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The Spread of Convenience Food in 20th Century Germany

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ABSTRACT

Considering the range of products, manufacturing, packaging technology and marketing the German food industry particularly from the second half of the 20th century onwards received considerable transfer from the U.S. Terms such as convenience food or fast food stand for a new culture of diet, which based on the spread of industrial processed food and finished products. Their continually growing market share underlines a changing nutritive behaviour and the change of society as well, which was recently called "McDonaldization" (George Ritzer).

Although baking powder and soup cubes as industrial manufactured products successfully penetrated the German market from the early 20th century onwards, the Americanization of German diet proved to fail before 1945. Well-known American companies such as Coca Cola or Wrigley at least did not succeed on a larger scale up to World War II. After a short overview on the history of industrial manufactured food products in Germany up to World War II the paper focusses on the Americanization of German diet by example of convenience products such as cake mixes and instant products. These from the 1960s onwards increasingly gained more acceptance among German housewives as convenience products were not only used to prepare a tasty meal but before all to save time. The paper concentrates on some of the companies, which implemented those food innovations in Germany, on their strategies and, at least, their success.

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As far as the range of products, manufacturing, packaging technology and marketing are concerned, the German food industry, particularly from the second half of the 20th century onwards, received considerable input from the U.S. Terms like ‘convenience food’ or even ‘fast food’ stand for a new culture of diet, which is based on the spread of industrially manufactured or processed food and finished products and which fundamentally changed eating habits. The continually growing market share of such products not only underlines a changing nutritive behaviour but also a kind of social rationalization which George Ritzer recently called “*McDonaldization*“. But while meat extract and stock cubes can be seen as the “the beginning of the kinds of food nowadays known as ‘convenience products’”¹, which penetrated the markets from the late 19th century onwards, other industrially manufactured products such as instant meals and frozen foods proved to fail in Germany before 1945. This was not only due to differing nutrition habits [Ernährungsgewohnheiten] but also to the level of technical equipment, as for example refrigerators and deep freezers, and to the individual consumers’ experience.

What influenced the spread of convenience food? What exactly does ‘convenience products’ mean? What role did the transfer of know-how about processing and products play in the formation of modern markets for foods and food innovations in 20th-century Germany? How did consumers react to industrially processed foods like packet soups and cake mixes that, on the one hand, promised a saving of time and easier preparation but which also touched upon the core competencies of female housekeeping (namely preparing food oneself)? Questions like these will be investigated in the following by example of instant products in the 20th century up to the 1970s.

After a discussion of the term ‘convenience food’, a short overview on the history of industrially manufactured food products in Germany up to the Second World War will be given. Afterwards, the paper focuses on the spread of convenience food in German nutrition in the aftermath of World War II by the example of instant products. These increasingly gained in acceptance from the 1960s onwards, particularly among the “younger generation” of German housewives as they wanted to prepare tasty meals but also to save time. The paper concentrates on a number of companies such as Kraft Foods, Dr. Oetker, Pfanni and Knorr, which, as carriers, implemented these food innovations in Germany, on their market strategies and, finally, their success within the main target groups. This paper is a first sketch of my research on the relation of food and transfer using the example of the history of convenience products.

¹ Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg et al., Die Rolle von Fleischextrakt, Bouillonwürfeln und Speisewürze für die Ausbildung der Ernährungswissenschaften und der Lebensmittelindustrie im 19. Jahrhundert, in: Lebensmittelqualität, Wissenschaft und Technik, Weinheim 1989, p. 319. Also: Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg, Die Rolle des Fleischextrakts für die Ausbildung der Ernährungswissenschaften und den Aufstieg der Suppenindustrie, Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag 1990, pp. 35, 39. Cf. Uwe Spiekermann, Zeiteinsparungen: Lebensmittelkonservierung zwischen Haushalt und Industrie 1880-1940, in: Ernährungskultur im Wandel der Zeiten, Köln 1997, pp. 30-42, p. 30. Also Hans-Werner Prah/Monika Setzwein, Soziologie der Ernährung, Leske + Budrich Opladen 1999, pp. 252-258.

The Term ‘Convenience’

According to Roger Haden ‘convenience’ is one of the distinctive terms of the Western ideology of consumption in the 20th century. He claims that it is “a huge flexible term which could not merely be applied to foods, but to all goods and services supposed to ‘make life easier’”.² This comprises not only technologies and products, but also images and ways of life. Concerning products ready to cook or to eat the term involves fields like food processing, information and consumption. Convenience products are nowadays a synonym of an ‘economy of time’ which put an end to “the drudgery of home cookery”.³ They comprise “foods that include industrially prefabricated, reproducible services, which are released at the consumption or at the use of the product in order to replace, in part or fully, work steps that would usually come up”.⁴ Convenience foods include finished as well as semi-finished products like vegetable or potato meals, ready sauces and puddings, frozen foods and dough mixes. Handy packaging which makes portioning and resealing possible and which includes aids for preparation furthers the convenience effect. Thus, according to Nast, not only processing technology and the industrial processing of flavour and synthetic ingredients, but also the diversification of packaging technology and the development of an advertising industry have aided the trend of convenience food.⁵

So the term ‘convenience food’ not only indicates specific ways of production, distribution and preparation, but also a cultural form. The sociologist George Ritzer names the following as fundamental elements of the “Convenience Bewegung” [convenience movement]: consumers’ need for amenity, comfort and economy of time in preparing and consuming food as well as for a „Geschmacksgarantie“ [taste guarantee] in the sense of predictability and control.⁶

