

# **Food Promotion Strategies: Drivers of Global Business Expansion**

**Sushil Kumar<sup>1</sup> and Nimish Jain<sup>2</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Associate Professor, Agribusiness Management, Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow-226013 (India). #91-522-2746987. Email: sushil@iiml.ac.in

<sup>2</sup> First Year Student, Postgraduate Program in Agribusiness Management, Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow-226013 (India). Email: abm03017@iiml.ac.in

## **Food Promotion Strategies: Drivers of Global Business Expansion**

**Abstract:** People identify themselves with the language they speak, the region they belong to, the place they are born in, the types of clothes they wear, and most significantly, the kind of food they eat. Food habits are some things which we learn very early in life. Over the years, individuals develop likings for particular kinds of foods and they start identifying themselves with the food they eat. Food habits vary from one country to another and even within a country or a state. Building on the argument that food habits are great bonding media among human beings, the paper suggests that nation states, in order to promote their businesses in different countries, should proactively promote their food in those countries as a first strategy.

**Keywords:** Food habits; Globalization; Food Culture

## 1. Introduction

In the past one decade or so, globalization has become the most popular agenda in the economic, political, and social lives of individuals, firms, and nations. The globalization process has altered the international competitive dynamics. Businesses, all over the world, are striving to integrate into global business networks (Tozanli, 2005). To compete in such a dynamic competitive global markets requires a fundamentally different vision of strategic thinking inside the firm as well as the nation states. Individual businesses have been making concerted efforts to develop *global mindset* among their managers. They are inventing and harvesting new technologies along global value chains and harnessing competencies for rapid and effective market response (Yaprak, 2002).

Not in all countries the local businessmen are sufficiently equipped and motivated to launch the requisite globalization strategies. Hence, in such cases the nation states need to proactively adopt innovative strategies of promoting their businesses at the international level. Many countries have introduced export-oriented economic and legal reforms aimed at facilitating their businesses to expand activities beyond the national borders. In addition to these macro level strategies, the nation states also need to adopt strategies of promoting their businesses in different countries. The success of a nation state in its globalizing strategies, to a great extent, would depend on enlightened government policies in cultivating good relations with other nations across the world. It is in this context that promotion of traditional food by a nation state in various countries can play a significant role.

It is said that the way to man's heart is through his stomach. What this essentially conveys is that if a person wants to win someone's love, he/she has to serve him/her delicious food. This paper tries to stretch the argument a little further and contends that food can even be

used as wheel for business promotion/expansion. Based primarily on authors' own experiences, thoughts and discussion with people from different cultures, the paper puts forward an argument that nation states, contemplating expanding their businesses globally, should promote their nation's traditional foods in different countries as one of the business expansion strategies.

## **2. Objectives**

The primary objective of the paper is to logically establish that promotion of food by a nation state at the global level can contribute significantly towards expansion of its businesses across the globe. This is achieved as traditional food of a country acts as national identity () and hence, its acceptability is likely to improve brand image of the nation. In addition, the promotion of food by a country is also likely to create inquisitiveness among people of other cultures to explore its culture leading to deepening and strengthening of relationships.

## **3. Background**

The socio-economic, cultural, political, historical, religious and ecological factors exert an influence on what we eat or do not eat. Food habits are some things which we learn very early in life (Perner, 2006). Over the years, individuals develop likings for particular kind of foods and they start identifying themselves with the food they eat. In addition to availability of raw agricultural products, the food habits in a particular society are driven by individual cultures, value systems, standards, norms etc. The way the food is processed or cooked and the way it is served, varies across cultures. Two kinds of food served on the dining table may contain same or

similar ingredients but how these ingredients are processed and cooked will determine the liking of these two foods.

To eat simply does not mean to be nourished, because the food occupies a place much broader in our life. It plays a very important part in the social and economic relations of the individuals. A food is certainly a product, but beside that it can be some kind of symbol of a person statute or reflects his/her identity. Acceptability of a country's food at the international level is sometimes used as a signal of the acceptability of country's culture. For example, a paper by SNU BA Team (2006) points out that 'one of the reasons Koreans are not treated well internationally is that Korean Food is not treated fairly at the international level.' It further points out that in 2005 Korean Food Cook Class, held in New York, some of the major participating newspapers and broadcasting companies remarked that 'the globalization of Korean culture has started by Korean food.'

