

ROMANIAN CONSUMERS' BEHAVIOR ON PACKAGING MATERIALS RISKS PERCEPTION

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Abstract

Romanian consumers' concern for food safety and health has increased in recent years due to media news about cases of illness due to the use of improper packaging of various food stuffs. Also, environmental protection actions have contributed to the development of research in the direction of obtaining biodegradable packaging materials but also to educate consumers to use and to promote "eco" packaging concept. Our study indicates that the consumer is interested to purchase packaged foods, without incurring increased costs due to the use of a package, to improve the quality of life, and to maintain a good health status. The European Commission indicates to mobilize municipalities towards the achievement of 2020 target 50% recycling to improve waste management and to reduce the amount of disposals.

Keywords: consumers' behavior, biodegradable materials.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Romanian consumer faced with the situation of the economic recession, and changed his behavior, trying to save money, but also sometimes consume more than it can afford. These approaches create a personal duality which is reflected in price increases and shortages of consumer goods. According to studies carried out in 2010, GfK consumer cuts in expenses that have with clothing and footwear in a percentage of 32%, to eat in the city (23%), while 25% have saved and have made investments. It can be concluded, regarding the changes of behavior visible in 2010 so far, that the Romanians buying increasingly more cautious, no more deviations from their priorities list for shopping and postponing major shops. Recent studies conducted by the Unilever highlight that 56% of Romanian consumers do not take into account the environment-friendly packaging when buying a product. The major objective of our study is to analyze how Romanian consumers react about packaging materials used on food stuffs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

It was created a research theme aiming high educated consumers from urban environment, to achieve a objective observation of consumers toward Romanian awareness materials used for food packaging. For this, we choose a set of questions about social criteria's and technical criteria's; we conducted a questionnaire investigation on 50 persons involved in this study and interpretation by quantitative methods of the obtained results. Among the questions it was elaborated a measurement scale about level of importance in food packaging technical characteristics and use the semantic scale technique.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Subjects questioned have answered to a number of 9 questions regarding their personal data for their engagement in social demographic range, but also questions relating to consumer risks perception-

correspondence materials used for packaging of food products.

Partial or total transparency of the package was marked as very important by 60% of the subjects, which leads to the conclusion that the visibility of the product is very important to most consumers.

How important is protection of the environment and how we protect the environment fails to constitute a priority in the selection of food products due to this issue, only 40% of the subjects were scored as being very important, with the maximum score, for this issue.

Packaging manufacturers are permanently studying newest packaging materials and make considerable efforts to provide consumers with better quality products. What opinion have Romanian consumers about "environment-friendly" materials?

In the Figure 1 was represented the distribution of opinions from unimportant (0) to very important (8) related to the materials considered to be environmentally friendly.

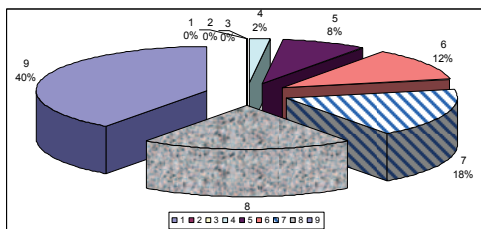


Figure 1. The importance of environmental issues in consumer opinion

The importance of environmental protection in the opinion of questioned consumers are reflected in the following ways: in favor of re-use (40%), in favor of recycling (60%) and in favor of biodegradable materials (58%).

As it can be seen in the Figure 2, 64% of the subjects mark as very important increasing the product shelf life by means of packaging.

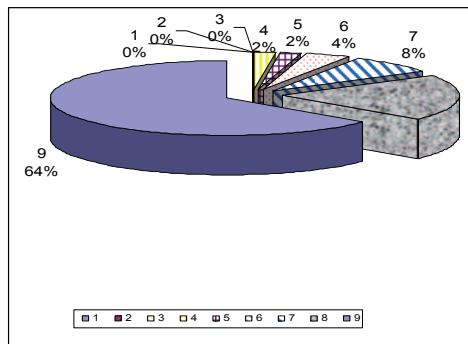


Figure 2. The importance of increasing food product shelf life in the consumers' opinion

Most consumers (54%) want to buy food that is packed in Ziplock bags.

Table 1

The importance of using Ziplock packages

The subjects' opinion	Points	% achieved
No opinion	0	2
Unimportant	1	6
Diferent levels of importance	2	0
	3	4
	4	4
	5	6
	6	4
	7	20
Very important	8	54

The packaging system Ziplock can be used several times. The thickness of the Ziplock packages protecting objects stored in them.

According to the study conducted for the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2009 the Romanian consumer behavior Analysis of meat products, 61,6% of consumers paid their attention to packaging and labelling, the clarity of information and especially the contents of the respective product information is particularly important.

From this question how interested is the consumer to know the technical characteristics of the packaging when they are buying food stuffs, has been assessed. Subjects questioned responded with a tremendous majority (92%) they are familiar with this, 67% stating the information obtained in this respect helps in choosing the product they have purchased. The data collected are described in the Figure 3.

