

# INVESTIGATION OF CONSUMER CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE CASE OF FOODS IN JASZ-NAGYKUN-SZOLNOK COUNTY IN HUNGARY

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## Keywords:

consumer behavior, consciousness, food consumption, eating habits

## Article history:

Received 20 May 2017

Revised 15 July 2017

Accepted 20 October 2017

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## Abstract

*In my paper I give a hint about an investigation I made in the case of food products. This county has some special features why people's behavior can differ from the country's average. Conscious consumers think in a longer run, they make more deliberate and rational decisions, their consciousness can be investigated from different aspects. More and more companies react to consumer consciousness from the supply side what also strengthen the actuality and importance of the topic. In my paper I examine victual consumption consciousness from different aspects principally concentrating on health-, quality- and price consciousness based them on my primary research results. It occurs what are the factors in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County in connection with any type of consciousness can be discovered but we also get an answer about the associations along what consumers think about healthy foods and the way they get information in connection with the topic.*

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## 1 Introduction

Investigation of consumer consciousness can be found widely in international concerns, its actuality is inevitable. Though formation and evolution of consumer consciousness started after World War II [2] its investigation implies a huge potential. By globalization consciousness becomes even more intensive hence in the other side it is harder to way around in this complex world. [11] This fact also legitimates the necessity and timeliness of the topic.

We can approach to consumer consciousness from several aspects hence it is hard to find a unified and universal definition. Whilst at first consciousness were mainly focused on prices as a reason of the war [4] thenceforth several approaches used in literature. Dudás [3] divide conscious consumption into two main parts as self-conscious consumption and responsible consumption. By this approach self-conscious consumption mostly includes health-, price-, value-, brand-, tendentiousness consciousness, knowledge of consumer rights and conscious financial actions while responsible consumption aim at society conscious consumption, environment conscious consumption and ethical purchase behavior. [8] All other type of consciousness can be somehow fitted to these frameworks.

Huszka and Kozma investigated health-consciousness and the complex system of health behavior in the dimension of food consumption [5] [1]. Conscious nutrition, value system, "time pressure", financial status and possibilities can be found among several other components.

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In this paper I investigate consumer consciousness from several aspects, especially concentrating on health-, quality-, and price consciousness supported by the results of my field research. Research focus concentrates on one county of Hungary. Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County can be found in the middle of Hungary with 383.000 inhabitants out of them 73,3% live in towns, cities. Economic development of the region is below the national average, GDP per capita were 36% lower in 2012 than the national average. Level of incomes from labor incomes is lower (64,8%), but the level of economically inactive people is the highest in the country after the Central-Hungarian Region. [6]

Income level fundamentally defines the frameworks and possibilities of households. But the financial situation of a household depends on the fact how many people within the household have an income and of what type. Income per capita is the lowest in this region within the country [6] in Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County monthly net average income per capita were 120.411 forints (app. 390 euros) while average pension per capita were 109.876 forints (app. 350 euros) in 2014, [7].

## 2 Material and Methods

In my research I used mainly quantitative techniques. Paper-based questionnaires were used in the third and fourth quarters of 2015 among the adult inhabitants of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County. I used quota sampling by the gender and settlement type of the respondents. I used the Hungarian Statistical Office's data to define the quota. [10]

Mathematical, statistical methods (average, modus, median, deviation, cross-table investigations, Cramer's V and Kendall coefficients, etc.) were used during data process with the help of SPSS 20.0 and Microsoft Excel 2010. Correspondence correlation were investigated in the case of Khi square probe with the help of Adjusted residuals (AdjR). [9]

Number of the sample is 764 out of this 50.9% are men, 49.1% women. 73.4% lives in towns, 26.6% in villages. These ratios are similar to the county average by the 2015 population statistics by the Hungarian Statistical Office. As to the age distribution 18.2% of the sample is between 20-29 years, 20.7% between 30-39 and 21.1% between 40-49. 20.5% are between the age of 50-59 years, 11.1% are 60-69 years old. Only 7.5% of the sample is between 70-79, 0.8% are above the age of 80 years. The highest proportion of the sample has an average financial status. Only 7.9% have under the average and 1.2% much under the average financial status. 8.5% of the sample feel to have an above the average whilst none of them have a much above the average financial status.

