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Brazilians in the UK: ethnicity consumption and market  
development**

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**Abstract**

Brazilians in the UK constitute a growing number of immigrants. In recent years, enough demand for Brazilian branded products have allowed for the expansion of grocery outlets catering for the specific needs of this segment. This study investigates the attributes supporting the consumption of such ethnic products. Using the value laddering methodology, the establishing of links between attributes, consequences, and values (A-C-V) aimed at attracting key buyers' motivators that could better characterise the consumption of Brazilian foodstuff, it was found that food consumption practices were linked to the construction of self and community identities as the foods were emblematically Brazilian. As for other motivators of foods consumption, health/dietary reasons and 'remembering home' were also important. Brazilians consisted of a typically heterogeneous and transient group in the UK society tending to undergo less acculturative pressures. Hence, in the host country (i.e. in the UK) it is likely that food adoption of the host's cuisine is slow. Presently, demand is characteristics of a niche market for processed Brazilian branded foods that caters for specifically needs and has little appeal to other ethnic groups outside Lusophone communities. Consumers in general showed traits of nationalism and patriotism through expressions such as Brazilian food tastes better or Brazilian food is more nutritious.

**Key words: ethnicity, consumption, food buying motivation, Diaspora, Brazil.**

**Introduction**

Ethnic foods could be defined as all foods (home-made or modified) that are from other countries and that contribute to the food culture of the host country (Church et al., 2005). In recent decades, increasing numbers of immigrants arriving in the UK have resulted in a steady growth in the ethnic food market. In 2008 such a market was worth £1.24 billion at retail selling prices characteristically a niche which has, until 2007, expanded at a rate of 2.0% per annum (Keynote 2009). Nevertheless, in the last year alone the sector experienced a 4.6% increase on 2007. Immigrants searching for foods that are similar to the foods of their original country have developed ethnic food markets in host countries, and the UK is no exception to this.

Belasco (2008) pointed out that ‘we are what we eat and what we eat defines where we come from and where we want to go’. For immigrants, food consumption no longer has the intrinsic function of nourishment, but it is also charged with social, cultural and religious meaning. As a result, one’s culture and identity is intimately linked to the foods eaten. As such, Verbeke and Lopez (2005) have alluded to the fact that eating ends up becoming symbolic of whom we are.

So far, studies on food consumption have focused on the Chinese, Indian, and Thai ethnic groups. This could be attributed to them being more representative of the minorities living in the UK; having been established longer; or because these foods have largely been adopted by the host’s country consumers. Nevertheless, very little is known of other ethnic groups’ behaviours. For example, representatives of the Latin American ethnic group are little studied with regards to their food consumption habits, the extent as well as the reasons these groups are motivated to consume specific foodstuff whilst in Diaspora. Bearing in mind the difficulty in generalising food habits of all representatives of such a diverse continent, added to the impossibility of covering many of the continent’s different ethnic make-ups, the case of the Brazilians in the UK was chosen for, presently, being the most representative of all the groups.

More and more Brazilians are moving abroad and in Diaspora constitute a growing number of immigrants in many parts of the world. Important diasporic communities are found in the USA, Japan and Portugal. Throughout the EU, groups of Brazilians are well represented and, specifically, in the UK, Brazilian migrants have become a relevant group. According to a study by the International Organisation for Migrants, in the UK, Brazilians in Diaspora make up a growing community, estimated at around three-hundred thousand who prefer to settle in large cities such as London (IOM, 2005).

In the UK, the Brazilians have originally followed the Portuguese who initially settled in London on either side of the river Thames. Similarly to the Lusitanian immigrant, Brazilians despite choosing to live near other fellow expatriates could not be described as cohesive as some other ethnic groups (Corkill and Almeida, 2007). According to Baganha (2003), the force behind emigration is usually determined by economic imbalances reflected mainly in wage differentials or by political motivations. In general, in the quest to emigrate, Brazilians have been affected by similar economic and political conditions to the Portuguese. Since the mid-1970s, but with increased intensity in the 1980s, vast numbers of the young population faced with limited future prospects of developing a career in Brazil have decided to emigrate.

Brazilians in Diaspora make up a growing community, which, in the UK, has generated a sufficient but growing demand for typical Brazilian branded products. As a result of this, the UK has experienced an expansion of Brazilian ethnic grocery outlets catering for the expatriate community (Aguiar, 2009a).

