



Article

Consumer Attitudes and Preferences towards Traditional Food Products in Vojvodina

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Abstract: The objective of this study was to identify consumers' attitudes about the consumption and certification of traditional food products, special characteristics to which they pay attention when buying food products, and their opinions regarding what traditional food products are to them. The research was based on an online questionnaire conducted on a sample of 540 respondents in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The results showed that 98.3% of the respondents consume traditional food products in their households, 95.2% of the consumers decide to buy food products based on their quality, and 68.2% of the consumers believe that certain types of certification can improve product placement on the market. The specific characteristics that consumers mostly prioritize when buying food products are products with no added sugar (41.2%), traditional production processes (38.8%), GMO-free products (36.9%), organic products (36.4%), and additive-free products (34.9%). The results of this research indicate that consumers primarily perceive traditional food products as items produced using traditional methods (72.8%), characterized by the absence of additives (53.2%), specific to a certain geographic area (49.9%), sourced from small farms or facilities (49.5%), and products with long production tradition (49%).

Keywords: consumers' attitudes; traditional food products; Autonomous Province of Vojvodina market; slow food; clean label; free from added sugar products

1. Introduction

Traditional food products are a significant element of a region's culture, heritage, and identity [1–5]. These foods are often passed down through generations and reflect the customs and traditions of a particular community or country [3]. In recent years, with the rising awareness of healthy food and environmental concerns, consumers are becoming more interested in the authenticity, food origin, unique food traditions, quality, as well as environmental sustainability and economic impact on local economies [6,7]. Traditional food products are mainly created using natural, fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients that are rich in nutrients. They are processed in small-scale processing units using artisanal production methods. Traditional, time-consuming processes such as fermentation, aging, curing, or slow cooking contribute to the unique and recognizable characteristics and quality of traditional foods [8–10]. These food products are often perceived as healthier alternatives to heavily processed or mass-produced foods [3,11,12]. Furthermore, the consumption of traditional food products promotes a positive economic impact and economic sustainability



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at a local level by supporting small-scale farmers, artisans, and local businesses involved in their production [3,6,7].

The consumption of traditional food products is steadily increasing due to numerous reasons. On the one hand, consumers' growing interest in traditional food products is due to globalization, food industrialization, various food crises, and environmental concerns [13–15]. On the other hand, there is a growing consumer interest in products of regional or local origin that support local producers and the economic development of rural areas related to sustainability [16–19]. Furthermore, traditional food products are characterized by unique characteristics and quality, providing a sensorial experience that connects consumers to the cultural heritage, history, and identity of a specific region. They reflect locally sourced ingredients, local climate and geography, traditional production methods, know-how, and social customs [20]. In order to protect and promote authenticity and unique quality and to provide consumers with a decision-making tool, traditional food quality schemes, also known as traditional food certifications or labels, have been introduced. These schemes control food through assessments, inspections, and compliance with specific criteria, ensuring that a product adheres to the predetermined standards and characteristics set by the brand owner [3,21–23]. EU quality schemes have the potential to alleviate uncertainty when it comes to food purchases, providing customers with confidence in the distinctiveness and nutritional attributes of certified food products [23].

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is a province located in the northern part of the Republic of Serbia, known for its rich cultural heritage, diverse traditional food products, and culinary traditions. The multifarious traditional food of Vojvodina is influenced by different cultures and ethnic groups that have inhabited this region over the centuries, including Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, and others [3,24–26].

The purpose of this survey was to identify consumers' attitudes and preferences towards traditional food products in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina market.

2. Literature Review

The literature review in this study incorporates topics related to consumer attitudes and preferences, the meaning and significance of traditional food products, and the role of certification in ensuring product quality and consumer trends in the food industry regarding health and nutrition concerns.

2.1. Consumer Attitudes and Preferences

Consumer attitudes and preferences towards traditional food products are of great importance to all entities in the food business chain, such as producers, businesses, and policymakers. These attitudes and preferences are influenced by numerous factors, such as health concerns, personal experiences, cultural habits, and environmental and ecoeconomic concerns.

The increasing consumption of traditional food products has been noticed in recent years due to consumers' rising awareness of healthy food and food quality. The growing interest in traditional food products can be explained by various food crises, food industrialization, globalization, and environmental concerns [3,11–15]. Furthermore, consumers are becoming more interested in products of local origin, unique characteristics, authenticity, high-quality food products obtained through traditional production methods, and food that influences environmental sustainability and economic development in local and rural areas [6,7,16–19,22]. Consumers are increasingly seeking products free from artificial additives, preservatives, and synthetic ingredients. This trend is driven by concerns about health and sustainability and a desire for greater transparency in food production processes.

