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Factors Influencing Milk Consumption and Purchase Behavior – Evidence from Slovakia

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Abstract

Current situation on a market characterized by continuous intensifying pressure of globalization, strengthening intensity of competition, introducing wide diversity and range of product offer, increasing pressure and influence of media, rapid booming of new technologies or supporting free flow of information and knowledge has put a consumer into the position of major decisive and leading element of a market. Consumption of dairy products by Slovak consumers is very low compared to other countries in European Union and the world what results in a negative impact on businesses in this sector. One of the main reasons is low demand of consumers. Therefore, it is important to study factors stimulating and influencing consumers when purchasing milk products in order to support their consumption as well as to study factors that prevent consumers in their purchasing and consumption in order to deal with them and eliminate them if possible. The aim of this paper is to analyze influence of selected psychological and personal factors on milk consumption and purchase. We test and reveal their relationships and identify predictors that could be practically used as segmentation criteria by marketing managers in marketing strategy development.

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1. Introduction

After the abolishment of milk quota system, introduced within the European Union that occurred in April 2015 it raised a number of questions concerning the future of the dairy sector, the existence of dairy businesses and the excessive production of milk (EurActiv.sk, 2015; Trend.sk, 2015). Slovakia and also some of other European Union´s member countries are therefore reasonably afraid of at least two big threats: intensifying pressure of foreign

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competitive dairy businesses that thanks to globalization have an excellent possibility to export and sell their products outside of home country and strengthening position of retail stores on a market that brought them a unique opportunity to dictate the prices of sold milk. For several years, the dairy sector in Slovakia has faced a number of problems concerning reducing size of dairy herd, lowering amount of milk production, insufficient purchase price of milk and shrinking number of milk producers and processors that have raised as a consequence of declining milk consumption (Národné poľnohospodárske a potravinárske centrum, 2015; Trend.sk, 2015). Milk consumption in Slovakia is also not sufficient with respect to the level of recommended annual intake of milk and milk products consumption set by World Health Organization upon the level of 200 kg per capita (for the comparison, in Slovakia, the annual level of milk and milk products consumption ranges from 160 – 165 kg per capita) and hence it is suitable to ask some important questions: "Why the consumption of milk is so low?" "What factors are "behind"?" "What could be done to support it and how to deal with possible barriers?" (PS:PR, 2014). It is a consumer who ultimately influences the existence and prosperity of a business in the future, hence studying consumer behavior and its influencing factors is interesting for both academicians and practitioners. The main aim of this paper was to examine chosen psychological factors of milk purchase among Slovaks in connection with their personal factors.

