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## CODES OF FOOD CONSUMPTION – MESSAGES OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND FOOD TRENDS

Food is not only the fuel by which people keep their bodies functional, it means much more to people; it has great symbolic importance both in good times and bad. When evaluating food trends, we consider the ambiguity of the term. Purchasing and consumer decisions may be motivated by the impulse toward indulgence as much as by a product's functionality. Different terms carry different connotations and affect trends in the food market, a remarkable phenomenon.

**Keywords:** food-trends, consumer behaviour, lifestyle, consumer groups, self-expressions

### 1. INTRODUCTION

When we think about life, we have to consider diverse influential factor groups, the connections of which – from the consumer's perspective – form a complex net. Eating is influenced by technical facilities, ingredients, availability, assortment, delivery, and more. The knowledge owned by a community (together with its transmission abilities) and the lifestyle of a given group may be typical for one of its members. These broad categories form our opportunities for and opinions about food. These indicators together offer numerous variations, generating useful or interesting behaviour in this huge market.

### 2. LIFESTYLE EXPRESSION, VISIBLE CONSUMPTION

After the transition in the 1990's, radical changes occurred in Hungary's food market. Brands, food types, restaurants, and other dining establishments appeared that had previously been experienced only by Hungarians abroad.

Nowadays traditional eating contexts have largely fallen apart at the same time as working rhythms have changed, new customs and systems have evolved that many describe as chaotic. The previously normal routine of breakfast, lunch, and dinner has altered

due to the new features of our lifestyle and in new trends in product selection, diet hypes, and news.

Besides shifts in the daily phases of eating, the changing content and importance of meals, the places where we eat are no longer certain. It is now more usual to eat on the go as a side activity, choosing the food appropriate for this. On-the-go foods and drinks have spread that can be consumed while driving or walking. Because of the needs of on-the-go consumers, it is increasingly usual for the hospitality industry to offer novel technical solutions for this type of demand (TÖRŐCSIK, 2010).

Parallel to the increasing speed of life, the counter trend becomes attractive for consumer groups. This takes the form of the slow food movement, the indulgence of food, the enjoyment of every moment of the eating experience, from preparation to consumption; in this context local products and traditional values become even more attractive (SZAKÁLY, KISÉRDI and NÁBRÁDI, 2010).

#### 2.1. Foods communicate and we communicate by eating

We communicate with food, the codes of which can be deciphered. Through the offer of a certain food we might express appreciation, celebration, or pampering. On the other hand we might express haplessness, power, or illness by the way in which we consume or refuse to consume (KARMASIN, 1996). We might give other sym-

bolic meanings to food and eating: they might evince caring, they might limit body performance and change appearance, they might constitute treatment for illness, connect us with health, creativity, or be a demonstration of knowledge, affection, or curiosity, a form of self-actualisation, the source of success and admiration, or nearly anything else (FORGÁCS, 2004).

We communicate by eating, because eating is a suitable medium for expressing ourselves and our lifestyle. The visibility of consumption is determined by the food category and brand selection (Fig. 1). Some categories (beverages, sweets, yoghurts, wines) present our lifestyle in a certain way. The same goes for brand selection: through our selection, ranging from ordinary to luxury brands, a message can be read (decoded). This message is transmitted by the strength and the image of the brand, and the consumer becomes identified with it, thus communicating information about him- or herself. Restaurant selection, one's behaviour inside eating establishments, the presence of on-the-go food in one's hand, the words on the bag one holds or the packaging are all message to translate.

