

BABEȘ BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ - NAPOCA
FACULTY OF ECONOMIC SCIENCES AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
DOCTORAL SCHOOL ECONOMIC SCIENCES AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
FIELD MARKETING

DOCTORAL THESIS
ABSTRACT

PhD coordinator:

Prof. Dr. Gheorghe Alexandru CATANĂ

PhD student:

Teodora - Mihaela SAV (TARCZA)

Cluj - Napoca

2015

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**THE BEHAVIOR AND PROFILE OF THE CONSUMER OF ROMANIAN
TRADITIONAL FOODSTUFFS**

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KEY WORDS

- *AGRO-FOOD MARKETING*
- *TRADITIONAL FOODSTUFFS*
- *PDO / PGI / GTS*
- *OFFER OF TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS IN ROMANIA AND EU*
- *VISIBILITY OF THE OFFER OF TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS TRADIȚIONALE*
- *BEHAVIOR AND PROFILE OF CONSUMER OF TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS*
- *VALSTM MODEL*
- *HEALTHY DIET*

INTRODUCTION

It is known that the *offer* and *demand* for traditional products exhibit a clear trend of increasing both globally and nationally. This trend is fueled by the desire of consumers to return to the natural, cultural values and healthy food traditions whose meanings have been minimized in time (Amilien, 2014; Jordana 2000; Wolfe, 1999). It seems that marketers everywhere are increasingly concerned with the discovery of needs, wishes, expectations of buyers of such products (Popovics, 2006; Vanhonacker, 2010). Also, the regulatory framework / environment for industries offering traditional products and services is increasingly well defined, globally, regionally, nationally and even locally. For example, there are significant concerns regarding the certification, production and marketing of that category. As a result of this interest, it increases the visibility of the offer of traditional agricultural products, using the whole offline and online arsenal of marketing strategies and techniques.

The *behavior* of the buyers / consumers of traditional foodstuffs is more and more sophisticated, refined, demanding to the authentic quality, their health by consuming them. We are witnessing the emergence of new social lifestyles based on this behavior. Theorists, marketing researchers, business profile are based on behavioral analyses of a wide range of variables. The aim of such analysis is a more thorough segmentation of the market, the description of the segments obtained, their evaluation and adoption of appropriate strategies for positioning.

The request for empirical studies on the traditional agro-food phenomenon is in an accelerated dynamics. Many marketing research are oriented towards the description of the profile of buyers / consumers of traditional foodstuffs in terms of demographic and / or socio-economic and / or psychological, cultural perspectives.

The *general aim* of this paper is the theoretical analysis of consumer behavior for traditional foodstuffs and its empirical study on the profile. To achieve this goal we proposed the following *objectives*:

- to delimitate the concept of "traditional agro-food product", from an agro-marketing perspective;
- to structure geographically the Romanian and European offer of traditional foodstuffs;

- to identify the most effective marketing techniques to increase the visibility of the offer of Romanian traditional products;
- to describe the variables of traditional products consumer behavior;
- to identify the connections between the consumption of traditional products and the "wellbeing" of the individual;
- to approach the market segmentation of traditional products from a behavioral perspective;
- to conduct an empirical study of market segmentation of Romanian traditional products; and to describe the consumer profile of Romanian traditional products.

To achieve the general goal and to fulfill the objectives proposed, we have adopted the structural logic / on chapters below.

The *first chapter* entitled "Traditional foodstuffs" is devoted to conceptual delimitation of traditional products from the interdisciplinary perspective of agromarketing. We note that agromarketing has different regional, national, economic, socio-cultural and even pragmatic (in terms of marketing) connotations / particularities which were translated in a variety of definitions thereof, respectively, of traditional products (Chiran and Gîndu, 2002; Constantin, 2009; Turek Rahoveanu, 2009; Stanciu, 2010). However, the particularities mentioned are translated into specific legislative regulations, especially regarding the certification, production and marketing of TP.

The *second chapter* ("The offer of traditional foodstuffs: diversity, geographic features, visibility") is destined to geographical structure of TP offer in Romania and EU (according to DOOR - Database of Origin and Registration). The following describes the features of traditional products *visibility* in terms of product mix (name, labeling – POD – Protected Designation of Origin, PGI-Protected Geographical Indication, TSG –Traditional Specialty Guaranteed - packaging, *merchandising* etc.) and in terms of specific marketing techniques (associative marketing, participation to fairs and specialized exhibitions).

Assuming that the consumer is the core of the marketing activities of any organization, and his knowledge and understanding of his behavior is the foundation of substantiation of effective marketing strategies, *Chapter Three* ("The behavior of the consumer of traditional foodstuffs") is a theoretical incursion in understanding this subject on the basis of general and personal *endogenous* variables or *exogenous* (social-cultural), respectively. The chapter goes on to describe some elements of the behavior of traditional products consumer through the

awareness of healthy eating. There are presented the main tools for measuring the wellbeing / *Indexes (Wellbeing States Index, Better Life Index, DAFNE)*. An important part of the chapter is allocated to the process of market segmentation, segment evaluation and selection of target market. Special emphasis is given to the VALS segmentation model based on behavioral variables. A comparison is made between the VALS segmentation typology and the profile of traditional products consumer outlined in one of our previous research.

Chapter four ("Empirical study of Romanian of the profile of the consumer of traditional foodstuffs") is dedicated to the research on the field of the theme illustrated by the title of the thesis in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives.

The method of scientific investigation is the *survey* based on a questionnaire inspired from the literature. It should be noted that previous to the empirical study itself was conducted a pilot study, in order to improve the form, content and effectiveness of the instrument. The pilot study was conducted on a sample of 115 subjects from the population of interest of research, namely the consumers of traditional products, participating in a fair in Cluj County (*Agraria* - the largest fair in the field). The improved questionnaire (final) was managed on a global sample of research of 545 people, of which 362 have completed it online.

The characterization of the profile of Romanian traditional products consumer was started from 46 scaled variables (*items*). Following exploratory factor analysis 9 latent dimensions of the researched profile resulted. Through a K-Means cluster analysis 2 distinct segments of consumers were reached, with the potential to be treated differently in terms of marketing. Specifically, it describes two segments of consumers of traditional products: the "traditionalists" and the "balanced" (those aspiring to a balanced life). At the end of the chapter the "average profile" of the traditional products consumer is synthesized in the sample investigated, based on two sets of features: demo, socio-economic and psychological, respectively.

The thesis concludes with *Chapter 5* ("Conclusions, contributions, limitations and future research directions"), section summarizing *also* the theoretical, empirical and practical contributions for the marketing management of suppliers of traditional foodstuffs. The most relevant contributions are those relating to the conceptual delimitation of traditional foodstuffs, the outlining of the profile of RTP consumer and the marketing techniques most appropriate to increase the visibility of traditional foodstuffs. In this chapter other contributions are inserted, too.

