CONSUMER ATTITUDES IN FIELD OF HUNGARIAN RED PAPRIKA

BARBARA BÓDI, LÁSZLÓ ZSOLDOS, GYULA KASZA, ÁGNES SZEGEDYNÉ FRICZ, DÁVID SZAKOS

Corvinus University of Budapest
Faculty of Food Science
Department of Food Economy
1118 Budapest, Villányi út 29-43.
barbara.bodi@stud.uni-corvinus.hu

ABSTRACT
Informed decision is a key issue in consumer science that has influenced the food control regime in Europe. Ground red paprika has got some specialities that make it a unique food stuff for Hungarian consumers: an uniquely Hungarian product or Hungaricum, in other words. This also means that beyond measurable quality parameters paprika accounts for an ethical value for Hungarian consumers. Considering this, it is even more important to provide a clear definition of products on the shelves at buying situations. Indication of quality categories certainly represents a critical part of food labelling. In case of red paprika, as a spice, the Hungarian "Food Book", Codex Alimentarius Hungaricus nominates four different quality categories. In our study we have conducted a throughout analysis of the level of consumer comprehension in regard of these categories. We found that there is a complete misunderstanding in this issue. Only two out of the four quality categories were identified by the consumers. We also recorded perplexity when we asked the respondents to organize the valid four categories in order according their quality level. As a summary, we have to conclude that conditions of informed decision making have not been met in regard of red paprika purchasing in case of most of the Hungarian consumers.

Keywords: ground paprika, reliability, hungaricum, quality categories, misunderstanding

INTRODUCTION

Ground red paprika as spice is a symbol of the Hungarian food economy which combines all of the agricultural and food-processing traditions, outstanding gastronomic value and cultural content in a unique way. This statement makes it one of the most important Hungaricum in spite of the fact that it is not a native plant. Actually, place of origin is America, more specifically Central America from where it spread to the southern part of the continent and later to other places of the world (SZŰCS, 1975). The paprika does not belong to those vegetable crops which are grown large quantities, therefore neither USDA nor FAO has been able to separate the data of bell pepper and red pepper (HODOSSI ET AL., 2012).

However, in Hungary production of ground paprika is of great importance for food industry. The relatively high (much higher than the European average) consumption per capita data confirms it as well. The Codex Alimentarius Hungaricus refers to the 7540:2007 specification of standard of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) which defines requirements concern producing, packaging, transport and quality parameters. This text also defines quality categories depending on the amount of capsaicin: delicate, slightly pungent, pungent (CODEX ALIMENTARIUS HUNGARICUS, 2008).

According to the standard (MSZ ISO 7540:2007) we can distinguish the following categories: Special quality (first-class), Exquisite Delicate (second-class), Noble Sweet (third-class), Rose (fourth-class). Names of these categories do not indicate clearly the differences between them. Furthermore, the names could be misleading, allowing us to hypothesize that Hungarian population has incomplete knowledge on this issue. Referring to results of previous research (LAKNER ET AL. 2005; KASZA, 2010) we can state paprika is

one of most important Hungaricum amongst pálinka, téliszalámi and tokaji. Despite all of the „food scandals" in the past (most prominently: mixing brick powder to paprika in the 90's, micotoxin contamination in 2004) consumers regard it as a confidential product. This means that it has got an added value beyond its measurable physical parameters. Therefore, it is very important that the consumers should have all the information to make soundly based purchasing decisions. In conclusion, the hypothesis we aimed to test: The consumers are not able to make an objective decision when buying, because the obscure and somewhat misleading concept of the naming of quality categories.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

