

# The role of consumers' perception and attitude in purchasing of meat and meat products\*

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*S u m m a r y:* The process influencing the consumer to accept certain meat product or meat is multi-dimensional. It is not always simple to establish the connection between the physiological perception and reaction of the consumer. Response of the consumer, in case of food, is not only based on sensory properties of the product and its physical status, but it is also associated with other factors, such as: previous knowledge, previous experience, as well as, consumer attitudes and believes.

Consumers today are much more demanding in terms of food quality and safety, product labeling, determination of producers to implement certain standards in food production, etc.

In this paper, different methods for acquiring the information on consumers' perception and expectations which influence the purchasing and consumption of meat and meat products, are studied and discussed.

**Key words:** consumer response, perception, attitudes, expectations, meat and meat products.

## Introduction

Consumers' perception on meat and meat products is critical issue for the meat industry because it has direct influence on profitability. Many studies have concluded that consumers' perception is both complex, dynamic and difficult to define (Issanchou, 1996).

The process influencing the consumers to accept certain meat or meat products is multi-dimensional. It is not always simple to establish the connection between the physiological perception and reaction of the consumer. Response of the consumer, in case of food, is not only based on sensory properties of the product and its physical status, but it is also associated with other factors, such as: previous knowledge, previous experience, as well as, consumers' attitudes and believes. People may utilize the same product and service features for very different reasons (Akaer and Maheswaran, 1997; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999; Sheth et al., 2000).

The literature on customer and market orientation argues for the importance of putting the customers' interest first and the creation of superior value for buyers' (Deshpande et al, 1993). In fact, customer value perceptions have been shown to positively influence product like service evaluations, behavioral intentions and repeat purchase, which all ultimately affect organizational success (Cronin et al., 2000; Patterson et al., 1997). Kotler (1994) observes, that even the best marketing department in the world can not sell products, which are poor made, or which fail to meet anyone's need.

Many valuable scientific contributions which have been widely taken up by the food industry have indeed improved the consumers' perception of meat and meat products particularly in terms of safety, quality and product stability (Raspor and Jevšnik, 2009; Matekalo-Sverak et al., 2009). As Rantsios (2007) observe when we are referring to food safety and quality, we first think to safety and quality at the time of consumption. Therefore, major responsibility lay on the consumer at the treatment

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time of food consumption. But, the same responsibility lay on meat industry and competent authorities (Šarčević *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, all stakeholders (consumers, producers, authorities) should fulfill their expected contribution in integrated manner and all efforts should be put in preventive control and consumption of safe and quality food. It is necessary to establish good two-way communication between stakeholders in order to provide all information of the hazards and the risks associated with food handling from the time of purchase and onwards (Šarčević *et al.*, 2009). In that case all stakeholders will be social responsible in process of getting safe and quality food (Šarčević, 2011).

Sensory quality should be considered as key factor in food acceptance, because consumer seek food with certain sensory characteristic. The acceptance of food will depend on whether it responds to consumers needs and on the degree of satisfaction that is able to provide (Heldman, 2004). Apart from the characteristics of the food itself and the sensations consumers experience when ingesting it, a consumers' purchase choice, and even degree of pleasure when consuming it, can be influenced by their attitude and opinion about the nutritional characteristics (Bruhn *et al.*, 1992), safety (Wilcock *et al.*, 2004) and even the trademark (Guerrero *et al.*, 2000), or price (Caporale and Monteleone, 2001) of the product.

The aim of this paper is discussion about different methods for obtain information about consumer perception, attitudes, beliefs and expectations.

## Consumers' perception

Perception is defined as the act of apprehending by means of the senses and/or the mind ([www.dictionary.reference.com](http://www.dictionary.reference.com)). Also, perception is the conscious recognition and interpretation of sensory stimuli, that serve as a basis for understanding, learning, and knowing, or for motivating a particular action or reaction ([www.medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com)). Behaviour is strongly influenced by psychological factor of perception.

Consumer can not be categorized by one type of the behaviour, because it is shaped by their needs. But behaviour is strongly influenced by psychological factor of perception.

Some of our non-cognitive mechanisms such as conditioning and imitation are predominant in the early formation of food habits (Troy and Kerry, 2010). Various models and theories have been developed and are discussed by Koster and Mojet (2007). They concluded that consumer perceptions are not fixed and may change. Therefore, consumers' per-

ceptions are very dynamic, and there are often differences between what consumers' perceive and their behaviour.

