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# Communicating Ethical Arguments to Organic Consumers: A Study Across Five European Countries

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## ABSTRACT

Additional ethical claims were tested with mock organic egg labels in five EU countries. The attitudes towards the advertising labels were assessed by multiple copy testing measures. A total of 156 individual responses were analysed. The study confirms the difficulty of conducting advertising research in a multicultural framework, and shows that additional local/ regional claims can reinforce the appeal of organic products.

*Keywords: cross-cultural advertising, ethical values, consumer attitudes, organic food*

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## 1 Introduction

Cross-cultural studies in an advertising context are relatively uncommon, partly because of the difficulty in conducting multicultural analyses. Since the 1990s, such studies have mainly focussed on the definition of major marketing trends (Dawar and Parker, 1994) or they have tried to contribute to the debate on standardised *versus* localised approaches to international advertising (Taylor, 2002). Most of the existing advertising studies have used only quantitative approaches for the analysis of consumer attitudes, rather than qualitative inductive approaches, and as such they have failed to define the delicate methodological steps that cross-cultural studies have to take into consideration (Desmarais, 2007). Advertising cross-culturally is an iterative process, during which adjustments are under continuous development. Advertising influences culture, and *vice versa*, especially when the products advertised are culture bound and deeply linked to national and cultural traditions, as in the case of food (Shalini, 2008).

Effective advertising has to be rooted in the customers value system, in their understanding of the discourse (or language) of the advertising tool, as well as in the analysis of the existing core characteristics of the advertising messages (Desmarais, 2007).

Where the intent is to market organic food products on a global scale, further considerations need to be taken into account. Research on the value systems of organic consumers has shown that consumers of organic food are willing to pay an additional price premium if ethical values that go beyond the mere organic standards are added to the organic products, and if these values are well communicated. Grebitus et al. (2009) and Holt (2006) presented empirical evidence that when coupled, both fair trade and organic attributes increase the willingness of the consumer to pay for the products (e.g. bananas or coffee). However, there are differences in the ways that consumers relate such additional ethical attributes of organic purchases (the ethical values) to organic production, which are known to vary according to their different cultural and behavioural backgrounds (Zander and Hamm, 2010). This organic production that has additional (ethical) values that go beyond the organic standards has been defined as an 'OrganicPlus' activity (Padel and Gössinger, 2008).

The present study details research conducted across five European countries: Austria (AT), Switzerland (CH), Germany (DE), Italy (IT) and the United Kingdom (UK).

To provide guidance for an OrganicPlus communication strategy in the complex, multicultural European context, we have explored how attitudes towards additional ethical attributes are formed when credence goods with high value content, like organic food products, are involved.

The aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness of a communication strategy aimed at communicating such attributes in terms of consumer response, using multiple copy testing measures related to the affective and cognitive content of the communication tool (Mitchell, 1986). A qualitative research approach has been used to collect these measures by means of a combination of group interviews (focus groups) and individual paper-and-pencil questionnaires.

This report is organised as follows. The theoretical background of our research precedes an illustration of the methodology and the data obtained. The results are then reported and discussed. Some conclusions are attempted in the last section of the report.

## **2 Theoretical Background**

### **Attitudes towards advertising messages**

Consumer attitudes towards advertising have become increasingly important over the last 60 years. They have been defined as a “learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner to advertising in general” (Lutz, 1985), and they are assumed to influence consumer buying behaviour and purchase intentions (Mitchell and Olson, 1981). According to most studies, consumers need advertising to support their decision-making processes. Although consumer criticism towards advertising has constantly grown over recent years, the attitude towards the advertising, more than the attitude towards the product itself, appears to have an impact on their product choice (Lautman and Percy, 1984). In trying to cope with the diffuse sense of manipulation, a lack of trust, and a feeling of exploitation, consumers relate to the advertising business (Cheung et al., 2008) by blending the affective and cognitive components of an advert to guide their buying behaviour (Kwon, 2008; Lautman and Percy, 1984).

Affect and cognition interplay influence consumer judgements and reactions to communication (Forgas, 2008). A review of the literature on attitudes towards advertising shows that many factors affect consumer perception of advertising from both sides. Advertising content (information), emotional feelings (entertainment, irritation and credibility) and demographic characteristics are only some of these factors (Wang et al., 2002). Consumers make their brand and/or product choices using advertising as an informational tool (Coulter et al., 2001), while other authors have stressed the entertaining role of advertising (Gordon, 2006). Nevertheless, there is a high degree of consensus among researchers on the mediating role of the affective reactions to advertising attitudes. The liking of an advert appears to influence consumer attention and comprehension of the advert, even though it has not been proven to be related to the effectiveness of an advert, which is increased purchases (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2008). According to the literature, consumers principally use their feelings as information to infer their evaluations of the communication mix, in terms of the elements of the advertising message: the message idea, the headline, the body copy, and the creative format (Peter et al., 1999). The communication mix is designed to inform the consumer about the product, and it is intended to answer three main communication goals: reminding, informing, and persuading (RIP). Once the information is recognised, persuasive communication increases consumer loyalty and preference for the product, and also reduces substitution strategies. Finally, the communication has to remind the consumers about the product characteristics that are unique and that are strongly connected with the final goals and values of the consumers themselves (Olson and Reynolds, 1983; Buck et al., 2004).

Over the years, the different cognitive and affective components of print advertising have received considerable attention by academic research, with respect to their impact on consumer attitudes towards an advert. While consumer processing of the information contained in an advert can be differentiated according to the think/feel distinction, it is possible to distinguish between these ‘think’ and ‘feel’ aspects of adverts (or the advert dimensions). The first of these aspects is more apt to be processed logically and analytically, and hence implies ‘left brain’ cognitive processing, while the feel aspects indicate ‘right brain’ affective processing, and imply emotion, image and holistic judgements (Claeys et al., 1995). Both the copy text and the graphical elements have been independently analysed to uncover the correct measures for the effectiveness of an advert (Chowdhury et al., 2008; Mehta and Purvis, 1995). Researchers have mainly tried to measure the advert effectiveness by focussing on the liking of the copy text, although it was recently shown that a single advert-based measure fails to predict consumer attitudes towards an advert. The success of an advertising campaign appears to be better measured by using other diagnostic instruments to support advert likeability in terms of the copy text (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2008). Since the

aim of an advert is to motivate and persuade consumers, measuring their emotions (the affective components) alone is not enough to be able to assess the effectiveness of an advert, and to understand the consumer behaviour (i.e., sales). According to research of the Advertising Research Foundation (Shimp, 2009), no one measure is universally appropriate or best to predict sales effectiveness. Multiple and multidimensional measures, which include the cognitive response to advertising, appear to fit the complexity of consumer behaviour better and to add value to the validation of the pre-test results of an advert. Believability, trust, recall and persuasion measures have been linked to increased attention in processing the consumer attitude towards an advert (Baack et al., 2008; Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2008; Cheung et al., 2007; Mehta and Purvis, 1995; Soh et al., 2009) and to the effectiveness of an advert.

### Development of cross-culturally valid research methods

Researchers, marketers and advertisers know that working in a multi-cultural international study has implications for examining the affective response to advertising. Consumers reply to communication messages in different ways according to many variables, and also because of different cultural influences (Andrews et al., 1991; Cheung et al., 2008). Previous studies have suggested that cultural background strongly influences consumer perception of the graphical elements, colours and copy of an advert (Donthu, 1998; Parissa, 2010), and have indicated a link between an appeal to humour and the effectiveness of an advert (Crawford et al., 2009).