We endeavoured to reach statistically robust results therefore choosing appropriate methodology has been an important aspect of the study. According to our experiences in food related topics personal interviews result in more relevant data than any other (e. g. telephone assisted or online) methods. The basic tool of quantitative studies is questionnaire (Hajdu-Lakner, 1999). Construction of the questionnaire is a remarkably long procedure. It requires expertise in need to integrate professional aspects, practical considerations of surveys and conditions of data processing. Most of the questions we generally use are of closed type (offering a set of possible answers to choose from). We utilise an attitude scale (Likert scale) to quantify the answers. We have selected a 5-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) because this scale is accepted in the Hungarian educational system from primary school to higher education, hence the majority of respondents are able to understand it without effort. Before the survey the complete questionnaire was tested by consumers and experts (n=10). During the pilot survey we were able to refine the questionnaire and determine the average completion time, which was important information for practical realization of the survey.
After editing the questions, the next step was to determine an appropriate sampling method. It was an important aspect that all demographic group (by age, gender, habitation, education) ought to be abundantly presented in the sample.
The personal interviews were performed at some of the major traffic interchanges in Budapest. Selection of places was done also by the consideration to get answers from people living other places than Budapest (passengers).

<u>The place of sampling were:</u>

- 6th of September 2012
- 7th of September 2012
- 10th of September 2012
- 11th of September 2012
- 13th of September 2012
- 14th of September 2012

After collecting the data were recorded the questionnaires into MS Excel. The questions were coded before the data processing. During this method we assigned variables and range of values to the questions. We filtered the complete data table for errors. The checked data table were analysed by SPSS statistical program package. In this paper we present the first set of results. Later on, we are going to apply multivariate statistical methods.

RESULTS

During the survey period we interviewed 565 people. The number of elements allowed applying the planned statistical methodology correctly. We can summarize demographic characteristics of the consumer sample in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Content of the consumer sample according to demographic parameters

CONTENT OF THE CONSUMER SAMPLE			
NUMBER OF ELEMENTS:565			
GENDER			
Male: 41.96%		Female: 58.04%	
AGE			
Aged under 25 years: 41.25%	Aged between 25 and 35: 16.39%	Aged between 26 and 36 years 14.55%	Above 50 years of age: 27.81%
HABITATION			
Budapest: 35.14%	Other city: 52.25%		Village: 12.71%
QUALIFICATION			
Elementary: 16.01%	High- school graduation: 38.42%		Degree 45.57%
RATE OF INCOME			
High: 1.31%	Above average 7.30%	Average: 58.80%	Below average: 26.03%
NUMBER OF PEOPLE LIVING IN THE SAME HOUSEHOLD			
One person: 13.82%	Two people: 22.65%	Three people: 22.65%	Four people: 22.26%
IS THERE A CHILD UNDER 14 IN YOUR HOUSEHOLD?			
Yes: 24.16%		No: 75.84%	
WHO DOES THE SHOPPING IN YOUR HOUESHOLD?			
You: 32.46%	Another person: 19.22%		Together: 48.32%

Our assumption that Hungarian population has insufficient knowledge regarding paprika has been proved true from the beginning of the survey, according to the personal conversations. From the long list of possible quality categories (containing made-up ones) only two of the real nominations were identified by the consumers. Most of the respondents (55.69%) supposed that the „Exquisite Delicate" category was a real one, and another significant proportion of the sample (52.49%) had similar opinion about the „Noble Sweet" too. In the same time, the „First-class" (36.30%), and the „Premium" – in reality, non-existent - categories (21.35%) were identified as a quality group by several of them. In addition, the „Sweet" (16.76%), the „Special quality" (16.55%), the „Rose" (14.06%) and the „Curled" (14.06%) were regarded as a quality group by a relatively large number of consumers. It is probably good news that the fake „For consumption" category was less accepted. The Codex Alimentarius Hungaricus defines four quality categories of ground paprika: Exquisite Delicate, Noble Sweet, Rose, and Special Quality. The results show that Rose and Special category are not prevalent conception for the paprika out of

them. Although First-class is a non-existing category seemed to be correct for many people. We have indicated the real category nominations on the chart 1.