The viability of the food industry depends on consumers demanding and paying for products. In order for consumers to willingly purchase and consume a particular food type, their perception have to be positive towards it.

In context of consumer perceptions, food quality is difficult to measure (Šarčević *et al.*, 2011). In the recent past, food quality was more related to safety, sensory and shelf-life aspects of food products. Nowadays, it is associated with nutrition, well being and health. The basic definition of quality, as associated with food, relates to food as fit for human consumption or in its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. It must be constantly measured and evaluated in terms of consumer expectations and needs (Grunert *et al.*, 1996; Peri, 2006). Steenkamp (1990) proposed that perceived quality has three dimensions:

- preference – in terms of evaluative judgement;
- the interaction between the subject and the object – it is comparative in terms of other products and
- lastly consumption in terms of being valued by the consumer.

Quality cues contribute to the function of beliefs and therefore purchase choice. Troy and Kerry (2010) recognize the reason why meat industry have to fully understand quality cues in terms of:

- a) what these cues are and which are the most important;
- b) what can meat industry (producers, processors and retailers) do in order to maintain or enhance these cues in existing or new products;
- c) how through using best scientific knowledge and technology can the industry enhance such perception.

In context of meat and meat products, it is normally understood that consumer perception of meat relates to its quality in a broad sense (Troy and Kerry, 2010).

Kozen and Larsen (2010) describe two context of consumers perceptions in relation to meat:

- „everyday contexts“ – relating to buying, preparing and eating;
- „production contexts – relating to primary production, slaughtering and meat processing.

As *Troy* (2011) concluded, understanding of the most important factors which influence meat eating, is imperative in order to produce a consistent product, in line with consumers' expectations. Consumer focused research into meat eating quality has shown that tenderness, juiciness, flavour and overall palatability remain the most sought after attributes by consumers and tenderness is deemed most important (*Miller et al.*, 2002).

Much research has been carried out to understand and identify the major intrinsic and extrinsic quality cues in relation to meat (*Acerbrón and Dopico*, 2000) (Table 1)

**Table 1.** Meat quality cues and attributes

**Tabela 1.** Zahtevi kvaliteta mesa

<b>Point of sale/Tačka prodaje</b>
▪ Meat colour/Boja mesa
▪ Packaged meat colour/Boja upakovanog mesa
▪ Visible drip/Vidljivo kapanje
▪ Visible fat/Vidljiva mast
<b>Point of consumption/Tačka potrošnje</b>
▪ Tenderness/Mekoća
▪ Flavour/Ukus
▪ Juiciness/Sočnost
<b>Major background cues / Glavni pozadinski signali</b>
▪ Safety/Bezbednost
▪ Nutrition/Ishrana
▪ Sustainability/Održivost
▪ Ethics/Etika

Extrinsic quality cues include price, product presentation, origin or brand. Intrinsic quality cues for meat include the physiological characteristics of the product such as colour, visible fat and tenderness. Some, but not all of these quality attributes, can be evaluated by the consumer at the point of purchase. These and other contribute to the consumer „expected quality“. In case of meat consumers perceived likeness of appearance, as well as freshness, but decreases with for example the amount of visible fat present in meat (*Steankamp and Van Trijp*, 1996). Expected quality judgement is measured at the point of purchase while experienced quality is

measured on the basis of being fit for purpose at the point of consumption. The consumer form the decision to purchase meat and meat products on the basis of a large number of cues (price, label, brand, appearance and type of cut, which in turn signposts the quality of the meat in terms of attributes like tenderness, flavour, freshness and nutrition (*Grunert et al.*, 2004). This model calls „total food quality model“ and distinguishes between evaluations of food quality before and after purchase. In this case meat is introduced by focusing on differing ways quality which may display itself at the different stages of processing.

Since the most important quality attributes are known, the industry must ensure that they produce meat which meets the expectations of consumer. There is great challenge for the industry in communicating to the consumer on even a semi-quantitative scale degree to which these attributes are manifested in the product.

