publications, the less involved infrequent user participants suggested that the cost of these aspirational publications was too prohibitive to purchase.

A number of high-involvement and medium-involvement regular users remembered seeing olive oil advertisements in these aspirational magazines as well as in newspapers. When asked about the idea of brand reinforcement and olive oil, one participant talked about the effect of advertising on her shopping and purchasing behaviour:

Emily (RU): I also think advertising is probably more powerful than what other people say. [You remember] such and such a brand name. You have a tendency when you go



shopping and you're in a bit of a hurry; 'I've heard about that one - that'll do', and you take it.

Recipes were also discussed as influencing factors on both user groups' olive oil use. These recipes came from cook books, magazines, the back of olive oil bottles and tear-off pamphlets at the supermarket. A number of participants reported that they had noticed an increase in the number of recipes that included olive oil as an ingredient. Generally, it was the regular users who spoke about getting food and menu ideas as well as olive oil recipes from such sources and who were happy to experiment with them. The infrequent users made no references to current usage because of recipes. However, they did allude to potentially using it in the future if it featured in more recipes. When asked about what would make them use more olive oil, the following answer summarised many infrequent users' responses:

Betty (IU): Just trying out different recipes. Just trying out something new where you would need to use the olive oil.

These media influences have had a significant influence on participant olive oil usage. Cooking shows, advertising recipes, and magazines have all contributed to bringing olive oil into the homes of participants. These participants have been able to learn and read about olive oil and see how and when to use it. The data indicated that the increase in knowledge and confidence gained from exposure to these media has resulted in participants using more olive oil and using it more frequently.

### **5.3 An Interaction of Influences**

In many instances a combination of these key influencing factors acted as an instigator for olive oil usage amongst participants. After being asked how he first started using olive oil, Jeremy's immediate response illustrated the importance of many influencing factors:

For me, I always knew it existed, because my old man used to cook with it and stuff like that. Not as much as he does

now - but also in the beginning I got a bit swayed by media, especially by the health benefits and things like that. But I'm also a big fan of Jamie Oliver.

Jeremy's response was representative and typical of many regular olive oil users. Further questioning of many regular users highlighted that these key-instigating factors played an important role in influencing current olive oil consumption patterns and behaviour.

## **6. Why do people use olive oil?**

To gain a further understanding of olive oil usage in Western Australia it is important to look at why people use olive oil in general and then more specifically why they choose extra virgin olive oil. There were many motives for use reported, especially among the regular users. These motives rarely worked independently of each other as it was usually a combination of factors that succeeded in motivating participants to use olive oil. The key motives for using olive oil were utilitarian, aesthetic, habitual and symbolic in nature. These reasons were also inter-related with varying methods of usage.

### **6.1 Functional Motives**

The most significant motive for use was that participants simply needed an oil ingredient with which to cook. Olive oil was predominantly treated by all participants as a functional ingredient. Olive oil was needed for cooking food. However, for the high involvement and, to a degree, the medium involvement regular user, olive oil was also the preferred oil. Health benefits, ease of use, flavour and self-image appeared to be key triggers for choosing olive oil over other vegetable oils and fats (all of which are addressed further in the paper). The main reasons for using olive oil in a functional way were firstly to cook food so it was edible (fish, meat, eggs); second to stop food sticking to pans and baking equipment; third to increase the variety of cooking and food preparation methods used in the

home (frying, roasting, baking and dressing); and last to gain nutritional benefits.

Food preparation and cooking motives were discussed throughout all the focus groups. The initial motive for using olive oil was always reported to be a practical culinary one so that food could be prepared and cooked to make it more palatable and edible. Although this was not openly commented on by participants, all focus group discussions indicated that this was a very important reason for using olive oil.

In terms of the concentration of participant responses, practical cooking and food preparation factors were closely followed by olive oil's health benefits as important reasons for choosing oil and for using olive oil over other types of oil. A significant number of participants perceived olive oil as a healthy ingredient and referred to it as 'the good oil'. In fact, most of the responses to the 'why do you use olive oil?' question encapsulated both sensory and health rationales. The motive of health was a familiar theme found in both regular user and infrequent user responses.

However, for infrequent-users the nutritional and health benefits appeared to be more important as a motive for use than were sensory factors. This may be because this group's level of involvement with olive oil and food in general was much lower than the regular users, and flavour and taste were not as important. The only attributes that these infrequent user groups indicated and demonstrated an understanding about were olive oil's functional uses as a cooking medium and a tool to gain certain nutritional benefits.

Selections of various health-related topics were discussed by all participants in relation to olive oil usage. Many participants talked of wanting to learn more about the health benefits of olive oil. Most were in agreement that acquiring information had occurred relatively recently, with

most information being acquired in the last six to ten years. Some participants mentioned that it was good for cholesterol levels, and several others focused on the olive oil requirements of the Liver Cleansing Diet. Interestingly, it was the infrequent users who used more accurate health terminology like monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and cholesterol, whilst the regular users were not so detailed with their health-oriented comments. Such responses may indicate that they are more motivated by sensory attributes and that health may be less important than first thought. In fact for these participants health may be more of a symbolic or totemic issue. One regular participant related olive oil to feeling better whilst another had chosen to 'stick to it' after the liver cleansing diet because it was a healthier choice than other oils. For most participants in both user groups there was a general acceptance of a relationship between health and olive oil:

Sam (RU): I must admit, health does come into my mind. I don't know whether it's healthy or not, but I associate it with health and I use it because it's healthy.

Emily (RU): I do know that olive oil is obviously just as good [as canola oil] because Mediterranean people use it and have used it all their lives and they have the lowest cholesterol levels and heart disease, whatever it is.

These excerpts suggest that participants were implicitly aware that olive oil was healthy. However, the responses of 'health' and 'good for you' as motives for using olive oil were rarely expanded on by individuals. Not many people knew how in particular olive oil was healthy, but they continued to use it because they had heard or read that it was.

While most comments centred on using olive oil because of its health benefits, a small number of participants disagreed with the level of importance placed on health. Dave, a high-involvement regular user of olive oil, lessens health as a motive for his use:

Dave (RU): I use it more on flavour than health, because I know it has a better flavour. I really don't think about the health aspect. I use it at home because I just love the flavour.

Dave also made mention that he had grown up with olive oil and had worked with it in restaurants. It was very much part of his own culinary culture. The fact that he had been using it prior to the health information explosion may go some way towards explaining his beliefs. Another infrequent user participant discounted the importance of learning about the health benefits of olive oil through doctors and media. She likened it to getting 30 minutes of exercise with an attitude of 'who cares'. Health was not a motive for her cooking olive oil use.

The findings also alluded to a slightly different perception involving health and nutrition. Many participants commented on the concept of acknowledging that fat per se is bad for you. Olive oil was not considered a 'bad' fat like butter and margarine were, but on several occasions references were made about its high calorific value and the concept that 'too much is not good for you.' This belief was found across both regular and infrequent user focus groups. Interestingly it was far more significant for the female participants aged 26 and older. Males rarely talked of the fat concept and there was only one reference made to olive oil as a fat in the less than 26 year old age group and this was a positive comment stating that olive oil was a 'good fat'.

The majority of health-related comments made concerning this fat concept were related to the past tense. All participants from the Baby Boomer Generation and a number from the X Generation spoke about how for years they had understood olive oil to be a bad and unhealthy fat. There was little evidence of this for the Y Generation. Many Baby Boomers were told when they were young that they were not to use olive oil. Reasons for this could include; the fact that Australia did not produce olive oil in the 1960s and 1970s and therefore people were unfamiliar with it, olive oil was

not perceived as an Australian product as butter and lard were, and olive oil was viewed as a 'new' and 'foreign' food and only the Italians and Greeks used it.

Yet almost all participants went on to claim that they were aware of the developments in the last five to ten years that had proven the nutritional and health benefits of olive oil. This may be because the increased disposable income of this Baby Boomer generation combined with the aging population means that this group is more concerned about their health. For many participants, health had become an influence and motive for increased usage. Emily's comments encapsulate the general feeling of older participants who distinguished olive oil in this manner:

Emily (RU): I can say the [negative] word 'fat' in one mouthful, but in the other I know that it's also good for you...We've been brought up to believe that oil is not healthy for us. That's the way everyone thinks...It's only been recently that we've really been told that you can have olive oil and it's fine...It wasn't sort of like a taboo thing.

Another functional use of olive oil occurred when a recipe called for it. Both infrequent and regular users utilised olive oil in this manner. In several instances, infrequent users talked about going out and buying a small bottle of 'olive oil' specifically for a recipe. However, only regular users discussed using olive oil as a substitute when a recipe requested an alternative oil type (canola or vegetable) because olive oil was often the only type of oil in the cupboard. Discussions between regular users on using olive oil as a substitute for ingredients like butter and margarine also took place. This substitution most often occurred in baking, marinating and barbecuing. This substitution generally occurred because participants wanted to use 'healthier' fats and oils and these participants were confident with proceeding with the replacement. It should be noted that infrequent users appeared to be less confident with substituting other fats and oils with olive oil.

Although not strictly functional in definition, olive oil's physical ease and simplicity of use as an ingredient were also offered as reasons for using it. Many regular users discussed how a number of olive oil attributes (packaging, pourers and consistency) made it easier to use, pour and clean up when compared to other oils and that it was just so simple to use. It was also used because tasty food was simple to make with olive oil:

Steve (RU): It's also an easy way to make a simple meal taste bloody good...Just pasta and salt and pepper with good olive oil is a good meal.

This simplicity combined with the functional motives mentioned above highlight that olive oil was an important ingredient in many participants' homes.

## **6.2 Aesthetic Motives.**

Although the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Kant (1951) claimed that the 'lower' senses of smell and taste could not prompt an aesthetic experience, the majority of regular users commented that these senses were key to what they considered to be an aesthetic enjoyment of olive oil. References to a variety of flavours (also described as taste), colour, texture, the feel it left in the mouth, freshness and aroma were frequently made during these focus groups. This was much more significant for the eating oil and much less important for the cooking oil. Participants reported deliberately seeking out variety in eating olive oil by visiting different specialty outlets, tasting eating oils whenever they had the opportunity and by buying different eating oils to try. The positive terms 'beautiful' and 'awesome' and the expressions 'yum' and 'mmmm' were often used to highlight these feelings towards olive oil and are all terms that can be linked with an aesthetic response to food and beverage products (Charters & Pettigrew, 2005).

With the help of the projective technique, regular use participants discussed the bright golden-green colour of extra virgin olive oil and then compared it to the insipid 'wishy washy' pale colour of light olive oil and other vegetable oils they had seen and used in the past. Regular users talked of its strong smell, good flavour and great taste; however few participants actually further distinguished between more specific flavours in the olive oil. The infrequent users rarely commented on these aesthetic characteristics. For those infrequent users who did, their general perception of olive oil was that it had a very strong flavour and an almost overpowering smell which was often perceived as a negative attribute. These participants suggested that this was a key reason for them personally not using olive oil, but they did have small bottles in the kitchen if guests requested it or if they were entertaining.

Thus, for most regular users of olive oil, the data suggested that the key motives for using eating oil, and to some extent cooking oil, were aesthetic in nature. This aesthetic intention for using eating oil encapsulated hedonic pleasure-seeking motives. When asked why they used olive oil compared to other oils, the instant responses were centred on the aesthetic qualities documented above. The following dialogue from two regular user groups highlighted the level of importance placed on sensory properties of olive oil as a motive for use:

Interviewer: When you use olive oil, why would you use olive oil, and not butter or margarine or vegetable oil?

Tiffany: Healthy, flavour, easy.

Trevor: Flavour.

Anne: Flavour and ease of use.

Sam: Probably the flavour.

Richard: Definitely the taste of it.



Nicky: Certainly dishes where taste is really important.

Craig: I think you use olive oil when the taste counts.

Kathleen: And when it's one of the major tastes.

Craig: Yeah, an integral part of the dish.

Others echoed this, and a number of participants commented on using olive oil because it had distinctive qualities which could be utilised with an assortment of food types and flavours. These positive attributes made it a versatile product which participants say could be used in a variety of applications. A number of participants noted that because they enjoyed the taste and flavour attributes of olive oil, their usage had increased and so had their level of confidence. Jeremy's comment below signifies his level of comfort and assurance with olive oil. He knows and feels happy that when he prepares any food with olive oil, no matter what it is, he is confident that the flavour will be 'fantastic':

Jeremy (RU): Again I'm attacking it from a confidence point of view. It is the flavour. I know whatever I'm going to prepare, it's going to be fantastic. I feel good using it [olive oil] in respect that I know whatever I'm going to cook, it's going to be fabulous.

It was noted that high-involvement regular users commented on the sensory attributes of different types of olive oil and why they used them. When using eating oil, flavour, colour and aroma were far more important than they were for an all-purpose cooking oil. Craig, a high-involvement regular user, used eating oils because of their sensory attributes. He used a wine comparison to convey his point about the importance of aesthetic qualities when using the two styles of oil:

Craig (RU): I think it's like opening a bottle of super premium wine to a bottle of ordinary wine. There's an anticipation that you've got a better quality product - because you're going to

have it raw, so the flavour counts. The anticipation of the intrigue, of that flavour.

As well as olive oil itself, a number of participants talked about the important role that flavour played with food in general. Throughout the discussions both regular users and infrequent-users made comments about how food culture was changing and how sensory factors were becoming more significant. In the following extract Sam, a 18-25 year old high-involvement female, explains how she valued sensory factors and food:

Sam (RU): I think food's a total experience for me. It is how it looks, how it smells, how it feels in your mouth. It's not just whether it tastes good, it's whether it's visually appealing, all your senses.

Thus sensory factors were a motive not only for olive oil usage but for food in general. It was noted that although other factors contributed to the participants' initial usage of olive oil (as discussed earlier), both flavour and taste were important motives for continued use. These sensory characteristics also played a part in increasing the volume and frequency of eating oil and cooking oil used.

### **6.3 Habitual Motives**

Another motive for using olive oil was habit. This appeared to be most significant for both the medium and high-involvement regular users who purchased and consumed cooking oil on a repeated basis. The construct of habit did not appear to be evident with any infrequent-users. However, infrequent-users talked about habit as an important motive for their use of alternative fats and oils, including butter and vegetable oil.

Habit was not mutually exclusive of upbringing and family influences, as many olive oil consumption habits appeared to have their origins in a family brought up with olive oil. Similar ideas were used by participants to describe this motive and included using olive oil because of intuition and

because it was second nature. Jeremy discussed how using olive oil had become part of his culinary routines:

Jeremy (RU): It's almost become habit with me because that's the first thing I reach for. I don't even pay any attention to the cooking spray or anything like that anymore. For the last seven or eight years, I haven't bought anything but extra virgin olive oil.

## **6.4 Symbolic Motives**

A symbol can be described as something that is used or regarded as representing, or standing for, something else. In many cases a material object can be seen as representing something immaterial (Yallop et al., 2005). Thus a symbolic motive to purchase or use a product like olive oil can be strongly related to the message this action will send to others (friends, family and associates). In this research there appeared to be a considerable amount of congruence between buying and using eating olive oil and to a lesser degree cooking oil and self image, status and preferred lifestyle.

### **6.4.1 Self Image**

A noteworthy number of regular users appeared to be motivated by a personal desire to create and support a certain self image. Part of this desire included the need to express this self image and identity to friends, family and associates. Although not expressly commented on, many of these medium and high-involvement users indicated that they were motivated to use olive oil because: their friends had, they knew chefs in restaurants used it, and 'famous' people in the media used it. These participants wanted to create a 'foodie' self image and be seen as 'trendy' and 'up with the fashion'. They wanted to feel food savvy, cool and knowledgeable in the kitchen and convey that impression to others. This type of behaviour may have been a contributing factor in making the

choice between using a cooking oil or using an eating oil. Jacquie talked about how she sees her self image in relation to olive oil:

Jacquie (RU): I always feel like a chef in the kitchen when I use the olive oil from this lovely little tin. I top it up with the Always Fresh or whatever I buy at the supermarket. I splash it in vegies, put another splash in, toss everything together - another dash...I probably go overboard with it, but I just enjoy it, enjoy the flavour, I've seen a lot used on TV and in restaurants so I tend to use it quite a bit in the kitchen. I feel a bit 'chefy' when I use it.

And later in the focus group Jacquie contributed this reflection:

It's groovy, Chefs use it and all my friends use it.

Many also chose to use a quality eating olive oil when they were cooking something 'special' or they were cooking for a 'special occasion' and wanted to impress others.

For the majority of infrequent users and some medium-involvement regular users, generic 'olive oil' was often seen as special occasion oil. They did not differentiate between eating and cooking olive oils. However, when compared to other cheaper vegetable oils, olive oil was viewed as premium oil.

A few regular high-involvement users claimed to use an eating oil every day, however the majority of regular users referred to using an eating olive oil only on 'special occasions' which usually entailed cooking and preparing food for someone else. This could indicate that using eating oils may be more about outward-directed symbolic behaviour than internal gratification. Further evidence of this can be seen by several frequent use participants chatting about using specialised olive oil serving equipment

(special bottles or stainless steel oil tins) on tables and the need to display bottles either in the kitchen or on tables. The regular-user discussion below highlighted the significance of wanting to impress guests with a particular self image:

Christine: But if you're paying that much you'd want it to look special; you'd want to display it almost.

Chelsea: Absolutely, all the packaging and stuff.

Jeremy: Most of those ones that are in that price bracket [expensive] - they're sexy, they've got a great label and you'd want to drag out it onto your table.

Sarah: Keep the price tag on it.

Christine: I mean you wouldn't want to drag out your tin.

Alison: At that price [expensive] we've poured it into a decorative oil tin before anyone really sees it. So I suppose we should put it [the bottle of eating oil] onto the table as it is.

Christine: You should be bringing out the full bottle. For all they [friends and guests] know you could be pouring it out of a can in the pantry.

