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CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AT THE FOOD MARKET

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Abstract

Attitudes of consumers towards food depends on many attributes, which affects in different ways on their preferences, lead to acceptance and the selection of some products, and rejecting others. Development of an appropriate marketing strategy in the enterprise, requires knowledge of consumer tastes and preferences. An integral part of consumer behavior in the food market is raising funds to meet the needs, which can be regarded as a condition without which there is no process of consumption. These acquisition may take place on the market by consumer purchase, or with the exclusion of the market by the self-supply or acquisition of certain goods in the form of donations from legal persons or natural persons. In relation to food this general conclusion is especially relevant.

The article will cover the following issues regarding: place of purchase and the factors determining the choice of buying food, factors determining the behavior of buyers of food products as well as factors affecting the preferences of buyers of catering services.

Key words: consumer behaviour, food market, catering services,

Introduction

Consumer attitudes towards food depends on many attributes, which affects in different ways on their preferences and lead to acceptance and choice of one product, and rejecting others. The development of an appropriate marketing strategy requires knowledge of consumer tastes and preferences [15]. An integral part of consumer behavior in the food market is raising funds to meet needs, which can be regarded as a condition, of without the process of consumption do not exist. These acquisition can take place on the market by their purchase, or with the market exclusion by the the self-supply or acquisition of certain goods in the form of donations from legal persons or an individual persons. For food this general conclusion is especially relevant.

1. Places of purchase and factors influencing the choice of buying food

Retail trade is the last link in the distribution channel, and the resulting from this fact direct contact of different forms of organization of trade with customers, makes the consequences of its significant role in shaping of buying behavior and achieving satisfaction with their purchases. This fact was discovered long ago by sellers, whose ability to make contact with the customer, especially in the learning abilities of specific desires in the process of meeting felt needs is often decisive for achieving success in the market. Currently, vendor less and less determines the success of trading enterprises, because of its role has been taken over by "virtual instruments" or packaging. It performs especially for unmanned forms of trafficking, the function so called as "silent seller" to the by providing consumer important information

from his point of view, to rationalize its purchasing decisions. Today's consumer can realize purchases in various forms of trade organizations, which assortment, the prices of products, range of additional services, as well as the popularity resulting from this among the consumer is very diverse [10].

At the food market, we have seen the deepening of the fragmentation of consumer needs and there is a clear process of diversification in terms of consumers' expectations for specific foods. Increasingly, the distribution system changes in the direction as soon as possible to respond to the needs and desires of consumers. Hence, producers are trying to adjust the supply to meet changing needs, but also create more job-specific and often aggressive advertising, trying to convince consumers into it [9].

Offering food at point of sale, both producers and distributors should take into account the factors which characterize the modern consumer, who demonstrates an increased interest and concern about food safety, growing awareness of the relationship of food and nutrition to health and general welfare and the growing demand for disposable and convenient food that is easy to prepare for consumption and changing lifestyles, clearly differentiating various groups of consumers [3].

Hence, companies in the food market should pay close attention to trends in society, that boost food industry, which results in a variety of supply of food through the production of functional food, convenience food spread, adjusting production to consumer needs, or the sale of food in places in which the consumer can buy it somehow "accidentally", such as fuelling a car at a gas station.

According to the researches by K. Gutkowska and I. Ozimek [10] for the purchase of various food products, consumers, depending on the type of product prefer a different place of purchase. In the case of cereal products, sugar, flour, frozen foods, fats, beverages, consumers often buy them in hypermarkets / supermarkets. The meat and meat products usually buy in so called "one branch stores" (similar results in their study showed P. Łągiewka and M. Sznajder [14]), while products such as bread, milk, dairy products consumers usually purchase in a small local department store. Fruits, vegetables and eggs, consumers usually buy at markets or bazaars. As for the places where they shop most often regardless of the variety of assortment, most consumers bought in places in the order indicated below:

- small shops where the goods are given by salesman,
- small or medium-sized self-service stores and
- a large supermarket or a hypermarkets.

In places where consumers are least likely to buy food in the order are indicated below:

- a warehouse or store which sells wholesale quantities,
- market bazaar, street stalls,
- discount store and
- store of a specific company or industry.

Consumers choose different places to buy particular food products, but these preferences mainly differentiate socio-demographic and economic conditions, as well as place of residence. These are not the only one of the elements influencing the choice of places of purchase or organization of trade.

K. Gutkowska and I. Ozimek also showed that the most important factors determining the choice of buying food products in the order, are indicated below:

- freshness of products,
- the quality of the products,
- a wide range of assortment,
- friendly and courteous service,

- the cleanliness of the store,
- speed of service,
- low level of prices,
- easy orientation in the store,
- convenient opening hours of the store,
- proximity store
- the possibility of self-selection of products,
- the opportunity to purchase products other than food and
- easy access.