From a historical point of view, the term appears to be directly opposed to the German ideal of a housewife as it had been propagated in the *Hausväterliteratur* since the early 19th century. It was unthinkable for generations of German housewives to “have a comfortable life” or “to be comfortable” (true to the motto “sich regen bringt Segen” [of idleness comes no goodness]). It was only the 20th-century United States’ understanding of consumption that produced innovations which allowed for convenience through easier handling and saving of time in the preparation of food, the core competency of housekeeping. So ‘convenience’ represents the American rhetoric of “easy living” and “everything is possible”.⁷

In the face of this contemporary discourse it appears almost ironic that the origins of those innovations in the food sector that are today known to be convenient and time saving were

² Roger Haden, Taste in an Age of Convenience. From Frozen Food to Meals in ‘the Matrix’, in: Carolyn Korsmeyer (ed.), *The Taste Culture Reader. Experiencing Food and Drink*, Berg Oxford 2005, pp344-358, p. 345.

³ Haden, Taste, p. 345.

⁴ Quoted Matthias Nast, *Die stummen Verkäufer. Lebensmittelverpackungen im Zeitalter der Konsumgesellschaft*, Lang Bern et al. 1997, p. 131.

⁵ Nast, *Verkäufer*, p. 132.

⁶ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society. An Investigation into the changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*, Pine Forge Press Newbury Park/CA 1993, pp. 9-11.

⁷ Susan Strasser et al. (eds.), *Getting and Spending*, CUP Cambridge 1998.

closely linked to efforts to cope with specific situations of shortage which made the preservation of foods and rational solutions for the provisions for larger groups of people necessary. That is why transfer, more than the transnationale dimension, was a matter of spin-offs between the military and civilian sectors.

On the History of Industrial Food Products in Germany

Teuteberg sees the “first revolution in nutrition” in the industrialization of food production in the second half of the 19th century. The scientification of food production, e.g. through the works of Justus von Liebig, entailed a “a fundamental change in the nutrition of the whole people” [“tiefgreifende Umstellung der gesamten Volksernährung”].⁸ Those works not only made an industrial production of foods possible but it also led to a gradual replacement of self-supply through own production by the consumption of industrially processed foods. The emergence of a food industry, which was parallel to the urbanization resulting from industrialization, can be traced back to the middle of the 19th century and was – as Jakob Tanner has pointed out – the base for the production of foods in the growing industrial cities, in particular with respect to the provisions for the industrial workers.⁹

Gunther Hirschfelder also places the emergence of a European food industry in the late 19th century and refers to processing techniques that were used at that time such as heat treatment, dehydration and freezing and to the development of synthetic substitutes. These techniques for mass processing allowed for independence from seasonal crop variation¹⁰, led to a standardization of ingredients for soups, puddings and other infant formulas, and thus guaranteed a composition and quality that remained constantly the same.¹¹ In analogy to that, consumer behavior was trained through the emergence of brand products which were of a constant quality, worth their money and had a high recognition value. This is why the “semiotische Kraft der Warenästhetik” was distinctive for finished foods as it helped charge goods with diverse connotations, which might have an appetizing or suggestive effect, through packaging and advertising.¹²

In the following I would like to concentrate on the spread of instant products in my analysis of novel time-saving mass products in the food sector. The industrial production of meat extracts, soup powders, infant formulas and starch puddings, but also of stimulants like coffee surrogates, which has been increasing since the middle of the 19th century, is, as the examples of the Swiss companies Nestlé and Maggi or the German Knorr company underline, closely

⁸ Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg, *Der Verzehr von Nahrungsmitteln in Deutschland pro Kopf und Jahr seit Beginn der Industrialisierung (1850-1975)*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 19, 1979, pp. 331-388, p. 335.

⁹ Jakob Tanner, *Fabrikmahlzeit. Ernährungswissenschaft, Industriearbeit und Volksernährung in der Schweiz 1890-1950*. Zürich: Chronos Verlag 1990. Vgl. auch Sue Shepherd, *Pickled, Potted and Canned. The Story of Food Preserving*, London: Headline 2000, pp. 307-309 to the beginnings of instant food in the early 1840s.

¹⁰ Gunther Hirschfelder/Tanja Portz, *Von der Brot- und Breispeise zur Tütensuppe und Tiefkühlpizza. Der Wandel des Lebensmittelsortiments seit 1850*, in: Peter Lummel/Alexandra Deak (eds.), *Einkaufen! Eine Geschichte des täglichen Bedarfs*, Berlin 2005, pp. 129-144, p.134.

¹¹ Wildt, *Konsumgesellschaft*, p. 171. Jakob Tanner, *Modern Times: Industrialisierung und Ernährung in Europa und den USA im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, in: Escher/Buddeberg (eds.), *Essen und Trinken*, pp. 27-52, pp. 32-33.

¹² Wildt, *Privater Konsum*, S. 286. See for example Rainer Gries, *Produktkommunikation. Geschichte und Theorie*, Wien: Facultas 2008.

connected to the insufficient nutritional situation of the people in the growing industrial metropolitan areas. Deficiency symptoms caused by bad nutrition became particularly apparent in raising children and in the poor physical constitution of adults.¹³

At the same time, the industrial fabrication of food products gained a lot of momentum because large-scale consumption had to be ensured, e.g. in the military sector. The scope of the rationalizing effects of the organization of war and thus of the provisions for the troops on all of the food industry in the 19th and 20th centuries cannot be overestimated. Food innovations made for the catering for the troops that helped get over shortages and made efficient and appropriate provisions possible were often subsequently transferred to the civilian sector.¹⁴ This holds for field and soup kitchens as well as for margarine (1863) and industrially processed jam, potato flakes, coffee surrogates, process cheese and frozen foods.¹⁵ And even the use of microwave devices in the preparation of food has its origin in the military engineering of the 1950s.

