

THE MODIFICATION OF FOOD CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF PROMOTIONAL ACTIONS

Mioara MIHĂILĂ¹, Elena LEONTE¹, Andy-Felix JITĂREANU¹, Maria ROBU¹

e-mail:mioara@uaiasi.ro

Abstract

The consumption behaviour represents one of the main attractions of the marketing study area which sparks a lot of interest. Within the enterprise marketing mission, the food consumption behaviour is a particular sub-category, given the significant realignments of production and food consumption. The statistics from the last 10 years indicate a strongly ascending trend for all product categories. The hypothesis of the current research is that this increase is due mostly to the simultaneous increase in the number and intensity of promotional campaigns and actions, to which consumers respond with pro-consumption favourable reactions. The analysis from this paper is performed for Romania with data from the period 2010-2020 by means of the following methods: observation, data analysis, processing and interpretation. The research results confirm the increase in food consumption under the influence of promotional actions, which does not always favourably support a stable, socio-economically healthy and sustainable market. An atypical situation, which invalidates the correlation hypothesis of an increased food consumption directly influenced by promotional actions, is that of fruit and vegetables consumption in Romania, products for which there is no consumption increase registered, at least compared to other products (meat, sugar products, tobacco, beer etc.), but also have not been observed significant promotional actions.

Key words: food consumption, promotions, growth, balance

The interest for studying the consumption behaviour, and especially the food consumption patterns, is visible both in the specialized literature and in applied studies, as well as among the main stakeholders which are present on the food consumption market: producers, traders, consumers, other entities - for example the medical or educational system.

For more than 20 years, the consumer behaviour carries a lot of interest in the field of marketing studies. In a constantly expanding economy, food consumption behaviour is a separate sub-branch, given the significant changes in food production and consumption, especially since the statistics of the last five to 10 years indicate a strongly upward dynamics of food consumption in its entirety.

In the present paper, we consider that this increase in consumption can be explained mainly due to the numerical and content intensification of promotional actions, to which consumers respond very favorably through a pro-consumption attitude and, consequently, through increased consumption.

The present analysis is conducted in Romania, through data collected in the last five years, using several methods, such as: observation,

data collection and analysis, synthesis and interpretation.

The research results confirm the increase in food consumption for most products on the Romanian market, due to influences of promotional actions, which does not always prove to be favorable to support a stable, strong socio-economic and sustainable market.

An atypical situation is encountered for the consumption of fruit and vegetables for which there is registered a very low growth or even none.

The importance and evolution of the specific phenomenon of food consumption are undeniable for the economic growth and, implicitly, for the general well-being, but it is indicated to take into account the optimal level of this consumption, from the perspective of a quantitative threshold and qualitative recalibration.

For example, it is considered not only the quantity analysis of the food consumed, but also its categorical structure and quality.

A series of current phenomena observed and which are of interest for the study of a topic such as the one addressed in this paper are:

- the food consumption has an accelerated growth with an obvious focus on hyperconsumption, lack

¹ Ion Ionescu de la Brad” University of Life Sciences, Iași, Romania

of sustainability and generation of increased food wastage and other types of waste;

- the promotional actions are gaining more popularity, most of them being even 'invasive' for all product categories, including food;
- the challenge of the current agri-food market is given by major changes in food consumption patterns, including structural and quantitative;
- the complex paradigm of food education becomes of great interest to entities in various fields.

Due to the fact that general references for the food consumption field are extremely various, we will focus mainly on the study of food consumption evolution in Romania over the last five years (2015-2020), for the fruit and vegetable market. The reason for choosing these agri-food products is arising by the correlation between the level of consumption and the state of health, respectively the observation from the statistical data of a different trend compared to other categories of food consumed by Romanians.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study considers, first of all, the analysis of the factors that influence food consumption. Given the fact they are wide-ranging and numerous, we intend to analyze a main factor of influence: promotional actions, by reviewing several market studies indicating various areas of sale and promotional means used to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables.

The objectives of the paper are delimited by the scope of identifying the link between fruit and vegetable consumption and promotional actions and are summarized in:

- O1.** Identifying the dynamics of food consumption in the last five years in Romania.
- O2.** Analyzing a series of promotional actions designed to increase food consumption.
- O3.** Establishing if there is a correlation between increasing food consumption and stimulating promotional actions.