Several participants reported that when they were at home on their own they would use only a cooking oil – be it olive or another vegetable oil. The following comments highlighted this different way of thinking:

Emily (RU): When it's me at home or just the family at home, I just spray [potatoes] with olive oil and they go into the oven and I get crisp potatoes. If I'm cooking and I've got people coming over I'll do it properly. Last week we had family over from Adelaide, we had the dukkah and the olive oil and the bread and I can cope with that. But that's just once in a blue moon. I just couldn't hack that for very long...only once in a couple of weeks maybe.

And later in the focus group:

I've used [good] olive oils for making a dressing or for dipping. That [dressing] is not for myself at home - but if I'm cooking something really special then I would use that oil as well. If I'm just cooking for myself I would use the other or nothing because I don't use it for everything because they're not cheap.

Emily's comments above appeared to indicate she wanted to use eating oil to cook flavoursome food and impress friends and family. Earlier, Emily talked about using it because of its health benefits but she limited her use because it was still viewed as a fat. It therefore appeared that Emily's views on olive oil were conflicting and she often battled with whether to use it or not. This internal struggle was evident throughout most of Emily's discussions. Further evidence of this conflict was witnessed across both user groups and both genders. Interestingly, the younger 18-25 year old participants showed no sign of this conflicting guilt. This may have been because they had not yet been exposed to the negative 'fat' connotations that the elder participants had spoken about or perhaps the health and flavour benefits outweighed the negative implications.

#### **6.4.2 Lifestyle**

Linked to the concept of self image was lifestyle. A number of participants saw olive oil and its use with food as an important part of their recreation and lifestyle. This was only relevant to some regular medium to high-involvement users. These participants referred to entertaining, eating and drinking and cooking either outside on the barbecue or in the kitchen as an important part of their lifestyle and recreation. This was not only cooking for others but also taking pleasure in cooking for themselves and enhancing their personal time. Olive oil was not discussed as an exclusive

ingredient but was referred to on most occasions as part of the whole culinary lifestyle package.

### **6.4.3 Status**

The responses of many medium-involvement regular-users indicated that eating olive oil fitted into this 'high status' food category whereas the cooking oil was not rated as highly by the same users. Therefore motivation to use eating oil may be linked to establishing status. This motive was not as important to the high-involvement users who were more interested in the aesthetic profiles of the oil. Interestingly, it would appear that for infrequent users there was no differentiation between the types of oils. Perhaps for some of these people, olive oil was seen as a commodity related to higher status. Canola and vegetable oils were appeared to fall into the lower status groups.

When discussing what people knew about olive oil, there was clear evidence that many regular high-involvement users wanted to show that they had a knowledge and understanding of olive oil. Even though this information was not always correct, the tone of voice and authoritarian way of delivering their expertise was evident. Because of this confident attitude, there appeared to be a slight element of food snobbery that existed and this at times had an intimidating effect on the less-involved participants.

### **6.4.4 Wine and Olive Oil**

Both user groups and all involvement levels commonly associated olive oil with the world of grapes and wine. In addition, comments on geography, cultivars and production techniques were often made. References made by the regular user groups included the similar effect of soil and climate on olives and grapes, different varieties of olives having different flavours like grapes and that the process of making olive oil was similar to wine

(crushing, blending, pressing and filtering). This adds further support to the idea that these participants have a higher level of involvement with both food and wine in general. By comparison, the comments made by the infrequent user groups were more generic in nature and revolved around the basic fact that olive oil and wine were 'just' similar.

It appeared, however, that the regular users more often related eating oil and not cooking oil to wine. Craig's comment, documented earlier, talked about his perception that a good eating olive oil is like a super premium bottle of wine and this implies that an all purpose cooking oil is more akin to an everyday or bulk wine.

Many regular high-involvement participants were motivated to use better quality and often more expensive olive oils for eating but paid little attention to sensory and quality attributes when buying cooking oil. For lower involvement and infrequent users this was not really an issue as other factors like price, packaging, size and labelling played a more significant role. These factors are discussed in depth in the following chapter.

## **7. Conclusion**

After working through the participants' thoughts and ideas it appears that regular usage for them was often related to confidence. By experiencing olive oil in a variety of situations, by seeing it being used and by learning more about it, many participants felt more at ease about the ingredient as a whole. Thus they were using it regularly and in many cases their usage increased with their familiarity. As usage increased so did their level of confidence and comfort in using the product. This increase in usage, confidence and comfort appeared to be a key motive for using olive oil.



This chapter suggests that the world of olive oil means many different things to different people. Participants' initial contact with olive oil appeared to have a definite influence on them, either positively or negatively. In most instances it has had a constructive effect and for many, these experiences have resulted in sustained and growing use. Olive oil is used in a plethora of ways, both culinary and medicinal. The bilateral approach of a cooking versus eating oil for culinary usage explains a variety of motives that were intertwined with initial experiences and current usage patterns.

Although the participant information provides valuable insight into how they perceive and use olive oil, few participants from either usage group or involvement level elaborated about olive oil in any great detail. However, it was noted that amongst the regular user groups a great deal of enthusiasm, knowledge and understanding existed towards food and cooking in general. This could indicate that consumers' involvement with olive oil is perhaps not perceived as relevant as it is with food and wine. Such information could provide the foundation on which further exploration of consumer perceptions, influences and motives can be undertaken.

Having undertaken an exploration of participants' olive oil use, influencing factors and motives for use, it is important to assess the marketing dimensions of this data. The following chapter explores where participants purchase their olive oil and what issues influence their purchasing decisions. It then explores the types of barriers that have reduced or stopped their olive oil use.

## **Chapter 5. Marketing Dimensions**

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This chapter reports the findings relating to three key marketing dimensions. The first aspect assesses the olive oil purchasing patterns amongst participants. This includes an examination of where olive oil is purchased and the main influences on the purchasing decision. The second dimension is concerned with exploring the barriers to olive oil purchasing. The concept of perceived 'saturation' points and the inadequacies in knowledge and confidence are then assessed. The third dimension explores possible future motivators and potential ways to encourage greater frequency and volume of olive oil use. Figure 5.1 was created to highlight and simplify the overarching relationships and findings between the different user groups, their level of involvement with food, and key purchasing patterns.

### **1. Purchasing Patterns**

In order to further understand Western Australian consumers' views about olive oil, it is important to look at the purchasing patterns and behaviours of oil users. It is also essential to assess the key influencing factors that affect these behaviours. The following pages document the type of purchasing decisions made by participants and the varied places of purchase. This is followed by an exploration of the impact on purchase of such product attributes as price, brand, packaging and country of origin. The decision on what to purchase was most often related to the oil application. Therefore the purchasing decision varied depending on whether a cooking or an eating oil was being purchased. This is investigated in depth below.

#### **1.1 Type of Purchase Decision**

Research indicates that there are many types of buying behaviours. The most significant types include planned, unplanned and impulse buying

(Iyer, 1989; Park, Iyer, & Smith, 1989; Rook, 1987). The participants from this study indicated that they were usually aware that they needed to replenish their olive oil supplies and thus planned to purchase it. However, there was evidence of unplanned buying. Examples of this include buying it when it was 'on special' in supermarkets or when participants saw it on the shelf and they were reminded that they needed to buy it. Evidence of impulse buying could be seen when regular high-involvement users spontaneously purchased eating oil at wineries, markets and specialty outlets.

## **1.2 Types of Olive Oil Purchased**

As discussed in the last chapter, there appear to be two different categories of olive oil used by participants, cooking oil, used by both regular and infrequent users across all levels of involvement and eating oil used when flavour and taste were required. High to medium-involvement participants would seek out variety, uniqueness and quality when they bought this oil and they wanted something different from the 'average' supermarket oils. Medium-involvement to high-involvement regular users were aware of this category of oil and several often purchased both types. However, the lower involvement regular users and the low-involvement infrequent users did not further differentiate olive oil into this premium category. To these participants, olive oil was one homogenous style of oil.

The different types of olive oil were bought by participants from a varied number of places (see figure 4.2 in chapter 4, section 4.2). The findings of this study indicate that the place of purchase was different depending on what type of oil was being bought and the level of involvement participants had with food. Eating oils were bought from a selection of different outlets such as gourmet stores, markets and food fairs. By comparison, cooking oils were generally purchased from one type of outlet, and this was the supermarket.

Involvement Level	Olive Oil Usage	Purchase Type	Place of Purchase		Price	Brand Preferences	Packaging	Country of Origin
	Regular or Infrequent	Cooking vs. Eating	Cooking	Eating			Size, Outer Packaging and Added Value	
<b>High Involvement</b>	Regular user	Cooking and eating. Eating oils are an important purchase	Supermarket+ some specialty stores	Specialty stores	Eating oils - moderately sensitive. Cooking oils - not sensitive	Some brand orientation for eating oil. Cooking oil brands were bought regularly	Not important	Aware of Australian olive oil. Buy Australian
<b>Medium Involvement</b>		Cooking. Mainly some eating	Supermarket purchases	Mostly supermarket some specialty	Moderate price sensitivity	Strong brand orientation for cooking oil and those that use eating oil	Packaging is important, especially for eating oils as a quality cue. Cooking oil bought in larger volumes. Packaging is linked to image and status seeking and is often displayed on tables and in kitchens. Packaging very important for gift giving.	
				Rarely is eating oil purchased or used. If it is purchased, it is bought in small bottles (200ml-375ml) from specialty stores and supermarkets				
<b>Low Involvement</b>	Infrequent user	Cooking only			Very sensitive - buy what ever is 'on special'	Small amount of brand orientation. Mainly no brand preference but price is paramount	Not important - very small volumes bought and used. Price is key factor.	Generally unaware of Australian olive oil. Always buy European oils

Figure 5.1 A proposed relationship between level of involvement, olive oil usage levels and purchasing patterns.

### **1.2.1 Purchase Locations for Cooking Olive Oil**

When participants of all user groups were asked about where they purchased their cooking olive oil, the immediate response centred on supermarkets. These ranged from the larger conglomerate supermarkets such as Coles and Woolworths, to the smaller neighbourhood Supa Value and Dewsons stores. This was also the key location for other fat and oil purchases. A number of high-involvement regular-use participants suggested that they had also bought their cooking oil in bulk (3-4 litre tin) from specialty Italian grocers.

Regular and infrequent users offered many reasons for purchasing olive oil from supermarkets. The following conversation in a regular-user focus group discussed the key reasons for choosing supermarkets as a major place of purchase:

Interviewer: Supermarkets seem to be where you buy most olive oil, why?

Melissa: Convenience.

Chelsea: Yeah, we're there at the supermarket and it's there.

Christine: You're doing you're shopping and you grab it because it's there in one of the aisles you are going down.

Sarah: And when you have young kids - that's your major shopping expedition.

Christine: You get in and out before the kids grab everything.

Sarah: I just don't have time to go to those gourmet stores.

### **1.2.2 Eating Olive Oil Purchase Locations**

On occasions, a number of medium-involvement regular users also bought their eating oil from supermarkets. These participants talked about

aspiring to buy quality extra virgin 'eating oil' from gourmet stores, but the reality of time, price and convenience confined their purchasing to the supermarket. Many talked about substituting the eating oil they would have preferred to buy, with a lesser quality oil that could be bought conveniently at the supermarket and used for both eating and cooking purposes.

For those regular, higher involvement participants who bought eating oil, it was commonly purchased at gourmet and specialty stores. Participants believed that they could not (and many would not) buy this type and range of oil from supermarkets. Apart from finding eating olive oils less readily available in supermarkets, these consumers also perceived supermarkets to have olive oils of lesser quality. They referred to getting these oils at specialty food stores which also stocked other 'gourmet' foods including vinegars, cheese, spices and condiments. One participant talked about the positive effect of these types of stores on his purchasing patterns:

Dave (RU): The gourmet food markets have opened up our eyes to a lot more exotic foods and more of us obviously go there because they're popping up everywhere these days. I'm quite prepared to go and buy my cheese and olive oil from a specialised shop like the Re-Store. That's where I notice there's quite a few more [olive oils] on offer than you're going to get generically, from your Coles or your Woolworths. And that opens your eyes, because then you realise there's not two or three suppliers or producers, there's quite a few, and they all taste different.

Other regular but less involved users were aware of these types of stores but did not frequent them on a regular basis. One participant talked about having limited time to visit these stores, whilst others commented on going to these types of outlets no more than once a month. When these

participants did go, they commented on stocking up on olive oil and other gourmet foods they also believed they could not buy in supermarkets.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, eating oil was often given as a present, and a number of regular users referred to the experience of receiving eating olive oil in this way. Wineries were another common outlet where eating oils were purchased. Participants stated that one of the main reasons they had bought olive oil at wineries was because they were able to taste the oil first. Participants talked about tasting and then buying eating oil from markets, liquor stores, food and wine exhibitions and olive oil cellar doors. A small number of infrequent-users talked about noticing 'gourmet' olive oils (etically classified as eating oils) at wineries and specialty stores, but had not purchased them because of their perceived 'expensive' price point.

High-involvement participants alluded to a number of reasons for buying eating oil from such outlets. These included being able to choose from a wider selection of olive oils with different flavours, sizes and packaging, having the ability to buy other specialty foods at the same time and, lastly, because it was perceived that the quality of products was generally higher in these types of shops. Therefore, price appeared to act as a cue for quality. Many shopped in these types of outlets because they wanted to surround themselves by ingredients and foods which were aesthetically and hedonically pleasing. One participant commented on the multi-sensual character of such locations:

Kathleen (RU): I like going to the Re-Store. You walk into those shops and you can smell so much – a real sensual place.

For many medium- to high-involvement users, the desire to shop in such stores was strongly related to an experiential aesthetic motivation. These participants were quality-driven, interested, and knowledgeable about a range of food products. In these stores they felt comfortable and they

trusted the produce. The same symbolic motives (lifestyle, status and self image) for using olive oil may also explain some participants' desire to purchase gourmet foods from these types of outlets.

### **1.3 Key Influences on the Purchase Decisions**

Participants indicated that there were a number of factors that impacted on their decision to purchase olive oil. These factors had varying levels of significance for the different user groups as well as for those participants with different levels of involvement. It appeared that none of these factors worked independently of each other; rather a number of factors worked together to influence the final purchase decision.

#### **1.3.1 Price**

This study indicated that the price of olive oil can be a significant influence on the purchase decision. It was the most commonly referenced influence across all user groups. This was particularly relevant for the supermarket purchases of cooking oils, and in some cases eating oils. Participants believed that buying olive oil in the larger supermarkets was cheaper than buying it at alternative outlets. Some also believed that the more you paid for the olive oil, the better quality you would expect. One participant commented on this price-quality paradigm:

Alison (RU): I must admit, if you see something like that [eating oil] and it's more expensive, it sends out a message that for some reason it's better. Maybe not better for you - health wise - but there's something that makes it more expensive. Yes, that special flavour.

As a whole, most infrequent users viewed olive oil as a 'special' or 'premium' product with a higher price tag. Their regular oils for cooking were canola and vegetable. To these consumers, basic olive oil was seen as a more expensive 'gourmet' oil, and they often debated whether to buy it. If they did buy olive oil for cooking or medicinal applications, they tended to go for the cheaper oils initially, and then specific brands



recommended by friends and family. Thus, the price of olive oil and associated supermarket discounts and 'specials' were more significant influences on the purchase decision for infrequent buyers than were recommendations by friends and family.

In essence, price acted as a quality cue for many participants. Price also played an important part in the purchase decision for medium-involvement regular users. However, when compared to the infrequent users, the regular users appeared to justify spending a little more on their olive oil. This may have been because not only was the oil suitable for cooking, but its other perceived flavour and health benefits justified paying the higher price. Many medium-involvement regular users commented on choosing something from the middle price range. They assumed it would not be the really cheap basic oil, and at the same time they would still be getting value for money without being 'ripped off'. In some instances, participants purchased a slightly higher priced olive oil. Although they were not always familiar with the brand of oil, some thought it would be better quality compared with the cheaper oils.

Although factors like flavour and packaging played an important role in the purchase of eating oils for high-involvement regular users, price was still an important pressure. These participants mentioned that they expected to pay more for these eating oils as this was an indicator of quality, but they would not pay excessive prices. It was made clear that these oils were perceived as superior and that they were not a product that would be used on basic every day cooking. The following dialogue from one regular user group highlighted the value they placed on olive oil and the price that participants were prepared to pay for it. Wine was used as an interesting comparison to demonstrate different participant priorities:

Emily: I do tend to use it for special occasions because of the price, but I don't call it a 'special occasion' olive oil. I use it when I want taste - which is not always a special occasion.

It's an expense thing. I wouldn't use Joseph every day because its \$39.00 a bottle.

Jacquie: I couldn't justify spending that much on a good olive oil. I can't tell the difference that much.

Emily: I still like the taste, and I can appreciate the taste of a good oil.

Jacquie: I just haven't been exposed that much to olive oil to know the flavours.

Emily: And yet I would spend that on a bottle of oil and I would not spend that on a bottle of wine. That's the thing. I wouldn't spend \$39 on a bottle of wine, my husband might, but I wouldn't.

Jacquie: I'd spend \$40 like that on wine every night of the week. It wouldn't bother me at all, but olive oil; I wouldn't know the difference. A \$5 one is going to get me through no worries.

This discussion also highlighted a variation in participant priorities towards olive oil. For Emily, it was more important to buy quality eating olive oil than wine, whereas for Jacquie, wine was rated as a significantly higher priority than olive oil. It could be suggested that Emily's involvement with food was greater than her involvement with wine and vice versa for Jacquie.

Participants from all groups talked about the occurrence of cooking and eating oils being 'on special', both at supermarkets and gourmet outlets. Participants also talked about the importance of weekly specials, advertising catalogues and shelf 'sale' signs on their purchasing decisions. They were pleased when they got both cooking and eating olive oil on special, and many felt like they had 'bagged a bargain'. Linda, a regular user, talked about doing her sums in the supermarket to work out whether it was cheaper to buy four one litre bottles of cooking oil on special, or one

4 litre tin of the same brand which was not on special. She then made her decision based on what was better value for money.

Another participant explained how specials led to her unplanned buying behaviour:

Cheryl (IU): What's on special! Normally when you walk down the aisle you see a special you go 'Oh, I'll get it now'.  
Yeah - because it is there now and easier.

