

INVESTIGATING CONSUMER MOTIVATION IN THE ADOPTION OF A NEW PRODUCT UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF UNCERTAINTY

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Abstract: *The question related to what behaviour consumers exhibit in conditions of uncertainty is extremely relevant at the present time. Therefore, the report examines consumer behavioural responses provoked by factors that generate uncertainty. The results of an empirical study aimed at researching end users from Ruse and the region regarding the perception of a new product (bio-dough snacks) are presented. It is established which motivational factors influence consumers in the process of making a decision to purchase this product, which is new for the region, by classifying potential consumers according to the Rogers model. Specific conclusions are drawn, on the basis of which recommendations are formulated, revealing possible alternatives to stimulate the generation of positive attitudes among consumers towards the new product.*

Keywords: *consumer behaviour, uncertainty, motivational factors, new bio product.*

JEL: M14, M31

Introduction

The consumer occupies a central place in achieving the success and sustainable development of any business organization in modern economic conditions. In order to achieve efficiency in management, it is necessary to carefully study the desires and needs of consumers, the qualities they value and their attitude towards individual products.

By focusing our attention on tracking and analysing the process of making the purchase decision by the end users, it is found that they do not act in the same way even in the same situations. The reason for this is the various factors that influence them and the way they refract them through their personal judgments. One of these factors is motivation.

The emphasis in the present work is on studying the influence of the motivation factor in the perception of a new product (bread snacks, produced biologically on

the territory of the city of Ruse and the region) in conditions of uncertainty caused by the complex impact of the pandemic, economic and political instability and ongoing international military conflicts.

1. Consumer behaviour, motivation, perception of a new product

As a general concept, the term behaviour is defined as: 1. a manner in which someone behaves; 2. anything that an organism does, involving action or response to stimulation; 3. response of an individual, group, and biological species to influences from the environment (Merriam webster, 2022).

In particular, the American Marketing Association (AMA, 2022) defines consumer behaviour in three levels as: 1. A dynamic interaction between affect and cognition, behaviour and the environment through which human beings carry out the exchange aspects of their lives; 2. Users' public actions; 3. The behaviour of the

consumer or the decision maker in the market of goods and services. Therefore, consumer behaviour is a completely subjective behavioural process affecting the way they behave – think, feel and act in the shopping process (Yankov, 2006).

The decisions taken by end users are: *routine* (it is done out of habit without serious intellectual load, as well-known brands or products are bought); *limited* (some time is taken to acquire information about a new brand within a familiar product category); *complex* (require more time to collect the necessary information about an unknown product category in order to minimize possible sources of risk). These are very important aspects that marketing managers should pay special attention to when making product decisions, according to the conceptual model of subordinate manager behavior in organizational theory. (Kotsev, 2022).

The main factors influencing consumer behaviour in making any of these purchase decisions are distributed into the following groups: socio-cultural, marketing, personal and psychological. Motivation refers to the last group presented and is the driving force that causes consumers to take action to satisfy specific needs or desires caused by internal arousal (motive) or external influence (stimulus) (Stoyanov, 2001). On the surface, motivation appears as a high level of readiness to achieve a certain goal. It is a dynamic and time-limited state that should not be confused with an emotional state (Raichev, I., 2006). The driving force of motivation arises from the states of tension that are a consequence of unsatisfied needs (Kehaiova-Stoycheva M., 2008). As a factor determining the various manifestations of consumer behaviour, motivation can be described by its strength, direction and dynamics. These characteristics are the dependent ones that have a direct impact on the process of perception of the innovation (new product) by consumers (Solomon, Bamossy, 2002; Solomon, 2011).

Innovation is the introduction into use of some new or significantly improved product (commodity or service) or production process, of a new marketing method or of a new organizational method in commercial practice, workplace organization or external relations that create market ad-

vantages and increase the competitiveness of companies (Ministry of economy and industry, 2022). It should be noted that innovative performance of companies is driven by various factors (Antonova, Kostadinova, 2022), and some of them are strongly connected with the personal characteristics of the employees involved, the managers and entrepreneurs (Beloeva, Antonova, 2020).

Successful innovation is strongly linked to financial results and is a major driver of economic growth that brings more benefits to society and leads to improved living standards and, in some cases, can provide an opportunity to protect the environment. They might also be a driving factor for establishment and growth of family business (Dimitrova, Pavlov, 2020; Pavlov, Vitliemov, 2022).

