
CONSUMER WILLINGNESS TO EAT TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS

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Abstract

Traditional products are becoming increasingly popular both on domestic and foreign markets. It has also been noted that the interest in high-quality products has grown, and traditional products by excellence are quality products. Consumers have grown their demands, and this should be an incentive for investors to invest in food production capacities, especially in the field of agricultural products.

The purpose of this research was to find out how consumers view traditional products, the intensity with which they are consuming this type of products, and the type of products that present interest to them.

Keywords: Traditional products, Regional gastronomy, Intensity of consumption, Rural environment

JEL Classification: L80, C1, Q1

Introduction

Gastronomy studies various cultural components that have nutrition and food in general as a basic element. Thus, it is related to the Arts of Beauty and the social sciences in terms of culture, and to natural sciences relating to the digestive apparatus of the human body. Popovici affirms that "The culture of a people can be known through the open window of his kitchen" (Popovici, 2010). The cuisine of a people does not come out of the blue. It is a sum. It gathers and synthesizes the entire civilization of that people. Everything is reflected in gastronomy: history, geography, influences of other civilizations, population psychology, technology. Gastronomy breathes in its own rhythm that has been created by climate, resources, traditions, religions. Culinary art is the art of food preparation.

Sosa Ingredients affirms that gastronomy "is one of our most cultivated pleasures, we love trying, tasting and cooking". People regularly enjoy discovering new ingredients, new products and like to test new recipes and by doing that they discover the locals through cuisine (Sosa Ingredients S.L, 2018). Gastronomy is also considered an essential aspect of traveler's satisfaction (Galvez, et al., 2017).

This category of products is very important for Romania and is an opportunity for economic growth, especially in isolated or disadvantaged rural areas, if they are addressed through concerted strategic measures.

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Literature review

According to RNDR (Rețeaua Natională de Dezvoltare Rurală, 2015) traditional product is represented by food produced on national territory and for which local raw materials are used, which does not contain food additives, which has a traditional recipe, a way of production and / or processing and a traditional technological process and which distinguishes itself from other similar products belonging to the same category.

According to the Regulation (EC) no. 510 of 20 March 2006, traditional products can be protected at Community level (Ministerul Agriculturii și Dezvoltării Rurale, 2013). The registration of quality agricultural products and foodstuffs is seen as a way of supporting European producers in order to maintain their competitiveness and profitability (European Comision, 2016). These protected quality agricultural products and foodstuffs are categorized into three categories: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG). The fact that these products are produced ensures the protection of knowledge, skills, and local jobs, but also the development and economic growth of rural areas. Food produce locally represent strong elements of local identity and culture (Fernández-Ferrín, et al., 2018). Traditional food may also be used as vehicles of branding and marketing (Bardone & Spalvěna, 2019). The registration also grants name protection from misuse and imitation, help consumers in their decision of buying (Grunert & Aachmann, 2016). At European level Italy, France and Spain having the most products registered in these three categories mentioned above (Dias & Mendes, 2018).

Although there are a variety of food products registered at Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development at the moment in Romania there are 5 products recognized and protected at Community level (European Commission, 2019): “Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată” – PGI (2018); “Novac afumat din Țara Bârsei” – PGI (2017); “Salam de Sibiu” – PGI (2016); “Magiun de prune Topoloveni” – PGI (2011); “Telemea de Ibănești” – PDO (2016).

In addition to these, there are five others application registered for recognition at European level (European Commission, 2019): “Salată cu icre de ștriucă de Tulcea” – PGI (2018); “Telemea de Sibiu” – PGI (2018); “Cașcaval de Săveni” – PGI (2017); “Magiun de Prune Topoloveni” – PGI (2016); “Cârnați de Pleșcoi” – PGI (2016).

Panagou et al. asserts that traditional foods are those that have been consumed locally or regionally for an extended period of time and which could be considered as an extension of culture, history, geography, climate, agriculture and lifestyle. The necessary ingredients or recipes for the preparation of such preparations have been transmitted from one generation to the next and have eventually become part of the country's folklore (Panagou, et al., 2013). "If we have to eat and drink to live, why not make from it a passion" said Simion (Simon, 2013). Life demonstrates this fully and Romanian cuisine, with its variety, is extremely generous. Other specialists in the field underlines that food affects quality of life and health of modern man (Trichopoulou, et al., 2007). The close relationship between food and health is influenced by the natural and climatic conditions, the level of development of the economy, population occupations. Lew identify the times when tourist / consumer meets with food, namely in moments of recreation, exploration and experimentation of new tastes (Lew, 2013). In the moment of meting with food, tourists give importance on familiarity and on natural content of food (Balogh, et al., 2016) (Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017).