Another point worthy of note was the relationship between price and buying Australian olive oil. If the price of Australian olive oil was the same or slightly more expensive than imported oils (no more than \$0.50 - \$1.00) participants suggested that they would in the future choose the Australian product. On the other hand, if the Australian product was more expensive than the imported oils most buyers chose the cheaper imported product. For most infrequent users there was no loyalty towards Australian grown olive oil, it was simply about price. The effect of country of origin on purchase is further explained later in this chapter.

### **1.3.2 Brand Preferences**

Most participants from all user groups had certain brands of olive oil they had been told about and that they preferred and purchased. These participants' underlying feeling about olive oil was 'better the devil you know than the devil you don't'. Throughout all the focus groups, a number of factors played an important role in determining what brands participants used. In order of most important to least important, these included recommendations by friends and family, word of mouth, advertising, and certain wine and food associations.

High-involvement regular users were more adventurous with trying different brands for their eating oil, but for their cooking oil they bought the same brand of oil repeatedly. They talked about having brand favourites for their eating oil, but were always keen to taste and maybe

spontaneously buy something else if the flavour and taste were satisfactory. This was further evidence of impulse buying behaviour.

The medium-involvement regular users talked frequently of buying the same brand when replenishing cooking olive oil supplies. This was very much a planned purchase. They trusted the reputation of these brands. They, like the high-involvement users, were a little happier to try different brands for their eating oils, but many commented that once they had found a good brand they tended to stick to it. Many medium-involvement participants talked about buying the same brands, but very few could actually recall the brand name either correctly or at all. Those who did recollected such brands as Bertolli, Colavita and Lupi (all Italian), Always Fresh (Spanish) and Viva (Australian). The projective stimuli were successful in reminding participants of certain brands, and it also helped to explore a combination of other purchase cues including bottle shape and size, colour, and the writing on labels. For regular medium and high-involvement users, 'on special' purchases were most often brand-related. These participants would stock up on olive oil when their favoured brand had a reduction in price. However, the less involved participants cared little for brands and would buy what ever was on special.

Although price was a dominant influence on infrequent user purchase decisions, a small number of the infrequent users admitted they were influenced by brand, and some were regular same-brand purchasers. Once again, few could actually recall the brand name but remembered the oil by other cues:

Ruby (IU): I can't tell you any certain one I use, but I know the one I always buy in the squarish shaped bottle [drew a square bottle shape with hands]. I don't vary and go and buy a different type of olive oil. I always buy the same bottle and I always buy the extra virgin I like, then I continue to use that. I won't go and look for what might be the cheapest this

week. I would never buy a black and gold or anything, I guess I buy brand name.

There appeared to be considerable aversion across all user groups toward buying 'Home Brand' olive oil. Participants suggested buying other home brand products, but not olive oil. They did not trust the packaging and they perceived it to be of inferior quality. There was, however, one infrequent user who declared that she did use home brand olive oil and other home brand products. The main motivating factor for her choice of brand was almost entirely price-related.

### **1.3.3 Packaging**

Another attribute that influenced participants' purchase behaviour was the packaging of olive oil. The projective technique of showing four different styles of olive oil bottles was very successful in highlighting that packaging (materials, labelling and medals), product size and value adding with complementary pourers and recipe tags were important dimensions on oil choice. This was important for the purchase of eating oils and to a lesser degree for cooking oils by medium- to high-involvement participants. One of these participants suggested that if it was just supermarket cooking oil he would rarely consider the bottle packaging, whereas if it was oil for eating or dipping with bread, packaging rated more significantly. For this participant, flavour and aroma rated higher than packaging. Several medium-involvement regular user participants talked about the need to see packaging that they liked before they would decide to purchase it. Packaging appeared to 'signify' good flavour and aroma. A number of medium-involvement regular users agreed with this and suggested that if the packaging was aesthetically pleasing, it must taste good.

#### **1.3.3.1 Outer Package**

The way olive oil was packaged was discussed in all the focus groups. The preferred container for buying olive oil was glass bottles followed by tin containers. There was an aversion for using plastic in which to store

olive oil. It was thought of as 'cheap', 'thin' and 'revolting'. Only inexpensive vegetable oils were acceptable in plastic. Glass was perceived by many as being a healthier packaging material. In one case, an infrequent user believed that although it was not always economical to buy in glass, it would be better quality. The colour of the glass came up for discussion. A number of references were made to choosing dark over clear glass bottles, but very few participants could explain why they felt this was important. For the more highly involved regular users, dark glass was preferred. However, most medium- to low-involvement participants preferred clear glass because they could see the colour of the oil.

A number of regular-use participants bought their olive oil in large 3-4 litre tins. If participants frequently used larger volumes of oil, they decided to purchase it in this pack size as it was seen to be better value. To a small extent the artwork and tin design attracted some buyers. Many used this oil to fill up smaller bottles which were easier to use. There appeared to be a small amount of resistance to these tins amongst less frequent users. Most of this opposition centred on such issues as the larger volume being too much to use, and the fact that the packaging would not fit onto shelves and into cupboards.

Another form of olive oil packaging rated as noteworthy by regular user participants was the aerosol olive oil cooking spray. Participants indicated that they bought this packaging type for health reasons so they could reduce the amount of fat that they were consuming. This was a key influence for the regular users. It was often used to line pans and baking utensils and for spraying over potatoes and vegetables before roasting. The infrequent users also talked about using spray oils, but in this case olive oil was not the most used ingredient. These participants used spray canola and vegetable oil more than spray olive oil. Several infrequent users offered price sensitivity as a key factor for purchasing vegetable and not olive aerosol cans.

Bottle colour, shape and decoration appeared to be an important factor for all regular users when buying eating oils. Often these were given as gifts or placed on tables for eye-catching appeal. When asked about what was looked for when buying such oils, the following comments from two focus groups were made:

Richard (RU): Typically it's got to be expensive or it's got to be in a nice bottle or something like that. It's got to look nice as well.

Chelsea (RU): Absolutely, all the packaging and stuff.

Christine (RU): If you're paying that much you'd want it to look special. You'd want to display it almost.

Jeremy (RU): Most of those ones in that higher price bracket are sexy. They've got a great label and you'd want to drag [them] out onto your table.

This highlighted the importance of the aesthetic nature of packaging which, for some medium involvement regular users, influenced and prompted purchase. Other aesthetic influences that had an impact on the purchase decision included the oil's labelling and the presence of medals and award stickers.

For some medium involvement regular users, label creativity influenced the purchase decision. Generally, the look of the label was important for both infrequent and regular users. This was evident for both males and females and for all age groups. It appeared to be a more significant factor when regular users were choosing eating oil. If the label was 'groovy' and stood out, an impulse buy was more likely to be made. For the infrequent user, creative labelling only played a minor role in the purchase decision. Price and brand played a much more important role.

Several participants from both user groups talked about how having award and medal stickers on the label of olive oil contributed to the decision to

buy the product. Although participants were not always aware of what the medals and awards represented or meant, they still had an endorsing effect. Regular and infrequent users suggested that these medals represented quality and excellence. Joanne, a regular user talked about the effect that these medals have had on her purchasing behaviour:

Some of them have got medals on them, like three gold medals...I've bought oils because it's got medals on it. It means they are good quality oils. Even though I don't know what they are for. I never read what the medals say.

#### 1.3.3.2 Product Size

Participants from all groups talked about purchasing a variety of packaging sizes. These ranged from 250ml. bottles to four litre tins of olive oil. The size chosen was most often directly related to their overall volume of use. Those who used olive oil every day, and great volumes of it, tended to buy it in larger sized packs, whereas those who used very little bought in smaller pack sizes. One participant talked about his reasons for buying larger volume packaging:

Jeremy (RU): I guess it's the size of the bottle; you don't want to buy some 200ml. thing. You know it's going to run out within a week. You want to make sure you get something with a bit of volume.

At certain times of the year (Christmas and summer), participants bought larger volumes as they used more of it during these periods. As mentioned earlier, pantry or shelf space restrictions had an influence on the purchase decision. Another factor that influenced what size packaging was purchased was the number of people living in the household. Comments were made that if there were only one or two people living at home, there was no need to buy olive oil in larger packs. Others commented that they bought olive oil in bulk because they had large families to feed and 'value for money' was very important.



However, the eating oils bought by high-involvement regular users tended to be purchased in smaller volume packaging. Freshness was paramount and by buying smaller volumes they were able to buy different brands and taste a larger selection. One high involvement regular use participant also bought smaller bottles as testers and if she liked it she would then buy bigger bottles of the same brand. The most common size for eating oils was 500ml. There was mention of smaller volumes (250ml and 375ml), but these were associated with gift giving, high prices and speciality oils. Cooking oils tended to be bought in larger sizes (1 litre and more). To a certain degree, size of olive oil packaging may act as a cue for quality. However, due to a perceived lack of value for money and a high price tag, medium involvement participants rarely bought these sized bottles.

By usage classification, the infrequent use participants consume olive oil less than once a week. Although they often bought large 3-4 litre tins of vegetable and canola oil, the most common size for their cooking oil purchase was 375 - 500ml bottles. The main reason given for this size choice was that they did not want the oil remaining in the cupboard for a long period of time and then being thrown out unused. A few of these infrequent use participants talked about recently increasing their packaging size from a 500ml to a 750ml bottle, or, in some cases, a 1 litre bottle. This, combined with the recent endorsing influence of TV chefs and the media, could possibly indicate that their usage is on the increase.

#### 1.3.3.3 Adding Value with Packaging

At the time of purchase participants from all user groups were influenced by the marketing strategy of 'value-adding'. Such influences included free olive oil pourers, recipe booklets for using olive oil, competitions to win prizes, and bonus sample sachets with purchase. Value adding strategies were reportedly used by manufacturers of both cooking and eating oil. Nonetheless, participants noted that they would not pay more per bottle for these additional marketing tools. However, if they perceived them to be free, most regular users and some infrequent users were more likely to

purchase that product than something that was without added value. The effect of this can be seen by the following story told by a medium-involvement regular user:

Jacquie: The one place where I've been tempted to buy olive oil besides at a supermarket has been a liquor store. And they've had a little value add. A tall bottle with a silver cap with a little hook and the pourer on it. But I'm more interested in the pourer than the oil. I would've [bought it] had I been in an impulse shopping mode. I would have bought it then and there.

It is important to note that the perceived extra value of these items needed to be high. Some participants commented that they would not be tempted to change brands unless the value added item was worth it. This could be explained by the fact that they were not regular brand changers. The risk involved with changing brands to gain something for free must be higher than the risk of being disappointed with the new brand of olive oil.

#### **1.3.4 Country of Origin**

It was noted that country of origin played a varying role in influencing the purchase decision for olive oil. There was a perception amongst many regular and infrequent user participants that if the olive oil came from a well known olive oil producing country, most significantly Italy or Spain, then it was superior to other oils. Many participants talked about having associated olive oil with Italy and to a certain extent Spain for a long period of time. They thought intuitively that these oils were the best and that olive oil and Italy had always 'gone together':

Richard (RU): [The Italians have] been making it for so long. If a country's not known for something like olive oil, you wouldn't get olive oil from there.

Although some regular users offered Australia as an alternative olive oil producing country, a considerable number of other regular users and most

infrequent users were not aware that Australia produced olive oil. These participants believed that all olive oil in supermarkets was imported from Italy and Spain.

For the higher involvement regular users, country of origin played a part in the purchase decision, but the desire for 'good' quality oil with good flavour and taste outweighed country of origin as a key influence on purchase for both cooking and eating oil. These participants wanted a premium product, and it did not matter from which country it originated. They were happy to buy different oils, taste them, and then choose which types of oils they would buy on a regular basis. Interestingly, these participants commented that by chance many of them had been purchasing Australian eating oil and other gourmet food supplies. This was not specifically because it was Australian, but because it had the correct quality and flavour attributes. There were also a larger number of Australian oils on offer in the places where they bought their eating olive oil. In addition, when they did buy these Australian products, participant comments suggested that they were parochial about buying 'local' and 'regional' Western Australian olive oil:

Kathleen (RU): I feel much more inclined to buy a local product than something from overseas. There's so much of it around and it feels good to be supporting local produce.

The experimental nature of this higher involvement user group also led them to buy and taste a selection of supermarket cooking oils. These participants alluded to the fact that they had enjoyed the taste and flavour of some of the Australian supermarket oils. As a result, they have started to purchase a combination of Australian and imported brands for cooking at home.

For the medium-involvement regular users, country of origin appeared to play a more important role than it did for the more highly-involved regular users. This group frequently bought Italian and Spanish olive oils because they trusted that these came from traditional and reliable sources.

Although some of these participants were not aware, or had become aware only recently, that Australian olive oil existed, a small number of participants had started using Australian oils for both cooking and eating.

It appeared that this 'buy Australian' mentality was important to medium-involvement participants because they felt that they 'should' be supporting Australian industry. Most regular and infrequent users who were aware that Australia produced olive oil talked about wanting to buy Australian product. Nonetheless, price had an overriding influence on whether they bought Australian product or not.

As with the high-involvement users, flavour elements of olive oil were also important to these medium-involvement participants. However, many talked about feeling more comfortable with the European oils because they did not really know the difference between Australian and Italian oil. One participant commented on this dilemma:

Trevor (RU): I wish I could find the difference [between Australian and Italian oils]. If I knew there was an Australian that was just as good as the one we buy [Italian], I'd probably get it.

Over ten different Australian brands exist on supermarket shelves. During these focus groups many medium-involvement participants like Trevor, and most infrequent users, showed enthusiasm toward wanting to buy Australian brands and were keen to find out what brands were Australian so they could try them next time they were stocking up on olive oil:

Ruby (IU): I would buy Australian if I knew one and knew that it was good. I think if you can tell me an Australian brand I will [buy it]. Next time I go to the supermarket I'd look for it [Australian brand]. I would buy it to try it because everyone's mentioned about Australian. I just didn't even know they did one. I'm so used to buying my normal brand.

Many medium- and low-involvement participants did comment on feeling obliged to buy Australian products and would possibly start buying Australian in the future. Many also thought it was important to support Australian industries. It should be noted that it was correctly perceived by many of these participants that Australian olive oil had a higher price than imported oils. This acted as one of the barriers to purchase and will be discussed in depth in the following section.

## **2. Barriers to Use**

Participants talked about a number of factors that either partly or completely acted as a barrier to using cooking and eating olive oils. The most significant barrier uncovered for both types of oil usage was a lack of knowledge about the product. This negative effect is discussed below, as well as other barriers including price, reaching saturation point, time restraints, the 'fat' perception and the influences of taste and background. Figure 6.2 in section 2.1 summarises these factors and highlights the relationships between food involvement and olive oil usage.

### **2.1 Knowledge and Confidence**

The most spoken about and most significant barrier to general olive oil use appeared to be a lack of awareness and knowledge about olive oil. Although this study was not specifically designed to assess what knowledge participants did have, certain information and knowledge deficiencies did appear over the course of the focus groups. It became particularly evident that there was a limited understanding of olive oil and what information was offered by both regular and infrequent participants was mostly incomplete and inaccurate. Having incorrect knowledge did not necessarily mean that informants used no olive oil at all, but it was suggested by several regular and infrequent participants that if they had more knowledge, they would buy and use it more often.

Participants mostly referred to all of the grades of olive oil (light or extra light oil, pure olive oil, virgin olive oil and extra virgin olive oil) as just 'olive oil'. They rarely used these terms or differentiated between them. This was evident across all groups; all levels of involvement, both genders and every age group. The only occasions that these terms were used was when the projective stimuli reminded them of the different sorts of olive oil. Participant references indicated that they did not really know the differences between these oils, nor did they understand olive oil in general and how to use it. The plethora of olive oil grades and brands on the supermarket shelf often confused and bewildered participants and this also acted as a barrier when choosing olive oil.

To assess this 'lack-of-knowledge' concept further, it was necessary to etically<sup>14</sup> group knowledge about olive oil into two sub categories. The first category was termed 'how to use' knowledge, and was based on having functional knowledge about how to cook with and use olive oil with different food applications. For example, all participants knew about using olive oil for pan-frying foods and dressings, but most were not aware it might be added to mashed potatoes, used for garnishing soups, dipping with bread and in baking. The high-involvement and some medium-involvement users had a wider and more accurate 'how to use' knowledge, whereas the low-involvement infrequent users had very little of this type of knowledge.

The second category of knowledge was 'product' based and incorporated information about the differences between the oils (pure, light, extra virgin etc), production methods, nutrition and health benefits, faults, the meaning of marketing terms (cold pressed and first pressing), storage conditions and the implication of oil colour.

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14 An "etic" account is a description of a behavior in terms familiar to the observer. It is the outsider's view (Pike, 1971).

Involvement Level	Olive Oil Usage	Barriers to Use							Motivators to Future Use			
		Knowledge	Price	Saturation Point	Time Restraints	Fat Perception	Upbringing and Personal History	Flavour	Education	Accessible	Price	Endorsement
High Involvement	Regular use	Good with few inaccuracies	Not important	Important. Participants believe they are using as much as they can at the moment	Not important	Important. Higher importance for the 'Baby Boomer' generation than for the younger X and Y generation	Not important - familiar and accepting of olive oil	Not important - no barrier to use	Important	Quite important - if eating oils were more easily accessible and available more would be purchased	Not very important	Somewhat important
		Moderate knowledge with many inaccuracies			Important barrier for eating oils use but not so much for cooking oils				Important - Not a lot of time spent at home cooking			
Medium Involvement	Regular use											
Low Involvement	Infrequent use	Very little or no knowledge	Price was a strong barrier for cooking oils	Not important	Not important for the little amount used	Important. Originally saw olive oil as 'foreign', not part of upbringing	Important. Flavour and aromas too strong		Not important - Limited to basic supermarket purchase	Very Important	Important - TV Chefs, friends, family, chefs, doctors and health specialists	

Figure 5.2. A proposed relationship between level of food involvement, olive oil usage and barriers and motivators to use.

