

Traditional Gastronomy in the Perception of Romania’s Z Generation

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Abstract

Today the world is facing a continuous evolution, and in this process all age categories are affected. This is all the more obviously for the Z Generation, a generation born at the outskirts of the communist regime, or at the end of the cold war and at the beginning of the technology driven society. Among the many challenges that imply adaptation to this changing environment is that regarding food habits, that are dramatically influenced by the introduction of technology in all life aspects, including here eating routine. One of the goals for this study was to identify the interests of young people in eating traditional food and also to underline the factors that influence their decisions to eat this type of food. The research ended with a test of knowledge regarding the origins of some traditional food products from different Romanian countryside.

Key words: traditional product, z generation, youth consumers, innovation

J.E.L. classification : D10, L66, L83

1. Introduction

After 1990 a new generation was defined by the specialized literature, namely Generation Z, this being preceded by Generation Y (Millennials). The members of Generation Z include people who were born since the 1990s and make up about 25% of the global population (Kasasa, 2019). People belonging to this generation are characterized as being great users of mobile devices, people who adopt a more conservative behaviour regarding debt purchases, who love authenticity and freedom of expression, who have an entrepreneurial spirit and are competitive, people who easily adapt to changes and prefer independence (Clark, 2019). These people have accessed the labour market and as a result they started to obtain their own income. This last aspect becomes important for goods producing companies or service providers, including those related to traditional gastronomy.

The definition of the traditional product concept was done from several perspectives such as (Fibri & Frøst, 2019): the experts' perspective, the social perspective, the consumers' perspective and the ingredients' perspective. These definitions are limited only to the presentation of the definition of traditional products in accordance with the specialization of those who formulated them. (Bardonea & Spalvėna, 2019). It is believed that this hierarchy is an instrument to protect national and regional agro-food products. The industry producing traditional products mentions that for a product to be considered traditional, its production must be mostly local (Fernández-Ferrín, et al., 2018).

The consumers' perspective is a little different. For example, a study done in Austria and Croatia shows that Austrian consumers see traditional products as fresh and tasteful, while Croatians believe that traditional products are safer products and also products that are associated with elation (Cerjak, et al., 2014). Consumers from Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain

associate the concept of traditional products with health, elaboration, heritage, variety, habit, origin, simplicity, special occasion and marketing. (Guerrero, et al., 2010).

2. Literature review

The lifestyle of young people has undergone a spectacular change with the development of telecommunications equipment and especially with the emergence and evolution of smart phones - the first authentic smart phones were those produced by Apple in 2007 - iPhone, but urbanization accelerated the shift towards dietary consumption, towards "western" diets high in sugars, fats, animal-source foods, processed and packaged products (Colozzaa & Avendano, 2019). The world we live in has become hyper connected, which has made it easier for people to communicate with each other, sending information but also accessing information (Guaragni, et al., 2016). Asgar & Chauhan (2019) point out that progress never means the death of culture, tradition and heritage. This change was also manifested in terms of eating habits. Food consumers have become highly concerned not only about the taste of food but also about quality, cleanliness and authenticity (George, et al., 2019). However, in these harsh competitive conditions, certain traditional products enjoy popularity, which stimulates entrepreneurs to propose to consumers traditional products tailored to the needs of today's consumers, such as attaching to the existing products new services. (Pieroni, et al., 2016). Vanhonacker, et al. (2013) mention that consumers are open to innovation in terms of traditional products. The changes that highlight the tradition are on the top from acceptance point of view, while at the opposite pole there is the introduction of vending machines for traditional products. It is estimated that nearly 255 million people with sufficient incomes form the potential market of traditional products (Fibri & Frøst, 2019). According to the study done by Vanhonacker et al. (2013) consumers in Belgium, France, Italy, Norway, Poland and Spain are open to innovation in the field of traditional products, an innovation that needs to be done carefully, especially regarding the intrinsic characteristics of the products (Guerrero, et al., 2009). The same are the consumers of Belgium, Italy, and Hungary as Kühne et al. (2010) show in their study. The market success of the innovation mainly depends upon the perception and traits of consumers as Roselli et al. (2018) state.

