The examination of time awareness in the preference of catering at places of work

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In our opinion an individual’s value system has an influence on their motivation of food consumption. An individual’s relation to time influences the circumstances of food consumption and preparation, as well as the criteria system of food purchase and in this aspect it may become – as a secondary segment criteria – a group forming factor in the market of food consumption.

One of the alternatives to release the time-risk factor emerging during food purchase is to take advantage of the possibilities to consume food away from home. As opposed to traditional food consumption methods new service and merchandise solutions, which are capable of satisfying demand for comfort, are gaining importance. As a result, the currently the currently insignificant sector of canteens will probably expand.
Although price sensitivity is a currently determining factor in Hungary, it is proven that time – because of its scarcity – is being reassessed, which slowly but steadily will induce changes in connection with food consumption and purchase preferences thus influencing the structure of food merchandise and the product-service portfolio. Institutional catering is not a common practice in our country yet-primarily due to the price sensitivity of food consumers. The publication of the overall results of the survey is beyond the constraints of the present paper but we were aiming at drawing the most important conclusion. Such practice-oriented conclusion can be that as far as employers are concerned, their growing contribution to institutional catering would be advantageous for many reasons: on the one hand, it could increase loyalty to the workplace and also it could give a huge impetus to the market of domestic institutional catering on the other hand. In our opinion the value-system and food preference-based segmentation could provide an opportunity to both employers and caterers to work out target-group oriented marketing activities.

Keywords: effect of time dimension, the changes of the consumer behaviour, time-conscious consumer group, eating outside home

1. Introduction

In the past decades there has been such a multi-level modification in the social-cultural environment of our country whose impact could be felt on food consumption by generating changes in the preferences of the food preparing and buying habits.

One of the most important changes is the growth of the employment of women working either in full-time or part-time that resulted in the decrease of the time spent on cooking.

Regarding the cultural factors it is important to mention the modifications in the system of values and value preferences-especially the greater emphasis put on the role of time as a value-forming criterion on the one hand and the greater role of the symbolic content of food consumption due to which food consumption has become the means one self-expression besides meeting the purely physiological needs. (Lehota, 2002)

Taking the social factors into consideration, relevant information is the tighter and stronger connection between food consumption and spending one’s leisure time. In this relation by examining the assessment of time and the consumer/food consumer behaviour we can state that the relation to time can be defined as a secondary segment criterion and a crucial factor in the present-day Hungarian society regarding the fact whether the effect of the trend of acceleration or that of slowing down prevails in the way of life of the individual.
We think the relation to time is also reflected in the individual food consuming habit by affecting food preparation and food buying as a more preferred factor. The difference between the groups of old and new consumers can be defined on the basis of many criterions among which I would highlight the relation to time and we wish to characterise the differences shown concerning this factor.

According to Mária Töröcsik, the prominent figure of trend research in Hungary, the most characteristic difference in the old and new consumers’ habits can be noticed in the time dimension (Töröcsik, 2003). Time sensitivity has a greater and greater effect on the consuming and within it food consuming behaviour of the individual by generating higher demands in trade and services. As a matter of fact, the new breed of consumers do require instant rewards, non-stop opening hours as well as the possibility of buying consumer goods at one place. To meet these demands, this has resulted in generating the growth in the significance of One Stop Shopping (Agárdi-Bauer, 2000).

As time is one of the most scarce means for the new consumers (Lewis-Bridger, 2000) they give a higher priority to it than to money that basically influence the content of the consumer basket of the individual.

All this is reflected in the greater demand for convenience products. According to the survey of ACNielsen carried out in 2005, 40 out of 100 Hungarian city dwellers regard convenience the most important factor when it comes to choosing a shop or consumption. One of the incentives of retail trade turnover can be the greater demand for convenience.

This statement is also reflected by the survey covering 11 EU member states whose conclusion is that the consumption of convenience, leisure and functional products is making the biggest headway besides healthy food, bio-products and the meals of ethnic cuisines (Balogh-Panyor, 2002).

We think the changes mentioned above will result in the appearance of new consumer needs and a new segment, the time-sensitive/time-conscious consumer group. To meet the demands of this group there are new opportunities offered in the already saturated food consuming market.

2. The methodology and background of the research

In our present paper, I would like to outline the following partial results of the results of our primary research carried out in May 2006 without listing them all:

- characterising the structures of value systems,
- getting to know the preferences of food consumers
in the time dimensional relation with special regard to the examination of the role of eating at workplaces.

3. The demographic feature of the sample

As a result of the oral survey carried out this May using standardised questionnaires I received 277 that can be assessed. The ones interviewed were correspondence students of Békés county. The proportion of females and males is 58% and 42%, respectively.

Regarding age, the representatives of the age groups 20-35 (132 persons) and 36-50 (120 persons) were in equal number in the sample. The older generation was represented in only a slight number (25 persons) among the interviewees.

Regarding qualification, those with a secondary education were over-represented in the sample by a proportion of 78%.

Regarding earnings, almost half of the interviewees earned HUF 61-100 000 a month followed by those earning less than the average net of HUF 60 000 per month (28%) and finally (lagging only 1% behind) those who had a monthly net income of HUF 101-150 000.

Regarding the place of living typically (83%) city dwellers are represented in the sample.

4. Characterising the structures of value systems

As we think the structure of the preference of food consumer cannot be separated from the value ranking system of the individual, it was important to map the structures of value systems.