The research indicated inconsistent 'product knowledge' across all user groups and involvement levels. For example, many believed that 'light olive oil' was light in calories rather than merely refined and light in colour and flavour.

Misunderstanding and confusion was evident when knowledge-oriented probing questions were raised by the interviewer. Most regular and all infrequent users suggested that they did not understand the differences between the oils themselves. Such factors as flavour, smell and colour were a mystery to many participants, as were olive oil production methods and the concept that olive oil had a limited shelf life. The focus group data indicated that few participants actually knew what labelling terms like extra virgin, cold pressed and traditional meant.

A combination of this low level of knowledge and limited exposure to olive oil has created a lack of confidence in both buying the product and in using it. Many could not justify buying expensive cooking and eating oils because they did not comprehend the difference between these and the lesser quality, cheaper oils. This lack of confidence created a barrier to using these products. Some of the more highly involved regular users did have a better 'how to use' and 'product' knowledge of olive oil, but there was still evidence that suggested there were gaps and inaccuracies. This indicated that olive oil educational strategies could be useful at all levels of use and involvement.

## **2.2 Price**

The second most important barrier to use was financial in nature. Although price was an important influence on purchasing for all user groups, it appeared that the infrequent users particularly found the price of olive oil was an obstacle to use. Most regular users seemed prepared to tolerate small changes in cooking oil prices within brands. However, price appeared to be a hurdle for regular users when buying eating oils.



The infrequent users were familiar with buying other oils (canola, vegetable), which were usually around one third the price of olive oil. Many struggled to justify spending extra to buy olive oil instead of, or as well as, canola or vegetable oil. These participants outlined that they did not know the differences between the olive oil types (pure, light, virgin et cetera) and as a result their main purchase decision was price- related. Therefore, in most infrequent user and some regular user cases, price acted as a barrier to purchase, a barrier to use, and a barrier to upgrading from a basic to a better quality cooking olive oil.

### **2.3 Saturation Point and Time Restraints**

When asked why they did not use more olive oil, the next most mentioned barrier for regular users was reaching saturation point with personal olive oil consumption. Many of the regular-use participants talked about using it as much as they could and as much as they knew how to. They struggled with thinking of any other possible ways to use more of it. Some of these regular users also believed that they were using enough olive oil and did not need to use any more. In this instance, saturation could be viewed as a barrier. However, it was interesting that a number of regular and infrequent use participants claimed that if they knew more about olive oil and how to use it, they would use more of it and that their perceived 'saturation point' would not exist.

Others suggested that time restraints were a barrier against using more olive oil. Several regular participants talked about how their busy lifestyles, their long working hours, and an increased frequency of eating out had led to a reduced amount of time spent at home cooking and preparing food. One participant declared that although she is very interested in and loves to use olive oil, and that she enjoys it when dining out; she rarely has the opportunity to cook at home. Therefore, time restrictions for using olive oil exist for these participants. They are not buying and using olive oil

because they either do not have the time to be in an environment often conducive to using it or they make the choice to eat out. In a number of instances, medium-involvement regular users also talked about not using olive oil because they or their spouses/partners do very little, if any, food preparation in the household.

## **2.4 Fat Concerns**

The fourth most common barrier to consumption was related to health. Participants from both user groups and from all involvement levels commented that they still viewed olive oil as a fat. Although they knew it had its health benefits and was a 'good oil', they still controlled the volume of both cooking and eating oil because they wished to reduce their fat intake. For these participants this factor acted more as a barrier to increased use, rather than a barrier against starting to use, olive oil. When asked why they did not consume more, Craig and Sam's responses confirmed this view:

Interviewer: Can you tell me why you don't use more olive oil?

Craig (RU): My body shape.

Sam (RU): Yeah – body shape. The fat thing. I don't need unnecessary fat.

Craig (RU): Well, yeah, it's calories at the end of the day. I want to look after my health.

## **2.5 Background and Taste**

Although not as significant as the aforementioned barrier, participant backgrounds and heritage played a noteworthy role in acting as obstacles to use for infrequent-users (see Chapter 4, section 5.1.1). Many of these infrequent users grew up in environments with no exposure to the flavour and taste of olive oil. Several also grew up in an atmosphere where olive oil as an ingredient just did not exist. It became evident that this lack of

awareness and knowledge of olive oil created a long term barrier to use. The participants who had no exposure to olive oil during their upbringing indicated that they have slowly started to use olive oil. With an increased familiarity and confidence with the product, participant usage could possibly increase further.

The final barrier to use was identified as the negative effect of taste. For some infrequent-use participants, the taste of the olive oil and its bitterness acted as a barrier to use, and some infrequent users referred to the oil flavour and taste being too strong to use on food. This may have been due to a lack of experience with olive oil or perhaps because historically they had had a bad experience with olive oil. They may have been force fed it for medicinal reasons as children, or maybe the composition of their physiological 'taste systems' have not been attuned to olive oil (Bartoshuk, 2000). They may have felt greater oral unpleasantness from the naturally occurring bitter polyphenols in olive oil than other participants did. Bartoshuk's (2000) 'supertasters' category could be useful in classifying these consumers whilst 'non-tasters' could be used to categorise those who found the levels of bitterness pleasant. A number of regular users also commented that the strong taste and smell of olive oil did not always suit many culinary practices. Olive oil was not always the choice for certain cooking methods, including baking and stir-frying, because of its organoleptic potency.

### **3. Future Motivators**

According to the participants, prior to each focus group, they had not paid olive oil much attention. However, after hearing from fellow focus group members, and talking about the product, their interest in the product increased. There was a feeling that most participants actually wanted to use more olive oil as a result of what they learned from the focus groups. These participants spoke of certain factors that would encourage them to use both a greater volume of olive oil, and at a greater frequency than

their current levels. These motives have been ranked in order of significance and importance.

### **3.1 Education and Learning How to Use**

The most important motivator for use evolved from participant comments, and focused on understanding olive oil, learning how to use it, and increasing their level of comfort with the product. These participants indicated that they would be motivated to use more olive oil if they understood a number of things. Firstly, many wanted to know the differences between the different types of olive oils; secondly, many wished to know what types of oil they should use for what applications; and, thirdly, participants wanted to have basic olive oil knowledge including the best storage conditions, heating temperatures, the health benefits of olive oil and, in some instances, the production methods used to make olive oil. Although there seemed to be a general lack of knowledge about olive oil, there was enthusiasm shown towards learning about it. One participant's comment below highlighted this keenness for knowledge:

Gretta (IU): I didn't even know there was a difference between olive oils. I didn't realise that with extra virgin – one is more for cooking and one's supposed to be used more in dressings. I didn't know that. I just started to use the one bottle for whatever. Now, after today, I'm more aware of what each one is used for. I like to learn these things. It makes me feel clever and then I tell my friends.

Participants talked about a number of ways that this information and knowledge could be shared. These included a greater promotion of olive oil and its health benefits through advertising, magazine articles, sections in cook books and on the actual olive oil packaging (bottle back labels and tins). Having the ability to try the oils before they bought them was also considered a powerful motivator for purchasing. This was especially true for unplanned and impulse purchases of both cooking and eating oils. In-

store tastings, cooking demonstrations, and supplying olive oil samples to take home, were all ideas that participants indicated would motivate them to use more olive oil.

Other frequent suggestions from participants revolved around accessing more ways to use it. Many participants talked about wanting recipes and ideas on how to use olive oil. They suggested that these recipes could be on the packaging, on tear-off pads on the olive oil shelves, in pamphlets, in magazines and in cookbooks. The more access to recipes that used olive oil, the more olive oil they would use. This would have a compounding effect as the more that participants used olive oil, the more they felt comfortable and confident with it. This confidence would enable them to share ideas, recipes and knowledge with friends, family and associates, and in turn this may motivate their friends and families to use olive oil.

### **3.2 Accessibility and Price**

The second most significant motivator for future use was the impact of accessibility and convenience. Participants commented that if quality eating olive oil was available to buy in more shops, they would probably use more. This motivator was more relevant to the regular users who were entertaining the idea of purchasing and using more eating oil. They commented that if high quality olive oil was more accessible and not only available in specialty gourmet stores, they would buy more of it. It would not be something they had to specially source and it could easily become part of their regular shopping routine.

Some participants talked about how a price reduction for olive oil would have a motivating effect on purchase. This was especially true for regular users who were buying eating oils. If the eating oils were more affordable they thought they would purchase and use more of them. Price had a significant motivating influence for the infrequent users when purchasing

cooking oil. Although these infrequent users were interested to hear about eating oils, they implied that until they became more comfortable with olive oil and learnt more about the differences between them, most would not spend the money on eating oils. They would, nonetheless, be grateful to be given one as a gift.

Having weekly specials and deals for olive oil was important for both infrequent and regular uses. Using value added items and packaging like pourers and recipe booklets would motivate some participants to buy the different types of olive oil. Nonetheless, even with the influence of packaging, not all participants agreed. Some regular users suggested that they would not use more olive oil just because it was cheaper. The most important motivator for use for these participants was related to education and learning how to get the most out of their olive oil.

### **3.3 Endorsement**

The final important motivator for future use was related to the media. Apart from the educational ideas documented above, several regular-use and many infrequent-use participants suggested that by having people endorsing olive oil and showing them how to utilise it, they would use more of it. If well-known chefs and media personalities approved of the product and used it regularly then participants thought they would be more inclined to increase both the volume and frequency of their own olive oil use. This effect would be further strengthened if the endorsement occurred in relation to food and cooking where participants would be able to improve their knowledge and confidence with food and olive oil at the same time. This was relevant for both medium-and high-involvement participants.

## **4. Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the marketing dimensions of olive oil consumption and purchase in Western Australia. The types of purchase patterns including the style of purchase and the varying types of olive oils

were initially addressed and this was followed by a detailed explanation of the key influences which affect participant's purchasing decisions. This included price, branding, packaging and country of origin. The key barriers that impacted on olive oil use were then outlined and discussed. This was followed by the documentation of suggested issues which might act as future motivators to use.

Having documented the findings of this research in the last two sections, the next chapter discusses the dominant findings which evolved from the analysis of participant data. This in depth discussion is then followed by an evaluation of what marketing implications these findings may have for Australian olive oil producers, the Australian olive oil industry, and for the consumer. Areas for further research are then suggested.

## **Chapter 6. Discussion and Research Conclusions**

A selection of important themes evolved from the review of the literature, the data collection phase and the analysis period. This chapter integrates these themes in relation to the research question and the research objectives first documented in chapter one. This includes exploring the role olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian olive oil consumers by focusing on the following topics:

- How do olive oil consumers view cooking oils, especially olive oil, and what thoughts and feelings do they have about all of these oils?
- From where do these thoughts and feelings come?
- What do olive oil consumers understand about olive oil?
- How is olive oil used, and what influences this use?
- What motivates the current use of olive oil?
- Why do consumers choose olive oil?
- Why do some consumers use olive oil only infrequently?
- What influences their purchasing decisions?
- What are the possible future motivators and barriers to olive oil purchase and consumption?

Following this discussion will be an evaluation of the marketing implications of this study. Suggestions for maximising the marketing potential of olive oil by the Australian olive oil industry and the food trade in general is addressed, followed by an explanation of areas for further investigation resulting from the research.



## **1. The Nature of Olive Oil Consumption in Western Australia**

Olive oil has a range of uses and plays several different roles in the lives of the recruited participants. It is clear that all participants knew, in one degree or another, about the basic culinary uses of olive oil, and of its commonly mentioned health benefits.

The modified version of Traill's (1999) *Conceptual model for consumer behaviour with respect to food* proved a useful tool with which to plan and execute this olive oil study. Traill's three overarching dimensions that influence food choice, person-related factors, environmental factors and food-related properties, helped to successfully explore the role that olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australians. It provided a framework for a comprehensive literature review and this in turn formed a solid base to start data collection. The author's revised version of Traill's (1999) model was also helpful as it was used to dissect the subdivisions of olive oil consumption, including those that were involved with the hedonic and symbolic consumption of olive oil.

### **1.1 Involvement with and Involvement with Food**

This research suggests that participants have a level of involvement with olive oil. Although the intensity of the involvement appears to be less compared to other food research, including studies on seafood (Juhl & Poulsen, 2000), wine (Charters & Pettigrew, 2006; d'Hauteville, 2003) and cheese (Hughes et al., 1998 ), it is still a useful tool for understanding the olive oil consumer. The fact that olive oils are almost always used to prepare other foods means that it is a product with secondary demand rather than primary demand. This may go some way towards explaining olive oil's strong association with food and weak individual identity.

It also became evident that the level of involvement assigned to each participant may also be useful in determining these participant's level of

involvement in food in general. When participants talk about olive oil, it is rarely discussed in isolation. References to pasta, seafood, cheese, bread, dukkah, wine and food were regularly made when talking about olive oil.

The medium-to high-involvement regular olive oil users have an interest in what they put into their mouths, they enjoy cooking and entertaining and were keen to know more about food. Interestingly, when looking at olive oil in particular, few actually have the same intensity of enthusiasm and understanding of olive oil as they do with food as a whole. Those that do have good olive oil knowledge share the same keenness for other food and beverage items and purchase them at similar establishments (gourmet stores, food markets, wineries). Such items include specialty cheese, premium wine, fresh pasta and good bread. It is this smaller group of participants who reported consuming eating oils.

To a certain degree, this study corroborates other food and wine involvement research conducted previously, and this supports wine researchers who suggest that product involvement as well as brand and purchase involvement have an important influence on purchase and consumption behaviour. It also reflects the suggestion that high-involvement wine shoppers are interested in and motivated by knowledge about products and brands (Lockshin, Quester, & Spawton, 2001; Lockshin, Spawton, & Macintosh, 1997).

From this research, it appears that there are similarities between the level of involvement and the key reasons for choosing premium foods and beverages and for choosing and using eating oils. The most significant reason for the choice of all of these products is the pursuit of flavour, taste and pleasure. These high-involvement 'foodie' participants also talked about reaching saturation point with their olive oil use. This suggests that they are quite significant users of olive oil. This finding parallels the wine focused research of Goldsmith and d'Hauteville (1998) who concluded that

heavy wine consumers were more likely to be knowledgeable and interested in wine and more highly involved with it.

Many medium-involvement regular users who enjoy food are aware of eating oils and like the idea of using them, but few purchase them. The main reasons for not purchasing eating oils appears to be because they have a higher price tag, they are not readily available in supermarkets, and they are much harder to source than cooking olive oils.

There is very little involvement with the cooking type of olive oil. This was still viewed by most participants (excluding some high involvement participants) as a commodity and staple ingredient with predominantly functional properties.

The medium-involvement regular use participants still enjoy food and cooking, but they are not so driven by the aesthetic and hedonic nature of food. Those who only cook with olive oil and use the lesser quality olive oils as their only cooking oil, have little knowledge about it and buy it at supermarkets where the key purchase drivers are price and brand.

Showing interest in learning about food was generally linked to a high-involvement level with a food product. However, this research shows that many participants who displayed lower involvement traits, also showed the higher involvement trait of 'knowledge seeking' and 'interest' towards olive oil. Evidence of this can be seen when participants stayed after the focus group to learn more about olive oil. The fact that these participants wanted to learn about olive oil, albeit in varying quantity and detail, is an important finding. This shows that given an appropriate opportunity maybe participants are becoming more interested in olive oil. If this trend continues, their increased knowledge about olive oil will no doubt have an influence on their level of involvement with it. The positive effect of greater knowledge on involvement was demonstrated in McCarthy, O'Reilly, and

Cronin's (2001) study, where it was found that increased knowledge was related to higher levels of involvement with specialty cheeses.

This study also suggests that consumers with higher involvement levels in food may spend more money on eating oils, shop in a variety of outlets, know more about what they are buying and are stimulated by flavour, taste and aroma. This concurs with the research of McCarthy *et al.* (2001) which highlighted the importance of one's level of involvement on specialty cheese choice.

## **1.2 Olive Oil as Two Products**

There is no doubt that regular emic descriptions and references to olive oil imply that it is one homogenous product which comes in many styles. These different styles usually relate to the olive oil's colour and production method. For example, participants talk about olive oil being a bright yellow/green 'extra virgin' olive oil and they also talked of a clear, neutral 'pure' olive oil. Nevertheless they still generally referred to them equally as 'olive oil'.

From the etic analysis of the participant comments, it is evident that although olive oil is described as a single entity, two forms of 'olive oil' actually exist. One olive oil is known by and is used in varying frequencies by all participants and was termed cooking oil by the researcher. This is a functional oil and used predominantly for all food preparation and cooking needs. The purchase of this oil is typically planned and is price and brand oriented. It is most often bought in supermarkets, in larger quantities and treated very much as a food commodity.

The second olive oil is only known to and used by the medium and high-involvement regular olive oil users, and was etically labelled eating oil. In contrast to cooking oil, eating oil's health, functional and price attributes were second in importance to its highly-discussed sensory and aesthetic

properties. This category of oil is used where flavour and taste are required. It is also utilised to embellish the user's self-image and own lifestyle. It is usually bought at a price premium compared to cooking oils and the key place of purchase is specialty outlets. Freshness and flavour are paramount, so buying smaller volumes enables the oil to be used and replaced more often. The behaviour of these consumers is often viewed as being variety and quality seeking in nature.

There appeared to be a significant dissimilarity between the way in which participants viewed, used and talked about these two oils. Many participants that used only cooking oil, had no awareness that there were alternative olive oils on the market or that they might use these oils when they required flavour in an oil (such as dipping bread in oil). The purchasing behaviours, methods of use and consumer expectations of these two oils were also diverse and distinctly different. This highlighted the need to treat each oil as a very separate and individual product with very different marketing needs.

