

# WHAT YOU OUGHT TO EAT -

ORIENTATION VERSUS PATERNALISM



**DIE LEBENSMITTELWIRTSCHAFT**  
WEIL ESSEN GESELLSCHAFT IST

# FOREWORD

The eating habits of the general public are different to those which policymakers and health economists would like to see. Official bodies such as the German Federal Chancellery, the Federal Ministry of Justice or the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture are therefore focusing on the effect of nudging the public into eating what they consider the right foods. Even NGOs have made it their mission to lead consumers in what they consider the “right” direction with the aim of improving unfavourable eating habits in today’s affluent society by suggesting new products and rules of behaviour. The toolbox of regulatory paternalism provides a variety of instruments for achieving this aim, including disseminating trendsetting information, nudging, tax policies, regulations, and even government bans.

Already today, consumers in search of orientation are confronted with measures of this nature in the public debate, generally leading them to conclude that dietary habits are likely to be more and more strongly influenced by political and social aspects and players in the foreseeable future. Their free, individual decisions regarding what to eat and drink would then be increasingly restricted and the paternalistic pressure on consumers ever greater going forward.

Our representative study “What you ought to eat – orientation versus paternalism”, which we conducted in collaboration with Professor Peter Kenning of the Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf, provides a scientific survey on the degree to which consumers in Germany currently perceive themselves as being treated in a paternalistic manner. Moreover, by what and by whom do consumers actually feel themselves being treated paternalistically? The study was based on a simple description of the term paternalism: “Not being allowed to make one’s own decisions in one’s own affairs, i.e. an unreasonable restriction of the free will of responsible citizens to make their own decisions”.

In the first Germany-wide survey on the topic of “paternalism”, 1,000 people answered questions put to them between 4 and 11 August 2016. The complete presentation of the results and the questionnaire used to conduct this survey are available to download at: <http://www.lebensmittelwirtschaft.org/?wpdmdl=290>

Best regards Stephan Becker-Sonnenschein  
Managing Director  
DIE LEBENSMITTELWIRTSCHAFT e.V.

# PRELIMINARY STUDY CONVERSATIONS WITH CONSUMERS

As a fundamental study on the subject of paternalism had never been conducted in Germany, the work was performed in two separate steps: a qualitative preliminary study with consumers, followed by a representative consumer survey based on the study.

The aim of the preliminary study was to clarify what consumers understand by the term “paternalism” and which institutions and measures consumers associate with paternalism.

Firstly, in May and June 2016, two focus groups comprising a total of 18 participants were intensively surveyed. The basis for these moderated surveys was a structured guideline that helped bring together the associations of the consumers on the subjects of freedom, food information, and paternalism.

To summarise, the focus groups produced the following results:

- ▶ Consumers view their own freedom to decide which foods they buy and eat and the topic of nutrition in general as highly important.
- ▶ Information or media campaigns regarding food are not perceived as paternalistic.
- ▶ Consumers do not perceive that which is frequently discussed politically as “paternalism” as such under this term. Consumers do not perceive paternalistic pressure.
- ▶ When specifically asked about government measures of consumer policy, although they are perceived as restrictive, they are seldom criticised by those surveyed.
- ▶ Informative labels and ratings provided by governmental or other institutions are mostly seen as positive.
- ▶ The perceived independence of the institutions that evaluate foods is considered important.

The opinions of those surveyed

Areas of daily life in which freedom of choice is particularly important:



# THE DIFFERENTIATED CONSUMER MODEL

The preliminary study and the representative survey are designed to take the German government's differentiated consumer model into account. Accordingly, three different consumer groups were designated: the vulnerable, the responsible, and the trusting consumers.

As these three groups play a role in the following analysis of the representative core results, here is a short explanation of the three consumer types<sup>1</sup>:

The **vulnerable consumers** have a relatively low level of problem-solving competence. These consumers have the least similarity to the model of the "responsible" consumer. The danger of not being able to master the conventional challenges and economics of everyday life is high for this group.

