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## Consumer habits of purchasing food products, grown in Hungary

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### **Abstract**

*A key performance indicator for the prosperity of Hungary's domestic food industry is the proportion of Hungarian consumers who specifically purchase Hungarian-made goods. The aim of the research is to determine the factors that influence consumers the most when making purchasing decisions through a multilateral literature review. Additionally, it is to assess the consumer habits and attitudes towards Hungarian products within a quantitative framework through a questionnaire. The results of the survey describe the factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions. The information revealed by the survey could potentially be utilized by the Hungarian food industry to change the packaging and labeling of the goods adhering to customer needs. The research summarizes the results and identifies opportunities that may facilitate the sale of Hungarian products in the future.*

Keywords: Hungarian consumption habits, product information, conscious consumerism, factors influencing consumption

### **1. Introduction**

With this research, we aim to reveal to what extent are Hungarian consumers informed about the origin, labels, and descriptions of the products they purchase. Furthermore, what are the criteria for choosing a grocery store, an item in the grocery store, and choosing a domestic product or a foreign product? It is important to get an accurate depiction of the decision-making process of the consumers and their orientation in the product information. This enables us to understand how Hungarian consumers make decisions and what are the specific advantages and benefits of a product or brand that may influence their purchasing decision. Before the results of the quantitative research could be presented, it is appropriate to review the relationship between consumption and purchase, the stages of customer decisions, and the factors influencing consumer behavior. This will help to analyze the results of the questionnaire within a theoretical framework. The authors of this research have relevant experience in the subject of domestic food consumption, and therefore, provide meaningful insight in the literature review section and criticism in the conclusions. Nowadays consumers are flooded by ads, offers, combo packs, sales, seasonal and social media campaigns, and loyalty programs by companies. It is incredibly easy to get lost in this sea of information and lose sight of what is it consumers want and what information to consider and look for when buying a product. We must face that in our present world, we are increasingly moving toward

standardized products, with most companies not only producing and selling to domestic markets. We can find very similar or almost identical products within Europe, which greatly simplifies our lives, but raises several questions. We are looking for an answer as to where exactly a product is made and from what raw materials, whether it is produced by a domestic company or one from abroad, whether the company is from within the European Union or possibly from outside. Since personal preferences vary significantly and change over time, we chose a limited number of variables influencing a purchase decision.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. *The connection between consumption and purchase*

An observable trend nowadays is that we can access more and higher quality goods cheaper than ever before. This would have been hard to achieve in the past. The field of consumption and consumer society has been investigated quite thoroughly by many researchers. Consumption encompasses a much larger sphere beyond the purchase of goods and services. While shopping signifies action and it provides the basis for consumption, the roles of the process do not always coincide with buying and consuming. Hoffmeister – Tóth Ágnes redefines consumer behavior in her book (2008) based on (Engel-Kollat-Blackwell, 1968), which is considered to be the first book on the subject. Based on this, "consumer behavior is the behavior of people expressed in the purchase, purchase planning and use, of goods and services." To understand and to be able to predict the success and acceptance of a given product or service on the market, it is necessary to examine what factors affect the consumer before, during, and after the purchase. (The following factors will be discussed in more detail later, in the relevant section).

Hoffmeister – Tóth Ágnes consumer behavior grouping:

Social factors influencing consumer behavior:

- Culture and values
- Social structure, lifestyle
- Reference groups
- Family and household

Psychological factors influencing consumer behavior:

- Unique perception
- Learning theories
- Motivation and personality
- Attitude

Töröcsik's 2003 book shows that in today's world, speed, convenience, entertainment and experience come to the fore. Decisions are made locally and are made in a quick manner with the least risk.

New consumer behavior characteristics according to Töröcsik's 2007 book are the following:

- It is becoming more common for the purchase choice to be made at the point of sale and to choose from the present stock.
- Consumers only look for a particular brand if they have a strong motive, and for the most part, do not make the extra effort for their convenience.
- Hypermarkets and shopping malls are coming to the foreground, so shoppers can find what

they are looking for in one place. They come across a huge complex range of goods.