At the European Union level, the traditional products market has sales of over 14 billion euros annually (Popa, 2011). At Romanian level of these products are usually marketed in fairs and markets, but very few are displayed on the shelves of the big stores. These products, however, accumulate annual sales of over 100 million euros, according to statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Ministerul Agriculturii și Dezvoltării Rurale, 2013).

Just 27.3% of EU population lives in rural areas according to data from Eurostat, with Lithuania leading in this aspect with a 56.2% of population living in rural area while Malta is having only 0.2% people in rural area. For Romania 46.5% of the population is living in rural area, 24.6 % in towns and suburbs while 28.9% of them living in cities (Eurostat, 2019).

According to statistics regarding internet access at EU levels we can say that there is a small difference between cities and rural areas. A slightly difference was present in Bulgaria, Greece and Lithuania where the proportion of households with internet access was higher in cities compared with rural area (Eurostat, 2019). For Romania 81% of the households have internet access, percentage that put Romania on the bottom of the list.

Methodology of research

We conducted an exploratory research aimed at: identifying the categories of traditional products that are likely to have success if they will be promoted; identifying the right moment for promotion campaign; regional particularities associated with the different types of traditional products.

For our research we considered the following objectives: *1. Identify the consumption period for traditional products; *2. Gastronomy importance in choosing a holiday destination; *3. Frequency of consumption for different categories of traditional products; *4. Identify the association between different types of traditional products and the historic regions of Romania.

For each of the 4 suppositions we framed research hypotheses as follows: *1. Usually traditional products are consumed during the holidays (Easter, Christmas, etc.); *2. When choosing a destination, respondents also consider local gastronomy; *3. For the types of products envisaged is expected low consumption; *4. Respondents will frame the different types of traditional products, considering their previous experience;

In order to achieve the goal, we used the survey that is a primary data collection method. It's using the questionnaire as a data collection tool. This method was based on a self-administered questionnaire. We have used exploratory research, given the knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon investigated.

The surveyed collectivity was represented by people over the age of 18, both female and male, coming from different regions of the country, people with Facebook accounts, and which had access to Internet. The observation unit coincided with the sampling unit and was represented by the individual consumer. Spatial coordinates: the online platform www.isondaje.ro was used, a platform used also to build the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was applied at the beginning of April 2019 – for one week. This method was used as it involved low costs, because of the time resource limit, and due to possibility of obtaining a relevant amount of information related to the investigated field. There were no incomplete answers.

The usefulness of the research theme is confirmed by the limited number of studies in Romania on the issue of traditional products, the lack of a unanimous opinion on the content of the term, both among consumers and tenderers, and last but not least, the European consumers' increasing demand for traditional products in the region.

It was estimated that the questionnaire reached more than 3000 people. We conducted a pilot study on 263 respondents (table nr. 1). A response rate of 8.76% was estimated.

Table no. 1 Demographic data

Sex		Studies				The residence	
<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>High school</i>	<i>Post-secon</i>	<i>Unive rsity</i>	<i>Postg radua</i>	<i>Urban area</i>	<i>Rural area</i>
68%	32%	62.8%	6.8%	20.9%	9.5%	82.9%	17.1%
Number of respondents						263	
Average Respondents' Age						29.3 ani	

Source: realized by authors based on research (April 2019)

The sampling method used was snowball, non-probability method. The link to the questionnaire was distributed through the Facebook social network to different groups, so that as many respondents could access it, and they had the option to distributed it further to their friends for more answers.

The questionnaire contains 13 questions. We use different type of queries like: opinion, behavior, nominal queries. This type of question has been used to facilitate the filing process and subsequent for ese of centralization for collected data.