In an international market, target consumers are often subject to different cultural influences, and they reply to communication messages in different ways, according to these many variables. Culture and subculture are particularly relevant environmental variables, although it is well known that “measuring the content of culture is actually a tricky matter” (Peter et al., 1999). The reason for this is that our own culture is often used as a reference framework, and this itself can lead to the misinterpretation of other cultures. This is very relevant when working in a multi-cultural, international study, and it has implications for both the researcher and the communication specialist. There are two basic approaches in consumer research when culture is involved, which are known as the ‘*Emic*’ and the ‘*Etic*’:

- *Emic* research emphasises the uniqueness of each culture, and allows insight into a particular culture, but cannot be used for comparisons across cultures. *Emic* approaches involve using culture-specific symbolism, concepts and terms.
- *Etic* research, on the other hand, aims at comparing different cultural settings, and therefore tries to use terms, concepts and symbols that will be common across the cultures to be investigated. *Etic* research can therefore be used for cross-cultural studies (Peter et al., 1999).

Measuring attitudes towards advertising in an international market calls for some form of standardisation of the communication across the cultures, as localised and country-specific advertising proposals will not be comparable (Dibb et al., 1994). Unfortunately, where food and ethical values are concerned, a standardised communication tool is hardly optimal. This simplifies advert attitude measurements, but requires more effort in the planning phase and needs to carefully consider language and cultural bias.

As it has been indicated that not only culture influences advertising, but, in a reverse way, communication is also influenced by the originating culture (Ahmed, 1996; Shalini, 2008), understanding the particular characteristics of each culture in an *Etic* perspective is of crucial importance. As a result, the value system of the consumer, which affects consumer attitudes towards advertising and advertising effectiveness, is important for its expectation to differ from one culture to another culture. Values – defined as “criteria used by individuals to select and justify actions, and to evaluate people, the self and events” (Grunert and Juhl, 1995) – provide the fundamental motivational drive that guides consumer behaviour (Peter et al., 1999). These values, which are represented by people’s goals and needs, are not usually consciously used by consumers as analytic, sequential cognition (Buck et al., 2004), but they have a large influence in consumer affective responses (Zanolì and Naspetti, 2001).

In the present study, by analysing the responses to the tools used for communicating three different and additional ethical values, we aim to obtain deeper insight into the different cultures, and their values and beliefs. At the same time, by investigating the role of different values in explaining organic food purchases, we can learn about the consumer understanding of both the discourse (as language) of the advertising tool and the core characteristics of an advertising message (Desmarais, 2007).

### 3 Methodology

Three different additional ethical values of organic food were previously identified by Zander and Hamm (2010) and selected from those actually used by organic farmers and processors in Europe – within the CORE Organic FCP partnership (<http://fcp.coreportal.org/>). These values are: animal welfare, regional/local food products, and fair prices to farmers. To explore how these additional ethical values affect consumer attitudes towards organic food, we needed to incorporate them as actual attributes into real food products.

The same communication tool with the same terms, concepts and symbols common across the cultures to be investigated was studied, planned and designed: a mock organic egg label. This thus produced standardised cross-cultural advertising of organic eggs within the above-mentioned additional ethical attributes.

As the intention was to conduct an Etic study that allows for cross-country comparisons, eggs were chosen as the product to advertise. Other products (e.g., milk or pasta) have different connotations and are perceived quite differently across the five EU countries investigated (AT, CH, DE, IT and UK).

Focus Groups (FGs) and paper-and-pencil questionnaires were combined to capture the variability of the consumer reactions to the mock egg labels across Europe. As recommended from other studies (Desmarais, 2007), we blended qualitative and quantitative measurement tools to gain deeper insight into the cross-cultural validity of pre-testing consumer attitudes towards advertising.

The FG results provided rich and redundant information, helped to reduce the danger of misinterpretation in a cross-cultural context, and allowed for a full account of differences in the consumer perception of the labels. The multidimensional copy testing measures that were applied allowed for comparative copy testing of the labels.

The investigation of the consumer response to the organic mock-egg labels was devised as a four-stage process, as detailed and discussed in what follows.

#### 3.1 First stage: An inventory of existing organic-egg packaging labels

The first step was to collect and classify all of the existing organic-egg labels possible, across all of the countries involved in our study, at the time of the study (January, 2009). In the classification, we focused on the distinctive features – both linguistic and visual – to characterise the advertising discourse (of the egg labels) (Desmarais, 2007). We used the ‘think’ and ‘feel’ classifications (Claeys et al., 1995).

Aesthetically, some of the organic-egg packaging and labels were relatively rational looking, especially those in supermarkets (e.g., clear type, using Arial or Times characters), and appeared to target the ‘think’ dimension in the consumer–product relationship. Most of the labels showed pictures of eggs or hens, either as drawings or as actual photographs. Some labels showed sketches of farmhouses or hens, and many reported details and information on the producer, at least in separate leaflets included in the boxes. The labels that used drawings instead of pictures to enhance the ‘old fashioned’ style of the packaging, and to give an image of traditional values and a ‘home-made’ product, appeared to be more consistent with the ‘feel’ product image (Claeys et al., 1995). Light colours, like yellow or green, dominated most labels: green text and/or green decorative elements were used for almost all of the labels. As a basic unprocessed product that consumers perceive as a commodity, eggs are rarely sold in colourful and attractive packaging. When this is the case, the pleasant appearance is intended as a ‘feel’ substitute for making the purchase a bit more exciting, given that there is not a lot that consumers want to know about an egg (the ‘think’ attributes), and nothing relating to an actual marketing innovation. Including new additional ethical attributes of organic production represents a new opportunity within both the cognitive and affective dimensions of consumer attitudes towards the advertising.

Concerning the additional ethical attributes of an organic purchase, in most of the countries investigated, organic eggs had minimum animal welfare included, as this is required by the European regulations. Other ethical aspects were rarely mentioned: i.e. the support of small-scale agriculture, as well as eggs produced using genetically modified organism (GMO)-free feed, while strictly linking the eggs to the farmer via a traceability scheme. Traceability for eggs was almost universal, via the simple EU coding scheme that has been in force since 2004, where the eggs are stamped with a code identifying the establishment (production site), country of origin, and method of production (i.e. organic, free range, barn or cage). Some egg producers provided a website where the names and addresses of the farmers can be traced, some put a leaflet in the box, and others provided pictures of the farmer and their family, among other things.

Overall, no specific country differences were identified among these labels.

### **3.2 Second stage: creation of the communication tool**

At the second stage, an advertising company was selected via a public international call, and was asked to prepare proposals and creative formats for a portfolio of six printed labels in colour (two for each additional ethical attribute: animal welfare, regional/ local food production, and fair price). These were to be composed of headline, body copy and symbolic images. Guidelines were provided to generate the advertising message, following a modification of the Maloney (1961) deductive framework.

Since the creativity of the message as well as the presence of images in advertising are generally expected to increase consumer attention and to have an effect on advert effectiveness and memory (Baack et al., 2008), the three additional ethical attributes were expressed in symbolic graphical artwork on the egg packaging labels, thus going beyond just words.

So as not to influence the consumer selection of their preferred creative format for each attribute, a common design with a green background colour and with the same symbolism (images) was used for all of the six labels, and for each of the two competing creative formats for each attribute. This design was based on various 'heart' images, thus symbolising care, love and respect, as well as 'deeply felt' ethical values, in all of the cultures involved in the study. The heart has long been used as a symbol to refer to the spiritual, emotional, moral, and in the past, also intellectual, core of a human being. As the heart was once widely believed to be the seat of the human mind, the word heart continues to be used poetically to refer to the soul, and stylised depictions of hearts are extremely prevalent symbols in the representation of love (Viswiki, 2009). This imaging is 'reflected' in three graphical elements/ illustrations for each argument: the 'hearty hen' for animal welfare, the 'hearty farm/ region/ Earth' for regional/ local food product, and the 'hearty farmer' for fair price (Appendix 1).