#### *Consumers' attitudes and beliefs*

The influence of food habits, attitudes, beliefs and opinions on the food choice and purchase is of particular importance in the acceptance or rejection of food (*Schifferstein*, 2001; *Magnusson and Koivisto* 2002; *Harker et al.*, 2003; *Urala and Lahteenmaki*, 2004; *Jaeger*, 2006; *Villegas et al.*, 2009). The Pan-European Survey of Consumer Attitudes to Food, Nutrition and Health found that the top five influences on food choice in 15 European member states are quality/freshness (74%), price (43%), taste (38%), trying to eat healthy (32%) and what my family wants to eat (29%). These results obtained by grouping 15 European member states, which differed significantly from country to country. In the USA the following order of factors affecting food choices has been reported: taste, cost, nutrition, convenience and weight concerns (*Glanz et al.*, 1998). In Pan-European study, females, older subject, and more educated subject considered health aspects to be particularly important. Males more frequently selected taste and habit as main determinants of their food choice. Price seem to be most important in unemployed and retired subject.

Today consumers pay much more attention on health aspects of meat and meat products. One example is negative health aspects of increased common salt/Sodium intake, which lead to many different health problems such as: direct risk of heart attack, hypertrophy of the left heart chamber, greater possibility of infection of *Helicobacter pylori* and risk of stomach cancer etc. World Health Organisation (WHO) initiated the reduction strategy through re-

gional directorates. Eleven EU countries have agreed to and signed the program of salt content reduction of 16% in the next 4 years (Lilić and Matekalo-Sverak, 2011).

Consumers' attitude and beliefs of meat and meat products at the point of purchase, are based on very different elements such as: their experiences, knowledge about meat and meat products nutrition, understanding of meat labels (which provide nutritional information, cooking and storage guidelines and suggestions) etc. In the mind of the average consumer about purchase meat, colour becomes synonymous with fresh red meat quality (Renner, 1990). The colour of fresh meat is of the most important in meat marketing science, because it is the first quality attribute seen by consumer who uses it as an indication of freshness. At the point of sale, colour and colour stability are the most important attributes of meat quality and various commercial approaches have been used to meet consumer expectation. Also, attractive bright red colour is compatible with long-shelf life and good eating quality (Hood and Mead, 1993). Discoloured meat can not be sold unless it is significantly discounted or minced (Sherbeck et al., 1995). Packaging is second basic visual factor influenced on consumers in purchase of meat and meat product. Therefore, selection of appropriate packaging is of main importance for fresh red meat presentation on the consumer (Troy and Kerry, 2010).

In order to produce meat of consistently high eating quality, it is necessary for meat producers to understand important factors, which influence quality. Results from focused research into meat eating quality revealed that tenderness, juiciness, flavor and overall palatability remain the most sought attributes by consumers. Tenderness is deemed most important (Miller et al., 2001).

Nutritional information, also, is one of the main factor in consumers' decision in purchase meat and meat products. The relationship between nutritional awareness and the demand for a product depends on consumers' knowledge of the nutrition in relations to the attributes of the product (Kenkel, 1990). United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) require the food label offer complete, useful and accurate nutritional information; easy to read formats; amount per serving of saturated fat; cholesterol, dietary fibre and other nutrients of major health concern, and nutrient reference values, expressed as percentage of daily requirements (FDA, 2003). Nutrition labelling is particularly valuable to consumers because there is no other way for consumers to evaluate the nutritional content of the food they are buying.

Socio-economics variables influence various stages of consumers' decision making. Grossman and Kaestner (1997) reported a positive relationship between education and health. Better education enhances the access to nutrition information, thus increasing the likelihood of nutritional considerations while making selection in purchase meat and meat products. Some researches (Braidstein, 1988; Guseman et al., 1987; Sapp and Harold, 1989) have found that social psychological factors have a greater influence on consumer demand, than do demographic and economic factors.

#### *Methods for investigation consumers' attitudes, beliefs and opinion*

The most commonly used methods to investigate consumers' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions can be classified in two main groups: qualitative and quantitative (Chambers and Smith, 1991; Lawless and Heyman, 1998). Qualitative methods are based on observation of focus group (Barrios et al., 2008), or using in depth interviews, which have exploratory nature. They generate oral descriptive, non numerical information, and are usually carried out within small group of people. Quantitative methods are usually based on questionnaires, where the answers to different questions are generally presented numerically, and it is suitable for larger groups of people.