The **trusting consumers** want to be able to rely on policymakers, institutions and other market players and also do so. This consumer group is the largest in our society, as consumers make use of the trust mechanism, partly for reasons of efficiency, in order to save time (reduction of transaction costs) and to make their complex environment somewhat simpler to handle (trust for the sake of reducing complexity).

The **responsible consumers** pursue a basic approach of being able to take responsibility for themselves and their environment. This group is characterised by the fact that, despite limited capacities, these consumers obtain information, for instance regarding consumption, with the aim of behaving in a well reflected manner and ultimately in the way they see fit.

With the help of the core questions contained in the questionnaire, the participants in the representative survey were divided into these three model categories.

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<sup>1</sup> See also: Wobker, Kenning, Lehmann-Waffenschmidt, Gigerenzer: What do consumers know about economy? J. Verbr. Lebensm. (2014)

**SELECTED  
RESULTS FROM THE  
REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY**



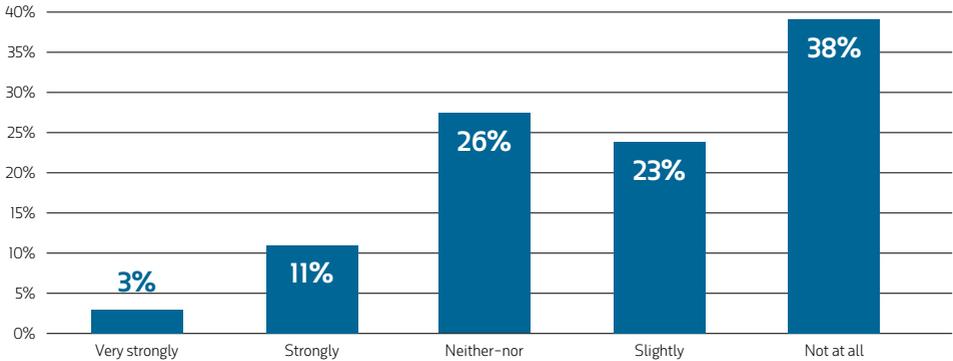
# 1.

## PERCEIVED PATERNALISM

**Consumers in Germany do not currently feel treated particularly paternalistically.**

A large majority of consumers (a good **86%**) do not currently feel paternalistically treated when shopping for food. However, among the group of people who perceive themselves as

being treated either “strongly” or “very strongly” paternalistically, the three consumer types were represented in varying degrees.



In order to gain an indication of the varying degree of paternalism perceived within the three consumer groups, the group of those who perceive “strong” or “very strong” paternalistic pressure when shopping for food was analysed in greater depth. It turned out that **22%** of the group of vulnerable consumers stated feeling treated either “strongly” or “very strongly” paternalistically and therefore somewhat more frequently than the others. **19%** of trusting consumers and only **13%** of responsible consumers selected this response.

In socio-demographic terms, the following groups are significantly different from one another: Men (**19%**) perceive paternalism in daily life somewhat more strongly than women (**14%**). The perception of paternalism in East Germany (**19%**) tends to be higher than in West Germany (**12%**). A perception of paternalism when shopping for food was expressed more strongly by the under-50 age group (**17%**) than by the over-50 age group (**10%**). Government warnings (without statutory regulation) when shopping for food have greater relevance for persons with A-level education (**39%**) than those with O-level education (**23%**).