- Customers wish to try, compare, and, if possible, bargain with the seller, making it increasingly difficult to achieve brand loyalty for some products.
- Local sales discounts and promotions are also important, as they are extra returns for the households – here the attraction to the gifting brand emerges.

## 2.2. *Consumption and purchase*

„Consumption provides a framework for purchasing it presupposes a connection, a correspondence with each other. It is difficult to separate the two areas, as in quite a few cases the time and place of purchase are the same as that of consumption, but in most cases, these categories are separated.” (TÖRÖCSIK, 2007, p.13 While shopping refers more to the activity, the action itself, consumption is much more nuanced, according to Töröcsik, it is a concept of the individual.

## 2.3. *Functional consumption*

In functional consumption, our goal is to fully solve a certain problem by lining up rational arguments and trying to achieve the optimal result through individual product comparisons. The most important consideration is often convenience and whether the product or service is cheap or not. The need for the product is easily justified, and in many cases, it doesn't even require justification, as the benefits of the possession of, for instance, a car, a laptop, or a mobile phone is obvious. It is important to emphasize, however, that the presence of such a justification or lack thereof can be attributed to the cultural and socio-economical background of the consumer. (TÖRÖCSIK, 2007)

Leveraging the phenomenon of functional consumption, manufacturers offer standardized cheap but high-quality products worldwide. In this case, the consumer makes “low involvement” purchases. This categorization is reflected in the product's ability to perform the function expected. We don't expect more from the product here than satisfying the reason we bought it for. Thus, it is evident that convenience and accessibility are key in the marketing and positioning of these products. Essentially, the low price compensates for the convenience aspect, so that we could spend time on things that require attention. (TÖRÖCSIK, 2007)

## 2.4. *Emotional consumption*

Consumption doesn't only occur when there is a need for the product but also because of the feelings accompanying the buying process and the emotions the product gives. It isn't always possible to explain or justify the need for a particular product within a completely logical and rational framework. This behavior also includes the purchase of brands with which we are trying to deliver a message or that we identify with. (TÖRÖCSIK, 2007)

Self-reassuring consumption describes the emotions purchasing evokes in us. Thus, in the case of products purchased for our reassurance, it is a personal motive that explains why we even needed that particular product. For others the products purchased for reassurance, reward, and pampering may seem superfluous at first, however, every person is different and not everyone can be examined in the same framework. (TÖRÖCSIK, 2007)

Self-expressive consumption also puts the induction of emotions to the fore. There are many similarities between the two emotional consumption models, however, in the case of the latter, consumers do not purchase for themselves, but rather for the sake of projecting an impact on the

environment. Through this, consumers can express their personalities, outlook on life, social status, or the social status they want to belong to. (TÖRÖCSIK, 2007)

### 3. Methodology

When constructing the questionnaire, it was essential for us to be able to categorize the respondents on the basis of appropriate criteria. In this research, this criterion is chosen as demographic data and distribution (19-26, 27-34, 35-43, 44-51, 52-59, 60-)

The examined statistical population is the sum of elements of the basic sample that we can draw appropriate conclusions on. It's rare for the elements of the population to be included in the sample with an equal chance. Thus, arbitrary sampling does not fully represent a basic population, therefore the results of research based on such sampling are less suitable for generalization and more serious conclusions.

„A major disadvantage of this method is that the accuracy of sampling cannot be verified by statistical means. The method can cause severe distortions due to arbitrariness, as in the case of the study it is quite difficult to accurately describe the “typical” individuals, as the real purpose of the recording is to reveal the behavior and motives of these typical individuals” (LEHOTA, 2001, 120. o.) The advantage, however, is that we get data quickly and get information about the most important target group.

The questionnaire was created through a google account using google drive. The biggest advantage of this is that the final answers can be displayed in a spreadsheet that can be easily copied to Excel, as well as creating a chart for each question that can be easily edited and inserted into the research using an image editor.