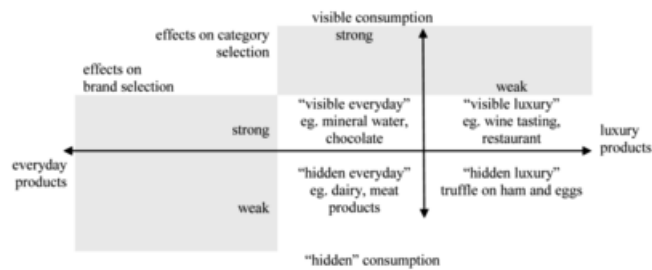


Fig. 1

### Visible consumption – decision mechanisms

Life has always meant more than just pure ingestion, but we should never forget eating is primarily a means of satisfying basic needs (FORGÁCS and NÉMETH, 1996). Of course, until basic needs are satisfied, other aspects of food like aesthetics and sophisticated taste cannot be considered. We might distinguish different periods of time (BATHIN, 1979) according to types of food, ingredients and customs. Yet the importance of food and eating has not decreased, its importance is shown by its prominence in marketing literature (LEHOTA, 2001).

Today, starvation is a rare phenomenon in developed countries, but even when discussing trends, we should not forget that there are segments of the population that struggle to get basic nourishment. We frequently find them invisible or of little concern to marketing work (BARZ, 2001).

When analysing the world of food, it turns out that the gap between industrialised, science-based production and romantic, heritage-based, humanist kind of production gets wider. It is uncertain which will hold supremacy in the future and will depend on the outcome of these dilemmas: sustainable or convenient, fast or slow food, traditional or industrialised production. Figure 2 presents explanatory factors, concerning business, distribution, consumption, and selling (BOSSHART ET AL., 2010).

The symbolic importance of food and eating is ever increasing and garnering a corresponding amount of attention. The obesity of societies, the threat of inadequate raw materials, and the spread of food scandals necessitate transparency and authenticity, as the category of food becomes a field of consumer resistance (TÖRŐCSIK, JAKOPÁNECZ and SOÓS, 2010).

Given the growing popularity of gastronomic channels, TV programmes related to food, books, and gastro bloggers who later become esteemed experts, it is also true that food and eating became the part of entertainment. These phenomena could be characterised by the word, "porn".

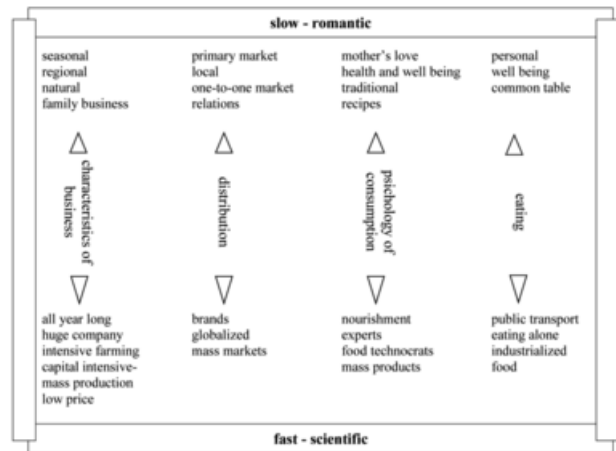


Fig 2

### Romanticism or science

## 2.2. Food trends

Food is not a stand-alone, abstract notion; it is influential part of our lives with many connecting points. It is an important business area (RATSCHI and FELDMANN, 2003), so it is understandable that it is not only a trend related category, but an area involving megatrends and trends, a category connected to and reacting to every trend. Megatrends have long-term effects and they are present in almost all aspects of life connected with it at many points. The following megatrends are especially relevant to food: Health, Eco-chic, Convenience, Globalisation, Consumer Resistance, Cheapness (BOSSHART, 2004), the Women's Millenium.

Many experts name food trends from time to time. We should look particularly at the trend thoughts of authors RÜTZLER and REITER (2010). They named 7 trends:

1. We will need to get more out of less in the future.
2. Back to the beginnings: in the future our foods will be characterised by new streams: closeness, emotions, identity and sense.
3. Common pleasure: we won't eat together more frequently, but will enjoy our foods together in a different way.
4. Naturally healthy: in the future healthy food and indulgence food will be the same.
5. Global will be the norm: globalisation makes the world more tasty. International cuisine will be served, while keeping responsibility in mind.
6. Simply better: in the future convenience food, besides saving time, will provide sensual pleasure and nutritional gain.
7. Always more beautiful: in the future foods will have to be even more appealing to the eyes.