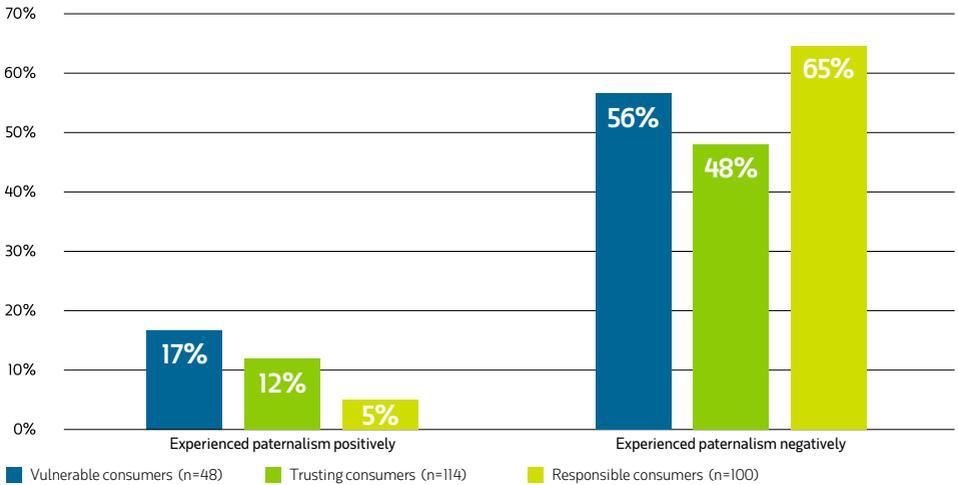
# 2.

## PATERNALISM – A NEGATIVE FEELING

**When paternalism is perceived, it is mostly viewed as negative.**

Only a relatively low percentage of the population (26%) stated having experienced at least one paternalistic event within the six-week period prior to the survey. Looking at the distribution of how this paternalism was actually

perceived, 56% state that they perceived it as negative. Only 10% perceived the event as positive. Here too, there are differences between the three consumer model groups.



The group of vulnerable consumers differs significantly from the group of responsible consumers.

### Perceived paternalism over the course of time:

In a time comparison, a slight trend is visible. However, the validity of this trend statement needs to be further examined in a more in-depth survey.

Only a minority of 7% of those surveyed state having felt treated paternalistically when shopping for food five years ago, whereas currently the figure is 13%. In relation to the next five years, 23% expect to perceive paternalism when shopping for food.

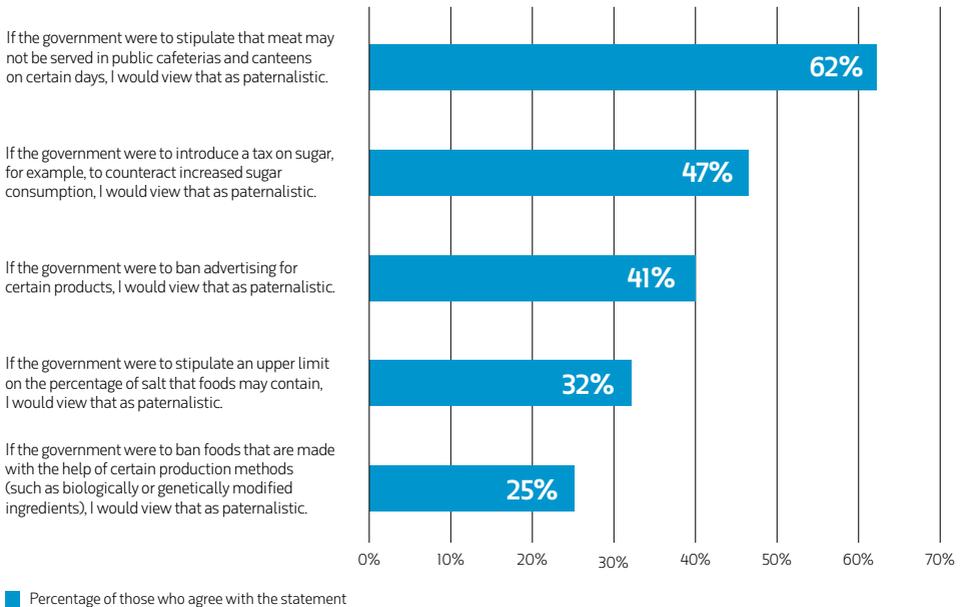
# 3.

## GOVERNMENTAL PATERNALISM?

### Regulations on abstaining from meat in public canteens and cafeterias, taxes on sugar or advertising bans have an outstanding potential for paternalism.