So not only food in hospitals or canteen meals („Fabrikmahlzeit“, Jakob Tanner), but also the catering for armies and troops provisions were at the origin of convenience food. As Sue Shepherd points out rightly, each war brought “a new innovation” in the sector of the food industry.¹⁶ As early as in 1855, the French cook Alexis Soyer rationalized the provisions for the British troops as well as the catering for hospitals (together with F. Nightingale) during the Crimean War after he had already pushed the establishment of soup kitchens to fight the Great Famine in Ireland (famine soup).¹⁷ The so called “Erbswurst”, a concentrated peassoup which was wrapped with paper, was developed by the cook Johann Heinrich Grüneberg in order to feed the German troops during the German-French War in 1870/71.¹⁸

The First World War led to an increase in dehydration technology, e.g. in the field of drying fruit and vegetables. Werner Eckart, an entrepreneur from Munich, started producing dried potatoes for the troops at the time. After the Second World War, this know-how brought about the foundation of the Pfanni company, which, until today, is known as the mother of all dried

¹³ Teuteberg et al., *Fleischextrakt*, Weinheim: VCH 1989, pp. 29-46, pp. 54-55. Also: *ibid.*, *Rolle des Fleischextrakts*, pp. 58-59. To Nestlé: Albert Pfiffner, *Henri Nestlé (1814-1890). Vom Frankfurter Apothekergehilfen zum Schweizer Pionierunternehmer*, Zürich: Chronos Verlag 1993, pp. 112-204. Tanner, *Modern Times*, p. 45, calls instant soups „die Ikone der industrialisierten Ernährung“. Cf. also Susanne B. Schmidt, *Julius Maggi. Singens würziger Weg zur Industriestadt*, in: Alfred G. Frei (ed.), *Habermus und Suppenwürze. Singens Weg vom Bauerndorf zur Industriestadt*, Konstanz 1987, pp. 111-143.

¹⁴ Siehe Arnulf Hügel, *Kriegsernährungswirtschaft im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre 2003 sowie August Skalweit, *Die deutsche Kriegsernährungswirtschaft*, Stuttgart: DVA 1927. See also Stuart Thorne, *The History of Food Preservation*, London et al: Parthenon Publishing 1986. H.G. Muller, *Industrial food preservation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, in: Anne Wilson (ed.), *Waste not, want not. Food preservation from early times to the present day*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1991, pp. 104-133.

¹⁵ Michael Wildt, *Am Beginn der “Konsumgesellschaft”. Mangelersföhrung, Lebenshaltung, Wohlstandshoffnung in Westdeutschland in den fünfziger Jahren*, Ergebnisse-Verlag Hamburg 1994, pp. 95-97.

¹⁶ Shepherd, *Pickled, Potted and Canned*, p. 314.

¹⁷ Shepherd, *Pickled, Potted and Canned*, pp. 311-312. Muller, *Industrial food preservation*, p. 110.

¹⁸ Angelika Dollinger-Woidich, *Fertignahrung in Österreich. Ernährung und Gesellschaft im Wandel*, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt Austria 1989, pp. 62-63. „Erbswurst“ is up to nowadays is among the product range of the German Knorr company.

potato products in Germany.¹⁹ Instant coffee has its origins in the war provisions industry as well. The General Foods Corp. started distributing instant coffee for the American armed forces under the brand name Maxwell House around 1916. Nescafé, which was merchandized by the Swiss Nestlé Company since 1938, did not arrive in Germany until 1943. And still the civilian population did, at first, not have access to this product which was manufactured for the use of the *Wehrmacht* only. Instead, those circles had coffee substitutes made of malt, barley or chicory since the 19th century such as Kathreiner's, Linde or Caro Kaffee some time later.

“The scientific interest in the influence of the water content on the durability of food” grew even more during the Second World War, as dried goods now were among the basics for the provisions for allied troops around the globe. This particularly since other forms of preservation, as for example tins, declined for reasons of a shortage of raw materials.²⁰ To this was added that American troops in particular mistrusted the fresh foods available on the European continent. They preferred to have recourse to their own provisions. This was the reason for the supply of one-man rations which contained provisions for one day: „In 1941 ... the regular use of composite rations“ was introduced, „which were to combine the advantages of both tinned and dried food“.²¹

The Dawn of the Age of Convenience – Ready Meals with “guaranteed success”

Although people's needs immediately after the war were turned to cover strong demands such as the getting of quality food or luxury stimulans²², there is no doubt that the increased range of dehydrated food in the 1940s had an impact on the foods on offer for civilians, especially as the manufacturing facilities for drying foods, meat and other products as well as new technologies (tunnel drying) and means for packaging were already available. Those foods were compact, lightweight, had long shelf-lives, and lost only little of their nutritional values. This special structure of the market for foods accelerated developments in the field of dehydration technologies, as the large product capacities for drying fruit and vegetables were converted for manufacturing convenience products of the instant kind after World War II.²³

However, the German consumers' acceptance of dried goods depended strongly on their palatability. Spiekermann relates that products made of dried fruit “with a horrible taste” [“mit grauenvollem Geschmack”] were used at mass feedings during both Wars and that they

¹⁹ Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg/Günter Wiegelmann, *Nahrungsgewohnheiten in der Industrialisierung des 19. Jhd.*, Münster 2004 (ND von 1972), p. 84; also Wildt, *Konsumgesellschaft*, P. 83. Cf. Dollinger-Woidich, *Fertignahrung*, p. 67.

