



Article

Market Introduction and Sensory Evaluation of a Traditional, Revitalized “Back to the Future” Greek Cheese (Kashkaval Pindou)

Sotiria Sifaka¹, Fotios Chatzitheodoridis²  and Dimitris Skalkos^{1,*} 

¹ Laboratory of Food Chemistry, Department of Chemistry, University of Ioannina, 45110 Ioannina, Greece; pch01450@uoi.gr

² Department of Management Science and Technology, University of Western Macedonia, 50100 Kozani, Greece; fxtheodoridis@uowm.gr

* Correspondence: dskalkos@uoi.gr; Tel.: +30-265-100-8345

Abstract: Kashkaval Pindou is a traditional semi-hard cheese produced in Greece since the beginning of last century. Its production was halted in the last decades but has recently been revitalized using modern techniques. In this study, the quality and organoleptic criteria for this “recently introduced to the market” cheese in the dishes of selected restaurants and hotels was studied. Research was conducted in the city of Ioannina, Greece using two types of questionnaires via a survey which was carried out in person between September and December 2023, distributed to 18 experts, chefs, and owners of restaurants utilizing the Kashkaval Pindou cheese. The statistical analysis used was an approach of the Delphi methodology, which seeks consensual agreement within a group of experts. Following the two rounds of survey, the experts evaluated the 11 quality criteria for the use of the cheese in order of their preference (10–9 mean values): “Greek Tradition”, “ease of consumption”, “quality, healthy and safe properties”, “easy to be used product” and “ease of integration in the menu”. Of medium preference (9–8 mean values) was the cheese’s “geographic origin”, “producers’ and suppliers’ capacity”, “enhancement of the kitchen’s creativity”, and “value for money”. Last in the order of selection (8–7 mean values) was the cheese “reputation in the market” and “attractive packaging”. Regarding the organoleptic evaluation, the experts indicated the cheese’s pleasant taste, creamy texture, uniformity of the color, and buttery, milky foam aroma as high in their preference. These results, in agreement with findings in the existing literature, prove that Kashkaval Pindou fulfils the required quality and organoleptic criteria to become an appealing new cheese in the global market.

Keywords: traditional products; semi-hard cheese; Greece; restaurants; revival products; innovation; supply chain; gastronomy; Delphi method



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1. Introduction

Traditional food products are considered essential components of European culture [1]. The European Union counts 3885 certified products in its registers as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), of which 233 are cheeses [2,3]. Greece is a European country with several products classified as PDO and PGI. Specifically, there are 116 PDO products in total, of which 22 are cheeses, and 138 PGI products from which 2 are cheeses [4]. According to the Eurostat report, in 2022, 160 million tons of raw milk were produced in the EU-27 (European Union—27 countries) [5]. Today, around 3500 to 4000 different types of cheese are produced around the world, reflecting the rich culture and tradition associated with cheese making. It is therefore clear that cheese is of particular importance not only as a foodstuff capable of providing essential nutrients, but also as a commodity of undeniable economic importance at a global level [6,7].

All European countries have cultural traditions linked to specific cheese products [8]. However, the greater variety of cheese producers in Europe is often observed in Southern

European countries, including Greece, where traditional products are therefore of greater economic importance [9]. Guerrero et al., analyzing the perceptions of European consumers, defined a traditional food product as “a product that is frequently consumed or associated with specific festivals and/or seasons, usually handed down from generation to generation, made in a precise way according to the culinary heritage, with little or no processing/handling, distinguished and known for its sensory qualities and associated with a specific local area, region or country” [10].

TPs, including traditional cheeses, are a major economic resource as the food of choice for many cultures and regions across the world, contributing to their sense of identity, pride, and prosperity [11]. During the last decade, consumers have shown increased acceptance for TPs especially in Europe, which may cause increased growth, especially after the pandemic period [12]. Greek cuisine is represented by a triangle of influences and connections: food, culture, and history [13], with the sensory analysis being the main tool and the first step for the development of new innovative products and flavor combinations in this cuisine [14]. The longevity associated with the Mediterranean Diet cuisine could be partially attributed to the traditional Mediterranean foods that this diet incorporates, including traditional Greek cheeses [15].

We recently proved that the sustainability and growth of quality traditional Greek cheese in the new post-COVID-19 era is dependent on the good practices of production, promotion, and sales developed before the pandemics, exploring, however, new avenues and practices to increase consumption, which is currently in decline [16]. The world is gradually becoming global (and in some ways unified), but both domestic consumers and tourists are increasingly seeking experiences based on “divergence”, on the identity and culture of the destination [17]. One way to increase consumption is local gastronomy. According to Morgan, food is as vital to human health and well-being as any other product, and this is the main reason it is given so much importance [18]. Cooking and gastronomy, including local gastronomy, are gradually becoming increasingly important in modern societies [19]. Cheese is part of the gastronomic identity of Greece and a key element of the Mediterranean diet [20]. The increased sensory perception of cheese by consumers [21], including the traditional revitalized Kashkaval Pindou cheese, has recently prompted its use by local restaurants as a growing trend that falls within this tendency and reflects the modern desire through foodways [22].