This existence of a dual classification approach to a single product concurs with a number of alternative food and wine studies. Both Charters (2002) and Kupiec and Revell (1998; 2001) have described similar dichotomous relationships that existed within a single food / drink product. Charters (2002) argued that wine can be split into the two categories of 'beverage' wine and 'premium' wine, with the main differences between them being related to aesthetic appreciation, the purpose for drinking each wine type and the characteristics of where it is grown and produced. Kupiec and Revell (1998) make a clear distinction between mass produced industrial cheese and the more 'specialty' artisanal group of cheeses. They claimed that quality and flavour were the fundamental properties that influenced consumer's decision to purchase artisanal cheese and that its price and functional properties were less important. Sensory and pleasure factors, quality, uniqueness and superiority were

attributes evident in the higher categories of eating olive oil, 'artisanal' cheese and 'premium' wine, whereas the attributes of price, functionality, and availability were more important for the cooking olive oil, 'industrial' cheeses and 'beverage' wine categories.

Thus the findings of this olive oil research support the theory that a single homogenous product can, in certain instances, exist as two very different types of products with varying product expectations, alternative uses, different motives for consumption and diverse purchasing behaviours. These concurrent findings could have an impact on other food-related consumer behaviour research where one 'product' may have at least two clearly distinguishable product applications and values. For example, perhaps coffee could be divided up into the readily available, generally cheaper and lesser quality, everyday 'instant' coffee, and the more premium, ritual-focused, specialty ground coffee.

### **1.3 Consumers' Knowledge and Understanding of Olive Oil**

Another significant etic finding of this research is that participants in general have very little accurate knowledge about olive oil. This supports the key findings of The Loyalty Factor (2003) where it was suggested that the majority of Australians are relatively uneducated about olive oil. The one group which is an exception to having limited knowledge is the high-involvement regular users. Apart from this group, the remaining participants' 'how to use' knowledge and their 'product' knowledge are limited and incomplete. Rarely were issues such as the differences between oil grades, production methods, nutritional benefits, labelling terms and storage requirements mentioned. If they were, they were most often talked about incorrectly or with great apprehension. Further evidence of this limited knowledge was found when participants of both regular and infrequent user focus groups frequently questioned other group members about basic olive oil facts and information.

However, it is important to note that although there seem to be deficiencies in both types of knowledge, there appeared to be a general enthusiasm toward learning more about olive oil and this was evident when participants stayed after class. Alternatively, it may be that these participants only stayed after the group because it was easy and convenient to do so. If they had to independently read and teach themselves about olive oil, their interest and desire to learn may wane. If this is true, the choice of medium for educating people about oil needs to be as simple, interactive, uncomplicated and – crucially – as convenient as possible.

Apart from limited ‘how to use’ knowledge for cooking oil and even less knowledge on how to use eating oil, there is a definite void of general ‘product knowledge’ among participants. This is evident for both cooking and eating oils. The findings support the findings of several organic food studies (Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002; McEachern & McClean, 2002; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002), and a number of studies on the effect of new technology on food choice (Batrinou, Dimitriou, Liatsos, & Pletsa, 2005; Eastwood, 1994), where it was found that a lack of knowledge was a major limiting factor on consumer purchase behaviour. Participants regularly talked about wanting to know more about olive oil and how this knowledge would positively influence their usage and purchasing patterns.

As mentioned previously, this was not a study focused primarily on the relationship between olive oil knowledge and use. However, in reference to nutritional knowledge, it is important to note that although there was little mention and evidence of nutritional knowledge among participants, they still used olive oil because of it was ‘good for you’. This study corroborates the research of Pirouzina (2001) and Saegert and Young (1983) which suggest that there is a positive relationship between purchase and nutritional awareness. Although participants may not know of olive oil’s exact nutritional advantages, they still believe it to be healthy

and therefore they chose to use it because of these health-related benefits.

This research indicates that one of the key messages getting out to participants is that olive oil is healthy. Just knowing that olive oil is 'good for you' and 'healthy' was enough to influence most participants' use. In fact the 'healthiness' concept appeared to have an almost 'mythological' symbolic influence. Without any actual knowledge of how and why olive oil is healthy, participants are still happy to 'believe what they want to believe', which is that olive oil is a healthy product. If they understood the health differences between the varying grades of olive oil (extra virgin to pomace), it might influence their decision to purchase and use more or less of certain olive oils.

#### **1.4 The Importance of Symbolic Consumption**

Another significant finding is that olive oil consumption occurs for several symbolic reasons. It suggests that the use of olive oil is linked to, in varying degrees, participants' intrinsically-directed self image (Belk, 1988) and a symbolic representation of their external self image (Mick, 1986). It is important to make the distinction between eating and cooking olive oil in this context. The use of eating oil emerged to be a significant driver of image and status-oriented behaviour for those medium–involvement regular users who purchase and consume it. For those medium-involvement users that only use cooking oil, it appeared that both image and status were an important motivator for their use of cooking oil. The high-involvement users did not use cooking oil for the purpose of externally directed image building and rarely used eating oil for this purpose either.

One of the reasons why regular-use participants use olive oil appears to be very strongly related to the message participants want to send to friends, family and associates and, to a certain degree themselves.



Informants indicated that it is important for them to share their knowledge, skills and enthusiasm for olive oil and food with friends, family and associates. The positive externally-directed 'foodie' image derived from this type of activity appears to be welcomed by participants.

An intrinsic-directed image also appears to be important with medium-involvement and, to a smaller degree, the high-involvement users. These medium-to high-involvement users like to think that they themselves are quite sophisticated and food savvy. They 'splash' and 'drizzle' olive oil because they want to be like the TV chefs. In fact, these television chefs promote olive oil as an essential ingredient and strongly endorse its use. These participants see great chefs, personalities, friends and family using olive oil and they aspire to emulate this and act like this at home. One might suggest that many of these regular olive oil consumers could be wishing for an idealised modern 'lifestyle' (Featherstone, 1991), where culinary taste (the flavour, aroma, texture, visual appeal of a food) in combination with gastronomic experiences (such as preparing food at home, entertaining friends and family, visiting food markets and dining out), becomes an important way in which consumers can live out their 'perfect food' existence (Sloan, 2004).

The health benefits of olive oil also appear to be linked to image. When participants use olive oil in this way they feel they are being responsible for their health. This could indicate an internally directed symbolic motivation for wanting to 'be healthy'. The consumer 'feels' healthy when they use olive oil and it contributes to an inner feeling of being a 'good' person by taking responsibility for their own health and that of their families. This confirms the organic food research of Makatourni (2002) where it was found that consumers perceive organic food as a way of achieving individual and social values, with the most important value focused on the health construct for themselves and for their families.

Using olive oil also sends a similar outward directed message to friends, family and peers. Medium-involvement users wish to portray an image of being a healthy eater and someone who is concerned with the food they put into their mouths. Many of the high-involvement participants, however, were less interested in this type of external gratification and more interested in internally directed aesthetic and hedonic stimuli. Although they were aware of olive oil's nutritional and health benefits, they were far more concerned with intrinsically enjoying the aroma and taste of olive oil and food in general, and seemed to be less worried about proving to others how much of a 'foodie' they are.

The data suggest that status and image were most important for the regular medium-involvement users, followed by the other factors of taste and health. It should be acknowledged that no participants actually declared that they use olive oil because it enhances their status and image. However, there are several key issues that lead to the important realisation that image and status are significantly yet subtly linked to olive oil use. Although these participants commented that taste is important, many of them only buy imported Italian and Spanish oils from supermarkets. Many of the imported supermarket oils are more than 2-3 years old and are often technically faulty. This results in the dulling of olive flavour characteristics through oxidation and rancidity (Fedeli, 1996). This could indicate that although users of these oils classify taste as an important factor for their personal olive oil consumption, they may not really know what 'fresh' oil tastes like. They may perceive that because they are buying Italian or Spanish olive oil, it must be good and it must be fresh and as long as the oil serves its purpose it will be used.

A further argument for the importance of image and status lies in the packaging of olive oil. Those medium involvement users who bought eating oil regularly reflected on the importance of packaging, bottle shape, label colour and value adding. Whether the oil is being given as a gift,

used in the kitchen or on display on the table, the packaging of the product seems very important in enhancing the *bon vivant* image of the user.

Another pointer that image and status are more important than medium-involvement participants indicated is that they have no great knowledge about olive oil. Many participants believe their knowledge is correct and they are more than happy to voice their opinions about it, but in fact, a large volume of the information they share is inaccurate. It appears that participants are trying to impress others with their knowledge, and in doing so they are portraying a knowledgeable 'foodie' image they wish others to see them having.

It is also widely acknowledged that advertising, marketing and the media are important mediums with which to create and develop self-images linked to products and services (Aaker & Biehl, 1993; Kapferer, 1997). It is the marketers' task to generate a brand image that fits with the self image of their intended customers (Graeff, 1996). Interestingly, few participants talked about the impact of direct advertising (for example, print and radio) on their olive oil consumption behaviour. However, the study found that consumers might be influenced by a different type of media; the television cooking show. The television personalities promoting the use of olive oil could be viewed as opinion leaders. These personalities have extensive food product knowledge and they are frequently able to influence others' attitudes to products or behaviours (Rajecki et al., 1993). They are seen by participants as experts on food, and communicate this information through television and other food appropriate media (cook books, lifestyle magazines).

This quasi-advertising medium seemed to contribute to the creation of a 'foodie' image for participants. As a result, participants may even tend to buy the same types of food, cookware, kitchen utensils and ingredients that are used on such shows. This contributes to the research on the

influence of advertising and promotional messages on self-image (Graeff, 1996) and further extends the research by adding that marketers can utilise alternative media tools like television cooking shows and not only advertising, to create and send specific brand- related self image messages.

### **1.5 Lifestyle**

It could be argued that the use of olive oil contributes to the intrinsic and extrinsic need to have an idealised modern 'lifestyle' (Featherstone, 1991). When the regular users, both medium and high involvement, are at home or dining out, they reported enjoying eating olive oil because it makes them feel 'groovy'. Intrinsically, these participants seemed to like to think of themselves as 'up with the times' and sophisticated. They pay attention to the external influences which create a personal desire to be 'cool'. Participants also want others to see them as having a 'foodie lifestyle'. They do this by using and talking about olive oil when they have guests at home or by talking about it when dining out.

Most regular olive oil using participants associate olive oil fondly with the 'Mediterranean' region and their own idealised version of the Mediterranean diet. When they use it, many feel like they are living a Mediterranean type of lifestyle at home. They toss pasta and seafood in olive oil; they enjoy a glass or two of wine; dip crusty bread in olive oil and drizzle it over home grown tomatoes and vegetables.

However, there appears to be a difference between what participants believe the 'Mediterranean' diet is and the traditional Mediterranean diet<sup>15</sup>.

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15 The hallmarks of the true Mediterranean diet are said to include an abundant consumption of plant foods and olive oil, high quantities of carbohydrates (grains, breads, pastas), high consumption of mono-unsaturated fat (with low consumption of saturated fat), low quantities of animal food and a moderate intake of wine (Wahlqvist & Kouris-Blazos, 2001).

Santich (1996, p. 58) writes about the Mediterranean diet and how it has changed from simple artisanal foods with “wholesome, homely qualities” to a broad Mediterranean diet “synthesised by nutritional experts and elevated to cult status”. It could be argued that Australians have re-interpreted and re-invented the traditional Mediterranean diet to suit their own likes and dislikes. Evidence of this change could be seen when medium and high involvement regular users would dip bread into bowls of olive oil, and in some cases dukkah as well, both at home and in restaurants and cafes. When a selection of Mediterranean immigrants from Spain, Italy, Turkey and Southern France were questioned by the author about this practice, none could recall ever using olive oil in this way in their country of origin; in fact it was suggested that bread was only used to absorb food juices (P. Morreli, S. Gonzalez, M. Mustau & F. Giannetti, personal communication, May 20th, 2006). It could be proposed that medium- to high-involvement food consumers are either deconstructing the traditional Mediterranean diet and creating their own version, or they are following the lead of others who have done the deconstructing. At the same time they believe they are gaining the purported health benefits of the Mediterranean diet and therefore satisfying an internally-directed self image of being both healthy and a ‘foodie’.

The regular users also reported an increase in olive oil consumption due to a general proliferation of experimenting in the kitchen. They have been engaging in recreational cooking for the satisfaction of themselves as well as others. This can also be linked to an increase in leisure interests which further contributes to the formation of one’s ideal lifestyle (Featherstone, 1991).

## **1.6 The Power of Branding**

The findings of this research indicate an interesting relationship between oil use and oil brands. They suggest a bell curve effect for the importance of branding as a predictor of food choice for olive oil (see figure 6.1).

The selection and use of olive oil for the low-involvement participants was rarely brand-related. They know little about olive oil and they do not differentiate between brands. Their main stimulus for purchasing their cooking oil is functional and related to price. These findings reflect Graeff's (1996) research on branding and self image. It highlights that if a person's self-concept is not stimulated, for example if one does not think or care about how olive oil will enhance their own image or how others will view them when they use it, branding will have little effect on the decision to purchase it. The same argument could be used for high-involvement participants who have some knowledge about olive oil; they are variety seeking, innovative and are influenced regularly by the need for flavour and taste in olive oil. They are not very concerned about how olive oil will affect their image. Therefore brand played a small role in their cooking oil purchase decisions and an even more minor role in the eating oil purchase decision.

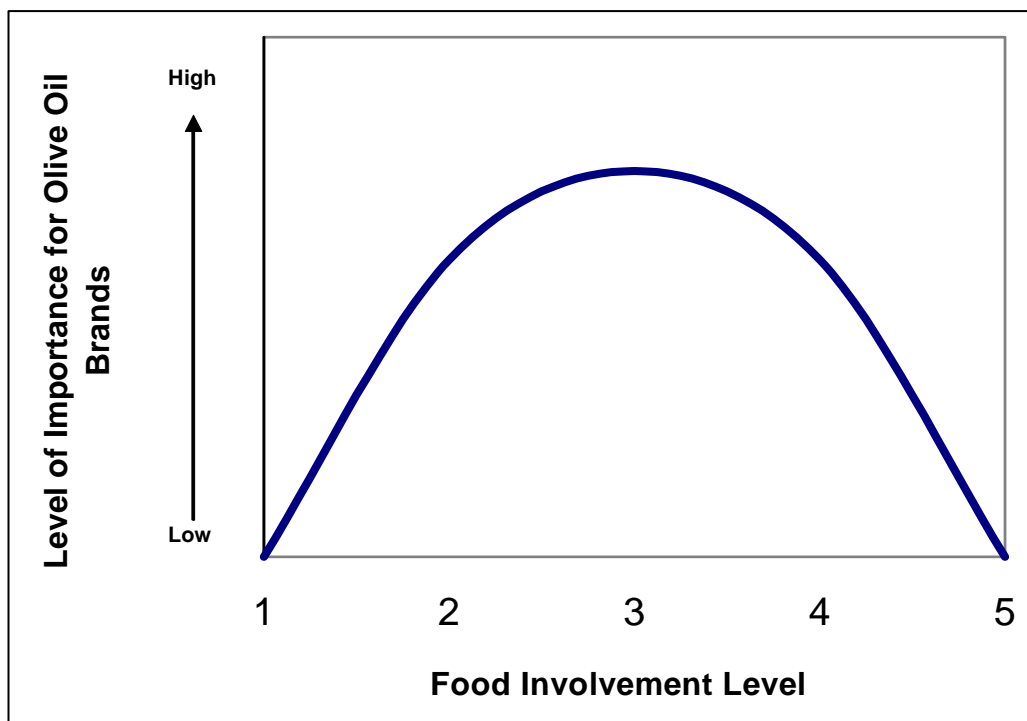


Figure 6.1 Effect of Involvement Level on Brand Importance

However, as the graph indicates, the medium-involvement users are strongly influenced by brand. These branded products are sourced from Mediterranean olive oil producing countries. Although some of these participants are aware that Australian olive oil exists, imported products are perceived as the oil to buy.

Once they have found a good cooking oil brand, whether through experimentation or by recommendations from family or friends, they tend to use the brand with which they feel familiar and comfortable. These informants are happy to use the same olive oil brand and trust its reputation. These oils are predominantly Italian or Spanish and the Mediterranean country of origin appears to be a cue for quality. This could be strongly linked to self image as the image created by using imported oils contributes to the internally and outwardly directed 'foodie' and 'Mediterranean' image.

Having said this, further evidence that participants are more involved with food in general than in olive oil can be found in the lack of reference to actual brand names. In the absence of having the physical product in front of them, visual and packaging attributes are needed as cues to remember brand names. Cues like bottle shape and size, colour and the writing on the label help participants to both recognise and remember brand names. This finding is significant for those involved with product development and marketing as it indicates that for the average olive oil user, branding needs to be strongly linked to the physical appearance of the product. Thus, in effect, the actual brand may be less important than consumers think, but country of origin, packaging and image-creating attributes may play a more significant role.

As the level of data provided for brand preferences is less dense than other relevant issues, it is important to treat this information with caution. Having said this, the findings relating to the high-involvement users

support the research of Foxhall & Bhate (1993) who found that high-involvement innovators are less brand loyal because they are often seeking out new products on the market and they have more confidence in their own tastes and preferences. Thus, the same behaviours of Foxhall and Bhate's research were apparent among the high-involvement olive oil users in this sample.

### **1.7 Generational Issues**

The effect of generational differences was also prevalent throughout the findings. The three generations that were strongly identifiable were the baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1981) and Generation Y (born between 1982 and 2000). Although each of these generations appears to perceive olive oil differently, the most significant differences were observed between the Baby Boomers and Generations X and Y jointly.

Participants belonging to the Australian baby boomer generation perceived olive oil as something new, foreign and 'ethnic'. Those in this group had not been brought up on olive oil and all had been exposed to the regular 'fat is bad for you' health warnings of the 1980s and 1990s. A certain element of neophobia and ethnophobia is evident among this group. Only in the last five to ten years have the majority of these participants begun to use olive oil, and it has been the media, friends and family that have endorsed the positive benefits of the product and lessened the believed 'negative' connotations of olive oil. It should be reminded that the results are specific to Perth, Western Australian. These findings may not be representative of the Baby Boomer generation in other Australian cities. For example, the high proportion of Greek and Italian Baby Boomer immigrants living in Melbourne may prove to contradict this study's results and it appears that the results of The Loyalty Factor (2003) do this with the traditionalist segment.