In the beginning a trend is only in a state of a sprout but time gives a large impetus to it so that it spreads fast among different consumer groups (SIGRIST, 2004, 2005). Trends sooner or later provoke counter-trends, which should be identified and discussed

when analysing trends; they pulsate together, and they influence each other (TÖRÖCSIK, 2006, 2007a).

The analysis of food trends provides an overview of new mechanisms (the summary is based on TÖRÖCSIK 2007b). This summary presents the numerous means of self-expression, communication, or even the expression of our values by the means of food.

When we analyse trends and counter-trends, we can relate new phenomena to either a slow or fast pace of life and to modern or traditional values. Further on, food trends become part of the following coordinate system (Fig. 3). At some part of our lives we “accelerate”, while at others we slow down. Eating is strained between these poles; this activity is not only about basic needs, but it is part of social interaction, and it is the source of experiences.

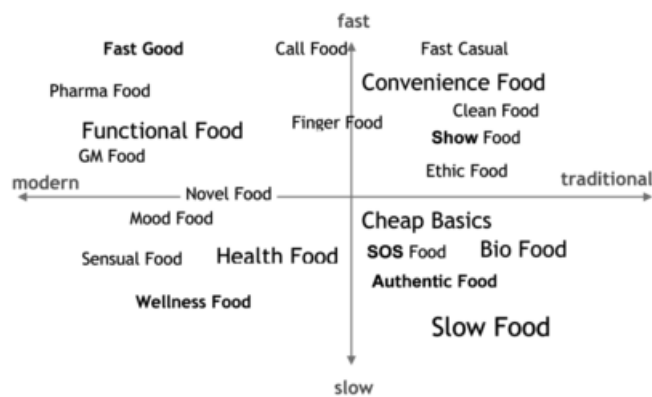


Fig. 3

Food-trends

Food trends can be characterised by different calling words, which describe the topics most important to consumers. Clearly, each calling word might cover more food trends and there might be connections between reacting consumer groups and their needs. In present study we present the following:

- speed, convenience
- environment, responsibility
- health, science
- experiences, expertise.

#### *Speed, Convenience*

Today's rushing man chooses fast food – the main aim is to get something edible rapidly in order to save time. We can do this by visiting fast food chains; we might order food at home. This latter is called call food. Finger food is the type of food which can be eaten on-the-way by hand, it is small and offered in “bite-ready” pieces.

A new direction within fast food is called fast good, preserving rapidness, but using fine ingredients and keeping a healthy diet in mind. Fast good food is not of high quality, but it is fast and at least not made of “junk” ingredients.

Convenience foods are semi-prepared, ready cooked, frozen foods that are finished or reheated at home. These have been popular among consumers for decades. Technological development has led to a wider range of better quality products being available to those preferring fast results.

Within the megatrend of cheapness, there are cheap foods, called cheap basics, made of economical ingredients for those cooking. This involves necessity: for many eating is still a matter of necessity and not indulgence.

#### *Environment, Responsibility*

Together with the growth of the number of LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) people the importance of responsible (for local and wider environment) decisions is growing (WENZEL, KIRIG and RAUCH, 2007). Bio food, chemical-free, organic, natural food, is ever more significant; the demand for it is increasing, although its assortment has limitations as a result of circumstances prevailing today. The spread of authentic food reflects expertise, authenticity, and responsible production, which are even more valued. Those offering these products know the processes of production well; producers are usually the sellers on this market. Trusted food represents the promise of transparency, which assures the consumer that he or she eats what he or she is willing or has promised to eat. Consumers in this case know the food and the circumstances of its production and may trust that it won't harm the health of their loved ones.

For consumers it is important to feel secure when buying food; they would like to avoid food scandals. The media news often raises attention to the circumstances of production and consumption. SOS food (Save Our Society) and harmony food emphasise the importance of sustainable development and the importance of harmony between man and nature. These priorities are supported by environmentally-conscious decision-making.