When the research topic concerns certain personality traits or attitudes towards complex topics such as the degree of interest in health or factor influencing the acceptance of certain products, using a single simple scale does not usually provide enough information. In these situations proposed multiple scales known as Likert scales, because interviewees use them to indicate a degree of agreement or disagreement with several statements related to the topic under study. Each subscale measures an aspect of common factor, which constitutes the basis for the construction of multiple scales. It enables a single score to be obtained for each individual by adding the values procured with each sub-scale.

Stephens et al. (1998) developed and validated some multiple scales in order to measure the factors influencing food choice (Food Choice Questionnaire) included aspects related to health and to food flavor, as well as wide range of factors related to their choice. The Food Choice Questionnaire was developed through factor analysis of responses from a sample of 358 adults ranging in age from 18 to 87 years. Nine factors emerged, and were labelled health, mood, convenience, sensory appeal, natural content, price, weight control, familiarity and

**Table 2.** Food Choice Questionnaire – items and factors loading  
**Tabela 2.** Upitnik o izboru hrane – stavke i faktori opterećenja

	Loading
It is important to me that the food I eat on a typical day:/ Veoma mi je važno da hrana koju jedem svakog dana:	
<b>Factor 1 – Health/Faktor 1 – Zdravlje</b>	
22. Contain a lot of vitamins and minerals/Sadrži puno vitamina i minerala	0.77
29. Keeps me healthy/Održava me zdravim	0.75
10. Is nutritious/Dijetalna je	0.75
27. Is high in protein/Bogata proteinima	0.72
30. Is good for my skin/teeth/hair/nails etc/Dobra je za moju kožu, zube, kosu itd.	0.68
9. Is high in fibre and roughage/Bogata je biljnim vlaknima	0.66
<b>Factor 2 – Mood/Faktor 2 – Raspoloženje</b>	
16. Helps me cope with stress/Pomaže mi da se suočim sa stresom	0.79
34. Helps me to cope with life/Pomaže mi da se suočim sa životom	0.79
26. Helps me relax/Relaksira me	0.78
24. Keeps me awake/Održava me budnim	0.60
13. Cheers me up/Uveseljava me	0.60
31. Makes me feel good/Čini da se osećam dobro	0.57
<b>Factor 3 – Convenience/Faktor 3 – Uverenja</b>	
1. Is easy to prepare/Lako je za pripremu	0.82
15. Can be cooked very simply/Može jednostavno da se spremi	0.81
28. Takes no time to prepare/Nije potrebno vreme za pripremu	0.76
35. Can be bought in shops close to where I live or work/Može da se kupi u radnjama blizu mesta gde živim i radim	0.65
11. Is easily available in shops and supermarkets/Lako je dostupno u radnjama i supermarketima	0.59
<b>Factor 4 – Sensory Appeal/Faktor 4 – Sensorna analiza</b>	
14. Smells nice/Miriše lepo	0.80
25. Looks nice/Izgleda lepo	0.72
18. Has a pleasant texture/Ima prijatnu teksturu	0.70
4. Tastes good/Dobrog je ukusa	0.53
<b>Factor 5 – Natural Content/Faktor 5 – Prirodni sadržaj</b>	
2. Contains no additives/Ne sadrži aditive	0.81
5. Contains natural ingredients/Sadrži prirodne sastojke	0.72
23. Contains no artificial ingredients/Ne sadrži veštačke sastojke	0.71
<b>Factor 6 – Price/Faktor 6 – Cena</b>	
6. Is not expensive/Nije skupo	0.87
36. Is cheap/Jeftino je	0.87
12. Is good value for money/Dobrog je kvaliteta za datu cenu	0.76
<b>Factor 7 – Weight Control/Faktor 7 – Kontrola telesne težine</b>	
3. Is low in calories/Ima malu kalorijsku vrednost	0.87
17. Helps me to control my weight/Pomaže mi da održavam telesnu težinu	0.79
7. Is low in fat/Ima nizak sadržaj masti	0.74
<b>Factor 8 – Familiarity/Faktor 8 – Poznavanje</b>	
33. Is what I usually eat/To obično jedem	0.79
8. Is familiar/Poznato mi je	0.79
21. Is like the food I ate when I was a child/Liči na hranu koju sam jeo u detinjstvu	0.66
<b>Factor 9 – Ethical Concern/Faktor 9 – Etički stavovi</b>	
20. Comes from a country I approve politically/Dolazi iz zemlje koju politički priznajem	0.87
32. Has the country of origin clearly marked/Zemlja ima tržište hrane organskog porekla	0.79
19. Is packaged in an environmentally friendly way/Pakovano je u skladu sa zahtevima za zaštitu životne sredine	0.43