The research methods used are: observation and investigation, a review of food consumption literature, relevant data collection, synthesis and analysis, interpretation.

The sources of information for quantitative data consist of databases and reports published by specialized institutions.

Methodologically, we started from the observation that most of the reports and studies on the topic of food consumption show that, in Romania, food consumption registers high increases, especially for "star" products such as meat, alcohol, tobacco, sugar products.

The changes in consumption behaviour through a chronological analysis point of view, one can observe that "our diet has changed in the last

forty years more than in twenty centuries". (Ivașcu, 2011).

Furthermore, the promotional actions are increasingly influencing the buying behaviour regardless the type of goods purchased. This is evaluated as an increasingly present and active component for the dynamics of the consumer market. It is considered that the main purpose of promotional actions is represented by the intention of consumption stimulation. As a main promotional tool, advertising has an undeniable impact on purchases.

Market researches and the literature review show that "40% of commercials refer to food, ads for fatty, sweet or salty products occupying 89% of the food commercial screen time and even more if we take into account chemically processed products", respectively that "worldwide, the average food consumption / person (Kcal./day) has increased, since the 1960s until now by about 20%, from 2360 Kcal./day to 2803 Kcal./day " (Ivașcu, 2011).

The main determinants of the food consumption growth are represented by internal factors that refer to motivations, sets of personal values, preferences and needs, the relationship to the environment, the conceptualization of well-being, temptations, commercial communication etc. It is observed that, for the most part, food consumption is determined by individual actions and behaviours in a specific environment, therefore, social patterns and the influence given by the reference group, are essential in stimulating consumption.

Psycho-neurological studies show that people are much less rational and less disciplined when purchasing different products. (EEA, 2014) In addition, it is no longer a novelty that advertising is mainly focused on the full exploitation of emotions, through different stimuli: messages, characters, sets, colors, music etc. Moreover, emotions are used as amplifiers of motivation and as intensifiers of the advertising message. (Costache, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A series of studies and literature review indicate some controversy in the debates about the influence of advertising in the food industry regarding consumption behaviour. According to Steenkamp (1993), "food plays a central role in the life of consumers" and "it is the source of nutrition and hedonic experiences, it serves a social and cultural function, and has considerable economic significance." If many years ago the food consumption was mainly in the attention of the producers, nowadays it is a concern of the researches in different field of interest: production, market and sales, psychology, medicine, etc. Also, in order to emphasize more the deep interest for the food consumption

behaviour, we mention the subjective approach as the preferences or internal motivation, so "the food preferences, choices and habits occupy a central role in human cultures and food consumption goes far beyond its functional role as a means to survive." (Vermeir et al., 2020).

Given the great attention for the food consumption behaviour, is normally to have some controversies and we observed that there are more pronounced given the exposure, unanimously and involuntarily, of consumers to advertising. On the one hand, it is emphasized the minor impact of advertising on consumer behaviour, and on the other hand, it is highlighted the major incidence of food advertising on consumption, including in the sense of increasing it, even when there are registered negative consequences on consumer's state of health. (Chelcea, 2021).

Almost unanimously, studies show that the current pattern of food consumption has a negative effect on human health, with over 50% of adults in

Europe being overweight. (European Council, 2021). For the present paper we consider the consumption of fruit and vegetables, a series of surprising findings being represented by the fact that for this type of healthy products, the levels of consumption in Romania are not increasing significantly, compared to other types of products.

At the same time, through the method of observation together with the literature review and profile publications indicates a lower dynamic of promotional actions and advertising means for these products.