To ensure equivalence in the cross-cultural response to the print advertising, the final creative format was selected via a democratic vote of the cross-cultural (country) research teams, across the five different combinations of design and colour proposed by the advertising company.

The claims used to substantiate the additional ethical attributes were based on the results of previous studies (Padel and Gössinger, 2008; Zander and Hamm, 2010) and on the literature (Zanolì, 2004). Nevertheless, as expected, the semantic issues and cultural differences across the five countries involved in the survey promoted a lot of discussion between the cross-cultural research teams and the advertising company. To solve at least some of the cultural differences and to ensure at least theoretical comparisons, semantic and measurement equivalence was pursued (Shaffer and Riordan, 2003). By taking full account of the linguistic differences and using common wording, all of the research teams collaborated with the advertising company to select the most-correct sentences with accurate translations into each language. The headlines and the claims of each label were widely discussed and largely agreed on in all of the five countries. Some country-specific translation issues had to be solved to make the labels more clear and understandable. As in any cross-cultural study, some adjustments in terms of wording were made to achieve equivalent comparisons. Given the cross-cultural nature of this study, the labels (headlines and copy) were first developed in English and were then translated into German and Italian. Mother-tongue translators and research teams collaborated in the final definitions of the label contents. In Appendix 1, the various final labels are shown in the English versions. In the end, the combinations of headline and body copy were laid down to have comparable concepts and claims across these five countries (see Appendix 2).

To make the labels as real and credible as possible, the company was asked to draw them according to the actual dimensions of a six-egg package, and with all of the legal signs and writing that are required by each national law. The labels were designed to be consistent according to the different legal requirements in the different countries, so as to have reliable and trustable packaging labels. This is the reason why the final layout was slightly different in the different countries (e.g. in CH the national organic logo – the Knospe – was included instead of the EU logo). The nutritional indications and the bar-code were included in all of the labels.

### **3.3 Third stage: data collection**

At the third stage, a total of 15 FG discussions (3 repetitions per country) were held in the five European countries that participated in the study (AT, CH, DE, IT and UK). These FG discussions were carried out in March and April, 2009, in the capital city or in a large metropolitan area in each country .

Only organic egg consumers and/or buyers were included in the groups, as either regular or occasional organic egg consumers (i.e. no non-organic consumers, no non-egg consumers/ buyers). Also, to avoid inexperienced participants, we only included organic egg consumers who were between 25 and 65 years of age, and who had exclusive or shared responsibility for the household shopping. These participants were recruited from among the consumers who reported themselves to be knowledgeable about the

organic issue, which was checked – via specific questioning – according to their ability to identify real organic products. Customary exclusion criteria ruled out participants employed in the food/ food processing industry and in market research companies, and those who had been interviewed on food products in the previous six months. Finally, recruitment was carried out by means of convenience sampling, according to the following quotas: (1) age: half in the 25 to 45 year age group, half as 46 to 65 years; (2) gender: one-third male, two-thirds female; (3) employment: at least 1 participant per FG was unemployed, or a student, or a housewife (but no more than one-third of participants per FG).

In total, 156 consumers participated in the FG discussions (see Table 1). Each participants received a small incentive: a 20-euro petrol voucher.

**Table 1.**  
Sample description (156 consumers)

	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Age</i> <i>25-45</i>	<i>Age</i> <i>46-65</i>	<i>Full or part- time employed</i>	<i>Not employed</i>
AT	24	13	21	16	17	20
CH	20	8	12	16	22	6
DE	14	14	14	14	20	8
IT	18	12	15	141	21	9
UK	23	10	16	17	28	5
Total	99	57	78	77		

\*One respondent did not want to give her age.

The FGs explored consumer attitudes according to three different standpoints. First, off-the-top-of-the-head (immediate) statements on the adverts were elicited, to explore the **recognition** of the communication arguments and the respective claims of each of the six labels. Secondly, the labels were shown paired per argument (two at a time), to explore the **liking** and preference of the communication concepts proposed. The labels with the same additional ethical attributes were shown simultaneously to avoid bias in the affective responses to the adverts of similar valence (Chowdhury et al., 2008). To investigate their cognitive attitudes towards the labels, the participants were asked to select the 'label they prefer/ like the most', and to specify the reasons for their choice. They were encouraged to express any thoughts or comments they might have about the labels, particularly relating to anything they especially liked or disliked (e.g. graphical element [illustration], headline, body copy/ copy text, claims they think the most convincing and the least convincing). Finally, the **effectiveness** of the communication was explored by asking the participants which one of the labels – paired per argument (two at a time) – would influence them the most in their buying of the product.

The FGs were held on the basis of semi-structured guidelines that had previously been tested on a small sample in a pre-test FG session. The discussion guidelines and questionnaires were written in English and translated into Italian and German. During the FG discussions, each participant was provided with a printed copy of each label and a beamer was used to show the labels to be judged and discussed together. The label order was shuffled before each FG session. The FG discussions were video recorded and later transcribed. Due to the simple structure of the FGs, which were aimed at eliciting consumer attitudes to the proposed stimuli, the analysis was transcript and note based, and performed at the country level on the basis of a common reporting structure and guidelines.

After the FG discussions, the participants where asked to fill in a paper-and-pencil questionnaire that was aimed at measuring their general attitudes towards advertising (Mehta and Purvis, 1995), and specifically, their emotional quotient scale towards each label (Wells, 1964), as well as the label believability (Beltramini, 1982).

Ten days after each FG discussion, a **recall** survey was carried out through individual telephone interviews with the participants. This telephone survey was aimed at testing which arguments were retained by the consumers, and which were related to 'value messaging', i.e. the communication of the claims.

Traditionally, recall questions are more connected with functional benefits than values, and in this study, the labels aimed to communicate claims that substantiated the ethical values. Therefore, the recall survey was aimed at determining the recall of values, more than of benefits. An emotional bond can be assumed to be stronger if the recall of such values is correct. Initially unaided **recall** was elicited, and then aided **recall**.

### 3.4 Fourth stage: validation of the measurement tools

Five different measures were used in the questionnaires to evaluate the participant attitudes towards the egg labels.

**Attitude towards advertising (AtA).** A 5-item scale that was developed by Mehta and Purvis (1995) was used to measure the perception of each participant towards advertising in general.

**Emotional quotient (EQ; label liking).** A 12-item scale that was previously used by Wells (1964) was applied to investigate the affective/ emotional attitudes of each participant towards the labels. The responses were in terms of a 5-point Likert-type scale, which ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' (scored as 1 and 5, respectively).

**Believability.** A 10-item scale that was proposed by Beltramini (1982) was aimed at measuring the perception of label believability. The scale was measured as a semantic differential, ranging from 1 (unbelievable) to 5 (believable).

**Effectiveness.** A direct question was included in both the post-FG questionnaire and the recall questionnaire that was used to measure the participant purchase intentions with respect to organic eggs in the week after having seen each of the labels. Purchase intention was measured according to a score ranging from 1 to 5 (1, I will certainly increase the number; 5, I will definitely not increase the number).

**Recall.** Both unaided and aided questions were used to evaluate delayed recall, 10 days after the FG discussions.

All of these scales were tested for reliability and internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the measures.