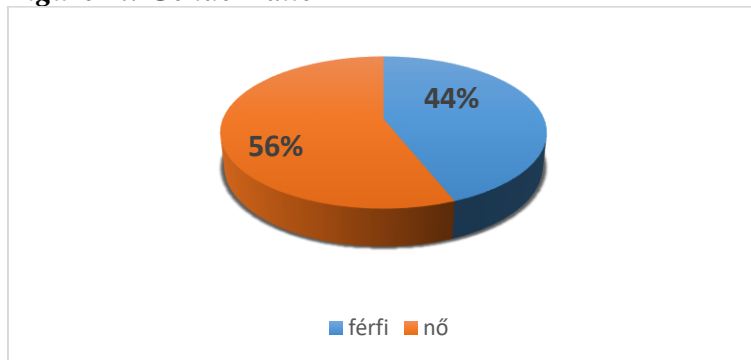
The data in the table can thus be exported to Excel and then easily copied further into SPSS, which makes it easy to visualize and evaluate the obtained data.

### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Gender of the respondents

The questionnaire was completed by 486 people. Visualized by figure 1, the gender ratio is 56 to 44, which corresponds to 270 female and 216 male respondents. The nearly identical completion rate provides a good basis for the analysis of the questionnaire. There is no significant shift in the gender ratios, and the focus group survey also yielded similar results in the gender ratio.

**Figure 1.: Gender ratio**

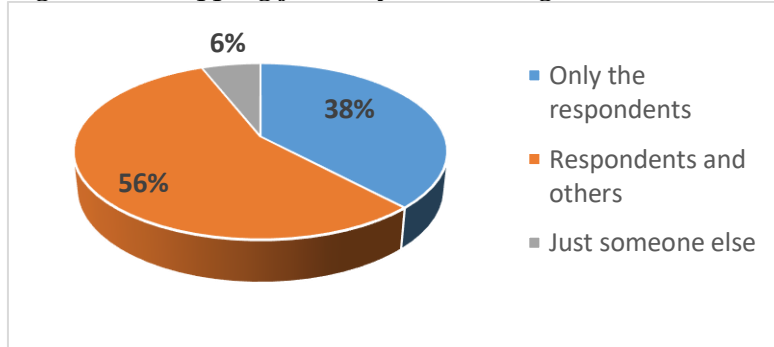


Source: Compiled by author, own research N=486

4.2. *Who does the daily shopping of consumer goods in the household of the respondents?*

Figure 2 shows that in more than half of the cases the shopping of daily consumer goods is done by the respondents accompanied by someone else. From the perspective of the correctness of our research, figure 2 provides reassuring results: 94% of the respondents are actively taking part in the purchasing process, while only 6% abstain from it completely. Within the scope of our sample, this 6% is 30 respondents.

**Figure 2.: Shopping for daily consumer goods**

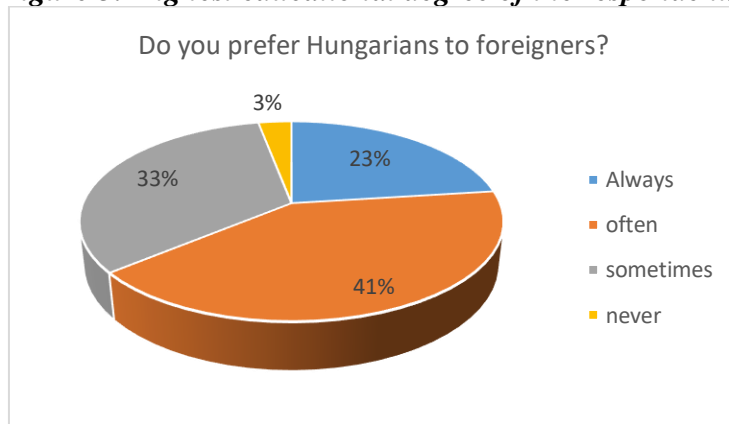


Source: Compiled by author, own research N=486

4.3. *Highest educational degree of the respondents*

The majority of the respondents at the very least have a university degree – this makes up 351 people from the total sample, also visualized in Figure 3. The proportion of graduates in Hungary is comparatively lower than in other European countries. This might create a bias in subsequent studies. The second-largest group in this sample are high school graduates making up 90 people. 30 respondents have a profession but also a high school diploma. The smallest proportion is non-graduates, with only 12 people.