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Literature Review

In case of milk, we could identify four essential *motives* (reasons or drivers) of milk consumption. The first motive is its nutritional composition. Milk is considered to be one of the most nutritionally complex and balanced foods "containing a wide range of essential nutrients required for growth, development and overall health and wellbeing throughout one´s life cycle" (The National Dairy Council, 2008, p. 65, Gonda, 2009, In Kurajdová, Táborecká-Petrovičová, The Dairy Council, 2014, 2015; Kadison, 2014;). The second is its positive impact on health preservation and various diseases prevention, e.g. the pleasurable impact of milk consumption on the prevention of osteoporosis (Deakin University Australia, 2013), the reduction of blood pressure and the reduction of type 2 diabetes occurrences (The Dairy Council, 2014), the occurrence of breast cancer, colon cancer and rectum cancer (The Dairy Council, 2014; Kajaba et al., 2007), strengthening cognitive behavior (William Reed Business Media SAS, 2013) or improving the quality and texture of skin (Dallmeier, 2012). Last two possible motives that may bring, especially Slovak, consumers to the consumption of milk are mutually interconnected – tradition and utilization. Beginnings of the milk products production and consumption in Europe date back to the middle ages (Mlieko.sk, 2014), where sheep milk was the first kind of milk in Slovakia. Today´s most popular kind of milk is cow milk (accounting for 98 % of Slovak milk consumption) started to be processed and consumed several years later (Ministerstvo pôdohospodárstva a rozvoja vidieka Slovenskej republiky, 2013). Such a long tradition has left consequences in Slovak culture and especially in Slovak national gastronomy. As an evidence of that could be considered the fact that one of the essential ingredients, from which most of Slovak national meals are prepared, is milk and products made from it (SACR, 2015). In the field of studying and examining *motives* of milk purchase and consumption was realized a number of scientific studies and researches. Ľ. Nagová et al. (1998) revealed that the top stated reasons for purchasing milk by Slovak consumers were taste, healthy life style, habit, product´s availability and its utilization in a household. C. Mannerbo and G. Wallin (2007) examined determinants of a purchase of eco-labeled milk. Based on their research results, perceived taste and attitudes of important people to consumers (i.e. family and friends) were found to be statistically significant motives leading consumers of Stockholm towards a purchase of eco-labeled milk. A. Alwis et al. (2009) did an analysis of factors influencing consumption of fresh milk among consumers of Sri Lanka and revealed that taste and nutritional content have positive (stimulating) impact and conversely health problems, price level and product´s availability have negative (dissimulating) impact on consumer decision to purchase fresh milk. Similar to already mentioned motives came also other authors G. Krešić et al. (2010) who identified taste, health and price as the most important motives for selecting dairy beverages; then S. Santoso et al. (2012) who found health; B. Bonaventure and W. Umberger (2012) nutrition and P. Senadisai et al. (2014) health, proportion between price and quality and knowledge about milk as main motivational factors influencing the purchase behavior of milk. However, there exist also some discouraging factors that conversely create *barriers* to milk consumption and its purchase. Consumers may be influenced by media articles presenting

negative effects of milk consumption: excessive creation of sputum, formation of acne, increase of weight, problems with digestion, lactose intolerance, emergence of allergies, prostate cancer or inception of various other health problems caused by milk contamination (Frolkovičová, Bukovský, 2009, Furindová, 2010). However, these negative views are currently being more and more disproved by official statements of domestic and foreign doctors, nutritionists and other experts in field (Dairy Council of California, 2015; MilkMeansMore.org, 2015). Besides (de)motivation human behavior is determined also by the geographic, demographic and social environment in which a man grows up. Such environment influences man´s personal desires, needs, preferences, attitudes or interests that ultimately have an impact on his consumer behavior. Simply said, in the concept of segmentation, businesses identify factors having the most significant and substantial influence on purchase behavior of consumers and consequently transform them into segmentation variables, acting as baseline criteria through which businesses determine potentially attractive groups of consumers to address via their product portfolio. In marketing literature, the most popular classification of segmentation variables is the one recognizing four groups of segmentation variables, namely behavioral, demographic, geographic and psychographic group (Ferrell, Hartline, 2014) but could be simplified and divided into two main groups: the group of profile-related and the group of behavior-related segmentation variables.

2.2. Hypotheses development

The main aim of this paper was to examine chosen psychological factors of milk purchase among Slovaks in connection with their personal factors. Following main aim, our partial aims were to: (1) specify top motives and barriers of milk purchase among Slovak consumers and then (2) examine dependencies between 2 variables belonging to the group of psychological factors and 4 variables belonging to the group of personal factors. We focus our research attention on the identification of the most significant motives (as drivers) leading Slovak consumers to the milk purchase and the most significant barriers that have not been properly examined, yet. In addition to this, we aim on verification of various dependencies between two psychological factors (motives and barriers of milk consumption) and four (based on the results of above mentioned research studies and analyses identified as statistically significant factors) personal factors, i.e. gender (Krešić et al., 2010; Mannebro, Wallin, 2007; Nagyová et al., 1998), age (Senadisai et al., 2014; Bonaventure, Umberger, 2012; Alwis et al., 2009; Mannebro, Wallin, 2007), education (Santoso et al., 2012; Alwis et al., 2009; Mannebro, Wallin, 2007) and income (Alwis et al, 2009; Mannebro, Wallin, 2007). In connection to the aims we formulated following hypotheses. Main hypothesis H: *There exists relationship between psychological and personal factors of milk purchase behavior*. Partial hypotheses:

H1: There exists relationship between motives of milk purchase and gender.
H2: There exists relationship between motives of milk purchase and age.
H3: There exists relationship between motives of milk purchase and education.
H4: There exists relationship between motives of milk purchase and income.
H5: There exists relationship between barriers of milk purchase and gender.
H6: There exists relationship between barriers of milk purchase and age.
H7: There exists relationship between barriers of milk purchase and education.
H8: There exists relationship between barriers of milk purchase and income.