²⁰ Felix Escher, *Lebensmittelverarbeitung – Von der Empirie zur Wissenschaft*, in: *ibid./Claus Buddeberg* (eds.), *Essen und Trinken zwischen Ernährung, Kult und Kultur*, Zürich 2003, pp. 85-109, p. 95. Martin Humbert, *Entstehung der Konservenindustrie*, PhD Thesis Hamburg 1997, pp. 71, 154.

²¹ Shepherd, *Pickled, Potted and Canned*, p. 312. “... the shortage of metal for tins during both World Wars and the need to save shipping space with more compact food supplies led to a greater relevance of dehydrated meat and vegetables”.

²² Arne Andersen, *Der Traum vom guten Leben. Alltags- und Konsumgeschichte vom Wirtschaftswunder bis heute*, Frankfurt: Campus 1997.

²³ Escher, *Lebensmittelverarbeitung*; see also Teuteberg et al., *Fleischextrakt*, p. 39. On the process of dehydration of vegetables, meat and fish Muller, *Food Preservation*, pp. 112-113.

had evoked a lasting aversion to dried goods.²⁴ So the success of the new products on the market was particularly dependent on the one hand on the flavor quality.²⁵ In 1949, the manufacturers of soup powder Knorr and Maggi offered products in hermetically sealed bags made of aluminum foil treated with thermoplastic for the first time. This new method allowed for better protection of the content from light, moisture and external aromas. In addition to that, larger amounts of noodles, dried vegetables and other ingredients could be added. The packaging of those branded goods has traditionally been used as advertising space.

While meat extracts and soup seasonings were still sold as flavor enhancing ‘aids’ for preparing food, packet soups, ready sauces and flans “ohne Kochen” [without cooking] had already become components in the food preparation of modern US-households. And they paved the way for convenience food in Germany as well.²⁶ In doing so a new image was to be created, which was far away from deprivation and scarceness and thus closely connected to the term “convenience”.²⁷ Convenient product innovations like cornflakes, chips and pasta, ketchup, mayonnaise and ready sauces made the US economy the starting point of a massive revolution of the market, which was transferred to Europe through an increasing commitment of US companies.²⁸ Kraft’s Macaroni & Cheese is one of the classics in ready meals; it is a ‘dry ready meal’ which was introduced in Germany under the brand name Miracoli in 1961.²⁹ On the one hand, this spaghetti meal met the desire for quick and easy preparation and, at the same time, it transported the interest in Italian cuisine which had been raised by the just emerging holiday traffic.³⁰

But German food producers such as Dr. Oetker also focussed on convenient products, which aimed at the fact that German housewives spent less time on cooking and baking. The company started “Galletta”, the first pudding “without cooking”, in 1961. Ten years later cake mixes and frozen food followed to counter the decreasing turnovers in the company’s core business with backing ingredients such as backing powder.³¹ Ready-to-bake cake mixes as well had become “a big deal in the USA” after World War II and they turned out to be an

²⁴ Spiekermann, *Zeitensprünge*, p. 32.

²⁵ dazu auch Haden, *Taste*, p. 346: Convenience food „depends on a specialized flavour industry“.

²⁶ Bernward Selter, „Der satte Verbraucher“. Idole des Ernährungsverhaltens zwischen Hunger und Überfluß 1890-170, in: Peter Borscheid/Clemens Wischermann (eds.), *Bilderwelt des Alltags. Verbund in der Konsumgesellschaft des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 1995, pp. 190-221, p. 203. Klaus-Peter Ellerbrock, *Geschichte der deutschen Nahrungs- und Genußmittelindustrie 1750-1914*, Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag 1993, pp. 362-368.

²⁷ Janet L. Wolff, *Kaufen Frauen mit Verstand?*, Düsseldorf: Econ 1956, pp. 133-135.

²⁸ Kraft Tomato Ketchup (1954) was the first ‘deli product’ on the West German market and a genuine innovation for the German consumer. In the beginning it was only available in selected shops. Ulrich Wittig, *Die Unternehmensentwicklung von Kraft Foods in Deutschland unter besonderer Berücksichtigung internationaler Akquisitionen zwischen 1978 und 1998*, PhD thesis Bielefeld 2007, p. 202. See Michael Wildt, *Privater Konsum in Westdeutschland in den 1950er Jahren*, in: Axel Schildt/Arnold Sywottek, *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau. Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 1950er Jahre*, Dietz Bonn 1993, pp. 275-289, here pp. 278-279.

²⁹ Wittig, *Kraft Foods*, p. 194; see also Hirschfelder/Portz, *Tütensuppe*, p. 142.

³⁰ Wittig, *Kraft Foods*, p. 202. With its canned „Ravioli in tomato sauce“ Maggi was the first to launch a ready-to-serve-noodle dish in 1958. This can be seen as an response to the early mass tourism with Italy as preferred destination.