2.2. Traditional Food Products

Traditional food products are consumed in specific regions and countries by multiple generations and represent an inalienable part of cultural heritage and identity [1–5].

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These products are characterized by unique characteristics, nutritional value, and high quality due to numerous factors. First, traditional food products are made from local, natural, fresh, and seasonal ingredients rich in nutrients, without additives and artificial supplements [20], in small-scale processing units using traditional production methods and know-how. Traditional, time-consuming processes such as fermentation, aging, curing, and slow cooking contribute to the unique characteristics, recognizable quality, and sensorial experience of traditional food products [8–10]. Furthermore, the consumption of traditional food products promotes a positive impact on local businesses and economies, as well as promotes environmental sustainability [3,6,7].

2.3. Quality Schemes and Certification

Traditional food products are characterized by their authenticity, specific sensory properties, and unique quality [1–5,20]. In the process of protecting and promoting these characteristics, food quality schemes, also known as food certifications or labels, play a crucial role, providing benefits to both producers and consumers. In addition, the application of quality schemes and certification ensures and improves the positive impact of traditional food production and consumption on the local economy and rural area development [3,19,21–23].

Food quality schemes or food certification programs are established to ensure the safety, quality, and sustainability of food products by guaranteeing that they meet certain predetermined quality standards. Specific criteria and requirement standards are defined for each quality scheme and certification program to protect product quality, safety, and uniqueness [4,19,20]. During the certification process, independent accredited third-party organizations assess whether products comply with the established quality standards and criteria. The importance of quality schemes and certifications is significant. Primarily, these schemes assure consumers, retailers, and regulatory bodies that food products meet specific standards [23]. Furthermore, producers receive feedback and recommendations to enhance product quality and identify possible areas for improvement and innovation. Finally, certifications can enter certain markets and create various business opportunities [4,19,21].

2.4. Specially Labeled Food Products

Specially labeled food products are food items with unique characteristics and qualities are specially labeled. These labels are used to provide consumers with information about the product's nutritional content, potential health benefits, and production methods. Some examples of specially labeled food products are organic products, additive-free products, GMO-free products, products free from added sugar, allergen-free products, gluten-free products, etc. [27–29]. Health and nutrition policies are, in many cases, key factors that influence consumer choices. For example, public health policies recommend limited sugar intake due to the potential to cause risks of obesity, diabetes, and heart diseases [30–32]. Also, with higher consumer consciousness and awareness about their health and the quality of the food they consume in recent years, their preferences towards clean labeled and slow food are on the rise. Both slow food and clean label focus on promoting food quality, sustainability, and transparency, with slow food emphasizing the importance of local, sustainable, and traditional food production, and clean label emphasizing the naturalness of ingredients and the absence of artificial additives, preservatives, and synthetic ingredients [27,28,33–37].

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Objective and Hypothesis

The research objective of this study was to identify consumers' attitudes and preferences towards traditional food products in the Autonomous Province of the Vojvodina market and to understand their opinions about the consumption and certification of these products. To achieve this research objective, answers to the following questions were collected:

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Q1: How often do respondents consume traditional food products, and what are their opinions about certification?

Q2: What are the special characteristics of food products to which consumers pay attention while purchasing, and what do traditional food products mean to them?

Q3: What are consumers' opinions regarding the availability and quality of traditional food products, the relationship between higher prices and quality, and their preferences for traditional food products over conventional and foreign ones?

This study hypothesizes that traditional food products are widely consumed because of consumers' demands for quality, authenticity, and sustainability. However, to achieve a stronger influence on environmental sustainability and impact on local economies, scientific research on special characteristics and quality, as well as natural and local ingredients, production methods and processes, and consumer attitudes towards all mentioned topics is necessary for further consumer education of traditional food products' importance and significance of certification and better placement of these products on the market.

3.2. Research Methods and Questionnaire

The research was based on a consumer survey conducted in the period between June 2022 and April 2023. The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire on a sample of 540 respondents in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, which consists of seven administrative parts. The administrative part with the largest number of inhabitants (33.8%; 183 respondents) was southern Bačka, and in this part, the survey was conducted for three months. Furthermore, in the region of Srem (16%; 86 respondents) and southern Banat (14.9%; 81 respondents), surveys were conducted for one month and a half, respectively. In the other four administrative parts, northern Bačka (9.6%; 52 respondents), central Banat (9.3%; 50 respondents), western Bačka (9.1%; 49 respondents), and northern Banat (7.3%; 39 respondents), surveys were conducted for one month each. The respondents in each administrative section were selected using a convenience sampling technique [38].