For the purpose of gaining primary descriptive data we availed questioning via online questionnaire which was tested in pilot phase and then after minor corrections widely distributed. In the consumer survey we addressed 1 033 respondents from which 60.79 % respondents were women and 39.21 % men. Regarding the age structure of asked respondents, 18.59 % respondents were 18 – 25 years old, 23.33 % were 26 – 35 years old, 19.17 % were 36 – 45 years old, 18.01 % were 46 – 55 years old, 10.26 % were 56 – 65 years old, 4.45 % were 66 – 75 years old, 5.03 % were 76 – 85 years old and finally 1.16 % were 86 and more years old. Considering highest level of education achieved, 4.65 % respondents had elementary education, 9.49 % had high school education without graduation, 36.01 % had high school education with graduation and 49.85 % had university education. Finally, in terms of the level of monthly disposable income of respondent´s household, 4.55 % had income up to 334 €, 12.39 % from 335 – 550 €, 41.63 % from 551 – 1 110 €, 27.88 % from 1 111 – 1 670 € and 13.55 % had income from 1 671 € and more.

3. Results and Discussion

Following the first partial aim we asked respondents to introduce whether they purchase (animal) milk or not and reasons behind that. There were 975 respondents (94.39 %) who answered positively and they stated their *reasons why they purchase milk* (introduced in Table 1). Top three reasons motivating Slovak consumers towards purchasing milk are taste (19.80 %), health (18.33 %) and utility or usefulness (reason "I gave milk to a coffee" with 18.02 % and "milk is widely used in household" with 17.46 %).

Table 1. Motives of Milk Purchase by Slovak Consumers.

No.	Motive	No. of Answers	Percentage (%)
1.	Milk tastes me.	566	19.80
2.	Milk is healthy.	524	18.33
3.	I give milk to a coffee.	515	18.02
4.	Milk is widely used in household (cooking and meal preparing).	499	17.46
5.	I purchase milk because of children.	197	6.89
6.	Drinking milk has a tradition in our family.	188	6.58
7.	Milk is my favourite drink.	156	5.46
8.	I purchase milk habitually.	88	3.08
9.	Specialists (doctors, experts) recommend drinking milk.	65	2.27
10.	Dissemination of news (articles, reviews, researches) about beneficial impacts of drinking milk motivates me towards purchasing milk.	37	1.29
11.	Other	23	0.80
Sum		2 585	99.98

Secondly we targeted on recognizing factors that *create barriers* in purchasing milk. Such barriers have not been properly studied and researched, yet and therefore they represent attractive research gap and tempting area of exploration. There were 58 respondents (5.61 %) who answered negatively on the question "Do you purchase milk?" and resulting from the number of most frequently marked options that are introduced in the Table 2 we identified top 3 breakers: taste (23.81 %), other purchase person (16.67 %) and negative promotion (16.67 %).

Table 2. Breakers of Milk Purchase by Slovak Consumers.

No.	Breaker	No. of Answers	Percentage (%)
1.	Milk does not taste me.	20	23.81
2.	Milk is purchased by other family member.	14	16.67
3.	Dissemination of news (articles, reviews, researches) about adverse impacts of drinking milk on human body discourages me towards purchasing milk.	14	16.67
4.	I cannot drink milk because of healthy issues (allergy, intolerance).	9	10.71
5.	Specialists (doctors, experts) do not recommend to drink milk.	9	10.71
6.	Other	8	9.52
7.	I have cow/sheep/goat that are providing me with enough milk.	4	4.76
8.	None of my family members drink milk.	3	3.57
9.	High price of milk.	2	2.38
10.	Insufficient milk offer.	1	1.19
Sum		84	99.99