The AtA scale did not pass the reliability and internal consistency test, as was expected given the low number of items (the original scale by Mehta and Purvis, 1995, was not reliable either). Although an aggregated score was not computed for this reason, the statistics for the individual items show that the participants generally considered that advertising is informative, even if most of the products did not perform as well as the claims, and therefore they failed if considered as a 'quality assurance' tool. Looking at advertisements appeared to be liked by most participants, although they considered advertising overload a disvalue (Table 2).

**Table 2.**  
Attitude towards advertising (%) – full sample

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Total</i>
I like to look at adverts	7.8	35.8	22.9	20.7	12.8	100
Much advertising is way too annoying	42.4	29.9	14.7	7.9	5.1	100
Too many products do not perform as well as is claimed in the adverts	23.0	49.4	21.9	3.4	2.2	100
On average, the quality of brands that are advertised is better than of brands that are not advertised	2.2	10.7	36.5	32.6	18.0	100
Advertising helps me keep up-to-date about products and services that I need or would like to have	11.8	38.8	24.7	15.2	9.6	100



Both the EQ and the believability scale were measured using reliable and internally consistent scales (Cronbach alpha, >0.7) for all of the ethical values (Table 3.).

Reliability and internal consistency was confirmed for each advert label and at each country level, which indicated that the scales represented valid and invariant measurements across the five countries (Malhotra et al., 1996).

**Table 3.**  
Reliability of scales per argument (Cronbach Alpha)

<i>Additional ethical values</i>	<i>Animal welfare 1</i>	<i>Animal welfare 2</i>	<i>Local 1</i>	<i>Local 2</i>	<i>Fair prices 1</i>	<i>Fair prices 2</i>
Emotional quotient (12 item)	0.938	0.937	0.909	0.927	0.893	0.874
Believability (10 item)	0.923	0.926	0.926	0.923	0.912	0.908

The recall questionnaire that was submitted 10 days after each of the FG discussions contained both unaided and aided recall questions to determine whether the consumers remembered the product under investigation and the advertised claims/ arguments. Recalled claims were classified according to either central or peripheral processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986); claims totally missing on the labels that consumers 'recalled' were also recorded (Table 4 and Table5).

**Table 4.**  
Unaided recall

<i>Central/ peripheral processing of the advert</i>	<i>Claim/ theme</i>	<i>Recall (%)</i>	<i>Avert type code</i>
Central	Regional/ local	45.8	LO1&LO2
	Tradition	19.3	LO2
	Environment protection	19.3	FP1
	Animal welfare	13.9	AW1&AW2
	GM free	10.8	AW1&AW2
	Farmers' support	4.8	FP1&FP2
	Free range	4.2	AW1&AW2
Peripheral	Heart	37.3	All
	Hen	34.9	All
Missing	Health	12.7	

**Table 5.**  
Aided recall

<b>Central/ peripheral processing of the advert</b>	<b>Claim/ theme</b>	<b>Recall (%)</b>	<b>Avert type code</b>
Central claims	6. local eggs	96.4	LO1&LO2
	17. heart's choice	92.5	
	1. GMO-free feed	89.4	AW1&AW2
	4. free range	86.9	AW1&AW2
	3. animal welfare	86.3	AW1&AW2
	13. animals live outdoor	83.8	AW1&AW2
	10. minimum transport & less pollution	81.9	LO1
	19. respect for farmer values	72.5	LO2
	11. fair reward to farmers	72.3	FP1&FP2
	15. environmental protection	66.9	FP1
	7. food miles	63.1	LO1
Peripheral claims	14. egg quality	38.8	
	9. egg shelf-life	22.6	
	2. egg size	20.6	
	8. egg colour	13.1	
Missing arguments	5. good working conditions for farmers**	78.1	FP2
	12. consumer's health**	38.1	
	18. love for own children**	7.5	
	20. slow food**	7.5	

The consumers were also asked if they had purchased any eggs since the FG discussions, and if they were going to purchase eggs in the coming week. Finally, a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the consumer perceptions as to how much their buying behaviour towards organic eggs had been influenced by the labels that they had seen and discussed in the FGs. The unaided recall questions were subsequently centrally coded using content analysis software (Text Smart), by clustering common terms on the basis of the term frequency. Multiple coding was allowed for each of the consumers, but each of the consumer responses was assigned to at least one of the following content codes: heart, regional/ local, hen, tradition, environment protection, health, GMO free, animal welfare, free range, farmer's support.

The data collected with the paper-and-pencil questionnaires and in the recall telephone surveys were centrally analysed using a standard statistical package (SPSS Statistics 18.0)

#### 4 Results

The results provide a picture of attitudes towards the proposed egg labels across the five EU countries investigated. The questionnaires and quantitative analyses were complemented through the FG discussions, and were aimed at providing rich qualitative information on the most preferred concepts and

additional ethical attributes in each of the countries. To determine whether there were differences between the consumer juries in the five countries, and between the concepts/ labels, t-tests and ANOVA analysis were run on the measured scales.

### Cross-cultural similarities and differences in attitudes towards the labels

#### Focus-group results

From the very beginning of the label testing, there was evidence of the broad cross-cultural differences with respect to advert perception and to what is considered as an acceptable label. Although at least three of the countries investigated (AT, CH, DE) should have shared similar cultural backgrounds and the same level of organic market development (Hamm and Gronefeld, 2004), they appeared quite different in both label layout perception and attitude towards the label messages. Translation issues and the label styles partially justified the opinions of these participants towards the labels.

In general, many participants clearly did not like to be emotionally touched by the labels/ arguments. These consumers (especially in CH and DE) were more interested in the cognitive (think) aspects of the labels than the affective (feel) ones: they mostly appreciated the amount of information given and the clearness of the labels (Claeys et al., 1995). This preference for the 'think' dimension of the labels was particularly evident in the participant perception of both the visual and the verbal components of the egg labels (except in IT, and partially in AT).

The visual components influenced the attitudes towards the adverts by generating an affective response (Mitchell, 1986) and by evoking emotional (not necessarily positive) feelings (Chowdhury et al., 2008). Nevertheless, at first sight, most of the participants disliked the label layouts (**Fehler! Verweisquelle konnte nicht gefunden werden.**) because of the visual features that characterised the adverts. The green background, commonly perceived as related to an organic and natural product, was not appreciated in all of the countries (except IT and AT), although green is the prominent colour in current labelling and packaging in all of the countries (see § "3.1 First stage: An inventory of existing organic-egg packaging labels"). In most of the countries, the majority of the participants also mentioned that they would prefer to see photographs of real hens ('think' dimension) instead of eggs on the label.

Among the sketched designs (the overall 'pink heart' theme, associated with yellow artwork), the 'two hens with the heart' design was generally liked (AT, DE and IT), although it produced mixed reactions among the participants. The 'heart/ Earth looking farm' associated with the local-food argument was perceived as too complex and too full of stimuli to be easily understood. Finally, the fair-price 'sketched farmer with great heart' logo was found to be hilarious and inappropriate in all of the countries. Some consumers (IT) even associated it with a cook more than a farmer, while others (the UK) associated the image with all of the above: either a Mexican, Spanish or French farmer, or with a butcher – showing that sometimes different cultures are not that different in their prejudicial imaging!