Kashkaval Pindou is a semi-hard cheese, whitish to pale yellow in color, cylindrical or parallelepipedal in shape, which for years has belonged to the category of traditional products [23]. This is a cheese which was produced locally with the traditional way until World War II. Its production stopped due to the lack of consumers’ interest then, and it is produced again, in the last two years, by local cheese-producing SMEs, mainly KARALIS S.A., town of Arta, Epirus region, Greece. It is produced using heated cheese-making equipment utilizing a special technique developed and disseminated by the Vlach-speaking groups of Balkan farmers from the central and northern reaches of the Pindos Mountain range in Greece [24]. Its traditional production has been recorded since the beginning of the last century. Local preparation styles, ingredients, and presentations are integral parts of the cultural culinary experience [25]. It is a cheese product with only 1.6 g of salt per 100 g of product. Its production has recently been revitalized and improved by Samelis et al. [26], and the quality characteristics have been identified separately by Pappa et al. [27]. Integrated in the category of semi-hard cheeses and addressed to the market at an early stage of ripening, it has the capacity to retain the buttery taste that the milk of the production area offers it, but also to melt at high temperatures, retaining flavor [28]. The reputation, quality, and timeless value of this cheese continue uninterrupted to this day. Nowadays, it is a PGI cheese product submitted to the EU [29]. Its production has recently been carried out industrially to the maximum extent by Karalis S.A Dairy Industry based in Epirus. It is therefore a “back to the future” innovative food, based on the definition we introduced for such traditional foods existing in the past and re-born, revitalized now as “new to the market”, appealing products [30]. It is worth mentioning

that the Kashkaval Pindou by the Karalis company has already won a quality award at the ProExpo exhibition in Russia in 2022, and in January 2021 it was honored for its taste with an award, a distinction from the International Taste Institute.

At a commercial level, in order to ensure the sales and consumption of this newcomer to the market, some actions have already been launched to promote and publicize this cheese, some of which involved taste testing events, TV commercials, etc. There has also been great interest in the absorption and inclusion of Kaskavali Pindou cheese in the gastronomic choices of both catering establishments and hotel menus, with a variety of serving methods. Restaurants are the most successful way of communicating flavors and combinations of ingredients by directing customers as to their preferences or making them aware of preferences they did not know they had for products new to the market or rarely available. The combination of traditionalism and high gastronomy in the city of Ioannina is an action that has been recently reinforced successfully. The above prompted us to conduct this study, where we identify and analyze the criteria that prompted restaurant owners and chefs to introduce this cheese in their menus with the consumer as the direct recipient, and then present the results that verify the influence that the use of cheese in the catering sector had on its “future” in the wider market. To ensure sales and consumption of this cheese newly on the market, there has been a lot of interest in the absorption and inclusion of Kashkaval Pindou in both the gastronomic choices of catering establishments and hotel menus with a variety of ways of serving. In this study, we identify and analyze the criteria for the introduction of this cheese in the catering sector linked to the consumer. To achieve this objective and based on the existing literature, this study examines the criteria for the selection and use of Kashkaval Pindou in catering establishments in the prefecture of Ioannina, both from the point of view of practical qualitative characteristics and an organoleptic point of view which, combined, define the cheese as a product. More specifically, as for the product value proposition, 11 criteria were chosen:

(1) Importance of the region of origin, (2) Organoleptic characteristics, (3) Tradition, (4) Easy use, (5) Ease of consumption, (6) Successful integration of recipes, (7) Enhancement of creativity, (8) Reliability of suppliers, (9) Value for money, (10) Reputation, (11) Attractive packaging.

And as for the organoleptic characteristics, four criteria were chosen:

(1) Taste, (2) Appearance, (3) Aroma, (4) Texture.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Area of Survey

The area where the research was conducted is the town of Ioannina as it is inextricably linked to the promotion of Kashkaval Pindou cheese, a newcomer in the market [31]. Ioannina is located in Northwestern Greece. Specifically, it is the capital of the Region of Epirus attracting many tourists with the aim of both diversified activities and of a culinary nature with a multitude of choices in restaurants [32]. The town hosts a major university, too, with more than 30,000 active students and 5000 faculty and staff, all of whom are living in town [33]. It has an important primary and secondary sector, especially in the agrifood supply chain, animal husbandry sectors, and aromatic pharmaceutical herbs [34,35]. The agricultural economy of the wider region is largely composed of the above and is mainly strengthened by the goat and sheep farming sector which occupies a prominent position in the total domestic production [36]. It is for the above that the city of Ioannina was chosen as the area of survey in this study.

2.2. Data Collection and Characterization

This study was conducted with two rounds of questionnaire interviews with 18 experts (chefs and local restaurant owners). The questionnaires consisted of two sections. The first aimed at placing 11 quality criteria within a calibrated scale, which were considered when introducing Kashkaval Pindou into the gastronomic recipes of each restaurant. The second section aimed at the sensory evaluation [37] of the product by including questions for the expert assessment of its organoleptic characteristics, which the experts were asked to

answer using a descriptive vocabulary for each parameter separately. The construction of the questionnaire was based on the existing related literature from different subjects [37–47]. It should be mentioned at this stage that chefs were selected for the study since they are skilled and trained cooks working in restaurants or hotels [48].