Following our above mentioned findings we can declare that, as for the motives of milk purchase, they, from the greater degree, correspond to the findings of other authors and researchers mentioned in the introduction especially in the case of taste and health. In addition to this, we identified one more frequently referred motive of purchasing milk – its wide utilization in a household (for cooking and coffee preparing), that was also observed by Ľ. Nagová et

al. (1998) in their research. As for the barriers of milk purchase, our findings do not fully correspond to the findings of other mentioned authors and researches. According the analysis provided by A. Alwis et al. (2009), health problems, price level and product´s availability were identified as factors having dissimulating impact on consumer purchase of fresh milk. In our research the factor of health problems appeared to be important in case of 15% of respondents. Price and product´s availability were not been significantly recognized by our respondents (the factor of high price was placed to 9th position and the factor of insufficient product´s availability was placed on 10th position of our milk barriers' ranking). However, this discrepancy is probably caused by the fact that foreign study examined specific kind of the fresh milk, whereas our research covered milk in general.

   Our second partial aim was to examine dependencies between 2 variables belonging to the group of psychological factors and 4 variables belonging to the group of personal factors. We applied two statistical tests: the Fisher´s Exact Test (dependencies between gender on one side, and motives and barriers, on the other side) and the Spearman Correlation Test (dependencies between age, education and income on one side, and motives and motives and barriers, on the other side). According to the p-value of the Fisher´s Exact Test, it was rejected independence between variables and detected weak dependency (judging by the value of Cramer´s V), between *gender* and four motives: "Milk is healthy." (p-value=0.007), "Milk is my favorite drink." (p-= 0.039), "Milk is widely used in the household." (p-value=0.000) and "I gave milk to a coffee." (p-value=0.000). The presence of dependencies between motives and remaining three personal variables were tested by the Spearman Correlation Test. When it comes to *age*, the results of the test demonstrated the presence of a correlation with respect to five motives. All of detected correlations were found to be weak, while two of them were positively oriented (motive of "Milk is healthy." and "I purchase milk because of children.") and three correlations were negatively oriented (motive "Milk tastes me.", "Milk is widely used in household." and "I gave milk to a coffee."). Considering *education*, we found its weak positive correlation in relation to the motive of "Other" and also weak but negative correlation in relation to the motive of "Milk is healthy." and "I purchase milk habitually." Finally, looking at the p-value of Spearman Correlation Test, it can be rejected the independence between the last examined factor, i.e. *income* and some motives of milk purchase. Results are presented in the Table 3 while a weak positive dependency appeared in case of the motive "I purchase milk because of children." and "Other" and conversely a weak negative dependency in case of the motives "Milk is healthy.", "I purchase milk habitually." and "Specialists (doctors, experts) recommend to drink milk.".

Table 3. Dependencies between Motives and Selected Personal Variables.

Motive	Gender		Age		Education		Income	
	p-value	*Cramer´s V*	*p-value*	*Spearman´s rank correlation coefficient*	*p-value*	*Spearman´s rank correlation coefficient*	*p-value*	*Spearman´s rank correlation coefficient*
M_1	0.007	0.088	0.026	0.071	0.009	- 0.084	0.034	- 0.068
M_2	0.053	-	0.000	- 0.149	0.231	-	0.140	-
M_3	0.039	0.068	0.391	-	0.395	-	0.085	-
M_4	0.819	-	0.872	-	0.002	- 0.100	0.003	- 0.096
M_5	0.566	-	0.012	0.080	0.281	-	0.001	0.110
M_6	0.212	-	0.137	-	0.159	-	0.428	-
M_7	0.000	0.192	0.024	- 0.072	0.180	-	0.942	-
M_8	0.000	0.142	0.001	- 0.109	0.082	-	0.076	-
M_9	0.433	-	0.324	-	0.473	-	0.036	- 0.067
M_{10}	0.864	-	0.449	-	0.056	-	0.733	-
M_{11}	0.390	-	0.479	-	0.036	0.067	0.011	0.082

M1 – Milk is healthy. M2 – Milk tastes me. M3 – Milk is my favorite drink. M4 – I purchase milk habitually. M5 – I purchase milk because of children. M6 – Drinking milk has a tradition in our family. M7 – Milk is widely used in household (cooking and meal preparing). M8 – I give milk to a coffee. M9 – Specialists (doctors, experts) recommend to drink milk. M10 – Dissemination of news (articles, reviews, researches) about beneficial impacts of drinking milk motivates me towards purchasing milk. M11 – Other.