The local area and food grown at home are becoming more important. The essence of local food is relevance to a given place at a given time. This is also the characteristics of slow food (PETRINI, 2002), which encourages people to make and eat food traditional to a given territory and to create appropriate circumstance for eating.

Concerning spiritual food, research experts emphasise that food has a symbolic power for people; it is able to transmit values, ease or eliminate the burdens of soul, and manifest some kind of moral, which people should consider when eating.

Fair Trade and ethical shopping is not only a food term, but relates to sustainability and environmental consciousness. The purchasing of Fair Trade products reflects responsible behaviour towards those producing it (ensuring a fair profit for small scale farmers). Ethical shopping aims for the same, but in a more extended way. It encourages proper treatment of animal, supporting needy farmers and dealers, and neglecting products of certain companies for moral reasons, these all show that consumers bring some ethical philosophy to their decisions.

#### *Health, Science*

Conscious nourishment is even more widespread and many trends are involved in it. Extreme health behaviour has also appeared: some people have health problems because they focus too much on healthy eating (for example orthorexia) or work too hard to make their bodies more acceptable (WALDENFELS, 1999). As science facilitates more and more food industry innovations in the field of healthy food, more terms appear related to health improvement and health preservation. The broad category of health food encompasses natural sources (aloe vera, green tea) and natural but modified sources that might support health.

Superfood is food that is naturally functional; the desired effect is achieved by careful production. In the case of these products there are no artificial interventions, only selection in order to get the most out of the food's effect.

Novel food is the name of food coming from science labs, created by chemists or biologists. Novel food contains chemical substances that have previously been not used for human nourishment in a significant amounts. Microorganisms, fungi, algae, extracts from them and genetically modified organisms belong to this group.

Molecular cuisine uses natural resources and breaks them down by means of science; it creates re-composed menus. This field is strongly related to science but has a strong relation to show as well. It is not only unique in ingredients and in methodology, but also in its presentation and nomenclature, which tries to affect the senses.

Functional food has been known for a long time, but always reveals new solutions (SZAKÁLY, 2007). Today this type of food implies not only supplementation of minerals and vitamins, but also additional performance enhancers and weight loss support.

Nano food might result in unpredictable changes in nourishment; in its processes such composition changes are possible as may totally reform the outlook of a given food or the forms of healing. It may result in fresh foods produced at home or in shopping centres or it may create meat without animals. It works with synthetic molecules.

Clean food aims at people suffering from allergies, it sorts out those element that might cause problems for groups of people sensitive to given ingredients.

Phood (pharmaceutical food) is healing food; the industry surround it builds pharmaceuticals into foods, so that with its everyday nourishment the body receives a necessary treatment.

The trend supporters of GM food, genetically modified food hope that human need might be decreased by manipulating plant and animal genes. Such ingredients are produced as are suitable to satisfy higher demand with a given and reliable quality.

#### *Experiences, Expertise*

Numerous phenomena support the notion that today's hedonist man not only intends to get something, but would like to gain experiences while getting and consuming. It might be a nice experience when someone speaks of food like an expert or gourmand and can also enjoy eating in that way. We note that besides good experiences, problems and illnesses from eating gain ground (ERDŐS, 2001; FORGÁCS, 1997; TURY, 1997).

Mood food covers those types that make for happy eating. The food and the circumstances of consumption create a mood in which the participant should receive additional positive feelings (BOSCH, SCHIEL and WINDER 2005; GARDNER and VANDERSTEEL, 2001; SILBERER and JAEKEL, 1996).

Sensual food or entertainment food, emphasizes the delight of eating. Foods in this category should affect as many senses as possible, should influence the eyes, nose, ears, and tactile receptors just as much as the tongue (VROON, AMERONGEN and DE VRIES, 2005). Designing experiences that affect as many senses as possible (LINDSTROM, 2005) is sophisticated professional work (ASENSIO, 2005). Food industry members and restaurants reveal unfamiliar tastes like chilli and green tea chocolates or crunchy, loud, blasting, crackling snacks.

