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# Heritage Products, National Dishes and Consumer Identity

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## **ABSTRACT**

Food is an interdisciplinary area of research crossing fields (Biglan 1973) from liberal arts to science and technology, medical disciplines to marketing. There are many enigmas about food consumption preferences some of which have been solved at the individual consumer level or household level or the economy level. For instance, there are theoretical parallels between the Theory of Reasoned Action in Marketing and the Life Cycle theory of consumption preferences in Economics. Both explain consumption based on prior attitudes. Preference patterns have been shown to change with income-based consumption experiences over time. In one approach, prior attitudes to food remain stable and are difficult to change and in the other prior consumption behavior sets expectations that evolve through the life cycle. In the marketing literature, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1988) has been used to explain planned food consumption. The basis of the applied model: belief – attitude - behavior relationship has been widely applied in the diet and health literature streams in marketing and nutrition. The theory is considered a cognitive theory of high effort attitude formation, established on the premise that most consumption behavior is rational and goal-oriented (Conner & Armitage, 1998).

Process models in marketing such as the EKB model breaks consumption into five phases of problem solving at the individual level. Maslow's motivation inspired consumption theory increased the focus of researchers on internal psychological forces that explain consumption. With a rich stream of theoretical approaches available to a food researcher in marketing, an examination of global diet consumption becomes a stimulating and thought provoking area for research contributions.

One puzzle that seems to have escaped close examination is whether people the world over have standardized food consumption preferences? Certain categories of food habits have grown around breakfast, lunch, teatime and dinner. However there are differences in preferences for popular cuisines that may be explained by demographic and psychographic factors. What would explain living heritage food preferences? Living heritage is commonly defined by UNESCO as “traditional diets that contribute to food security and good nutrition through the knowledge and beliefs related to food-ways, from the cultivation of crops to the preparation of meals. Some forms of living heritage focus on the sanctity of food and encourage eating locally grown produce, thus reducing food waste (SDG 12), and ‘Responsible consumption and production and carbon emissions (SDG 13, ‘Climate action’). Many cultures also follow the practice of food-sharing among community members, helping alleviate hunger while strengthening social bonds. The Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2, ‘Zero Hunger’) notably targets the maintenance of genetic diversity of seeds, the implementation of resilient agricultural practices and the enhancement of agricultural productive capacity in developing countries.”

There are several arguments in support of living heritage products, including their unique, often handcrafted nature and the cultural and historical significance they hold. Living Heritage foods are typically made using traditional methods and materials, which can make them high quality and authentic. In addition, purchasing living heritage foods often supports skilled chefs and can help to preserve traditional cuisines and cultural traditions. These foods can also serve as a link to the past, providing a tangible connection to the history and heritage of a particular place or culture. In many cases, heritage foods are also environmentally friendly, as they are often made using locally sourced ingredients and techniques. Overall, heritage foods offer a unique and authentic alternative to industrially produced or synthetically processed foods, and can provide sustainable economic and cultural benefits.

What role does a living heritage cuisine play in an increasingly global marketplace? What is the future of national dishes which are quintessentially living heritage examples or the processes that create them in a post-Covid marketplace? Can living heritage foods proliferate in the presence of a dynamic multinational branding environment? Will living heritage foods fuse, merge, intermingle, converge or differentiate in a pervasive virtual information environment? This is the impetus behind this living heritage research agenda.

### **Impetus for research**

An impetus for this research paper is the sustainability framework adopted by all members of the UN. A second impetus is the marketing of living heritage elements by UNESCO. As of 2021, UNESCO has recognized 584 elements from 131 countries as global cultural heritage. Several items related to food, its cultivation, harvesting, processing, communal consumption and plating have been recognized as cultural heritage. Mexico, France, Japan, the Mediterranean countries, South Korea, Belgium, Kenya and Singapore are some countries with a formal living heritage recognition agenda. National and regional institutional branding in addition to corporate branding has had successes as with olive oil. Greek olive oil is as well-known as corporate brands (Sakellaropoulos' Masterpiece Blend EVOO) of olive oil. Another example of combined efforts by multiple countries such as Bahrain – Egypt – Iraq – Jordan – Kuwait – Mauritania – Morocco – Oman – Palestine – Saudi Arabia – Sudan – Tunisia – United Arab Emirates – Yemen have been recognized for their skills, knowledge, practices and traditions with respect to date palm development. The national origin of date products is sought after as much as corporate date brands.

