

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF BEEF CONSUMERS

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Abstract. The main aim of this research was to conduct consumers' attitudes and behaviour toward beef and to get know factors influencing purchase decisions as well as barriers discouraging consumers to choose this kind of meat. The research was conducted on 10 groups of consumers: housewives aged 35–65. The research was run by means of focus study. The results indicate that beef is perceived to have positive nutritional, health, and sensory attributes and it is bought for special family occasions. However, popularity of this meat is severely restricted because of barriers deep-rooted in consumers' minds: (1) price – beef is much more expensive comparing to other kinds of meat and it is less efficient; (2) it needs a lot of consumer commitment – it is rather difficult to prepare and time-consuming so some consumers cannot cope with this type of meat and do not have the guarantee of obtaining the desired culinary effect. The last factor mentioned by consumers was (3) lack of acceptance among children – female consumers state that children usually do not like this kind of meat due to its sensory properties.

Key words: decision process, consumer, beef

INTRODUCTION

Consumer behavior is a complex of reactions to internal and external stimuli causing the deficiency feeling referring to the object. The objectification of this deficiency is determined by the level of awareness, values, social norms and the availability of resources to meet the needs. A particular example of consumer behaviour is the consumer behaviour on the food market. Such behaviours are implied on the one hand by feeling a sense of hunger, appetite (the original internal stimulus), dietary patterns (secondary internal

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stimulus), and on the other hand, they are under the influence of particular elements of marketing referring to food (food product, its price, availability, the way of product attribute communicating) as well as the natural environment, socio-cultural and economic conditions [Gutkowska, Ozimek 2002]. According to Narojek [1993], food behaviour is an activity and ways of proceeding referring to meet the food needs and depends on various factors. The activity and ways of proceedings refers to food product's choice, the organization of buying, storing, meals planning, the frequency of their consumption, as well as the food quality. Some of the mentioned behaviours affect the nutritional food value, and the other ones refers to the overall accuracy of nutrition, mainly when it comes to the health. Consumer behaviour is caused by various factors. Factors influencing food behavior in general includes as follows: geographical, cultural, economic, social and psychological agents [Narojek 1993]. Jeżewska-Zychowicz [1996] notes that in the literature there are three groups of factors affecting behaviour in the field of food and nutrition: (1) relating to food, (2) referring to the individual making the choice of food and (3) factors according to the external environment. Babicz-Zielinska [2000] classifies them as follows:

- “associated with the product factors”, defining its physicochemical, sensory properties (taste, smell, appearance, texture); functional characteristics (packaging, availability, convenience); its nutritional value;
- “associated with the consumer”, including personal characteristics (age, sex, education); psychological factors (personality, experience, mood); physiological factors (state health, satiety, hunger);
- “environmental factors”, including economic factors (price, income); cultural agents (beliefs, and convictions); social ones (social status, fashion, environmental influences).

According to Matuszewska [1992], among the factors influencing the food acceptance there are as follows: physical, chemical and nutritional properties of products, short-term physiological body effects (hunger, saturation, thirst, appetite), sensory factors, socio-economic and psychological (price, product availability, tradition, cultural and religious characteristics). Socio-economic, sensory and psychological factors influence on the formation, or the disclosure of specific attitudes and opinions about products which cause the acceptance and food choice.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

A qualitative approach was used in the study. The main aim of this approach is to know the ways of thinking and assessing referring to research objects. Qualitative research respond to exploratory questions and it is designed to clarify issues which slipping out quantitative research methods. It also allows to know opinions, ways of expressing thoughts, emotions and proper established customs and habits. In order to determine how consumers perceive the food quality referring to animal origin products, the study was carried out using the method of focus groups (focus group interview – FGI)¹. Focused

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interviews are carried out mostly in groups of 8 to 12 consumers selected on the basis of specific criteria for targeted testing [Kędzior 2005, Maison 2001]. A characteristic feature of this type of research is to use the group dynamic and common ideas generation by participants selected to the study [Kędzior 2005, Maison 2001, Maison 2007, Nikodemaska-Wołowik 1999]. The research by focus groups was conducted in November and December 2010. In order to ensure the greatest homogeneity degree of the studied consumers groups, 10 women aged from 35 to 65 years were recruited into each group. There were completed 10 FGI sessions and each session lasted approximately 2.5 hours. The sample was selected in a targeted manner in accordance with the essence of this method. The consumer responsibility for food shopping and meal preparation in the household were the main criterions of consumer recruitment. The other criteria which were taken into account were as follows: an economic criterion (positive evaluation of family financial situation), the frequency of beef consumption (1. the regular intake – three times per month: four groups; 2. the potential intake – two times per month: four groups, 3. the occasional purchase – consumers who rarely purchase meat or do not buy it: two groups). The main aim of the study was to determine consumer's attitudes and the behaviour with respect to beef in order to identify various barriers in the decision process.