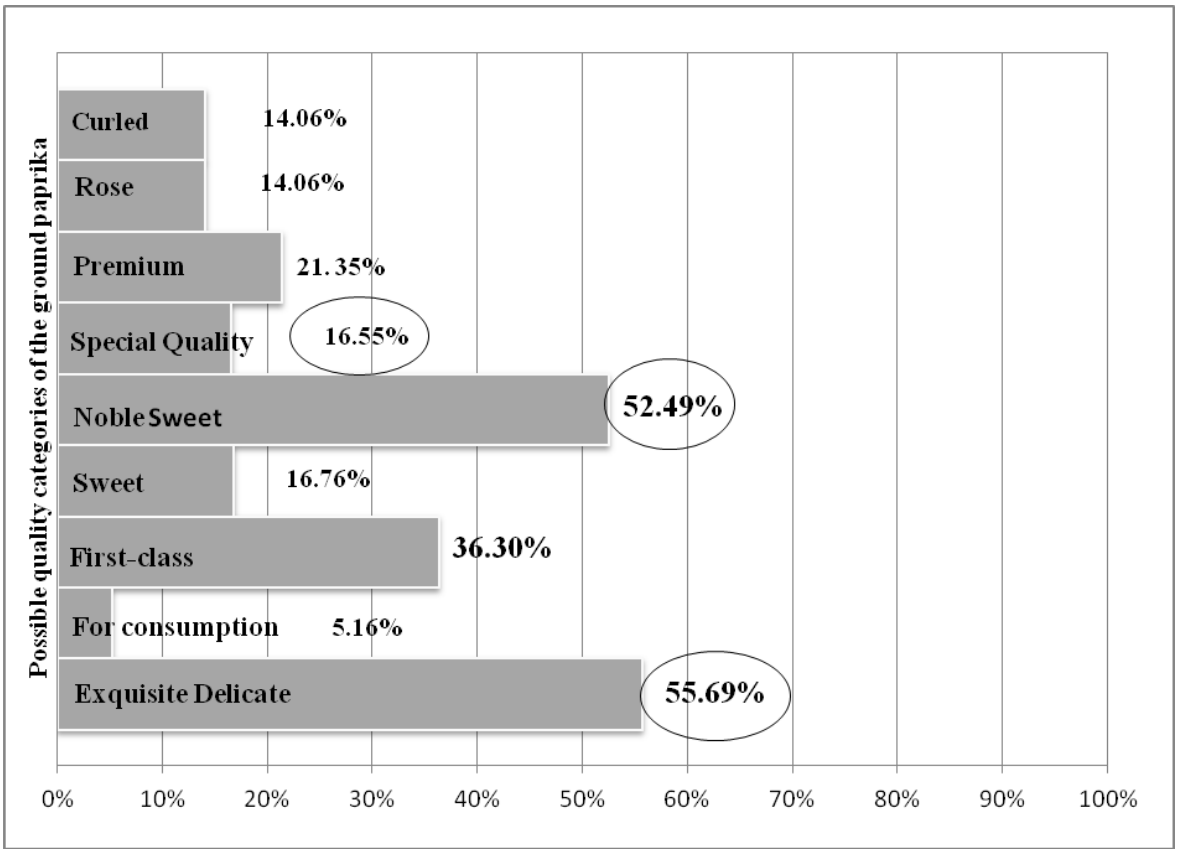

Figure 1. Possible quality categories of the Hungarian ground paprika according to the consumers

Before the next question consumers got information about the real quality groups. Aware of this consumers were asked to select between low and high quality groups (*Figure 2*). The categories of Noble Sweet and Exquisite Delicate have raised positive attitudes (3.98). According to standard deviation scores (*Table 1*) Noble Sweet paprika has been a bit more preferable, maybe because of the expression of "noble". The Special Quality category has been also awarded by high level of points (3.92). In case of Rose the lack of information could be measured, consumers' opinion was neutral (3.36). According to the research results, our 1st hypothesis has been confirmed: consumers could not make objective purchase decision, because the lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of quality categories.

