

## THE INFLUENCE OF AGE AND EMOTIONS ON CONSUMER'S FOOD PREFERENCES

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### INTRODUCTION

For food consumption, there are some questions whose answer must be very clear: what food do we like, why do we like some foods and dislike others, which are the factors which can help the food producer? Some food preferences are stable and fixed overtime. They are relatively permanent and unaffected by changes in settings or moods, other preferences are transitory and change from day to day.

A great number of factors affecting food preferences have been identified. Like: food characteristics, body weight, age, sex or race, self concept, social economic status, peer or other models, parental attitudes, family relations, nutrition knowledge, television viewing, familiarity, context, geography, culture, food meanings, emotional status. Many researchers investigate the influence of several variables at once, and these may interact so that any one variable has no direct effect by itself, but became important in conjunction with other variables.

We have to see how the questions are implemented. The subject must be not angry, hungry or tired. Also the age is responsible for some modifications in preferences.

The question is: how preferences are measured. Some time it is simply a matter of asking whether a particular food is liked or disliked, but one cannot always rely on the accuracy of the answers.

Most people tend to give favorable answers more fairly than unfavorable ones. Some of them answer in a way to some questions because they think is good the answer not because they action in that way.

*For acquired food preferences, the studies suggest that what happens in the mouth is more important than what happens in the stomach.*

Taste, odor, and texture seem more important than the hunger-reducing properties of food. These are also important in food dislikes (Rozin and Fallon 1980). Simple exposure enhances preferences and acceptance. There are individual differences in responsiveness to food stimuli.

If the cakes are left on the table, some individuals will leave them alone unless they are

hungry, but others will nibble and eat them simply because they are there. This is known as *external responsiveness*. It is found in individuals at all weight levels. (Rodin 1980).

Some studies presented that, it left to make their own choices, newly weaned children eight to ten months old would select balanced, healthy diets. They might eat only one food for several days running and then switch to something else, but in a long run proper diet was obtained.

The self-selection of healthy diets based on assumption of preference for healthy foods must take into consideration the effects of curiosity, novelty, peer pressure, television commercials, and other onslaughts on human suggestibility. Also, in time, the preferences vary and the consumer will have more experience, may be he will travel knowing in this way many eating habits or he will read about some new products fact that change the diet.

Foods determine our moods so do our moods determine what we eat? If we try to find out just what foods are preferred during different emotions there are a few specific answers. Many are quite general suggesting, for example, that individuals tend to drink milk when sad, eat a great deal when bores, or eat high calories dessert when frustrated.

### 1. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The aim of this study was to explore food habits and preferences of people linked to age, school, and emotional. Variables such age, gender and socio/economic status may affect food habits and preferences, as described in several studies. Babayan et.al. (1966), Fischer & Chiva (1986), Rolls (1988), Story (1989), C.R.E.A. (1990) and Walsh (1993) reported gender differences: women presented more food aversions than men and had a different pattern of consumption.

The study was made on a questionnaire basis. The questionnaire contained :

- ↳ 10 items related to personal data (age, sex, religion, profession, economical status, emotional);
- ↳ 10 items related to preferences and food necessities (type of food preferred – meat or vegetables, diary products);

↳ 5 items related to food -emotions link, external stimuli, liked and disliked food related to these emotins.

Subjects - the test group was composed by 200 subjects choused by age criteria. They were all from Galati, Romania and aged between 15 and 73 years old (fig 1.).

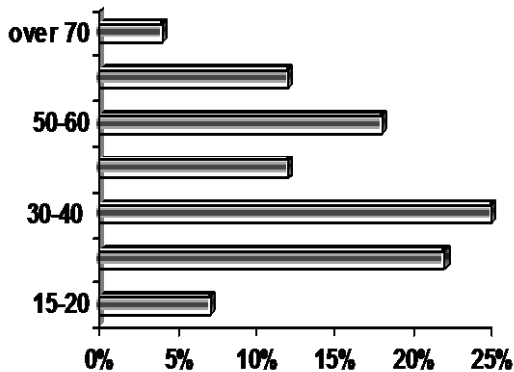


Figure 1. Age partition of the subjects.

The representative is 20 - 40 and 50 - 60 years old areas. The subjects in this case having food experience, knowing exactly the food necessities and pleasures. Data analysis – after we separated the subjects on 7 age categories, we followed the receptivity to new food products, liked and disliked foods, the self control on external stimuli and the preferred foods in 21 emotional states.

RESULTS

First aspect we approached was the influence of external stimuli. In fig 2 is presented the behavior of the consumers given to cake left on the table.

The age is the first factor that influence.

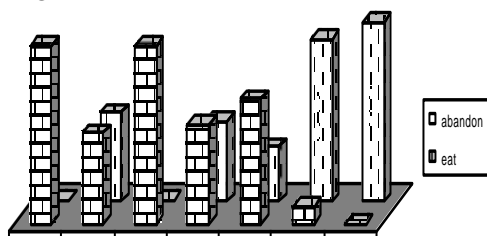


Figure 2. The behavior of the consumer.

Over 70 years the subjects don't resist to external stimuli at all. The more resistant is the area 15 – 20 and 30-40 years. The young age (20 – 30) is equilibrated.