The results were processed with the Delphi Statistic Method (or Delphi technique) [49,50], since it is a method designed to achieve unanimity or a large majority consensus among a group of people [51,52]. There were no substantial adjustments to the criteria between the two rounds. Based on the standard deviation of the first rounds, relative consensus was set at 80% and consensus at 90%. It is worth noting that the selected individuals, while collectively referred to as a group of experts, usually have limited or no prior familiarity with each other, which was the case in this study, too [53]. The Delphi technique combines the strengths of expert analysis with an element of collaboration, making it a valuable research methodology [54].

A total of 18 experts fulfilling the requirements were selected for the study. The findings presented for the quality evaluation were derived from two rounds of questionnaires. In the first round, which was conducted between September and October 2023, experts were asked to answer the 11 quality criteria questions presented in Supplementary Table S1 on a calibrated scale of 1–10 (1 = strongly disagree—10 = strongly agree). In addition, they were asked to provide additional background and justifications which were then used to optimally draw conclusions. For the second round, which was conducted between November and December 2023 after sharing the results of the first round with the experts, the participants were asked to study and re-score the same questions sharing the agreement reached in the answers of the first round with the results obtained on the most prevalent criteria for the introduction/choice of the use of Kashkaval Pindou in their respective ownership or employment establishments. According to the literature concerning the application of Delphi, in each round of questions the participants should be informed about the results of the previous round so that they can be repositioned considering the general picture as well. In no case are they informed about their own answers compared to the summation of other individual participants. This procedure was also followed in our study. The results obtained from Rounds 1 and 2 are presented numerically in Table 1 and graphically in Figure 1. The number of participants remained the same in both rounds and seemed to be a normal number to reach the desired consensus. The second questionnaire concerned the sensory evaluation and characterization of the cheese (Supplementary Table S2). It was constructed containing 4 sections (taste, texture, appearance, aroma), and each section consisted of 6 descriptive characteristics (24 in total). Responses were also on a calibrated scale (1 to 10) and the results are presented in Figure 2. The experts simultaneously answered the sensory evaluation questionnaire once during the second round of the overall process in November–December 2023.

Table 1. Quality evaluation results regarding the insert criteria of Kashkaval Pindou in restaurants and hotels, first and second round of the Delphi Approach (Max value 10 = Absolute agreement, Min value 1 = Absolute disagreement).

Introduction of Kashkaval Pindos Cheese in Restaurants and Hotels	Results of the 1st Round				Results of the 2nd Round			
	MAX	MEANS	MIN	STDEV.P	MAX	MEANS	MIN	STDEV.P
Q1	10	9.38	5	1.296957	10	8.94	5	1.099943
Q2	10	9.0	6	1.201850	10	9.11	7	1.048220
Q3	10	9.05	5	1.352866	10	9.38	8	0.755637
Q4	10	7.94	5	2.013074	10	9.0	6	1.154700
Q5	10	8.33	3	1.825741	10	9.33	7	0.942809
Q6	10	7.22	3	2.370081	10	9.05	5	1.352866
Q7	10	8.83	4	1.343709	10	8.16	5	1.054092
Q8	10	8.88	4	1.911627	10	8.83	4	1.5

Table 1. Cont.

Introduction of Kashkaval Pindos Cheese in Restaurants and Hotels	Results of the 1st Round				Results of the 2nd Round			
	MAX	MEANS	MIN	STDEV.P	MAX	MEANS	MIN	STDEV.P
Q9	10	8.66	6	1.763834	10	8.88	5	1.328695
Q10	10	6.94	1	2.857197	10	7.44	5	1.257078
Q11	10	5.55	3	2.060804	10	7.16	3	2.060804

INDICATORS: Q1: Because of its specific characteristics, due to its geographical origin, which distinguish it from similar cheeses. Q2: Because of its organoleptic characteristics that characterize it as quality, healthy, and safe. Q3: Because it is a Greek Traditional Product. Q4: Because it is an easy material/product in terms of management and time (storage, processing, serving, etc.). Q5: Because it is easily consumed by customers (as a side dish, hors d’oeuvre, etc.). Q6: Because it can be easily integrated into the menu of a catering establishment. Q7: Because it is a material/product that enhances the creativity and effect of the kitchen in a catering establishment. Q8: Because its producers and suppliers take care and ensure its quality and are consistent in its availability and marketing. Q9: Because it is good value for money. Q10: Because it has a reputation in the market and among consumers. Q11: Because it has attractive packaging.



Figure 1. Quality reasons for adoption according to experts of the Kashkaval Pindou cheese in the first round (mean values).