Wellness food increases physical, mental, spiritual well-being by selecting ingredients carefully while also thinking of their far reaching meanings.

Show-food has that kind of additional value that is introduced by invited media star master chefs. This category contains the masterpieces created at home in a family atmosphere and by specialties ordered for well composed family celebrations.

The appearance of fusion cuisine among middle class families is more and more usual. We not only enjoy Asian specialties in restaurants, but also in our everyday home-cooking. It is also true in the other way around: in Asian countries European gastronomy is spreading rapidly. Ethnic food, the inclusion of national specialties in domestic meals is an everyday experience. Migrant workers from other nations bring in "imported" faith, diet, and ingredients. Ever more companies offer meals catering to the requirements of a specific faith. The biggest market among these is halal food, food made to meet the requirements of Muslims.

As its name suggests, retro food involves foods and drinks with a nostalgic quality that have become fashionable once more. Foods worthy of preservation can be had at special venues – in Hungary, for example, at places designated as retro canteens.

Strange food is normally unappetizing food. This trend involves eating foods belonging to one culture that are found disgusting in the eater's culture. Desire for "adventures", and demonstrating bravery be the motives of people seeking such cuisine. As an example, the eating of beetles is repulsive in our culture whether they be fried or grilled. Some, nevertheless, are happy to try it.

### 3. NOURISHMENT TYPOLOGY

Consumers react to different trends in different ways. As a result there are characteristic groups with certain eating, food purchasing and cooking habits (WWW.BAUERMEDIA.DE, 2010):

- quality-oriented, passionate cooks, who have high brand loyalty and like to buy special ingredients;
- price-conscious, passionate cooks, who buy special ingredients based on price;
- family managers who do "Everyday Cooking"; they need help accomplishing their daily objectives
- "young beasts", who are simply creative life-style cooks; for them curiosity is of the utmost importance.

A German study, ordered by Nestlé, titled "So is(s)t Deutschland 2009/2011" (WWW.NESTLE.DE, 2010), studied eating habits. It turned out from this research that eating habits reflect a given society, since changes in the society immediately alter its eating habits. This study emphasises that every second person did not have regularity in eating habits, and 85% of the people would like to change their habits. There is a significant problem concerning age and eating habits: one million people over the age of 65 do not get enough to eat, while 20% of children are obese.

There are four magic criteria that serve as basics when people evaluate and judge food: price, taste, health, and convenience. Furthermore, certain brands should provide some additional values. People prefer brands that evoke emotions and also support their consumption by rational arguments. (for example: making the consumer better looking or promising extra features like the elimination of wrinkles, anti-aging, or lowering stress levels).

Mood food appears in the study as an emphasised trend food that focuses on well-being and mental performance. Mood foods are not only healthy but tasty, so there is no need to give up pleasure when eating.

According to the study it has three types:

- emotional eating
- functional mood enhancers
- brain food

In the cited study by Nestlé, there is a strong difference between genders concerning nourishment and attitudes toward food. While women are much more interested in the effect of nourishment on the shape of the body, men are more interested in the effects on health.

Different consumer groups can be designated based on attitudes, motivations, and consumer habits.

#### *Nest Heaters*

As in other parts of life they strive for harmony in food. Responsibility for the family is the focus. Freshness and quality are important for them; they are passionate chefs.

#### *Modern People With Free Choices*

They expect a lot of themselves, so they are always pressed for time. They do not have order in eating and they like eating together with others. They seek quality.

#### *Health Idealists*

They are health-conscious and have high living standards. For them fitness and being healthy is important. They seek quality; as a result they frequently buy bio food directly from farmers. They take time for eating and cook more than once a day if necessary.

#### *Uncontrolled*

Quantity and convenience are much more important for them than quality and health. Most of them are young men seeking superficial pleasure in eating. They are not very healthy and frequently overweight. They spend little energy on cooking.