**Figure 3. Highest educational degree of the respondents**

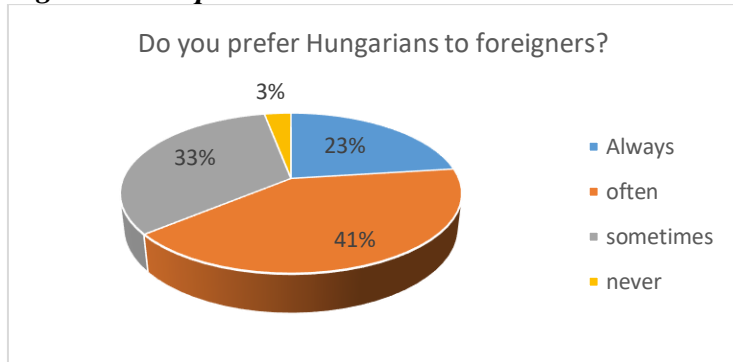


Source: Compiled by author, own research N=486

4.4. *Type of settlement of the respondents' place of residence*

In Figure 4. it is visible that 40% of the respondents (195 people) live in Hungary’s capital-Budapest. 17% of the respondents (84 people) live in county capitals, while 13% (60 people) in villages. Food shopping habits can vary from settlement to settlement, but the dominance of Budapest and the cities is not a disadvantage, as there are many hypermarkets, supermarkets, and discount stores in the towns and villages as well.

**Figure 4.: Respondents’ residence**

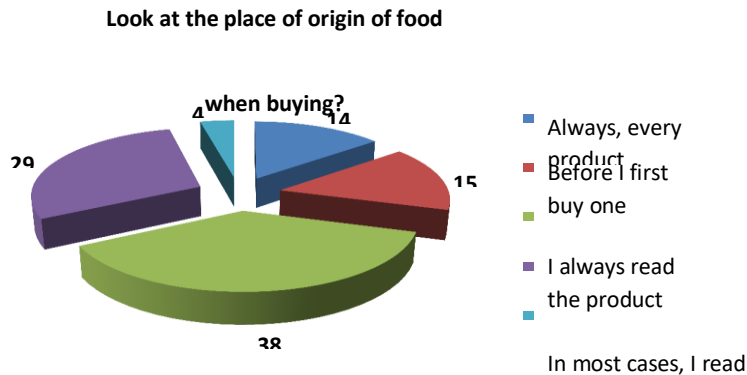


Source: Compiled by author, own research N=486

4.5. *Do you check the origin of production during purchasing?*

Analyzing Figure 5, it is well observed that 38% of respondents in most cases read the country of origin of consumables. 29% of the respondents research the country of origin only in certain cases. These two groups comprise 67% of those who pay at least some attention to the country of origin of the products – this seems realistic, as generally this is how we would expect Hungarian consumers to behave. 14% of the respondents, however, always check the country of origin before purchasing, while the people who do not check the country of origin at all only comprise 4% of the total sample.

**Figure 5.: Do respondents check the origin of production during purchasing**



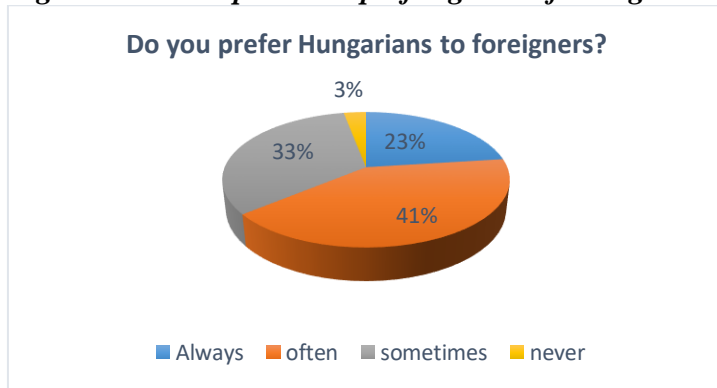
Source: Compiled by author, own research N=486

During the preliminary focus group interviews, we concluded that almost all of the respondents belonging to the 25-29 age group checked the place of origin of the purchased product. In other age groups, such uniformity is not observed. Therefore, the proportion of respondents that check the country of origin only in some cases is low.