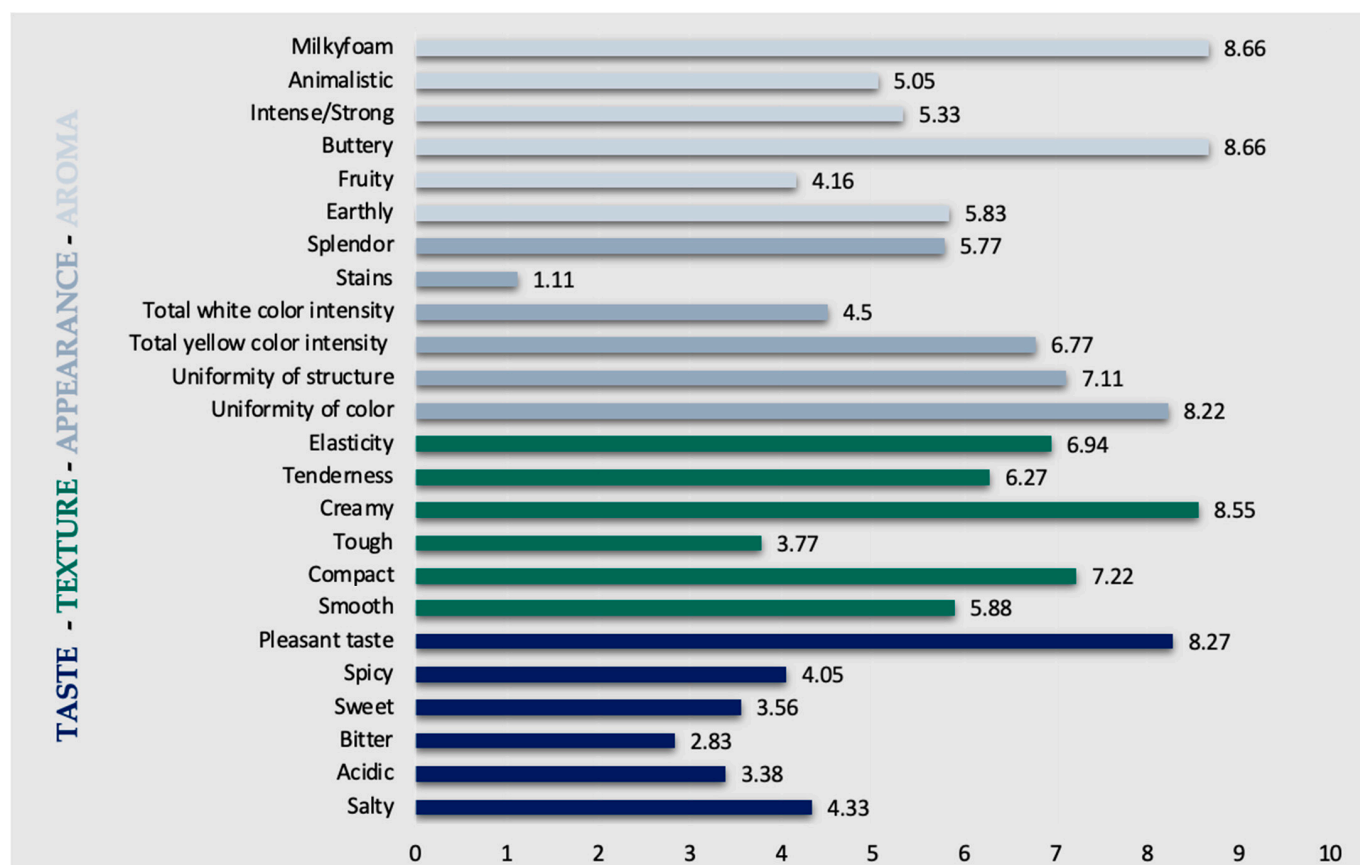


Figure 2. Organoleptic evaluation of Kashkaval Pindou cheese and criteria importance in selection of the product based on the experts' opinion (characterization of aroma, appearance, texture, and taste).

3. Results

Table 1 summarizes the experts' consensus limits expressed in units of maximum (Max), minimum (Min), and mean (Mean) as evaluated after the two rounds including standard deviations. Both the minimum and maximum values of all criteria questions in both rounds were calculated using the range of responses obtained from the distributed questionnaires based on the calibrated scale (1 to 10). The mean values were calculated using the AVERAGE function and the corresponding standard deviations using the STDEV.P function.

According to the results of the first round, the minimum value was 1 of Q10 (Because it has a reputation in the market and among consumers) with a maximum value of 10. The calculated mean values ranged from 5.55 to 9.38. The sum of the questions' average values (means) of all the selection criteria was a total of 89.78 (Table 1). In the second round, the minimum value was 3, two units more than the first round, with a maximum value of 10. The mean values ranged between 7.16 and 9.38. In this second round, the minimum and maximum values were closer to the respective mean values, while the standard deviations decreased compared with the corresponding values of Round 1 (Table 1).

The results of the average (mean values) values of the first round of the 11 questions are presented separately in Figure 1.