The cross-cultural consumer perception of the label verbal components caused even more difficulties relating to 'Etic' advertising (Appendix ). The wording and claims of almost all of the headlines were extensively criticised. Although for most of the participants in most of the countries the Animal Welfare 1 'Heart's choice' was the most successful headline, no headline was really appreciated by all of the consumers on the basis of an intellectual request for more information, based on facts and evidence (particularly in DE and CH) or on the grounds of a common-sense preference for the sensory evaluation of the food. Some participants (AT) did not want to choose their eggs with their heart, but "with the stomach". The 'health' claim was also felt to be a dubious and probably false statement ("*Eggs are not good for the heart*" [UKFG2.7M]).

Of the regional/ local food production headlines, the only one that had some appeal was 'From the heart of our region' (Local Food 1). The consumers felt that 'local' and 'close' were synonymous with 'less polluting', and also with 'safer', and that the claims were more credible. However, the 'region' was considered to be too broad and vague in all of the countries: "*the heart of Lazio would be better...it is more trustworthy if I read it...if not I don't believe it is close to me*" [ITFG2.3M]. 'Local' was the much preferred and suggested term, although the exact geographic origin would be much preferred: "*Why can't it just say produced locally instead of putting from the heart of our region?*" [UKFG3.5F]. The Local Food 2 headline ('From the heart of our tradition') was rejected, because of negative connotations of the term tradition in the context of additional ethical values. Tradition was seen here as synonymous with conventional/ traditional farming ("*Tradition, this is strange... traditional agriculture is the agriculture with chemicals*" [CHFG1.3M]), or with conservative political views.

The Fair Price 1 headline, 'I support those who have our world at heart', was certainly preferred to the Fair Price 2 headline of 'The wellbeing of our farmers is close to our heart', but the term 'support' was

particularly disliked: *"I like to pay a fair price to farmers. I really want. But I do not like to support them"* [CHFG3.26F]. In the Fair Price 2 headline, the consumers were puzzled that the message centred on farmers instead of consumers or animals: *"buying food (eggs) is not like being a supporter of WWF ...farmers are not like animals we must save from extinction!"* [ITFG2.8F]; *"when I buy eggs, I don't care about the farmer. I care about the hens and how they are looked after. The farmer is not important"* [ATFG2.6M]. Among the various body texts, the only elements that were not controversial across all of the countries were: the GMO-free feed reference, and the freedom to live and roam outdoors. In most of the countries, the claim '100% organic healthy life' was instead perceived as overblown and fake, as did the '100% bio' yellow circle that was replicated on all of the labels. Some consumers felt that this was redundant, and even caused confusion about the organic status (*"What is the reason for 100% organic? Do you get organic things that aren't 100%?"*) [UKFG3.5F]).

The FG participants declared they would support egg labels that explicitly mention or visualise the actual producer (either on the labels or in enclosed leaflets), although not on supermarket egg packages (where trustworthiness relies more on the supply chain).

The fair-price argument was certainly the most disliked, at least in the way it was presented to the consumers in the headlines and text. In the Fair Price 1 concept, the term 'Mother Earth' was seen as conveying spiritual or religious meanings that were felt inappropriate in egg packaging by many of the consumers in many of the countries.

A general perception across all of the countries was that the arguments (animal welfare, regional/ local food production, fair price) should have been combined. At least, animal welfare and local production were both seen as important by the consumers.

Furthermore, as eggs are probably seen as a 'commodity' even by organic consumers, when they are advertised with too much emphasis on ethical arguments and/or emotional marketing, this might have appeared strange and unusual to most of participants. Here, the product itself can influence the consumer attitudes towards the concepts and the underlying arguments by mediating the processing of the emotional adverts (Geuens et al., 2010). Only the sentence: '6 fresh organic free-range eggs', was particularly liked, as this made the consumers trust the quality of the eggs, while it was also short and clear.

#### *Label liking*

According to the EQ measurements (Wells, 1964) of the label advertising of the additional ethical attributes (Figure 1), animal welfare was by far the most preferred argument across the countries studied, even where the participants showed a clear dislike towards the labels overall (DE, CH, the UK). Regional/ local food production scored second in most countries, while fair price scored last.

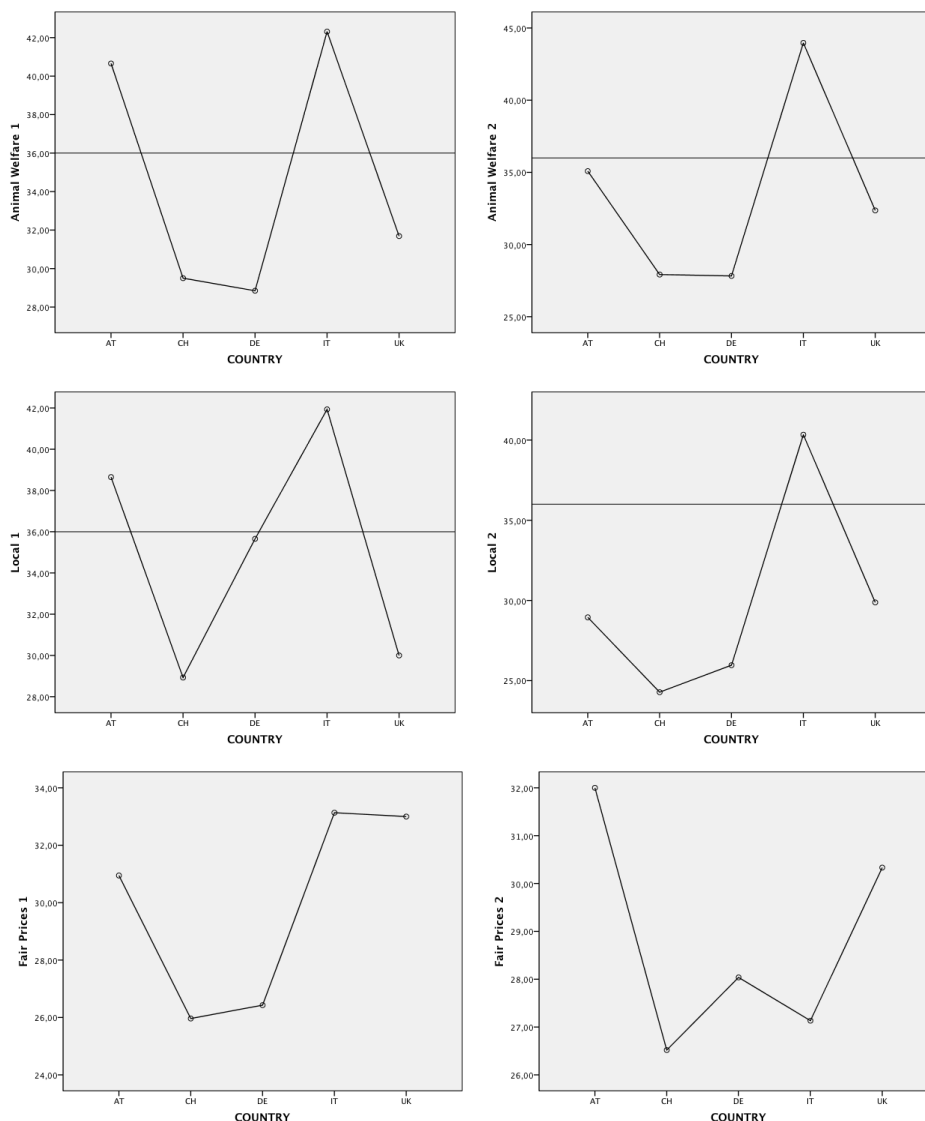


Figure 1. Emotional quotient (label liking): mean values per country/label concepts

Nevertheless, by analysing these label liking (EQ) scores according to country, the widespread bad perception of the labels/ arguments emerges for almost all of the countries. Despite this generalised low level of liking for the various additional ethical attributes and for almost all of the labels (Figure 1), the mean scores of the EQ scale (label liking) are quite different when the different arguments are evaluated in the various countries. Only IT, and sometimes AT, had scores that show – on average – that the members of the consumer juries liked at least some of the concepts: EQ scores above 36 for animal welfare (Animal Welfare 1: IT and AT; Animal Welfare 2: IT) and regional/ local food production (Local 1: IT and AT; Local 2: IT). Fair-price label arguments were generally disliked in all of the countries (scores well below 36), although they had comparably better scores in AT, IT and the UK, although with different preferences towards the various labels across the different countries. Only the DE participants gave scores around the mean values (neither like nor dislike) for the Local Food 1 label (Local 1).