Heritage foods have been the study of botanists, agriculturalists, plant geographers and genetic scientists in government institutions, commercial and academic laboratories. Marketers and International business researchers have developed insightful theories on the branded aspects of food marketing. There are several theories of branding that have been proposed over the years. These include:

1. The functional benefits theory, which suggests that brands are associated with the functional benefits they provide to customers, such as reliability, quality, or value for money. (Aaker, 1991).
2. The symbolic meaning theory, which proposes that brands are imbued with symbolic meanings that are derived from their cultural, social, and personal context.(Hirsch, 1967)
3. The experiential value theory, which suggests that brands are valued for the emotions and experiences they provide to consumers.(Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982)

4. The relationship theory, which proposes that brands are built on the relationships they establish with consumers, based on trust, loyalty, and commitment.(Palmatier et al, 2007)
5. The consumer-based brand equity theory, which states that the value of a brand is based on the perceptions and attitudes of consumers towards the brand. (Neslin et al, 2003)
6. The brand identity theory, which proposes that a brand's identity is made up of its unique characteristics and attributes, which differentiate it from other brands.(Kapferer, 2008)
7. The brand image theory, which suggests that a brand's image is the result of the perceptions and attitudes of consumers towards the brand. (Keller, 1993)
8. The brand personality theory, which proposes that brands can be thought of as having personalities, with traits and characteristics that make them unique and attractive to consumers. (Aaker, 1997)

Few marketers have studied unbranded or institutionally branded living heritage foods. In 2022, some countries used the appeal of living heritage foods and customs to revive the Covid-damaged flow of tourists and commerce in a more resilient manner. UNECSO has recognized many of these living heritage foods.

## **METHODOLOGY**

One of the largest repositories of food supply and consumption information is developed by FAO. All UN agencies including WHO and medical researchers use FAO data resources to understand consumer diet and its medical consequences. The Global Dietary Database was started in 2010 and has been improved through several iterations. GDD (Global Dietary Database) has models that explain consumption through 2015. It will be updated in 2025 or every ten years.

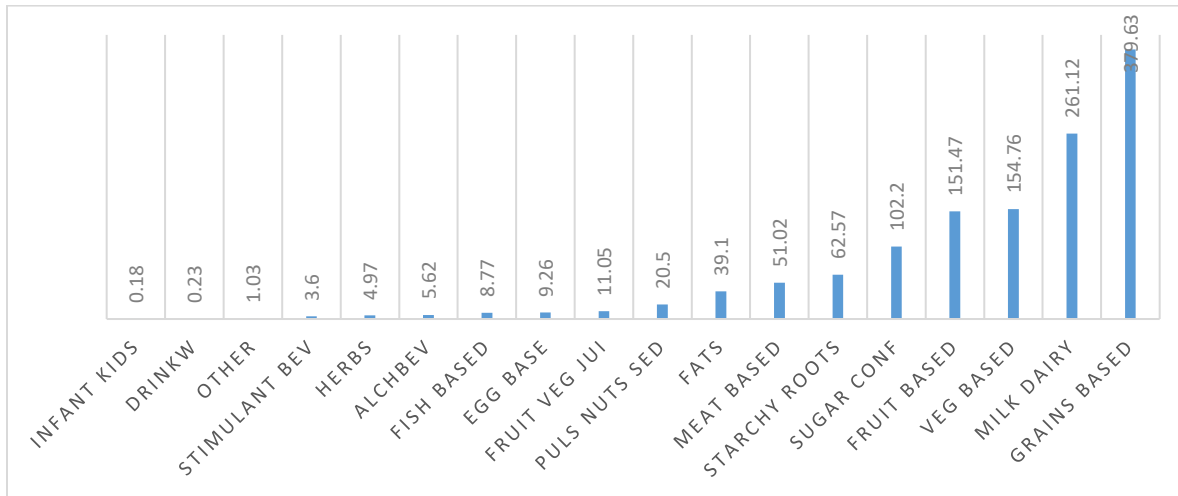
A hierarchical cluster analysis model on the data led to a study of correlations between proneness to certain diseases and diet. WHO designed its clustering model by calibrating the average per capita food consumption. This resulted in 17 groups of countries that were members of WHO. The total amount of available food is divided by the total population and weighted to account for individual country population in each region. Countries with similar patterns of food consumption are grouped together. The food diet data was grouped into food categories and the cluster analysis procedure identified 17 country clusters ranging from 2 to 30 countries in a cluster. The core assumption behind the clustering procedure is that within cluster countries have similar diet preferences.

The data has also been used in the health and diet industry. This research study has been designed to examine clusters in the 17 groupings of countries. In this paper we take cluster #1 which has 16 representatives within cluster countries. We examine the similarities and differences in the diet composition of the sixteen countries. Some of these diets have UNESCO recognized living heritage food items. This paper is an attempt at using statistical data analysis as well as qualitative research methods to formulate hypotheses at national or community level within the new sustainability framework.