What was considered the most important criterion by the experts in the first round of their responses was Q1, "Region of origin that differentiates it from similar cheeses" (9.38). Following the same order of importance, the experts showed importance in Q3 "Because it is a Greek traditional product" (9.05), and in Q2, "Because of its organoleptic characteristics that characterize it as quality, healthy, and safe" (9). Next in the order of preference was Q8, "Because its producers and suppliers take care and ensure its quality and are consistent in its availability and marketing" (8.88) followed by question 7, "Because it is a material/product that enhances the creativity and effect of the kitchen in a catering establishment" (8.83),

Q9 “Because it is a good value for money” (average 8.66), and Q5, “Because it is easily consumed by customers as a side dish, hors d’oeuvre, etc.” (average 8.33).

Moderately important, with a slightly lower ranking, were Q4, “Because it is an easy material/product in terms of management and time (storage, processing, serving, etc.)” (7.94) and Q6, “Because it can be easily integrated into the menu of a catering establishment” (7.22).

On the other hand, what they did not consider as important and moved on a low scale was question 10, “Because it has a reputation in the market and among consumers” (6.94) and question 11, “Because its attractive packaging” (5.55).

The results of the average (mean) values of the second round of the questions are presented separately in Figure 3.

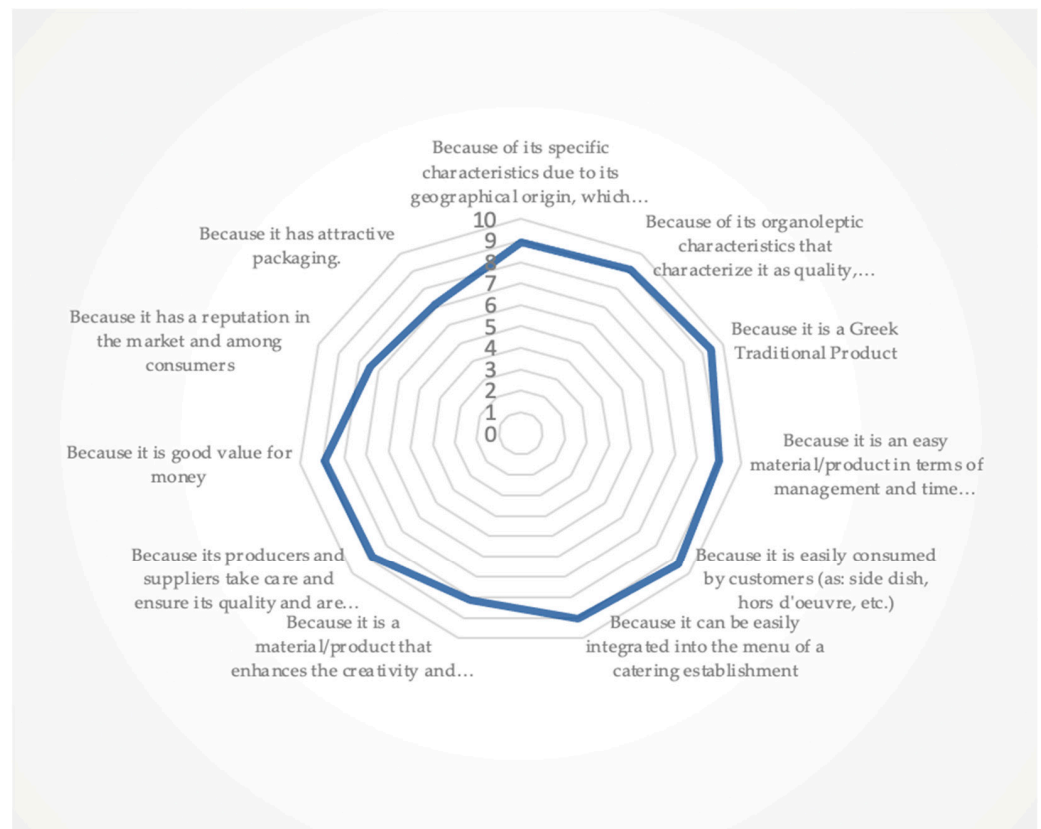


Figure 3. Quality reasons for adoption regarding the experts of the Kashkaval Pindou cheese in the second round (mean values).

In the second round where the product was used in culinary recipes by the experts 2 months after the first round, they considered Q3, “Because it is a Greek Traditional product”, as the most important criterion (9.38), followed by Q5, “Because it is an easy material/product in terms of management and time (storage, processing, serving)” (9.33), Q2, “Because its organoleptic characteristics characterize it as quality, healthy, and safe” (9.11), Q6, “Because it can be easily integrated into the menu of a catering establishment” (9.05), Q4, “Because it is an easy material/product in terms of management and time (storage, processing, serving, etc.)” (9).

Moderately important but with an average ranking from 8.99 to 8.00 mean values, they considered this time Q1, “Because of its specific characteristics due to its geographical origin which distinguish it from similar cheeses” (8.94), Q9, “Because it is good value for money” (8.88), Q8, “Because its producers and suppliers take care and ensure its quality and consistent in its availability and marketing” (8.83), and Q7, “Because it is a material/product that enhances the creativity and effect of the kitchen in a catering establishment” (8.16).

Less important this time, but with an average ranking from 7.99 to 7.16 mean values, were Q10, “Because it has a reputation in the market and among consumers” (7.44) and Q11, “Because it has an attractive packaging” (7.16).