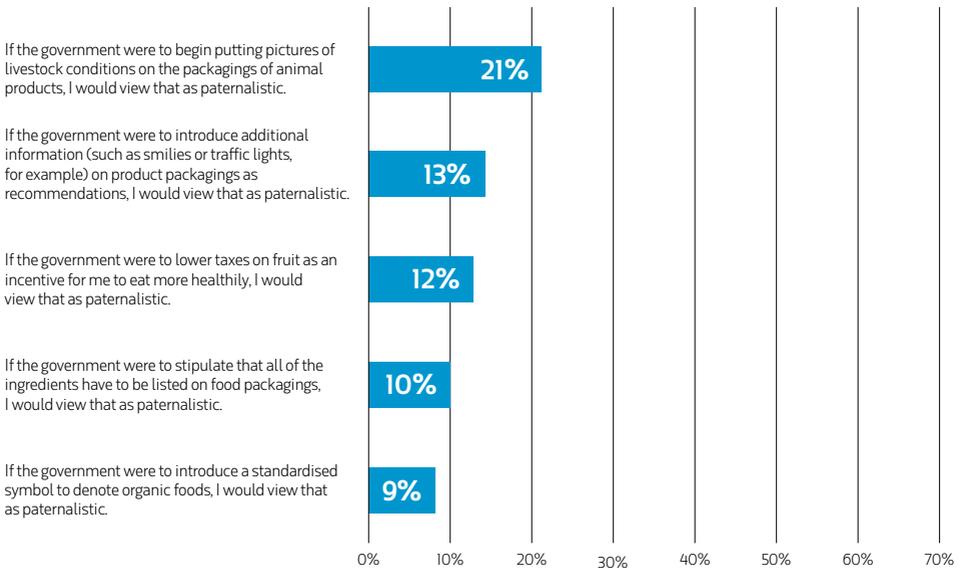
The assessment of government measures presents a varied picture. Whereas some government measures are hardly perceived as paternalism, others have the potential to appear strongly paternalistic. Government

regulations and bans have a great deal of paternalistic potential. For instance, **62%** of those surveyed would feel “very strongly” or “strongly” paternalistically treated if the government were to determine that meat will



no longer be offered in public cafeterias and canteens on certain days. Taxes on sugar consumption and/or advertising bans give **47%** and **40%** respectively a feeling of being treated paternalistically.

Conversely, an organic certification, information on the ingredients, or lower taxes on fruit and vegetables are considered to be right at the bottom of the scale of perceived governmental paternalism.



# 4.

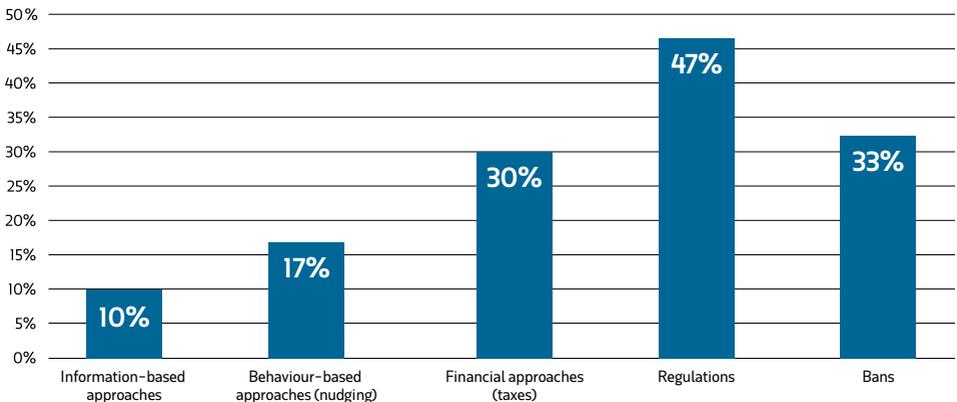
## ACCEPTABLE INTERVENTIONS IN DAILY LIFE

**Information and behaviour-based measures (such as nudging) are perceived as far less paternalistic than government regulations and bans.**

More than **75%** of those surveyed refused to accept that the government should decide what is healthy and what is not without consulting the people. Precisely in line with this finding, more than **80%** of respondents find it important to decide individually exactly which foods to buy when they go shopping.