## **DATA ANALYSIS: QUANTITATIVE**

In table 1 below, there are 18 categories of food classified into universal groups of food consumption consumed by all countries including cluster 1 countries. The food classification system was adopted by all member countries of FAO. It is used to assess the food security level of member countries. Within each category there are sub groups. The highest food availability is in grains-based foods in grams per capita and the lowest availability is infant foods and drinking water. In our principal component analysis, we dropped the statistically insignificant categories of infant foods, drinking water and other. We ran the model with and without the three categories with none or minute changes in the model diagnostics. We also assume that no living heritage food is based predominantly in these three categories of infant foods, drinking water or other.

**Table 1. Cluster 1 Country Composition of Diet Availability in Grams**



The clusters are based on the FAO Supply Utilization Account, and represent average per capita food consumption for 17 groups of 194 countries in the world, where the amount of food available for consumption in each group of countries is divided by total population numbers (weighted to take account of individual country populations in each region). This data is therefore based on actual consumption of listed foods. While not the highest, the consumption of grains-based foods in cluster 1 countries is above average and is third highest among the clusters. The grain-based category includes barley, maize, sorghum, millet, oats, processed semolina and couscous as well as wheat. The crops are used for heritage eating, festivals, ceremonies and daily consumption. Almost all country clusters rely heavily on grains-based consumption in their diets. Couscous is one of such grains used heavily in the North African countries of this cluster.

Nikolai Vavilov (1887-1943), Soviet Russian plant geographer spent his research career studying the origin and dispersion of cultivated plants be they vegetables, fruits, grains, pulses or herbs. Hence his work is seminal to this area of global diet studies and especially living heritage foods.

We ran a Principal Component analysis using Varimax rotation. The results are below in table 6. Based on the component loadings we interpret the first component as main dish that would be relatively higher in protein than side dishes with scores of 0.929, 0.924, 0.898 and 0.843. The stimulant beverages such as tea, coffee, juices, and alcohol would be served alongside. The second factor we interpret as side dishes than may be high on grains with a score of 0.880. In cluster 1,

the consumption of grains was among the top three as per our analysis above. Hence we do expect the main dishes in this cluster to have grains with some protein integrated into the meal. We do expect multiple side dishes with flat breads, desserts and snacks with more emphasis on carbohydrates. This would be the second component. The principal component would clearly be a main dish within a menu. We use qualitative data to establish the actual national dishes in the living heritage cuisine. It is also very likely that a main dish not a side dish will assume the position of a national dish in the living heritage cuisine.

**Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix<sup>a</sup>**

	Component	
	1	2
FATS	.929	.207
STIMULANT BEV	.924	-.093
MEAT BASED	.898	.136
EGG BASE	.843	.360
FRUIT VEG JUI	.794	.030
ALCHBEV	.752	-.346
MILK DAIRY	.687	.421
SUGAR CONF	.618	.450
HERBS	.528	.332
FISH BASED	.342	-.341
GRAINS BASED	-.368	.880
STARCHY ROOTS	-.079	-.800
VEG BASED	.284	.714
PULS NUTS SED	-.209	-.604
FRUIT BASED	-.093	-.370