The AT and IT participants showed a clear positive attitude towards the Animal Welfare 1 concept, with scores significantly higher – in statistical terms – than the boundary value of 36 ( $t_{AT} = 2.801$ ,  $t_{IT} = 5.877$ ). In CH, DE and the UK, where the t-test for Animal Welfare 1 scored significantly lower than the boundary value, the label was disliked, although this label was, on average, the most preferred (either the most liked or the least disliked) in all of the countries, compared to all of the other labels. This suggests that Animal Welfare (1) would provide the most universal additional ethical values across the countries studied.

#### Label believability

The analysis of the believability scale (Beltrami, 1982) showed that in some of the countries, even if they disliked the labels, the consumer juries considered them quite believable in their arguments (Figure 2).

Specifically, the Local Food 1 label appeared to be believable in three of the countries (AT, IT and DE), while the CH juries, who generally disliked all of the concepts due to the emotional influence of the label layout, regarded the Local Food 1 label as neither believable nor unbelievable. Labels related to the fair-price argument can be excluded since they were clearly considered not to be believable in any of the countries.

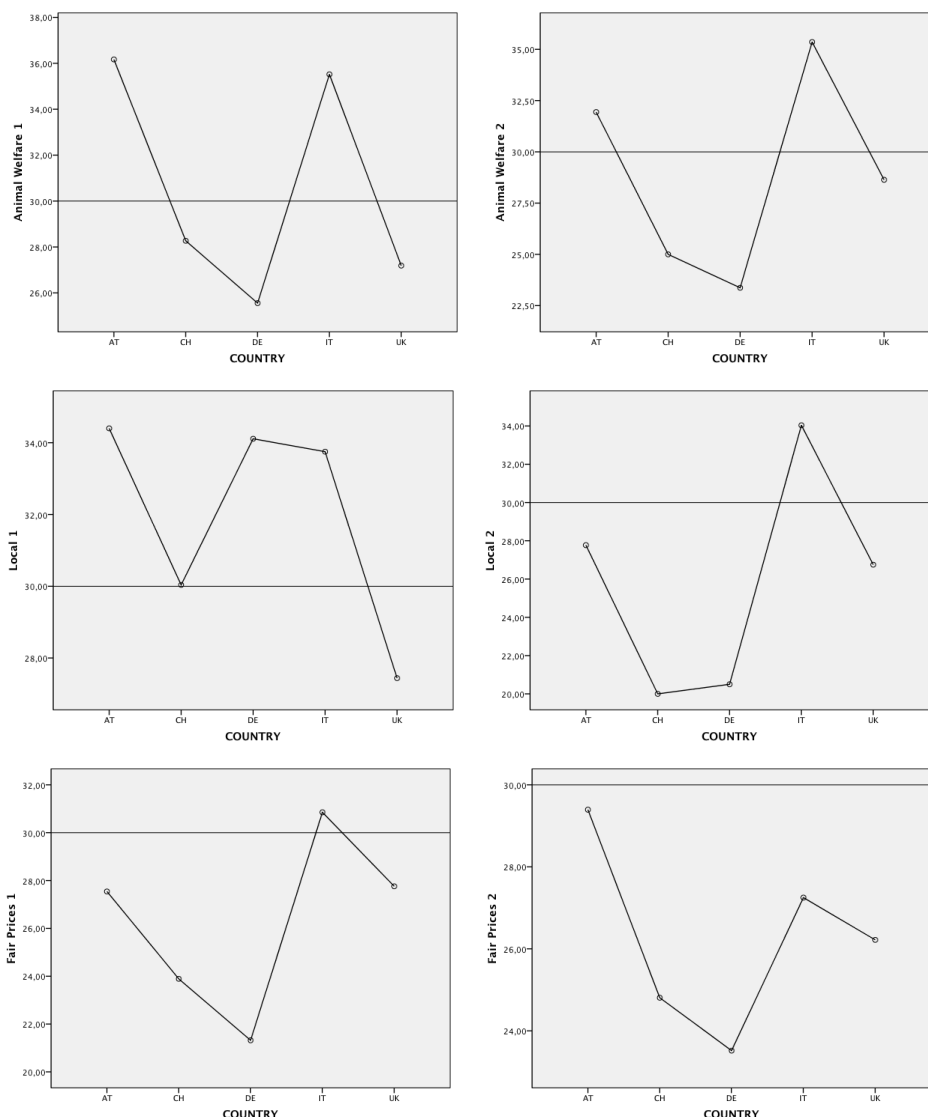


Figure 2. Believability: mean values per country/label (arguments)

Only in AT and IT did the consumer juries find – on average – the Animal Welfare 1 label actually trustworthy. The mean scores of the believability index in these countries were significantly higher – in statistical terms – than the boundary value of 30 ( $t_{AT}=5.645$ ,  $t_{IT}=7.944$ ). Although all of the labels were clearly disliked by the juries in DE ( $t=-2.857$ ) and there was nothing clear-cut in CH and the UK; in these countries the organic consumers probably perceive the intrinsic trustworthiness of the animal welfare claims, no matter how ill posed they are in the labels.

By analysing the differences in the believability scales within the same argument, a pattern similar to the EQ scales emerges. In general, the version named with number 1 always appeared to be considered more believable, whatever the additional ethical value was, although the differences in believability were significant only in a few cases: Animal Welfare 1 versus Animal Welfare 2 (AT); Local Food 1 versus Local Food 2 (AT, CH and DE); Fair Price 1 versus Fair Price 2 (IT).

The FG results give some further insights into these preferences. In general, the Animal Welfare 2 concept (headline: ‘Produced with the heart!’; body text: ‘The welfare of our hens is close to our heart! They have access to the outdoors where they are free to roam, and they are fed on natural, GMO-free feed. For them we have chosen a 100% ORGANIC healthy life!’) was considered ambiguous, and even involuntarily comical in the headline and too naive in trying to capture the affective support of the participant. As a

result, the whole concept sounded “false”, “exaggerated” and “unreliable”. According to many of the consumers, the lack of credibility was also enhanced by the boasting and pretentious wording: ‘100% ORGANIC healthy life’.

As already mentioned, the German-speaking participants (AT, CH and DE) also perceived the local food argument in the version of ‘From the heart of our region’ (Local Food 1) as significantly more believable than in the version of ‘The heart of tradition!’. The DE results were particularly noticeable, as the participants were always relatively negative during the FG discussions, with complaints about the lack of information found for all of the label arguments. The exception here was for Local Food 1, the body copy of which was preferred over all of the other body texts, because of the valuable information provided. In the other countries, the success of this concept was related to the connection of the Local Food 1 concept with closer farmer–consumer partnerships, as expressed by a shorter ‘farm-to-fork’ path that would lead to reduced food miles. This is how the consumers interpreted the part of the body text referring to “eggs produced close to where consumers live and brought to their table with minimum transport and less pollution”. Indeed, the same sentence was particularly emphasised in other countries, like IT and the UK, even though the believability scores were not significantly different from the competing concept of Local Food 2.