When asked specifically which instruments the government should be able to use to influence the behaviour of consumers, those with a less penetrating character, i.e. with a relatively low level of intervention, obviously seem to be better accepted by consumers.

Taxes as financial incentives to buy or not buy foods are variously assessed according to their individual impacts. For example, **12%** agreed with the statement “If the government were to lower taxes on fruit as an incentive for me to eat more healthily, I would feel paternalistically treated”. In contrast, **47%** agree with the statement: “If the government were to introduce a tax on sugar, for example, to counteract increased sugar consumption, I would feel paternalistically treated”.



■ Percentage of those who state they feel treated paternalistically

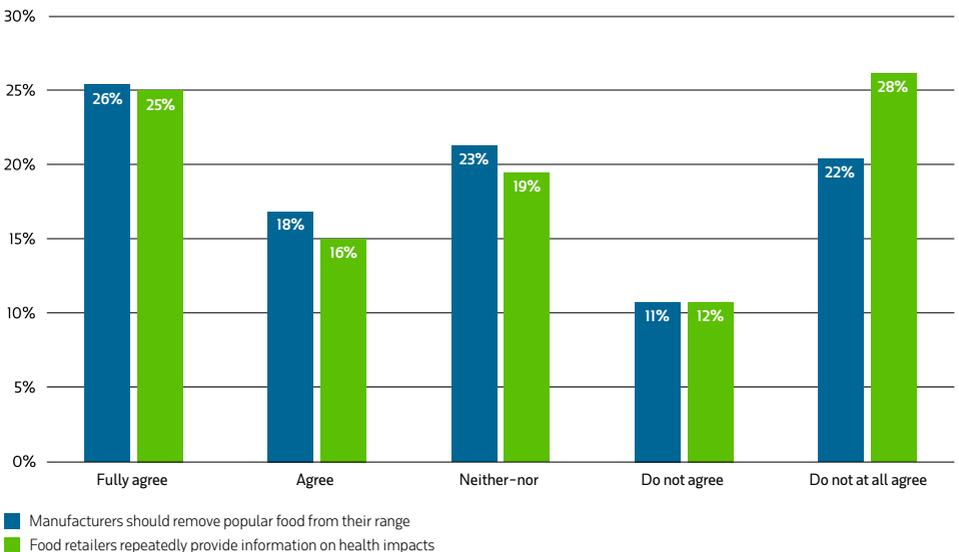
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## THE ROLE OF MANUFACTURERS AND RETAILERS

**A certain percentage of consumers think that taking popular foods off the shelves or providing warnings on possible negative health consequences is also potentially paternalistic.**

Overall, the paternalistic pressure applied by the food retail industry is low and **78%** do not feel they are treated paternalistically by their food retailers. However, a certain number of consumers do not want to see restrictions in the range of foods on offer or health-related evaluations of foods they personally like. **44%** say they feel treated paternalistically if a food manufacturer removes a product from its range that they personally enjoy eating.

Health warnings provided by food retailers are seen by **41%** of consumers as paternalistic. However, both measures polarise opinion, which is divided between those who agree and those who disagree in similar percentages on both sides.



