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Environmental Facility of Food Products as a Factor of Market Positioning

Ekologiczny wizerunek produktów spożywczych jako czynnik pozycjonowania na rynku

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Abstract: The purpose of the article is to analyze the reactions of consumers to the quality characteristics of food products, in particular related to the level of their environmental friendliness, in order to develop proposals for improving the communication programs of manufacturers of these products in Ukraine. The authors describe the reactions of consumers to the qualitative characteristics of food products based on the results of a sociological study. 1269 people participated in the study, including 539 (42.5%) men and 730 (57.5%) women. The distribution of respondents by age is as follows: from 18 to 20 years old – 68 people or 5.4%; from 21 to 30 years old – 367 people or 28.9%; from 31 to 40 years old – 705 people or 55.5%; over 40 years old – 129 people or 10.2%. The age structure of respondents shows that about 90% of respondents belong to generations Y and Z, according to the well-known American classification. The intensifying competition among food manufacturers in Ukraine requires them to improve their own communication programs and positioning strategies by identifying significant emotional and functional attributes of the specified products. The conducted sociological study of the purchasing behavior of consumers on the food market in Ukraine contributes to the solution of this problem. The authors identified a number of factors influencing the formation of stereotypes of food quality perception. Indicators of environmental friendliness and safety for human health turned out to be the most important attributes in market positioning. The results of the study serve as a methodological basis for improving the communication programs of food manufacturers, contribute to the development of healthy competition among them. The findings of this study can be considered important as a guide for future research.

Keywords: ecological safety, food market, product attributes, positioning, perception

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza reakcji konsumentów na cechy jakościowe produktów spożywczych, w szczególności tych związanych z poziomem ich przyjazności dla środowiska, w celu zaproponowania korekty programów komunikacyjnych stosowanych przez producentów tych produktów na Ukrainie. Autorzy opisują reakcje konsumentów na cechy jakościowe produktów spożywczych na podstawie wyników badań socjologicznych. W badaniu wzięło udział 1269 osób, w tym 539 (42,5%) mężczyzn i 730 (57,5%) kobiet. Rozkład respondentów według wieku przedstawia się następująco: od 18 do 20 lat – 68 osób, czyli 5,4%; od 21 do 30 lat – 367 osób, czyli 28,9%; od 31 do 40 lat – 705 osób, czyli 55,5%; powyżej 40 roku życia – 129 osób, czyli 10,2%. Struktura wieku respondentów pozwala przyjąć, według znanej amerykańskiej klasyfikacji, że około 90% z nich należy do pokoleń Y i Z. Nasilająca się konkurencja wśród producentów żywności na Ukrainie wymaga od nich doskonalenia własnych programów komunikacyjnych i strategii pozycjonowania poprzez identyfikację istotnych cech emocjonalnych i funkcjonalnych dla określonych produktów. Przeprowadzone badanie socjologiczne zachowań zakupowych konsumentów na rynku żywności na Ukrainie może pomóc producentom w dostosowaniu ich programów komunikacyjnych do oczekiwań konsumentów. Autorzy artykułu zdefiniowali szereg

czynników wpływających na kształtowanie się stereotypów dotyczących postrzegania jakości żywności. Najważniejszymi atrybutami pozycjonowania rynkowego okazały się wskaźniki przyjazności dla środowiska i bezpieczeństwa dla zdrowia ludzkiego. Wyniki badania stanowią metodologiczną podstawę do doskonalenia programów komunikacyjnych producentów żywności i przyczyniają się do rozwoju zdrowej konkurencji między nimi. Wyniki tego badania można uznać za istotne dla dalszych badań w tym obszarze.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo ekologiczne, rynek żywności, cechy produktu, pozycjonowanie, postrzeganie

Introduction

Positioning of any product on the market combines, as is known, two interrelated processes: working with the product and working with the consciousness of consumers. In determining the strategic segments of the positioning of any product, the most difficult task is the identification of factors and the formation of a hypothesis regarding the purchasing behavior of consumers. A multi-step segmentation process is commonly used in the segmentation of FMCG markets, which includes food products. First of all, the geographical, socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the segments are determined, then the behavioral differences of consumers in the middle of each segment are revealed. Since food products provide the basic needs of consumers, we assume that geographic (place of residence) and socio-economic (social status, education and income level) characteristics have relatively less influence on their behavior. The listed factors influence the food structure and the volume of purchases of certain food categories, which is beyond the scope of our study. That is why, we omit these factors in our study, without denying the expediency and importance of identifying their influence.