A new finding resulting from this research highlights the importance of the younger generations teaching the older generation. It is significant that the younger generations of X and Y were key influences on teaching parents about olive oil and how to use it. The Baby Boomer generation also shows little need to define who they are by buying and using olive oil. This may help to explain why most of the Baby Boomer participants fell into the medium to low involvement category. It supports the proposition that as one ages, the level of importance placed on material possessions for image creation and status decreases (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

The majority of participants belonged (unintentionally) to the Generation X category. This generation tends to eat away from home more frequently than their parents or grandparents do (Blisard, 2001). Due to this, these participants have more exposure to olive oil and its varied uses, and are therefore very accepting of it as a food product. Many struggle to find time to cook and entertain with family, friends and peers due to busy work lives, but when they do, the experience is greatly enjoyed. The media plays a key role in influencing their purchasing behaviour with television and magazines being very important.

Interestingly, the generation Y participants expressed no apprehension about olive oil and few viewed it as a bad fat. They are generally adventurous and experimental with food and many in this research showed an interest in olive oil. However, the fact that not all of the Y Generation participants showed this same enthusiasm for olive oil, may indicate that the level of adventurousness and experimentation could be related to specific food products or categories.

### **1.8 Olive Oil Consumer Profiles**

The findings of this study have enabled the development of six olive oil consumer profiles based on the participants in the data collection process.

The groups of participants belonging to each of these profiles have different thoughts and feelings about olive oil and also varying patterns of consumption and purchase behaviour. It is important to stress that it is not the intention to formally identify market segments, nor can precise generalisations be made from the small sample in this research. However, by simplifying and categorising these characteristics, the different profiles offer a more in depth picture of the olive oil consumers under study. These profiles could form a basis for future in-depth segmentation research and are summarised below.

Apart from McEvoy and Gomez's (1999) first attempt at segmenting the market, there has only been one pertinent segmentation study that has focused on Australian olive oil consumers (The Loyalty Factor, 2003). Although the characteristics of each of these segments are only briefly documented in The Loyalty Factor's (2003) study, a comparison has been made between those segments and the profiles of this Western Australian research. These comparisons are discussed in section 1.2.7 and diagrammatically shown in figure 6.2.

### **1.8.1 The Foodie (High-Involvement Regular Users)**

The best way to describe the high-involvement regular olive oil user in this study's sample was as a 'foodie'. These participants cared about what they ate and drank, both from a flavour, quality and health point of view. They were confident and took pleasure in cooking and experimenting in the kitchen, as well as eating out and experiencing the food of different cultures. These food lovers viewed olive oil as two products and used both regularly. The first type of oil was used for all purpose everyday cooking applications, (predominantly olive oil and pure and light oils and a small volume of extra virgin oil), and the primary motives for its use were functional and health oriented. The second type of olive oil was of extra virgin quality only and its applications were for eating, finishing dishes, dipping with bread and using where flavour is paramount. The motivations

for this group's use of eating olive oil were aesthetic and hedonic in nature. This agrees with the research of Thompson et al. (1994) where taste and flavour attributes of olive oil were paramount for regular users of olive oil in the UK and also gives some validation to McEvoy and Gomez's (1999) Australian study which found that taste and flavour (along with health) were important influences on olive oil consumption.

These high-involvement regular users have a reasonable knowledge of the different types of olive oil and how to use them. They also enjoy sharing this information with friends and family and giving olive oil as a gift. These participants are aware that Australian olive oil exists, and will buy it if the flavour and taste requirements match the desired quality and price point. They shop in supermarkets for their cooking oil and at specialty outlets for their eating oil. They appreciate being able to taste the oil before they buy it. Many of these participants suggested reaching 'saturation point' with their olive oil usage. However, they are enthusiastic about broadening their olive oil use and learning about additional foods with which it can be used. These participants also implied that if olive oil was more easily obtainable, their volumes of both cooking and eating olive oil will increase. The key to this consumer profile is that flavour and taste are vital, not just with olive oils, but food in general and they are prepared to pay for it.

### **1.8.2 The Aspirational Foodie (Medium-Involvement Regular Users)**

This group of users could best be described as the 'aspirational foodies'. They enjoyed food, wine, cooking and entertaining. They used olive oil for cooking regularly and extra virgin olive oil for eating less frequently as they often perceived it as 'special' oil. They had some knowledge about olive oil and they liked to share this among friends and acquaintances, but much of this knowledge was inaccurate and misinformed. Whenever they had the opportunity, they were keen to learn more about olive oil and food in general. Recommendations from friends and family had encouraged this

group to buy certain brands, most of which are imported from Mediterranean oil producing countries, as these were perceived as premium oils. They were aware of Australian oils and many were starting to experiment with them. The participants in this group were recipe followers.

Olive oil's flavour and taste played a notable role for this group of users. The purchase and consumption of olive oil for symbolic reasons, such as the internally and externally directed healthy and food savvy self-image and the desire for a 'foodie lifestyle' was very significant in this profile. These participants were moderately price sensitive but the packaging, country of origin and branding were most important. Watching TV chefs and other 'foodies' use olive oil inspired them to also use it. These medium-involvement regular users mainly purchased their cooking oils at supermarkets but if they had the chance to taste eating oils at other outlets, they often did so. If they liked the oils they tasted, they would purchase them either for themselves or as gifts.

### **1.8.3 The Recipe Reader (Low- to Medium-Involvement Regular Users)**

Although, this group of consumers in this study used olive oil more than once a week and they enjoy food and eating, they were not overly interested in olive oil. They used olive oil for cooking and were generally not aware of the possibility of using olive oil as an eating oil. The main reason for using olive oil for this profile derived from its functional capabilities and health benefits. Olive oil's aesthetic attributes were rarely motives for use. These users followed recipes consistently, and they lacked the confidence in the kitchen to experiment. They chose olive oil over other oils because it was known as a healthier oil and that it is what they 'think' they should be using. 'Product' and 'how to use' knowledge was limited for this group and this acted as a barrier to purchase and use. However, they showed enthusiasm for learning more about olive oil.

These consumers shopped for their oil supply in supermarkets and price played a significant role in the final choice decision. They were regular brand buyers who believed that imported olive oils from Mediterranean countries must be superior to other oils. They were not really aware of the existence of Australian olive oils and Australian brands. They were influenced by the media and television cooking shows. These types of endorsements, as well as increased olive oil education and having a competitive price, will motivate this group to use more of it.

#### **1.8.4 Time Poor Foodies (High-Involvement Infrequent Users)**

The fourth profile was a small group of consumers who were knowledgeable and interested in olive oil and had all of the high involvement traits as listed above, but they only used it infrequently. These people tended to be 'foodies', but due to time restrictions and the high occurrence of eating out, their opportunities to use olive oil were limited. It is important at this stage to differentiate between using and consuming olive oil. Although these consumers did not use it often, it did not mean that they do not consume it frequently. This group still consumed and appreciated olive oil when they ate out and dined at family and friend's houses. So in essence, they were still regular eaters of olive oil, just not regular users.

#### **1.8.5 Time Poor Aspirational (Medium-Involvement Infrequent Users)**

The fifth group in the study was similar to the smaller high-involvement infrequent user group outlined above; however it was less interested in olive oil. These consumers had a medium involvement profile similar to that discussed in section 1.2.2, however once again, their usage was limited because of eating out and time restrictions. Another reason for infrequent use could have been that the cuisine of choice is not Mediterranean and or olive oil friendly. For instance, at home, some may prefer to cook Asian food with peanut oil or Indian food with ghee, in which

case, olive oil was used much less. It is difficult to extrapolate more information about this and the high-involvement infrequent user profile because of the limited data gained from the focus groups. It does suggest however, that there could be consumers in the market place that are involved with olive oil to one degree or another and who 'consume' it regularly, but not 'use' it frequently.

#### **1.8.6 The Uninterested (Low-Involvement Infrequent Users)**

The sixth group in this study was the low-involvement infrequent users. This group was aware that olive oil exists but they had little preference for, or interest in, using it. Apart from the health advantages, olive oil meant very little to them and they did not spend time thinking about it. They were indifferent to it. The main oils used by this group consisted of canola and vegetable oil and occasional olive oil bought only in supermarkets. The olive oil that they did use was imported cooking oil and tended to be pure, light or extra light olive oil and usually the cheapest. The only time extra virgin olive oil was bought was for very specific purposes such as medicinal applications or a recipe or a special diet called for it. Although consumption in the past has been infrequent, there were indications that olive oil consumption in this group may increase. Very few were aware that olive oils for eating exist, and none of this group used oil for this application. There also appeared to be a smaller sub-group within this profile that encompassed consumers who physiologically disliked the smell and taste of olive and therefore used it rarely or not at all.

This profile's purchase decisions were almost solely based on price, with the heart foundation tick and health were a further influence. Perceived high olive oil prices worked as a barrier to use, as did its strong flavour. The next key barrier to use after price was that these participants know very little about how to use it, apart from frying foods. Their 'product' and 'how to use' knowledge was very low. Potential motivators for future use by these participants included being educated about olive oil, keeping the

price competitive and having health specialists and celebrities endorsing the product.

### **1.8.7 Profile Comparisons**

A comparison of the aforementioned profiles to those segments of The Loyalty Factor's (2003) study highlights a number of similar and different characteristics that could be used to classify Australian olive oil consumers. Figure 6.2 shows how these profiles and segments measure up against each other.

The Foodies profile has many overlapping and similar characteristics to The Loyalty Factor's (2003) *Confident Gourmet* segment (see figure 6.2). The key likeness is that both groups are driven mostly by flavour and taste as well as health and they are prepared to spend the money on buying and regularly using quality extra virgin olive oils. They both enjoy cooking and entertaining, they shop at the same outlets and they are less influenced by the price, packaging and labelling of olive oil.

What The Loyalty Factor's segmentation fails to recognise are those *Confident Gourmets* who are not regular users. This study's profile of *Time Poor Foodies* (and the *Time Poor Aspirationalists*) suggests that although these segments are small, they still warrant attention.

It is interesting that there was little evidence of The Loyalty Factor's (2003) *Traditionalists* segment in the author's research. The demographic and ethnic make up of the sample from Melbourne, Adelaide and Queensland as well as the smaller sample size used in this study may help to explain why this profile was not more evident. The small number of Western Australian participants that showed Traditionalists traits were profiled into the *Recipe Readers* and *Aspirational Foodies* depending on other characteristics.

The health benefits of olive oil were important to almost all of the participants in this study and these findings agree with the findings of other olive oil researchers (Bech-Larsen, 1996; Martinez et al., 2002; McEvoy & Gomez, 1999; Nielsen et al., 1998; Sandalidou et al., 2002; The Loyalty Factor, 2003; Thompson et al., 1994). However, a segment based on buying olive oil mainly for its health benefits like the Loyalty Factor's (2003) *Health Driven* segment, could not be established. In fact the majority of the Western Australian Baby Boomer participants fell into the *Recipe Readers* profile and preferred to buy in 500ml - 1 Litre volumes and were price sensitive. Once more, this may be related to the varying sample characteristics.

Many more similarities were found between The Loyalty Factor's (2003) *Recipe Followers* and the author's *Aspirational Foodies* profile than other participant profiles. Both of these groups enjoyed entertaining, used a selection of different oils, bought oil from a variety of outlets and viewed olive oil as a normal part of culinary life with premium extra virgin olive oil seen as a special oil. They both regarded and treated olive oil in much the same way. However, the key difference was that the *Aspirational Foodies* used olive oil more frequently than the *Recipe Followers* who used it very irregularly.

There is very little variation between the author's *Uninterested* profile and the Loyalty Factor's (2003) *Indifferents* segment. The only difference is that the *Uninterested* consumers from this Western Australian study use olive oil very rarely compared with the *Indifferents* who use it more often. Again, it is important to stress that this was not a segmentation study. However, data from past studies and this research suggest that diverse segments and variations on segments could exist in different parts of Australia, and that a particular segment in one state may not always be relevant in other states. Further segmentation research across the country would help to ascertain how significant each of these profiles might be and



how successfully they could provide a more in depth picture of the Australian olive oil consumer.

## **2. Marketing implications**

The findings of this research have a number of marketing implications. A significant result of this research suggests that olive oil is a product that few participants really understand. Participants are aware of its existence, but they have no great knowledge about it, how to use it or the specific health benefits of it. If Australian olive oil producers and marketing companies want a share of the multi-million dollar Australian market they are going to need to educate olive oil consumers about olive oil, how to use it and what foods it can be used with. Both 'how to use' and 'product' knowledge need to be communicated as effectively and efficiently as possible. The findings from this research suggest that several ways of doing this may be through television cooking shows, chef endorsements, recipe books and 'try before you buy' tastings at places of purchase (supermarkets, specialty stores).

It is likely that the increased confidence created by a greater understanding of olive oil will have a flow on effect to the friends and family of users. This confidence may incite the new purchase of, and experimentation with, eating oil. Education should aim to minimise the negative 'foreign' and 'fat' perceptions of olive oil, whilst highlighting the positive attributes including health, freshness and flavour. This may encourage both current and new olive oil consumers to show loyalty to those brands responsible for educating them.

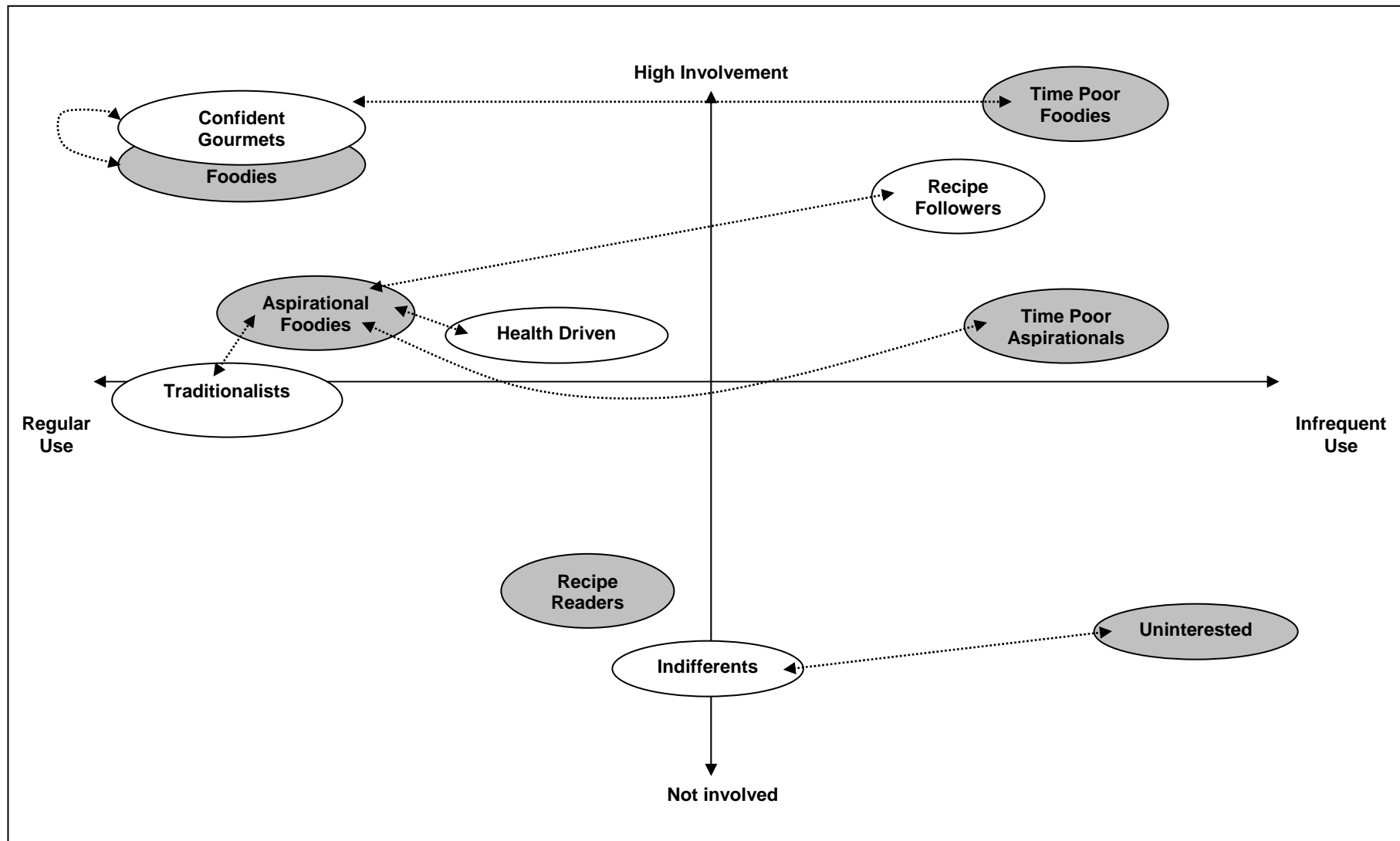


Figure 6.2 A comparison of the Loyalty Factor's (2003) market segments (clear ovals) and profiles from this research (grey ovals). The arrows highlight where characteristics between profiles overlap or are similar.

Emphasis on the central 'health' message is critical to the growth of the olive oil market. Both regular and infrequent participant responses indicate that it is a main reason why they started using olive oil. Therefore, it could very well be the key motivation behind further olive oil sector growth and development. The health opportunity should be maximised and used on all packaging, promotions and endorsed in the media.

The research suggests that two distinct types of olive oil applications exist instead of the one homogenous product usually marketed. It also suggests that participants view this single olive oil as a premium product when compared to other vegetable and seed oils. This revelation has significant marketing implications. Producers and marketers need to know which market they wish to pursue and how their consumers understand, or do not understand, the differences between the eating and cooking olive oil. They need to be aware of how consumers use (or do not use) the different oils, why they are used and who uses them. This segmentation information will enable the streamlined creation and production of products with effective price points, packaging requirements and sizes and distribution channels demanded by consumers. It will also highlight what sort of retail outlets the oils should be sold in and how accessible the product needs to be.