Innovations are classified into different types. According to their relationship and place in scientific and technical progress and their scale, they are (Antonova, et al., 2006): radical, adaptive, imitative, product, production, marketing and organizational. According to the degree of novelty (Ruskova, 2012) they are divided into: epoch-making, basic, improving, micro-innovations, pseudo-innovations and anti-innovations. From the point of view of the space of action, they can be categorized into: global, national, regional, local and micro-local (Panteleeva, I., 2013).

Innovation adoption and diffusion are processes by which innovations penetrate the market over time. It is especially important to understand that not all consumers on the market have the same willingness to buy the new products. The perception of the innovation by the users and the way in which they can be influenced determines the diffusion of the new product (Petrov, Slavova, 1996). There are several key factors influencing the adoption and diffusion of an innovation: relative advantage, relative utility, compatibility, complexity, divisibility, and visibility.

Consumers react differently to innovations and differentiate themselves into separate categories. Regarding the adoption and diffusion of new products for short-term use, Roger's model has been widely applied. According to him, consumers are distinguished into five groups depending on the perception of the innovation over time and the sources of information that

influence them in making a purchase decision, namely: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards (Roger, 2003).

2. Consumer behaviour in conditions of uncertainty

Uncertainty is an orientation in human life. It is an inevitable part of everyday life, no matter how programmed a person is, to have social aspirations to achieve peace of mind and balance. Uncertainty changes over time, sometimes acts oppressively, but in most cases creates a desire to be ignored through actions that lead to sustainable equilibrium. It is an alternative to security and is interpreted differently in different spheres of public life. The individual types of uncertainty also have their own specific subject-oriented content.

Economic uncertainty is subdivided into:

- uncertainty caused by the *impossibility of exercising the right to work* due to the economic conditions in the country, diseases, aging, individual subjective qualities, etc.
- *information uncertainty*, related to a lack of sufficiently reliable business information for various reasons, which also affects business decisions.
- *investment uncertainty*, characterizing the conditions that pose barriers to investment alternatives.
- *credit uncertainty*, including the difficulty of returning and repaying credit.

There are also a number of other varieties of uncertainty, determined by the field for which they are defined, but in the present development, attention will be directed to *personal uncertainty*, which, at the individual level, can be linked to psycho-social factors influencing consumer behaviour (Atanasov, 2020). It concerns the processes of motivation in people and its alternative is personal security, positioned on the second step in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Some authors consider personal security as a motivated defence against threats. Other opinions about personal insecurity are summarized as follows: "Security leads to the orientation of goals in people's lives, while uncertainty leads to behaviour that is oriented to counteract threats and potential harm" (Tomov, 2004).

In the current conditions, the behaviour of Bulgarian end users when making a purchase decision is influenced by a number of factors that give rise to personal uncertainty. Among them are the rapid rate of inflation, declining incomes, rising unemployment, the economic and political crisis in the country, the consequences of the COVID pandemic (Popova et al., 2021), the military actions in Ukraine and a number of other problems arising in everyday life as a result of more global negative influences. All these conditions of uncertainty guide the individual consumer's choice towards market actions that maximize individual welfare (Traikov, et al., 2005). This stimulates the satisfaction of the needs of the lower levels in Maslow's hierarchy - physiological needs and especially the needs of the second level - safety: the desire for long-term survival, guaranteeing security, permanence and stability. The need for security is a very strong motivator of consumer behaviour and in conditions of uncertainty it becomes a priority. The fact is that in critical conditions, people primarily seek to maintain their health and safety. This also connects with their skills and knowledge how to deal with crises and to perform adequate counter actions (Venelinova et al., 2021). It is for this reason that the following presentation will present some of the results of a survey carried out on the territory of the city of Ruse and the region regarding the motivation of consumers in conditions of uncertainty when purchasing a new food product - "organic breakfast" that has not been available at the local market so far.

3. An empirical study on consumer motivations for purchasing a new product under conditions of uncertainty

The reason why the study is oriented towards researching the likely behaviour of consumers in the perception and distribution of "organic snacks" as a new product, stems from shared serious difficulties experienced by small and medium-sized producers of bread and bread snacks operating in the territory of the city of Ruse and the region. Their main problems are the result of: changing the pattern of behaviour in the consumption of bread products in our country in the last 10 years, which leads to a 30% drastic drop in consump-

tion (<https://infostat.nsi.bg>); a contraction in demand for bread snacks over the previous two and a half years, due to the isolation caused by the COVID pandemic and the ongoing major economic metamorphoses predetermined by the current hostilities in Ukraine.