The most significant factors for this market are demographic factors, which include age, gender of the consumer and the life cycle stage of his/her family. It is known that consumers' tastes, preferences and opportunities to satisfy them change with age. Equally important factors in people's purchasing behavior are changes in their marital status: marriage, birth of children and the need

to care for them, etc. However, the determining factors in people's behavior, from our point of view, are belonging to a certain generation or, in the terminology of demographers, an age group. Each generation has its own views and values, has its own "idols", symbols, images and stereotypes of their perception. This circumstance is extremely relevant in the formation of attributes for the positioning of food products, which determines the expediency of the study.

1. The Conceptual Framework

The works of scientists from various branches of behavioral sciences: philosophy, psychology, economic theory, sociology, anthropology, etc., are dedicated to the study of people's needs and the characteristics of their behavior, including consumer behavior. Among economists, the theory of absolute and acquired needs of J. Keynes, developed in the research of R. Blackwell and P. Miniard, is the most well-known (Blackwell, Miniard and Engel 2004). The basis of the hierarchy of needs proposed by scientists J.-J. Lambin and F. Kotler also put forward the idea that all human needs have their natural roots (Lambin and Schuiling 2012; Lambin 1993; Kotler and Keller 2008). A. Ulwick emphasizes such an essential characteristic of the product as its ability to solve consumer problems. The scientist proposed a fairly simple and at the same time comprehensive typology of these tasks: functional tasks explain in what way the needs of consumers are satisfied, personal – characterize how a person wants to feel when using the product, and the social aspect explains how a person

wants to be perceived by the immediate environment. According to the scientist, goods differ in the degree of emotional and functional complexity, however, for goods of daily demand (primarily, for food products), emotional attributes are the most significant (Ulwick 2007).

A similar approach regarding the attributes of the product and directions of its positioning was proposed by T. Gad. According to the scientist, in order to understand the strengths and weaknesses of any brand, a four-dimensional model is needed, which has the following components:

- the functional dimension refers to the perception of the usefulness of the product or its ability to satisfy the basic, generic, physiological needs of consumers;
- the social dimension is related to the product's ability to promote consumer identification with a certain social group;
- mental dimension – ability of the product to support certain beliefs and lifestyle of the consumer;
- spiritual dimension – perception of the global or national usefulness of the product, that is, its ability to solve a number of socially significant problems (Gad 2005).

A number of scientists emphasize that the success of an enterprise on the market is determined by effective positioning, which is characterized by the conformity of product attributes with criteria that should be relevant for consumers in the long term and by their nature go beyond national or cultural limitations (Kozak 2012; Ries and Trout 1986; Yerankin 2009; Ries and Trout 1982). The general trends in the development of the economy in many countries are increasing attention to the social responsibility of business, in particular, regarding its impact on the ecology of the environment, so such a comprehensive approach to the study of food attributes is justified. That is why, the expediency and possibility of using emotional and associative attributes

relevant for end consumers in food product positioning strategies requires additional study. The specified circumstance determines the relevance of the proposed study.

2. Methods

In the process of researching the manifestations and reactions of consumers to the qualitative characteristics of food products, in particular related to their level of environmental friendliness, the authors conducted a sociological study using the Google Drive office tools. In modern conditions, the dominant characteristic of purchasing behavior in the food market is the thesis regarding the determining influence of emotional (imaginary) attributes on consumer choice. The authors of the article put forward a hypothesis that the behavior of consumers in the given market is becoming more rational and the basis of consumer preferences is the functional characteristics of food products, in particular their environmental friendliness and safety for health.

1269 people participated in the study, including 539 (42.5%) men and 730 (57.5%) women. The distribution of respondents by age is as follows:

- from 18 to 20 years old – 68 people or 5.4%;
- from 21 to 30 years old – 367 people or 28.9%;
- from 31 to 40 years old – 705 people or 55.5%;
- over 40 years old – 129 people or 10.2%.