The fact that only a small number of participants consumed eating oil and the majority of participants used cooking oil should not be disregarded. There is a large number of Australian olive producers who are producing a plethora of gourmet bottled quality eating oils with premium price tags (Miller, 2005b). Yet there are few companies producing the cheaper, lower quality olive oil that is demanded for cooking applications by the bulk of the Australian market (Australian Olive Association, 2003). Thus a conflict between volume and market share exists. Producers and marketers need to understand this market phenomenon and amend, where possible, their

production and packaging approaches to meet the demands of consumers.

The Australian olive oil industry, as a whole, may need to re-assess its structure and organisation in order to maximise the effectiveness of olive growing, oil production and marketing strategies. The larger more recently established olive groves and production companies (more than 5000 trees) have specifically designed their facilities to maximise technology, utilise economies of scale and be cost effective (D'Emden, 2001; Ravetti, 2005). However, the smaller 'boutique' growers (less than 5000 trees) who are the key suppliers of the premium eating olive oil brands, need to be acutely aware that there is a limited market for their products. Many of these businesses need to charge a premium for their oils because they have to sustain higher resource and production costs. The Australian wine industry has experienced similar production issues, and as a result many of the smaller and middle sized wineries have been bought out by the larger conglomerate wineries (Beeston, 1994). If these smaller olive oil businesses are not pro-active, basic survival could be their most important challenge.

Another solution for these smaller growers may be to operate in a 'co-operative' business structure similar to the wine and olive oil co-ops throughout Europe. By pooling harvesting, production and storage resources, these businesses may be able to keep costs to a minimum. These savings could then be used to create olive oil brands specifically aimed at supplying the bulk cooking oil market.

The findings also suggest that those producing eating quality oils might need to educate the consumer about the attributes and benefits of this style of oil and create a demand for it. They might have to differentiate their oils from other Australian and imported olive oils on the shelf. They might also need to educate the consumer about the differences between

the oils. Justifying why a price premium has to be paid is also a challenge these producers will need to face.

Participants belonging to the Australian baby boomer generation indicated their apprehension about unknown and new foods. Marketers need to think about how neophobic behaviour may be adversely affecting the success of other new products. For example, recent growing and production technology (such as genetically modified foods) may not be understood by this segment of the market and therefore it will continue to impact on purchase choice and consumption. Once again the education by marketers, industry bodies and government departments may play an important part in providing consumers with information so that they can make informed decisions about the foods they choose. It may pay to have new products endorsed by authorities and specialists in the specific product area, as well as using people who are recognised by this generation as trustworthy and reliable. Another way to reach this Baby Boomer generation maybe through a campaign directed at their Generation X and Y children.

Only the medium- to high-involvement regular users were aware that Australian olive oil exists. The majority of participants bought imported oil from Mediterranean producing countries believing that this is superior. Considering the large forecasted volumes of Australian olive oil production and the growing opportunity for domestic market growth, it would be wise for the Australian olive oil industry, the AOA and all domestic olive oil producers to start spreading the 'Australian' word. These stakeholders need to provide a compelling 'buy Australian' rationale, for the consumers of traditional Mediterranean olive oils, in order to convert them to buy and use the Australian products on the market shelves.

The significant effect that television cooking shows have on olive oil consumption should not be overlooked. The use of this media resource for

endorsing products was acknowledged across all user groups, genders and involvement levels. Stakeholders in olive oil need to keep this in mind if they intend to educate the market effectively and efficiently. This medium would also be valuable for other food industries intending to get similar marketing messages across to the consumer.

### **3. Further Research**

This study used a qualitative research design to explore and discover views, beliefs, ideas and concerns about olive oil. Further quantitative and qualitative research is necessary to build on the particulars of the current findings and contribute to a more in-depth and extensive understanding of the olive oil consumer. This research provided several valuable topics for further investigation both within the olive industry as well as other food choice and consumer behaviour disciplines.

The findings indicate that olive oil has two quite distinct applications within the one food category. Further research is required to directly test these applications for cooking and eating, and the value that consumers place on them. These results could prove important to marketers of both olive oil and other foods alike.

It would be feasible to replicate this research in a culture that is well known for its olive oil consumption, either abroad or within specific ethnic communities in Australia. Studying the role that olive oil plays in the lives of an Italian or Spanish community may serve to enhance the richness of the findings. One would expect that olive oil plays a significant utilitarian and functional role in these communities but the importance of other motivating factors like symbolic meaning and aesthetics is more difficult to anticipate and could be investigated. An exploration of the existence or non-existence of the two types of olive oil in these communities may also prove beneficial. Such data may help marketers further understand their markets and suggest possible segmentation boundaries. Further

explorative research on Australian consumer's versions of the Mediterranean diet and the relationship it has to the traditional diet would provide a much more accurate picture of this new phenomenon. If Australians have re-interpreted and re-invented the traditional Mediterranean diet to suit their own likes and dislikes, further research could help to uncover the cultural and societal impact of such a metamorphosis.

The findings of this study have also offered six consumer profiles based on their level of involvement with food. These different profiles offer a way of categorising consumer types. These profiles could be used in combination with McEvoy & Gomez's (1999) segmentation research to form a basis for new segmentation research on olive oil consumption. The findings could also aid in the development of preliminary market profiles and segmentation for other food products.

The same symbolic motives (lifestyle, status and self image) for using olive oil may be used to explain certain motives for purchasing gourmet foods from similar types of outlets. Additional research into the intensity of the relationship between these factors and gourmet food choice in general, may provide insight to why such products are chosen. The splitting of knowledge by the author into two types, 'product' and 'how to use', provides a new way with which to assess consumers' knowledge levels of a food product. Further research to confirm the impact of these different levels of knowledge and knowledge in general on food choice would also prove beneficial to marketers, health educators and policy makers involved with changing consumers' food choice and consumption behaviours.

The impact of the media as a means of information and message delivery is evident in this study. Additional research focussing on the best way to utilise this tool would help companies streamline their marketing strategies and media campaigns.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore Western Australian consumers' views and thoughts about olive oil, how they felt about the product and what influenced their decisions to both purchase and consume it. Although limited, past consumer research suggests that Australian olive oil consumption is significantly increasing and Australians are becoming more aware of olive oil, the Mediterranean diet, and the health attributes of olive oil. Previous research also suggests that flavour, product quality, price and packaging attributes are important factors when choosing different olive oils. This Western Australian research supports these past findings and also suggests that health, flavour and taste, packaging and price are key attributes influencing olive oil choice. It also revealed a number of influences not previously documented, including the effect of symbolism and hedonics and different generations on olive oil choice and use.

Five focus groups were conducted in Western Australia to investigate participants' thoughts about and feelings towards olive oil, as well as probing for factors that motivate or inhibit the purchase and use of it. These findings, although not conclusive or generalisable, do suggest that Western Australian olive oil consumers have varied views, feelings and thoughts about olive oil and that the majority of participants viewed olive oil in a positive light.

The findings of this research indicate that olive oil is not a homogenous product, and in fact, it is treated by participants as two different products with varying applications and different symbolic meanings, with consumption driven by diverse motivating factors. The involvement construct was found to be useful to gauge involvement with food in general. Those participants who were more highly involved with olive oil also appeared to be more highly involved in food and wine.



It appears that many consumers have poor knowledge about olive oil. This encapsulates a lack of understanding about how to use olive oil as well as general olive oil product knowledge. Similar poor knowledge issues have been found in other food studies, including those focusing on organic, artisanal and technologically enhanced (GMO) products. This lack of information may act as a barrier to purchase and use and is an important indicator for the producers and marketers of olive oil.

The six consumer profiles offered by this research vary from previous studies and include; the foodie, the aspirational foodie, the recipe reader, time poor foodie, time poor aspirational and the uninterested. A combination of this study's profiles and past segmentation studies may further offer a deeper understanding of the current Australian olive oil consumer.

Although product specific, this research theoretically attempts to reduce the Australian literature gap relating to olive oil consumption, consumer behaviour and food choice. It extends the current literature and has provided several themes that can be further investigated both quantitatively and qualitatively including replicating the research in a different culture and further researching the impact of knowledge, symbolism and the media on both olive oil and other food products. This substantive account also provides insight into several consumer behaviour and food choice theories and it contributes to the understanding of food choice practices and the relationships between particular food-related behaviours and the greater food system as a whole.

This research has important benefits for the Australian olive oil consumer and potential new users. By understanding the consumer's thoughts and feelings about olive oil and resulting consumption behaviour, the end user will be better understood. Product attributes including packaging size and shape, pricing strategies and communications decisions have all been

shown to be important to the participants. If consumers can better understand olive oil, they can make an informed decision about purchasing and using it.

With the dynamic and potentially volatile environment of the Australian olive oil industry, it is imperative that olive oil producers and marketers know their market and the consumer. This research provides an insight into Western Australia olive oil consumers and what they think and feel about olive oil. It has also assessed the key barriers and motivators for use. This information may prove beneficial for marketers in creating olive oil products and effectively targeting them to meet consumer expectations. This research is exploratory in nature and further research is necessary to confirm, validate and expand on these findings.

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## **APPENDIX ONE**

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### **Australian Olive Oil Data Discrepancies**

## **Australian Olive Oil Data Discrepancies**

It has long been acknowledged by many Australian olive oil industry specialists and organisations that getting reliable and accurate industry statistics and data has been and currently is very difficult (Australian Olive Association, 2003; McEvoy & Gomez, 1999; Miller, 2005b; RIRDC, 2002; Sweeney, 2000). The Australian olive industry is a relatively youthful industry compared to other horticultural industries like grapes, oranges and almonds. In 2001 the industry was highly fragmented with 37% of olive growers planting no more than 500 trees and 90% of growers having 5000 trees or less. The remaining 10% of growers are managed investment scheme companies and account for the majority of Australian olive oil production (D'Emden, 2001). Therefore obtaining statistical data about tree numbers, varieties and oil volumes have proven very difficult for the Australian olive oil industry. As a result it has been extremely challenging to paint an accurate picture of the current industry.

For example, the most current data on olive tree numbers (Sweeney) was conducted in 2002 and used tree sales and orders to estimate that over eight million trees were planted across Australia. However there has been no recent industry wide data available to update these figures. It has been estimated that there will be 12 million trees planted by 2007 and over 30 million by 2020 (Timbercorp, 2006) yet when, how and where these have been and will be planted is not publicly shared or known.

The only statistics that appear to have been reliable for this study were the import and export figures collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS also collect data on the volume of Australian olive production, however McEvoy & Gomez (1999) claim that even these figures undervalue the actual position of the industry because of the lack of co-operation by many olive producers, and the fact that many smaller producers who sell their oil locally, or consume for personal use, do not think it is necessary to provide information.

The discrepancies and inconsistencies between the data collected for this research have been frequent and frustrating. The industry, for what ever reason, appears to be secretive and guarded with their grove and production information. This challenge is regularly acknowledged by the industry and key representative figures (Joiner, 1998; Miller, 2005b; Sweeney, 2006). Therefore, the statistics documented in this study should be treated with caution.



## **APPENDIX TWO**

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# **Recruitment Assistance Guidelines**

## **Recruitment Brief for Olive Oil Research Participants**

### **Background to research**

You have been approached to find people interested in participating in small focus groups with in the next month.

I am an Edith Cowan University postgraduate business student undertaking research in the area of olive oil consumption. The research topic is; *The 'Good Oil'. The role olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian consumers*. The aim of this investigation is to find out how Western Australians view olive oil.

This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of my Masters Degree at Edith Cowan University that is close to completion. The information provided by participants will help gain a better understanding of how and why olive oil is consumed in Western Australia.

### **What the focus group entails**

- The simple focus group is a relaxed casual way to discuss and talk openly about group member's thoughts about olive oil.
- I am interested in every person's views. If people use olive oil irregularly or even if they don't use olive oil at all, their input is extremely useful to this study.
- I will personally conduct the focus group, which will include approximately six other people.
- It will last approximately 60–90 minutes and will be audio and video recorded.
- Location: a convenient venue to be arranged.
- Timing – focus groups will be held over the next 4 weeks (Saturday Mid Mornings, early evenings)
- Participants will be offered a gift of a bottle of premium Australian olive oil to say thankyou

## **Confidentiality**

Information given will be treated as strictly confidential with recordings and transcriptions being permanently destroyed. Participation is entirely voluntary. The results will not include any information that may identify individual participants. Any questions concerning this project can be directed to myself (08) 9362 2253. It is a regulation of the university that participants sign a Consent Document at the time of the focus group in order to participate.

## **Recruitment**

My research requires a selection of different respondents. They need to be:

- Both male and female participants
- Have varied occupations (not all one occupation like teaching or nursing)
- There needs to be a good cross section of age groups

We need to get keen participants to be in 5-6 focus groups. I will need to recruit at least 6-8 people per group. The groups will be split into two categories:

1. People who use olive oil at least once a week (regular users) and
2. People who use olive oil less than once a week (infrequent users)

If people would like to participate in this research, THANK THEM IMMENSELY and please get their contact details (see following sheet) and I will be in contact with them to discuss the project, dates, times and locations further.

I really appreciate your assistance and time with helping me find people to help me in this study. This will enable me to finish my research. If you have any queries please call me on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] You can also email me on [REDACTED]

Thankyou again

Trudie

## **APPENDIX THREE**

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### **Participant Recruitment Letter**



Joondalup Campus  
Joondalup Drive  
Joondalup, WA 6027  
Phone: 13 43 28  
Fax: +61 (08) 9300 1257

Hello

My name is Trudie Michels and I am inviting you to participate in my research project. I am an Edith Cowan University postgraduate business student undertaking research in the area of olive oil consumption. My research topic is; 'The 'Good Oil'.

The role olive oil plays in the lives of Western Australian consumers

This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a Masters Degree at Edith Cowan University. I am very interested in olive oil and the olive oil industry. I am currently working part time for an Australian olive oil company. Therefore the aim of this investigation is to find out how Western Australians view olive oil. The information that you provide will help gain a better understanding of how and why olive oil is consumed in Western Australia. Through common acquaintances my research assistant selected you as a potential participant for this research. This research involves several stages, including recruiting participants, undertaking focus groups, transcribing and analysing the information gained from the focus group and the writing up of the information into a university thesis.

I am asking for your participation in the focus groups. The focus group is a relaxed casual way to discuss and talk openly about your and other group member's perceptions, beliefs, and thoughts about olive oil. I am interested in every person's views. If you use olive oil irregularly or even if you don't use olive oil at all, your input is extremely useful to this study. I will personally conduct the focus group, which will include yourself and about six other people. The group will meet at an Edith Cowan University Campus (Mt Lawley, Churchlands or Joondalup) at a convenient time and will last approximately 60–90 minutes. This will be audio and video recorded. These recordings will be transcribed and I will use these transcriptions to analyse the findings and write up my research project.

The information you give will be treated as strictly confidential. On completion of the research project the recordings and transcriptions will be permanently

destroyed. Participation is entirely voluntary. No explanation or justification is needed if you choose not to participate. You may freely choose to withdraw your consent to further involvement in the research project at any time. You also have the right to fully withdraw from the research including the withdrawal of statements or information once it has been collected in the focus groups.

The results of this study will be compiled in a Masters Thesis. The results may also be disseminated and used in conferences and journal publications. The results will not include any information that may identify individual participants. On request you can receive feedback regarding the results of the study. A small gift will be given as a 'thankyou' for your help and for giving time out of your busy schedules to help in my research.

Any questions concerning this project can be directed to Trudie Michels of Edith Cowan University on [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] or the research supervisor Dr Steve Charters on (08) 6304 5047. If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact the:

Research Ethics Officer,  
Edith Cowan University  
100 Joondalup Drive  
JOONDALUP WA 6027  
Phone: (08) 6304 2170  
Fax: (08) 6304 2661  
Email: [research.ethics@ecu.edu.au](mailto:research.ethics@ecu.edu.au)

If you would like to participate in this research please contact me on [REDACTED] [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] or the person who initially approached you about partaking in the research.

Thank you for your time and co-operation.  
Kindest regards

Trudie Michels

## **APPENDIX FOUR**

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### **Focus Group Participant Demographics**

#### **Focus Group Demographic Summary**

## Focus Group Participant Demographics

Name	Usage	Gender	Involvement Level	Age Group Years	Nationality	Parents' Nationality
Alison	Regular	Female	4	26-38	Australian NZ	South Africa
Amanda	Regular	Female	2	26-38	Australian NZ	Asia
Amy	Infrequent	Female	2	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Annabel	Regular	Female	2	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Anne	Regular	Female	2	26-38	Australian NZ	Nth Europe
Betty	Infrequent	Female	2	51+	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Chelsea	Regular	Female	3	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Cheryl	Infrequent	Female	1	39-50	Nth Europe	Nth Europe
Christine	Regular	Female	2	26-38	Australian NZ	Nth Europe
Chris	Infrequent	Female	2	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Craig	Regular	Male	4	39-50	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Dave	Regular	Male	4	26-38	Australian NZ	Seychelles
Emily	Regular	Female	3	51 +	Australian NZ	Nth Europe
Greg	Infrequent	Male	1	26-38	Australian NZ	West Europe Mediterranean Greek
Gretta	Infrequent	Female	2	39-50	Australian NZ	Other
Jacquie	Regular	Female	2	26-38	Australian NZ	Nth Europe
Jeremy	Regular	Male	3	26-38	Australian NZ	USA
Joanne	Regular	Female	3	18-25	Australian NZ	West Europe Mediterranean Italian
Kathleen	Regular	Female	3	18-25	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Linda	Regular	Female	2	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Lucy	Infrequent	Female	1	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ



<b>Name</b>	<b>Usage</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Involvement Level</b>	<b>Age Group Years</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Parents' Nationality</b>
Matt	Infrequent	Male	2	18-25	Australian NZ	UK
Melissa	Regular	Female	2	39 -50	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Nicky	Regular	Female	3	18-25	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Paul	Regular	Male	3	39 50	Australian NZ	UK
Pru	Infrequent	Female	1	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Richard	Regular	Male	3	18-25	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Ruby	Infrequent	Female	2	51+	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Sam	Regular	Female	4	18-25	Australian NZ	West Europe Mediterranean Italian
Sarah	Regular	Female	3	39-50	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Steve	Regular	Male	3	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Tash	Infrequent	Female	1	18-25	Australian NZ	Nth Europe
Tiffany	Regular	Female	3	26-38	Australian NZ	Australian NZ
Trevor	Regular	Male	2	26-38	Australian NZ	UK
Wendy	Infrequent	Female	1	51+	Australian NZ	UK

## Focus Group Demographic Summary

Demographic	Category	Frequency
Usage	Regular User	23
	Infrequent User	12
Gender	Female	26
	Male	9
Involvement level	Level 1	4
	Level 2	12
	Level 3	13
	Level 4	6
Age group	18-25 years	7
	26-38 years	18
	39-50 years	6
	51 + years	4
Nationality	Australian / New Zealand	34
	North European (UK)	1
Parent's Nationality	Australian / New Zealand	19
	North European / UK	9
	Western / Mediterranean Europe	3
	South Africa	1
	Asia	1
	Seychelles	1
	Other	1

## **APPENDIX FIVE**

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### **Semi Structured Focus Group Guides**

## **Focus Group Topic Guide for Regular Users**

### **Introduction and Welcome**

Welcome participants & thank very much for time travelling to office and giving up their time. Introduction to Moderator.