Regarding the average of the ranking assigned to the value factors still the dominance of the traditional values can be noticed based on the responds of the sample members, who regarded the calm, balanced life, health and good human contacts the most important.
To get to know which values form a correlated unit according to the deem of the interviewees, we carried out a factor analysis and, as a result, we had three distinguished factor groups: „the group of traditional values”, „the group of hedonistic values” and finally „the group of values in connection with financial well-being”. During the factor analysis I used Varimax method and the received KMO value (=6.45) fell within the acceptable boundaries. However, we had to leave „independence” as a value category involved in the analysis as based on the factor weight shown by the rotated factor matrix it could have been both assigned to the group of traditional and the group of values in connection with financial well-being.

All this suggests that consumers interpret this value in a differentiated way: it can both mean natural independence to accompany human life and independence in a financial way. The result of the analysis carried out later showed a clearer structure.
## 5. Getting to know the preferences of food consumers

When getting to know the food consumers’ preferences, not only the points of view of food buying but also those of food consumption and food preparation were involved in the factors to be ranked. Based on the average value of the rank assigned to these factors the following order was formed: the most preferred point of view is the taste of the food, its vitamin content and variety – according to the members of the sample. In spite of the fact that according to several professional opinions the time necessary for the preparation of the food is a more and more important criterion, the respondents considered it the least important. Typically none of the influencing factors were characterised by an average value

### Table 1.

Factor analysis of values

From: own resource, 2006, N=277

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Factor weight of factors</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hedonistic values (F1)</td>
<td>Traditional values (F2)</td>
<td>Values in connection with financial well-being (F3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>0.798</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enjoyable life</td>
<td>0.744</td>
<td>-0.115</td>
<td>0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affording myself something good</td>
<td>0.646</td>
<td>-0.145</td>
<td>0.456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health</td>
<td>-0.056</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good human contacts</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.726</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>calm, balanced life</td>
<td>-0.160</td>
<td>0.710</td>
<td>0.270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>independence</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>0.417</td>
<td>0.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thriftiness</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial well-being</td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>0.118</td>
<td>0.757</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
under three so all in all, the value assigned to the time factor was considered to be more or less important.

![Bar chart showing ranking of food consuming points of view](image)

**Figure 2.**
Ranking order of food consuming points of view
From: own resource, 2006, N=277

There was a difference regarding the importance of cooking time between the genders. Comparing the average assigned to this factor by women and men it can be stated that women (average=3.52) think it more important to have some ready-made, convenience food on the table than men (average=2.97).

It is likely to be linked to the fact that cooking is still regarded to be the task of women and the dominance of women prevails among the persons who can cook. 98% of the women interviewed stated that they are able to cook while this proportion was only 49% among the men. What is more, based on the opinion of the sample, men can not and rather they do not like cooking as much as women do. The average of 3.50 can be assigned to the group of women in the ranking order from 1 to 5 to the question how much they like cooking (5= like cooking very much). It can be concluded that they relatively like cooking when compared to men whose average was only 1.86.

This can determine the fact that typically men take the opportunity of eating out. This is also justified by the result of another, earlier research carried out in 2003 where we could notice the dominance of men among the cluster members who were the most willing to open to the services of eating out (Fodor-Gidófalvy, 2003).
From the time-conscious consumer segment the proportion of those having secondary education are outstanding. Regarding the income circumstances the time-conscious segment is featured by having monthly net income higher than the average. From the 35 persons asked, 40 % belongs to those having incomes between HUF 61 – 90 thousand and also 40 % to those with income higher than HUF 90 thousand. Having examined the time-conscious consumer segment plotted against the age it can be declared that 57 % of the group of 35 persons can be attributed to those between ages 20 – 35. On the ground of the sample the time consciousness is mostly typical of the male singles. Our results of the primary research are consonant of the survey carried out by the Ad Hoc Worldwide Institution of the Market Research Institution (GFK, 2003) covering 21 Central-Eastern-European countries, which shows that the dispersion within the group of those eating out is the highest according to the age, income and education.

The data of GFK supported the results of our independent research:

- 69 % of those having the highest level of income spend willingly their spare time in restaurants
- those having higher degree of education go more and often to restaurants
- the distribution by sex did not show significant difference between those going to restaurants

The impact of the role of time on food consuming habits can best be grabbed form the point of view of eating out, especially in the examination of the structure of different service methods belonging to this area as well as the extent of expenditure. As our objective is the examination of the role of eating at the workplaces, we analysed the frequency and cost of consuming food taken from home on working days by comparing it with other eating alternatives outside home.

As a result, we can state that the members of the sample typically take food consumed at the workplace from home and use the canteen and buffet there only once or twice a month.
We examined all the alternatives except the consumption of food taken from outside home regarded as eating outside home to find out the average sum how much is spent on food taken from home and the possibilities of eating outside home at workplaces a month. The following result was gained: HUF 6445 is spent every month on food taken from home and totally HUF 1632 on eating out on average by the members of the sample.

**Summary**

This result is in harmony with the fact that the proportion of eating out in Hungary is very slight yet (about 75) in proportion to the worldwide 27% but shows a growing tendency (Lehota, 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>1993</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1997</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2001</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total spending on food</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from it:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- consumed at home</td>
<td>92.6</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>94.0</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- eating out</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3:
Data of food consumed inside and outside home 1989-2001
From: KSH (Central Statistical Office), 2004

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Figure 3.
Ways of eating on working days
From: own resource, 2006, N=277

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### Table 3:
Data of food consumed inside and outside home 1989-2001
From: KSH (Central Statistical Office), 2004

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By examining the data of the KSH (Central Statistical Office), the growing tendency of eating out within the expenditures spent on food after 1995 (Mikesné, 2004).

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