³¹ Hans-Gerd Conrad, *Werbung und Markenartikel am Beispiel der Markenfirma Dr. Oetker von 1891 bis 1975 in Deutschland*, Berlin 2002, p. 58.

interesting product innovation for the West German market.³² Surveys on the baking habits of German housewives had shown that round about 53 percent of all German housewives baked often, i.e. at least once in a fortnight. Almost 30 percent of the women interviewed stated that they liked to bake, but that they were not confident about the success of their baking efforts [“hinsichtlich des Gelingens des Backwerks unsicher”]. The supply of cake mixes was at first mainly targeted at this clientele.³³ According to a survey from the year 1967, housewives had a particularly strong wish for more expertise in the field of baking.³⁴ At the same time, a continual turning away from self-made cake over the 1950s is reflected in the money spent on cake and pastries, while the use of flour declined by half. Making cake is quite a laborious and time-consuming activity. That is why the new commodities from the Dr. Oetker product line, as for example the clear flan jelly, enjoyed increasing popularity since 1950. Fruit flans left housewives a feeling of capability which included self-made cake. In this context, Michael Wildt has pointed out the conflict between making things oneself and using industrially manufactured products which formed in the 1950s in consequence of the mechanization of kitchens and an increasing usage of tinned foods and other industrially processed readymade products.³⁵

However, „baking intensity“ [Backintensität], which meant the frequency of baking in the single households, decreased from 54 percent in 1951 to 49 percent in 1962. This, as Conrad points out, mirrored a trend according to which “home made baking went out of fashion”.³⁶ So advertising for the ready-to-bake cake mixes, which Kraft was the first company to introduce in Germany in 1965, was made with “Geling-Garantie” [guaranteed success]. Those products offered baking ingredients in the right mixing ratio and thus made the preparation considerably easier. Furthermore, it made making one’s own cake possible even for people with limited domestic competence.

And it was not only traditional food companies like Kraft or Oetker; manufacturers of detergents and cleaning agents like Henkel and P&G became stunningly interested in the foods business in the 1960s. They saw it as a possibility for diversification as the markets were thought to be “promising” [aussichtsreich].³⁷ In addition to that, corresponding processing techniques, namely in the field of dehydration, were used in both industries, foods and detergents as well. For example, the process of “spray drying” in the production of detergents is similar to that used in food manufacturing technology. It came into use in 1909, especially for the production of classic instant drink powders. A liquid in a highly concentrated form is dispersed in a spraying tower in very small drops and thoroughly mixed with hot air. The drying takes place while the product is falling, and the dry powder can be carried out of the facility via a pneumatic system.³⁸ Another method is freeze drying, which

³² HA 153/21, report, 6.9.1962 and 22.1.1963.

³³ HA 153/27, daily minutes, 14.5.1965.

³⁴ Otto Neuloh/Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg, Ernährungsfehlverhalten im Wohlstand. Ergebnisse einer empirisch-soziologischen Untersuchung in heutigen Familienhaushalten, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 1979, pp. 160-161.

³⁵ Wild, Fresswelle, p. 219; *ibid.*, Konsumgesellschaft, pp. 80-82.

³⁶ Conrad, Werbung und Markenartikel, p. 57.

³⁷ “P&G’s Offensive Defense”, in: Forbes, 15.4.1965.

³⁸ Escher, Lebensmittelverarbeitung, p. 99.

has also been a traditional procedure for processing potatoes. It has been used for the production of soluble coffee extract since the 1960s.³⁹ Thus the American soap manufacturer Procter & Gamble from Cincinnati has been committed in the convenience food business since the 1950s. In 1956, P&G bought shares of Duncan Hines, the market leader in cookie and cake mix products.⁴⁰ Its German competitor Henkel, too, started watching the various efforts of other companies for producing ready-to-bake cake mixes and other foods like mashed potatoes and instant coffee closely in the early 1960s but withdraw all too early from these plans.⁴¹

In contrast to those goods produced before the Second World War, products like those mentioned above now combined good quality, palatability and aroma with aspects of convenience: ready-to-serve products were thought to be the “Kundendienst der Zukunft” [service of the future].⁴² In his studies of West Germany after the Second World War, Michael Wildt has proven that the usage of foods reflects specific changes in the practice of consumption. For example, the increased purchasing of cakes and pastries showed that baking was less and less done in the households themselves. The use of fresh potatoes also decreased, while industrially processed foods like potato dumplings and mash found their way into more and more kitchens. At the beginning of the 1980s, 80 percent of all consumed foods were industrially manufactured in highly industrialized countries.⁴³

Target Groups and Consumption

Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg has called the period between 1948 and 1965 the “zweite Ernährungsrevolution” [second nutritional revolution]. He says it marked the breakthrough to today’s prosperity of the masses.⁴⁴ What role did convenience products play in this development?

In spite of an increasingly diversified range of high-quality products the spread of ready meals in West Germany remained rather limited for a long time. Their market share rose from 5 percent in 1970 to 14 percent in 1989.⁴⁵ Jakob Tanner puts this down to a particular “resistance to change” [“Veränderungsresistenz”] as far as eating habits are concerned.⁴⁶ This

³⁹ Dollinger-Woidich, *Fertignahrung*, p. 72. Freeze dried instant meals had been already given to the US-troops in Vietnam.

⁴⁰ Davis Dyer/Frederick Dalzell/Rowena Olegario, *Rising Tide: Lessons from 165 Years of Brand Building at Procter & Gamble*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004, p. 94. Also: “P&G’s Offensive Defense”, in: *Forbes*, 15.4.1965.

⁴¹ HA 153/25, daily minutes, 7.12.1964.

⁴² Wittig, *Kraft Foods*, p. 200.

