

# APPLIED MARKETING RESEARCH REGARDING THE PERCEPTIONS OF CUSTOMERS FROM TRANSYLVANIA TOWARDS MEAT PRODUCTS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD

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**Abstract** The objective of the article is to highlight the necessity and vital importance of conducting applied marketing research in the field of food industry. Focusing on identifying the perceptions and behavior of target customers towards meat products, by revealing their thought processes and buying intentions. This data is essential for the meat processors and producers who faced a decline in demand during the pandemic period and are now faced with the need to adapt their marketing strategies. The survey was done on a swatch of 1000 subjects, all target customers from Transylvania, selected by a nonrandom method - accessibility. The instrument used was the questionnaire. The pretest phase was conducted on a sample of 50 respondents. After this stage, the final structure of the questionnaire was obtained. The questionnaire development was centered on the research objectives and hypotheses. The objective of the survey is to identify the customers knowledge and attitudes towards meat products.

**Keywords:** marketing research, marketing strategies, meat products.

## INTRODUCTION

The pandemic period saw a severe decline in customer demand across the food industry sectors. Thus, the meat processors and producers suffered significant losses. This has inevitably led to the intensification of competition on the market of meat products. The response to the reality of fierce competition faced by companies on the market is represented by their need to continuously outperform their competitors on the market. A successful business is powered by a winning brand. At their core, brands are the ideas, perceptions, expectations, and beliefs that are in the mind of consumers, your potential customers or any individual who can affect your enterprise. As Leonardo DaVinci said that "all our knowledge originates in our perceptions". In this regard "a brand is a cluster of functional and emotional benefits that extend a unique and welcomed promise" (Adamson 2009), basically brands help the consumers to anchor their identity projects.

What should a brand communicate to be successful? A first answer would be this: to communicate the difference, that is, to say something different. The difference between brands is made by the "promise", more precisely it is about the promise made by the brand to the consumers. This promise must be new, original so that consumers can, based on it, clearly and distinctly identify the brand in question. The secret of a brand's success is communication and keeping the promise made to consumers (Kotler 2014). The brand promise must basically represent that range of conceptually synthesized ideas as simply as possible, which refer to a completely different way (to look differently) of perception and perspective towards a specific product or service. The brand refers to the concept of "difference" and its range of implications, but

simply putting the difference into play will not bring the expected success unless it is of particular importance, relevance for consumers; it must respond exactly to the needs or wishes of consumers. The difference and uniqueness of the brand must be essential and relevant for potential consumers, otherwise they have an irrelevant impact that will result in the failure of the sale of the product or products on the market (Kotler 2016). The difference takes on a deeply practical and at the same time pragmatic character, in order to be successful and therefore contribute to ensuring the long-term value of a certain brand, it must present a special significance for consumers, being something representative and/or useful, but in all the case something important for the latter.

Therefore, it is a mistake for an enterprise to fall into the mirage of the overflowing enthusiasm of the new, ignoring the thorough study of the market and implicitly the demands of the consumers (Kotler 2008). The original, the new that emerges from a brand must correspond to the launch on the market of some products or services that have relevance for consumers, thus constituting an important, basic element in their lives; therefore, it is essential that the new meets the demands of consumers. Firms are in a continuous need to assess their brand performance in order to develop effective marketing strategies (Doyle 2006). In a market where competing firms have access to the same technological solutions; competition moves to the symbolic domain where brand owners seek to differentiate their brands through attributes that relate to consumers' emotional states.

#### **APPLIED MARKETING RESEARCH REGARDING THE PERCEPTIONS OF CUSTOMERS FROM TRANSYLVANIA TOWARDS MEAT PRODUCTS**



Figure 1. The opinion regarding meat products

The survey was done on a swatch of 1000 subjects, all target customers from Transylvania, selected by a nonrandom method - accessibility. The instrument used was the questionnaire. The pretest phase was conducted on a sample of 50 respondents. After this stage, the final structure of the questionnaire was obtained. The questionnaire development was centered on the research objectives and hypotheses. The objective of the survey is to identify the customers knowledge and attitudes towards meat products. The timeline of the survey was from March 2022 until July 2022.