The standard deviations of the answers presented in Table 1 from the two rounds are also presented separately in comparison between the two rounds in Figure 4.

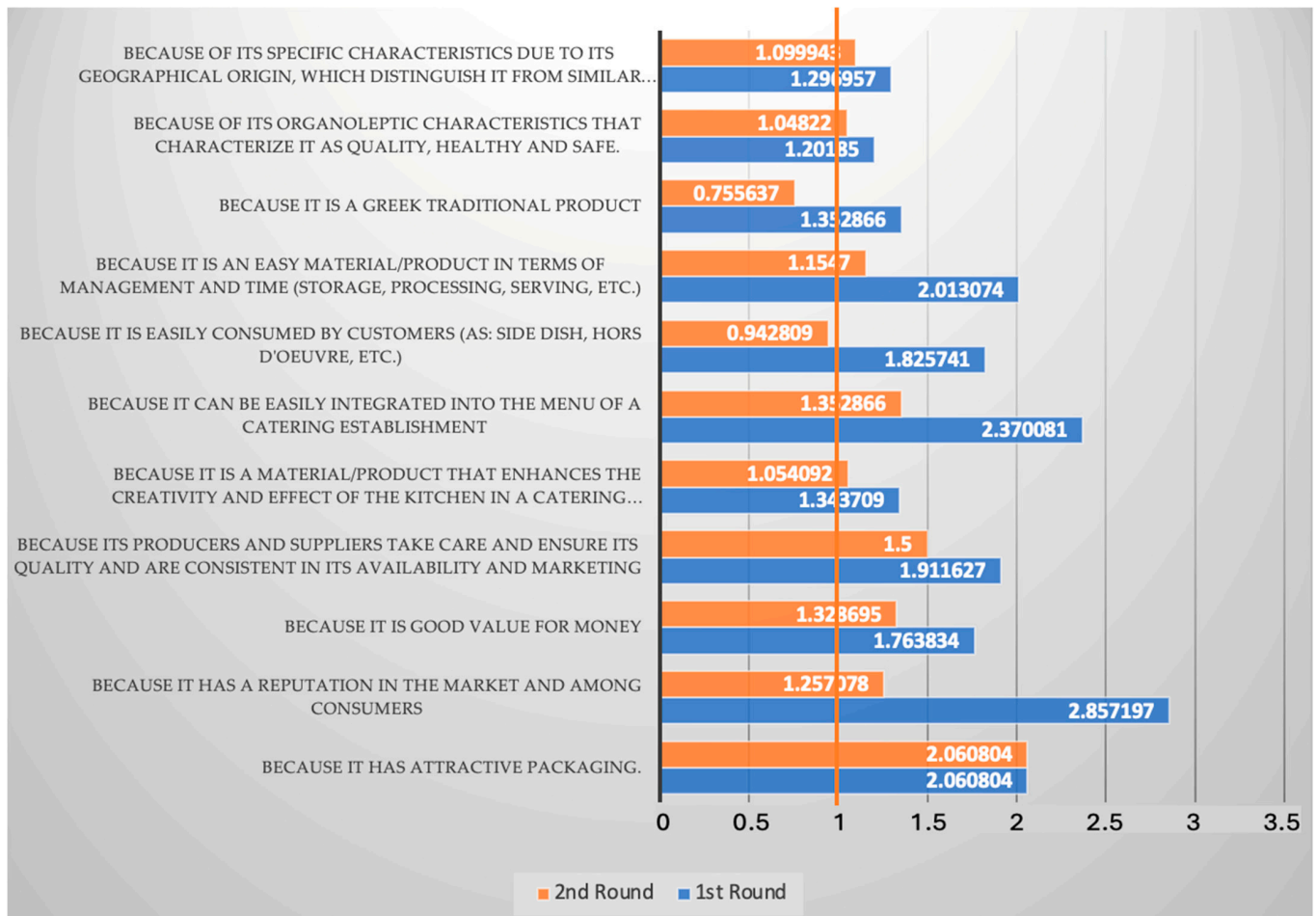


Figure 4. Consensus of the experts based on standard deviation regarding the quality reasons for the adoption of Kashkaval Pindou cheese in restaurants.

In the course of conducting the repeated rounds, the experts adapted changes to their answers after reflection, analysis, and two months use of the cheese in their recipes to achieve a degree of consensus among the group. The standard deviation of the answers to the 11 questions decreased continuously, as shown in Figure 2, with satisfaction of the consensus concept after two rounds at standard deviation value one using the red line threshold. It can thus be seen that after the second round, the mean standard deviation of most of the criteria was close to unity (1). In the second round, the criteria questions that showed the maximum decrease in the standard deviation, thus the maximum increase towards consensus in preference by the experts, were Q10, “Because it has a reputation in the market and among consumers” (−56%), Q5, “Because it is easily consumed by customers as a side dish, hors d’oeuvre, etc.” (−48.36%), Q6, “Because it can be easily integrated into the menu of a catering establishment “ (−42.92%), and Q4, “Because it is an easy material/product in terms of management and time (storage, processing, serving, etc.)” (−42.64%).