The authors of this paper created a questionnaire based on a literature review and their own knowledge and expertise in the quality of traditional food and GI products. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 21 questions divided into three sections, covering the following topics: socio-demographic characteristics (6 questions), consumer preferences and attitudes towards GI and specially labeled food product quality and certification (7 questions), and general attitudes about traditional products on the market (8 questions). The questionnaire used various types of questions, including open-ended questions, closed questions, and multiple-choice questions.

Within Section 1, the socio-demographic characteristics of 540 respondents from the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina were recorded (Table 1). The respondents answered questions about their gender, age, place of residence, employment, monthly income (in EUR), and the number of members in their households.

Section 2 focused on consumers' consumption of traditional food products in their households, frequency of consumption, consideration of product quality in purchase decisions, opinions about certification, and perceived impact of certification on product placement in the market. The respondents also indicated the specific characteristics they pay attention to when buying food products and provided their definition of traditional food products.

In the third part of the questionnaire, respondents expressed their general attitudes about traditional food products on the market, including aspects such as the product offer, quality, price, availability, and importance of quality assurance marks. The attitudes were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with response options labeled as follows: 5—Strongly Agree, 4—Agree, 3—Neutral, 2—Disagree, 1—Strongly Disagree.

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Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of 540 respondents from the Republic of Serbia.

		Whole Sample			
Socio-Demographi	c Characteristics —	п	Percentage		
Carallar	female	373	69.1		
Gender -	male	167	30.9		
	<25	140	25.9		
Age	25–45	300	55.6		
	>45	100	18.5		
	village	55	10.2		
Place of residence	town	26	4.8		
-	city	459	85		
Employment -	student	95	17.6		
	employed	380	70.4		
	unemployed	25	4.6		
	pensioner	40	7.4		
Monthly income (EUR)	<425	55	10.2		
	425–850	170	31.7		
	850–1275	124	23.1		
	>1275	188	35		
3.6 1	1	62	11.5		
Members in households	2	124	23		
	3 or more	354	65.6		

3.3. Statistical Analyses

The data were processed using Microsoft Excel (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington, DC, USA). Descriptive statistics were employed to emphasize the characteristics of the study sample. The socio-demographic status of participants was supplied as a sum and as a percentage, while the other survey data was classified and summarized by age, place of residence, and frequency of consumption and was stated as a percentage. Furthermore, the collected data were subjected to correspondence analysis to determine relationships and associations between variables, as this method is a useful statistical tool to visualize the data in low-dimensional space and is helpful in determining patterns and gaining insights into the interdependence among variables.

4. Results

4.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-demographic characteristics of the 540 respondents are presented in Table 1. The data show that the majority of the respondents were female (69.1%). Regarding the age group, 55.6% of the respondents were between 25 and 45 years old, while 25.9% were younger than 25 and 18.5% were older than 45. The largest number of respondents, 85%, lived in a city, whereas 10.2% lived in a village and 4.8% lived in a town. Among the respondents, 70.4% were employed, 17.6% were students, 7.4% were pensioners, and 4.6% were unemployed. In terms of monthly income, 35% of participants had more than 1275 EUR per month, 31.7% had an income ranging from 425 to 850 EUR, 23.1% had an income ranging from 850 to 1275 EUR, and 10.2% had less than 425 EUR per month.

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4.2. Consumer Preference and Attitudes towards Traditional Food Products

The findings of this study showed that 98.3% (531) of the respondents consume traditional food products in their households, with 38.7% consuming these products daily and 34.6% consuming those two or three times a week. It is important to emphasize that 89.1% of the participants consume traditional food products at least once a week. Furthermore, 95.2% of the consumers participating in the survey decide to buy food products based on their quality, and 83.2% often or from time to time prefer to buy certified food products (44.2% often, 39% from time to time). Among the participating consumers, 68.2% believe that a certain type of certification can improve product placement on the market (Table 2).

Table 2. Traditional food products consumption and consumer attitudes towards certification.

Owerthan		Whole Sample		
Question	Answer –	п	Percentage	
Are traditional food products consumed	yes	531	98.3	
in your household?	no	9	1.7	
	daily	209	38.7	
	2–3 times a week	187	34.6	
How often are traditional food products	weekly	85	15.8	
consumed in your household?	few times in a month	44	8.1	
	few times in a year	13	2.4	
	not consumed	2	0.4	
Are your purchase decisions for food	yes	514	95.2	
products based on quality?	no	26	4.8	
	yes	239	44.2	
Do you prefer to buy certified food	from time to time	211	39.1	
products?	not sure	56	10.4	
	no	34	6.3	
Do you think that certain types of	yes	368	68.2	
certification can improve product	not sure	139	25.7	
placement on the market?	no	33	6.1	

The results of the special characteristics that consumers pay attention to when buying food products are presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 represents the total consumer preferences towards special characteristics of food products. As shown in Figure 1, consumers mostly choose products with the following special characteristics: 41.2% prefer products with no added sugar, 38.8% prefer products with a traditional production process, 36.9% prefer GMO-free products, 36.4% prefer organic products, and 34.9% prefer additive-free products. Regarding GI (geographical indication) products, 25% of consumers pay attention to products with a geographical indication of origin.

