

Study of consumer preferences for domestic vs imported food products

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ABSTRACT

Romania is among the top twenty countries worldwide in terms of production of meat, livestock and prices of fruits and vegetables. Due to the dynamics of consumer preferences for food products, lately, many foreign producers have entered the domestic market, generating a quick diversification of food products range. Consumer purchasing decisions are influenced significantly by the intrinsic quality of the products, information on the label, appearance, price and packaging. In terms of the increasingly diversified food products, the present study seeks to highlight the consumer preferences for domestic and imported food products. The paper is structured in three parts. The first part, through documentary synthesis and analysis of statistical data (Voineagu V., 2007), make a market analysis of the main categories of food. In this part are analyzed the production, the consumption and the volume of imports and exports. The second part of the study is a marketing research (Manole V and Stoian M, 2004), which examines the consumer preferences for different categories of domestic and imported food products through a questionnaire survey administered to a representative sample of 200 people. The last part of the study shows the conclusions of the analysis carried out and a set of pragmatic proposals for matching the supply of food products to the needs and preferences of consumers.

Keywords: food products, market research, consumer preferences, market analysis, purchasing decision

1. Food products market analysis

The first part of the study aimed to analyze the food products market in Romania, in terms of production, consumption and the volume of imports and exports. Following the analysis, the market of food products is varied. For the analysis were considered meat market, milk market, fruit and vegetable market and grain market.

In terms of exports and imports of agricultural products, Romania has a deficit as exports are less than imports (Romanian Statistic Yearbook, 2012). The lowest rate was recorded in fruit export, where the export quantity is ranging between 1-2 tons for cherries and peaches.

Productions of meat, milk, fruits and vegetables were oscillating, with no great differences in the last years.

Pork and poultry has the largest amount consumed; in 2011 it was recorded a consumption of 28.7 kg / capita for pork and 16.5 kg / capita for poultry. Beef meat consumption recorded in 2011 an average of 5.2 kg / capita and mutton goats recorded the lowest consumption of 2.2 kg / capita (Romanian Statistic Yearbook, 2011, 2012).

Average annual consumption / capita for milk and milk products was about 227.7 liters / capita in 2011 (Romanian Statistic Yearbook, 2011, 2012).

According to the analysis, the most consumed vegetables are potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, peppers and watermelon. (Romanian Statistic Yearbook, 2011, 2012)

Apples are the most consumed fruit by the population, followed by plums, peaches and nectarines, cherries and apricots. (Romanian Statistic Yearbook, 2011, 2012)

We believe that the main causes of low consumption of local food products are the low capacity of local producers and processors to attract investment funds for modernization, in order to compete with foreign competitors, the low level of subsidies granted to primary production and lack of funds for promotion of domestic food products.

2. Marketing research over the buying decision for domestic or import food products

Next in the study was conducted a marketing research, using a questionnaire survey on a representative sample of 200 people in Bucharest (according to sample formula of Amerein, P., Barczyk, D., Evrard, R., Rohard, F., Sibaud, B. & Weber, P., 2002), in order to find out the consumer preferences regarding the purchase of domestic or imported and the main factors that influence their purchasing decisions. The results of the analysis are presented below.

Asked what kind of food products they consume, 47% responded that they prefer imported products, while 53% prefer domestic products. They consume domestic products because of information on the label, the price and the fact that they are more tasty than imported ones.

Figure 1: The buying preferences



Source: Own data collection

In terms of product type, 40 women responded that they prefer local products of meat and 46 men prefer imported ones. 75% of them said that the most important criteria are the freshness and taste. The remaining 25% said they prefer imported products due to the wide variety in terms of packaging and control of hygiene/preparation.

52 women prefer domestic fruits and vegetables, while 50 men prefer imported ones. The majority of respondents prefer the local ones because they purchase it directly from the producer, in a larger quantity at a lower price and consume them unprocessed.

In terms of the criteria of buying food products, the top is: look (3.53), price (3.38), followed by information on the label (3.28), and the packaging (3.27). 30 women consider look the most

important product criteria that guide when buying food, while 18 men consider the label information the most important criteria. Price is considered a very important criteria when buying food by 26 women and 24 men.

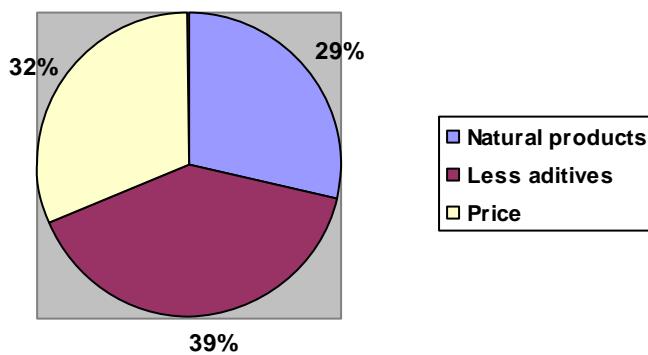
Figure 2. The criteria of buying decision



Source: Own data collection

Talking about the reason for buying domestic products the first place is that they are natural products (6.24), they contain fewer preservatives (2.32), and finally that have a lower price (2.12). 43 Romanian women buy domestic products because have an affordable price, while 29 men buy domestic products because they are natural, less processed. 48 women buy domestic products because they contain fewer preservatives, while only 32 men answered the same.