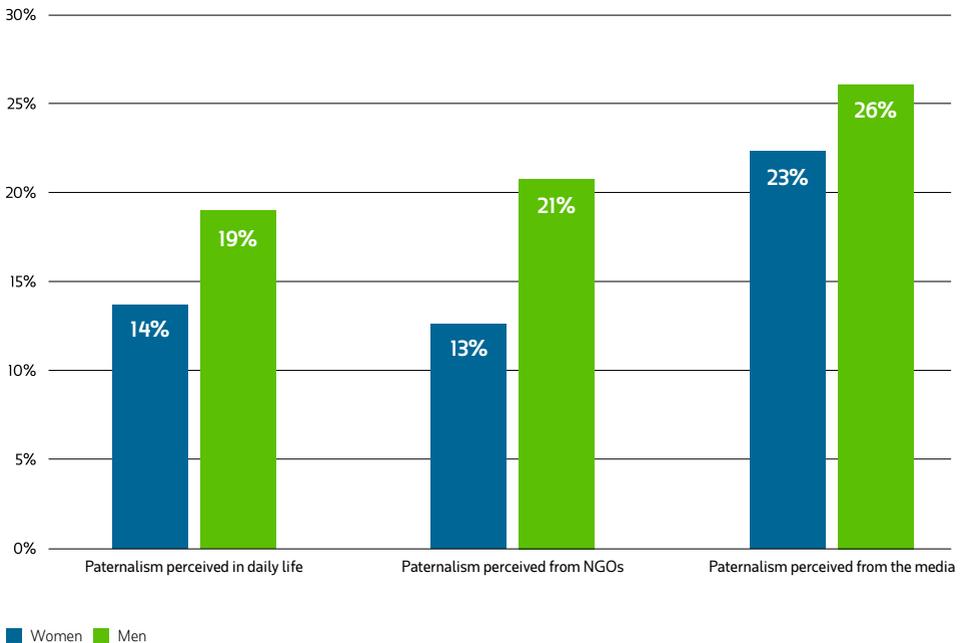
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## OTHER PATERNALISTIC PLAYERS

**NGOs and the media are also seen by a number of those surveyed as paternalistic, more so by men than by women.**

The feeling of being treated paternalistically in everyday life, particularly by the media and NGOs, is far stronger in men than in women. More than **25%** of the men surveyed perceive themselves as treated paternalistically by the media, more than **20%** by NGOs. Apart from manufacturers and retailers, other groups also

run the risk of appearing paternalistic – in descending order, as follows: animal protection organisations, insurers and health insurance companies, but also friends, acquaintances and families to a certain degree. In this question, however, health information provided by doctors is not seen as particularly significant.



If food manufacturers were to remove certain foods that I enjoy eating from their range, I would view that as paternalistic.

44%

If a food retailer were to repeatedly point out that certain foods that I do not like are good for my health, I would view that as paternalistic.

41%

I feel paternalistically treated when environmental and animal protection organisations morally question my eating habits.

40%

If my insurer or health insurance company were to point out that certain foods that I enjoy eating are possibly bad for my health, I would view that as paternalistic.

30%

If friends, acquaintances, or family members point out that certain foods that I enjoy eating are possibly bad for my health, I view that as paternalistic.

27%

If groups such as consumer protection organisations, Foodwatch or Greenpeace point out via the media that certain foods that I enjoy eating are possibly bad for my health, I view that as paternalistic.

26%

If my doctor points out that certain foods that I enjoy eating are possibly bad for my health, I view that as paternalistic.

16%

Percentage of agreement

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45% 50%

■ Percentage of those who agree with the statement

# 7.

## HELPFUL WHEN SHOPPING

**Information about ingredients, lower prices for fruit and vegetables and information on the fair payment of food producers play a major role when shopping for food.**

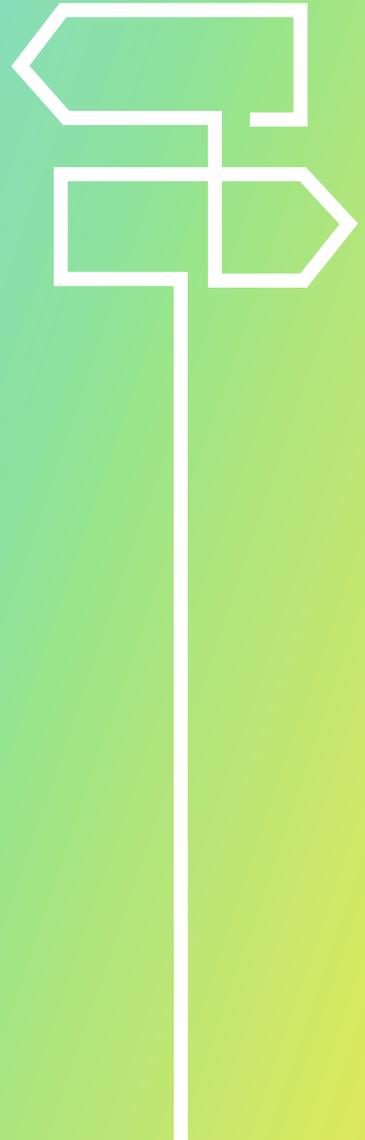
Due to the broad range of information regarding the quality of foods, consumers look for important criteria when purchasing their food. They look for instruments that provide them with guidance to help them make the right choices without appearing paternalistic.