The subjects of the survey were asked if they consider meat products to play an essential role in human nutrition. 97% of the investigated subjects answered “yes”, and only 3% have answered “no” (Fig. 1). The fact that the overwhelming majority considers meat products to play an essential role in human nutrition, shows that most people in Transylvania are less likely to change their eating habits and become vegetarians. Their option is also backed by science. Indeed, studies prove that meat offers an excellent source of protein and also provides an impressive range of essential nutrients for the human body. (Tinggi 2008).

Regarding the question what the most important criteria in is choosing their meat products, the subjects of the survey gave the following grades (Table 1):

Table 1

Grades regarding the most important criteria in choosing meat products.

Criteria	Grades
Taste	10/10
Perceived quality	10/10
Price	8/10
Brand image	8/10
Form of packaging	7/10
Word of mouth	9/10
Advertisement	6/10

Starting from the given fact that there are many different types of meat that feature significant differences in their nutritional properties, it was essential to find out what form of meat the subjects of the survey prefer. Regarding the question what form of meat they prefer; 45% responded pork, 35% said chicken, 9% beef, 8% prefer lamb and mutton (Fig. 2). The survey confirms the fact that pork is the most popular form of meat in Transylvania. Being classed as red meat because it contains a large amount of myoglobin, a protein responsible for the red color of meat, pork meat also has a deep cultural significance. In the rural areas of Transylvania, it is a custom to “sacrifice” a pork around Christmas time.

The nutritional profile for ground pork meat is a testament to the importance of its consumption (<https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/fdc-app.html#/food-details/167902/nutrients>). Meat products tend to be a better source of B vitamins than most other types of food. As the scientific undertaking confirms: “Thiamin (or vitamin B-1) is an essential micronutrient that catalyzes several key biochemical reactions involved in the metabolism of glucose and is thus critical for normal tissue and organ function.” (Kerns 2015). “Thiamine (or vitamin B-1) is present in lean pork “Thiamin(e), also known as vitamin B1, is now known to play a fundamental role in energy metabolism.”( Lonsdale 2006).