Recent official data show that 27% of the population in the European Union consumed fruit in 2017 at least twice a day, 37% consumed fruit once a day, and 36% consumed fruit less or not at all during a normal week. Compared to fruit consumption, in the vegetable field, the levels are being lower: 23% of the EU population consumed vegetables at least twice a day in 2017, and 40% once a day. Eurostat (2019)

Table 1

Daily consumption of fruit and vegetables in the EU in 2017

| Daily consumption of fruit (% of population) | | Daily consumption of vegetables (% of population) | |
|--|----|---|----|
| European Union | 64 | European Union | 64 |
| Ireland | 84 | Italy | 85 |
| Italy | 80 | Spain | 77 |
| Portugal | 78 | Slovenia | 69 |
| Slovenia | 71 | France | 62 |
| Spain | 65 | Netherlands | 58 |
| Greece | 60 | Greece | 51 |
| Germany | 54 | Croatia | 46 |
| Bulgaria | 45 | Romania | 42 |
| Romania | 41 | Lithuania | 37 |
| Hungary | 30 | Latvia | 35 |

Source: data adaptation and processing according to Eurostat statistics (2019)

The table above states that daily fruit consumption levels are low in Romania in comparison with other European states. Thus, Romania ranks penultimate in the European Union (in 2017), only 41% of Romanians consuming fruit daily, half compared to Ireland and Belgium (84%). Only Hungary is in a lower position than Romania, with daily fruit consumption among only 30% of citizens.

In 2017, in only five European Union member states the average daily fruit consumption was below 50%: Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Hungary. National statistics (INS, 2020) show that in 2019, compared to 2018, the average annual fruit consumption increased, but to a very small extent (on average for all fruit about

2%). Likewise, considering the consumption of vegetables, it can be observed in the table above that Romania registered a low level of the average daily consumption of vegetables, in 2017 being recorded a daily consumption per inhabitant in annual average of 42%, significantly lower than the EU average (64%), which is half of Italy's maximum consumption.

The situation continued for the next years also, national statistics indicating that in 2019, compared to 2018, vegetable consumption was reduced to almost all reference categories (INS, 2020). A conclusion of Eurostat reports (2019) shows that, among European Union member states, less than 45% of the population consumes vegetables daily (Latvia 35%, Bulgaria and

Lithuania 37%, Hungary 40%, Romania 42%). Correlating these data with the World Health Organization warning that low consumption of fruit and vegetables significantly rises the increased risk of non-communicable diseases (diabetes, cardiovascular disease etc.) an impending negative impact can be a future effect. In addition, the UN Agency (2017) estimated that 3.9 million of the world's deaths are associated with inadequate, or very low, consumption of fruit and vegetables. This overlaps with the increase in the consumption of unhealthy foods based on carbohydrates, sugars, ultra-processed products, tobacco, alcohol.

Consequently, promotional actions to stimulate the consumption of healthy foods, such as fruit and vegetables are a major necessity, along with the reduction of those that encourage the consumption of unhealthy food products.

In December 2019, RetailZoom company conducted a comprehensive study on food consumption in Romania, analyzing mainly the consumption of fruit and vegetables, the reference study baseline being the major networks of traders present in Romania: Kaufland, Carrefour, Cora, Lidl, Mega Image, Profi, Penny Market, Metro and Selgros. The results of the study, presented during the event "RO Fruit & Vegetables Show", indicate the following (Parfene, 2019):

- in the top of fruit sales are the following: bananas, apples, oranges, lemons, grapes, avocados, clementines and melons, representing 77% of total sales in supermarkets; it can be observed the predominance of imported fruits over local ones;
- in the top sales of vegetables are: tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, onions, mushrooms, cucumbers,

representing 77% of sales in value and 90% in terms of volume sold;

- the total expenditure on these agri-food products was lower for fruits than for vegetables, the latter being sold by 8.5% more in volume and 30% more in value;

- fruit and vegetables ranked 4th and 5th in terms of sales value, 1st, 2nd and 3rd rank being occupied by the 'star' categories of food sales: meat, cigarettes, beer;

- the enticements for the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, quite low for Romanians, is stimulated by various promotional actions, but they are less dynamic and sensitizing in order to stimulate consumption, compared to promotions for other types of food;

- between July and October 2019, a number of 1347 articles were promoted in nine commercial networks in Romania, through a wide range of weekly promotional actions;

- for fruit and vegetables, most promotions consist in price reductions and actions like "pay 2 and receive 3", "week of XXL quantities";

- other promotional methods, more dynamic or more suggestive, are limited compared to the methods dedicated to other categories of goods, promoted much more intensely.

Other market research studies that conduct an extensive analysis of the dynamics of food consumption in Romania are made by GfK. Thus, it is found that in the fruit and vegetables segment, the agri-food farmers markets are a significant competitor for the super/hyper-market commercial networks.