### **The Expansion of the Brazilian-owned Grocery Outlets**

Until recently, grocery outlets owned by the Portuguese served the relatively small Brazilian expatriate community in the UK. These used to cater for both the aforementioned Portuguese community, which was keen on consuming, amongst

other things, the famous dried cod [*bacalhau*] and products of charcuterie. The Brazilians, on the other hand, were eager to buy dried grocery foodstuffs such as cassava flour, black beans, guava marmalade and *guaraná*. With shifting preferences, the notion of the relationship within the Portuguese-Brazilian network has also shifted.

At the present time, the Brazilian expatriate community constitutes a strong niche market for typically processed foodstuffs catering for specifically Brazilian needs. In Brazilian grocery outlets, owners have moved away from more traditional Portuguese products to a different product mix. Brazilians look for processed products of established Brazilian brands. Such a growing expatriate population has led to a rise in demand. Consequently, Brazilians have taken over market opportunities which the Portuguese might have failed to perceive or did not react to early enough. This has also had an impact on the channels of distribution of ethnic Brazilian groceries. Brazilian-owned companies are now importing Brazilian groceries, which were originally supplied by Portuguese traders. Initially the reason for relying on the Portuguese marketing channel was to do with the size of a shipment<sup>1</sup>. A greater demand for Brazilian groceries made it possible for the setting up of specialist Brazilian wholesalers/importers contracting shipments which could now reach the UK by bypassing the Portuguese traditional trade route. As a consequence, by importing foodstuffs directly into the UK, the supply chain has been rearranged. Despite such an arrangement still being in its early stages, it is clear that the Portuguese are losing their premium dominance. Conversely, the Brazilian supply chain for traditional branded food staples is now being extended and is becoming more international.

The net effect of the restructuring of the ethnic food supply chain is the lowering of average prices. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, importing larger volumes directly to the UK have reduced transaction costs and the larger scale has allowed per-unit costs to be reduced. Secondly, establishments selling Brazilian groceries have displaced Portuguese outlets, thereby increasing their market segment. With increased competition, Brazilian grocery outlet owners trade in products which attract relatively low profit margins and are bulky in nature (flour, beans, carbonated drinks and fruit preserves). However, the Brazilian consumer has benefited from such restructuring as choice increases and the prices charged are less high than previously.

### **Models of Food Choices, Acculturation and Adoption**

Marketing theory indicates that consumption in general is influenced by one's individual set of choices and preferences which reflect one's life experiences.

Many authors have tried to conceptualise human consumption decisions (Fishbein and Ajzen (1975); Blake (1999); Kollmus and Agyeman (2002)) and, more specifically, food choice in the models of Herne (1995) and Marshall (2002) amongst others. Consumer decision is based on conscious and unconscious attributes that take into consideration, personal characteristics, the surrounding environment, past experiences, information, intrinsic attributes such as colour, aroma, texture, flavour as well as extrinsic characteristics such as price, label, availability and credence. The

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<sup>1</sup> In order to make an import consignment viable, the minimum requirement would be one container load or the equivalent to twenty tonnes of cargo shipment from Brazil which is, presently, possible. Portuguese traders had the advantage of shipping greater volumes as trade routes with Brazil are considerable and ships destined for the UK would usually visit one Portuguese port.

interaction of these various factors plays an important role in determining food choice. In the case of immigrants, price, availability and brands that are easily recognised are relevant determinants in cases of search for key ethnic ingredients. When foodstuff or ingredients are not found, migrants are led to some process of acculturation in order to adapt to a new environment.

Since *enculturation* is the process by which individuals become members of their own culture, *acculturation* means movement, distancing and transformation of individual's choices based on one culture in relation to another. Palumbo (2004) proposed two views of understanding acculturation: one-dimensional and bi-dimensional. The bi-dimensional model better explains how the immigrant cultural set and the host's country culture interact. Over time, rather than total assimilation, acculturation would take place. In the process of acculturation, immigrants could become integrated, assimilated, separated or marginalised.