Results and debates

Of the total number of respondents, more than half have High school studies – 62.8% of them, University studies only 20.9%, while postgraduate studies have 9.5%. Most respondents came from urban areas, ~ 83% of them, most of them from Muntenia and Moldova. In terms of revenue ~35% of them earning between 1500 and 2499 lei, while ~32 of them earning less than 1500 lei. The rest of respondents earning more than 2500 lei (table 2).

Table 2. Characteristics of respondents

Region of origin							Revenue Category					
<i>Moldova</i>	<i>Transilvania</i>	<i>Muntenia</i>	<i>Oltenia</i>	<i>Dobrogea</i>	<i>Banat</i>	<i>Bucovina</i>	<i>Less than 1500 lei</i>	<i>Between 1500-2499 lei</i>	<i>Between 2500-3499 lei</i>	<i>Between 3500-4499 lei</i>	<i>Between 4500-5500 lei</i>	<i>Higher than 5500 lei</i>
13%	5%	66%	7%	5%	1%	3%	32 %	35%	13%	11%	4%	5%

Source: realized by authors based on research (April 2019)

Most of the respondents have parents that lives in urban areas 58%, while the rest are living in rural area.

Of interest was also the social status and the actual occupation of respondents. We found out that most of respondent were single 32%, 27% of them stated that they are in a relation, while 23% of the were married and with one child. The rest were unmarried, divorced or married without children (table 3).

Table 3. Characteristics of respondents

Social status							Actual occupation							
<i>Married without a child</i>	<i>Married with a child</i>	<i>Not married</i>	<i>With children</i>	<i>Alone</i>	<i>Divorced</i>	<i>In a relation</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>Private sector</i>	<i>Public sector worker</i>	<i>Public management position</i>	<i>Private sector – management</i>	<i>Entrepreneur</i>	<i>Pensioner</i>	<i>Unemployed</i>
3%	23%	10%	4%	32%	1%	27%	48%	19%	17%	2%	5%	3%	4%	2%

Source: realized by authors based on research (April 2019)

The majority of respondents mention that they are enrolled in a study program 48%, while 19 % of are working in the private sector, with 17% working in administration sector. Only 3% of them had their own business. Others were retired people, unemployed, while others have management positions in private or public sector 8%.

First objective for our research was to proper identify the periods when traditional products are consumed. According to research results we find out that people tend to give importance to religious holidays and that constitute a good opportunity for them to consume traditional products, 51% of them agreed to that, while 31% are strongly agree with this statement (fig. no. 1B). While they visit a destination, tourist tend to try 1-2 types of local dishes 49.6% of them, 31.3% are eating mostly local dishes while the rest of respondents eat products that are customs with or they don't eat traditional products at all (fig. no. 1A).

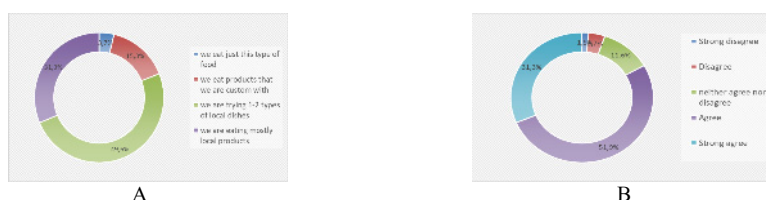


Fig. no. 1 A - Consumption of traditional products during holidays vacation
Fig. no. 1 B - Consumption of traditional products during religious holidays

Source: realized by authors based on research (April 2019)

The results in this case confirms the hypotheses stated at the beginning of the research project. People do consume traditional products during holidays, including religious holidays (Easter, Christmas).

Second objective of our research was to identify the importance given to gastronomy by tourist in choosing their places of holidays.

We found out that tourist gave relatively importance to local gastronomy when choosing a destination. The average answer was 3.26 on a scale from 1 to 5 (fig. no. 2A). The same situation we encounter when we compare the results for the importance of gastronomy in choosing a destination to celebrate religious holidays, on average the answers were situated at 3.43 on a scale from 1 to 5 (fig. no. 2B). This indicates that gastronomy is important, but it is not the decisive factor in choosing a destination.