Agri-food farmer markets are preferred by many consumers, holding 15.8% for fruits and 25.4% for vegetables. (WallStreet, 2019)

Table 2

The dynamic of promotional actions for fruits and vegetables in the major commercial networks in Romania (2019)

| Fruit and vegetable promotion: comparison (%) | | | Fruit and vegetable promotion by sale point | | |
|---|--------|------------|---|--------|------------|
| Network | Fruits | Vegetables | Network Category | Fruits | Vegetables |
| Kaufland | 57.73% | 42.27% | Hypermarket | 51.18% | 48.82% |
| Carrefour | 54.04% | 45.96% | | | |
| Cora | 39.39% | 60.61% | | | |
| Mega Image | 37.5% | 62.50% | Super, proxi & discount | 46.24% | 53.76% |
| Profi | 60% | 40% | | | |
| Lidl | 45.26% | 54.74% | | | |
| Penny Market | 42.68% | 57.32% | Cash & Carry | 23.85% | 76.15% |
| Metro | 16.76% | 83.24% | | | |
| Selgros | 31.82% | 68.18% | | | |

Source: data adaptation and processing, according to "ModernBuyer" (2019) - "The promotion in the category of fruits and vegetables, an element of differentiation in retail?"

CONCLUSIONS

The paper results, based on the analysis of data and studies on food consumption in Romania, indicate - first of all - a paradoxical situation: although our country is a consistent and recognized producer of fruit and vegetables, Romanian consumers are far below the European average or even among the last places to consume these foods.

Another atypical situation is that, in 2020, a year of pandemic situation, consumers had a different consumption behaviour regarding fruits and vegetables: Romanians bought fresh fruits by 30% more, respectively vegetables by 26% more. The most plausible explanation of this phenomenon in this context is that Romanians have taken more into account health grounds in their fruit and vegetables consumption patterns.

A first conclusion, reflected by the research results, confirms the increase of food consumption under the influence of promotional actions, but the conclusion is not valid for the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Certainly, increasing food consumption does not always prove to be conducive to supporting a stable, sustainable and socio-economically healthy market, especially since the food consumed is unhealthy. Another conclusion refers to food consumption in general which proves to be strongly influenced by the diversity and intensity of promotional actions. However, in the case of fruit and vegetables consumption the hypothesis is not fully confirmed, its level in Romania, generally limited, not increased even though promotional actions were supported. One mention is that the promotional system for fruit and vegetables is limited in terms of dynamics, persuasion and power of influence.

In addition, the European Green Pact (2020) which aims at orienting the current food system towards a sustainable consumption model should be considered when it comes to promoting a series of agri-food products. The implementation of this pact involves, among others:

- promoting healthy eating patterns and diets;
- reducing food loss and wastage;
- combating food fraud along the food supply chain

For achieving desired results of promotional actions to support the growth of fruit and vegetable consumption, not just food consumption in general, it is necessary to be taken into account two essential aspects:

1. The current consumer society has a strong attitude towards increasing consumption, so a hyper-consumption behaviour, based on emotions and external influences.
2. The analysis and monitoring of the influencing factors of food consumption, together with the

implementation of specific promotional activities, involves the consideration of specific needs and conjunctural elements (EEA, 2020) such as:

- *stability*: food utilisation, social value, food safety, food availability, food access etc.;
- *ecosystem health*: resilience, biodiversity, functions and services;
- *social well-being*: income, employment, wealth, equity, health, culture, ethics.

Taking into account the international reports of the recognized institutions, as WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) we can conclude and accept the need to find the importance place of the consumption behaviour in the social and economic systems, mainly the food consumption, because "the consumers are a major force in the global economic system, with their purchases representing about 60% of the world's GDP." Maybe is appropriate to discuss about the force of the consumer instead of the client. More, "the consumer food decisions have important impacts on the food system through their market demand, sometimes determining what food will be produced and by what methods." (Muñoz & Marselis, 2016).