Smaller change showed in questions Q9, “Because it is good value for money” (−24.67%), Q3, “Because it is a Greek Traditional Product” (−22.77%), Q8, “Because its producers and

suppliers take care and ensure its quality and consistent in its availability and marketing” (−21.55%), and Q7, “Because it is a material/product that enhances the creativity and effect of the kitchen in a catering establishment” (−21.53%).

Only an infinitesimal change was recorded for questions Q1, “Because of its specific characteristics, due to its geographical origin, which distinguish it from similar cheeses” (−15.19%) and Q2, “Because its organoleptic characteristics characterize it as quality, healthy, and safe” (−13.07%). With question Q11, “Because its attractive packaging”, there was no change for the experts’ answers between the two rounds.

The results of the sensory evaluation and characterization of the cheese questionnaire constructed (Supplementary Table S2) are presented below in the Figure 2 histogram constructed representing the answers for each organoleptic theme separately. The results of the responses (on a scale of 1 = not at all, 10 = very much) are based on calculated average values.

According to the results of the experts’ answers regarding the sensory evaluation of the Kashkaval Pindou cheese from the taste point of view, the most important were the following: pleasant taste (8.27) followed by salty taste (4.33), sweet taste (3.56), acidic taste (3.38), and least important was bitter taste (2.83).

According to the results of the texture experts’ characterization of the cheese, the most important were the following: creamy texture (8.55) followed by compact texture (7.22), elasticity (6.94), tenderness (6.27), softness (5.88), and least important was hardness (3.77).

In regard to the results of the experts’ opinion on the appearance of the cheese presented in a 3 kg packaged product, the most important criteria was the color uniformity (8.22), the structure uniformity (7.11), and the yellow color intensity (6.77), as well as a medium white color intensity (4.5) with no stain spots practically based on the statistical average value (1.11).

Finally, regarding experts’ opinion on the aroma characteristics of the cheese, they described it as buttery (8.66) and equally milky foam (8.66). They described its aroma, with less significance, however, as earthy (5.83) and intense/strong (5.33) and animalistic (5.05). They found less fruity aroma in it (4.16).

4. Discussion

The aim of this work was to determine the opinions shared between all the key experts on using the Kashkaval Pindou cheese in the culinary options in the menu lists and the importance of the correct assessment of the criteria that prompt each professional to introduce and use this cheese. In this paper, a modified Delphi methodology [55–58] was developed, which combines the strengths of the experts’ analysis of the criteria for the selection and introduction of Kashkaval Pindou in catering establishments run by or staffed by them. Specific criteria were applied to select potential participants. These included the requirement for the experts to be actively involved in the quality and organoleptic evaluation of Kashkaval Pindou, to have relevant experience and a defined number of years of experience in the catering sector, and to be based in the Ioannina town of Epirus. The eleven questions used for the quality assessment of the cheese by the experts (in two rounds with a 2-month interval) presented a correlation that led to the grouping and understanding of the characteristics that proved to be primary for the introduction of this cheese in culinary creations. In the first round, the experts evaluated “the geographic origin” (Q1) as the most important criteria for the use of the cheese, which, however, was replaced by the criterion of “Greek Traditional Product” (Q3) in the second round [59,60]. Q1 was moved in the sixth place in the second round. Such a change proves that during the use of the cheese at the restaurants, the consumers indicate their preference for the cheese because of its traditional Greek origin rather than of its geographic origin, and this is reflected in the experts’ second opinion. These results agree with recent literature findings that show respondents’ association of consumption of colonial cheese with traditionalism [61].

Question Q2 of “quality/healthy and safe” as a criterion of choice for the cheese was recorded high, in the third place, of the experts’ selections in both rounds [62]. This was

expected since these are major consumer concerns for any food in the market and also agrees with literature findings continuously over the years [63,64].

The question of “producer/supplier capacity”, Q8, was recorded high, in the fourth place, by the experts in the first round; however, it was moved lower, to the eighth place, in the second round since the experts on the use of the cheese realized that the origin of the product does not concern the consumers at the restaurants [65]. A recent report studying consumer choices based on the origin of producers of cheese found that consumers show increased purchasing trends towards the purchase of niche [66] products, made with more sustainable production systems.

Questions Q4, “easy management of material/product to be used”, and Q6, “ease of integration in the menu” were evaluated in the lower order of preference by the experts in the first round; however, following use of the cheese in the 2-month interval, they evaluated these two criteria higher in the ranking [67]. The importance of easy management of the raw foods integrated in the restaurant menus has been reported since 2006 by Gustafsson et al. as part of the five-aspect meal model used as a tool for developing meal services in restaurants [19,40,68].

Relatively low, in seventh place in the order, was Q5 “easy cheese consumption by the customers” of the restaurant in the first round, but the experts changed their mind to positive in the second round, placing it on the second place following cheese use in the restaurants and possible consumer reactions. These findings correspond to those recorded in the literature where increased cheese consumption is associated with parameters that make the consumption easy and appealing, such as pleasure and satisfaction [61].