⁴³ Wild, *Privater Konsum*, p. 280.

⁴⁴ Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg, *Zum Problemfeld Urbanisierung und Ernährung*, in: *ibid.*, *Durchbruch zum modernen Massenkonsum. Lebensmittelmärkte und Lebensmittelqualität im Städtewachstum des Industriezeitalters*, Münster: Cöpppenrath 1987, pp. 1-36, pp. 35-36; *ibid.* Et al., *Fleischextrakt*, p. 42; also Michael Wildt, *Das Ende der Bescheidenheit. Wirtschaftsrechnungen von Arbeitnehmerhaushalten in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1950-1963*, in: Klaus Tenfelde (ed.), *Arbeiter im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1991, pp. 573-610. Tanner, *Modern Times*, p. 31.

⁴⁵ Quot. Detlef Stender, *Vom Leben der toten Dinge. Schränke zum Kühlen als historische Quelle*, in: *Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt* (ed.), *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte. Zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot 1995, pp. 157-173; p. 165.

⁴⁶ Tanner, *Modern Times*, 48.

can also be found for the spread of convenience products in West German households after the Second World War. The image of those foods was still impaired because they had been used in times of hardship and shortages.

Furthermore, ready meals interfered with a traditional stereotype which defined nutrition and housekeeping as classic responsibilities of a housewife. This is the reason why ready meals were, with a very few exceptions, not approved of in conservative single breadwinner households. As Teuteberg explains, the “good housewife” of 19th-century middle class families remained the social model for nutrition. This is the reason why elder housewives proved to be particularly adverse to innovations in the field of food preparation, especially because of their suspiciousness about industrially processed foods, but also about politically motivated supply crises which made self-supply preferable.⁴⁷ Janet L. Wolff, a specialist in marketing, pointed out in 1956 that, even in the USA, many women opposed foods that could be prepared quickly and easily because they made them feel they neglected their duties as housewives and that they worked less diligently than men.⁴⁸ However, it was not only the factual shortening of working time, but also the connotations linked with those products that caused a refusal of them. It was feared that the term ‘ready meal’ could inspire associations with a housewife who was comfortable and thus lazy and, in this way, damage their reputation.

Such reservations presented manufacturers of ready foods with a difficult marketing situation. Younger women were most likely to become the target group for the market to be developed whereas elder housewives stuck to the traditional ideals of the value of female housekeeping. So the two practices, making things oneself and using industrial products, were determined by different meanings and contexts of experiences particular to certain generations as well as by the desire to save time and to make housekeeping easier.⁴⁹ It was only young housewives who lived in urban areas who appeared to be less susceptible to such reservations⁵⁰ while eating habits remained the same for a much longer time especially in rural areas where familial forms of life stayed intact very long. Manufacturers of industrially processed foods acted in response to the generational change in German households. Dr. Oetker, for example, created the advertising character of an ideal young housewife who young consumers were thought to be able to identify with. With reference to this shift of generation Conrad cites an advertising copy from the year 1955: “Die langjährige, erfahrene Hausfrau wird uns sicher gern verzeihen, wenn wir uns hier einmal besonders an die junge Hausfrau wenden. Denn, was ihr schon längst zu einer Selbstverständlichkeit geworden ist, das will ja Renate (und ihre vielen jungen Kolleginnen) erst lernen! ... [Renate] ... ist die nette, adrette junge Hausfrau, die immer kurz vor Landeschluß zum Kaufmann kommt und alles einkauft, was sie für ihren kleinen Haushalt braucht. Renate ist – wie viele Millionen anderer junger Frauen – berufstätig. Das ist oft nicht ganz einfach – ... Eines aber ist doch auch allen diesen jungen, modernen Frauen gemeinsam: Sie stehen fest und sicher im Alltagsleben und wissen, wie man sich die Arbeit verkürzen und die Freizeit verlängern kann ...” [Housewives with long years’

⁴⁷ Teuteberg, *Nahrungsmittelverzehr*, pp. 338-339. Dollinger-Woidich, *Fertignahrung*, pp. 224-225.

⁴⁸ Wolff, *Kaufen Frauen mit Verstand?*, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁹ Wildt, *Konsumgesellschaft*, p. 161; also Spiekermann, *Zeitensprünge*, p. 39.

⁵⁰ Neuloh/Teuteberg, *Ernährungsfehlverhalten*, p. 139. Wildt, *Konsumgesellschaft*, p. 83.

experience will hopefully forgive us if, today, we wish to appeal to young housewives in particular. Because things that have long since become matters of course to them, are things that Renate (and her many young colleagues) still wants to learn. Renate is the nice and neat young housewife who always goes to the grocer's just before closing time to buy everything she needs for her small household. Renate is working – like millions of other young women. That is not always easy – ... however, there is one thing that all those young, modern women have in common: they face their everyday life firmly and self-assured and they know how to keep their work short and to expand their free time].⁵¹

So convenience products benefit from a trend which sociologists would call the emergence of a leisure society.⁵² Saving time in preparing food was mainly among younger women aimed at gaining more free time. As far as this was concerned convenience products afforded useful advertising arguments. This is true, for example for campaigns for puddings without cooking by Dr. Oetker, which became big sellers as “Ein-Minuten-Krem” [one minute mousse] or “Mini-Zeit-Pudding” [quick time pudding].⁵³ The increase in female occupation since the 1960s led, for one thing, to a rise in the buying power. Then again, less time remained in the families for the duties of housekeeping. New eating habits, which were influenced by the necessity to save time and to make kitchen work easier, emerged. The 1960s as a period of intense changes in social and economic structures and of a shift of generation were of an importance that can hardly be overrated for the development of the convenience food sector. This is also reflected in the results of surveys by the “Allensbacher Institut für Demoskopie” [Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Polling] from the 1950s, according to which stock cubes were used at least from time to time in the households of more than half of the people interviewed while many people still opposed those products because of their bad memory of the surrogate character they had during and after the war. In the long run, industrially processed foods have had a radical influence on eating habits in Germany.⁵⁴