Regarding barriers of milk purchase results of the Fisher´s Exact Test identified the rejection of the independence between *gender* and the barrier of "Milk is purchased by other family member.". We could classify this dependency (accounting for the value of 0.322) as the middle-strong one because the value of Cramer´s V is greater than 0.3. Turning into the results of the Spearman´s Correlation Coefficient, we detected relatively middle-strong negative dependency between the personal factor of *age* and the barrier of "I cannot drink because of healthy issues (allergy, intolerance)." and "Other" and conversely strong positive dependency between *education* and the barrier of "I cannot drink because of healthy issues (allergy, intolerance).". Except of them, based on the level of p-value we reject independence between education and the barrier of "Milk is bought by other family member." and the barrier of "I have cow/sheep/goat that are providing me with enough milk." that was found to be significantly correlated to personal factor of income as well. We classified all of these detected correlations as the middle-strong negative ones because their value of Spearman´s rank correlation coefficient ranged from - 0.200 to - 0.299 (see Table 4).

Table 4. Dependencies between Barriers and Selected Personal Variables.

Barrier	Gender		Age		Education		Income	
	p-value	*Cramer´s V*	*p-value*	*Spearman´s rank correlation coefficient*	*p-value*	*Spearman´s rank correlation coefficient*	*p-value*	*Spearman´s rank correlation coefficient*
B_1	1.000	-	0.823	-	0.654	-	0.546	-
B_2	1.000	-	0.019	- 0.307	0.013	0.325	0.455	-
B_3	1.000	-	0.762	-	0.282	-	0.808	-
B_4	1.000	-	0.832	-	0.452	-	0.664	-
B_5	1.000	-	0.789	-	0.183	-	0.272	-
B_6	0.029	0.322	0.111	-	0.047	- 0.261	0.611	-
B_7	1.000	-	0.132	-	0.218	-	0.713	-
B_8	0.760	-	0.082	-	0.513	-	0.162	-
B_9	1.000	-	0.080	-	0.025	- 0.294	0.038	- 0.273
B_{10}	0.253	-	0.017	- 0.312	0.536	-	0.708	-

B1 – Milk does not taste me. B2 – I cannot drink milk because of healthy issues (allergy, intolerance). B3 – High price of milk. B4 – Insufficient milk offer. B5 – None of my family members drink milk. B6 – Milk is purchased by other family member. B7 – Specialists (doctors, experts) do not recommend to drink milk. B8 – Dissemination of news (articles, reviews, researches) about adverse impacts of drinking milk on human body discourages me towards purchasing milk. B9 – I have cow/sheep/goat that are providing me with enough milk. B10 – Other.

Based on these results from testing, we may accept the hypotheses as following (see the Table 5). In each hypothesis there was possible to identify at least one relationship with particular motive or barrier and other selected personal factor.

Table 5. Hypotheses and their Evaluation

Hypothesis	Evaluation
H1: There exists relationship between motives of milk purchase and gender.	Weak dependency for 4 motives
H2: There exists relationship between motives of milk purchase and age.	Weak dependency for 5 motives
H3: There exists relationship between motives of milk purchase and education.	Weak dependency for 3 motives
H4: There exists relationship between motives of milk purchase and income.	Weak dependency for 5 motives
H5: There exists relationship between barriers of milk purchase and gender.	Middle-strong dependency for 1 barrier
H6: There exists relationship between barriers of milk purchase and age.	Middle-strong dependency for 2 barriers
H7: There exists relationship between barriers of milk purchase and education.	Middle-strong dependency for 3 barriers
H8: There exists relationship between barriers of milk purchase and income.	Middle-strong dependency for 1 barrier