4.6. *Do you prefer goods of Hungarian origin over foreign ones?*

Figure 6 indicates that 23% of the respondents prefer Hungarian-made products 100% of the time, while 41% of the respondents choose Hungarian-made goods most of the time. Therefore, statistically speaking, when there is a choice to be made between Hungarian and non-Hungarian made goods, 2/3 of the people will almost certainly choose the Hungarian product. The probability that the foreign product is chosen is quite small, estimated at 3%, while the probability that consumers likely purchase a foreign product instead of a Hungarian one is 33%. The real question, in this case, is whether the buyer is aware of what exactly Hungarian food is. Also, in this case, it would be important to conduct further investigations into product categories and types.

**Figure 6.: Do respondents prefer goods of Hungarian origin over foreign ones?**



Source: Compiled by author, own research N=486

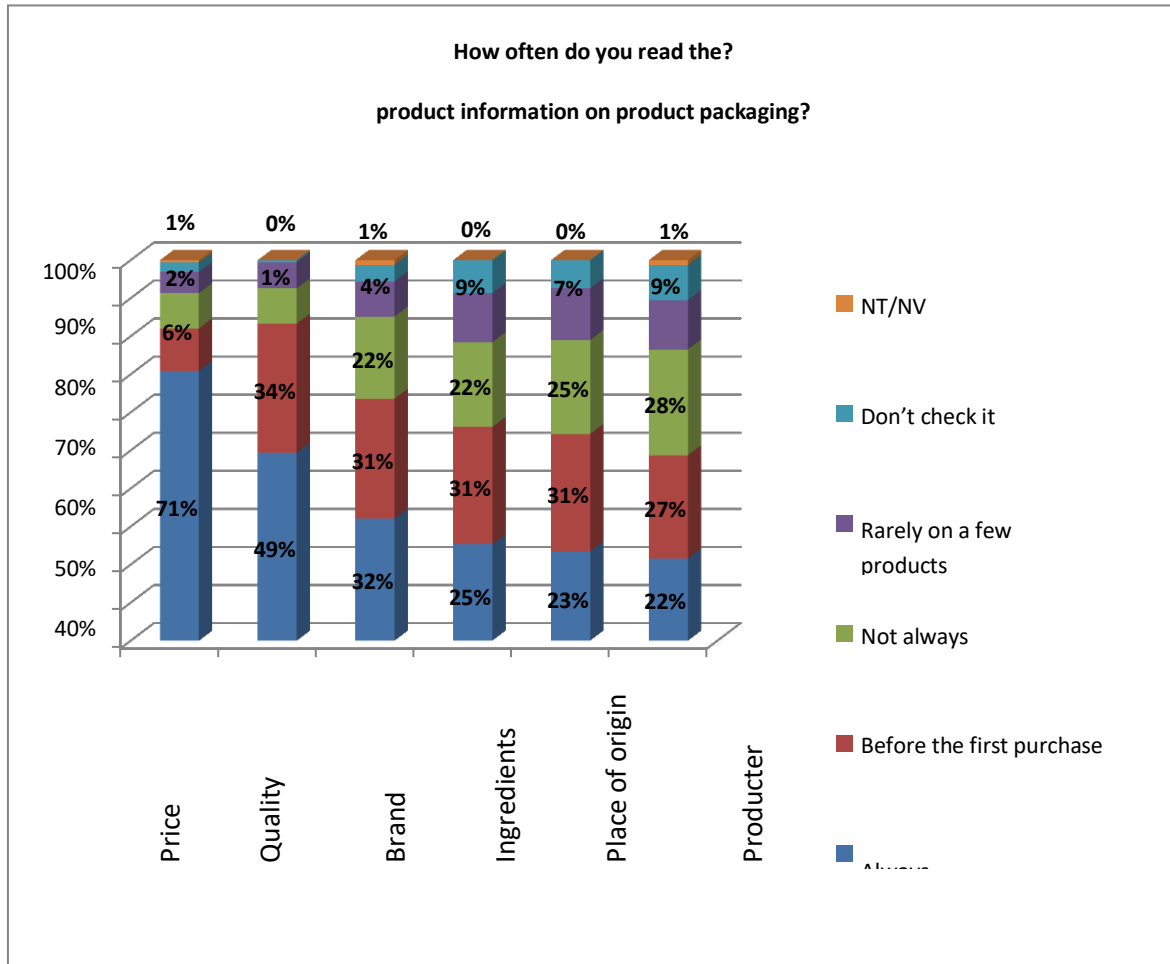
The youngest age group of the sample uniformly choose domestic-made products, whereas the oldest age group preferred products of a foreign country of origin. Middle-age people are reluctant to purchase Hungarian-made products. So, the age and life stage of the individual are the decisive factors in checking the country of origin of products. This can be explained by the following statement: a well-established person, presumably with a family, or possibly even a breadwinner will be prudent in spending and will almost certainly choose a product that they know about and which will bring the most value for money, regardless of the place of origin.

