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Plant-based foods in focus – media language across cultures

Introduction

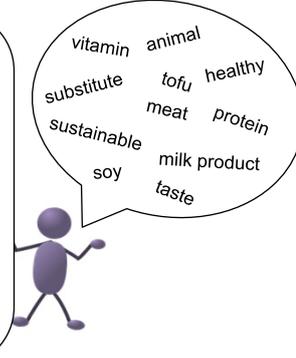
Food markets currently change very quickly due to the higher consciousness about climate change and the impact of food consumption. Especially in Switzerland consumers are very open to new products like plant-based alternatives to animal products. Food companies are constantly updating their selection of products in this segment – and media report on these new products.

Method

Methods included the analysis of written corpora for Swiss and Chinese media in German and English. Corpora are large collections of written texts or transcribed conversations. Both the selection of the corpora and the search strategy are crucial for the results. For Swiss media, the media database *Swissdox* was used, for Chinese media the press database *Factiva*. Data was processed to extract quantitative results.

Objective

Objective of the study was to analyse language use in media about plant-based products in different corpora in order to better understand what consumers perceive from the changing product market across cultures. Chinese data was selected as it is hypothesized that their product market is less plant-based.



Key findings in the Media Discourse analysis about plant-based products

Corpus-linguistic approach

Corpus compilation

Query of media databases with search words "plant-based" ("plant-based"), "pflanzliche Alternative" ("plant-based alternative"), "vegan" ("vegan") and "vegetarisch" ("vegetarian"). Processing of the data included linguistic principles (lemmatisation, part-of-speech tagging etc. for further linguistic analysis). The value of the keywords shown in Figure 1 and 2 were calculated by comparing the compiled Swiss corpus with a larger non-topic-specific corpus. The size of the keywords in the figures is based on a significant score of the lexis used.

Chinese data is processed in a similar way and shown only in Figure 3 reduced to topical clustering.

Swiss corpus (German language)

Period 1.7.2020 to 17.7.2022

- 2'166'575 words in 1'827 texts
- 92 Swiss newspapers in German language

Chinese corpus (published in English language)

Period 23.8.2020 to 23.8.2022

- 364'369 words in 1'084 texts
- Chinese newspapers in English language

Keywords in ^{CH} Media Discourse

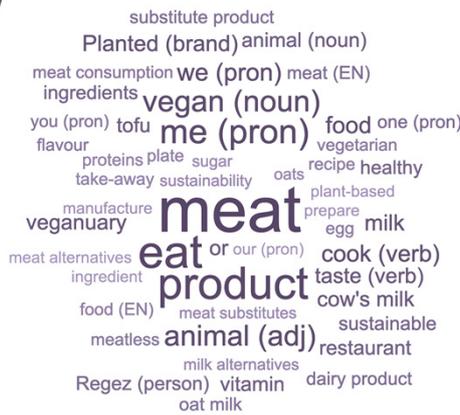


Figure 1
First 50 keywords extracted from CH-corpus, terms translated into English. Special characteristics in German are added (e.g. verb, person, etc.).



Products in ^{CH} Media Discourse

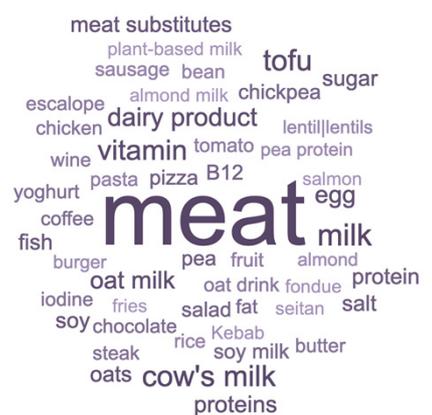


Figure 2
50 terms related to products among the first 200 keywords CH-corpus, terms translated into English.



Cultural Differences in Discourse

Topical Clustering in Swiss and Chinese Media Discourse

Clustering of the keywords used in the Swiss discourse in Figure 1 highlights specific topics that are clearly distinct from the Chinese discourse (Figure 3).

- Milk and milk alternatives have a higher value in the Swiss discourse.
- Climate discourse is less prominent in the Chinese discourse.
- The brand "Beyond Meat" dominates the market of plant-based alternatives.
- Depending on culture different food products are central in the discourse (e.g. pork, tofu,...).

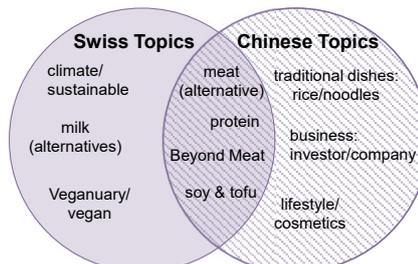


Figure 3: Swiss and Chinese topics in comparison

Conclusions

- Written language in media is clearly dependent on culture and products on market.
- Chinese data shows a focus on traditional dishes as well as a strong focus on meat.
- As the Chinese corpus is more business oriented, other topics like lifestyle are prominent. This is a limitation of the study.
- Big players on market for plant-based products are frequently mentioned as products are easily available.
- Veganuary is an interesting word creation by marketing.
- Soy is in focus for both corpora showing the predominant importance of this crop.

References

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- Databases: Factiva. New York: Dow Jones & Reuters. & Swissdox. Zurich: SMD Swiss Media Database.

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