An important point that should not be overlooked is the fact that the behaviour of consumers when purchasing food products has changed significantly since the beginning of the XXI century in the direction of choosing products that meet their expectations for value to the maximum, and are consistent with the overall benefit that would be received from this purchase. A new model of food consumption is emerging, the so-called "satiety" model (Fonte., M. 2002), which is characterized by saturation of the individual's diet with calories, increasing importance of health and hedonic properties of food, and also with stabilization of food costs relative to the general ones. This leads to a weaker influence of income on food consumption and also to an increase in requirements for food quality and safety (European Parliament, 2022a, 2022b).

The environmental circumstances presented in this way lead to a situation where the traditional products offered by small and medium-sized producers of bread and bread snacks become extremely vulnerable to the changing needs and tastes of the consumer, new technologies, shortened product life cycles and increasing competition and the multiple conditions giving rise to environmental uncertainty. In order to survive in the changing market, these organizations should completely change the concept of their business, including, for example, a new variety of "bio-bread snacks" in their assortment structure, which until now have not been present on the market of this type of products in the territory of the city of Ruse and the region.

The new product - "bio snacks" is a local, product, improving innovation. It has a clear relative advantage over conventional ones in terms of the guaranteed biological origin of the starting raw materials, the applied certified technology for the production of "bio product", which provides a competitive advantage in the direction of higher quality, better taste characteristics, health protection not only at active age,

but also at higher age by avoiding unhealthy eating (Bratoeva-Vasileva, 2021), and last but not least, protection of nature in terms of not allowing the use of chemicals and artificial enhancers in the entire production process from the raw material to the final product. Another characteristic of "bio-bread snacks" is divisibility, i.e. they can be tried, and this will help their acceptance by the users and contribute to the faster diffusion of the innovation. Trying the product reduces the uncertainty, allows the user to evaluate it and makes it easier to make a purchase decision.

For the study of consumer motivation when purchasing a new product - "organic bread snacks" the quantitative method "survey" is used. An anonymous survey, developed in Google Forms™, was made available for filling out online in social networks in the period 24.04/24.06.2022 on the territory of Ruse and Ruse region. The number of surveys conducted was 384, which makes the sample representative, since the total population of Ruse region as of 31.12.2021 is 209,084 people. Accordingly, the number of residents on the territory of the district who are over 15 years old is 182,147. The sample size was determined using an electronic calculator (Raosoft, 2022) with a statistical error of 5% and confidence probability 0.95%.

Results of the conducted study

The structure of the survey card includes five groups of questions, the last of which provides information on the demographic profile of users. The content of the remaining four groups will be presented step by step in the subsequent presentation.

Based on the first group of three questions, information is sought on the attitude of respondents to the "bio food" category as a whole. It was found that although 71.3% of those questioned buy bio food, the cumulative percentage of people who do not buy it is relatively high (28.7%). The specific reasons given as an obstacle to buying bio food are: 50.7% do not believe that the food is really organic, 34.8% are prevented by the high prices of these products, 10.1% doubt their quality, and 4.4% claim to produce their own bio food. It is interesting that the high price is indicated as an obstacle to purchase, although a dominant part (more than 70%) of the

respondents giving this answer is with incomes above the average for the region. This is because in conditions of uncertainty, the "price" factor is shaped as one of the main motives for making a purchase decision. For the remaining two-thirds of the respondents who consume "bio food", a higher price is not an obstacle, as they believe that in this way they secure healthy and quality food products, live in an ecological way and support the local economy.