The age structure of respondents shows that about 90% of respondents belong to generations Y and Z, according to the well-known American classification (Kotler and Keller 2008).

As consumer tastes and preferences may change over time, the study of likely variables of strategic positioning in the food market is relevant for each generation. However, the youngest generations Y and Z, namely young people aged 20 to 40, are the least researched, and in the near future their purchasing values will become dominant. They were born in a period of change

in many stereotypes, their views were formed in the information age of the beginning of the 21st century and can be intertwined with the views of the next generation, i.e. that of the present schoolchildren. This factor determines the special relevance of the research, as it allows making certain predictions regarding purchasing behavior in the specified market.

In planning the representativeness and volume of the sample population, we used the methodical approach of V.I. Paniotto and V.S. Maksimenko (Paniotto, Maksymenko and Kharchenko 2004). The survey method used is a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of an adaptive part (appeal to the respondents, the first two questions) and 8 questions on the research topic. In order to activate respondents' participation in the survey, as well as to ensure their motivation to provide reliable information, the appeal provided an explanation of the purpose of the study and the possibilities of using its results to improve the communication programs of food manufacturers, and, therefore, their information needs regarding the quality of the specified products. In order to increase the reliability of the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to evade the answer, give an uncertain answer or offer their own opinion.

3. Results and Discussion

In the formation of approaches to the market positioning of goods, such a characteristic of the segment as its ability to respond to the marketing efforts of enterprises plays an extremely important role. Since the thinking of the youngest generations is different from the rest, this factor determines the need for a thorough study of their purchasing behavior. Born and raised in the information age, they are able to effectively work with information and analyze it like no other. Access to an almost unlimited amount of information and educational materials contributed to the early high education of the representatives of the specified

generations and the formation of rational decision-making skills in them at a fairly young age.

In the modern communication programs of enterprises regarding the market positioning of food products, there are a number of associative attributes and symbols of products that appeal, first of all, to secondary, not primary needs according to A. Maslow's hierarchy. Traditionally, this factor was explained by the irrational behavior of consumers in the market and the high emotional component of food products. However, according to the results of our research, we see (Fig. 1) that the vast majority of respondents, when buying food products, do not associate this process with the satisfaction of higher-order needs. Thus, the largest number of respondents (64.7%) buy food simply to maintain their daily activities, for 54.6% it is important to maintain the level of physical activity, and for 16.5% – to ensure their own safety. That is, the younger generations in the food market, first of all, critically evaluate their impact on the physiological state of the body. Only 12.9% of consumers evaluate the purchase process as an expression of their own lifestyle, and 21.7% as a manifestation of freedom of choice.

For the older generations, the purchase of goods and services means largely the satisfaction of a number of social needs. Unlike them, this factor is insignificant for the studied group. When buying food products, only:

- 2.4% of surveyed consumers want to be like everyone else;
- 3.1% – satisfy the need for communication and social contacts;
- 3.5% – seek respect and recognition from the environment;
- 3.0% – support their own social status.

Thus, our study confirms the thesis regarding the predominance of individualistic beliefs of representatives of these age cohorts. In addition, there is no significant difference in the perception of food as a commodity among men and women.

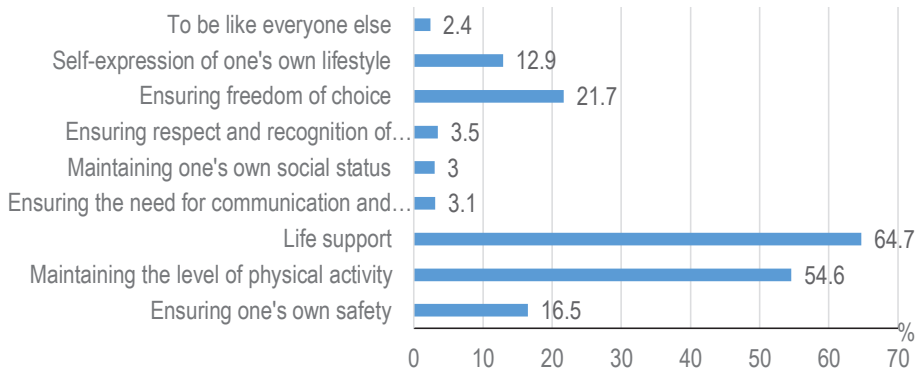


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents according to their perception of food products as needs