CHAPTER 1. TRADITIONAL FOODSTUFFS

Beginning with the second half of the 20th century, the application of marketing has expanded geographically (and even stronger with the emergence of the idea of globalization), yet especially as a scope of the various economic sectors. From the lucrative sphere, that of consumer goods and means of production, to the service and agriculture sectors, marketing has easily found applicability (Florescu, 2002).

1.1. Agromarketing: particularities and types

Agromarketing or *agro-food marketing* is difficult to define because it is an interdisciplinary concept. In the USA it has been addressed since the 1930s, after the Great Depression of Overproduction (Halcrow, 1984), but in our country it has developed only after the Revolution years, with the transition to capitalism (Manole, 2009).

Constantin (2009) defines agro-food marketing as being an “entire system of economic activities targeting the planning and realization of production, price setting, designing and implementing decisions in the field of distribution and promotion of foodstuffs, in order to satisfy in the best conditions the requests of current and potential consumers, concomitantly with the increase of enterprise profitability.”

According to Funar (1999), the *specific of agro-food marketing* is considered significant through:

- marketing was first known in the agro-food sector and then generalized towards other sectors;
- marketing activities conducted on significant consumer markets always have in view food products;
- marketing is not interesting only for agricultural products or for those after the first transformation, but also for foodstuffs;
- agro-food marketing cannot be conceived only within the binomial given by the “product-market” elements, but especially within the trinomial “product-technology-market”;
- there is a multitude of economic agents in the agro-food marketing branch.

Szakaly *et al.* (2010) believe that agromarketing deals with the creating of the raw material and foodstuff product market, after the primary and secondary processing. A feature of agromarketing compared with other branches of the national economy is its total dependence on the size of the enterprise. According to this feature, we can identify the *types of agromarketing* shown in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1. Types of agromarketing

Size of enterprise	Degree of product differentiation	
	Low	High
Small	Limitative marketing	Marketing oriented towards market niches
Large	Marketing oriented towards price and distribution	Total marketing

(Source: Meulenber, 1986, in Szakaly *et al.*, 2010)

The *characteristics of the main types of agromarketing* according to Szakaly *et al.* (2010) are the following: *limitative marketing* (small size of enterprise - low degree of product differentiation); *marketing oriented towards market niches* (small size of enterprise - high degree of product differentiation); *marketing oriented towards price and distribution* (it integrates stages of primary processing); *total marketing* (large size of company - high degree of product differentiation).

In the actual meaning, the agromarketing serves to the creation, communication and transmission of business value. Marketing management aims choosing target markets, which aim the final consumer and the creation of purchasing value by attracting, maintaining and increasing the number of consumers (Szakaly *et al.*, 2010). In the field of agromarketing there is the category of traditional, regional and local traditional products, with guaranteed specificity.

1.2. Foodstuffs: definitions, characteristics, classification

With their special features and characteristics, foodstuffs are a special category of agricultural products. Chiran and Gându (2002) propose a definition of *foodstuffs* by explaining the two constituent words: "agro" - suggests the origin (agricultural production), while "food" highlights their intended use (food consumption). The fundamental difference between *agricultural* and *food* products consists in the fact that the first must go through several processes of transformation to become food. From Diaconescu's perspective (2006), "the food product intended for final consumption, that is for human consumption, is the result of a system of organizations, consisting of production, distribution and promotion companies belonging to various economic fields".

Our scientific approach requires the clarification and highlighting of the differences between the concepts of *conventional foodstuffs* (regular), and the *traditional, ecological* products (organic or bio), with *local, regional* or *zonal* specific. *Conventional* products and foods (classic) are those products that can be found in the market, made in large quantities, in units of production of industrial type complying with technological conditions generally available, without the use of raw materials or special technology (Szakaly *et al.*, 2010). To differentiate between them, these products need to create and develop their own *brand*.

A better understanding of the definitions of foodstuffs requires the knowledge and analysis of their *main characteristics: seasonality, perishability*, agricultural production *is done / obtained only in certain geographical areas*, while the *consumption* of these products takes place *throughout the country*; the *harvesting of agricultural products* can be made at different times depending on the geographical area, but the consumption is made concomitantly in the whole country; the agricultural production (especially the vegetable production) is characterized by a high *volume* and low *value* (sales price); there is a *tendency for consumers* to invest large amounts of money into processed foodstuffs; in the agro-food field we cannot talk about post-sale *services*.

The classification of foodstuffs aims to systemize this whole in a unitary, logical and synoptic manner, the hierarchical ordering based on judiciously selected criteria (Stanciu, 2010). Over time, it appeared an important number of theoretical classification models of foodstuffs, used both nationally and internationally. Frățilă and Dabija (2004) propose a classification of

food products taking into account the *food trend*, influenced by the adoption from the international vocabulary of terms such as: light, fast food, slow food, functional food, novel food, convenience food. This paper presents a range of information and clarifies the notions of: dietary foods, nutritional supplements, organic food, "light" food, "new" food, genetically modified food, "functional" or "processed" food, "traditional" or "alternative" food.

1.3. The concept of traditional foodstuffs: theoretical - methodological premises

The liberalization of agricultural markets poses problems both to developed countries that want to protect the income of their farmers and to developing countries, whose agricultures survive with difficulty (UNIDO, 2010). One such issue is that a product made in a certain area, marketed under a name based on its place of origin (with signs of origin) or after a traditional recipe (e.g. Sibiu Salami, Ibănești cheese, Pleșcoi sausages, Salonta bread etc.), without being registered and / or adequately protected under a *brand name* (van Ittersum, 2007) have to compete with products that claim to be original, using the exact same name.

Traditional products have a culturally, economically and socially remote *history*. The Bordeaux wines and Roquefort cheese were recognized by the Parliament of Toulouse in 1666, yet legally regulated only at the beginning of the 20th century (Cambra Fierro and Villafuerte Martin, 2009). The French were the first who decided to mark and vary to some extent the quality of the wines produced by them, introducing the concept of *terroir*. Terroir, in its technical meaning, is "tied to land" (fr. *le terre*), referring to the particular characteristics of climate, soil and temperature that are to be found in a region or specific area and conferring special features to agricultural products. This name was later extended to AOC – “Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée” (Controlled Denomination of Origin – CDO) and “Protected Denomination of Origin” – PDO.