The second group of questions concerns identifying the type of decision that consumers make when buying "organic foods" and the sources of information they trust when making a decision to buy a new product "bio bread snacks". The results of these responses are as follows:

In total, for 74.4% of the respondents, the decision to purchase "bio bread snacks" is related to research and accumulation of a larger volume of information about the product and its recommendation by close people who are trusted - behaviour characteristic of new and more expensive goods. This classifies the solution in question as limited. Bearing in mind that the researched innovation is of the type of goods that are regularly consumed, and the subsequent purchase time is short, the Rogers innovation diffusion model is used as the main tool for predicting market adoption and diffusion. Respondents who can be referred to as the group of "innovators" because they are willing to take risks, are informed by various mass media and are ready to buy the new product immediately make 19.3% (assuming 2.5% according to the model for this group). Early adopters are 48.6% (according to the model they are 13.5%). They are informed by the media, interested in the specifics of the new product, inclined to buy it, but are worried about the failure of their use, and, therefore, look for information from a variety of sources. The early majority – 18.8% (34% according to Rogers) are ready to buy the new product only when they are well informed by relatives and acquaintances about its qualities. The late majority 9.7% (34% according to Rogers) do not like to take risks and tend to buy the new product only after it has established itself on the market and has been recommended to them by relatives and friends who have convinced themselves of its good quality. Laggards who

will not buy "bio bread snacks" are only 3.7% (against 16% according to the model).

The reported deviations in the relative shares of consumer categories, according to Roger's classic model and the results of the survey, are due to a number of factors, among which the higher social status of 65.1% of the respondents who have incomes above the average, as highly qualified specialists, management personnel or business owners and have a higher education (61.1%) - bachelor, master and higher.

The questions of the third group in the survey concern the motivation of consumers to buy "bio bread snacks" as a new product on the market. The main reason why they were chosen was the consideration that they are more beneficial for one's health than their conventional equivalents - 57.3%. This choice can be argued with the conditions of uncertainty resulting from the COVID pandemic and the danger of consuming products from contaminated raw materials coming from Ukraine, used in the production of conventional bread snacks. 24.3% would buy the "bio bread snacks" because of their taste qualities, and 15.3% because of their guaranteed biological origin, which has its impact on personal and family health by improving the work of the immune system, and increasing the body's natural defences against viruses, bacteria and other causative agents of various diseases. Therefore, respondents are ready to pay a higher price for a product with a higher added value resulting from the production method and specific characteristics. Regarding the price they are willing to pay for the new product, the largest share (44%) belongs to those who are willing to accept a price up to 25% higher, which defines the acceptable range of variance.

The fourth group of questions was asked to get an idea of how the conditions of uncertainty would affect the perception of the new product by the consumers. 73.6% would buy "bio bread snacks" even in the conditions of growing economic uncertainty. As the reason for this is again related to the advantages of the product in terms of its healthiness for the individual and his immediate environment. The condition that the respondents set here in order to maintain their interest in the new product

is to guarantee its biological origin in accordance with all current certification requirements that prove it and that its price does not exceed that of its conventional analogues with the above mentioned 25% that are considered acceptable.

Conclusion

The following generalizations can be made from the conducted study regarding the motivation of consumers when purchasing a new product - "bio bread snacks" in the conditions of uncertainty in the territory of the city of Ruse and the region:

The identification of the specific features in the process of perception and distribution of "bio bread snacks" as a new product for the market in the city of Ruse and the region is an important point for making effective management decisions with a wider time horizon.

It is established that precisely because of the specificity and innovative charge that the new product carries with it, and the conditions of uncertainty in which it is about to be developed and put on the market, it provokes a transition from routine to limited decision-making for purchase by the users.

It was found that a greater part of the respondents buy and tend to buy bio food. But at the same time, there is also a certain degree of mistrust of the reality of the

bio category, doubts about the quality of "bio products" and compliance in terms of their price and qualities. This gives reason to say that "bio bread snacks" can be a possible successful alternative for small and medium-sized business organizations engaged in the production of bread and bread snacks, but only in the presence of a very well-developed overall management strategy, taking into account all situational characteristics of the environment and aimed at building trust on the part of the client regarding sustainability in the quality of the new product.

To learn about the characteristics of "bio bread snacks", consumers can be directed to the direct learning approach, where they are given the immediate opportunity to personally evaluate its advantages and disadvantages through tasting, an activity linked to the characteristic of divisibility of innovation.

It can be argued that there is a positive attitude on the part of potential consumers towards the "bio bread snacks", as the dominant part of the respondents declare their willingness to buy the new product at least two to three times a week. The leading motive for their decision, even in the conditions of uncertainty, is to satisfy the need for food with guaranteed qualities and biological origin, which would ensure personal health and that of the family in the longer run.

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