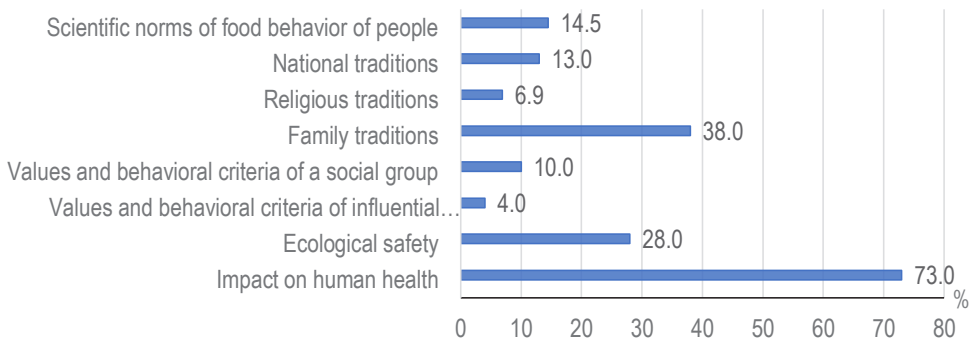


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents according to moral and ethical values and criteria for purchasing food

When evaluating purchasing behavior, it is necessary to take into account the cultural, social and individual characteristics of the consumer. That is why, these factors were also the subject of our research. Fig. 2 presents data on the distribution of respondents according to moral and ethical values and criteria for purchasing food.

Such values and acquisitions of modern social development as environmental safety and scientific norms of people's food behavior are important factors in purchasing behavior in the food market for 28.0 and 14.5 percent of respondents, respectively. Subcultural factors have even less influence, in particular, 13.0 percent of respondents are guided by national traditions, and only 6.9 percent are guided by religious ones.

Among the social factors, family traditions have the greatest influence, which are significant for 38.0% of surveyed consumers, which proves the relevance of additional research into the composition and distribution of status roles when purchasing food in families. The influence of reference groups on the views of the studied group is low, in particular, the values and behavioral criteria of the social groups to which they belong are significant for 10% of the respondents. The purchasing criteria and behavior of "opinion leaders" or influential persons (reference groups of indirect influence) are valuable to only 4.0% of surveyed consumers. The vast majority of respondents are guided by their own value beliefs. The basic value underlying the system of beliefs and

behavior in the food market of the studied group of consumers is health safety. According to this criterion, 73.0% of respondents make purchases, which indicates their tendency to make rational decisions.

The satisfaction of nutritional needs, of course, belongs to the category of biogenic, the motivating motive of which is the physiological features of the human body (Kozak 2014a). Real (functional) attributes of food products, such as taste and appearance, should play a key role in satisfying such needs. However, the consumer's choice of specific types of food can be significantly influenced by psychological associations and the emotions they cause. Traditionally, in Ukrainian culture, food products, in particular bread, are a symbol of national well-being, wealth, health, love of work and honesty, that is, those concepts that are associated with the level of development of the country, individual family or an individual. Also, the abundance of food in a Ukrainian house is a symbol of hospitality, peace, family comfort and other positive emotions. Ukrainians treated food as sacrosanct, there are many beliefs about this, which in ancient times had a ritualistic and magical meaning. In particular, our ancestors made sure that bread did not fall to the ground, it was considered a sin to sweep bread crumbs on the ground, even to not eat a piece of it, etc.

Generations Y and Z in Ukraine grew up in a society of much higher prosperity, compared to the previous ones, and their perception of satisfying basic needs was definitely transformed. In order to find out this factor, respondents were asked a series of paired questions to determine the importance of real and imagined attributes of food as a product, as well as to identify positive and negative associations that they cause (Figs. 3 and 4). In order to determine preferences in consumer attitudes, respondents were first given the opportunity to give unambiguous answers regarding positive emotions and associations related to food products, and subsequently regarding negative ones.