Interviews were conducted by the so-called "moderation script", which includes the following issues: (1) consumer attitudes and behavior with regard to cooking and food preparation, (2) perceived positive and negative traits of meat with the particular emphasis on beef, (3) the use of beef in the household, (4) making purchase decisions according to beef (the place of purchase and decision-making process), (5) identifying factors influencing the purchase of beef, and barriers to purchase, and (6) opinions about the concept of communication of selected characteristics of beef. The recorded discussion was used to prepare the precise transcripts. This material was analyzed by the experts by preparing a written development of the main results. Then, according to the principles of qualitative data analysis [Maison 2001], the obtained results were organized and the material has been categorized by the major research problems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the opinion of the respondents the meat should be included in the daily diet because of its significant role in nutrition. According to the FGI participants' opinions, meat gives the proper energy and satisfies human's hunger for long time comparing to other food products. Meat also can be used to prepare many dishes, and thus it has got the great potential and diversity. According to respondents, meat requires the special preparation due to the children preferences who are not always keen on this type of food. On the other hand, the adverse meat effects may relates to human health, which can be associated with the type of material (for example too high level of fat in the meat) or the wrong preparation way (the fried meat). A few illustrative comments follow:

- *We all like the meat, it is tasty.*
- *It is needed for health; it is essential (...) so the grit, the satiety.*

erational Programme, 2007–2013, Optimizing beef production in Poland according to strategy from "fork to farm".

- *Dinner diversity; there is greater opportunity to create some different dishes.*
- *Quickly you can prepare something like cutlet/chop, and this is filling. When I played with the dumplings, my sons asked me about dinner; cause it's dessert.*
- *This is the basis of dinner. There is no dinner without meat, simply.*

According to respondents, each type of meat should be characterized by certain attributes. Among the most frequently beef purchase factors which were taken into account, consumers mentioned sensory qualities such as taste and smell and preferences of family members. In the case of beef, consumers mainly pointed out that meat should be juicy with a lively, bright red colour (“not too dark colour”). In the consumer opinion, beef should not contain too much fat, and the fat cannot be yellow colour. The age of the animal from which the meat was obtained was an important meat quality indicator (so-called “young beef”, without veins), and thus the meat should result in the appropriate size dish (“not too large pieces”). Meat freshness was one of the most important attributes mentioned by participants. They also stressed the health benefits of this type of meat and its “uniqueness” comparing to other types of meat. Here again, the following comments illustrate these interpretations.

- *And if you buy for the broth you have to pay attention to fat, it must be white not yellow.*
- *(...) and the smell, the smell here is very important.*
- *(...) taste, smell, appearance (...).*
- *It contains a lot of proteins and it is one of the healthiest meats.*
- *In these anemic states it improves the condition of the body, improves the level of hemoglobin. It is recommended meat.*
- *It is healthier, because the world actually went in the direction of such industrial farming.*
- *After eating beef the man is not such hungry.*
- *It is delicious and such a little bit unique; this meat is different.*
- *It is (...) rich in iron; healthy.*
- *(...) freshness probably.*

An important element of the study was to investigate decision-making process of beef consumers. The decision-making process is generally distinguished in five phases of varying duration [Gajewski 1994]: (1) feeling the need (awareness), (2) looking for the alternatives, (3) evaluation of alternatives, (4) the purchase decision, (5) feeling after purchase. The analysis of obtained results indicate that some consumers, do food shopping taking into consideration the specific thought of action plan. Those consumers want to buy raw material for the proper dish, however it happens that consumers can change the decision in the shop when another attractive raw material is available. In the light of the results, the buying process can be summarized as follows: (1) the consumer choice referring to trusted butcher shop, (2) the comparison referring to various types and parts of meat including beef, (3) the final decision. Here, the following some comments illustrate these interpretations.