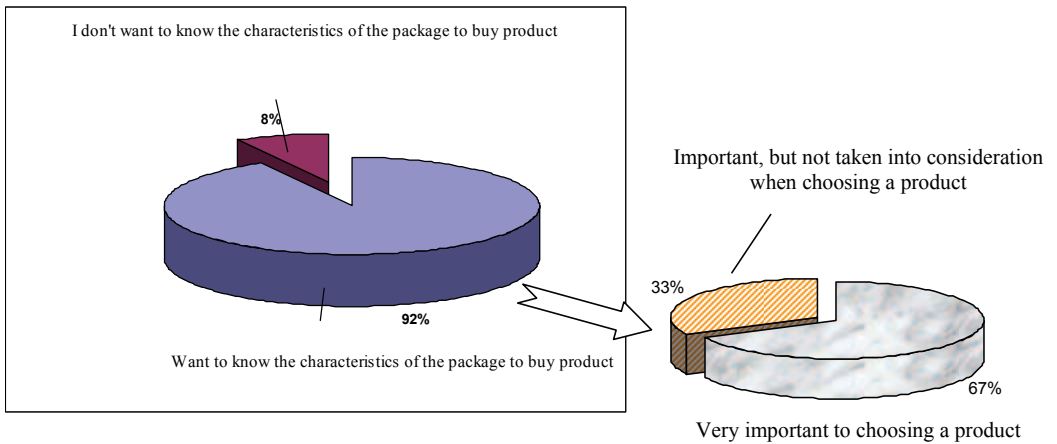


Figure 3. Importance of knowing the technical characteristics of the package in the decision to purchase the product

Generally speaking, any material in contact with food should not release the chemicals in foods at levels that can cause harm to human health (EU 1935/2004, article 3 and the U.S. 21CFR174). To be able to assess the risk associated with food packaging should be better understand the chemical composition of packing material and the levels at which these compounds can migrate into the food; however these issues are solved by the packaging material producers just meeting the legislation requirements for the food contact materials.

How Romanian consumers are preoccupied about this information and what opinions their have can be found in the answers to the following question:

- Do you consider that, at present, the materials used for packaging affect your health?
- The scores scale was from 1 (very unfavorably) to 5 (very favorable) for consumer health relationship with food packaging materials.

For the first question, the answers were Yes for 38% of subjects, no for 20% of subjects and I don't know for 42% of the subjects, as it can be seen in the Figure 4.

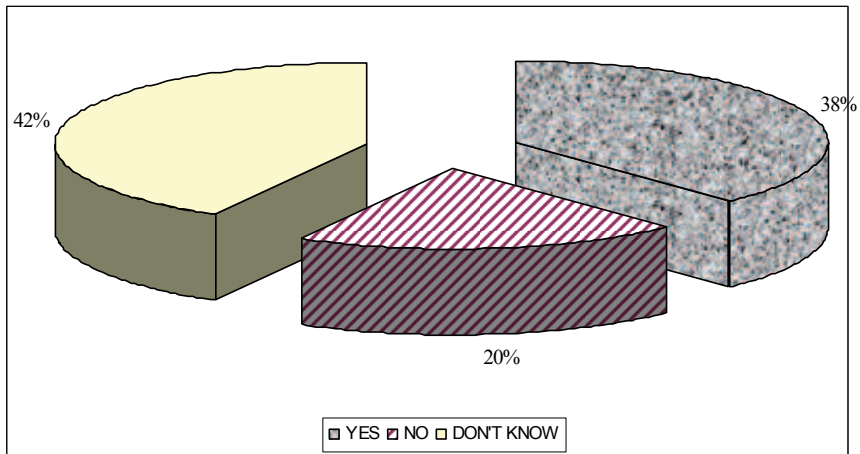


Figure 4. Consumers' opinion about the health risk of the food packaging materials

About the consumer health relationship with food packaging materials, each 2% of the respondents scored as very unimportant and inconsequential the relationship quality of packaging materials -consumer health, 36% marked as important this relationship and very important for 28% of subjects (Figure 5).

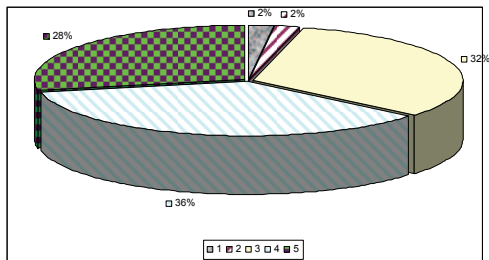


Figure 5. Consumer health relationship to-quality of food packaging materials

Tremendous majority is represented by the subjects who are buying individually packed food (92%) and only 8% of subjects are buying foods packaged in large packages or large packages with individual servings (Figure 6).

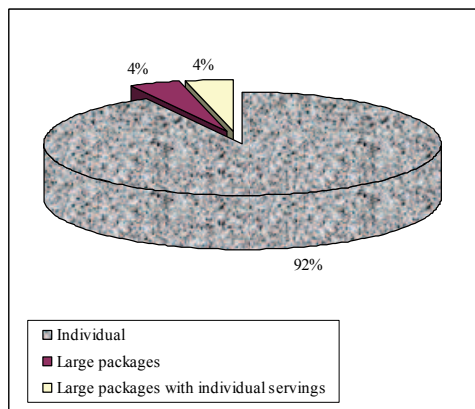


Figure 6. Consumer opinion on type of packaging of food

Consumers are not willing to pay more for food packaging that contributes to improve the quality of life compared with conventional ones in proportion of 42%. Compared to these, 30% agree with a higher price to 5%, 22% agree with a price

increasing between 5-10%, and 6% are in agreement with the higher price between 10-20%.

CONCLUSIONS

The consumer is interested to purchase packaged foods, more safety for the health but without any additional costs due to the use of more sustainable materials which should improve the quality of life. Nearly half of respondents don't know whether packages used today affect their health, but most of them would like to read the proper information on the label of the purchased food product.

An increasing number of consumers appreciate Ziplock packages, so to consume foods in smaller portions, maintaining at the same time the product quality. Protection of the environment, in our opinion is not a priority in the opinion of consumers when they are choosing packaged foods.

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