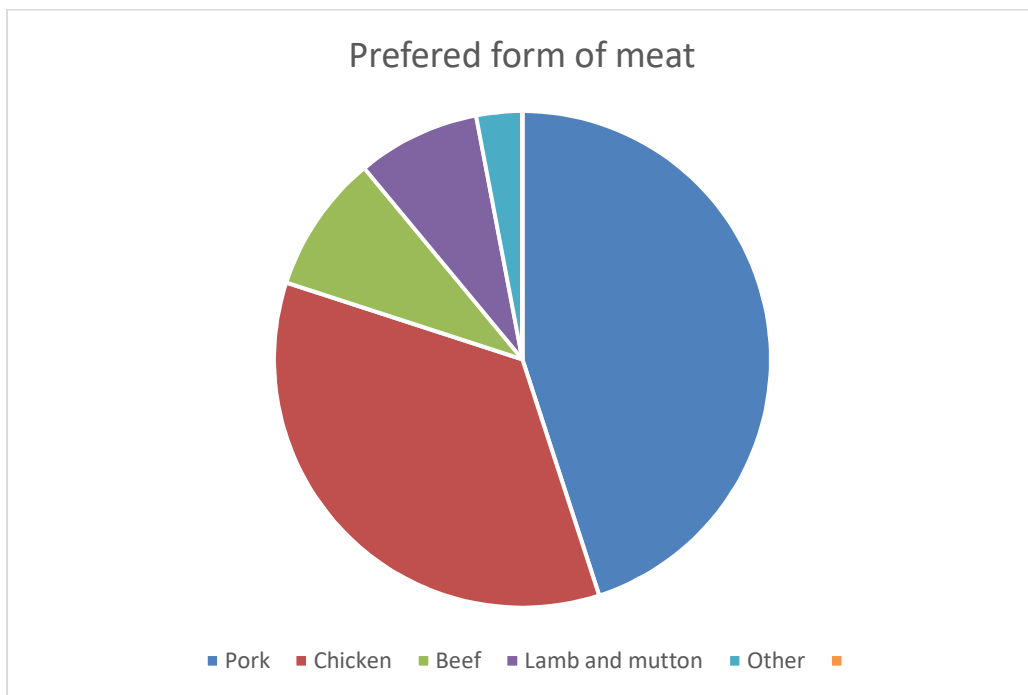


Figure 2. The preferred form of meat according to the survey

The cuts of pork that the subjects of the survey prefer are: 30% Mici (traditional sausages), 30% salami, 20% ham, 10% bacon (Fig. 3). The traditional sausages called Mici and the salami are the most popular among the investigated subjects.

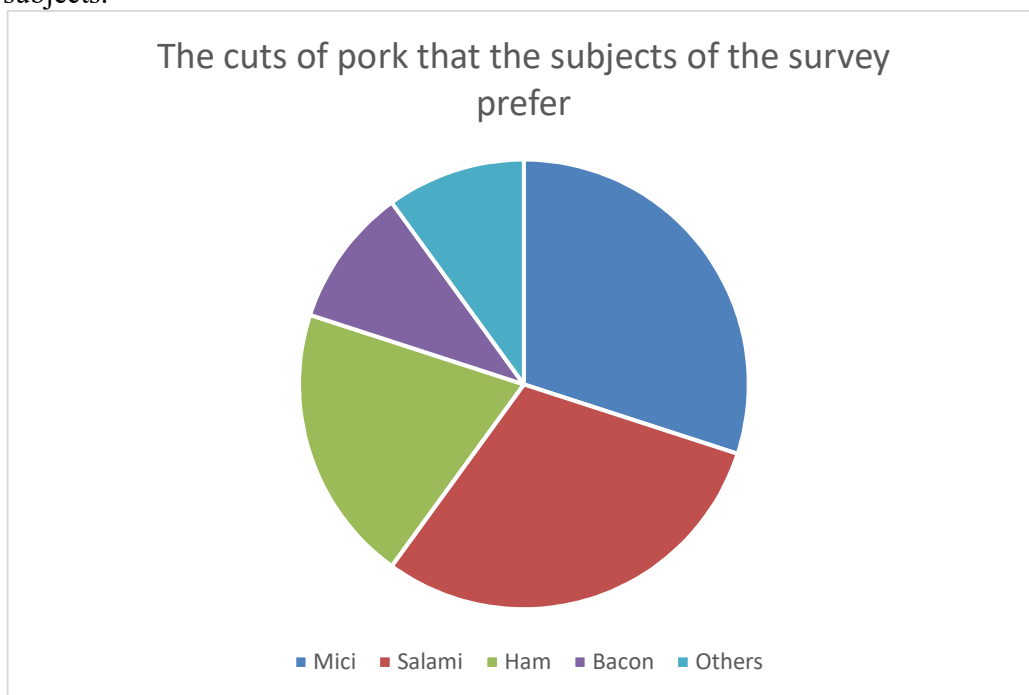


Figure 3. The cuts of pork meat according to the survey

Regarding the question if they are aware that pork is more susceptible to bacterial contamination and food-borne illnesses than other meat (Meyer 2010); and that ensuring pork is thoroughly cooked is essential, 95% responded “yes” and 5% responded “no” (Fig. 4).