Instruments that inform consumers without intervening to greatly in their everyday lives or costing too much are at the top of the list.

### Instruments that influence which foods consumers buy:

› Ingredients clearly recognisable	72%
› Low taxes on fruit and vegetables	69%
› Information on percentages paid to food producers	54%
› Pictures of livestock conditions on packagings	42%
› Government campaigns	43%
› Recommended maximum amounts on packagings	40%
› Additional information on packagings (smilies, traffic lights)	42%
› Higher taxes on high sugar, salt, fat and alcohol content	29%
› Government warnings	29%
› A call to reduce meat consumption	21%
› Regulations on the size and shape of fruit and vegetables	14%

# SUMMARY OF RESULTS



# FURTHER QUESTIONS DERIVED FROM THE SURVEY

## FROM THE PUBLISHER'S POINT OF VIEW

When asked, around **56%** of those surveyed see paternalism as “negative” or “very negative”, although a good **86%** of the population do not currently view the topic as uppermost in their minds. It seems reasonable to assume that the calls of policymakers and NGOs presented in the media are less important to the general public.

Around **75%** of those surveyed refused to accept that the government should decide what is healthy and what is not without consulting the people. Even though the majority of consumers (a good **86%**) do not currently feel treated paternalistically when shopping for food, it does, however, raise the questions of why policymakers are giving such intense consideration to the topic of intervention in consumers’ food buying behaviour and why they are in search of new regulations.

It is also clear that consumers are more easily able to accept instruments that intervene to a lesser extent in their lives, such as informational approaches or behaviour-based rules, than relatively strong interventions such as regulations and bans.

Consumers assess the financial approaches purely in their own personal economic interest, i.e. they judge the potential degree of paternalism by the amount of money it leaves them in their pockets, which poses the question of whether rationally thinking consumers do exist after all.



The vulnerable consumer group expresses its feeling of being treated paternalistically more frequently than the two groups of trusting and responsible consumers. Interestingly, they tend to view paternalism as positive in some cases.

Here, the food sector continues to rely on the policy of information and transparency, which is also desired by consumers as a form of guidance. More intensive research needs to be conducted in order to determine the best course of action in order to improve consumer acceptance for this approach.

The new results corroborate our previous studies on the subject of transparency<sup>1</sup> and innovation<sup>2</sup>, which points to consumers having a high degree of trust and confidence in the foods they purchase. They indicate that the government, with its current statutory framework conditions, has defined a suitable range within which consumers can trust in security and quality<sup>3</sup>.

For institutions that deal with promotional measures for a healthy lifestyle in the interest of public health, this study provides initial key information regarding how various regulatory measures are evaluated by consumers.

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1 "Die Lebensmittelwirtschaft e.V." (publisher): Transparency and consumers: a misunderstanding? (2014)

2 "Die Lebensmittelwirtschaft e.V." (publisher): Edible Innovations (2015)

3 "Die Lebensmittelwirtschaft e.V." (publisher): Reputation Studies (2012–2016).