Defining any concept linked to tradition is a subjective matter, influenced by the national culture, customs and rituals specific to an area or family. In Europe we find a lot of crop types, each with distinct dietary patterns (Trichopoulou, Soukara and Vasilopoulou, 2007). The mission assumed by the European Union to protect the culture and traditional products of member countries is challenging and involves going through a long process of creation, assuming and implementation at the legislative, cultural, social and mental level (Trichopoulou, Soukara and Vasilopoulou, 2007).

A traditional or local product is closely linked to *its place of origin*; for preparing traditional dishes they use local produce in general. We have identified a variety of *multidisciplinary* and *interdisciplinary approaches* of traditional products, from defining them as "an expression of resources and local specific knowledge, embedded in the product" (Allaire & Wolf, 2004), "a tangible result of cultural traditions" (Treager & Giraud , 2011) or products "for which a given quality, reputation or other characteristics of the product is due largely to geographical origin" (Broude 2005). Turek Rahoveanu (2009) recommends Romanian producers to exploit commercially, those "*inherent characteristics of traditional agricultural or foodstuffs that clearly distinguish them from similar agricultural or foodstuffs*". Informed consumers refuse to see the usefulness of a standardized product and are willing to pay a premium price to consume and / or use products that are related to their place of origin, which maintains the same perceived quality as in the past, and which have not been "colored" with what many people consider to be an exhaustive modernization (Van de Kop et al. 2006; FAO 2008 in UNIDO, 2010).

1.4 The legislative environment of traditional foodstuffs

Companies whose business is conducted in the agro-food sector have realized the potential of traditional products due to the current increase in the interest and demand from the consumers concerned about their health for this category of products (Trichopoulou, Soukara and Vasilopoulou, 2007). This trend was also mentioned by Jordana (2000). The term "traditional" is not adequately defined in the EU member states in terms of legislation, which leads to its abusive use, the selling of products under the name of traditional products, products that meet only part of the legal conditions

According to the Order regarding the Certification of Traditional Products (MARD, 2012), the *traditional product* is a food product made on the national territory, for which local raw materials are used, which does not have in its composition food adhesives, which has a traditional recipe, a traditional production and / or processing manner and a technological procedure and which distinguishes from other similar products belonging to the same category. Romanian traditional products have been marked since 2013 with a national logo, exclusive property of the MARD and are listed in the National Register of Traditional Products (NRTP).

On 14 July 1992 it was issued Regulation (EEC) No. 208/92, which defined the term "*specific character*". By this, the European Economic Council allowed small and middle-sized enterprises (SME) to market regional products labeled "Protected Designation of Origin" (PDO). The Council Regulation (EC) 509/2006 is currently in force. In order to certify *traditional specialties at the community level*, a product must be: made from traditional raw materials, characterized by a traditional composition or a manner of production and/ or processing reflecting a traditional type of production and /or processing, its denomination must be specific in itself, express the specificity of the agricultural or food product, be obtained according to the specifications in the task book and prove the fact that the product has been bequeathed from one generation to another.

The system requires the voluntary use of one of the three specific marks: PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), PGI (Protected Geographical Indication), GTS (Guaranteed Traditional Specialty), gathered in a common database, DOOR (Database of Origin and Registration). In short, the definitions of the three types of marks are as follows (EC 509/2006): *Protected Designation of Origin* - PDO: foodstuffs produced, processed and prepared in a geographical area with recognized expertise; *Protected Geographical Indication* - PGI: foodstuffs are directly linked to the geographical area - at least one stage of production, processing or preparation is made in that geographical area; *Guaranteed Traditional Specialty* - GTS: highlights the traditional character, either in the product composition or in its preparation (<http://goo.gl/S110vs>).

Once the commercial denomination of the traditional agricultural or foodstuff product is registered under one of the three quality marks, EU will make sure that the same protected denomination is not used by other producers. The certification of traditional agricultural products is made according to a series of specific rules, so that the consumers have the certainty that those products are made in accordance to them.

The registration of products provides benefits to both producers and consumers. For buyers (a rather narrow segment) the GTS label is a guarantee of the quality of the product. This guarantee of the quality will determine the consumer to reacquire the same product, believing that will benefit again from the same qualities (Turek Rahoveanu, 2009). For the manufacturers, the attraction and retaining of a well-defined segment of customers will ensure the continuity and development of the business.

CHAPTER 2. THE OFFER OF TRADITIONAL FOODSTUFFS: DIVERSITY, GEOGRAPHICAL MARKERS AND VISIBILITY

2.1 The geographical structure of the offer of Romanian traditional products

According to the geographical location, climate conditions and the occupations of the inhabitants of a country or a region, the offer of traditional products is different. For example, it must be in line with the specific traditional cuisine. In terms of food, preparation technology, raw materials or finished association product structure, Romanian cuisine has regional particularities (Vizireanu, 2006). Each region has a certain specific which has been maintained, completed and enriched from the point of view of type and quality.

The geographical structuring of traditional products at the *national level*, according to the categories of products registered in the National Register of Traditional Products (NRTP) led to a better knowledge of the offer. Most traditional products registered nationally are part of "meat and meat products" category and the category with the lowest number of registered products is the "fish" category. We propose that in this work to track and highlight the correlations between the offer of traditional products registered and the consumer expectations from them. The study conducted in Chapter IV aims, among other things, to identify the categories of traditional products preferred by the consumers.

The region with the highest number of registered traditional products is the Central Region and the regions with the lowest number of registered traditional products are the West and South – West regions. This is justified by the fact that in the area several producer associations were established but also by a certain economic advance of the region. The advantages of the association of traditional product producers will be discussed extensively in the paper.

Turek Rahoveanu (2009) finds that in Romania there are counties with a rich culture and tradition in the production and certification of foodstuffs as traditional products, but also some areas at the macro-territorial national level, which are bounded by the developing regions, in which there is an agglomeration traditional products.

2.2. Traditional products in EU according to Database of Origin and Registration (DOOR)

Traditional products registered and recognized *worldwide* are included in an official list of the European Commission, a database called DOOR (*Database of Origin and Registration*). Based on information contained in the database we conducted a series of analyzes of the situation of traditional products registered in the European Union. This database includes 1461 products, mostly made by EU member states (1436). Among the EU Member States, Italy (301), France (255), Spain (206), Portugal (138) and Greece (106), followed by Germany (97) and Britain (72) occupy the top places in the top. At the opposite pole lies: Luxembourg (4), Romania (4) and Cyprus (4). The percentage of the Romanian products included in DOOR represents 0.28% of the total of products. The types of specific brands, PGI and PDO are more required for certification (711 and 658, respectively), compared with GTS (67), both in the entire EU and in the five countries that registered over 100 products in DOOR and were analyzed in our study.