Yet, Peñaloza defined 'consumer acculturation as the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country'. Here, individual differences such as age, social class, gender, recency at arrival, language used, the length of stay in the host country and ethnic identity would affect how the process of change took place (Peñaloza, 1994). She mentioned the possible outcome of a process of acculturation would be either to assimilate the host's culture, exhibit a mixed behaviour of accumulation or maintain the original culture. Jamal (1998) concurs with a two-way idea of a transitional acculturative process in which the immigrants are exposed to the host's culture at the same time as the host's nation culture is exposed to the culture of the migrants. Jamal stated that it takes time in order for a full process of acceptance of ethnic cuisines (Jamal, 1998). Nevertheless, Verbeke and Lopez (2005) mentioned that since food has strong cultural symbols which are learnt from childhood, it is unlikely that one would give it up at an old age.

Rogers (1983) proposed a model consisting of stages of adoption or acceptance that when applied to ethnic consumption. That model can be adapted to the case of ethnic consumption as a stage one would be when the ethnic population has just started to be part of the host country. As time goes by and with the ethnic group interacting more with the host people some sharing of foods and food ingredients would take place. As a result, a market develops, and shops and restaurants start to cater for the needs of the ethnic population in the neighbourhoods where they are more representative. Consequently, at stage two a new supply chain catering for specific ethnic needs would start to develop in the host's country. As the offer of foodstuff becomes more prominent, local people would start to visit shops and grocery stores catering for the ethnic groups. With increased demand, the market tends to expand. Foreign travel could even support the growth in demand for ethnic foodstuffs resulting in a fourth stage of acceptance where the ethnic food is accepted by the local people who feel confident enough to even prepare specific ethnic cuisines. This would lead to the final stage of total acceptance characterised by home cooking.

Hui et al. (1998) viewed ethnicity as having an impact on consumer behaviour which underlined a belief that consumption was part of a cultural phenomenon. Despite ethnicity being experienced at home, it was, however, reaffirmed in the public space (Parameswaran and Pisharodi, 2002). Reaffirmation was a process that reconstructed

ethnic identities that, in the case of immigrants, forged the sense of belonging of a community distinguishing the self, the similar, from the others. Language sharing is an obvious factor to distinguish ethnicity identity. Nevertheless, food is considered not only a cultural symbol, but also a construct of an ethnic trait in immigration and resettlement. Ethnicity reaffirmation could be exercised in public places for meetings such as restaurants, communal celebrations during festivals and spaces of activities (Georgiou, 2001).

#### The Brazilian Consumer

Brazilians in the UK have a characteristically transient nature. Many stay for up to three years working in jobs where English skills are not essential, such as casual labour, cleaning and washing-up positions in restaurants and bars. In groups of Brazilians where English is not commonly spoken, respondents frequently felt that they relied more heavily on their ethnic food staples (Aguiar, 2008). As seen from Sook-Lee's (2002) study, language for social communication was important for establishing or preserving cultural and ethnicity identity. However, the Brazilian community's make-up in the UK is more complex than at first glance. Added to those economic immigrants on menial jobs, its also represented by typical teenagers on their gap year adventure, university students, students learning English whilst working, diplomats, those who have married British citizens, representatives of companies and bankers, as well as officials of international organisations. Social class, disposable income and level of education are expected to further impose differences in consumer behaviour for ethnic foods. Consequently, such a group of people that constitutes a market segment is in essence not homogeneous. In respect of the shared ethnicity traits with the Portuguese (i.e. some Brazilian food preferences overlapping) they are, nonetheless, distinct from the Lusitanian.

Beswick (2007) used the notion of 'being and becoming' with respect to ethnic groups. She explored how assimilation and anti-assimilation into a new society played an important role in defining how ethnic groups related to their new environment. In her paper Beswick mentioned that 'immersion within the host society does not always imply integration' and subsequently 'did not challenge group and intra-group identification practices'. This was supported by Wang and Lo (2007) and was in line with Hui et al.'s (1998) ethnicity indicators of consumption. In this sense, it is relevant to address issues on how personal or group assimilation, 'being', 'becoming' and 'belonging' relates to, for example, food neophobia or the avoidance of, and reluctance to taste, unfamiliar foods. Acceptance and rejection of new food offerings immigrants are exposed to in a host country and how they regard and relate to their foods of origin would play an important role in determining consumer behaviour.

In such a transient segment, the adoption of new food groups and the assimilating of a new culture's food habits are very slow. Young and temporary residents also face the effects of psychological disruption regarding the inability to easily access familiar foodstuffs and preparations. In such an alien environment, one's feeling of homesickness [*saudade*] is quite often expressed by the urge to consume specific foods. Following Hui et al.'s (1998) acculturation patterns with reference to the Brazilian expatriate community, Aguiar (2008) identified three major foods interviewees regarded as being dominant: black bean stew [*feijoada*], a cocktail made of sugarcane spirit [*caipirinha*] and BBQ [*churrasco*]. These three major food and

drink items make Brazilians long for their typical food and, therefore, seek and consume imported products from Brazilian-owned outlets.