# APPENDIX

## Descriptive statistics from the paternalism study 2016

### Excerpt from the survey

Item	1	2	3	4	5	MW SD
When shopping for food, sometimes I feel restricted (e.g. by the government, by organisations or by other people).	4.9%	9.0%	15.9%	16.4%	53.8%	4,05 1,22
When shopping for food, sometimes I have the feeling of not being able to make a free decision.	3.2%	6.9%	12.3%	17.4%	60.2%	4,24 1,11
How strongly do you currently feel paternalistically treated in your everyday life?	3.7%	13.0%	32.6%	25.5%	25.2%	3,55 1,11
How strongly did you feel paternalistically treated when shopping for food five years ago?	2.2%	4.8%	27.0%	27.2%	38.8%	3,96 1,02
How strongly do you currently feel paternalistically treated when shopping for food?	2.7%	10.6%	26.3%	22.8%	37.6%	3,82 1,13
How strongly do you think you will feel paternalistically treated when shopping for food in five years' time?	9.0%	13.9%	25.8%	22.8%	28.5%	3,48 1,28
If the government were to stipulate that all of the ingredients have to be listed on food packagings, I would view that as paternalistic.	5.6%	4.2%	11.6%	13.2%	65.4%	4,29 1,17
If the government were to introduce a standardised symbol to denote organic foods, I would view that as paternalistic.	5.3%	4.2%	14.0%	13.2%	63.2%	4,25 1,16
If the government were to introduce additional information (such as smiles or traffic lights, for example) on product packagings as recommendations, I would view that as paternalistic.	7.0%	5.8%	18.4%	17.1%	51.7%	4,01 1,25
If the government were to begin putting pictures of livestock conditions on the packagings of animal products, I would view that as paternalistic.	13.5%	7.5%	21.2%	13.7%	44.2%	3,68 1,44
If the government were to introduce a tax on sugar, for example, to counteract increased sugar consumption, I would view that as paternalistic.	30.9%	16.1%	17.8%	12.7%	22.5%	2,80 1,54
If the government were to lower taxes on fruit as an incentive for me to eat more healthily, I would view that as paternalistic.	8.1%	4.3%	14.6%	13.3%	59.7%	4,12 1,28
If the government were to stipulate an upper limit on the percentage of salt that foods may contain, I would view that as paternalistic.	19.2%	12.8%	20.1%	17.0%	30.9%	3,28 1,49
If the government were to stipulate that meat may not be served in public cafeterias and canteens on certain days, I would view that as paternalistic.	46.9%	14.6%	12.7%	8.7%	17.1%	2,34 1,54

Item	1	2	3	4	5	MW SD
If the government were to ban advertising for certain products, I would view that as paternalistic.	25.8%	14.2%	20.0%	10.4%	29.5%	3,04 1,57
If the government were to ban foods that are made with the help of certain production methods (such as biologically or genetically modified ingredients), I would view that as paternalistic.	15.1%	10.4%	19.6%	16.5%	38.4%	3,53 1,46
If groups such as consumer protection organisations, Food-watch or Greenpeace were to disseminate information via the media that certain foods I enjoy eating are bad for my health, I would view that as paternalistic.	15.7%	9.8%	19.4%	16.4%	38.7%	3,53 1,47
I have already felt paternalistically treated by environmental and animal protection organisations (such as the WWF or Greenpeace).	9.7%	8.0%	18.8%	14.7%	48.8%	3,85 1,36
I feel paternalistically treated when environmental and animal protection organisations morally question my eating habits.	26.4%	13.8%	18.4%	13.1%	28.2%	3,03 1,57

The values result from the use of a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" = 1 to "strongly disagree" = 5.

# IMPRINT



## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY**

The survey analysed the results obtained from questioning 1,000 participants. In order to obtain an approximately representative sample of the population, quota variables for age, gender, federal state and level of education were predetermined. The survey was conducted online with consumers living in German private households (at least 18 years old) between 4 and 11 August 2016.

## **PUBLISHER**

DIE LEBENSMITTELWIRTSCHAFT e.V.  
Responsible within the meaning of media law:  
Stephan Becker-Sonnenschein  
Friedrichstraße 171  
D-10117 Berlin

## **THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED ON BEHALF OF**

DIE LEBENSMITTELWIRTSCHAFT e.V.

## **SCIENTIFIC SURVEY SUPERVISORS:**

Prof. Peter Kenning,  
Heinrich Heine University, Düsseldorf

Prof. Tim Eberhardt,  
Münster Research Institute

## **AUTHOR OF THE WHITE PAPER:**

Dr Karin Bergmann,  
DIE LEBENSMITTELWIRTSCHAFT e.V.

## **FIELD WORK (REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY)**

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