Figure 2a–c represent the relative contributions according to generation, place of living, and frequency of consumption towards special characteristics to which consumers pay attention when buying food products. What consumers under the age of 25 and those over 45 have in common is that their primary preference is to purchase products that are free from added sugar, while consumers between the ages of 25 and 45 primarily care about organic products. As a secondary consideration, consumers under the age of 25 choose GMO-free products, middle-aged consumers (25–45 years) choose additive-free products, and consumers over the age of 45 choose organic products. The third place for respondents under the age of 25 is organic products, while middle-aged consumers from 25 to 45 years focus on products free

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from added sugar, and for respondents older than 45 years, this is additive-free products. An interesting fact is that regardless of age, all respondents place high importance on products that are free from added sugar and organic products, as they consistently rank among the top three labeled products they pay attention to when making a purchase.

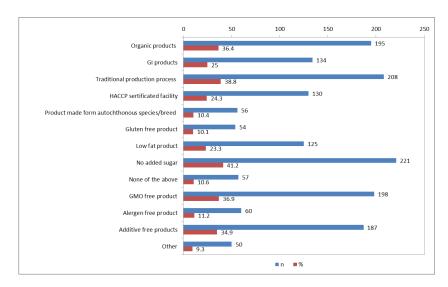


Figure 1. Total consumer preferences towards special characteristics to which they pay attention when buying food products.

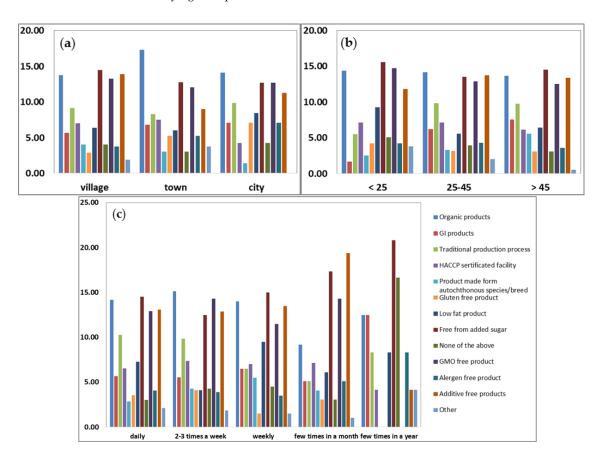


Figure 2. Relative contribution according to place of residence (a), generation (b), and frequency of consumption (c) towards special characteristics to which consumers pay attention when buying food products.

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Regarding GI products, it is interesting to note that consumers under the age of 25 consume them to a lesser extent, while these products are highly prevalent among consumers aged 25 to 45 and over 45. Drawing from these outcomes, it can be pointed out that the youngest consumers are not sufficiently informed about all the benefits of using GI products, and therefore it is necessary to educate them and undertake marketing activities to promote these products.

Considering the place of residence, consumers in both villages and towns or cities primarily choose products with the same special characteristics. In villages, consumers first pay attention to products free from added sugar, followed by additive-free products, organic products, GMO-free products, and products made by traditional production processes. In towns and cities, the order is the same with the following: organic products, products free from added sugar, GMO-free products, additive-free products, and products made by traditional production processes. In terms of GI products, they rank seventh among consumers from villages and eighth among consumers from towns and cities.

According to the frequency of consumption, it is important to highlight again that 89.1% of the participants consume traditional food products at least once a week. As shown in Figure 2c, products free from added sugar and organic products can be distinguished across all frequencies of traditional food product consumption. Additionally, additive-free products and GMO-free products can be distinguished for all consumption frequencies, except for respondents who consume traditional food products a few times a year.

Among respondents who consume traditional food products daily, two or three times a week, and a few times a year, the top five products also include those made using a traditional production process. For respondents who consume traditional food products weekly and a few times a year, low-fat products are among the top five choices. On the other hand, respondents from the "few times in a month" group ranked food products from HACCP-certified facilities in fifth place.