According to the classification of goods proposed by Anthony Ulwik, emotional (imaginary) attributes for the consumer are more significant than functional ones (Ulwick 2007). However, the studied group of consumers demonstrates absolutely opposite evaluation criteria of their own purchasing behavior in the given market, giving preference to the real (functional) characteristics of the goods. The taste qualities of food products turned out to be the most important attribute for them, and 71.7% of respondents were satisfied with the taste of food, and 42.5% were dissatisfied, on the basis of which it can be argued that positive consumer attitudes prevail.

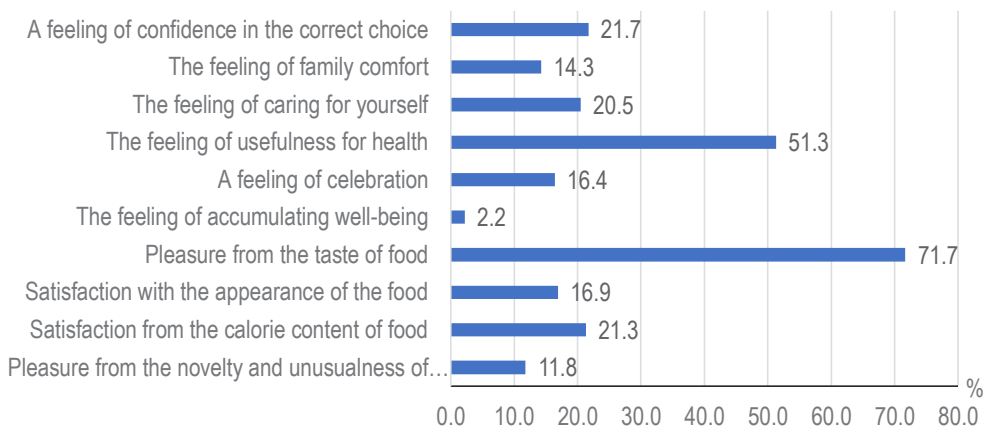


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents according to their positive emotions and food perception associations

The next most important attribute for food products is their safety, and therefore the fear of potential loss of health is felt by 61.6% of surveyed consumers, and usefulness – by 51.3%. The caloric content of food ranks third in consumer preferences, while 21.3% are satisfied with its high level, and 14.6% are dissatisfied. We refute the thesis that the majority of representatives of the mentioned groups carefully control the amount of proteins and fats in food and prefer low-calorie products. Most likely, this factor is neutral for the majority of young people. The views of women and men on the safety of food coincide, but the taste of food is much more important for women, and the calorie content is much more important for men.

Social and emotional associations related to food are significant for a much smaller number of respondents. As it was shown above, a significant part of the respondents take into account national and family traditions when choosing food products, and that is why they are associated with a feeling of family comfort in 14.3% of respondents, and with a feeling of self-care from those close to them – in 20.5%. That is, products acquire social value in the minds of a large part of representatives of this age group.

In addition, in a certain part of the surveyed food products arouse affective reactions, that is, they are associated with special

pleasant (unpleasant) feelings or contribute to their expression. In particular, the consumption process creates sensations:

- confidence in the correctness of the choice made – in 21.7%;
- holidays – in 16.4%;
- accumulation of well-being and wealth – in 2.2%.

However, the results of our study indicate the predominance of negative emotions in the perception of food. Thus, 15.6% of respondents associate them with fear of uncertainty about the correctness of the choice, 6.6% with fear of uncertainty and unknown future, 12.9% with a feeling of mundanity, and 4.1% with a feeling of loss of well-being.

It is traditionally believed that the vast majority of young people born in the 90s and 2000s suffer from attention deficit disorder because they grew up in families with working parents. Especially for them, marketers invented a supermarket with an extensive entertainment system. Hence, it can be assumed that the epistemic value of goods is important for them, that is, their ability to arouse curiosity with novelty or satisfy the desire for knowledge. Our research confirms the above assumption: 16.9% of respondents are satisfied with the appearance and presentation of food, and 11.8% are satisfied with the novelty and unusualness of food. At the same time,