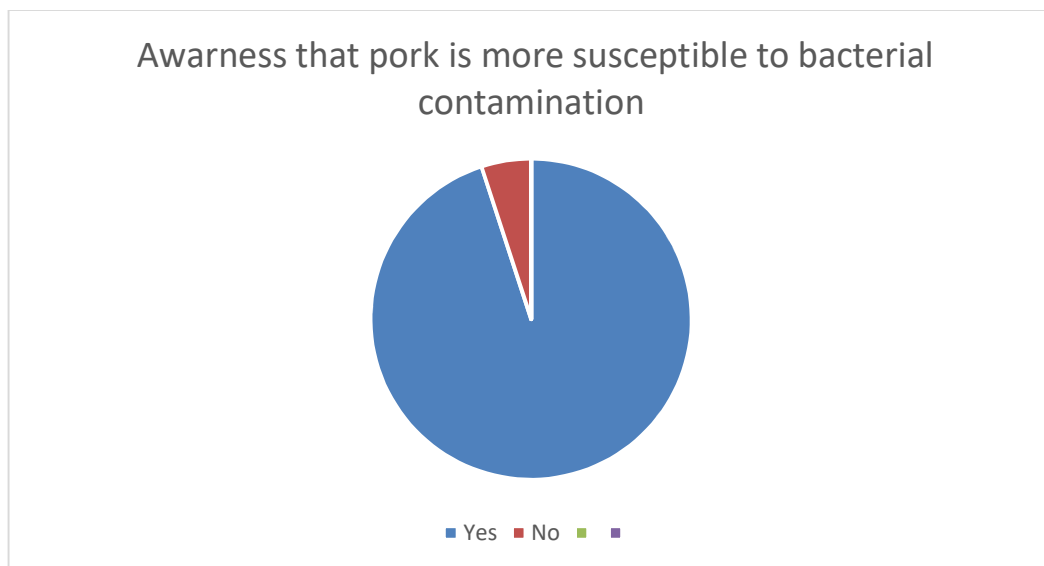


Figure 4. The degree of awareness that pork is more susceptible to bacterial contamination

Regarding the age group specific to the investigated subjects, most belong to the age group between 18-28 years 50%, 35% 28-38 years, 12% 38-48 years, and 3% over 48 years (Fig. 5). The fact that the survey has focused on the young generation implies that the results are a marker for the future.

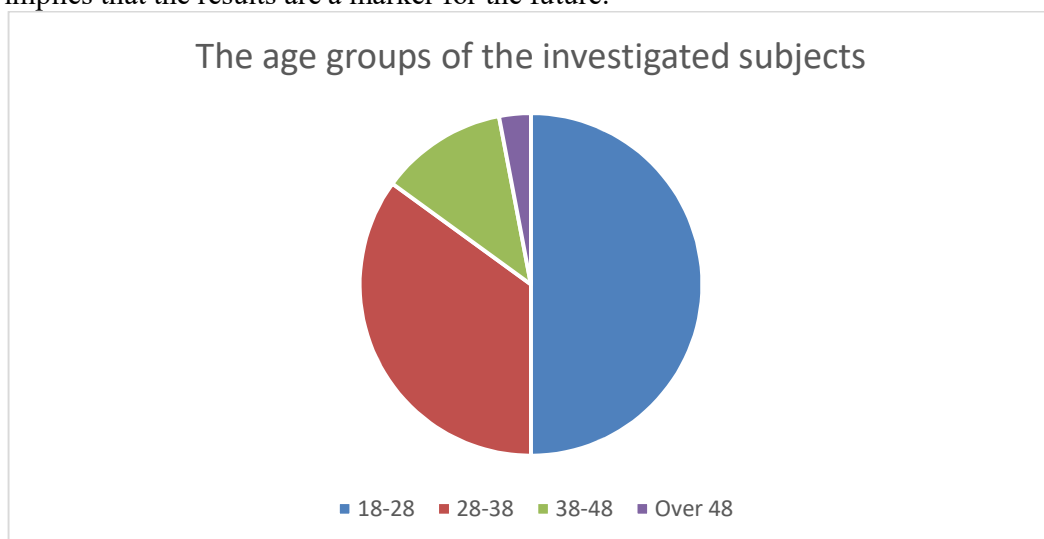


Figure 5. The age groups of the investigated subjects.