The biplot in Figure 3 shows the projection of the correspondence analysis (Figure 3a, total inertia of 0.013, χ^2 of 18.576, p = 0.774; Figure 3b, total inertia of 0.024, χ^2 of 33.748, p = 0.089; Figure 3c, total inertia of 0.037, χ^2 of 50.588, p = 0.372).

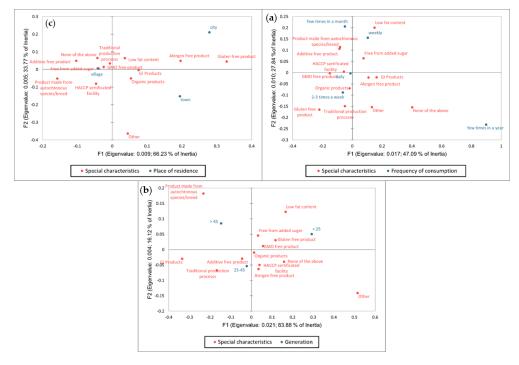


Figure 3. Correspondence analysis: relationship between special characteristics to which consumers pay attention when buying food products and (a) frequency of consumption, (b) generation, and (c) Place of residence.

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Consumer attitudes regarding what traditional food products mean to them are presented in Figure 4. Figure 4 represents the attitudes of all respondents. As can be observed from Figure 4, traditional food products are perceived as products made using the traditional production process by 394 respondents (72.8%). A similar number of respondents believe that traditional food products are those free from additives and modern supplements (288 respondents or 53.2%), specific to a certain geographic area (270 respondents or 49.9%), or sourced from small farms or facilities (268 respondents or 49.5%) and products with long production tradition (265 respondents or 49%).

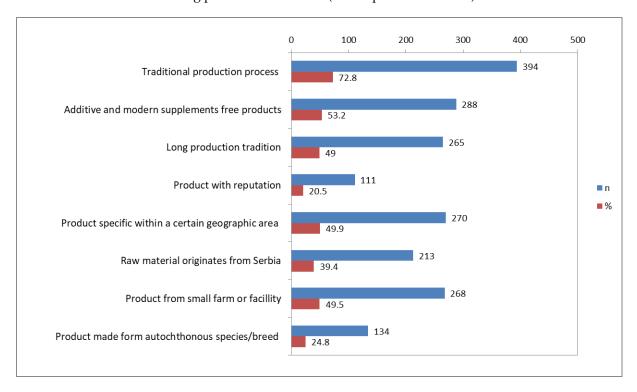


Figure 4. Total consumers' attitudes regarding what traditional food products mean to them.

Figure 5a–c show the relative contributions according to generation, place of residence, and frequency of consumption regarding what traditional food products mean to consumers. Initially, all consumers, regardless of their age, prioritize traditional products that are produced using traditional production processes. For consumers between the ages of 25 and 45, as well as those over 45, their second preference for traditional food products is those sourced from small farms or facilities. Their third preference is for products specific to a certain geographic area. However, for consumers under the age of 25, their second preference is products specific to a certain geographic area, while their third preference is for products with a long production tradition.

When considering the place of residence, traditional food products hold the top three positions for all consumers. These products include those made using traditional production processes, products from small farms or facilities, and products specific to a certain geographic area. It is worth noting that among consumers over 45 years old, products specific to a certain geographic area rank third, with the same level of preference as additive-free and modern supplements. The order of preference remains the same for consumers residing in villages and cities. However, for consumers in towns, products specific to a certain geographic area rank second, while products from small farms or facilities rank third.

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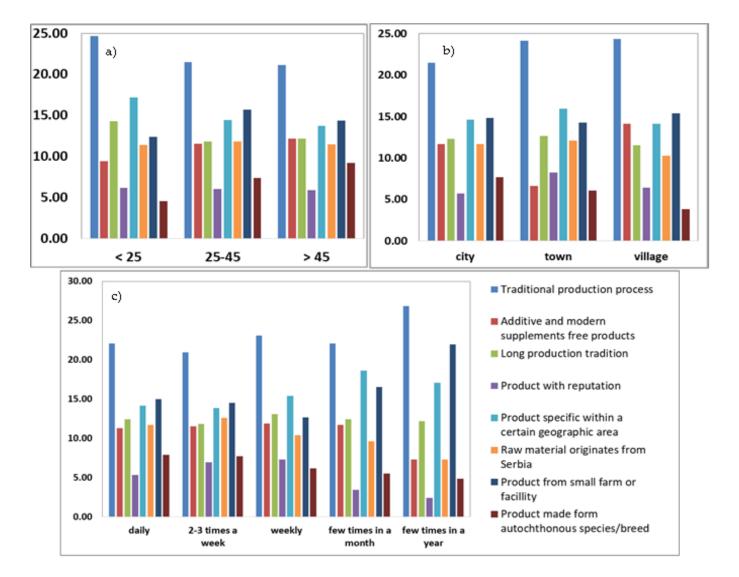


Figure 5. Relative contribution according to generation (a), place of residence (b), and frequency of consumption (c) regarding what traditional food products mean to consumers.