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser

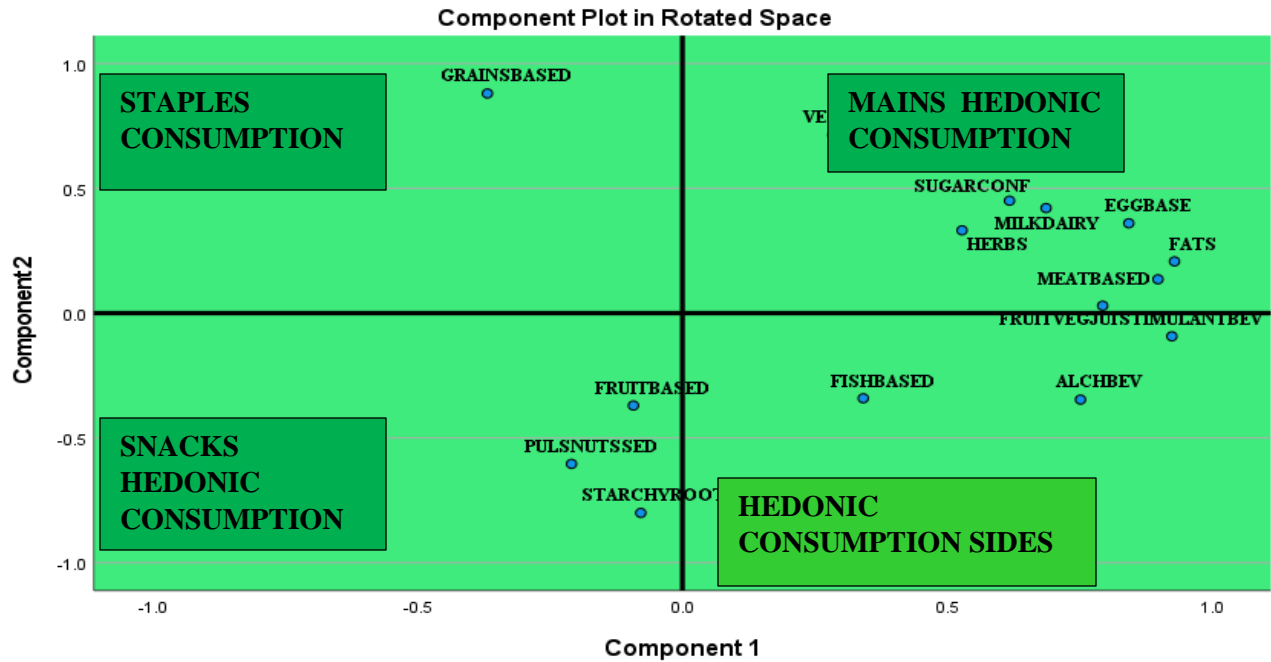
Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

## DATA ANALYSIS: QUALITATIVE AND HISTORICAL METHODS

We researched country cuisines for the FAO CLUSTER 1 group of countries using a combination of qualitative methods. In addition to data analysis, we used observation, personal narratives, social media conversations, visual image analysis and google searches.

**Figure 1. Consumption Clusters**



Recipe repositories online and culinary books of recipes were explored. Some results are summarized below. Based on diets, cluster 1 is the set of countries colored blue in North Africa, Central Asia and two countries outside the region: Mongolia and Vanuutu.



We attribute the outlying countries to the calculations on per capita food availability made by FAO and WHO in modeling the original clusters. In the cluster 1 national dish visual below are geographic subclusters in North Africa, East Central Asia and the Middle East, South Asia and two outliers which are Vanuutu and Mongolia.

CLUSTER 1	COUNTRY CODE	REPRESENTATIVE NATIONAL DISH	MAJOR INGREDIENTS & COMMENTS
ALGERIA	DZA	COUSCOUS	CHICKEN, GINGER, HARISSA, CHICKPEAS, COUSCOUS STEAMED, APRICOTS
AZERBAIJAN	AZE	PLOVDOLMA	RICE IN SHAH PLOV
IRAQ	IRQ	SAMAK MASGOUF	CARP BROILED, BABYLONIAN, CHUTNEY, PICKLED CUKES, PROCESS GRILLING
JORDAN	JOR	MANSAF	LAMB, YOG, BUTT, PITA RICE, ALMONDS, CC, NV
LIBYA	LYB	COUSCOUS	STEAMED IN KISKIS OR COUSCOUSIERE
MAURITANIA	MRT	THIEBOUDIENE	COUSCOUS FISH AND RICE
MONGOLIA	MNG	BUUZ	BEEF FLOUR DUMPLING, SOY, STEAMING,
MOROCCO	MAR	COUSCOUS	STEAMED IN KISKIS OR COUSCOUSIERE
PAKISTAN	PAK	BIRYANI	DISH NV
PALESTINE	PSE	MUSAKHAN	FLATBREAD WITH ROASTED CHICKEN USING SUMAC & OLIVE OIL
SRI LANKA	LKA	RICE CURRY/ KOTTU	CHARCHORI CHICKEN SHREDS, CHOPPED ROTI, SOY, LEEKS, CARROTS
SYRIA	SYR	KIBBEH	BULGHUR, ON, GROUND MEATS, LEVANTINE CROQUETTE
TUNISIA	TUN	COUSCOUS	STEAMED IN KISKIS OR COUSCOUSIERE
TURKMENISTAN	TKM	PALAW	RICE CARROTS MEAT PIECES BROWNED POUR IN RICE AND SIMMER COVERED RICE, LAMB CUBES, CARROTS, ONIONS, GARLIC, TOPPINGS, NAAN, SALAD SERVE
UZBEKISTAN	UZB	OSH PILAU	COMMUNITY WEDDINGS CHICKEN COCONUT SAUCE, SHRED TARO ISLAND CABBAGE, BANANA LEAF LINED
VAANUTU	VUT	LAP LAP	COCONUT MILK, OVEN COOKED BREADFRUIT CASSEROLE WITH FISH
YEMEN	ZMB	SALTAH	FENUGREEK SOUP ERVED WITH FLAT BREAD, BEATEN EGGS LUNCH, MARAQ SAHAWIQ SPICE MIX