Higgs & Thomas (2016) point out that eating behaviour is strongly influenced by the social context. People tend to consume different products when they are in the company of other people compared to when they are alone. Ma (2015) emphasizes that food is not only a source of nourishment for people but also that it plays different roles in our lives; that it has to do with people's beliefs and the fact that it can have economic connotations. Batat et al. (2019) say that eating food becomes a journey that involves the enduring cognitive and emotional pleasure consumers gain from savouring the multisensory, communal, and cultural meanings of meal experiences. Food can be used by people to display their social position. Rare and expensive food is often used to display people's wealth and social status. Sometimes traditional products fulfil this role of displaying social status (Balogh, et al., 2016). (Ma (2015), Lee et al. (2014) also point out that people tend to eat the same food that they are used to, even when they are established in other countries. Research has shown that the consumption of products, even traditional ones, is influenced by the consumers' status - married or single. Single persons tend to consume home meal replacement that is a food prepared in a store and to consume it at home or in store which require little or no preparation on the part of the consumer (Kim, et al., 2018).

Lorenzo et al. (2017) points out that gastronomic experiences have become an important component of tourism, and recent studies mention, among others, the consumption of local traditional products as main reasons for travel and (Testa, et al., 2019), and Chen & Huang, (2015) state that food puts its mark on tourism in both the pre-travel phase, travel phase and post-travel stage. Beaufort (2014) considers that food has a close relation to culture, hospitality, friendship, solidarity, intimacy and care. Food is important not only for our survival but also for its social, cultural, and religious meaning.

3. Research methodology

We conducted an exploratory research aimed at determining the interest of young people to traditional products.

For our research we established the following goals: *1. Determining young people interest for traditional products; *2. Importance of gastronomy in choosing a destination; *3. Types of products consume during holidays; *4. Testing the influence of social and demographic factors on young people consuming traditional products.

We used survey in order to achieve the goals of our research. As a data collection tool, we used self-administrated questionnaires. We used the snowball method for the distribution of the questionnaires – due to low cost for type of data collection and also to the possibility of obtaining relevant information in connection with the research topic.

We did an exploratory research. In the group for our researched we included people with ages between 18 and 35 years (according with the Youth Act no. 350/2006. s.2 (2)(a) a youth is a citizen which has its age between 18-35 years), male and female, with internet access. We used the online platform www.isondaje.ro to create and collect our information's.

The link to the questionnaire was distributed by email to all the contacts of the researchers, with the request to distribute it to their contacts also, in order to complete the “snow ball” effect. The questionnaire had 13 questions.

The pilot study had 186 respondents (table no. 1), on which 74.7% had high school studies, and the rest have university and postgraduate studies. One third of respondents comes from Muntenia while the other regions share the rest. The majority of people who answer to this questionnaire were young people with age between 18-25 years old, 90.4 % of them (Z Generation), while the rest were between the ages of 26-35 years, 9.6% of them.

Table no. 1 Sample structure

Gender						
Male			Female			
32.8			67.2%			
Age						
18-25 years			26-35years			
90.4%			9.6%			
Education						
High school	Post-secondary school	University	Postgraduate course/ Doctoral studies			
74.7%	1.1%	18.8%	5.4%			
Region of origin						
Banat	Bucovina	Dobrogea	Moldova	Muntenia	Oltenia	Transylvania
0.5%	2.7%	4.8%	12.9%	67.2%	8.6%	3.2%
The average net monthly income						
Less than 1500 lei	Between 1500-2499 lei	Between 2500-3499 lei	Between 3500 – 4499 lei	Between 4500 – 5499 lei	Over 5500 lei	
45.2%	32.3%	8.6%	7.5%	2.7%	3.8%	
Family status						
Married with children	Married without children	In a relationship		Unmarried	Single	
2.7%	2.2%	37.1%		14.5%	43.5%	

Source: Authors' own calculations

4. Findings

Regarding youth interest to traditional products the considered variables were eating behaviour during vacation and the connection between religious holidays and the willingness to consume traditional products.