## 3 Results

During my research I investigated different aspects of consumer consciousness among the inhabitants of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County. In merit it can be stated that most of the respondents (74.9%) hold themselves a conscious consumer to some extent and if not always but in the case of some products (16.4%) they pay attention. In some cases there are correlations and deviations among socio-demographic factors. The age group of 30-49 year olds is the most conscious one whilst those above 70 years are even less conscious than the expected level. As to the genders absolutely conscious consumers are mostly men (61.3%), the proportion is more equal among those who are mostly conscious 43.1% are men and 56.9% are women. Among settlement type, financial and marital status almost no correlation can be discovered as Cramer's V values also confirm, the values in order are 0.082, 0.077, 0.119.

An important element of consumer consciousness the level consumers pay attention to factors during the purchase decision making that has a special or sensitive effect on their lives. As it can be seen on Figure 1 part of the investigated factors can be linked to health (special diet, health impact, quality, GMO free), but also environment (GMO free, well-being of animals, environment protection) and price (rebates, price) consciousness can be discovered.

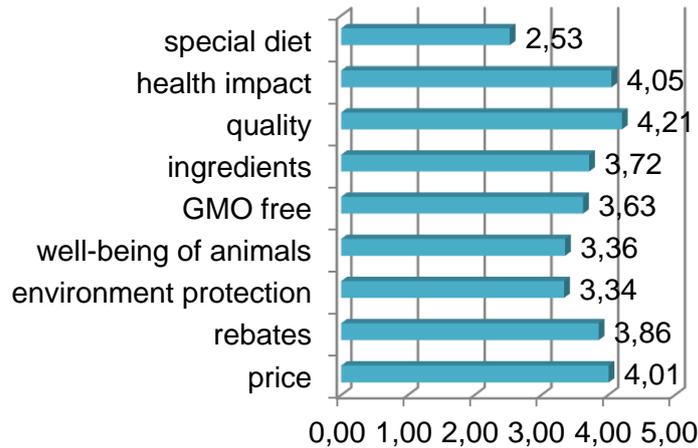


Figure 1. Importance of some factors in the case of victuals

Source: own research, 2015 N=764, 1=absolutely not important, 5=extremely important

It is the health and price dimension along what customers seems to be the most conscious and the environment dimension is the one where the less. Group of 20-29 year old differ a bit they are the one who make the most unconscious decisions along health dimension. As to price consciousness the group of 70-79 years is the most conscious, much more than the average in the case of rebates and prices nevertheless the rate of under the average incomes is the highest in this segment, this fact can explain the results.

Besides all of these I also investigated the level of consciousness in the case of some factors what can allow a deeper and more concrete understanding and able to highlight some possible aspects of the underlying content. Some of these factors can be connected to special diets, health impact, product quality, ingredients or combination of all these latter.