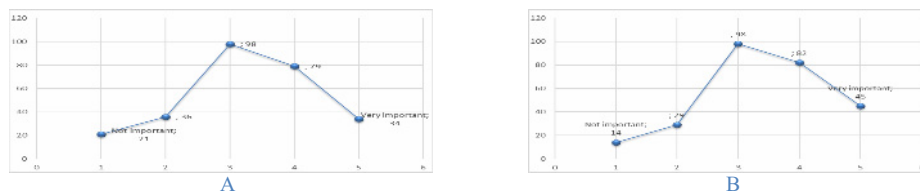


Fig. no. 2. A - Importance given to local gastronomy in choosing a destination
Fig. no. 2. B - Importance given to gastronomy in choosing a destination for religious holidays

Source: realized by authors based on research (April 2019)

The answers confirm the hypotheses, according to which respondents consider local gastronomy when choosing a destination. But the answers also highlight that local gastronomy is not a decisive factor in choosing a destination.

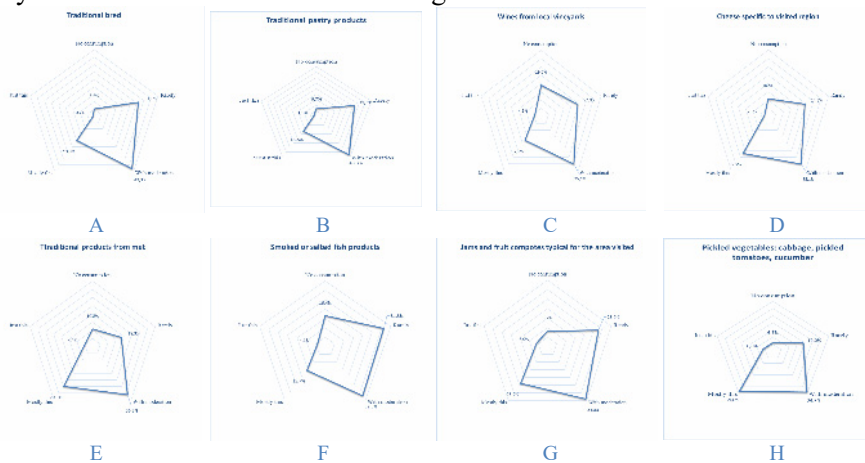


Fig. no. 3 Intensity of consumption for eight types of traditional products

Source: realized by authors based on research (April 2019)

Third objective of the research was to identify the frequency of consumption for: traditional bread (fig. no. 3A), traditional pastry products (poale-n brau, placinte dobrogene, etc) (fig. no. 3B), wines from local vineyards (fig. no. 3C), cheese specific to visited region (fig. no. 3D), traditional products from meat (jumari, slanina, pastrami afumata, etc) (fig. no. 3E), smoked or salted fish products (fig. no. 3F), jams and fruit compotes typical for the area visited (fig. no. 3G), pickled vegetables: cabbage, pickled tomatoes, cucumber (fig. no. 3H). We use a Likert scale to determine the intensity of consumption. We presented all these results in figure number 3.

In concordance with the answers we found that people eat traditional bread with moderation, 43% of them, while in strong connection with this they eat the same traditional pastry products. For both types of product respondents declare that they eat them rarely, 31% of them.

While on vacation tourist tend to drink local beverage, in this case wine, and to eat local cheeses. Also, we found that traditional products from meat are on the list of visitors, 30% of them declaring that they eat mostly this while they are on vacation.

Smoked fish product is not that popular among visitors, they declare that they eat this type of food rarely with 32% of them.

An important percentage of respondent, 28% of them, declare that they eat rarely jams and fruit compotes typically to area visited. In contrast visitors eat, in an important proportion, local vegetables, 34% of them declaring that they eat mostly this.

The answers invalidate the hypotheses assumed at the beginning of research, according to which visitors are consuming low quantities of local products. In state they declare that they eat at list with moderation local products. They eat mostly local vegetables, meat products local cheese. Only Smoked fish is not that in demand among visitors.