Figure 5c illustrates the results obtained from consumers in different frequencies of consumption groups. It shows that consumers across all frequency groups consider traditional food products made using traditional production processes to be their top preference. Furthermore, consumers in all frequency groups rank products specific to a certain geographic area as their second preference for weekly and few-times-a-month consumers and as their third preference for daily, 2–3 times a week, and few-times-a-year consumers. With the exception of weekly consumers, respondents from all frequency groups believe that products from small farms or facilities hold a place in their preferences. For daily, 2–3 times a week, and few-times-a-year consumers, these products rank second, while for few-times-a-month consumers, they rank third. Respondents who consume traditional food products weekly rank products with a long production tradition as their third preference.

The biplot in Figure 6 shows the projection of the correspondence analysis (Figure 6a, total inertia of 0.005, χ^2 of 9.279, p = 0.813; Figure 6b, total inertia of 0.008, χ^2 of 15.135, p = 0.997; Figure 6c, total inertia of 0.007, χ^2 of 12.793, p = 0.543).

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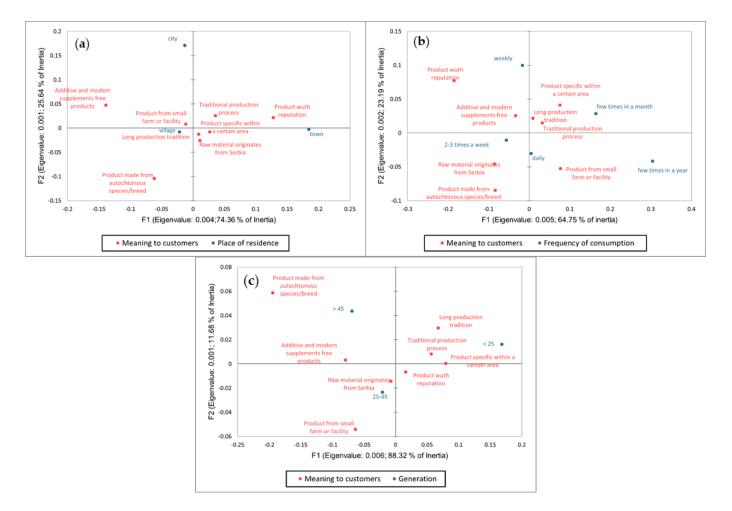


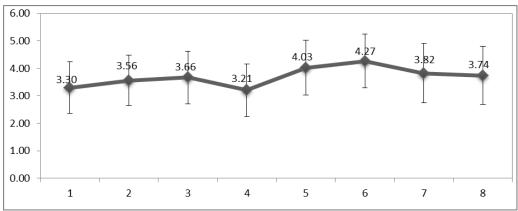
Figure 6. Correspondence analysis: relationship between traditional food products meaning to consumers and (a) place of residence; (b) frequency of consumption; (c) generation.

Table 3 presents the general attitudes of respondents towards traditional food products in the AP Vojvodina market. Consumers expressed their opinions regarding the availability and quality of traditional food products, the relationship between higher prices and quality, preferences for traditional food products over conventional and foreign ones, as well as their opinions on products with quality assurance marks. These opinions were obtained through eight questions, which were rated on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The mean values for these answers ranged from 3.21 to 4.27. It is noticeable, based on the results presented in Table 3, that the lowest values were obtained for questions 1 and 4, which reflect consumers' attitudes towards the availability of traditional food products on the market. Conversely, the highest values were obtained for questions 5 and 6, which demonstrate consumers' preferences for traditional food products over conventional and foreign ones. Consumers have nearly the same attitudes about the quality of traditional food products on the market (3.56), the price of traditional food products in relation to their quality (3.66), choosing traditional food products or dishes made from traditional food products in catering establishments (3.74), and the preference for products that have a certain mark of quality assurance (3.82).