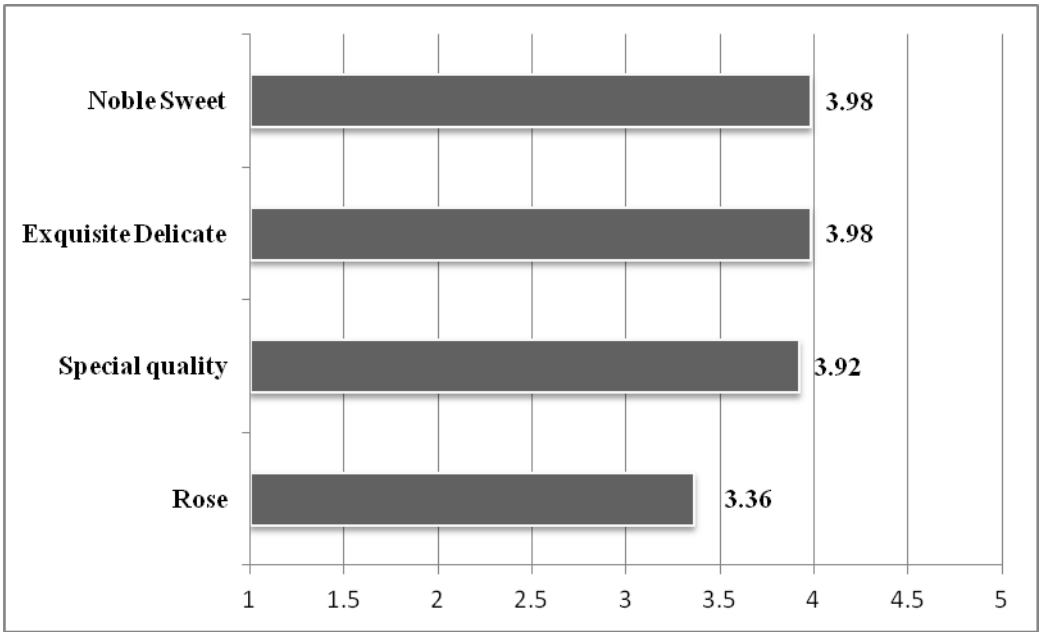

Figure 2. Evaluation of the actual quality categories of the Hungarian ground paprika according to the consumers

Table 1. Descriptive statistical data of the evaluation of the categories

Quality categories of Hungarian ground paprika	**AVERAGE**	**STANDARD DEVIATION**
Exquisite Delicate (second-class)	3.92	1.073
Special quality (first-class)	3.98	1.031
Noble Sweet (third-class)	**3.98**	**0.948**
Rose (fourth-class)	3.36	1.211

CONCLUSIONS

Informed decision is a key issue in consumer science that has influenced the food control regime in Europe. Ground red paprika has got some specialities that make it a unique food stuff for Hungarian consumers: an uniquely Hungarian product or Hungaricum, in other words. This also means that beyond measurable quality parameters paprika accounts for an ethical value for Hungarian consumers. Considering this, it is even more important to provide a clear definition of products on the shelves at buying situations. Indication of quality categories certainly represents a critical part of food labelling. In case of red paprika, as a spice, the Hungarian "Food Book", Codex Alimentarius Hungaricus nominates four different quality categories. In our study we have conducted a throughout analysis of the level of consumer comprehension in regard of these categories. We found that there is a complete misunderstanding in this issue. Only two out of the four quality categories were identified by the consumers. We also recorded perplexity when we asked the respondents to organize the valid four categories in order according their quality level.
As a conclusion we recommend either to define new nominations for the quality categories of ground red paprika, or conduct a communication campaign aiming the consumers to explain the content of the traditional quality classification levels.

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