Under these circumstances, it is more than necessary to stimulate the consumption of fruit and vegetables while the promotional actions have the role and capacity to change this consumption behaviour. And, finally we close the paper with an FAO recommendation presented within the World Food Day event (16th of October 2021): "The food you choose and the way you consume it affect our health and that of our planet. It has an impact on the way agri-food systems work, so you need to be part of the change."

REFERENCES

- Antonella De Cicco, 2019** - *The fruit and vegetable sector in the EU - a statistical overview*, available on-line at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=The fruit and vegetable sector in the EU - a statistical overview#Where are fruit and vegetables grown in the EU.3F By how many farms.3F Over what area.3F](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=The_fruit_and_vegetable_sector_in_the_EU_-_a_statistical_overview#Where_are_fruit_and_vegetables_grown_in_the_EU.3F_By_how_many_farms.3F_Over_what_area.3F)
- Chelcea, S., 2021** - *Psihosociologia publicitatii. Despre reclamele vizuale*, ProUniversitaria, București
- Costache, L., 2016** - *European legislation and its impact on advertising for Romanian food products*, PhD. Thesis, Universitatea "Transilvania" din Brașov
- Ivașcu, G.L., 2011** - *Studiu asupra consumului de produse agroalimentare în Județul Timiș*, PhD Thesis, USAMV Timișoara
- Muñoz, O.S., Marselis, I., 2016** - *Consumer behavior as a leverage point in the food system*, a WWF report in Metabolic Review, available at: <https://www.metabolic.nl/publication/consumer-behavior-as-a-leverage-point-in-the-food-system/>
- Parfene, I., 2019** - *Exclusiv: Promoția în categoria fructe și legume, un element de diferențiere în retail?*

Modern Bayer, available on-line at: <https://modernbuyer.ro/exclusiv-promotia-in-categoria-fructe-si-legume-un-element-de-diferentiere-in-retail/>

Stancu, M., 2020 - COVID-19 transformă comportamentul consumatorilor în întreaga lume, iar companiile trebuie să se adapteze rapid, available on-line at: <https://home.kpmg/ro/ro/home/presa/comunicate-presa/2020/12/covid-19-schimba-comportamentul-consumatorilor-companiile-adaptare.html>

Steenkamp, J.B. 1993 - *Food Consumption Behavior*, in *European Advances in Consumer Research* Volume 1, Pp. 401-409.

Vermeir, I., Weijters, B., De Houwer, J., Geuens, M., Slabbinck, H., Spruyt, A., Van Kerckhove, A., Van Lippevelde, W., De Steur, H., Verbeke, W., 2020 - *Environmentally Sustainable Food Consumption: A Review and Research Agenda From a Goal-Directed Perspective*, in *Frontiers in Psychology*, July 2020, 11:1603. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01603

*** **Agenția Europeană de Mediu, 2014** - *Ce anume determină comportamentul consumatorilor*, interviu cu Lucia Riesch, available on-line at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/ro/semnale/semnale-de-mediu-2014/interviu/ce-ne-face-sa-cumparam>

*** **Consiliul Uniunii Europene, 2021** - *De la fermă la consumator: alimente mai sănătoase și mai*

durabile pentru Europa, available on-line at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/policies/from-farm-to-fork>

*** **European Environment Agency, 2020** - *Food system desired outcomes. (Infographic)*. Available available on-line at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/soer/2020/soer-2020-visuals/food-system-desired-outcomes/view>

*** **Eurostat, 2019** - *Do you eat fruit and vegetables daily?* available on-line at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190401-1>

*** **Institutul Național de Statistică, 2020** - *Bilanțuri alimentare, în anul 2019*. available on-line at: https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/bilanturi_alimentare_in_anul_2019.pdf

*** *Consumul de fructe și legume în UE: Cât mănâncă românii*, Green Report 2019, available on-line at: <https://green-report.ro/consumul-de-fructe-si-legume-in-ue-cat-mananca-romanii/>

*** *Our actions are our future*, Food And Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). <https://www.fao.org/world-food-day/en>

*** *Fructele și legumele, în top 5 categorii de produse vândute în comerțul modern din România*, Wall-Street, 2019, available on-line at: <https://www.wall-street.ro/articol/Companii/247563/fructele-si-legumele-in-top-5-categorii-de-produse-vandute-in-comertul-modern-din-romania.html#gref>