*Effectiveness/ purchase intentions*

The final measure used to analyse the consumer attitudes towards the advertising labels was a simple purchase-intention question. The results do not show high purchase intentions. Again, cross-cultural differences are seen in these results, which mirror the label liking (EQ). While the general pattern of the preference (or lower dislike) for the Animal Welfare 1 concept followed by Local Food 1 was confirmed, the differences are much less strong in terms of the stated purchase intention.

Ten days after their participation in the FGs, 64.5% of the respondents had bought organic eggs, and 71.1% declared their intention to buy organic eggs in the week after the telephone interview. In general, the relative majority of the respondents (36%, modal value) felt that they were influenced very little by the labels seen during their organic egg purchase behaviour, and on average, the influence was just above ‘a little’. The IT and UK respondents felt significantly more influenced than the CH and DE ones. Indeed, while the modal value in CH and DE was ‘very little influenced’ (71.4% and 66.7%, respectively), the modal value was ‘very highly influenced’ in IT (34.6%). In the UK, the mode was ‘highly influenced’ (52.4%). In IT, the second-most-frequent value was the neutral one (‘neither much influenced nor little influenced’), while in the UK it was the ‘very little influenced’ value (19.0%), with a much more dispersed pattern of opinions. The AT consumers were, on average, ‘little influenced’; the modal value, however, was ‘very little influenced’, as indicated by 37.0% of respondents.

*Label recall*

Recall testing was also performed 10 days after the FGs, with a 91% response rate was obtained, with some significant dropping out especially in DE (see Table 6)

**Table 6.**  
Recall response rates

	<i>FG</i>	<i>Recall</i>	<i>Rate</i> (%)
AT	37	37	100
CH	28	28	100
DE	28	18	64
IT	30	26	87
UK	33	33	100
Total	156	142	91

Two-thirds of the respondents remembered that the FGs discussed organic eggs, 31.4% recalled that they were about eggs, and the remainder remembered that organic food was discussed. Unaided recall statistics showed that almost half of the consumers – surprisingly – remembered the regional/ local food

argument (see Table 4). Even if coupled with free-range, animal welfare was only recalled by less than one quarter of the consumers, while the fair price and farmers support argument did not stick in the minds of the respondents.

All of the 'real' central claims (Table 5) show greater aided recall than the peripheral ones, which are above the false ones. The only noticeable exception is 'good working condition for farmers' – a non-existent claim that was probably confused with 'fair reward to farmers' and 'respect for farmer values', which had similar recall rates – and 'consumers' health', which even if it was non-existent, it was unconsciously associated with organic products in the minds of the consumers. Again, the regional/ local food argument showed the highest recall rate (Table 5): in this case, almost a unanimous vote), together with the 'heart's choice', which was generally thought of as the most effective headline in all of the countries, including those where it was not liked. The GMO-free feed and the various animal welfare claims all had recall rates between 84% and 90%, while the 'environmental' claim that was embedded in the regional/ local food argument ('minimum transport and less pollution') was recalled by almost 82% of the respondents. The slightly lower recall rates of 'environmental protection' and 'food miles' show that not all of the consumers that recalled the 'minimum transport' issue clearly associated these themes to the labels.

Interestingly enough, the false claim 'heart disease prevention', was recalled by one fifth of the respondents. Analysing this result at the country level revealed that the problem was only in the UK, where 84.8% of the respondents recalled this claim, compared to 0% to 10% in the other countries. The 'heart' imaging – as already discussed – certainly caused confusion in the majority of the UK respondents, as did the wording of the two animal welfare concepts.

In general, not many other statistically significant country differences were seen, although the UK consumers showed more fantasy than the others. In CH, the participants specifically recalled that egg size was a specific claim on the label (57% vs. an average of 12.3% in the other countries). Egg colour was recalled by one third of the UK consumers, while on average only 7.5% of the respondents from the other countries recalled this non-existent claim. In the UK, 60% percent of the participants were also sure that the labels contained claims about the egg shelf-life, while only 12% of the other respondents felt the same. The UK (81.8%) and IT (53.8%) respondents also recalled a 'health' claim, which was not noted by the others (9.6%). The UK consumers also recalled a 'slow food' claim (24.2%), significantly differing from the average of 3%.

## 5 Discussion and concluding remarks

Although the intention of the mock label test was to examine additional ethical attributes via a common communication tool, there were a lot of difficulties involved in creating a shared and consistent EU organic egg label across all of these countries. The results of this study provide some evidence in favour of the hypothesis that in some countries (CH, DE and the UK) consumers prefer 'left brain' processing of the labels, either because of cultural bias (e.g. the values and emotions expressed and the imagery were inappropriate to their culture) or because of differing perceptions of the egg product across the various cultures (i.e. in CH, DE, and the UK, eggs are perceived as 'think' products, while in IT and AT, they can be classified as 'feel' products) (Claeys et al, 1995). Indeed, even in these last two countries (AT and IT), the overall impressions of some of the label headlines and text were that the advertising was excessive, pushy and somewhat overblown. It was quite clear that in most of the countries, except for IT and partially for AT, the use of the 'heart' symbolism – either in words or images – was not a successful labelling strategy for conveying ethical values.

However, the whole exercise resulted in quite high recall measures, although the influence was rather low in most countries except IT and, with a split sample, the UK. The results support the consumers perplexity and uncertainty towards the organic labels. Consumers still need specific information to make their purchase decisions, as they do not simply trust 'organic' (Declerck and Fourcadet, 2010).

Among the additional ethical attributes tested, animal welfare and regional/ local food production were by far and away the most popular among the respondents across all of the countries. Animal welfare is well understood in terms of better conditions for the hens: free-range is standard for organic production, so where does the additional ethical value come from? Outdoor roaming was a well accepted concept by the consumers, so maybe pasturing – as is already claimed by some egg producers in AT and CH – is also of extra value. Evaluating all of the results, the regional/ local food dimension appears to be the most appealing additional ethical attribute, and the concepts were widely accepted, both in terms of consumer qualitative and health attributes ('freshness', 'safety') and in terms of environmental concern ('food miles', 'minimum transport and pollution'). The consumers were happy to buy eggs produced "close to



where they live”, although they would like to know more clearly how close and where the eggs were from. In some cases, they would like to know the name and address of the farmer. The fair price concepts were rejected in all of the countries by the vast majority of the respondents. In general, the consumers did not like to think of having to ‘support’ organic farmers.

In conclusion, the results of our study suggest careful planning and pre-testing before analysing advert effectiveness in an *Etic* context, while we should be aware of the country differences that exist. IT consumers are certainly quite different from all of the others, while the DE and CH consumers are more similar. Quantitative results, especially in some countries, are difficult to interpret, given the overwhelmingly negative attitude shown by the participants over the label concepts.

For the future, there is a need to go through a complex and iterative advert-creation process using a non-standardised testing procedure. Only once the consumer expectations of the advertising message are understood will it be possible to compare that expectation with the current level of advertising performance, and only in a qualitative inductive approach (Desmarais, 2007). This kind of assessment allows the identification of culture uniqueness and hidden specificities that are not always easy to uncover using only quantitative research instruments.

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Appendix 1.