Second approach was the receptivity and respectively the conservationism in food choices.

In table 1 are presented the obtained values.

Here we have three possibilities for answering to the question: You are responsive given to new food product promoted in mass media?

First one Yes I buy them from curiosity (A) or I buy them for comparing with the ones, which already exist (B), or the last possibility is no I am conservative, I don't change the products(C).

Table 1. Receptivity given to a new food product.

Receptivity	AGE [YEARS]						
	15-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	60-70	Over 70
Yes [%]	50	69	56	44	31	44	60
Comp [%]	50	31	22	33	22	22	-
No [%]	-	-	22	23	31	34	40

The conservatism increases from 30 years old to over 70. The number of people who want only to compare is relatively constant, less than 30 - 40 and 60 - 70 which are equal like value.

Mass - media and new products have a greater impact on the consumers aged between 30 / 40 years old and this age is most equilibrated speaking of curiosity, comparing and conservationism.

In some emotional situations (were choused some positive psychological states, like amused, fearful, friendly, excited, joy, happy, love, relaxed and some negative ones like: anxious, bored, depressed, embarrassed, frustrated, guilty, hostile, jealous, lonely, sad worried and solemn -a state which belong to a special psychological category) every one prefers some food linked with that emotions.

We had linked different results, also in this case by the age 3 % from total tasters do not associate food with emotions. Especially the ones aged after 50 don't know for sure what they prefer (4 %). These are the ones which don't know only in some situations like embarrassed, fearful, jealous, guilty, solemn, hostile. These ones are 4 % from all.

There is the category which eats anything in every situation (2 %), and only one which eat salad in every situation. There are also some which eat nothing when they are in these emotional estates represent 19 % from all.

The rest of 68 % prefers one or two food products or there are some estates like: angry, anxious, embarrassed, frustrated, guilty, solemn and worried. For example salads eat 5 % when friendly, 2 % depressed or angry or sad or fearful and 1 % when they are lonely, amused or jealous.

The soup is preferred in positive situations like happy, relaxed and by contrast the eggs in negative situations like depressed, sad or bored.

The desserts are preferred in all the positive estates and alcohol especially when they are happy, amused, sad or relaxed. Only one subject prefers the

alcohol in every negative estate (sad, depressed etc.).

There are also some foods that the consumer doesn't eat in any case (fig.3). There are also some that are unlikely in a little percent (not totally) – spinach, cabbage, goose, duck meat.

The ones especially liked are fruits, fish, meat (pork, beef, chicken), milk and some consumers don't have any preferences (fig. 5).

The milk (which includes the diary products) is the food that is or extremely liked (45,2 % of the consumers) or there are consumers that not like at all this product only 8 %.

The fish a product with a low content of lipids, and with A and D vitamin content is preferred especially only by 21,5 % of the consumers.

The meat (that means pork, beef and hen) is preferred by 45,2 % of consumers but 11 % don't like sheep and lamb.

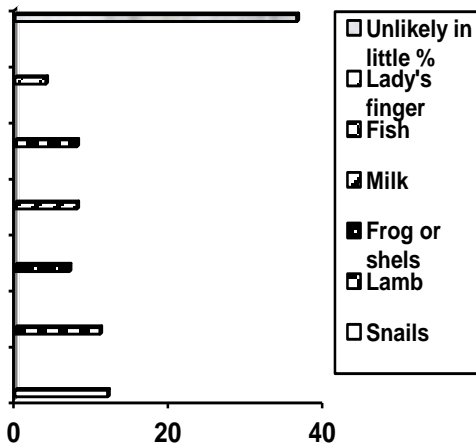


Figure 3. Foods that the consumers dislike.

12 % do not agree the snails and never shall eat and 4 % do not eat lady's finger.

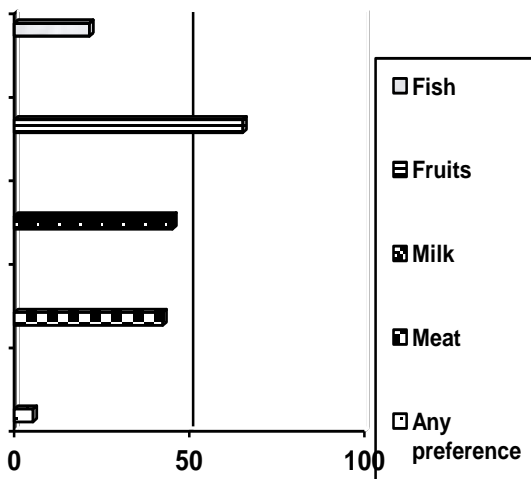


Figure 4. Food preferred especially.

These estimations eliminate the age criteria.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The food producer must know the consumer and his real preferences.

2. Food preferences are influenced by many factors (food characteristics, body weight, age, gender, race, religion, education and others), which can influence us in the choice or reject a food.

3. Some foods are consumed with pleasure, others are categorically refused. In first category are included meat (pork, beef, chicken), milk and milk products. In the second category (snails, frogs, shell – fishes and lamb meat.

4. The emotional estates create some preferences for some foods.

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