4. Conclusions

On the basis of our research we found out that huge majority of Slovak consumers purchase (animal) milk with just very minor group of non-purchasers. This is definitely positive information for the businesses involved in milk industry since there exists a huge segment of real customers but with various motives as presented above. We identified following most frequent reasons of "purchasers" and also revealed prevailing reasons or barriers of "non-purchasers". Interesting finding for us was that the taste was at the same time top motivating factor as well as top discouraging factor. It means that marketing managers should use and emphasize this product attribute e.g. during marketing communication campaigns together with positive health impacts and demonstrate practical utilization of milk in households (e.g. through recipes on the package) to reinforce segment of purchasers. In case of non-purchasers, it would be a problem to deal with the "taste" obstacle and somehow eliminate it. In case of second reason "purchase by other family member" there would be interesting deeper insight but we may suppose that this statement was chosen by respondents not ensuring household purchases of food (and not only milk) and this reason doesn´t probably "harm" milk consumption significantly. In further analyses there is possible to examine various combinations of (non-)consumers and (non-)purchasers to find best possible segments with their detailed characteristics and profiles. When it comes to the third barrier "dissemination of negative news about milk" here is the space for marketing managers to share confronting arguments with the public e.g. through the form of PR articles or interviews with opinion leaders. It is interesting to notice that price didn´t play significant role what induce the idea that marketing managers should probably work with other marketing mix tools, however, more extensive research would be necessary to confirm this.

Regarding possible predictors of milk (non-)purchase we found out that gender can be considered as (rather weak) predictor in revealing motives ("health", "favorite drink", "cooking" and "giving to coffee"). Hence it is questionable if this factor should be used as potential segmentation variable while appealing on customers´ needs. Again, closer analysis would reveal what is expected by women and by men and what are the differences. In case of age (again rather weak dependency) we may conclude that the older respondent was, the more important he considers "milk as healthy" and "buying milk for children" reasons. And opposite (because of negative orientation) the older respondent was, the less he considered "taste", "utilization in household" and "giving milk to the coffee". Possible managerial recommendation could be that if the company wants to focus in marketing campaign on older people, it should emphasize positive health impact, if the focus is on young people, it should emphasize taste. If the company wants to distinguish among customers with various educational levels (but it may serve just as a weak predictor of motives), the higher-educated customers, the less should company appeal on "health of the milk" and "habitual purchase". And lastly income is also considered as rather weak like all the previous predictors. The higher monthly disposable income group was connected with greater validity of the reason "because of the children" and less with because of the "health", "habitual purchase" and "because doctors/experts recommended". We applied the same analysis for the "barriers" and found out that gender is middle-strong predictor for barrier "milk purchased by other family member" – that is usually woman. Age is middle-strong predictor but in negative way meaning that the older customer is the less he concerns his "health issues" as barrier of milk purchase. The opposite situation was with education: the higher education was the more they concerned "health issues" as barriers. And the higher education was the less they considered "other family member as purchaser" and "ownership of own animal providing milk". This last reason was also negatively correlated to income what means the higher income respondents had the less they considered barrier of "own animals providing the milk".

Regarding further utilization of these results by practice, marketing managers may think of possible segments based on behavioral characteristic and study in details most attractive ones (those who purchase and also consume) to prepare suitable marketing strategy or they may think of non-consumers if their companies operate on rather saturated market and try to convince them and change their opinions by dealing with and eliminating barriers they face. If the company decides to segment according to the profile characteristics it may study e.g. women in certain age (and with certain education or income) and then search for their needs, motives and barriers. Further studies may focus on examination and comparison of these approaches. We are aware of the fact that this paper presents rather narrow scope on consumer behavior; we selected only some variables for examination, whereas various theoretical consumer behavior models present plenty of them. On the other hand this approach enables more in-depth insight into very complex issue of consumer behavior focusing on selected factors influencing consumer behavior.

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