In the mid-1970s, Otto Neuloh and Hans-Jürgen Teuteberg examined the attitudes of West German housewives towards convenient products relating to ready-to-serve-products as well as to semi-processed food such as tinned and frozen products. They differentiated their analysis into three evaluations scales, namely:

- 1) economic and rational factors like saving of time, costs and effort,
- 2) physiological and health factors like maintaining health and fitness, nourishing and filling qualities, and
- 3) socio-cultural functions of eating, i.e. aspects of conviviality and culture.

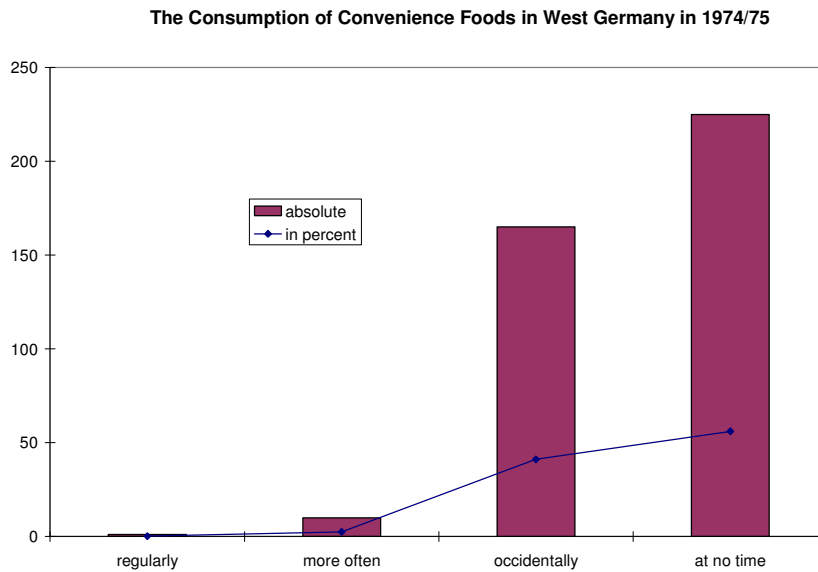
⁵¹ Conrad, Werbung und Markenartikel, p. 113. Dollinger-Woidich, Fertignahrung. Cf. Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe*, Cambridge/Mass.: HUP 2005, pp. 416-417.

⁵² Prahl/ Setzwein, *Soziologie der Ernährung*.

⁵³ Conrad, Werbung und Markenartikel, pp. 116-117. Also Lutz Aubry, *Von der tiefgefrorenen Erbse zum kompletten Feinschmecker Menü*, in: Wolfgang Protzner (ed), *Vom Hungerwinter zum kulinarischen Schlaraffenland. Aspekte einer Kulturgeschichte des Essens in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Wiesbaden: Steiner 1987, pp. 137-144m, p. 138.

⁵⁴ Quot. Neuloh/Teuteberg, *Ernährungsfehlverhalten*, p. 135.

According to their results, even at that time there is nothing more important than preparing tasty and varied meals in order to enhance the physical well-being and fitness of their families for more than 40 percent of housewives, irrespective of their age, social class and whether they were employed or not.⁵⁵ They say that the desire for appreciation could be immediately derived from this and that “gutes Kochen” [good cooking] was a form of distinguishing oneself and of self-affirmation especially for women without jobs.⁵⁶ This is the reason why the consumption of convenient products in West German households was rejected by more than 50 percent of the interviewees (Fig.).



Source: Neuloh/Teuteberg, Ernährungsfehlverhalten, p. 136.