2.3. The visibility of the offer of Romanian traditional products through elements of product mix

In order to "remain" in the minds of consumers, each organization must build a good image and reputation (Ashcroft, 2010). The product / service must be distinguished from the rest of the competing bids and stand out, be *visible*. Johnston and Bryan (1993) suggest that the visibility of a product increases if it is offered on the market with a set of services that contribute to enhancing the value offered. In terms of visibility of a product by identification, of interest for traditional foodstuffs are the ways in which the name, packaging and labeling of a product are chosen.

The *name* of the product underlies the *branding* process. The product names refer often to the place of origin of the product, as an element of attraction that helps the consumer understand the link between the product and the concept of "regional", "authentic", "healthy", "natural" or "exotic" (Cannon, 2005). In the case of traditional products, the naming can be an easy matter, since most times they retain the names inherited. The forms of identification used in the case of Romanian traditional foodstuffs are covered by a three-dimensional system: the place of origin,

the characteristics of the product and the manufacturer (the person involved in the process of product manufacturing) (Turek Rahoveanu, 2009). Analyzing the names of Romanian traditional products, we can notice some *elements* considered a starting point in *choosing names*: product property, place of origin, place of origin and the manufacturer's name, the ingredients used, the process (technology) to obtain the product, the ingredients used and the process (technology) to obtain the product, the process of obtaining and the place of origin (production), a name that highlights the social status of the local population in Romania.

By name, the traditional product *communicates* information about product features and the vocation of the area where the product is obtained. The name is the first and easiest form of identification of the product by the consumer, but it is not enough to stand out. The product must be accompanied by other suggestive elements, with supporting role: packaging, labels, emblems, logos, handicrafts, images showing the manufacturing process, images of the areas where the product is made, the background music, traditional costumes etc.

The *visibility* of products through *packaging* plays a decisive role in the commercial strategy of the producers, due to the changes occurred in the modes of distribution, on the one hand and the consumer behavior, on the other hand. Food product *labeling* is a matter of public interest, as it concerns the protection of consumers from a biological, economic and social point of view (Voinea, 2013), being able to hinder the forged or inadequate products in terms of quality, or conversely, to be an incentive to facilitate the product marketing. The consumer behavior on counterfeit products may vary and this is why this is happening due to lack of knowledge about the products they purchase (Dabija, Dinu, Tăchiciu and Pop, 2014). Choosing an appropriate name for the product, the packaging and labeling it properly can increase the product visibility by *highlighting them on the shelves*.

We believe that proposing some ways that the manufacturers can contribute to the improvement of the visibility and to create a favorable image of traditional products on the market is useful. For this, we referred to three marketing strategies addressed: *associative marketing, fairs and exhibitions and gastronomic tourism*.

Many organizations, especially small and middle-sized enterprises, saw the need to adapt in a more quickly pace to the continuously changing requirements of the market, realizing that alone will not be able to impose on the market and that the right solution in these circumstances is the *association*. Yet, the efforts of producers and producer associations will fail to reach their

full potential given that their actions are directed towards an uninformed and disinterested consumer segment. The task of educating the consumers in the spirit of granting the appropriate respect for the environment and promoting a healthy lifestyle is the responsibility of the consumer associations, state and private educational institutions, by presenting well-documented scientific articles (Pop and Dabija, 2012).

The study conducted in 2012 (Tarcza, 2012 c) allowed drawing conclusions on the number of *fairs* which are held on average in a year, zones and time periods chosen for these events. They are held mainly in those areas / counties where more traditional products are produced and registered; the residents, while retaining the customs and traditions inherited (port and recipes) are characterized by entrepreneurial spirit, and the living standard and tourism potential is higher than the country's average (Sibiu, Braşov, Cluj, Maramureş, Bihor, Harghita, Argeş. Traditional products are displayed and promoted at thematic fairs or take place during special events such as: religious holidays, special days for the local community, commemoration of a prominent local personality, habits kept in that place or the season / time of year specific to a fruit .

The interest of tourists to know different culinary cultures is a factor that contributes to the development of an agro-food sector of an area, while contributing to strengthening the culinary heritage (Bessiere and Tibere, 2013). The development of a network of traditional restaurants, the inclusion of traditional products in the *rural tourism* offers, spa or city – break type is, in our view, innovative elements aimed at increasing the performance in the tourism sector of Romania, while increasing the awareness of traditional products. As we have shown in this chapter, the names of Romanian traditional foodstuffs are closely linked to their place of production.

The approach of traditional products in this chapter was conducted particularly in light of producers and the offer on the market. In the next chapter we intend to approach the subject from a consumer perspective, understanding and knowing their needs and their behavior towards the use of traditional products, by mentioning several studies identified in the literature, and later, the empirical study will lead us to outline a profile of the Romanian consumer of traditional products.

CHAPTER 3. THE BEHAVIOR OF THE CONSUMER OF TRADITIONAL FOODSTUFFS

3.1. General theoretical aspects regarding consumer behavior

Knowing and understanding the consumer attitudes and behavior is an important step in developing viable marketing strategies. Their foundation is the research designed to determine *variables of the profile* of the consumer - demographic, social - graphic, economic, cultural, religious, thus setting a benchmark against which the manufacturer may initiate the necessary strategies. Knowing which the human typology the products are addressed shall ensure the concentration of the organization on specific masses of individuals.

3.1.1. Approaches of the concept of consumer behavior

The concept of *consumer behavior* is often used to describe the interdisciplinary scientific field that attempts to understand and describe such behavior. It is a mental and physical activity undertaken, resulting in the decision to pay, buy or use products (Czinkota *et al.*, 2000). This concept has been theorized and researched with the development of marketing as a coherent and permanent activity (Anghel, 2004).

In addressing behavioral entity there is a large variety of terminology. For example, Voinea (2003) uses the term "new consumer" and Tofler (1981), Kotler (1986) and Şeran (2013) that of prosumer. We believe that in the case of *consumer of foodstuffs*, the term consumer used in reference to three categories of businesses: *Business to Business* (B2B), *Business to Consumer* (B2C), *Prosume to Prosumer* (P2P). The idea of *prosumer* fits *Romanian traditional products*. In the pilot study, presented in the next chapter, it was observed that 35% of the respondents said that they used to consume such products *produced in their own household*. Romanian traditional products meet the requirements of Romanian consumers both in terms of quality, as they are produced in their own households, with their own methods, and in terms of satisfaction that they feel when they eat a home-cooked dish, a dish which has also emotional value.

The focus on *customer satisfaction* and *loyalty creation* to the products and services of the company are considered basic elements that determine the behavior of the consumer in relation to the organization. Even the buying decision is strongly influenced by customer satisfaction

(Piskoti and Nagy, 2008). An effective marketing attitude is what brings profit to the company and consumer satisfaction (Catană, 2003), having a direct impact on the consumer value financially (Piskoti and Nagy, 2008).