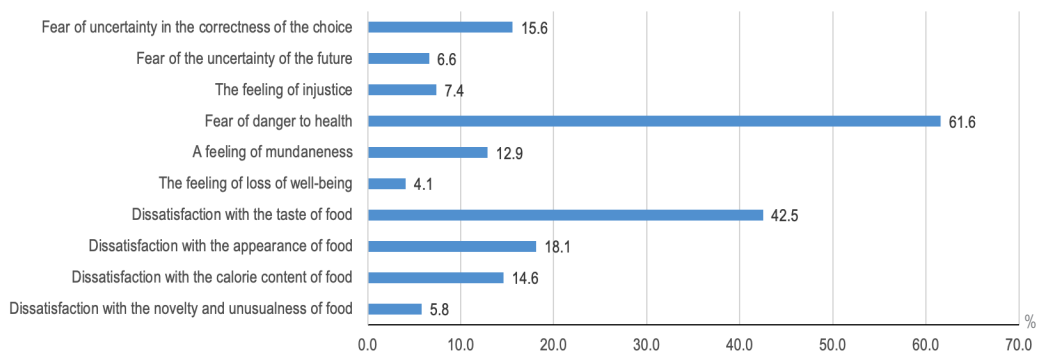


Figure 4. Distribution of respondents according to their negative emotions and food perception associations

negative emotions significantly prevail in the perception of the value of food, which indicates the imperfection of positioning strategies used by manufacturers (Figs. 3 and 4).

In addition to product attributes, an equally important factor in effective market positioning of goods and services is the definition of criteria for consumer purchasing behavior. Product price and quality, combined with perceived associations, also play a key role in determining the type of effective competition in the market. At the same time, it is considered that for those goods that satisfy the highest needs of consumers, quality and the ability to differentiate them according to this criterion are important. For standardized goods and those that satisfy the primary needs of consumers, the price is more significant, and therefore, the use of a developed system of discounts is justified. However, Fig. 5 shows that only for 3.0% of respondents, the price is a determining criterion for the purchase of food products. 27.7% of surveyed respondents buy food products based exclusively on quality characteristics, and the vast majority of them (69.0%) demonstrate flexible approaches to their own purchasing behavior in the given market, preferring a combination of factors such as price and quality of food products.

So, as Fig. 5 shows, the quality of food products (in combination with price and without it) is an important attribute for 97% of the surveyed respondents. A logical continuation of our research is the definition of factors that, from the point of view of consumers, are indicators of the quality of food products. First of all, we tried to find out which stage of the technological production cycle the studied group of consumers considers to be decisive in the formation of the quality of food products (Fig. 6).

As we can see from the above-figure, it is difficult for a third of the studied group of consumers to answer the question, but 43% of them believe that the key role in the formation of food quality is played by

the applied technology of agricultural production, and 24.7% by the technology of its processing. Thus, we can conclude that increasing the environmental friendliness of the applied technologies of agricultural products will contribute to the effectiveness of market strategies not only of agricultural enterprises, but also of processing enterprises.

An equally important factor in effective market positioning is compliance with established standards for food safety indicators and consumer trust in them (Kozak 2014b). Safety indicators are represented by a number of technical and technological parameters regarding the possibility of using agrotechnical, zootechnical and veterinary means that cause the appearance of certain harmful impurities in agricultural products. Based on specified parameters, relevant organizations draw conclusions about acceptability of a certain type of product for consumption and whether it ensures normal functioning of the human body. Among quality parameters of food products, safety indicators are the most strictly controlled. However, the low level of consumer confidence in specific control mechanisms will prevent market promotion of products.

Fig. 7 presents the results of an analysis on consumers' views on technological factors that negatively affect the quality of food products. The specific list of technological operations offered to the respondents referred both to the stage of production of agricultural products and to the stage of its processing. However, the respondents gave preference to factors related to the first of the mentioned stages of the technological cycle of food production.