At first glance, the percentage of people that frequently buy Hungarian-made products (64%) seems high. So, the question of the respondents' honesty regarding their submitted answers arises. Perhaps people may have answered in this way only because of their conscience, in reality, Hungarian consumers likely overestimate the number of Hungarian-made products on the market. If they live with the knowledge that they have bought a Hungarian-made product, even if it is not the case, it is evident that this explains the discrepancy of the attained answers.

4.7. How often do you read the product information on the product packaging?

Analyzing figure 7, we can observe that 71% of the respondents pay great attention to the price. This is the largest proportion among respondents. The quality of the product is checked by 49% of the respondents at each purchase, while 33% of the people check the quality only the occasion, they purchase the product.

Figure 7. How often do you read the product information on the product packaging?



Source: Compiled by author, own research N=486

If we consider the two variables (always consider and before the first purchase), it can be stated that quality overcomes price. 83% of the respondents check the quality, and 82% check the price in the “always” and “before the first purchase” categories. So, it can be stated that these two pieces of information are the most important for the buyers. Only the importance of the brand is a factor that slightly exceeds the rest, totaling 63%.

The product ingredients, the place of origin of the product, and the manufacturer of the product are always monitored by about a quarter of the respondents and one-third by the first purchase.

Examining the previous question, it occurred to us that the results obtained there do not necessarily reflect the reality that 64% of people always or often prefer the Hungarian product over the foreign



one. On the other hand, based on the question analyzed in this section, it can be observed that in 46% of the cases the place of origin is rarely checked by consumers, therefore, this contradicts the former statement.

In the focus group interviews, it has been found that even when respondents check the information on the packaging, generally, they specifically look at the calorie chart and ingredients. Only 23% of the respondents always check the packaging information before the purchasing decision. If we consider that after having read the packaging information provided on the product the consumers are fully aware of the products, those who answered “always” and “before the first purchase” comprise 56% of the respondents, which is considered acceptable.

*If the respondents don't always check the origin of a product, then what is the reason?*

In most cases, the place of origin is not the main deciding factor the quality of the product is more important. Many people don't care about this information at all, or they're just preoccupied or just don't have enough time to deal with it, let alone process it. If the product is good, it doesn't matter where it comes from.

Thus, it can be stated that, based on the responses, the place of origin is not considered relevant in most cases.