3.1.2. Explanatory variables of consumer behavior

To understand consumer behavior it is necessary to know the elements that make up the *behavioral mechanism*. The elements that lead to a certain economic behavior, on the consumer market (Botezat, 2006) are multiple, the most important and most intensively treated in the literature being grouped as follows:

- **endogenous** variables (individual): psychological and personal;
- **exogenous** variables: economic, social-cultural factors, mass-media influence etc.

A. Endogenous variables of consumer behavior

Psychological variables

- **Motivation** - Catană (2003) defines motivation as an inner force strong enough to induce the consumer to act to satisfy a need. The motivation that the consumers have to purchase food involves economic and social –demographic factors.

- **Perception** is a process carried out in three stages through which the individual selects, organizes and interprets the information received (Czinkota, 2000; Dăculescu, 2006). The marketing specialist strives to understand the consumer's perceptions and influence them in order to stimulate consumption.

- **Learning** is a behavioral change due to experience or cognitive activities. In fact, it can be a simple association between a stimulus and a response, or can be carried out by a complex series of cognitive activities. The study of personal goals, values, desires and motivations is vital for the success of the product (Solomon *et al.*, 2006).

- **Attitude** is a mentality that we acquire and maintain on an idea or an object (Prutianu, 1999), reflected in the acceptance or rejection of that situation or objectives (Catană, 2003). Attitudes consist of three components (Prutianu, 1999): cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings and behavioral (actions).

Personal variables

From the perspective of consumer behavior *demographic characteristics* such as gender, age, education, occupation, phase in the life cycle of the family are important.

Personality is a much debated concept in theory, in various scientific fields, being tackled from a variety of perspectives: the psychoanalytic theory, the theory of characterological features, the social- cognitive perspective, the humanistic perspective, the self-image perspective (Catană 2003; Dăculescu 2006)

The *perceived risk* relates to the context of uncertainty in which the consumer makes the purchasing decision (Bauer, 1967).

The *cognitive style* expresses the way in which individuals acquire and process the information.

Lifestyle is the mode of consumption of goods and services purchased by individual (Catană, 2003). An obvious trend in lifestyle change globally is *the increase of consumption of traditional foodstuffs* - a subject which we will tackle in the next section (3.1.3).

B. Exogenous variables of consumer behavior

The *exogenous or social-cultural variables* include the membership to reference groups, social classes and cultural factors. For the marketing specialist these consumers' variables are relevant in order to better know the consumers' needs. Of the *reference groups* influencing the consumers' purchasing decisions we mention: the opinion leaders, the innovators and the family (Catană, 2003).

The behavior variables influence all the stages of the *purchasing decision process*: a) identification of need; b) seeking information; c) evaluation of alternatives; d) the purchase itself; e) post – purchase behavior. It should be noted that the stages of decision making process do not manifest the same, their sequence is not covered in the same way for each purchasing decisions, but depends on the product, purchasing situation or the consumer's attitude.

3.1.3. Traditional product consumption – a new lifestyle?

Food has grown to surpass its basic characteristics (to provide bodily food) and has gained a *cultural* dimension, giving a special feeling of belonging and identification with a particular group or region (Broude, 2006). Researchers found that people change their lifestyle and diet according to social status and membership to certain groups of influence. People seeking to be always in line with fashion trends are careful about those concerning food, too. Food marketing attracts the interest of researchers, consumers and professionals, given the problems caused by a "chaotic" diet regime that more and more people are facing in developed countries. We see a society oriented towards a healthy lifestyle and a concern for "wellbeing" (Tarcza and Sana, 2014).

Apparently, the concept of healthy eating is associated in the common parlance of consumption of organic products (Tănase, Roșca and Jurcoane, 2012). Healthy eating is part of a complex system of factors which we must give due importance to improve our lifestyle, along with water, sleep, exercise, nutritional supplements, detoxification and stress management (Colbert, 2007), factors referred to as "pillars of health".

The wellbeing state

A booming concept in sociology, medicine and other sciences (including marketing) is the wellbeing state. The "wellbeing state" is regarded as "the condition characterized by health, happiness, prosperity, a satisfactory perception of life" (Souza *et al.*, 2009). The concerns of the researchers were focused on developing tools for measuring wellbeing. The *Wellbeing State Index* (WBI) analyzes the welfare system as a result of a complex system of *five factors*: purpose, social relationships, financial security, health and community ties (State of Global Well Being, Gallup Healthways, 2014). *OECD Better Life Index* comprises a set of *11 items*, considered essential for assessing the living conditions and the quality of life: food and living conditions, income and wealth, jobs, belonging to the community, education, quality of the environment, civic engagement, health, satisfaction (wellbeing), personal safety and work-life balance (OECD, 2014).

More and more researchers argue that *wellbeing* is significantly correlated with a healthy diet based on eating traditional foodstuffs and the incidence of degenerative diseases is attributed

to technological advances in the food industry (Lang and Heasman, 2004; Kessler, 2009; Chandon and Wansik, 2010). Therefore, the question is how to preserve, protect and differentiate elements of traditional and local foods from the vast offer of food industry.

Research on the biological effects of food intake is scarce. Some examples are: the "French paradox", the Mangalița breed pork, the Mediterranean diet, perceived as the *healthiest food style* (Batrinou and Kanellou, 2009) and associated with a healthy lifestyle. The traditional Romanian product, the Magiun of Topoloveni is positioned on the market as a *family brand* and highlights the *benefits of consumption on health*: it can be consumed by people with diabetes, is rich in fiber, has a significant content of vitamins and minerals, anti-stress and anti-ageing effects. People who have a healthy lifestyle, based on healthy eating, have some benefits: longevity, productivity at work, opportunities for relaxation and leisure in a pleasant way.

3.2. A behavioral perspective on market segmentation

3.2.1 Segmentation, target market, positioning

The segmentation is the process of dividing the market of a product into submarkets called segments / niches, based on variables among which behavior is very important (Catană, 2003). After identifying the segments of consumers willing to purchase and consume the products and determining the relevant criteria, they will be evaluated and ranked. Next it is the step that actually decides the target audience, the segments which the communication and promotion campaign will address, together with the methods that will be used to achieve the objectives. Making a successful segmentation process, which identifies the ideal segments (Botezat, 2006), is based on the following *criteria*: internal homogeneity, heterogeneity, substantiality, operability, accessibility.