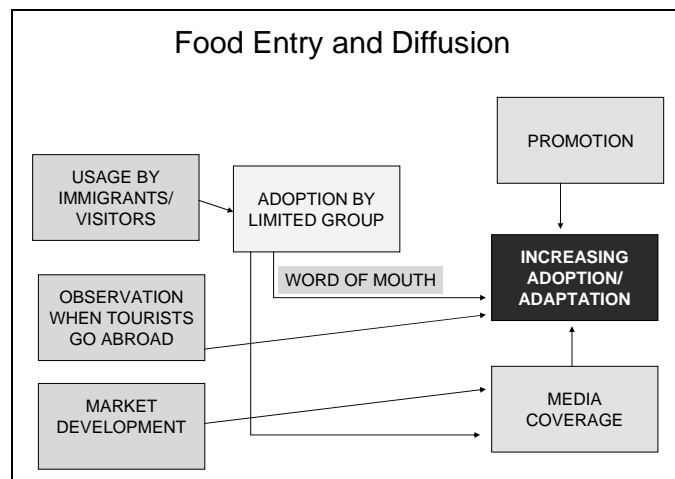
### ***3.1. Food as Symbolism and Cultural Identity***

Our identities are inextricably linked to the foods we eat and prepare (Rubin, 2006). Peoples' food habits, to great extent, vary from one place to another. Some of this is due to the fact that geography and climate affect the availability of certain foods, and some of it is just different for no reason we can pinpoint. However, irrespective of its origin, the food serves as a vehicle for the culture, most of the time. The way the food is presented, the ingredients used and the way people eat are different from a country to another and are generally inspired from the culture. People derive identities from the type of food they eat. People from the same part of the country eat the same foods, harvest and pick the same produce and make the same dishes. "Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you who you are," wrote renowned gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in 1825.

Traditional Food also acts as image of a nation. Food is one of the most important assets a nation state possesses and can use it for building brand image. Professor Youngshil Hahn from Sookmyung Women’s University emphasizes taste, nutrition, and cultural aspects in terms of globalization. She says, “Korean cultural assets cannot be taken outside Korea, but the taste of Korean food can be taken anywhere, so we should promote excellence of Korean food rigorously.” (SNU BA Team, 2006).

Some societies use food as a symbol of identity. They use their food to show that they belong to another culture. Many emigrants preserve their own food practices to be different from the population of the country where they live. Certain groups of population are also distinguished from the mass mainly through the consumption of alternate or ecological products.