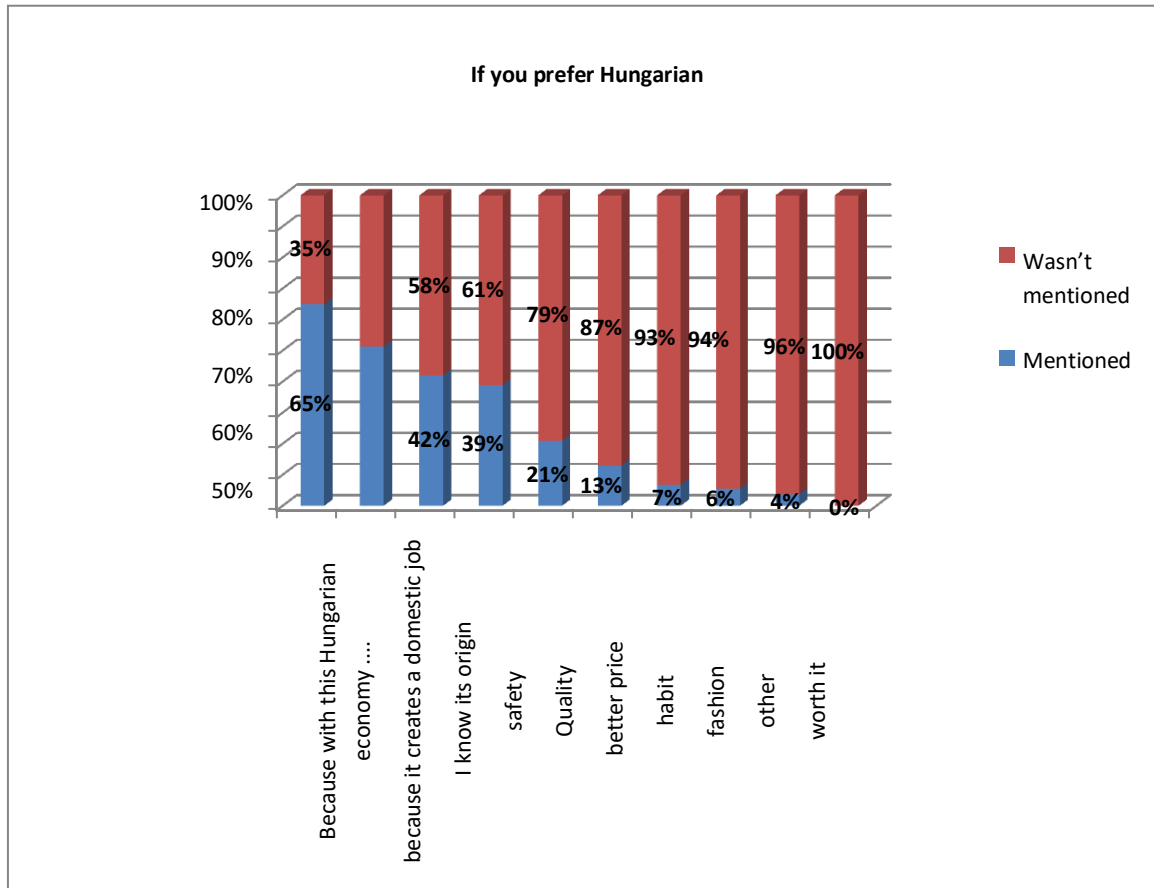
*If you only check the country of origin of some products, which are those products?*

In most cases, the origin of the vegetables and fruits is monitored by the fillers. Other important places are the dairy category and meat products. In one case, chocolate and beer were mentioned.

*If you prefer Hungarian-made products, what is the reason?*

Figure 8 displays the most frequent answers being: “because it supports the Hungarian economy” (65%), followed by “because it creates jobs in Hungary” (51%). It is thought-provoking whether respondents actually consider this important or have only heard these arguments many times and answered only in a manner consistent with the expected answers. It can only be hoped that the answers were sincere, however, to reiterate, a question arises whether the consumers know what is Hungarian and what is produced domestically.

**Figure 8. Reasons for preferring Hungarian products**



Source: Compiled by author, own research N=486

Further examining the answers, more than a third of the respondents indicated that the reasons for preferring Hungarian products over the rest include knowing its origin and a feeling of reliability. Other reasons are rarely mentioned. The aspect of a more favorable price was only mentioned by 13% of the respondents, while a supposedly “better quality” was only by 21%. If we examine the latter two aspects and add that none of the 162 people mentioned that the Hungarian product is worth the price, the question arises as to why people buy a Hungarian product and who buys such a value (in this case quality) ratio. The two variables: “knowing its origin” and “greater reliability” aren’t so dominant to conclude that Hungarians are willing to sacrifice more to ensure the origin of the product.

## 5. Conclusion

1: It is important for Hungarian consumers to purchase and consume Hungarian-made goods, but they are usually too busy informing themselves about the product during the process of purchase. Therefore, in the vast majority of cases, previous experience and a favorable price are more relevant for the consumers.

The youngest age group of our population sample was the most likely to choose Hungarian-made products. Middle-age group representatives of the respondents rarely prefer Hungarian products, while the eldest representatives are the least likely to buy. So, age and life stage are

the two decisive factors that dictate the product preferences of consumers. A well-established family person, who is presumably the breadwinner would most likely be prudent and purchase those products that have proven to be the most reliable and which are of the highest quality, regardless of the country of origin.