The *types of segmentation* are created so as to cover a large area of consumers, taking into account the peculiarities that will appear in the same masses of people. *The focus is on behavioral segmentation*, the clear setting of the consumer needs and motivations to meet them with the right product and the knowledge of the benefits perceived by them (Hollywood, Armstrong and Durkin, 2007). *Typologization* or typology technique (Catană, 2003) is a method used to identify potential customers. This was used to classify target-groups and market segments. The clear

identification of the buyer *profile* is essential because product marketing is based on the individual. The mass of people who purchase traditional products is heterogeneous, but has common elements. The logical continuation of the process of market segmentation consists in the detailed description of the differentiation strategy of the marketing mix for each chosen segment and that of the *positioning* of the respective differentiation in the consumer's mind (Catană, 2003). The way a product is perceived determines the manner in which it will sell as well as the category of buyers who will choose it.

3.2.2. Models of behavioral segmentation

One of the most popular models of behavioral segmentation (Kotler, 2000) is VALS (Values, Attitudes, Life Styles), the program developed in 1978 by Arnold Mitchell at Stanford University. In providing the theoretical basis of the program Maslow's theory of the pyramid of needs had influence. The result was the transformation of psychographic variables in the most accepted form of segmentation (Yankelovich and Meer, 2006). VALS incorporates features of the human being as a whole: the values, attitudes and lifestyles of individuals. It divides the types of people considering their identity, personal values, personality and demographic component (Kuiper and Smit, 2014).

Other models through which we can see market segmentation are: *AIO* (it includes demographic variables and relies on activities, interests and opinions of people) and *ACORN* (A Classification of Residential Neighbourhood, a model that helps market segmentation based on lifestyles, as a result of the evolution of society and the need for integration of several coordinates in assessing target audiences and life in general).

Going through the literature on consumer profile of traditional products as well as a deep understanding of the analysis model VALS have allowed us to *frame* the profile of European consumers of traditional products in VALSTM typologies (Tarcza and Sana, 2014). We have identified similarities between the characteristics of the consumers of traditional products and the typologies of *thinkers*, *confident* and *producers*.

3.3. Consumer profile: the current stage of theoretical-empirical knowledge of the profile of the consumer of traditional products

It is known that the consumer profile is, essentially, a description of the demographic, psychological characteristics and of the buying patterns and experiences thereof (Business Dictionary, 2015). Marketing research towards consumer profile target factors such as gender, age, origin, education level, availability and possibility of relying on the superior quality of a product (Dătculescu, 2006), factors which then manage to synthesize the target-audience of the product. To predict the consumer behavior in contact with the product, marketers must first determine his profile.

Vanhonacker *et al.*'s study (2010) shows that the EU citizens retain the feeling of national culture, preservation of local and regional identity, which is also reflected in the trends in terms of food consumption. They appreciate the products displaying labels with terms like "fresh", "home-made" or products that are sold directly by the producers, without intermediaries. When technology makes its way to develop traditional foods, consumers tend to turn to small producers, generally in rural areas, of which there are opinions that are reliable and do not use modern plant cultivation. The buyers consume, in addition to the product itself, the symbolic value of what they bought and they perceive it as part of self-identity.

The *profile* of the European consumer can be outlined as follows: middle age to old age, preoccupied with health, food connoisseurs, love foods that have increased or were bequeathed from generation to generation, have the passion of cooking (Vanhonacker *et al.*, 2010).

CHAPTER 4. EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE PROFILE OF THE CONSUMER OF ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL FOODSTUFFS

Purpose and objectives of research

The study aims to identify consumer segments based on the following *dimensions* suggested by the literature in the field (Burda, 2009; Lengrand, 2011; Pieniak *et al.*, 2009; Pieniak, Perez-Cueto and Verbeke, 2011; Rudawska, 2014; Szakaly *et al.*, 2010, Vanhonacker *et al.*, 2010): (a) the reputation of Romanian traditional products among local consumers, (b) specific habits of consumption, (c) the factors underlying motivation of consumption of traditional products (d) the image and perception of traditional products, (e) how to promote traditional products and (f) the psychographic characteristics of the consumers of traditional products.

To achieve the goal mentioned, we set up the following *objectives*:

- to know the consumers of traditional products and the consumer habits;
- market segmentation from the behavioral perspective, based on VALS psychographic traits, motivation, attitudes and perceptions of consumers of traditional products;
- to describe and assess customer segments obtained from the process of segmentation of the target market;
- to create a profile of the consumer of traditional foodstuffs.

4.1. Research methodology

The research method is *descriptive cross-sectional* (Malhotra, 2007), designed to provide a picture of the phenomenon studied, at a time. The data are *quantitative* (Popa, 2013). The research method is the *survey* and the research instrument used is the *questionnaire*.

The pilot study

The effectiveness of the proposed instrument (the questionnaire drawn up) was tested in a *pilot study*. The analysis of the results of the pilot study provided a provisional picture of the consumer of traditional products and highlighted the limits of the research instrument, limits that

have been corrected in the final questionnaire. *Data collection for the pilot study* took place at Agraria fair, in Jucu, in the region of Cluj - Napoca, between 23 - 27 April 2015. The target population was made up of people who consume, know or are interested in traditional Romanian products. The sample consists of 115 subjects.

The final study

Based on the results of the pilot study there were a few changes to the questionnaire: in the first stage, there were few formal changes, then a set of twenty-one statements selected from the items of the VALS model was introduced (Mitchell, 1978) and those of the indicators measuring the wellbeing - OECD Better Life Index (OECD, 2014) and WBI Well Being State Index (Gallup Healthways, 2014), in order to identify useful psychographic traits characterizing the consumer segments. The changes to the structure of the questionnaire contributed to a final version, more elaborate, with answers more clearly formulated, to reduce the time to complete the questionnaire and, not least, to facilitate the introduction of the results obtained in the SPSS program, used for data processing.

The *population of interest* for our study consists of people who know, consume and / or are interested to consume traditional Romanian products, used to attend trade fairs to research and purchase traditional products, which in other conditions are difficult to acquire.

The *sampling method* chosen to investigate the population of interest is the ad-hoc method (convenience sampling), which is to address the subjects that are available for observation at a time; the analyst observes their behavior and selects information from the site that may be useful for the research (Păun, 2014).

Data gathering lasted two months (May - June 2015), in two ways: (1) the application of the questionnaire face to face, at specialized trade fairs and (2) electronically, in the online environment. The final study involved a total of 548 subjects, of whom 186 were interviewed face to face, using two interview operators ,at the Agra Expo Transylvania Fair, Cluj-Napoca (05.07.2015 - 05.10.2015) and the Traditional Products Fair, Romexpo, Bucharest (05.29.2015 - 01.06.2015). A total of 362 people completed the questionnaire posted on the "isondaje.ro" website, distributed to email addresses, Facebook and Google+ social networks. The application of the questionnaires face to face required an *average time* of completing of 15 to 20 minutes. In

the online environment the necessary time for completion could not be estimated. A total of 545 questionnaires have been validated, three being not fully completed.