Accordingly to results more than half of respondents declared that they are eating 1 up to 2 local dishes during their vacation, while ~27% of them declared that they are consuming mainly dishes specific to the visited area. An important percent of them declared that they eat custom food. Only

~5% of respondents have declared that they consume just dishes specific to area that they are visiting. Regarding the consumption of traditional products during holidays 54.3% of respondents agree that they consume traditional products while 3.2% of them declared that they strongly disagree or are undecided regarding this question. 31.72% of respondents strongly agree that they consume traditional product during holidays.

Figure no. 1 Importance of Gastronomy in choosing a destination

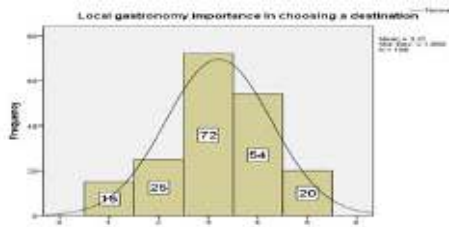
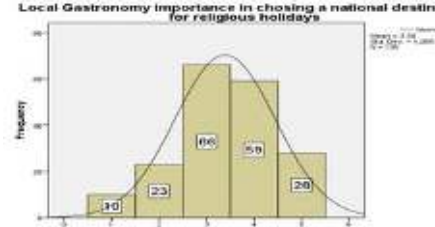


Figure no. 2 Importance of gastronomy in choosing a destination for local religious holidays



Source: Authors' own calculations

Analysing the importance of traditional gastronomy as a factor of choosing the holiday destination, we reached the following results: for vacations associated with the traditional holidays, the respondents gave a greater importance to the traditional gastronomy (3.39 average score of the answers compared to 3.21), in comparison with other vacations over the year.

Table no. 2 shows the main options for consuming traditional products among young consumers. Thus, approximately one in five people consumes, mainly traditional bred during their vacation, while 41.9% of them combine local traditional bred with non-traditional one. The results showed that male consumers tend to consume more local traditional bread compared to female consumers who prefer moderation. Moderate consumption is also present among those with high incomes and university studies.

Table no. 2 Consumption of traditional products during vacation

	Only	Mainly	Moderate	Rare	Never
Traditional bread	0.5	18.3%	41.9%	32.8%	6.5%
Local Wines	4.3%	8.3%	35.5%	24.7%	17.2%
Products from meat	3.8%	28.5%	33.9%	19.9%	14%
Local cheese	1.6%	24.7%	34.4%	25.3%	14%
Fish products	3.8%	14.5%	29.6%	30.6%	21.5%
Jams and compotes	6.5%	22%	32.3%	30.1%	9.1%

Source: Authors' own calculations

Another investigated aspect was the consumption of wines from local vineyards. Thus we found that one third of the respondents consumed local wines in moderation. Here we also notice the very high percentage of respondents who did not consume or rarely consume wine, 41.9% of them. The results confirm this trend also among young people who prefer whiskey and vodka (Muller, n.d.).

Regarding the consumption of meat products, we notice that there is a relatively uniform distribution regarding the choices of young people, so one third of them declares that they do not consume meat or rarely consume it, one third declares that they consume it moderately and one third declares that they consume mainly or only local meat products. These results somehow undermine the perception that Romanians are great lovers of meat, especially of pork.

Local cheese products are not that famous amongst young respondents, almost 40% of them declaring that they never or rarely consume this type of products. The results confirm the latest statistics in the field according to which Romanians consume almost seven times more imported cheese (Economica.net, 2018).

Other products that are not that popular are fish products, 52.1% of the respondents declaring that they never or rarely consume it. Romania is somewhere at the bottom of the ranking list regarding the consumption of fish at European level, and in terms of the origin of the consumed fish, it comes in most cases from imports, 2/3 of the total quantity (Etveş, 2018).

Jams and compotes are among favourite traditional products of Generation Z. 28.5% of them declaring that they consume this type of products, while 32.3% declaring that they eat it with moderation. Research has shown that women tend to consume more of this type of product.

We note the important percentages of people who never eat local fish products or drink local wines, results confirmed by official statistics indicating low consumption for the two categories of products.

Trying to analyse whether socio-demographic factors influence the consuming of different traditional products, the main correlation were summarized in table 2. Fish products are an interesting example of how the family status influence consumption. According to our results people who are married or in a relationship tend to consume more fish (fish products) than people who are single.