#### *Passionless*

Their lives are characterised by a lack of emotions – for these men and women financial stability and a good reputation are more important than health; shopping has only a functional role.

#### *Problem Conscious*

Health consciousness is one of their values. They are mainly seniors who live with their husband/wife or alone. Their health status is not the best, as their age suggests. Freshness and quality are important for them, but price is also decisive.

#### *Chased*

They are under constant time pressure. As a result they have sleeping problems and are tired and overweight. They do not focus on eating, they search for fast solutions. This group is mostly composed of young middle-class men.

#### 4. LIFE CYCLE GROUPS REACTING TO FOOD TRENDS

Life cycle marketing is based on the idea that the society can be well segmented by age, responsibility (towards others), type of settlement, and sources of income. The classic life cycle groups are the following: children, young people, life starters, people with their own families, people forming new modes of life, and seniors (TÖRÖCSIK, 2006). Within each life stage group there are different trend groups.

#### *Children – Clever Kids*

For some lucky children parents would like to provide the maximum in every aspect of life and they do everything so that their child can perform perfectly, even better than expected at a given age. As a result the development of the child becomes a family project, where the aim is to get the maximum. It is a frequent phenomenon among families with one child. That child becomes the “small treasury” of the family. This same attitude extends to the nourishment of the child. Parents choose foods from fine, selected, scientifically proven ingredients. Functional superfoods get to the forefront, especially those that improve mental and physical development (foods rich in omega3).

#### *Young People – Careless Teenagers*

These are teenagers who live together with their parents and family. They are inclined to buy many products (or getting someone to buy them). They do not consider price. They get their nourishment information from mass media (tv, magazines), which informs their eating habits. The most important thing for them is that food should be convenient (easily reheated) to prepare and to eat; they do not want to spend much time or energy on it.

#### *Life Starters – HEIDI (Highly-Educated, Independent, Degree-Carrying, Individual Females)*

These are mainly single, well-qualified, independent, young women in a good position. They do not cook, for them it does not make any sense, as the excess must be thrown away. Neither do they have time; they generally only eat a salad between work and a party. Their fridges are nearly empty: there are ready-to-eat, seemingly healthy, low energy foods in it, but only small portions.

#### *Families – Extreme Taste Hunters*

Men over 30 belong to this group. They are proud of their culinary sophistication and knowledge. They cook, they combine ingredients in a creative and bold way, and they often experiment. All fields of gastronomy interest them, and they search information about given ingredients and tend to spend a lot on them. They use professional tools and masculine logic. They have a detailed and technical approach to cooking and nourishment.

#### *Families – Feel Good Customers*

They purchase conscientiously, supporting someone or something by their purchases. It makes them feel good and it lowers the compunction of spending. They prefer sweepstakes, and sales that promote respectable aims. Age and gender varies, the attitude is what counts.

#### *Families – New Puritans*

These purchase authentic products. They prefer organic products or those produced in a village. They are willing to make serious efforts to get these products. They think the guarantee of health is in real products. They neglect shopping centres and private labels; they do not buy packaged and semi-prepared goods.

#### *People Forming New Modes Of Life – 50+*

Their needs are unique. They are experienced customers; they won't buy anything they don't know, and they cannot be attracted by anything unfamiliar. They persist with traditional food, but with an eye to their health.

They know that their nourishment affects health directly, so they cannot/do not eat certain types of foods (such as cause heart disease, stomach problems, etc.). They prefer certain things (cholesterol-free food), but at the same time they try to live without giving up too much!

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Eating is more than just ingestion of calories. When analysing nourishment habits, symbolic meaning have great importance for people. Besides the previously prevailing "modern way" (American fast food chains), many new concept chains and gastronomical innovations have been born and spread. From the literature review and research results, we conclude that the pace of people's lives have changed, as have their life and work circumstances, expectations and lifestyles. As a result diverse food trends have evolved and new ones are expected to arise. People react to them differently, creating several trend groups differentiated by their behaviour. Food is ever more an expression of lifestyle and values.

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