In particular, 44.1% of respondents believe that the use of growth hormones and antibiotics negatively affects the quality of food products, 54.3% have such views regarding the content of nitrates, nitrites and pesticide residues in them, and 39.2% regarding the content of radionuclides. The most dangerous for the human body, from the point of view of respondents, is the use of genetic

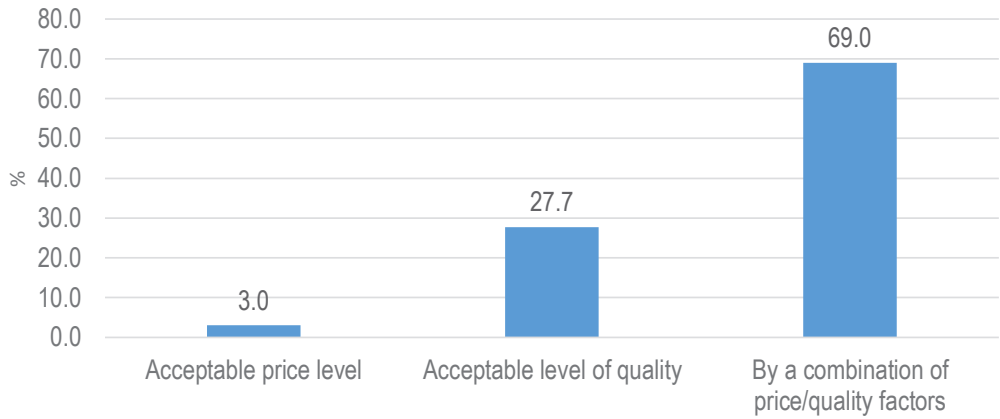


Figure 5. Distribution of respondents according to the criteria of their purchasing behavior in the food market

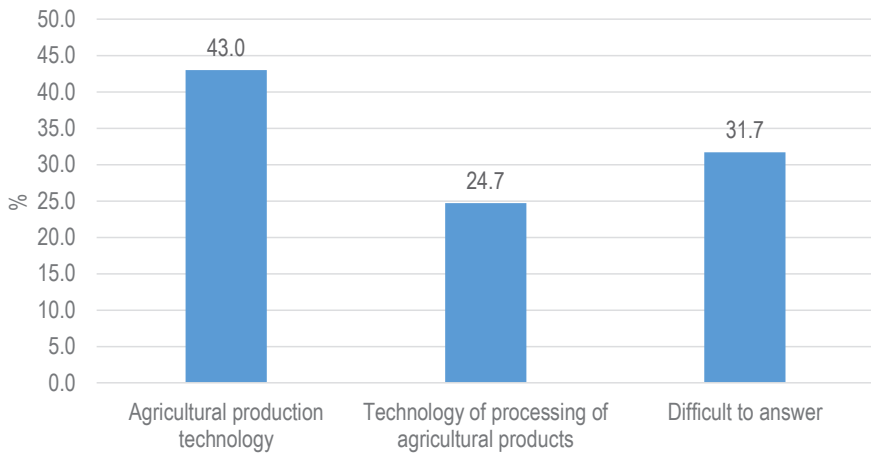


Figure 6. Distribution of respondents according to their views on the role of technological stages of food production in the formation of their quality

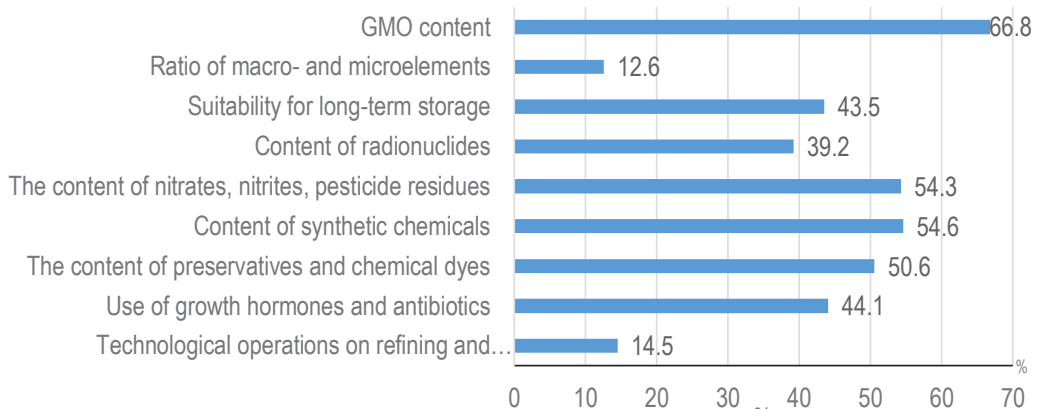


Figure 7. Distribution of respondents according to their views on technological operations that negatively affect the quality of food products

engineering in agricultural production. According to 66.8% of respondents, the content of GMOs is harmful, and the introduced special mandatory labeling of food products does not solve the problem of relieving social tension.