In the order of selection by the experts, questions Q7, “the kitchen creativity with the cheese” and Q9, “good value for money” were moderately chosen in both rounds, which means that the use and consumption of the cheese between the two rounds did not change the experts’ opinion regarding creativity and value for money for the specific cheese [69]. Contrary to these findings, we have recently reported that “value for money” is an important parameter for 85.8% of the consumers in regard to the purchase of hard and semi-hard cheese [16]. This proves that the experts are primarily concerned about the cheese’s high value when preparing quality meals for their consumers in restaurants, rather than the cost of the meal.

In both rounds, the lowest in the experts’ preference for the use of the cheese was the packaging of the cheese (Q11) and its reputation (Q10). Such response is expected since the packaging does not affect the end consumer in the restaurant or the hotel, and the reputation of the cheese is still low among the consumers at the Ioannina city or throughout Greece [70,71]. This low preference for the packaging and the reputation of the cheese product by the experts shines light on the way they consider the marketing of the food ingredients as part of their work, paying attention to the actual value of the food rather than the surrounding of it.

The fact that the standard deviation of all questions decreased during the two rounds, except Q11 which remained the same, proves that there was adequate satisfaction on the part of the experts during the two round answers. This decrease was more significant for questions Q10, Q5, Q6, and Q4, medium significant for questions Q9, Q3, Q8, and Q7, and less significant for questions Q1, Q2, and Q11.

The sensory evaluation of the Kashkaval Pindou cheese by the experts based on their answers to the second questionnaire showed that according to their opinions, this is a quality traditional cheese product with expectations on the market. Milky foam and buttery taste are the two major characteristics in terms of the aroma of the cheese. Buttery and milky foam are flavors identified positively by the trained panel characterizing the creamy flavor of the 7- and 9-month-old cheddar cheese in the literature [72]. The taste is characterized as mainly pleasant, and the texture as creamy. The pleasant taste and creamy texture are reported as significant by Brazilian consumer opinions and affect the sensory characteristics of petit Suisse and minas cheeses [73]. The appearance of the cheese is characterized mainly by the uniformity of the color and the structure as expected by such food. The results agree

with the literature finding indicating that color is shown to be important with consumers thinking that low-fat cheese is negatively influenced when the cheese appearance is too translucent or too white and uneven [74].

5. Conclusions

This research is the first to study the market introduction of the revitalized, traditional cheese product, Kashkaval Pindou, as a “back to the future” new cheese to selected restaurants and hotels in the Ioannina town of the Epirus region. From the experts’ overall answers, it is concluded that Kashkaval Pindou a new cheese in the world of gastronomy, which managed in just two months to stimulate the creativity of the chefs and the owners of the local restaurants.

From the results of this research, what is of greatest interest is that it is a Greek Traditional Product, which the experts also recognized and captured through their answers, identifying, therefore, one of the success criteria for its introduction into culinary options. It is worth mentioning the change in the experts’ preference on the selection criteria of the cheese following the two-month use of it in their meals and the feedback they received from their customers at the restaurants. An illustration of the relationship between tradition, modernity, and innovation in restaurants is presented, which means that it is beneficial to develop strong relationships with local product suppliers to ensure stable and cost-effective access to local raw materials. “Tradition” is based on the customer, and authenticity is based on the perception of the local market. Thus, traditional restaurants should develop relationships with regular customers and actively seek customer feedback with products that speak to the pinnacle of authenticity of the products. Undoubtedly, traditional foods play an important role in economic, social, and environmental sustainability. The results of this study, based on the increased preference of the participants for the cheese because of its locality and traditionality prove once again that loyalty to traditional foods is the key driver for ensuring all aspects of sustainability, as they are the ones who are forcing major changes in the market. The transition from yesterday to today seems to open a road to success for Kashkaval Pindou (“back to the future” concept).

The ethnocentric beliefs and country of origin (COO) affect consumer evaluation of food products, which has been an attractive research topic for other scientists for the last twenty years [39]. Studies on COO evaluating various foods by consumers reveal mixed and sometimes contradictory results, possibly due to different combinations of products, samples, and countries where studies are conducted. The cause of the appearance of the COO effect can be found in consumer ethnocentrism (CE). Most surveys underline the multidimensionality of the COO effect. It is in this context that the current research results contribute to the scientific community and aid other scientists, too. This is the first study that examines experts’ evaluation of such foods and not consumers themselves, shining light on another aspect of this research subject since the experts are also part of the food consumption process.

The limitations of the study are mainly due to the use of the questionnaires only in the city of Ioannina of the Epirus region, and the use of 18 experts only. The next study should be expanded with more experts from other towns of Greece, too, involving a larger sample of experts for more robust conclusions so that the Kashkaval Pindou cheese can be available to the restaurants for use in their meals.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/dairy5040053/s1>, Table S1: Questionnaire on quality evaluation criteria for successful introduction of Kashkaval Pindou cheese in restaurants and hotels of Ioannina city. Table S2: Questionnaire of organoleptic evaluation criteria for successful introduction of Kashkaval Pindou cheese in restaurants and hotels of Ioannina city.

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