The factors that have the least impact on the choice of place of purchase in the order, are indicated below:

- the opportunity to taste,
- the option of paying by card,
- decoration of shop,
- the way of goods exposure and
- frequent sales promotions.

Such a distribution of the factors determining the choice of place of purchase can be kind of indirect explanation that the dominant role when it comes to the place of purchase are small local shops as the most common place to purchase food, where prices are not the lowest.

2. Factors determining the behavior of buyers of food products

The free market and freedom of movement of most food products that meets both the needs of a luxury and essential factor, put the modern consumer quite often to face the dilemma of which product to choose and on which elements pay special attention. It has been also observed in Poland, where the change in the economic situation in the 90s and entry into the EU in 2004 is reflected in the changes of the hierarchy of food needs, primarily relating to acquisition of consumption patterns of Western European societies [25].

C. Bywalec and L. Rudnicki [4] interpreting the impact of various factors on consumer behavior distinguished the following factors:

- biological and ecological aspects, which include the impact of human physiology to their needs, purchasing behavior and consumption; there can be extracted features that have a particular impact on the nutritional needs, such as: age, height, weight, physical fitness; Emphasizing the biological-ecological determinants of consumption there must also be indicated the environmental impact on the level and quality of consumption and there may be noted that as economic growth, nutrition education and development of trade, the equalization of living standards of various regions, it has been observed more frequently unification levels and lifestyles, and the Europeans regardless of where they live more often similarly nourish;
- economic, among which are: the resource, and the availability of food, household income and the percentage of income spend for food, the level and the relationship of price of the consumer goods, the supply of consumer goods; there must be indicated here the impact of the environment and to seize and following the standard model, like others;
- demographic and social, which include: the number of household members, their age, sex, activity and professional standing, education, resources and use of leisure time;

- cultural factors, which include: customs, national traditions and local interaction patterns of consumption, consumer education. European integration by facilitating the distribution of food goods, thus increasing demographic and social mobility, as well as the widespread development of means of mass communication, unfortunately systematically limits the influence of traditions, customs and regionalism on the model of consumption, particularly among urban environments.

However, E. Babicz-Zielinska [2] shows classification of factors determining the specific behaviors of buyers, which includes the following:

- factors associated with a product that determine its nutritional value, sensory properties (taste, smell, appearance, texture), functional characteristics (packaging, availability, convenience);
- factors associated with the consumer and refer to his personal characteristics such as age, sex, education, psychological factors (personality, experience, mood), physiological factors (hunger, thirst, health status), dietary habits;
- environmental factors, among which especially economic factors are noteworthy (price, income), social (social status, fangle, environmental influences) and cultural (traditions, beliefs).

The researches of J. Szwacka-Salmonowicz [23] shows that factors in the hierarchy of the choice made by the consumer in the first place are sensory values of the product, the following ones: price, nutritional value and health, conditions of purchase, as well as information and marketing activities which, in the intensification substitution processes between groups and within products, play an increasing role.

In turn, according to studies by B. Grzybowska and M. Juchniewicz [8] consumers' market decisions regarding the selection and purchase of a particular product, are usually the result of a confrontation of their needs and capabilities of the product features and potential benefits that can meet those needs. The increasing rate of change of these needs and the factors, of which influence are formed causing a wide variety of consumer behavior in the market. The study shows that surveyed consumers are choosing food products mainly directed by sensory characteristics (smell, general appearance, texture), palatability and habit. While the portion size, durability and brand were not significant determinants of market decisions of consumers.

M. Grębowiec [7] in his researches indicates that consumers most often as the most important factors when choosing food products considered: price, quality and the experience of the first purchase. The least important shows advertising and packaging and personal information (product data). It also indicates that the consumer pays attention to a health product, sensory characteristics, as well as goods produced according to the latest certified quality systems.

Similar results were obtained by M. Nowak and others [18], showing that the taste, brand and price have the greatest influence on purchasing decisions of food products.

According to B. Lenart and T. Sikora [13], and M.J.A. Schröder [22] consumer when shopping and selecting specific products usually does this consciously, but this process may affect a number of factors which consumers are unwittingly controlled. These factors are grouped as follows:

- psychological (needs, motivations, learning, beliefs, attitudes, personality),
- social (cultural life, social groups, reference groups, family, social status),
- demographic and economic (age, sex, occupation, education, economic activity, economic conditions, place of residence, lifestyle, and family status).