Aguiar (2009a and 2009b) conducted interviews revealing that the consumption of Brazilian foodstuffs in the UK is clearly a function of being isolated from the cultural and nationality references of origin. Quite often elements of nationalism and patriotism were reflected in the proposition that Brazilian food tastes better or is of higher quality. Such an affirmation is important when Brazilians reject foods from the host country. This is in line with studies in Belgium by Verbeke and Lopez (2005). Anecdotal evidence reveals that, at times, Brazilian expatriates would be consuming more frequently typically Brazilian foods in the UK than in Brazil itself<sup>2</sup>. Owners of grocery outlets have captured this market demand and now sell *feijoada* kits consisting of all the ingredients required for cooking preparation. Relatives, especially mothers, visiting their offspring from home, buy enough quantity of the ingredients and prepare *feijoada* to be frozen for consumption in the months to come after they have returned home.

As evidenced before, Hui et al. (1998) mentioned that some aspects of the mainstream culture of the host country were generally expected to be adopted less rapidly by a minority of migrants. In view of this, acculturative pressures on a transient population are expected to be less important regarding the Brazilian adoption of the host's foods. The fact that the Brazilians relate more to their own culture's foods confirms what Jamal (1998) proposed that the presence of both Brazilian and Portuguese outlets has meant that ethnic foods would end up contributing to the diversity of the host country's cuisine.

Following Hui et al.'s (1998) acculturation patterns, cultural resistance in adopting British food amongst the Brazilians could be said to be strong. Brazilian expatriates, due to their short period of stay, could be then characterised as being culturally resistant. With the increasing number of years of permanence in the host country Brazilians would demonstrate some incorporation (adoption) of food habits of the host country. When Aguiar (2009a) asked about the extent Brazilians adopted British foods, the respondents promptly used as an example the adoption of the potato as a food staple. As rice is the staple starch food in Brazil, the frequent consumption of potato as a staple food was considered 'unappealing', 'boring' and 'unimaginative'. Many Brazilians found the various ways of cooking potatoes, i.e. boiled, mashed or roasted, unappealing. The only exception to this was chips which in Brazil are generally prepared in much thinner cuts. Thick potato chips are a source of common complaints such as 'how unskilled the British are at making chips'. Hence, those Brazilians who succumbed to the British habit of eating potato were regarded by the members of the community as 'going native': a symbol of acculturation. Therefore, Brazilian immigrants are expressing their ethnicity and cultural traits through a limited consumption of food types, thus expressing resistance, from the host country. The levels of adoption or resistance are, in turn, also reflected in the pattern of acculturation to the UK society.

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<sup>2</sup> This would be the case of, for example, black bean stew, *feijoada*, which is prepared with the addition of different pork cuts and sausages. *Feijoada*, a characteristic Brazilian dish, is in essence of very heavy digestion. Whilst in Brazil, *feijoada completa* [beans stew with all the trimmings] is consumed on Saturdays with much less frequency than before, Brazilian expatriates actually consume it regularly in the UK accompanied by some *caipirinha*.

## **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this research is to study Brazilians in Diaspora that upon emigrating to the UK have created a demand for 'exotic' foods. As for objectives, this study attempts to better characterise the motivations behind Brazilian foodstuff consumption, and to identify key products that could be emblematic of such a demand.

## **Methodology**

A brief review of the literature was carried out based on preliminary findings (Aguiar, 2008 and Aguiar, 2009a). Using the Means-End Approach or Value Laddering methodology, the establishing of links between attributes, consequences and values (A-C-V) would enable the construction of hierarchies of attributes that would identify key products, capture and map attitudes and motivations towards the consumption of Brazilian foodstuffs. A community of Brazilian immigrants was identified in Gloucestershire in the southwest of England. A sample of thirty respondents was selected. Using the Value Laddering method, a set of in-depth interviews was carried out. Data collection took place over a period extending from December 2008 until February 2009.