Vavilov centers of origin identify the fertile crescent as the place where wheat originated. The fertile crescent is part of cluster 1. Geography has played a seminal role in the creation of the living heritage cuisines and the national dishes. Many of these dishes predate the arrival of nationalism. As countries try to differentiate themselves, there are efforts to promote the living heritage cuisines and national dishes. Some governments have instituted national food days which are observed in their countries.

Here is a brief analysis of the national dishes. We explored Vavilov centers of origin of crops, plants, vegetables, fruits and herbs, couscous and wheat by products, olives, thyme, sage and anise used in the North African countries of Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania. These countries are in the Vavilov cluster 5. These plant and foods grew and dispersed from the Mediterranean area. It is therefore natural to find couscous in the national dishes of these countries. Bread such as flat breads, beans, onion, carrots, garlic and various nuts originated in Vavilov center 8 of Central Asia. Hence plant geography has played a role here in these national dishes as living heritage preferences. Rice which is a big part of the national dishes of Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the bread that accompanies Saltah in Yemen came from Vavilov center of origin 9 which is India and Myanmar. Vanuatu is an island nation with a French colonial influence. It uses breadfruit and fish to make its national dish. Mongolia still shows its pastoral nomadic past in its heavy reliance on meats and Tibetan inspired dumplings called Buuz. Very little fruits and vegetables grew on the steppe. One explanation for Mongolian living heritage is that Mongolian conquests brought back new foods and influenced Mongolian culinary food ways. Further research is needed to understand the nature of the national dishes listed above. Attributes of heritage products are embedded in the belief systems of consumers.

## DISCUSSION

Using a variety of research methods and tools, we have explored the diets of countries using FAO data. We have also used Vavilov centers of origin and dispersion of plant botany. We found common elements in the cuisines of the countries that include grains, dairy and vegetables. We have questions about the sustainability of heritage foods and the national dishes embedded in them.



New data may reveal that meat proteins are being integrated more frequently as lifestyles change and economic growth raises incomes and expenditures. Where there was a lack of proteins more is being offered in meat-based dishes. While tourists may travel to distant lands to experience local living heritage cooking, there is no doubt that diets are converging globally as the FAO food categories demonstrate.

People are making conscious decisions to include more of what international cuisines around the world are offering. Evidence is in the Vavilovian botany research on patterns of dispersion. There is clearly more to food research than the fabled Columbian exchange which resulted from Columbus' trip to the new world. Vavilovian dispersion has powerful evidence that can unpack the development of living heritage cuisines.

## **CONCLUSION**

Much more needs to be known about global diets and their fascinating evolution. Much more needs to be understood from the shocks to consumption of food from Covid constraints, the Ukraine War effect on food and energy prices and ongoing climate change. The FAO food systems framework is an integrating framework that may lead to better understanding of sustainable systems we had in the past and what sustainable systems we create in the future. For marketing managers, the survival and existence, the reverence for living heritage national dishes and heritage cuisines have lessons that can improve the sustainable attributes of food brands.

National dishes can potentially be rated on sustainability criteria, such as their environmental impact, the sustainability of their ingredients, and their social and economic impact. For example, a national dish that is made using locally sourced, organic ingredients and traditional cooking methods could be considered more sustainable than a dish that is made using imported ingredients and industrial methods. In addition, a national dish that supports local agriculture and the livelihoods of small-scale producers could also be considered more sustainable than one that relies on large-scale, industrial agriculture. Overall, sustainability is a complex and multi-faceted concept, and different living heritage national dishes may be rated differently based on the specific criteria used to evaluate their sustainability. This methodology can be extended to the dialogue on branding and a theory of sustainable branding may emerge.

Theoretically both streams of research: branding theories and living heritage concepts enrich each other. Living heritage brings concepts of authenticity, intangible cultural enrichment, cultural diversity as a source of enrichment, cultural transmission as a source of sustainable change, living heritage as a source of community unity, intergenerational bridging, recognition of the cultural heritage rights of communities, the critical role of cultural memory and living heritage creativity to the table. Branding theories relying on functional benefits, experiential value, brand equity, brand image, brand identity, brand personality, symbolic meaning and brand relationship theories will be enriched by living heritage explorations and lead to a theory of sustainable branding.

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