Do chefs have a beef with meat? An exploration of the professional representations and identities of French chefs in relation to traditional French cuisine and meat-based and plant-based dishes

Arnaud Lamy

UMR MoISA, Montpellier Interdisciplinary center on Sustainable Agri-food systems (Social and nutritional sciences) (Montpellier, France)
Institut Lyfe Research Center (Ecully, France)

Abstract

• Research objectives and questions
Faced with the demands of sustainability, which are leading to recommendations to reduce meat consumption, French chefs are being asked to rethink their cuisine, given how deeply rooted meat is in their culinary tradition. The aim of this study is to explore chefs’ professional representations and identities in relation to traditional French cuisine, meat-based cuisine, and meatless cuisine.

• Methodology
29 semi-directive interviews were conducted with chefs from the food service sector and a thematic analysis of the corpus was carried out.

• Results
The results show that chefs continue to enjoy cooking with meat and are aware of the environmental impact of its consumption. However, they differ in their representations of meatless cooking, which some see as a source of new creative practices, while others see it as an additional burden. Chefs differ in the identities they activate in addition to their chef identity, to support their culinary practices.

• Implications for marketing decision
This research suggests at least three ways to support chefs’ practices as they move away from meat-based cuisine and towards more plant-based cuisine.

• Originality
This research contributes to the fields of study on professional representations and multiple identities and to the thematic area of the place of meat in the sustainable food transition, by focusing on an influential professional stakeholder, the chef.

• Keywords: chefs, sustainable cuisine, social representations, professional identity.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers for their advice, which helped to improve the article. He would also like to thank the supervisors of the CIFRE thesis that gave rise to his research, Sandrine Costa (INRAE), Lucie Sirieix (Institut Agro Montpellier), and Maxime Michaud (Institut Lyfe Research Center), as well as Adélie Reboud for double coding the interviews and Rhett Nichols for the copy editing.

To contact the author: arnaud.lamy@inrae.fr

Lamy A. (2024), Do chefs have a beef with meat? An exploration of the professional representations and identities of French chefs in relation to traditional French cuisine and meat-based and plant-based dishes, Décisions Marketing, 115, online first.