**Figure 1: Food Diffusion and Adoption Process**



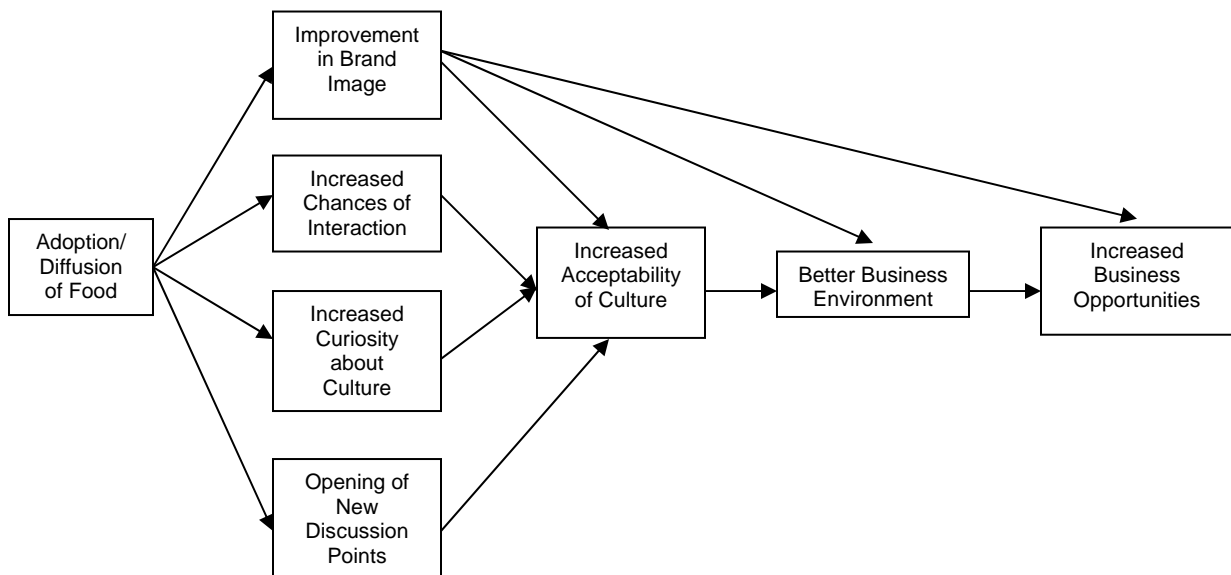
*(Adopted from Perner, 2006)*

It is argued that food acts as a mediator of communication and social contract. To eat together supports the social contact between individuals. Nothing is more pleasant than to sit at the dinner table and discuss together. What may be a feast day (marriage, birthday, communion...) or any work meeting without a meal or glass...? It is around a good dinner table

that family transmits values and standards from generation to generation. To eat together also means to learn what one can or what one cannot make in company. The social relationships are developed, maintained, deepened and strengthened around a glass or a good meal.

### 3.2. *Food Entry, Diffusion and its Consequences*

Some persons only eat specific foods and flavor combinations, while others like trying different foods and flavors. The first time one tries a foreign dish many questions occur in his/her mind: why do they present it like this? Why do they eat it this way? Why does it taste like this... this curiosity leads him/her to look for more details and more issues. In fact entry and diffusion of food is a complex process driven by number of factors and processes (Figure 1). The fundamental fact is that the more a person is exposed to a foreign food—and encouraged to eat it—the greater the chances that the food will be accepted. As the exposure to a food increases, the person becomes more familiar and less fearful of the food, and acceptance may develop.



**Figure 2:** Adoption and Diffusion of Food and its Impact on Business Opportunities

Adoption of food from a foreign culture is likely to lead to increased chances of interactions and increased curiosity to explore foreign culture, which opens up infinite discussion possibilities (Figure 2). Sometimes, the most mundane things (say, the origins or history of a particular dish) hold within them amazing stories. When one goes a step deeper one finds amazing facts about an unknown and unexplored culture. Food ignites the spark of passion in others and forces them to explore different facts associated with it. As a result it brings a person closer to the foreign culture and makes him/her accept it. While one accepts a culture he/she becomes able to live within it. This is exactly why it is said that eating food together can inspire and strengthen the bonds between individuals, communities, and even countries.

As pointed out earlier, traditional food of a country, as a symbol of national identity, when adopted at international level, helps improve 'Brand Image' of that country. The closeness, brought out by adoption of foreign food, leads to increased acceptability of thoughts and different practices prevalent in that country. This not only increases cross cultural interaction but also facilitates a better business environment between two countries. As shown in Figure 2, the better business environment between two countries offers immense opportunities for globalization of business. Dr. Richard Kwor, a professor at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, aptly puts that business people need to take time to learn about other country's diverse culture in order to exploit business opportunities in that country. Food can work as a wheel in this exploratory journey.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The paper, based on authors' thoughts, experiences and interaction with others, has tried to establish that promotion of traditional food by a country can be of strategic importance in globalizing its businesses. As a mediator of communication and social contract, food helps in

developing, maintaining, deepening and strengthening relationships. Improved relationships between individuals, societies and nation states are crucial for building suitable business environment and promotion of food can effectively achieve this for a nation state.

## 5. References

1. Perner, L. (2006). International Food Markets. MKTG 442 Course at: <http://www.larsperner.com/mktg442/>. Accessed on July 28, 2006.
2. Rubin, K. (2006). Understanding Food and Culture. Available at: <http://www.chefs.com/Features/Standard/103/Feature.aspx?SectionID=4>. Accessed on: September 24, 2006.
3. SNU BA Team (2006). Globalization of Korean Food. Available at: [http://meio.city.nago.okinawa.jp/gpachpup/topic/snu/snu\\_ba.pdf](http://meio.city.nago.okinawa.jp/gpachpup/topic/snu/snu_ba.pdf). Accessed on: September 24, 2006.
4. Tozanli, S. (2005). The rise of global enterprises in World's food chain. In: Rama, R. (Ed.), *Multinational Agribusinesses* (pp: 1-72). Binghamton, NY: Food Products Press.
5. Yaprak, A. (2002). Globalization: Strategies to Build a Great Global Firm in the New Economy. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 44(2): 297–302.