## **Results**

This study has far from exhausted the multifaceted nature of the investigation of Brazilian consumption patterns. In the case of the immigrant who is physically, culturally and psychologically removed (Cooke et al., 2006) from familiar surroundings, the consumption of food serves as ethnicity affirmation (Hirschman, 1981). This is more strongly seen in transient communities such as the Brazilian where immigrants expect to return to their country of origin within a couple of years thus, confirming with what Peñaloza (1994) assertions.

In the appendices, Figure 1 presents a ladder of attributes-values-consequences (AVC) for meat pasty [*pastel de carne*]. Respondents considered meat pasties as an important typical Brazilian foodstuff which they longed to eat. Despite this, the side effect of such a food was, for the health conscious consumer, was its fat content as its preparation consists of deep frying. But the taste and the 'feel good' effect compensated for the relative 'risks'. The sensation of satiation could also be understood as it has some connotation of eating a food that would provide full satisfaction, something that might not be happening through the eating of foods from the host country. In Brazil, this type of food is easily available as a fast food snack or even for as a replacement for lunch. Respondents regarded that a *pastel* bar was a good business venture which was being missed in the UK.

Figure 2, in the Appendices show the A-V-C for black beans stew [*feijoada*]. Distinct respondents referred to it differently. Here the consequence was dual: to reach or maintain good health or to maintain/reinforce the Brazilian culture. Nutrition was an important attribute which led to either the preparation of *feijoada* being a good essential source of natural iron or fibre in one's diet. The underlying issue was some apprehension by Brazilians in Diaspora of not eating enough *feijoada* hence missing out on an important source of mineral that would help combat anaemia and provide fibre for their diet. The intermediate value of *feijoada* was given as its nutritional value leading to (good) health, but when respondents were probed further, such a food preparation was also emblematic of Brazilian culture and tradition. It could be

inferred here that by ‘consuming tradition’ one would also be looking after one’s health and vice-versa.

Figure 3, shown besides Figure 2 provides the A-V-C for guava paste [*goiabada cascao*]. The two figures are deliberately shown side by side because of existing linkages between each (A-V-C) ladder. The attribute of guava had a dual meaning. A good source of vitamin C, which then linked to nutrition and (good) health run parallel to it having an ‘unbeatable taste’ in the absence of another food in the UK that could replace the strong taste of guava. It transpired that some respondents had a kind of craving for guava paste which was exacerbated when the sense of longing for home was more intense. Guava paste is a relatively cheap sweet/desert type of fruit preserve in Brazil that in the UK was eaten and savoured in very thin slices in order for it to last longer until the respondents could obtain more of that food.

Other ladders were obtained for jerked beef [*charque*], beef [*carne tipo picanha*], lemon [*limão taiti*], cassava flour [*farinha de mandioca*] amongst others. For the purpose of this article, those ladders would not be developed and analysed here.

Figure 4 is a draft of the overall Hierarchical Value Mapping of some preliminary data collected. It provides an indication of some of the most important A-V-C linkages (Aguiar 2009b). As the study progresses, more data would enable the calculation of the relative weights for every linkages characterised by the A-C-V method. Nevertheless, as it is it, the hierarchical value mapping already provides some good indication that health is an important consequence for migrant Brazilians buying ethnic foods. Maintaining good health together with the preservation of the Brazilian culture and tradition came more strongly as sequential ladders. The longing (*saudade*) effect that was to some extent expected to play a more important role on ethnic food purchase motivation has not revealed as a strong consequence at this stage of the investigation. As intermediary values: family, taste and diet were also important motivators. Providing the family with a good balanced diet which generally tasted better than the food in the host country was critical for having good health, maintaining tradition, reinforcing cultural values and reaffirming those values when sharing with friends.

## **Conclusions**

Brazilians consist of a typically heterogeneous and transient group in the UK whose acculturative pressures are expected to be less important regarding the Brazilian adoption of the host’s foods. The transition from being full-members of one community to being a new arrival in a host country is also slow with food adoption of the host country being one of the last elements to be given up.

The present demand is characteristics of a niche market for processed Brazilian branded foods that caters for specific needs and has little appeal for other ethnic groups outside Luso-phone communities. Direct imports, through the by-passing of the Portuguese controlled supply chain food retailing in the UK has generally lowered prices for consumers but as a consequence has also lowered the margins for retailers.