- *When I go to the shop I think: “I am buying today the stew” but I look around—and there is “so nice” beef. And I do not know what to do because the beef should be chill; so I buy the beef very often and I put it in to the fridge.*

- *You come to the shop to buy the meat for broth soup for example and you see nice/pretty beef so you can prepare “bitki” – so you buy it.*
- *I see such a nice piece of meat; let’s say pork ribs – and there is no bones in it so I take it and I can use it for example on the next day.*
- *Sometimes I want to buy chicken but I see pretty beef meat so I change the plans (I give up) and I prepare something different.*
- *When I plan the stew and there is now meat for stew I give up; or there is only “stringy” beef (...).*
- *(...) when there is beef for the gravy, and we want the beef for the other dish, not for the gravy in fact, we also give up.*
- *I come to the shop and I say that I want something for broth soup and the lady knows me from years so she shows which piece is better.*
- *I come to the shop, and there is the counter and I see what is good, and after that I say that I want a piece from the particular part.*
- *I watch, I stand and look/stare and ask, I indicate the piece, but the lady recommends pork, and I know that it is fresh pork and I know that pork chops will be.*
- *When I go to the butcher shop and I say that I want the meat in order to roast it, the seller tells me to come on the next day and he promises to leave the meat for me. On the next day the meat no longer exists, but I have put it off.*

The main factors that could possibly change the consumers’ initial beef purchase are as follows: an attractive and inviting display of meat and a recommendation of a trusted seller. However, in situations when the meat appearance does not meet the customer expectations, the consumer is ready to cancel the purchase. Among the motives encouraging the consumer to prepare the specific dishes mentioned by surveyed participants were:

- The need of meals diversity (“The beef was not prepared for dinner for a long time”);
- More festive lunch or the guests invitation;
- The seller recommendation;
- The taste of beef – “the desire for a particular dish” (“I would like to taste the stew with buckwheat”);
- Consideration referring to health aspects;
- The family needs.

The following comments may present consumer point of view.

- *(...) When I see a piece of meat or I have to prepare a dinner for a larger number of people, I usually prepare beef.*
- *Or any specific requirement that maybe we can do this and that.*
- *I plan, I have the time and I will spend time for it on Saturday.*
- *When I see it I buy it.*
- *I plan it usually.*
- *I go to the shop to buy the pork but when I see a nice piece of beef I have an idea and maybe I buy a piece of beef too.*
- *My husband sometimes comes and says that he would eat some meat, maybe beef. So I go straight to the shop. And he prepare the dish, the onions, frying and in the evening it smells throughout the house. And we have got it for the supper.*

- *I have been buying lately a ground beef because of my daughter's anemia, and often I buy a little of it, about 20 or 30 grams, and the lady grinds the meat for me. I buy it for my daughter's health.*
- *I also plan Stroganoff for example, I do it every Sunday in fact.*
- *(...) there were chickens or pancakes, so now it is turn to the beef. I care about the diversity.*
- *When I invite guests, I prepare two meat dishes. And usually one of them it is pork or poultry and the other is always beef.*

Besides the factors which motivate the consumers to purchase beef, participants indicated the factors considered by them as the “shopping barriers”. Other findings also indicate that consumers want to have an easy access to the groceries that they choose and to be able to afford them [Kowalska 2011]. In FGI research among the most frequently mentioned barriers were as follows: beef cost, preparation time, lack of ideas/concepts to prepare the beef, the problem with the availability the proper meat, lack of acceptance among children. With regard to the price, beef is perceived being significantly more expensive than other types of meat. Depending on the type of beef its price in consumer opinion reaches up to 50–60 zł per kilo. The price barrier makes that this meat is perceived to be quite elegant and it is not suitable for every occasion, thus it is bought on special occasions. Therefore beef is purchased for more family dinners on Sunday, or on a special occasion when guests are invited for a supper. A few illustrative comments follow.

- *I think that if beef was as much expensive as pork, the majority of people would buy beef in fact.*
- *It is not the most tasteful meat but the most expensive one in fact.*
- *Veal is expensive, beef may not be so expensive as veal, but in fact it is expensive also.*
- *Beef is getting more and more expensive every day, and this is the worst.*
- *Firstly beef is expensive and secondly it is more work-consuming, therefore it is prepared/eaten just for the variety.*
- *When the children were smaller I used mainly the veal or the veal and poultry. And now mainly poultry and pork. It is because of the price.*
- *Today in the morning I bought a brisket rib plate, 14.70 zlotys per kilo. It was in one part; and nice pork ribs – 9 zlotys. But that's because there is the gradation and we buy a bit less meat, but at this same price/for the same price.*

Preparation time was another factor limiting the choice of meat in the store. Beef is perceived to be “difficult” to prepare and it is time-consuming. Female consumers, particularly from younger age groups, also mentioned about their failures associated with the preparation of tasty beef. The process of preparing this kind of meat is associated with keeping it in the flood and long frying or cooking, therefore in general from consumer point of view this meat is not suitable for “quick lunch”. These comments below illustrate the consumer perception referring to difficulties with beef preparation.