4.2. Data processing and analysis

Data processing was performed using the statistic program SPSS (module 21), of the Rfactor module and the Mplus program and the following two phases were assumed: in the first stage we have identified the factors depending on which the subjects are grouped (factor analysis) and in the second, the grouping itself actually took place (cluster type analysis).

Going through the exploratory factor analysis, we identified a number of nine latent factors, according to which, subsequently we ran a K-means type cluster analysis. The number of clusters resulted (2 clusters) varies from the number of clusters identified in other studies carried out in this respect: three clusters (Dabija and Pop, 2012, Nikolic *et al.*, 2015; Popvics, 2006), five clusters (Kesic, 2003; Szakaly *et al.*, 2010), six clusters (Istudor and Pelău, 2011).

4.3. Results of study

Characterization of segments (clusters) identified

The two clusters are analyzed comparatively, given the list of variables related to social - demographic characteristics, habits and motivations underlying the purchasing decision, recognition and rewarding the quality marks and the traditional character of products as well as psychographic features considered to be relevant to our study.

Cluster 1 - the "*traditionalists*", comprises 69% of the respondents in the sample and is composed of people concerned about the health of their families, who appreciate the benefits of eating traditional foods on health and who seek a balanced lifestyle. They are young adults, aged 25-35 years (42%) and 35-55 years (38.8%), respectively, married with at least one child (40.2%), living in urban areas with secondary education (22%) and university education (44.9%). The level of incomes of the "*traditionalists*" is above the average (1600 lei - 3,000 lei). They

represent a segment of conscientious buyers (Popovics, 2006), well informed, who know what they want when they go shopping (Istudor and Pelău, 2011).

Cluster 2 – the "*balanced*" includes 31% of respondents; they have a promising career, seeking to maintain the career – family balance, realize the benefits of traditional products on health, yet are not willing to make an extra effort for their purchase. Most consumers in this group are under 35 (49.7%), single (52.1%) or married without children (25.4%), live in urban areas and have university education (47.9%) and post graduate education (37.8%). The level of incomes of the respondents in this cluster is higher than of those in the first cluster, 19.5% of them having a level of above 3,000 lei monthly income.

Analysis and evaluation of segments (clusters) identified

As we saw in the previous chapter, the process of market segmentation does not stop at identifying the groups of consumers, yet it continues with the analysis and choice of consumer segments, for which the marketing specialist will propose appropriate marketing projects (Catană 2003, Czinkota *et al.*, 2000). For a deeper analysis of the characteristics of clusters identified, we intended to identify to what extent the demographic characteristics influence the degree of interest that the respondents in both groups manifest for Romanian traditional products (Annex 5, Q3) and their willingness to pay a premium price (Annex 5, Q9) to purchase these products. Following the analysis and interpretation of the contingency tables, we found that those respondents who are interested to consume traditional Romanian products have common features, regardless of which cluster they belong. In terms of willingness to pay a higher price for the purchase of traditional products, there are significant differences between the two clusters.

Sinthesising the profile of the consumer of traditional products in Romania

The profile is a detailed portrait of the segment that presents a clear picture of the typical consumer of traditional products and helps us understand who the potential buyer is (Dăculescu, 2006). Based on this profile, we can create the appropriate marketing mix. In essence, it appears that, in terms of demo / social and economic aspects, most of the consumers of traditional products in our sample are: females, aged between 25-55 years, married / married with a child, secondary or university graduates, employees or freelancers, from urban areas, with an average net monthly income of between 800-1600 lei and above. Regarding the "psychographic" aspect,

the Romanian consumer of traditional products is concerned about the health of the family, the environment and preserving the work – family balance; they appreciate the time spent in the family (dining is an important moment in family life); appreciate traditional products for their composition: healthy raw materials, natural ingredients, without preservatives, but also for the specific taste; concerned about the compliance with national and international legislation; preoccupied with career development; have as topics of interest healthy food, health, environment, family, sports, technology; use as sources of information the online environment (websites and social networks) and offline: printed press, TV (cooking shows).

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The topic of the thesis is of *major importance* for both the *theory* on the behavior of traditional products consumers and for the *marketers* in the specialized market. From a *theoretical* standpoint, the most important contribution to the literature is the *behavior perspective* the market segmentation is being dealt with from.

The part relating to the regulatory environment of certification, production and marketing of traditional products and the conclusions of the analyzes on the comparative development of the registration and certification of such products at the EU level may be of interest to the *bodies responsible* for agricultural, food and health care policies, in the development and implementation of supportive and support strategies of small producers in areas with "traditional potential" (Turek Rahoveanu, 2009).

From a *practical* standpoint, the results of the thesis are useful, first, to the marketers of Romanian traditional products. The suggestions and recommendations of the thesis can be used for their benefit and, consequently, for the consumers' benefit. For example, the maps with the distribution of traditional products in the country are useful to the producers and associations of producers of Romanian traditional products for making gastronomic thematic routes or as tools to promote the cultural heritage of an area. However, the part on increasing the visibility of the Romanian traditional products can be a support for the formulation of strategies for the production, sale and the visibility centered on the profile of the consumer of such products, their expectations and needs. Implementing such strategies can increase the satisfaction of the consumer of Romanian traditional products, which will boost the demand etc.

We should also mention that the empirical study through the methodology used and the results obtained may serve as a case study in agromarketing teaching and seminarization in universities.

Conclusions

In accordance with the structure, content, scope and objectives of the research, in the following we present a summary of the most important issues and conclusions of the thesis.

1. From the diversity conceptual meanings on *traditional* foodstuffs, the thesis *agrees* that they are produced by traditional methods, have a specific way of producing specific to a certain area, have a historical past, are known and marketed in certain areas (Jordana 2000); often they are representative for the specific of a tourist area (Dabija, 2004).
2. Traditional agro-food products are included in the scope of *agromarketing*, an inter and trans-disciplinary field of high economic, technical, legal, cultural, medical complexity etc.
3. The certification, production and marketing of this category of products are subject to specific national legislation, harmonized with European Union regulations in the field. The adoption of the regulations concerning the status of traditional products is for the European Council competence, which reveals the importance of the market of these products. Moreover, all the EU Member States may adopt the *DOOR* system, which means the use of one of the specific brands: PDO, IGT, PGI (see list of abbreviations). This reference to the legislative environment of the analyzed market is very important for understanding whether a product deemed traditional in a certain country does not fall automatically in *DOOR*, too. This explains why at the level of EU in 2015 there were a total of 1461 products registered under *DOOR* (24/02/2015) from all the categories of foodstuffs (excluding wine), of which only 4 are Romanian: the Magiun of Topoloveni (PGI), Smoked Novac of Bârsa (PDO), Ibănești cheese (PDO), Sibiu Salami (PGI). Meanwhile, in the period 2005-2013, in Romania there were registered 4,402 traditional products (under national law), the vast majority in Sibiu, Argeș, Maramureș, Satu Mare, Brașov, Botoșani counties. Of the total of Romanian traditional products, 35% are beverages, almost 35% meat and meat products, 17% milk and dairy products, the rest being fruits and vegetables, bakery, confectionery, fish. Note that the dynamic of product registration in the analyzed period is very sinuous and ever decreasing acceleration (in Romania and the EU), mainly due to the enhanced fluidity of legislation in the field, particularly as regards the quality claims. By the number of registered products, the "leaders" in the EU market are, in order: Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Greece, the opposite being Luxembourg, Romania (each with 4 products). Almost 50% of the products are marked PGI, about 46% POD and about 4% TSG.