As seen from Kneassey and Cox (2001), food consumption practices are widely accepted in the construction of self and community identities. Foodstuffs were sought out because they were also emblematic of Brazil and reminded people of home. All



key food products revealed as a result of the interviews show motivations of taste, health/nutrition, family and friends gatherings and longing for home and familiar things. Consumers in general show traits of nationalism and patriotism assertions that Brazilian food tastes better or is has higher (nutritious) value. Some signs of acceptance (adoption) of food habits of the host country related to the length of stay of the immigrant. For migrants physically, culturally and psychologically removed from familiar surroundings, effective marketing communication strategies should be targeting elements of being, belonging and becoming.

Far from exhausting the topic, further studies could consider other aspects of the Brazilian ethnic food and drink market such as relationships in the supply chain; the diversification and specialisation of the internationalisation of such a supply chain; aspects of governance and trust, amongst others. More synergy with experts from the field of social sciences could lead to a rich form of collaboration towards understanding other aspects of emerging ethnic migrant consumer behaviour.

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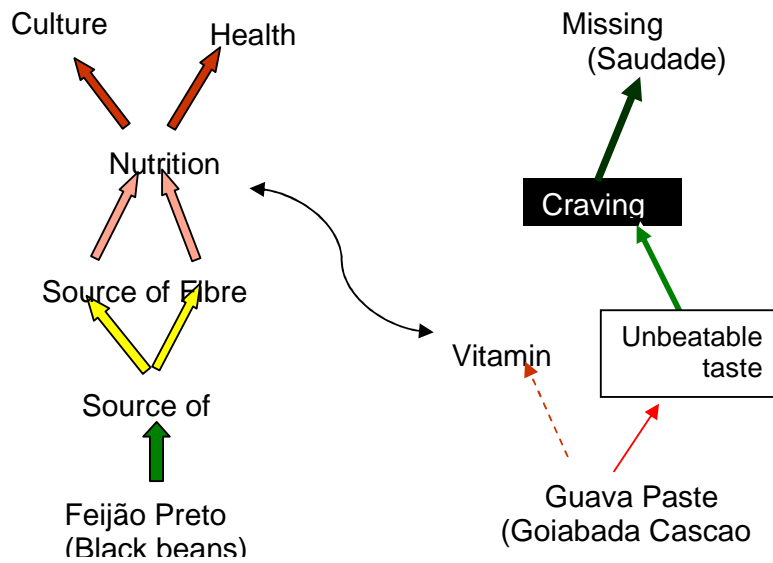
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## Appendices

**Figure 1 – Attribute-Value-Consequence of Meat Pasty**

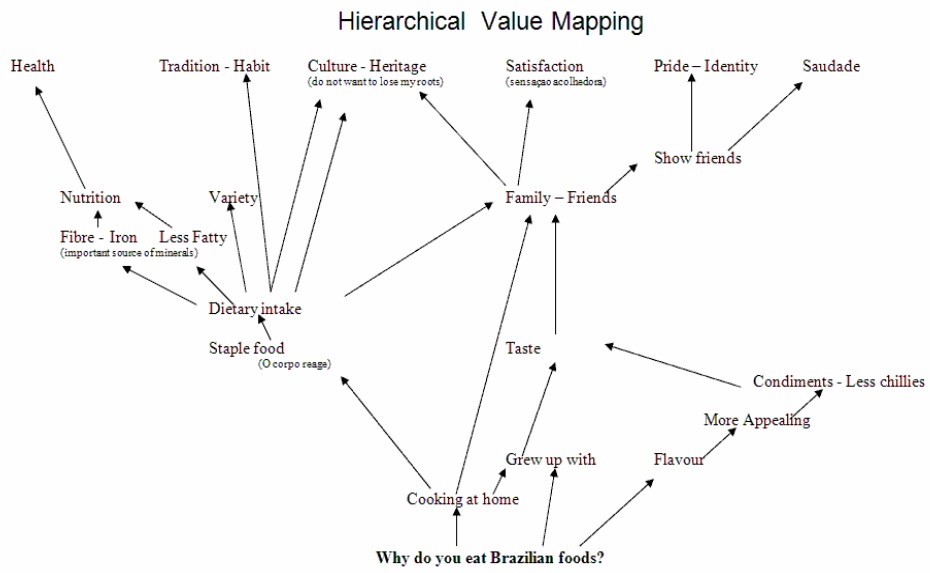


**Figure 2 - Attribute-Value-Consequence of Black Bean Stew**



**Figure 3 – Attribute-Value-Consequence of Guava Paste (*goiabada*)**

Figure 4 -



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