Figure 3. The reason of buying domestic food products



Source: Own data collection

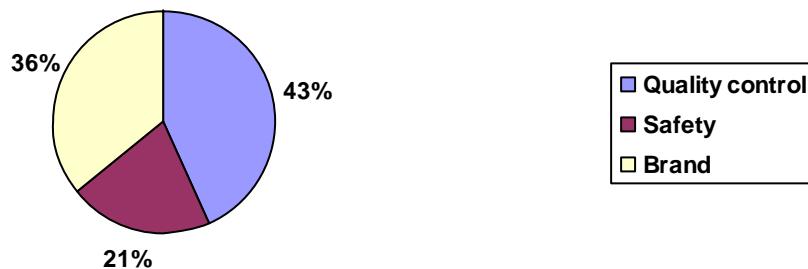
28.5 % of respondents do not consume foreign products because they prefer the Romanian ones that are natural, less processed. 40% motivates that domestic products contain less preservatives than imported products, and finally 31.5 % consider the lower price a reason for buying Romanian food products.

On the other hand, the reasons why the respondents prefer imported products are: the good quality control (2.46), followed by safety from the point of view of hygiene (2.42), and the brand reputation (2.04).

42 women buy foreign products because they trust the reputation of the company, while 20 men buy foreign products because they are safe from the point of view of hygiene. 46 women buy

foreign products because they have a good quality control, while 40 men buy imported products because of their good quality control.

Figure 4. The reason of buying imported food products



Source: Own data collection

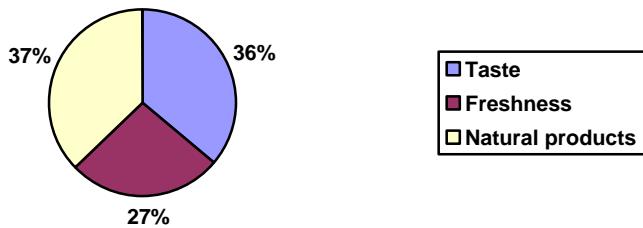
Good quality control leads 43 % of respondents to purchase and consume foreign products, while 21 % consider that safety in terms of hygiene is a reason for buying foreign products rather than domestic ones. Also, 36% of respondents trust the good reputation makes them buy and consume foreign products.

The respondents surveyed said that the most important strengths of Romanian products are: the taste (3.34), the freshness (2.66) and finally the fact that most of them are natural (2.64).

38 women said that the most important strength of the Romanian products is taste, while 32 men think the same thing. 48 women and 30 men believed that being natural is their strongest point. 26 women said that a strength of the Romanian products is that they are fresh, while 26 men considered the same.

36 % of respondents consider the taste a strength against foreign products, which are bland, tasteless. 27 % think that freshness is a strength against foreign products. The remaining 37% believe that the strongest point is that Romanian products are natural.

Figure 5. Domestic products strengths

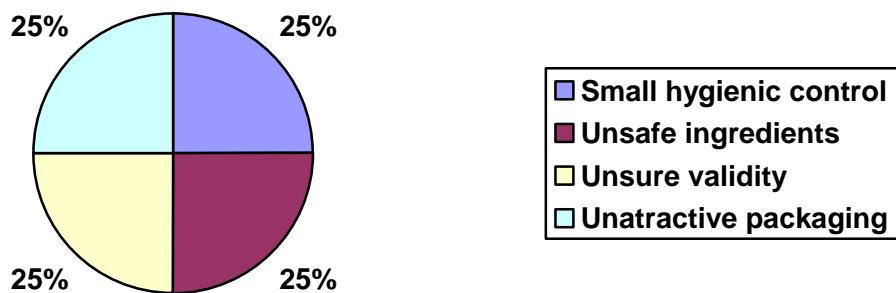


Source: Own data collection

According to the respondents, the most important weakness of domestic products are small hygienic control (3.73), unsafe ingredients used (3.52), the shelf life is uncertain (3.24) and unattractive packaging (3.22).

24 women responded that the unattractive package is one of the weak points of Romanian products, while 22 men deemed to be the less control in terms of hygiene / preparation. 27 women considered that the unsure validity is a weakness, while 24 men considered a weakness the uncertainty about the ingredients used.