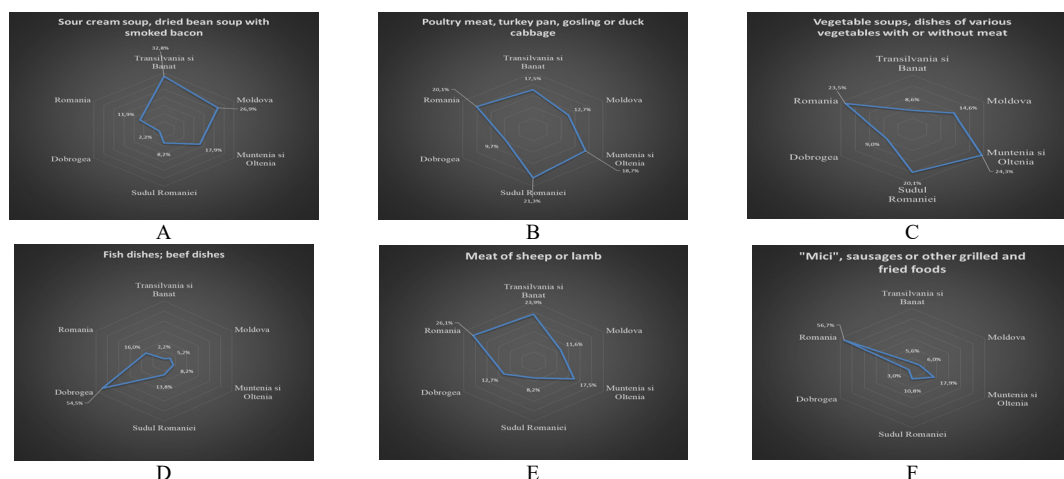


Fig. no. 4 The historic regions of Romania and their connection with specific dishes

Source: realized by authors based on research (April 2019)

Fourth objective of the research was to determine if there is a connection between different types of dishes with the historic regions of Romania. We've taken into consideration as historic regions Moldova, Transilvania and Banat, Muntenia and Oltenia, Dobrogea, South of Romania. We also took Romania as a country in case the respondents won't consider that the selected dishes can be associated with one of Romanian historical region. As dishes we chose the following ones: Sour cream soup, dried bean soup with smoked bacon (fig. no. 4A); Poultry meat, turkey pan, gosling or duck cabbage (fig. no. 4B); Vegetable soups, dishes of various vegetables with or without meat (fig. no. 4C); Fish dishes; beef dishes (fig. no. 4D); Meat of sheep or lamb (fig. no. 4E); "Mici", sausages or other grilled and fried foods (fig. no. 4F).

Regarding "**Sour cream soup, dried bean soup with smoked bacon**" we found that people associate this dish mostly with Transilvania, Banat and Moldova. They consider that it is a more regional dish. "**Poultry meat, turkey pan, gosling or duck cabbage**" is associated mostly with the south part of Romania and less with the northern parts. It is associated also with the concept of national dish.

"**Vegetable soups, dishes of various vegetables with or without meat**" is also associated with the regions from south of Romania, and less with the northern regions. The southern regions have a warmer climate that favors the growth of vegetables. People also agree that this kind of dishes are specific to Romania as a whole. "**Fish dishes; beef dishes**" are strongly connected with Dobrogea region. People made a connection with "Danube Delta" which is founded in this part of our country. "**Meat of sheep or lamb**" it is considered to have a stronger importance in Transilvania and Banat. It is also considered a national dish, Romania having a strong history in the growing of sheep. "**"Mici", sausages or other grilled and fried foods**" are strongly considered a national dish. Romanians are considered to be a meat lovers among gourmets (Ghimpeteanu, et al., 2015).

The results for this objective confirm the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of research that people associate different kinds of dishes accordingly to their previous experience, and also based on common knowledge about our country.

Results of this research clearly indicates that there is a demand for traditional products especially during religious holidays. Entrepreneurs who decide to have marketing campaign before this religious event could improve their sales. We also find that there is an important interest for local vegetable products, which also can constitute into an incentive for investors to invest in organic agriculture.

Conclusions

Along with organic products and products with designations of origin, traditional products are produced with a high level of valorization. Past years have been marked with a growing demand for this type of products and this could constitute a reason for further support of traditional products, this being one of the solutions to increase the competitiveness of the agricultural sector. According to results people tend to give importance to gastronomy when choosing a destination, they tend to consume local products during their journeys. Among the local products that they eat, local vegetables, wines and chees products are among the most consumed. Research show that “Mici” is recognized as a truly romanian dish.

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