Individual quality characteristics of ready-made food products acquired by them in the process of processing also cause tension and concern among a large part of the interviewees. In particular, 43.5% of respondents include the suitability of food products for long-term storage, 54.6% – the content of synthetic chemicals, and 50.6% – the content of preservatives and chemical dyes. The ratio of macro- and microelements in food products is an important quality parameter for 12.6% of respondents, and 14.5% of them believe that technological operations for refining and mineralization worsen the quality of food.

The next step of our research was to determine the views of the studied group of consumers regarding measures that will increase consumer confidence in the quality of food products of Ukrainian producers (Tab. 1). A significant part of the interviewees believes that the technology of agricultural production has a greater weight in the formation of the quality of food products. At the same time, a significant part of the interviewees consider the stage of processing of agricultural products to be no less important. According to respondents, the most important measure that will increase consumer confidence in the quality of food products is the strengthening of state control over agricultural production technology. This position was supported by 872 persons or 68.7% of the respondents. At the same time, 51.7% of respondents hold this opinion regarding the strengthening of state control over the technology of its processing. The factor that food manufacturers cannot rely on has gained the most weight. It is precisely in this that the greatest difficulties lie in the formation of effective strategic programs for the positioning

of both the products of agricultural enterprises and processing enterprises.

The next most significant factor was found to be partially influenced by manufacturers: 36.7% of respondents believe that increasing public awareness of food production technologies will positively affect consumer confidence in their quality. A slightly smaller number of respondents hold the same opinion regarding raising public awareness of agricultural production technologies. Based on this, we can conclude that despite the positive processes associated with increasing the openness of the activities of most enterprises, the interviewed group of consumers in Ukraine considers the amount of information provided to be insufficient.

As we can see from Table 1, measures implemented by manufacturers will have the least impact on the views of the studied group of consumers. Thus, only 16.2% of them believe that their confidence in the quality of domestic products will increase as a result of changes in the marketing programs of food manufacturers. An even smaller number of respondents (only 10.7%) hold this opinion regarding the change in the marketing programs of agricultural producers. Of course, if marketing programs have such a marginal effect on consumers, then they are outdated and need improvement. The results of the research on the views and beliefs of consumers show that the programs will be more effective if they rely more on informative, rather than persuasive measures, as most manufacturers do.

Conclusions

Thus, a selective marketing study of consumer purchasing behavior in the food market in Ukraine showed that respondents, when buying food, do not associate this process with the satisfaction of higher-order needs. Traditionally, it was believed that when choosing food products, emotional attributes are more significant for the consumer, compared to functional ones.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their views on measures that will increase trust in the quality of food products in Ukraine

List of events	Total respondents		Among them: men		Among them: women	
	Persons	% to the total number	Persons	% to the total number	Persons	% to the total number
Strengthening of state control over the technology of production of agricultural products	872	68.7	346	64.1	526	72.1
Increasing public awareness of agricultural production technologies	426	33.5	184	34.1	242	33.2
Change in marketing programs of producers of agricultural products	136	10.7	54	10	82	11.2
Strengthening of state control over the technology of processing agricultural products	656	51.7	252	46.7	404	55.3
Increasing public awareness of food production technologies	466	36.7	192	35.6	274	37.5
Change in marketing programs of food manufacturers	206	16.2	82	15.2	124	17

However, we found that the studied group of consumers demonstrates completely opposite criteria of their own purchasing behavior in the given market, giving preference to the functional characteristics of goods, critically assessing their impact on the physiological state of the body.

The basic value that underlies the behavior of the studied group of consumers is the level of environmental friendliness and health safety of food products, and their quality in combination with price is an important attribute for 97% of the surveyed respondents. The authors also identified a number of factors that influence the formation of a negative perception of the quality of food products, among which indicators of reliability and safety for human health and the associations created on this basis turned out to be the most important attributes in market positioning. Overcoming these negative stereotypes of perception through increasing public awareness and improving state control over production and processing technologies of agricultural products will improve the market image not only of agricultural, but also of processing enterprises.

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