- *I'll do this beef; for example “zraziki” take more time; the chicken – very fast; cut and there is; and beef needs more time.*
- *It needs much time because it is tough.*
- *Preparation takes longer; burning lasts longer; it is more complicated.*
- *The disadvantage is the difficulty in preparation and time-consuming.*

- *I seasoned it and it is really in the refrigerator 2 days in the oil and in the spices (...) pickled in it (...).*
- *Poultry push out the beef because of its ease of preparation.*
- *You celebrate the beef. It is not on every day. It is not so common (...).*
- *The cooking process is longer unfortunately. It happens very often, that it is tough. If it is fried it is not simply to chew.*

Moreover, the consumers emphasized that currently young housewives are less familiar with the beef and with the methods for its good preparation. Since the beef is not very popular meat, women often cannot deal with it and they are even afraid of “culinary failure”. Therefore, some female consumers rarely buy beef, and if it happens to them it is usually the meat for soup or stew; however after several failed attempts the women are getting to discourage to this kind of meat. Here again, the following comments illustrate these interpretations.

- *Beef; I think you have to be a specialist.... it's not that popular. We do not have tradition (heritage) from home(...). I associate it with exquisite (...).*
- *You have more ideas for pork than for beef. – You can cut poultry and it is done, and what you can do with beef – not so many dishes.*
- *And it incredibly “shrinks” and my family is eager to eat meat for breakfast, lunch and dinner. I am seriously; and this meat is really expensive; for example you buy 1 and half kilo and you prepare “bitki” and you have one more dinner. And that's all.*
- *Even if I like it and I think that it is nice, there is no guarantee that I can get this to make a good meal.*
- Another factor which was mentioned by participants as limiting the beef purchase is the problem with the choice of meat (a problem with the meat availability). Because of the fact that the beef is not so popular among many women, they also do not know how to choose the right piece of meat in order to gain a success, and for this reason some women gives up the beef purchase. There were also opinions referring to shop owners who order this type of meat very rarely because of low consumer attention. The following comments confirm this opinions.
- *Young mums do not have time to spend for the beef.*
- *I also admit that I buy in a shop which is next to me, but what's odd, despite the fact that beef is expensive, it quickly disappears and you have to go to the shop very early in the morning to buy. And I asked – they order little amount because it changes the colour and nobody wants to buy it; so it goes so quickly.*

In general, among the meat purchase points which were mentioned by FGI participants were small shops and bazaars, and when it comes to hypermarkets, the consumers' opinions were rather negative. With regard to the butcher shop and a bazaars, it was emphasized that the products are fresher and frequent of supply comparing to other purchase points. It was also underlined that there is the possibility to check the freshness through the senses (eg sight or smell), and the direct contact with the seller allows for further checking of the raw material before purchasing and making sure that the meat is fresh. Participants emphasized that in small shops the sellers (including local shops) show a greater interest and professionalism; generally it is nicer and the shop assistant is more likely to respond to consumer questions. According to respondents, contact with the seller is easier by the fact of “being a regular customer”. From the consumer point of view,

buying in the supermarket is more anonymous and it is lack of certainty referring to meat freshness. In the opinion of respondents, the supermarket service is often unpleasant for clients and the sanitary conditions are very low. A few illustrative comments follow.

- *It is cheaper in supermarkets but in these small local shops (...) they have a really beautiful meat. As you go, what you want, they will show, cut, grind.*
- *Large quantities of meat are brought in hypermarkets, so hypermarkets are filled with meat. For example, Real (...) my friend works there, so there are promotions in every Thursday in Real; so the pork loin is sold for 9 zł. And I suspect why pork loin on the bone is after 19 zł, and the boneless is sold at about 9 zł.*
- *As we look for something in our shop we can ask the seller more specifically; so when you ask if it is fresh you receive the honest answer.*
- *If you go to this shop and the meat is not fresh they will tell you not to buy the meat and they say that you can come tomorrow. You can trust to the seller and you are sure that you will buy the fresh meat.*
- *I do not buy in the supermarket but for example on the bazaar and I know that it is good quality.*
- *I do not buy in Tesco. (...) The fresh meat is mixed with outdated products, because they must sell everything.*

Another factor limiting the beef purchase by consumers is the children reluctance to eat this type of meat. FGI participants declare that children do not accept beef, because of the taste, and hardness. However beef is perceived by consumers as being very healthy, thus mothers try to use it in modified (changed) form in some foods such as broth and dumplings filled with meat. Some comments below illustrate these point of view.