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	Title 1		1	2	3	4	5
1.	I am satisfied with traditional food products offered on the market	n %	16 3	68 12.6	256 47.4	138 25.6	62 11.5
2.	I am satisfied with the quality of traditional food products on the market	n %	13 2.4	41 7.6	196 36.2	211 39	80 14.8
3.	I believe that the higher price of traditional food products is related to their quality	n %	11 2	50 9.3	156 28.9	215 39.8	108 20
4.	Traditional food products are available and easy to purchase	n %	23 4.3	89 16.5	230 42.5	152 28.1	47 8.7
5.	I prefer traditional food products over conventional ones	n %	11 2	24 4.5	123 22.9	162 30.1	218 40.5

Table 3. General attitudes about traditional products on the market.



5. Discussion and Conclusions

I prefer local traditional food products over foreign ones

In catering establishments, I usually choose traditional food

products or dishes made from traditional food products

I prefer products that have a certain mark of quality

6.

7.

8.

assurance

The research objective of this study was to identify consumer attitudes and preferences towards traditional food products in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina market and to understand their opinions about consumption and certification of these products, the special characteristics of products to which they pay attention during purchasing, and what traditional food products mean to them. In addition, for a deeper understanding of consumer attitudes and preferences regarding the availability and quality of traditional food products, the relationship between higher prices and quality and preferences for traditional food products over conventional and foreign products are very important.

11

2

27

5

18

3.3

%

n

%

п

%

20

3.7

20

3.7

38

7.1

82

15.2

149

27.7

164

30.4

126

23.4

168

31.2

165

30.6

299

55.6

174

32.3

154

28.6

Demographic data show that the majority of the respondents were females (69.1%), which is in accordance with the results of similar surveys [39]. Most of the respondents in the sample lived in the city (85%), were between 25 and 45 years old, were employed (70.4%), and lived in households with three or more members (65.6%).

The results showed that 98.3% of the respondents consume traditional food products in their households, with 89.1% consuming them at least once a week. These findings align with the literature, indicating a growing interest among consumers in unique, natural, high-quality food products obtained through traditional production methods with fewer additives and preservatives [6,7,16–18,22]. Furthermore, 95.2% of the respondents based their purchase decisions on product quality, highlighting consumer interest in healthy, sustainable, and nutritionally valued food [3,7,11,12,40]. Barska and Wojciechowska-Solis

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(2018) [22] in their study also found that consumers perceive traditional food in a very positive way and highlighted the main motives for this as high quality and specific sensory characteristics. Moscatelli et al. (2017) [12] stated that food value is not only linked to the consumer's health but also to numerous factors that affect the social, cultural, and economic spheres. Therefore, it can be concluded that the production and consumption of traditional foods are viewed from multiple perspectives. The necessity of promoting it and educating consumers about its multiple benefits should be emphasized. Consuming traditional food has an impact on various spheres of human life, ranging from healthy nutrition, environmental influence, and sustainability to the impact on local economies and the development of rural areas.

Moreover, 68.2% of the participating consumers believe that certain types of certification can improve product placement in the market, while 25.7% are unsure, and only 6.1% think that certification cannot improve product placement, which aligns with the findings of Prakash (2016), Belletti et al. (2017), and Barska and Wojciechowska-Solis (2018) [22,30,31]. Prakash (2016) [30] indicated that traditional food is naturally grown, nutrient-rich, and processed in a simple manner and that this influences not only physical and mental health but also can prevent disease. Regardless of all the benefits, food hazards do not differentiate between traditional and conventional foods, which means that all kinds of food must be safe and must comply with safety standards. All certifications and verifications that food products must meet regarding specific criteria and requirements greatly contribute to raising consumers' confidence. Barska and Wojciechowska-Solis (2018) [22] stated that producers of traditional products should increase consumer trust by protecting products against falsification. According to the results obtained in this study and the literature review, the importance of certification is clear. Additionally, the promotion of food quality schemes can increase consumer awareness and improve the position of traditional food products in the marketplace.

The specific characteristics that consumers mostly prioritize when buying food products are as follows: 41.2% prefer products with no added sugar, 38.8% consider traditional production processes, 36.9% opt for GMO-free products, 36.4% prefer organic products, and 34.9% seek additive-free products. The strong preference for products with no added sugars can be attributed to public health policies recommending limited sugar intake due to associated risks such as obesity, diabetes, and heart diseases [30–32,41–43]. Both consumers under the age of 25 and those over 45 prioritize products without added sugars. Additionally, these products are most important for consumers residing in villages and second in importance for consumers in towns and cities. For respondents who consume traditional food products daily, weekly, or a few times a year, products without added sugar rank first. For respondents who consume them a few times a month and two or three times weekly, these products rank second and third, respectively. The findings from this study lead to the conclusion that consumers, regardless of age, place of residence, and frequency of consumption, adhere to nutritional policies that recommend limiting sugar intake [30,32].