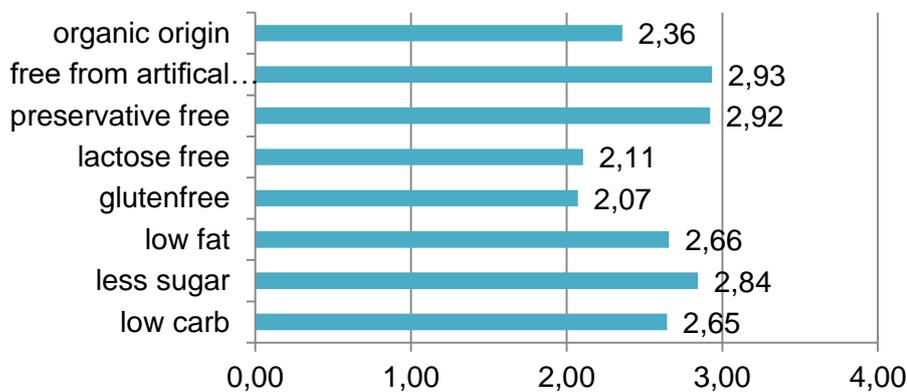


Figure 2. Level of consciousness in the case of some factors

Source: own research, 2015 N=764, 1=do not take care, 5=take care always

On Figure 2 shows that the level of attention in the case of some products is relatively low despite the fact that the respondents hold themselves conscious in the case of food purchases. Anyhow this is a serious contradiction and the underlying correlations strengthened this assumption. As there is a range limit I do not present the results in details, but it is crucial to give an introduction to the most contradictory ones. As all of these factors can clearly be connected to the composition of food products results are the most striking and unequivocal in this case. I find the most interesting to present those contradictory results when customers who hold themselves conscious or even very conscious do not really take care of a given factor. 54.7% of this group for instance absolutely not taking care of low-carb content. The proportion in the case sugar content is 53.4%, low fat 52.1% and gluten free 54.5%. Among the conscious 56.6% do not take care of

lactose free content; this proportion is 33.1% in the case of preservatives. Freeness from artificial colors is not important to 80% while this is true for 48.2% in the case of organic origin. These unexpected results were also confirmed by the adjusted residual values, mostly they took a negative sign, the most salient value were -6 but mostly they were smaller than -2.

I also investigated the sources the respondents get the necessary information from. The results show that there is a wide scope of information sources the respondents use, the consumers seems to be widely informed. Social environment seems to be an important source, family members and friends have a remarkable impact on decisions. 46.2% ask for the help of the help of their family members, 34.2% listen friends whilst 50.1% only rely on their own personal experiences. Independent sources have a weaker weight in the information source range of the respondents. Only 19.4% get information from special journals, 13.4% from magazines, 10.6% listen to experts and 34.4% rely on the internet. It can be seen by the results that most of the respondents rely on their own experiences and their close social environment. The proficiency, experiences and real knowledge of these sources are strongly questionable especially in the case of health and environmental consciousness. Other sources more likely to be reliable -like professionals, experts, journals or magazines-, have a much lighter weight. Personal experience is extremely important for those live in villages and have an under the average income level. Interestingly the elder generation (50-79) is using the internet above the expected level, but this is mostly true for those who have an average income level. The age group of 30-39 old listen to their friends the most and this is even more likely to be true in the case of men. Mostly women especially from the age group of 70-79 listen to the experts' opinion.