ethical concern. The questionnaire structure was verified using confirmatory factor analysis in second sample ( $n = 358$ ) and test reliability over a two to three week period was satisfactory. Obtain results showed in table 2.

Roininen *et al.* (1999) developed a questionnaire to measure the relative importance that different aspects related to health and sensorial characteristics have in food selection process through Health and Taste Attitudes Questionnaires. The later questionnaire included three multiple scales related to health: general health interests; light product interests, natural product interest. These scale can be used to determine and quantify the individual attitudes of group of consumers and to analyze how well these attitudes can predict their behavior when faced with the choice of different type of foods. Consumer population distribution in terms of their interest in healthy eating and their attitudes to new foods indicated that most people in the population were interested in eating healthily.

These methods can be useful for investigation of consumers' attitudes, beliefs and opinion in case of meat and meat products.

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## Conclusion

The food that we consume today is examined more than it has never been in the past, in many different ways, such as: product composition, labeling concerns, clean labels, health claims, product „naturalness“, safety concerns. In general, there is need for greater innovation and knowledge utilisation to enhance consumer perception (both expected and experienced) by meat industry. Producers in meat industry have to satisfy growing consumers demand of meat and meat products eating quality, packaging, nutritional information, healthy aspects, because it has directly influence on profitability. Consumers' perception become one of the most important elements for meat industry producers. For that reason, meat industry producers should develop a more strategic relationship with researchers. Also, industry should be capable of articulate needs in terms of enhancing consumer perception. Consumer must see clear benefits, and any communication of risk must be well managed and transparent. Further investigation will be oriented on research of consumers' perception in purchasing of meat and meat products in Republic of Serbia.

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# Uloga percepcije i stavova potrošača pri kupovini mesa i proizvoda od mesa

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*R e z i m e:* Proces koji utiče na potrošače da prihvate određeni proizvod od mesa ili meso je multidimenzionalan. Nije uvek jednostavno uspostaviti vezu između fiziološke percepcije i reakcije potrošača. Odgovor potrošača, kada je hrana u pitanju, nije baziran samo na senzornim osobinama proizvoda i njegovom fizičkom statusu, već je povezan i sa drugim faktorima kao što su: prethodna informisanost, prošlo iskustvo potrošača kao i njegovi stavovi i verovanja.

Danas su potrošači mnogo zahtevniji u pogledu kvaliteta i bezbednosti hrane, deklarisanja proizvoda, opredeljenosti proizvođača da primenjuju odgovarajuće standarde u proizvodnji hrane. Naučna istraživanja ukazuju na to da potrošači posmatraju meso i proizvode od mesa sa aspekta bezbednosti i kvaliteta proizvoda. U novije vreme, kvalitet hrane je sve više povezan i sa nutritivnim svojstvima proizvoda, dobrobiti potrošača, društvenom odgovornošću proizvođača kao i zdravljem potrošača.

Uticao navika, stavova, verovanja i mišljenja potrošača pri izboru i kupovini hrane je od presudnog značaja za prihvatanje ili odbijanje hrane. Kada je u pitanju meso i proizvodi od mesa, odluka o kupovini bazirana je na veoma različitim elementima, kao što su: njihovo iskustvo, znanje o nutritivnim vrednostima mesa i proizvoda od mesa, razumevanje deklaracija na proizvodima od mesa itd. To su razlozi koji su uticali na proizvođače da prošire svoja znanja i informacije o percepciji potrošača prilikom kupovine mesa i proizvoda od mesa.

U radu su razmatrane razne metode dobijanja informacija o percepciji potrošača, stavovima, verovanjima i očekivanjima koji utiču na kupovinu i konzumiranje mesa i proizvoda od mesa.

**Gljučne reči:** odgovori potrošača, percepcija, stavovi, očekivanja, meso i proizvodi od mesa.

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