

Environmental aspects of Hungarian consumers' food choice

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Enhancing of environmental awareness is not just a local aim, is a global priority that will contribute to ensuring a sustainable future. As one of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations as well as among the key areas of the FOOD2030 priorities, sustainable and healthy diets have to be promoted both locally and globally. Even the environmental aspects are not the leading elements of the Hungarian consumers' food choice (Törőcsik, 2009; Hofmeister-Tóth et al., 2011) and the rate of the most committed consumer group to sustainability is almost 8% (Lehota et al., 2014), the level of awareness is constantly rising (Dudás, 2011; Gulyás, 2017). In order to support this process identification of the intervention points is essential. Thus the aim of the present paper was to examine the appearance of the environmental factors in Hungarian consumers' food choice decisions and their relation to the level of healthy lifestyle.

Materials and Methods

In order to get more detailed information about the Hungarian consumers' food choice motivations a representative (gender, age, level, education, type of residency and region) self-administered questionnaire survey (N=500) was conducted among the 18-59 year-old Hungarian population in 2017. The questionnaire was developed using a number of relevant studies (Ferrão et al., 2018) and validated with the data from 16 countries. For the data analysis IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0 was used.

Results

With the help of the questions (by scoring) referring to the quality of the nutrition ('How often do you think that you follow a balanced/healthy diet?') and to the frequency of physical exercise ('How often do you usually engage in physical exercise?') three consumer sub-groups were created: 'having healthy lifestyle', 'having average lifestyle' and 'having unhealthy lifestyle'. One third of the analysed population followed a healthy lifestyle while a quarter belonged to the unhealthy group (Figure 1).

'Unhealthy lifestyle' was mostly carried out by men, younger than 30 years, having low level of education and living in villages, while 'healthy lifestyle' was mainly typical of higher educated and capital citizens.

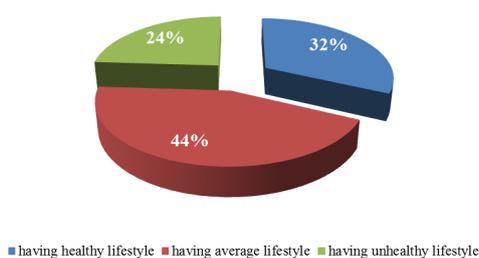


Figure 1. Distribution of the developed consumer sub-groups

Effect of environmental factors related to food choice was analysed by seven relevant statements. Those who follow 'unhealthy lifestyle' did not attend enough to neither themselves, nor to the environment when it comes to nutrition. Furthermore significantly less attention was paid to food waste during cooking, to the domestic nature of the food consumed, to the amount of food packaging and its environmentally friendly nature by consumers 'having unhealthy lifestyle'. While consumers 'having healthy diet' were the opposite; they tried to take care both of themselves and their environment. However, respect for human and animal rights and restaurants having a recovery policy for food surplus were not influencing factors for the Hungarian consumers (Figure 2).

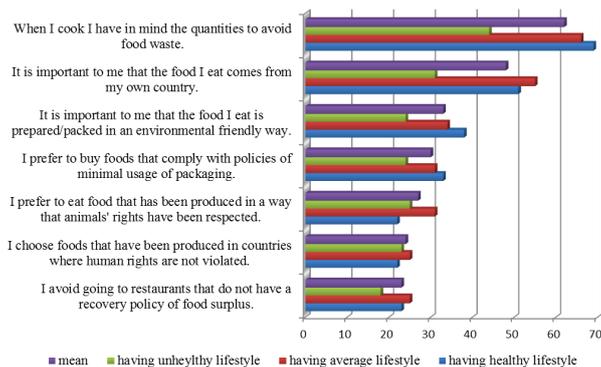


Figure 2. Level of agreement to the statements related to environmental factors

Conclusions

In the food choice process of Hungarian consumers' environmental awareness appears mainly in the form of food waste and the reduction of packaging waste. Results of the present study showed that environmental factors appear in different level during the food choice of Hungarian consumers on the basis of the level of the healthy lifestyle. Taking environmental elements into account is more active among consumers following average or healthy lifestyles, while less in the group of consumers having unhealthy lifestyle. Despite the fact that consumers having average and healthy lifestyle was more susceptible to the environmental aspects – medium level of agreement – their awareness should be further boosted. Thus, beside the promotion of unhealthy consumers' lifestyle, embedding of environmental aspects into gastronomic and lifestyle elements may provide remarkable changes.

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