### **Format for the day:**

Explain the concept of the study and process of focus groups

- Please help yourself to refreshments during the session
- Ethics brief - research conformed to Edith Cowan University Ethics policy
- Very informal, I'll ask questions and if you do not understand them please ask me to repeat them,
- This is not about knowledge but how you consume. There are no right or wrong answers
- Its Ok to think differently from others – the more varied response the better
- If you have any questions I can answer them at the end of the group
- Free to leave at any stage if you feel uncomfortable
- Assure Confidentiality and explain use of pseudonyms
- Sign consent letter for participation and agree to be recorded
- Explanation of guidelines for successful focus groups (encourage participation but please don't all talk at once – difficult to understand on tape, don't have side conversations, let everyone speak)
- Small gift to say thankyou

Housekeeping: Bathrooms, mobile phones, group will take between 1 hour – 1.5 hours

### **Warm up**

Ask everyone to introduce themselves and talk about something that they did on the weekend that they enjoyed. Get people relaxed and familiar with names.

Start tape and video recording – inform participants

### **Questioning**

#### **Section 1. Edible fats and oils**

What sort of fats and oils do you have at the moment in your kitchen at home?

Can you tell me what you most use in your kitchen for everyday cooking?

Can you tell me about your preferred oils for certain foods?

## **Section 2. Olive oil**

When I mention olive oil – what comes to mind straight away?

You use olive oil. Tell me about how you first started using olive oil?

How often do you use it now?

For what uses would you choose using olive oil over other fats and oils?

Can you think of anything that would make you choose to use olive oil over other oils?

Do you use different olive oils for different purposes?

When you are using olive oil what comes to mind? - Prompt – being healthy, feeling like an Italian, relaxed and warm summers, memories?

Are these + or – experiences

Apart from the home where else have you consumed olive oil? Can you tell me about that? Are these + or – experiences

Over the last five years can you tell me if there has been anyone or anything in particular that has influenced how you use olive oil?

Can you tell me more about that (probe with media, specialty chefs, doctors, family & friends etc)

Can you tell me about what you believe is the differences between olive oils?

After spontaneous responses – use projective technique - have the 4 types of olive oil names on cards - EVOO, VOO, Pure / Light OO, Olive Oil)

What sort of messages do you get from these four oils?

## **Section 3. Olive oil purchase questions**

Where do you buy your olive oil?

Why do you choose these particular places to buy olive oil?

Imagine you are replenishing your olive oil supply. What sort of things do you consider when you are at the shop?

Does the country of origin of the olive oil affect the way you choose olive oil?

What affect does price have on your choosing of olive oil?

What affect does size have on your choosing of olive oil?

What affect does packaging have on your choosing of olive oil?

Can you tell me why you don't use more olive oil? Can you tell me more about that (probe health, price, educations – don't know how to)

Can you tell me what sort of things would encourage you to use more olive oil?

What could olive oil sellers / retailers do to encourage you to use olive oil

Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

Can you remind me again why you use olive oil?

### **Conclusion**

Thank everyone for coming and his or her help and comments with my study. I am very grateful.

Invite anyone who has technical questions or would like to know the basics of olive oil to stay for a further 10-15 minutes and I'll go through the facts.

Make sure everyone received their bottle of olive oil

## **Focus Group Topic Guide for Infrequent Users**

### **Introduction and Welcome**

Welcome participants & thank very much for time travelling to office and giving up their time. Introduction to Moderator.

### **Format for the day:**

- Explain the concept of the study and process of focus groups
- Please help yourself to refreshments during the session
- Ethics brief - research conformed to Edith Cowan University Ethics policy
- Very informal, I'll ask questions and if you do not understand them please ask me to repeat them,
- This is not about knowledge but how you consume. There are no right or wrong answers
- Its Ok to think differently than others – the more varied response the better
- If you have any questions I can answer them at the end of the group
- Free to leave at any stage if you feel uncomfortable
- Assure Confidentiality and explain use of pseudonyms
- Sign consent letter for participation and agree to be recorded
- Explanation of guidelines for successful focus groups (encourage participation but please don't all talk at once – difficult to understand on tape, don't have side conversations, let everyone speak)
- Small gift to say thankyou

Housekeeping: Bathrooms, mobile phones, group will take between 1 hour – 1.5 hours

### **Warm up**

Ask everyone to introduce themselves and talk about something that they did on the weekend that they enjoyed. Get people relaxed and familiar with names.

Start tape and video recording – inform participants

### **Questioning**

#### **Section 1. Edible fats and oils**

What sort of fats and oils do you have at the moment in your kitchen at home?

Can you tell me what you most use in your kitchen for everyday cooking?

How do you use those oils and fats in their kitchen - probe – bake, eat, roast, marinade

Can you tell me about your preferred oils for certain foods?

Imagine you are replenishing your oil supply. What sort of things do you consider when you are at the shop?

## **Section 2. Olive oil and barriers to olive oil usage**

When I mention olive oil – what comes to mind straight away?

Can you tell me a little more about that? Probe – bad experiences, greasy,  
Prompt – being healthy, feeling like an Italian, relaxed and warm summers,  
memories? Are these + or – experiences

You don't use olive oil; can you tell me about that? Can you tell me why you don't use olive oil?

Can you tell me more about that (probe health, price, educations – don't know how to)

Has there been a time that you have used olive oil at home? – when, why, how?

Have you tasted and eaten olive oil elsewhere – apart from home? Can you tell me about that? Was that + or – experience?

Over the last five years can you tell me if there has been anyone or anything in particular that has influenced how you feel about olive oil?

Can you tell me more about that (probe with media, specialty chefs, doctors, family & friends etc)

Have you heard of the different types of olive oils?

Can you tell me about what you believe is the differences between olive oils?

After spontaneous responses – use projective technique - have the 4 types of olive oil names on cards - EVOO, VOO, Pure / Light OO, Olive Oil)

What sort of messages do you get from these four oils?

If you have bought olive oil in the past or if you were planning to where would you buy it?

Does the country of origin of the olive oil affect the way you choose olive oil?

What affect does price have on your choosing of olive oil?

What affect does size have on your choosing of olive oil?



What affect does packaging have on your choosing of olive oil?

Is there anything that stops you buying olive oil?

Can you think of anything that would encourage you to start using olive oil?

Can you explain what you mean by that?

What could olive oil sellers / retailers do to encourage you to use olive oil

### **Conclusion**

Thank everyone for coming and his or her help and comments with my study. I am very grateful.

Invite anyone who has technical questions or would like to know the basics of olive oil to stay for a further 10-15 minutes and I'll go through the facts.

Make sure everyone received his or her cash reimbursement.

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**APPENDIX SIX**

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**Participant Consent Form**



Joondalup Campus  
Joondalup Drive  
Joondalup, WA 6027  
Phone: 13 43 28  
fax: +61 (08) 9300 1257

## Consent Form

### **Project Title: Western Australians Perceptions of Olive Oil.**

I (the participant) have read the information above (OR "have been informed about all aspects of the above research project") and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in this activity, realising I may withdraw at any time. I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable (OR "understanding that I may be identified").

I understand that I will be interviewed and the interview will be audio and video recorded. I also understand that the recording will be erased once the interview is transcribed.

Participant: .....

Date: .....

Investigator: .....

Date: .....

## **APPENDIX SEVEN**

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### **Demographic Questionnaire**

## About Yourself Questionnaire

Please tick the boxes representing the most appropriate responses for you in respect of the following items.

### Your Age

- 18 - 25 years
- 26 - 38 years
- 39 - 50 years
- 51 + years

### Your Gender

- Female
- Male

### Household Status

- Single with no children
- Single with children
- Married / Defacto with no children
- Married / Defacto with dependant children at home (under 18 years)
- Married / Defacto with independent children at home (over 18 years)
- Married / Defacto with children no longer living at home
- Other (please specify) .....

Tick more than one if necessary	Where were your parents born?	What is your Nationality?
Australia / New Zealand		
South East Asia (China, Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Taiwan)		
Western Europe (France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece)		
Northern European and Scandinavian Countries (Germany, Holland, Belguim, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland)		
Middle East and North Africa (Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Arabic countries)		
Southern Africa		
United Kingdom or Ireland,		
Northern America		
Southern America		
Other (please specify)	.....	.....

Please turn over

Your Occupation (please specify)

.....

The Suburb you live in (please specify)

.....

How often do you use olive oil?

1 or more times a week

Less than once a week

A few times a year

Never

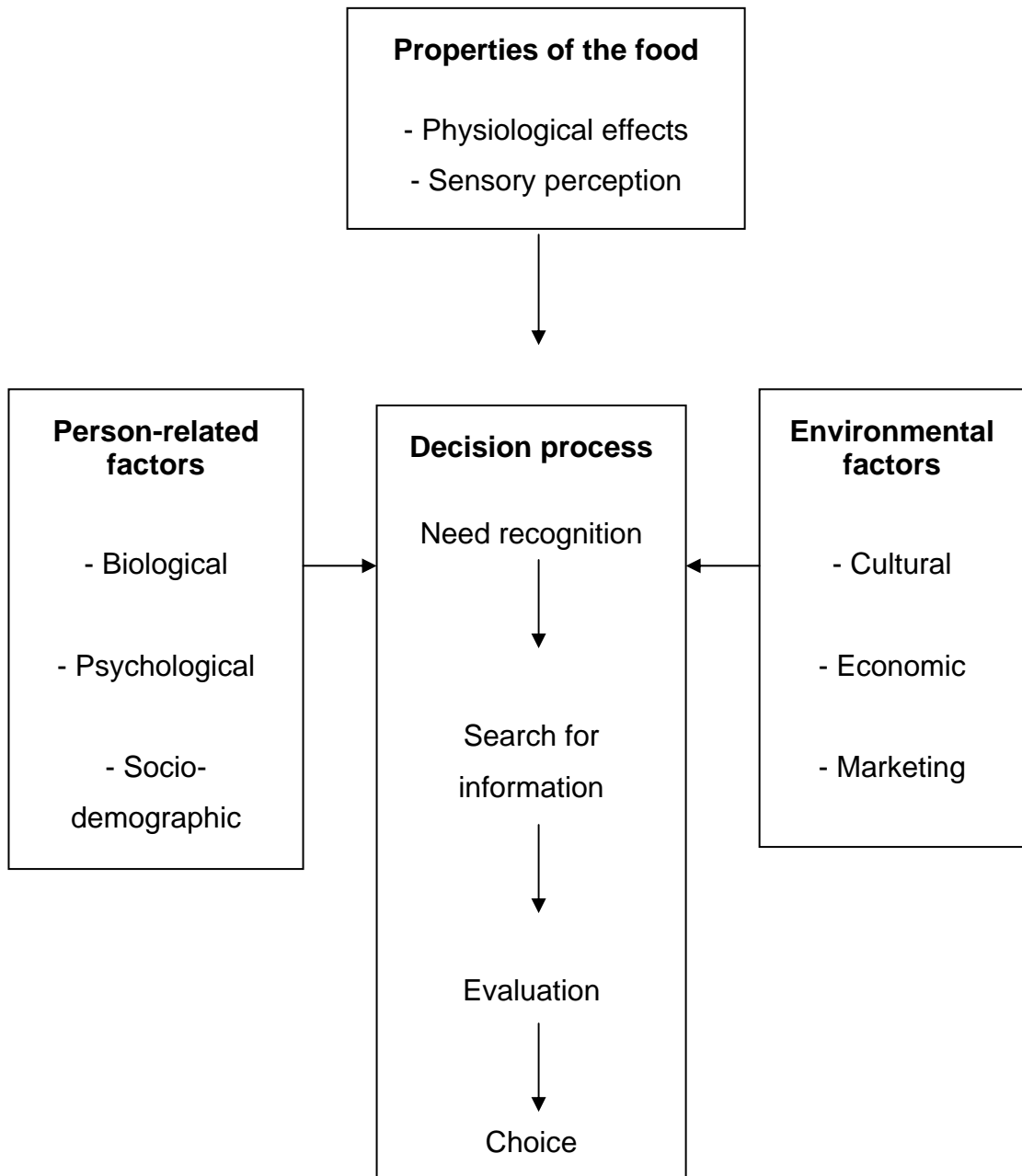
Thank you for your time and cooperation.

## **APPENDIX EIGHT**

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### **Trail's Conceptual Food Choice Model**

**Traill's Conceptual model for consumer behaviour with respect to food.**





## **APPENDIX NINE**

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### **The Culinary Use of Other Fat and Oils**

## **The culinary use of fat and oils**

The participants were asked to talk about what fats and oils they currently use in their kitchen and how they use these particular ingredients. Initial discussions indicated that the types and ways of using these items were diverse and wide-ranging. Butter, canola oil, margarine and vegetable oil featured most significantly.

### ***Butter***

Butter usage was discussed in all focus groups and was an ingredient that appeared in most participants' kitchens. However, its importance and level of usage was not highly rated. Its use was almost solely utilitarian in nature with any exceptions being because most of the participants enjoyed the taste and flavour of butter. The limited volume of butter consumed in the kitchen was used in a traditional sense. For those participants who referred to it, most used butter as a spread for bread and toast and for baking, both as an ingredient and to line oven tins. Participants also talked about a number of more specific culinary uses for butter that focused on specific food types. For example both olive oil users and non-users commonly used butter for frying eggs, putting in mashed potato to make it creamy and for making certain sauces like mushroom or white sauce. Jacquie's use for butter was quite definite:

Jacquie (U): If there is a really specific dish that you need butter for.... something like a fish, something that needs the flavour like prawns, something that really needs that butter. But otherwise I wouldn't use butter at all.

It was interesting to note that there were a number of negative comments made about butter being an animal product and therefore not good for you. For this reason, several participants did not use butter at all and for others it had a reducing impact on their usage.

### ***Margarine***

Although margarine would have been found in the kitchens of many participants, the positive response to butter was not repeated for margarine. Many participants who were against using an animal fat used margarine. Many used margarines that promoted healthy eating. This included using margarines that had no cholesterol, added omega 3 and low or no salt. As with butter, the use of margarine was almost entirely utilitarian in nature. The non-utilitarian motives of taste and flavour were not discussed by any participants. It was also used for baking and spreading on toast and bread. Again there was some negativity towards using margarine from a number of participants, mostly because it was perceived as an unnatural product and there was very little knowledge of its ingredients.

### ***Canola Oil***

Canola oil appeared to be a common ingredient used in most participants' kitchens. It was used as a general cooking medium for basic cooking including pan, shallow and deep-frying, some stir-frying, and various baking, including cakes and muffins. Participants used canola both in liquid form and as a cooking spray. Among the non-user participants, both canola oil and vegetable oil were a more popular choice of oil compared to olive oil. Cheryl and Betty appear to be representative of many non-user references to canola oil:

Cheryl (NU): I mainly use just canola oil on everything.

Betty (NU): [Olive oil] is more of a special thing. Everyday use would be canola oil for me.

The flavour neutrality of canola was an important motive for use both by users and non-users of olive oil. Many used canola where they did not require strong flavours and where they wanted the other food ingredient flavours to dominate. Chris's comment highlighted this flavour issue:

Chris (U): I used to use olive, but I don't, because it affects the taste - so I use canola.

A number of participants used canola oil because they identified it as healthier oil. Some canola oils were used because of a red 'Heart Foundation Tick' on the packaging. Emily was among many who identified canola as a healthier choice than other oils:

Emily (U): I do tend to use canola oil, because I have this idea that it's healthier to use, because I tend to try to keep my weight down, so I try not to use too much olive oil.

Participants did not perceive canola (and other fats and oils for that matter) as premium products. Regular references to price, buying the product because it was on special', and the use of 'home brands' may have indicated that these products were viewed as basic everyday ingredients used in the kitchen.

### ***Other Fats and Oils***

There were a number of other fats and oils discussed by the participants. The more commonly mentioned products were vegetable oil and peanut oil. There were also a selection of oils that were used for specific purposes. These included salad dressings (flax and avocado), Asian and Indian cooking (peanut and sesame oil and ghee), baking (grapeseed, vegetable, sunflower) and deep-frying (vegetable oil). Flavour neutrality in oils was again discussed and Greg's decision to choose milder oil can be noted:

Greg (NU): Because [olive oil] has such an overpowering flavour, I prefer to taste the food not the oil. That's why I use sunflower - it really doesn't have any flavour at all.

The health concerns of some participants also appeared prevalent for other fats and oils. Concern was shown about peanut oil due to its allergy and anaphylactic dangers (Bock, Munoz-Furlong, Burks, & Sampson,

2001) and comments were made about the understanding that sunflower oil or vegetable oil could lead to blindness (Cho et al., 2001; Seddon, Cote, & Rosner, 2003) .

In general participants used a number of alternatives to olive oil. Although participants probably have a very low level of involvement with these products, a combination of these different fats and oils appear to feature in the kitchen and are used for varying uses.