4. The *visibility* of a traditional product, its differentiation from the rest of (competing) foodstuffs involves actions that add *intrinsic characteristics* (color, flavor, odor, appearance) and *extrinsic characteristics* (brand name, designation of origin, its logo and the image of the traditional product), since the latter are those that the consumers perceive (in the first phase) as a guarantee of the superior quality of the product and help in the purchasing decision. Therefore, the product *name, packaging and labeling*, the application of the *logo* "Traditional product" or of the marks PDO, PGI, TSG are elements that contribute to highlighting traditional products on the shelves, to a better visibility on the market.

5. Research shows that for increasing the number of Romanian traditional products offered and increase their visibility at national and European level, efforts are needed supported by *associative marketing* and participation to specialized *fairs and exhibitions*, from all the market participants. The *association of the producers* by sector of activity, the area in which they operate or the interests pursued in the development of economic activity, participation to specialized *fairs* and the cooperation with catering and / or accommodation units in the *gastronomic tourism* field is a series of *opportunities* which the producers and consumers of Romanian traditional products should capitalize.

6. Identification of the needs, motivations, attitudes and perceptions, habits and consumer *behavior* should be a constant concern to marketers in order to choose the most appropriate stimuli of the purchasing decision. The stimuli are received, interpreted and organized by the buyer in a manner consistent with his world. Therefore, the buyers' perceptions are important for the development of marketing strategies (Plăiaș, 1997) appropriate to market segments and niches identified (including, in the case of traditional products). In the thesis, the behavior of the consumer of Romanian traditional products is analyzed according to the VALS model, which is simultaneously one of *behavioral analysis* and one of *market segmentation*. Also, VALS has a high potential for the description of the *consumer profile* for various market segments. In this context, the thesis describes the profile of several *socio-styles* resulted from a previous research (Tarcza and Sana, 2014).

7. A clear trend resulting from the theoretical and empirical investigation of the thesis is the association of the consumption of traditional products with a *healthy lifestyle*. The tendency to adopt a *healthy diet* has gained momentum since the 1980s, when a series of studies on the type of diets and eating habits were analyzed to emphasize their effect on health and the wellbeing of

people. This trend brings to the marketers of traditional products the *opportunity* to promote their products as beneficial to the health and wellbeing of consumers.

8. Our research led to the following description of the profile of Romanian consumer of traditional products: female, with secondary and / or higher education, concerned about the health of the family, seeking to maintain the work-family balance; she appreciates the time spent in the family, the meal is an important moment in the family life; she particularly appreciates traditional products for their composition and taste.

Based on the above, we can say that the marketers of traditional Romanian products must adapt to a set of changes and guidelines in the *behavior* of the consumer of food (in general) products, in the characteristics of their *profile* and in the *components of the environment* influencing this behavior, the most important being:

- the orientation of the consumer towards a healthy lifestyle;
- the increasing importance of information in the purchasing decision making;
- directing preferences towards information / purchase in the online environment;
- increasing the importance of young people, of those with high education, interest in career among the consumers of traditional products;
- tightening the competitive environment (through strategies of bidders of industrially processed food products and of the producers / sellers of traditional products specific to other countries);
- the need for convergence of the national legislation with the European and international legislation in the field of certification of traditional products and consumer protection;
- etc.

Contributions

1. From a *theoretical* point of view we approached *holistic* and *multidisciplinary* the traditional products market, both in terms of *offer* and of the *demand* and of *consumer behavior*:

- regarding the *offer*, we conducted a geographical structuring on development regions and counties of the Romanian market of traditional products, as well as the EU market (according to countries), we identified areas with potential for development of Romanian traditional products, both domestically, and on external markets; we made proposals for increasing the visibility of the Romanian traditional products by associative marketing and the participation to fairs;
- in the theoretical analysis of *the behavior of the consumer* of traditional products we have suggested the inclusion of the conceptual pair *prosum* - *prosumer* as suitable for this category of products;
- in the scientific investigation we have combined elements specific to agromarketing with cultural, legal aspects, health.

9. Regarding the *methodology* of the empirical study:

- we developed a research tool suitable to the subject investigated by adapting some tools from the literature in the field and from the VALS method;
- we identified the factors of subject grouping (using the device specific to *factor analysis*) and carried out the actual grouping of respondents (using the *cluster analysis*).

Limitations

We consider that the limitations of our thesis are generated by:

- the sometimes ponderous access to literature and studies;
- the reluctance of some managers / entrepreneurs and consumers towards the involvement in the realization of empirical studies;
- the conditioned access to some specialized studies (published by certain databases with scientific literature or by other special institutions) by the payment of a fee;

- the questionable objectivity of online responses, compared with those obtained face to face (the behavioral language reflecting the consistency / inconsistency between speech and thought);
- the geographical size and distribution of the sample, which diminishes the representativeness of the results for the entire population of consumers of traditional products; however, the study can be considered "exploratory" and a starting point for future research.

Future research directions

Being aware of the limitations above, we propose to *further research* in the following *directions*:

- extending the geographical scope of the research on a significant number of specialized fairs and exhibitions
- conducting a comparative empirical study on the profile of consumers of traditional products compared to Romania's neighboring countries
- behavior analysis and description of the profile of consumers of Romanian traditional products, living abroad
- extending the empirical research beyond the consumer profile, to other areas, such as the influence of the reference group or social class on consumer behavior
- investigating the issue of traditional products in the world of suppliers of such products and linking the results to be obtained with those obtained in this research.

Finally, we would like that this research paper does not remain just an actual analysis of the phenomenon of consumer behavior, useful only in the academic environment, but to have an impact on how consumers themselves perceive and relate to this niche market, actively participating to the design and implementation of marketing strategies by which the manufacturers and sellers of traditional Romanian products meet their expectations and desires.

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