Furthermore, consumers, regardless of age, place of residence, and frequency of consumption, prioritize products made using traditional production processes, GMO-free products, organic products, and additive-free products. These characteristics indicate that consumers prefer food that is minimally processed and free from artificial ingredients, additives, and controversial food technologies. Hartmann et al. (2019) [44], in their report on quantitative research findings on European consumers' perception and valuation of EU food quality schemes, as well as their confidence in such measures, indicate that for Serbian consumers, the presence of GMOs in products is one of the most important attributes in purchasing decision, unlike consumers in the UK and Norway [45]. Results from this study are in accordance with the results of the mentioned report. Traditional production processes are becoming increasingly important special characteristics of products for consumers in Serbia, while these attributes are also of great importance to consumers in Italy and France. This is related to the great variety of traditional food products in these countries, consumer

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awareness of their importance, and high quality, as well as the wide development of food quality schemes in EU countries.

In other words, consumers seek food that can be considered "clean-labeled" and "slow food". Both slow food and clean label focus on promoting food quality, sustainability, and transparency, with slow food emphasizing the importance of local, sustainable, and traditional food production, and clean label emphasizing the naturalness of ingredients and the absence of artificial additives, preservatives, and synthetic ingredients [27,28,33–37,46,47]. The results obtained in this study are consistent with the literature and the increasing consumer inclination towards natural, clean-labeled, and minimally processed foods [48–55]. Furthermore, the results align with the research of Chaniotakis et al. (2010), which emphasizes the importance of food labeling in consumer purchasing decisions [54].

The results of this research indicate that consumers primarily perceive traditional food products as items produced using traditional methods, characterized by the absence of additives and modern supplements. These products are often associated with a particular geographic region or sourced from small farms or facilities. Interestingly, regardless of consumer categories such as age, place of residence, and frequency of consumption, the concept of traditional food products remains relatively consistent. Based on the results obtained in the present research, traditional food products can be defined as food products with long production traditions made by using traditional production processes in small farms or facilities within a certain geographic area, without the usage of additives and modern supplements. Since the term traditional food is widely used in the world and there is no single accepted definition of traditional food, numerous researchers try to find it from different points of view [5,56,57]. The way traditional food is defined in our study is consistent with the definition of other authors who thought that traditional food is linked to a particular geographical area accompanied by a distinct set of traditions, including production practices, gastronomic heritage, and culinary habits (but there is a general agreement regarding the strict link between a certain food and a specific geographical location along with a set of traditions, including production practices, gastronomic heritage, and culinary behavioral patterns) [7,58-61]. Also, some authors believe that traditional food is food that has existed, been consumed, and been transmitted for many generations for more than 25–30 years [60,62].

According to obtain results, it can be concluded that traditional products are consumed to a significant extent in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and consumers are aware of the quality as well as the importance of the certification process as a tool that guarantees quality.

Based on the results obtained in this study, discussion, and conclusions, the significance of consumer preferences for traditional food products and products, such as no added sugar, traditional production processes, and GMO-free, organic, and additive-free products, can have useful implications for stakeholders, including food producers, marketers, policymakers, and certification bodies. In addition, findings from this study emphasize the importance of promoting and providing access to traditional food products, as well as the need for clear labeling to help consumers make correct choices. Also, the results of the study can serve as a starting point for the development of a strategic marketing plan, market analysis, segmentation, targeting, and positioning of traditional products in the market.

Future recommendations for researchers can be divided into a few segments. First of all, in order to develop consumer education through effective educational campaigns and to develop marketing strategies, it is necessary to deeply understand their knowledge and awareness of traditional food products and the benefits of this highly valuable food product consumption. Furthermore, additional research can be conducted on the effectiveness and impact of different certification systems on consumer trust and product placement in the market, as well as consumers' preferences towards various certification marks and their influence on purchasing decisions. In order to develop strategies for the improvement of traditional food products' presence on the market, it is necessary to consider challenges

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and opportunities, including availability, accessibility, and affordability of these products. And in the end, future studies can investigate the sustainability aspects of traditional food production, including the environmental impact and innovation in food production processes. Overall, suggestions for future research are to understand consumer preferences and attitudes towards traditional food products more deeply and to address the challenges and opportunities associated with their production, marketing, and consumption.

Like in all empirical studies, we must acknowledge certain limitations here as well. This study is primarily descriptive, focusing on consumer preferences regarding traditional products. Further research is needed to delve into the quality of traditional products, production processes, raw materials, authenticity, quality labels, impact on the local economy, and environmental sustainability. It is important to include and consider which component of attitude, cognitive or affective, has a greater influence on consumer behavior, specifically on the conative component of consumer attitude towards traditional products.

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