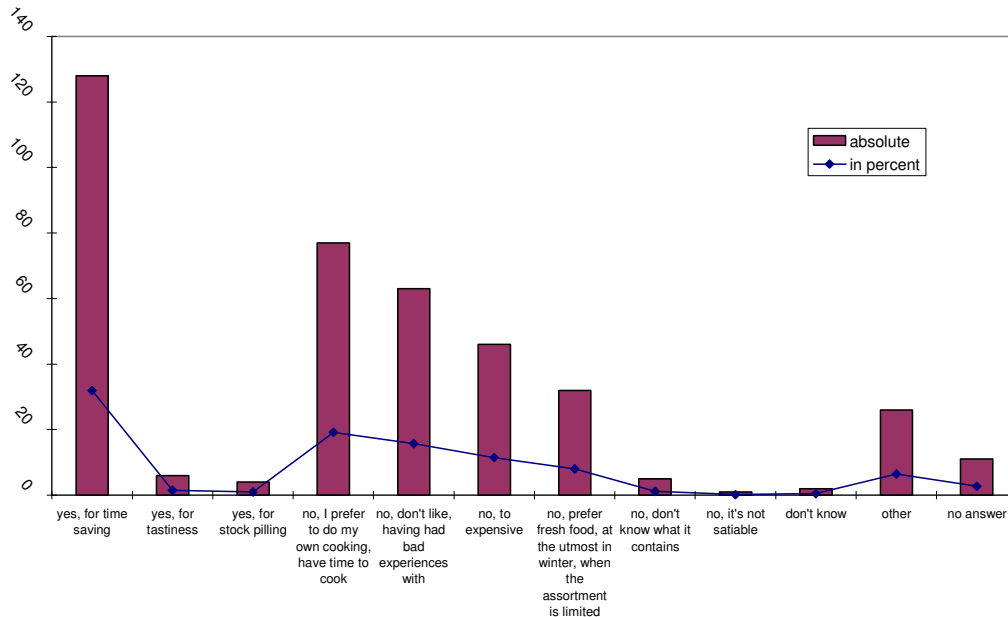
In Neuloh and Teuteberg’s assessment economic needs like saving time and effort came last. It seemed to be quite irrelevant to most of the women interviewed that the preparation of meals took only little time and effort. Rationalization was not yet a priority in kitchens at the time. A tendency to wish to save time and effort through mechanization and better arrangement could only be found among younger and working women, whereas the desire for social acknowledgement for their cooking was not as pronounced in this clientele. The economy of time was the most important argument for those women among the interviewed who used ready meals regularly. Younger housewives were no longer willing to spend hours in the kitchen in order to take care of the physical well-being of their families as their mothers and grandmothers had done (Fig.).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Neuloh/Teuteberg, Ernährungsfehlverhalten, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Hirschfelder/Portz, Tütensuppe, p. 142.

⁵⁷ Neuloh/Teuteberg, Ernährungsfehlverhalten, p. 106.

Reasons for and against the Consumption of Convenience foods 1974/75



Source: Neuloh/Teuteberg, Ernährungsfehlverhalten, p. 136.

Among the broadening range of convenience products from the 1960s onward canned vegetables were most popular, followed by frozen vegetables, canned fish, tinned fruit, frozen meat and canned meat and meat spread. In contrast to that, only 6 percent of all households used ready meals in tins or glasses. It was mainly young people under the age of 20, self-employed persons or people who lived in densely industrial areas that were the most important consumers of industrially prepared foods. All in all however, the refusal of ready meals prevailed. Round about 23 percent of the people interviewed had never or hardly ever eaten them. More than half of the housewives interviewed did not have confidence in ready meals yet. They used them rather as “Ersatz” [substitutes].⁵⁸ Fresh foods were still more appreciated so that industrially processed foods were thought to have more disadvantages than advantages. Poorer taste, artificial character, ingredients that could not be checked, and bad experience with quality, prices and unsatisfactory filling qualities were the main reasons for this judgment.⁵⁹

Conclusion

In the USA convenience food products were among the precursors of the culture of consumption of a throw-away society since the 1920s.⁶⁰ In contrast to that, they were criticized as surrogates of minor value in Germany until long after the Second World War. Contrary to what could have been expected, it was not so much the transnational transfer of the American culture of consumption to Europe, but rather spin-offs of food innovations from

⁵⁸ Neuloh/Teuteberg, Ernährungsfehlverhalten, p. 137.

⁵⁹ Neuloh/Teuteberg, Ernährungsfehlverhalten, p. 138.

⁶⁰ Vgl. dazu Prahl/Setzwein, Soziologie der Ernährung, p. 198. According to this it was the late 19th century which provided the basis for the development of a “snack culture” for example with the implementation of ‘fish ‘n chips’ restaurants in England.

the military to the civilian sector which had influenced the development of processing techniques and product forms in the convenience sector since the 19th century. This is not only true for dried goods but also, for example, for canned and frozen foods as well. It was not least this fact which might have influenced the attitude towards ready meals in the negative in German households. Convenience as a new rhetoric of corporate marketing was necessary to pave a successful way into the market for such products. This image could be based on the changes in society during the 1960s which go back to an increase in wealth and to the generational change and which laid the base especially for different attitudes toward free time and mobility.

So even if, as has been shown, the roots for the processing techniques for convenience products can be found in the late 19th century, the consumer benefit of those products has radically changed in the course of the 20th century. The main consumer benefit and actual added value of convenience products was no longer to bridge spaces of time, which had been the intention of preserving foods in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but the saving of time.⁶¹ It was precisely time-consuming and complex work like cleaning vegetables, which had to be on the schedule for preparing foods in running the household before, that could now be sourced out to centralized factory production and thus saved in housekeeping. As far as the range of products, processing technologies and marketing were concerned, the markets for food and luxury foods received important input from the war provisions industry after the Second World War.⁶² This influence did not come exclusively from the United States although novel eating habits formed much earlier there due to an automation of the production at an early stage. After 1945, those eating habits spread in the rest of the Western World as well thanks to transnational market expansion and internationalizing marketing activities.

⁶¹ Tanner, *Modern Times*, p. 35.

⁶² Michael Wildt, Abschied von der "Freßwelle" oder: die Pluralisierung des Geschmacks. Essen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der fünfziger Jahre, in: Alois Wierlacher/Gerhard Neumann/Hans Jürgen Teuteberg (eds.), *Kulturthema Essen. Ansichten einer neuen Wissenschaft*, Berlin 1993, pp. 211-225. Christoph Wagner, *Fast schon Food: die Geschichte des schnellen Essens*, Bastei: Bergisch Gladbach 2001. Hans P. Mollenhauer, *von Omas Küche zur Fertigpackung*. Aus der Kinderstube der Lebensmittelindustrie, Gernsbach: Kasimir Katz 1988.