3. Factors affecting the preferences of the buyers of catering services

The services sector is one of the fastest growing sectors of the Polish economy and plays an increasingly important role in the creation of national product, and therefore one of the most important tasks in creating an innovative economy in terms of product quality is the customer relationship management [6, 12].

Special attention in Poland requires catering services, primarily due to the current food law, especially provisions on traceability, which uniquely identifies the possibility of used materials and packaging, and detailed restoration of the manufacturing process of the finished product.

Catering services has a hybrid character, because include meals and serving them in an environment corresponding to the consumer needs [5]. They are also addressed to different groups of customers: tourists, travelers as well as residents of the village, where operates catering company. Purchase of catering services may be the result of inability to prepare a meal (visitors) or the alternative use of time spent on cooking activities performed at home [17]. The national survey conducted in 2001 by M. Jeżewska-Zychowicz [11], shows that 17.7% of respondents declared their desire to eat fast as soon as possible. At the same time 24.0% of men and 12.4% of women were ready for everyday eat outside the home.

The need for food has its source in physiological, psychological and sociological conditions. Buying basic food products is mainly due to a desire to satisfy hunger. Purchasers of catering services also draw attention to other factors, such as: interpersonal relationships, being in the right environment (the climate of the place where we eat), peer recognition of the environment (visit the trendy venues). It should be noted that socially determined choice of catering services is also individualized, due to the subjective preferences of consumers [24].

M. Nowak and others [16] in their studies showed, that the most important factors influencing the decision to buy catering services have the biggest impact:

- the quality of meals served,
- features a catering facility,
- quality of service and
- the price of catering services.

Additionally, they showed that consumers of catering services buying them primarily in bars and restaurants, such as fast food bars and traditional restaurants. An interesting finding is also fact that with the quality of meals respondents mainly associate the taste of foods, food variety and quality of raw materials used to prepare food. They also showed that 18% of consumers want to dine outside the home as quickly as possible, thus saving the time needed for activities related to preparing meals [17].

Similar results were obtained by G. Adamczyk [1], where consumers are also often use fast food restaurant. The research also demonstrated that for frequently visited restaurants, this type of customers especially appreciate the flavor of dishes offered there, their large selection and fast service and reasonable price. This research also shows that customers of fast food restaurants are usually young consumers, preoccupied with his work, who visit these locals to eat and drink primarily for lunch and dinner.

However, in studies conducted by A.S. Rood and J. Dziadkowiec [21] in Poland and the USA, it appears that the most important determinants of purchasing decisions in the catering services on the market are in order:

- offer of a catering facility,
- service,
- internal environment,
- the external environment and

- other.

These themes include 35 criteria factors that are presented in Table. 1:

Table 1. Restaurant attributes relevant to consumers.

Area	Attributs
External environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of parking spot • The menu displayed outside • Exterior (restaurant) • Location
Internal environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of seats (tables) • A place to wait to be seated • Mood / Atmosphere • Cleanliness • The noise level
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First contact with the waiter • Welcoming • The friendly waiter • Knowledge of waiter • The appearance of a waiter • Method of serving • Efficiency of service • The correct order of serving of food • Availability of a waiter during the whole service • The presentation of bill • Compliance of bill • Friendliness of staff
Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety • Appearance of dishes • The temperature of food • Quality of food • Compliance with the order • Taste of food
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families friendly place • Place to visit with colleagues • Healthy Food • Network restaurant • Independent restaurant • The behavior of staff in difficult situations

Source: Rood A.S., Dziadkowiec J.

From the other hand the research conducted by P. Nowicki and T. Sikora [20] in 2008 in Poland, regarding consumer opinion on catering services in bistro bars situated on gas stations, that may be considered as a type of fast food showed that:

- Nearly 70% of customers use bistros more than once a week.
- Both women and men equally use the bistro bars for eating.
- Customers aged between 36 and 45 years usually use the bistros.
- Over 90% of consumers are satisfied with the bistros' employees qualifications and professionalism and provided level of service.
- Women more critically evaluate the qualifications and professionalism of the bistros' employees and are much more demanding regarding this, while there are no differences in the perception of the level of service provided by those employees regarding gender.
- Education of customer significantly affects the assessment of the level of service, where the most critical customers were of higher education, and the less with vocational education.

Conclusions

Based on the above mentioned studies it can be concluded that the most important factors determining the behavior of buyers in the food market are the sensory characteristics, nutritional value and price, which remains in certain social groups is an important factor in shopping.

Summing up the results of different authors in the determinants of purchasing decisions in the catering services market, it can be concluded that the most important factors are quality of foods, their diversity, the environment inside and outside the local, and similarly to the overall food market - price [19].

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