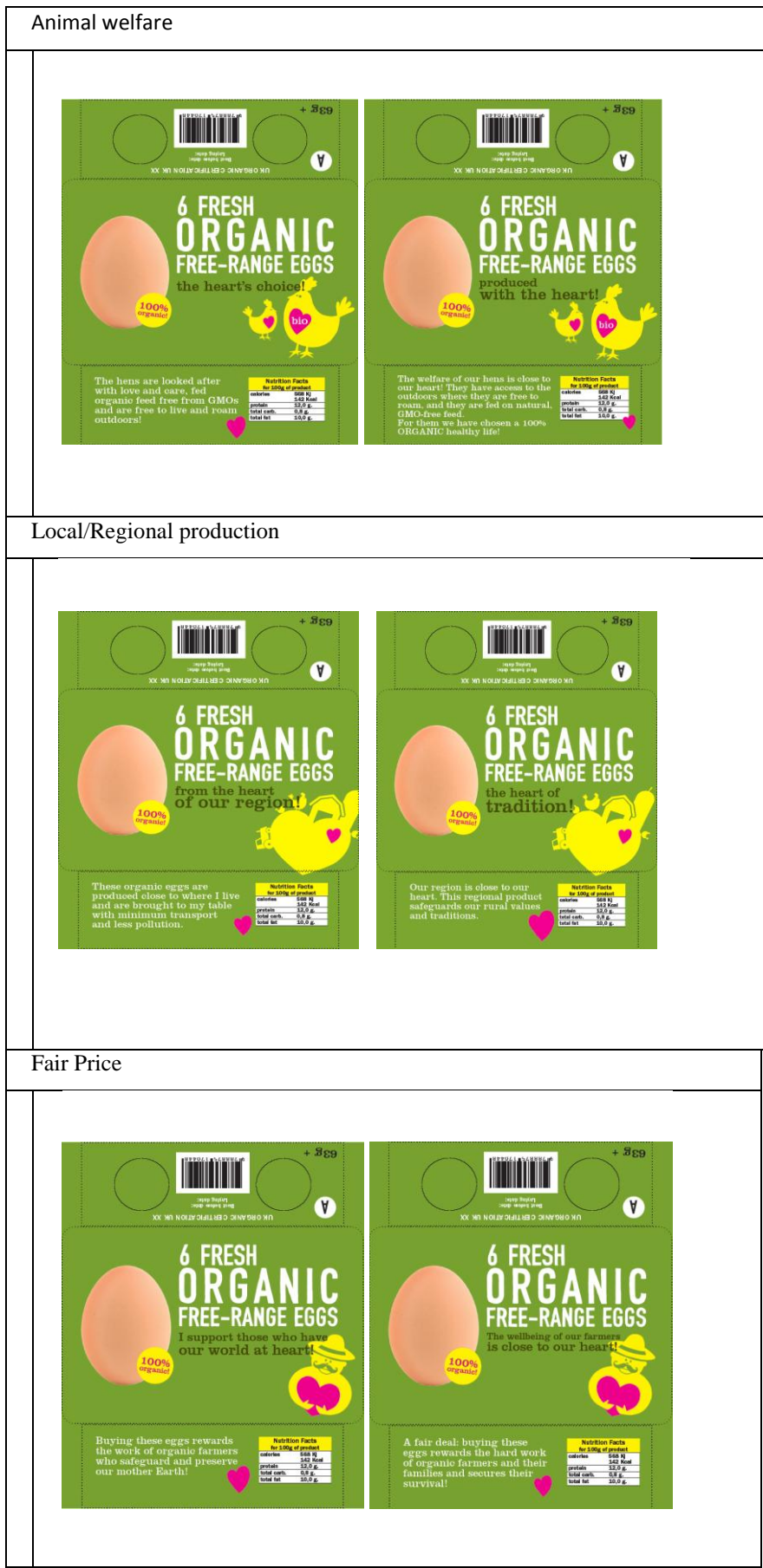


Figure A2. Label pictures in English, per attribute

**Appendix 2.**

**Table A1.**  
Label texts in the three different languages, per argument and claim

<b>Ethical attributes</b>	<b>German (DE/AT/CH)</b>	<b>English (UK)</b>	<b>Italian (IT)</b>	<b>Claims</b>
Animal Welfare 1 (AW1)	Die Wahl des Herzens	The heart's choice	La scelta del cuore	
	Die Hennen werden mit Liebe und Respekt gehalten. Sie bekommen gentechnikfreies Futter und können im Freien herumlaufen.	The hens are looked after with love and care, fed organic feed free from GMOs and are free to live and roam outdoors!	Le galline sono allevate con amore e rispetto, libere da mangimi OGM, libere di crescere e di razzolare all'aperto!	love & respect freedom GMO-free
Animal Welfare 2 (AW2)	Mit dem Herz erzeugt!	Produced with the heart!	Prodotte con il cuore!	
	Das Wohlbefinden unserer Hennen liegt uns am Herzen. Sie können im Freien herumlaufen und bekommen natürliches, gentechnikfreies Futter. Für sie haben wir ein 100prozentiges Bio-Leben ausgesucht.	The welfare of our hens is close to our heart! They have access to the outdoors where they are free to roam, and they are fed on natural, GMO-free feed. For them we have chosen a 100% ORGANIC healthy life!	Ci sta a cuore il benessere delle nostre galline! Sono allevate libere di razzolare all'aperto ed alimentate naturalmente e senza OGM. Per loro abbiamo scelto una vita sana 100% BIO!	welfare & care freedom GMO-free
Local Food 1 (LO1)	Aus dem Herzen unserer Region	From the heart of our region	Dal cuore della nostra regione	
	Diese Bio-Eier stammen aus der Gegend, in der ich wohne. Sie kommen auf kurzen Transportwegen und mit geringer Umweltbelastung auf meinen Tisch.	These organic eggs are produced close to where I live and are brought to my table with minimum transport and less pollution.	Queste uova bio sono prodotte a due passi da casa mia e arrivano sulla mia tavola senza compiere lunghi e inquinanti tragitti.	Local and near Food miles Environment

Local Food 2 (LO2)	Das Herz der Tradition!	The heart of tradition!	Il cuore della tradizione!	
	Unsere Region liegt uns am Herzen. Dieses regionale Produkt trägt zum Erhalt bäuerlicher Kultur und Traditionen bei.	Our region is close to our heart. This regional product safeguards our rural values and traditions.	Ci sta a cuore la nostra regione. Questo prodotto tutela i valori e le tradizioni rurali del nostro territorio.	Regional Rural values & traditions
Fair Price 1 (FP1)	Ich unterstütze die, denen unsere Welt am Herzen liegt!	I support those who have our world at heart!	Io sostengo chi ha a cuore il mio mondo!	
	Der Kauf dieser Eier honoriert die Arbeit der Bio-Bäuerinnen und Bio-Bauern, die unsere Mutter Erde pflegen und schützen.	Buying these eggs rewards the work of organic farmers who safeguard and preserve our mother Earth!	Comprando queste uova bio premio il lavoro degli agricoltori biologici che tutelano e custodiscono la nostra madre Terra!	Fair prices/reward for stewardship
Fair Price 2 (FP2)	Das Wohl unserer Bauern liegt uns am Herzen!	The wellbeing of our farmers is close to our heart!	Ci sta a cuore il benessere dei nostri agricoltori!	
	Ein faires Geschäft: Der Kauf dieser Eier honoriert die schwere Arbeit von Bio-Bäuerinnen und Bio-Bauern und ihren Familien und sichert ihr Überleben.	A fair deal: buying these eggs rewards the hard work of organic farmers and their families and secures their survival!	Un affare equo: l'acquisto di queste uova premia il duro lavoro degli allevatori biologici e delle loro famiglie e assicura la loro sopravvivenza!	Fair prices/reward for family farms