Figure 6. Domestic products weaknesses



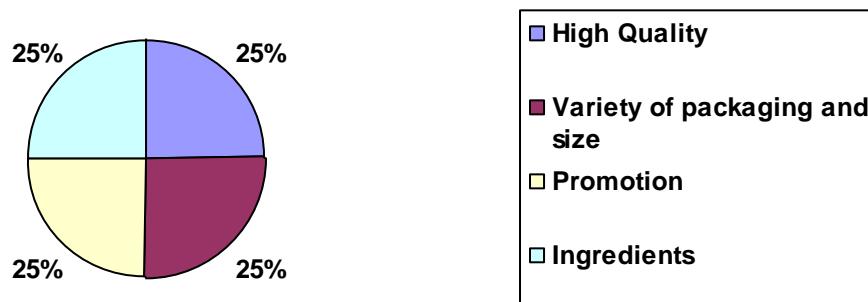
Source: Own data collection

The small hygienic control makes 25 % of respondents not to consume Romanian products, while the uncertain about the ingredients used leads 25 % to look carefully when purchasing products. Another 25 % said that the uncertain validity is a reason not to trust the Romanian products. The unattractive packaging leads 25 % of respondents not to purchase Romanian food products.

Asked about the strengths of the foreign products, the respondents said that those are: the high

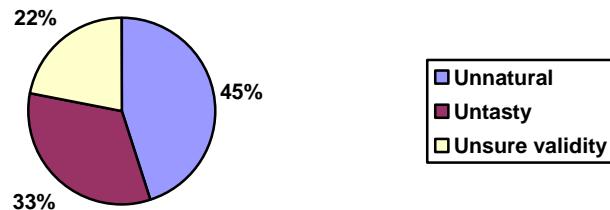
quality control (3.71), the ingredients used (3,7), the variety on packaging and portioning and the attractive advertising, which were in the same place with a 3.45 rank. 24 women and 26 men responded that the attractive advertising is a strength of foreign products while 27 women responded that variety of portioning and packaging is a strength of foreign products. 21 men considered a strong point the ingredients used, which are all marked on the label. 28 women consider quality control a strength of foreign products, while 22 men consider the same.

Figure 7. Imported products strengths



Source: Own data collection

Figure 8. Imported products weaknesses



Source: Own data collection

For 25 % of respondents, quality control / hygiene makes consume foreign products rather than the Romanian. Ingredients found on the label determine 25 % of respondents to consume foreign products. 25 % of respondents answered that the variety on packaging and portioning is a strength of foreign products, and finally another 25 % consider the attractive advertising a strength of imported products.

Talking about the weaknesses of foreign food products, the first place is the fact that are unnatural (3.39), un-tasty (3.20) and unsure validity (3.08).

29 women responded that a weakness of foreign products is that they are artificial, while 23 men consider the taste bad an important weakness. 28 women and 27 men consider that foreign products are uncertain about validity in consumption.

In relative values, 45% of respondents consider that the most important weakness of the imported products is that they are unnatural, 33% consider that the most important weakness is the bad taste, and 22 the unsure validity.

CONCLUSION

Following the survey, it was revealed a series of conclusions that highlight the current market situation of domestic and imported food products and consumer preferences for these categories. It was found from the questionnaire, that the majority of respondents said they prefer domestic products from Romanian manufacturers.

Domestic and imported products were almost equal proportions in terms of consumer preferences, such as: 53% of the people surveyed answered that they prefer local products and 47% prefer those imported.

The most important criteria that are taken into account in the purchasing decision are the appearance of the products, information on the packaging and the price.

Domestic products are most commonly acquired from traditional product fairs, followed by hypermarkets, supermarkets and a smaller number of respondents purchase their food products from homesteads.

The amount of money allocated for the purchase of food monthly is generally less than 1000 lei, while a lower class of people allocate to food amounts over 1000 lei per month. Reasons for acquiring Romanian products are that domestic products are natural, and that they contain less preservatives than foreign ones.

Foreign products are purchased because they have good quality control and are safe in terms of health and hygiene, but also because of the brand reputation. Taste, freshness and being natural are the strengths of Romanian products. The values characterizing the Romanian products are tradition and sense of belonging.

However, the intense and attractive promotion of imported food products, leads to an increased consumer confidence in the reputation of foreign brands, which influences their purchasing decisions and thus lowers the market share of domestic food products.

To counteract this phenomenon manifested lately, some local companies (ex: from dairy or meat industry) created messages and adverts that surround products in a story that expresses freshness, taste of childhood, the taste that fits with nature.

However, we believe that the efforts to promote Romanian brands need to continue and intensify, in order to stimulate mainly the consumption of domestic food products, for contributing to the economic growth of the country and to ensure food security and safety for population in the medium and long term.

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