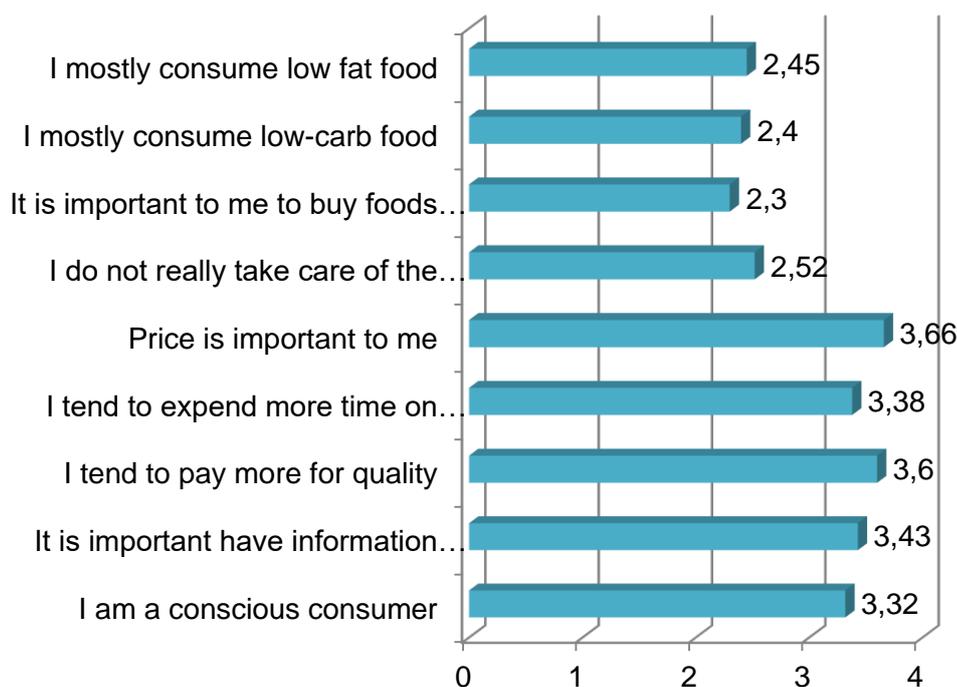


Figure 3. Importance of some factors connected to food consumption  
Source: own research, 2015 N=764, 1=absolutely not typical, 5=very typical

As we could have seen previously the respondents declared quite contradictory about their consciousness. Though they tend to hold themselves conscious their answers do not strengthen this reassuringly. These contradictions can be clearly seen on Figure 3. Though it is rather important to most of the respondents to know the composition of the food product they are consuming, usually not too characteristic to them to pay attention individually to the ingredients. This is especially true for the age group of 70-79 years. Those who live in villages are even less likely to pay more for quality and only to 16.8% of them the importance of diet adaptability is characteristic to some extent.

It can be seen clearly on Figure 4 how diverse pictures are in the mind of the consumers in connection of “healthiness”, health consciousness. I tried to measure with free associations what are the first maximum 5 words, thoughts that comes to people’s mind in connection with “healthy foods”. More than 3000 association were gained, but there are some tendencies, trends what can be easily discovered.



Figure 4. Word cloud of main associations about healthy food  
Source: own research, 2015 N=764, free association

In connection with healthy foods most of the people associate to the words like bio, local, health and fresh. All of these notions, characteristics can be a part or indicator of healthy nutrition but do not mean a guarantee. This association also confirmed the assumption that the respondents do not have a clear and homogenous picture in their mind and it is also probable that they do not have the necessary awareness about the topic.

#### 4 Conclusion and Summary

By the research result in merit it can be stated that most of the respondents hold themselves a conscious consumer to some extent nevertheless this consciousness is very contradictory. Remarkable deviations can be observed in concerning different investigation dimensions and social-demographic factors. In general women can be regarded conscious, concerning price consciousness the age group of 70-79 who are more conscious in the case of rebates and prices than the average. Also some contradictions were observed during the research process. Level of consciousness were investigated in the case of some factors what gave a deeper and more concrete understanding along the investigated dimensions and highlighted some possible aspects of the underlying content. Some of these factors could be connected to special diets, health impact, product quality, ingredients or combination of all these latter. It can be seen that the consciousness level is fairly low despite of the fact that the respondents held themselves conscious in the case of food purchases. It has shown a serious contradiction by itself and the investigation of underlying correspondences also confirmed this assumption. Most of the respondents acquire information by their personal experiences and their social environment. Proficiency, real knowledge, experience of these sources are not always reliable especially in the case of health and environment consciousness. Other sources more likely to be reliable -like professionals, experts, journals or magazines- have a much lighter weight. As a consequence it can be seen that the respondents do not have a clear and homogenous picture in their mind and it

is also probable that they do not have the necessary awareness about the topic, nevertheless consumers often lull themselves to contrary belief.

## Acknowledgment

This research is supported by EFOP-3.6.1-16-2016-00006 "The development and enhancement of the research potential at John von Neumann University" project. The Project is supported by the Hungarian Government and co-financed by the European Social Fund.

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