Respondents preferred Hungarian products over one of foreign origin 64% of the time. Those who choose foreign products attributed their decision to environmental friendliness and more reliable origin. The largest proportion of the respondents consider price, quality, and the brand of the product to be the decisive factors during purchasing. Only when the product meets the aforementioned requirements will the consumers check the product ingredients, place of origin, and product manufacturer. When asked the question “how important are these aspects when making the purchase decision”, the two most popular answers were former experience with the product (75%) and affordability (69%). Further down in the rank of influencing aspects were product ingredients, place of origin, and certificates. Therefore, Hungarian customers prefer Hungarian products, and in most cases rely on previous experience when making the purchase. The purchase decision is mostly influenced by price, brand, and product quality. Certificates, place of origin, and product ingredients are less important in making decisions.

2: Hungarian consumers prefer to visit those stores where the vast majority of available products are Hungarian, as opposed to those where imported products dominate the shelves.

The focus group interviews revealed that most respondents, quite unsurprisingly, prefer super and hypermarkets to Lidl. The primary consideration is for the store to be close to their place of residence. Based on the answers provided by the respondents, it can be concluded that in most cases they are not interested in the proportion of Hungarian and foreign-made consumables in stores. Quality and price are the most important aspects of the purchases.

3: Hungarian consumers believe that they attentively analyze the packaging information provided on the product and therefore, make well-informed decisions.

A significant proportion of the respondents read the product information before the first purchase, including the calorie chart and ingredients. However, most do not feel the need to review it for products they know well, and products they have been buying consistently.

The answers to the question of “to what extent do you consider the following aspects when making a purchase?” ranged from “previous experience” (75% - always, 23% - sometimes) to “attractive price” (69%- always, 27% - sometimes). While the brand, manufacturer, producer name (always - 39%, sometimes - 59%), product components (always - 42%, sometimes - 49%) and certificates, certification marks (always - 16%, sometimes - 49%, never - 33). It can be seen from this that in almost 50% of cases the name of the producer, product components and trademarks are only occasionally influencing buying behavior. When considering how often do the consumers read the product description on the packaging the following answers were obtained: product price (always – 71%, before the first purchase - 11%), product quality (always- 49%, before the first purchase – 34%). 25% of the respondents always pay attention to the product ingredients, 31% before the first buy, 31% rarely pay attention to any product information, while 9% do not review any packaging information at all.

The focus group interview revealed that convenience plays a major role in the consumers’ purchase habits and the location of the selected store is preferred to be closer to

the respondents' home. The country of origin is checked for some products, however the product information on the packaging is reviewed less frequently. When, it is, however, usually what is of interest is the calorie chart and the list of ingredients. It can also be said that price and quality are critical, which is what most people decide on. Based on the primary research, it can be said that the majority of respondents review the product information, but previous experience and a favorable price usually overweight the former. If the consumers are able to distinguish Hungarian products, then their choice clearly lies with them. However, both quality and the price of a product irrelevant of its country of origin would play a greater part in the purchase decision process. Most people think that if they buy a Hungarian product, they will support the Hungarian economy, create jobs in Hungary, and thus know the origin of the products more surely and reliably. Hungarian consumers are usually hasty in their purchasing process, so they have little time in checking for certificates and packaging information. Instead, they rely on past experience as a decisive force in their purchase process. Hungarian consumers turned out to be price sensitive in the food market as well.

The following conclusions can be made of the research:

Hungarian consumers prefer to visit those stores where the vast majority of products available are of Hungarian origin, opposed to those where imported products dominate.

Hungarian consumers believe that they should read the information on the packaging carefully and thus make an informed decision. Questionnaire respondents almost always pay attention to product information or at least during the first purchase. It is important for Hungarian consumers to choose and consume domestic food, but they already have little time to be informed during the purchase, so in the vast majority of cases previous experience and a favorable price matter.

During the processing of the results, we gained insight into the product consumption habits of Hungarian consumers, their decision-making mechanism, order of preference, the assessment of domestic and foreign products, their business choice habits and the assessment and knowledge of product information on packaging. We have been able to explore the contexts and factors that influence consumers and that allow us to better understand them.

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