The distribution of the subjects regarding the Counties of Transylvania to whom they belong: 30% Cluj County, 20% Alba County, 11% Brasov County, 9%

Sibiu County, 9% Bistrița-Năsăud County, 8% Mures County, 8% Hunedoara County (Fig. 6).

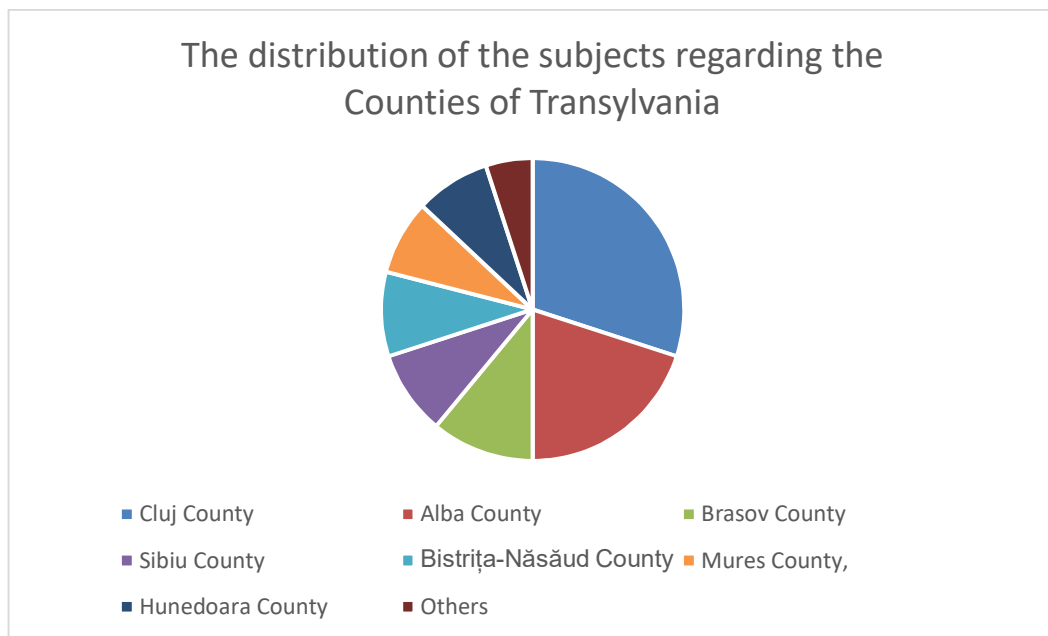


Figure 6. The distribution of the subjects regarding the Counties of Transylvania

## CONCLUSIONS

The applied marketing research highlights that for most of the investigated subjects, meat products represent an essential and indispensable part of their diet. All this despite modern trends that encourage abandoning the consumption of meat products, in favor of “green friendly” alternatives. When assessing the most important criteria in choosing meat products, the investigated subjects mentioned taste and perceived quality as being of the at most importance to them. At the other end, the survey results show that advertisement has a lesser impact on customer decision making process, by comparison with word of mouth.

The survey confirms the fact that pork is the most popular form of meat in Transylvania. This is also because the consumption of pork in Transylvania is deeply embedded in the regional culture. Therefore, the cultural factor impact is a key element to take into consideration. According to the investigated subjects their favorite cuts of pork are Mici (traditional sausages) and salami. It is worth mentioning that the participants of the survey are aware that pork is more susceptible to bacterial contamination and food-borne illnesses than other meat; thus ensuring pork is thoroughly cooked is essential (Xu Y, 2011).

Since the Middle Ages, Transylvania has been the home for many ethnicities, each with their own language. But alas, consumer culture exceeds the boundary of language diversity due to the fact that it is centered on the presence of the icon. The icon represents the heart of any brand, and the structure of social interactions is built

around it. Part of the Transylvania icon is the image of people coming together around the table eating meat-based foods.

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