- *That's very good if it is cooked well (...). I remember when I was in the kindergarten the meat was tough, I remember when I was resting I kept it still in the mouth.*
- *It is reach in iron, children do not want eat the red meat, unless it is "hide" in something.*
- *We must look on it in order to check if it is "stringy" for sure, because the children do not want to eat such beef.*
- *My son says that it is hard/tough and he does not want to eat it.*
- *I do not buy because my children do not want to eat.*
- *My kids do not like it, but if they liked it I would have bought it.*
- *A child does not associate me with beef; husband – yes (...); for me it is food (powerful food) for adults.*

Buying barriers refer to consumer risk associated with various elements: social, psychological (self-doubt and the opinion of family or friends), economic (the high price of beef), risk of loss of time (a long time to prepare a meal) and functional one (lack of repeatability of quality in relation the raw material; problem with the availability and reproducibility of raw material).

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the qualitative research results indicates that beef is perceived to be positive for health comparing to the other types of meat (it is low in fat, it contains many valuable and essential nutrients). However, popularity of this meat is severely restricted because of barriers deep-rooted in consumers' minds as follows: (1) price – beef is much more expensive comparing to other kinds of meat and it is less efficient, (2) it needs a lot of consumer commitment-it is rather difficult to prepare and time-consuming so some female consumers cannot cope with this type of meat and do not have the guarantee of obtaining the desired culinary effect. Moreover it is not easy to select and purchase a good piece of meat and it is easy with the culinary failure. The last barrier factor is (3) lack of interest among children – female consumers observe that children usually do not accept this kind of meat due to its sensory properties (eg taste, hardness). According to the younger consumers the popularity of beef has declined and now it is rather rarely used in the households in order to meal preparation. Moreover, beef is rather planned for special occasions, such as family celebrations. Among older consumers popularity and skills preparations are higher which is associated with a particular lifestyle connected with lower labour force participation and with the family activity.

Decision-making process referring to beef is quite special. As noticed, the decision relates to planned purchases, for example special occasions. Moreover, when it comes to the selection of specific meat cuts, the decision depends on the suggestions and seller advice. The decision can be also changed according to prepared or pre-planned dish which is connected with the available assortment. Consumers can change their decisions, both in relation to particular parts of beef and toward to the other types of meat, such as pork or poultry. It seems that in the further stage of research, the most important area is to know the ability how to communicate the consistent quality of raw material. Moreover, the crucial point is to provide information according to the appropriate culinary methods for selected parts of beef in order to reduce the purchase barriers and the risk referring to beef perceived by consumers.

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CZYNNIKI WARUNKUJĄCE PROCES DECYZYJNY KONSUMENTÓW WOŁOWINY

Streszczenie. Podstawowym celem przeprowadzonego badania było poznanie postaw, a szczególnie zachowań konsumentów w odniesieniu do czynników powodujących zakup mięsa wołowego oraz określenie barier ograniczających wybór tego rodzaju mięsa. Badanie przeprowadzono na 10 grupach konsumentów (gospodynie domowe w wieku 35–65 lat) wykorzystując metodę zogniskowanych wywiadów grupowych. Wyniki badań wskazują, że wołowina jest postrzegana jako mięso o pozytywnych walorach odżywczych, zdrowotnych oraz sensorycznych; jest kupowana ze względu na ważne uroczystości rodzinne. Jednakże popularność tego mięsa jest ograniczona z powodu barier głęboko zakorzenionych w świadomości konsumentów takich jak: (1) cena – wołowina jest mięsem znacznie droższym w porównaniu do innych rodzajów mięs oraz jest mniej wydajna; (2) mięso to wymaga większego zaangażowania konsumenta – jest raczej trudne w przygotowaniu oraz wymaga czasu, w związku z czym konsumenci mają problemy z przygotowaniem tego rodzaju mięsa oraz nie mają gwarancji uzyskania pożądanego efektów kulinarnych. Ostatnim czynnikiem wymienianym przez badanych był (3) brak akceptacji wśród dzieci – konsumentki twierdziły, że dzieci zazwyczaj nie lubią tego mięsa ze względu na jego właściwości sensoryczne.

Słowa kluczowe: proces decyzyjny, konsument, wołowina

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