As for the interest in pickles, we found out that it is higher among men than among women. 80% of them tend to consume pickles with moderation. It was found that women mostly consume local pickles during holidays, namely 39%. The research revealed a medium to strong connection between the respondents' sex and pickles consumption.

Table no. 3 Factors that are influencing consuming of traditional products

Variable	Variables	Pearson Chi-Square / Likelihood Ratio (Asymp. Sig (2-sided))	Phi/ Cramer'sV
Family status	Fish products	L – 0.037	C - 0.187
Gender	Pickles	P – 0.05	C – 0.226
	Soups	P – 0.015	C – 0.275
Monthly income	Poultry meat	L – 0.004	C – 0.230
	Meat from sheep's	L – 0.044	C – 0.199
Region of origin	"Mici"	L – 0.002	C – 0.249

Source: Authors' own calculations

Another aspect that was noticed was that is that men tend to associate sour soups with cream and dried beans with smoked ribs sour soup with Muntenia or Oltenia while women associate them with Moldova, although the specialists consider them to be specific to Transylvania or Banat.

We tested also if gender has an influence on drinking local wines, as there is a common knowledge that men are drinking more than women, but we didn't find any such connection, as it is also concluded by (Coros, et al., 2019).

At the end of the questionnaire we also investigated the degree of knowledge, among Generation Z, of the origin of some traditional dishes. The history and geography of Romania have led over the years to certain specific gastronomic particularities of the main regions, which, in the last century, have expanded at national level. Starting from associating some dishes or groups of culinary products with a certain region and with specific origins from a geographical area, but consumed at national level, it results that the level of recognition of their origin is the following:

- 53.8% of the respondents correctly associate the category of "Mici, sausage or other grilled and frying meat products" as Romanian specific dishes; 33.4% of them believe that they are specific to the South of Romania while the rest believe they are specific to the Northern Regions of Romania;
- 86% of the respondents incorrectly associate the category of "poultry meat dishes, turkey tray steaks, goose or duck on cabbage" as specific dishes of Moldova; 51.6%, of the respondents believe that these dishes are rather coming from the south of Romania; 91.4% of the respondents incorrectly associate the category "lamb or sheep meat dishes" with dishes specific of Dobrogea; they perceive these dishes as specific to Romania in general or to Transylvania / Banat;
- 29.6% of the respondents correctly associate the category of "sour soups with cream and dried beans with smoked ribs sour soup" as being specific to Transylvania and Banat, while the rest associate these dishes with Moldova (23.1%), Muntenia and Oltenia (20.4%);
- 86% of the respondents incorrectly associate the category "poultry meat dishes, turkey tray steaks, goose or duck on cabbage" (which are dishes specific of Moldova). The majority of the respondents consider that the south of Romania is the region those dishes come from.

- 23.7% of the respondents correctly associate the category "Vegetable sour soups, dishes of various vegetables with or without meat" as specific to Muntenia and Oltenia. A significant 22.6% of the respondents consider these dishes are specific to Romania in general and not to a particular region.

5. Conclusions

The results of the research have revealed that young people are open minded in connection with the consumption of traditional products. But according to other researchers they like products that are adapted to nowadays consumers (Vanhonacker, et al., 2013). We note that more than half of our respondents tend to consume 1 or 2 traditional products during their vacations. We want to point out that young people consider that there is a strong connection between consuming traditional products and religious holidays. This also supports the conclusions of (Grunert, 2019).

Most of the respondents consider that the existence of local gastronomy plays an important role when choosing the next vacation, fact that is also highlighted by Testa et al. (2019) and Chen & Huang (2015). We also note that among youth there is a low demand for traditional products for fish and local wines, fact also confirmed by official statistics (Muller, n.d.), (Etveş, 2018).

According to the authors of the study, the consumers who are part of Generation Z have difficulties associating traditional products with the regions of Romania, which denotes the lack of an appropriate gastronomic culture. They tend to associate the dishes mentioned in the research with the regions from which they come, not really thinking about the specificities of each region.

As a main limitation for this study is that the sample is not representative at national level, but the results come to complete the existing literature in the field of traditional products. The results could be use also by the entrepreneurs in the field to proper orientate their campaign of promotion when targeting the members of Generation Z.

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