

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY LABELS IN MEAT PRODUCTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In a dynamic and intensive lifestyle, eating healthy in this decade is one of the most important and discussed issues. The busy consumer needs to be protected and well informed through product certification to insure good product quality. A well described label should always accompany all the products especially meat products. A quality label will provide more knowledge about the health benefits of food, and be able to increase awareness of food-borne disease

A well product describe will impact to consumers to be more concerns about the environment which influence the consumer welfare. A Major task for food producers and policy makers would be creating efficient mechanism or program to provide food quality information demanded by consumers, though it is not an easy one, due to the complicated relationship among food quality attributes.

This approach evaluates the consumer label importance in meat products in 2 of the main cities in Albania: Tirana and Durres area where is concentrated almost half of the habitants.

This study evaluates that consumers are identified by lack of faith on label description. Only 16.8% of the interviewers always read the product label, 36.8% read the label from time to time, and 14.5% read often the product label. The study showed that the habitant in urban area (average= 3.65) are more interested in reading the label compared with the habitants in rural areas average=3.2). Meanwhile, the results shows that females are more interested in a quality certified product than men.

At the end of the study are the discussion and recommendation for the producers.

**Keywords:** consumer, consumer behaviour food quality, label.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Meat is for a tradition and most cooked food Albanian family. It dominates the food basket of households. In fact, the meat especially sheep and beef meat are far more expensive when compared to poultry or pork meat which makes about ½ of total meat supply consumption. In contrast on a different situation is presented in the EU, where beef has much smaller share compared with other types of meat. Imports represent a significant share of local consumption for all main types of meat. The meat value chain is considered a priority sector considering import substitution potential.

Chicken meat plays different roles in the meat diets of the populations of countries. In the Western Balkan Countries (WBCs), for instance, poultry is a popular meat and represents roughly 30% of total meat consumption. Based on FAO study, as incomes rise in developing countries, consumers generally diversify their diets, moving away from staple foods and towards including more meat (along with dairy products and fruits). The new lifestyle favours “ready-to-eat” and “convenience” food products. This shift in consumption pattern increases the demand for high-value food products such as poultry meat and eggs (FAO, 2010;). In that last quarter of 2008, poultry meat prices remained stable, but in early 2009, the price of poultry meat fell when consumer demand started to falter, portending another year of low profits or even losses. (FAO 2010; Poultry meat and eggs)

As, Shkreli et al. (Shkreli & Imami, 2019) mention in his report, there has been an increasing trend in the production of all types of meat and meat production is destined to the domestic markets, thus the production increase is mainly triggered by increase in the domestic demand. Despite the increase in production, imports have remained high – thus any investments or business developments should consider import substitution as a priority, while exports are not feasible in the near future.

One major concern is the lack of compliance with standards, which also bans Albania from exporting livestock (meat) products to EU markets (E. Shkreli & 2019)

It is important to underline that the global poultry meat production has been revised downwards since November 2008 to 94.7 million tons, largely because of the avian influenza epidemic in Asia.

Suphabphant et al., 1983, mentioned that contaminated chicken meat may represent the greatest potential hazard of human gastroenteritis caused by salmonellae. As well, segun different studies of various authors (Barrel, 1987; D’Aoust, 1989; Rampling et al., 1989; Bean and Griffin, 1990; Cooper, 1994; Morris, 1996) it is identified that there are various reports which link human cases of salmonellosis to the consumption of chicken. Numerous outbreaks have been reported related high rates of contamination of broiler chickens with Salmonella (Bokanyi

et al., 1990; Machado and Bernardo, 1990; Burow, 1992; Rusul et al., 1996; . Uyttendaele et al., 1998; Boonmar et al., 1998).

All over the world, people are becoming increasingly aware of farm animals' welfare (Commission). Based on Euro barometer, people believe that broiler and laying hen industries need to improve the current level of bird welfare. Consumers' perception can influence the type of product purchase.

There are guidelines which determined that imported products should meet the basic EU standards to enter this market.

The Regulation (EU) n. 1151/2012 has defined further and maintained protected designations of origin (PDOs) and protected geographical indications (PGIs) schemes. This Regulation aims to help the producers of agricultural products and foodstuffs to communicate with buyers and consumers the product characteristics and farming attributes.

Consumers have to choose between various meat products, with different origin, type of production and conservation. Meat label product should be accompanied always the product in order to be a source of nutrition information also a guaranty of meat food quality.

Albania is facing serious problems with the national food safety control system in terms of legislation, food processing, transportation, (Kapaj, 2016) trade and control as well as law enforcement, which pose real and perceived safety risks for consumers (Vercuni et al, 2016).

Our study is concentrated on two main areas with highest number of habitants.

## **2. POULTRY MEAT CONSUMERS PREFERENCES AND LABELLING PRODUCTS**

Starting from the intensive and dynamic life, people have less time to have a healthy lifestyle. Nowadays is becoming an important issue for consumers living healthy, preferring friendly environment products and take intention on animal welfare.

Thus, consumer preferences are focused more and more to poultry meat. This type of meat has a good quality of the protein needed on the consumer's diet. This product, needs short time to prepare also.

In a competitive market food safety issues often arise from problems of asymmetric information between consumers and food producers with regard to product-specific attributes or characteristics (Ortega et al., 2011). The consumers' interest in the origin, freshness, taste are the cues for the poultry meat producers.

Based on different studies, the consumers' attitudes are influenced by extrinsic cues as well by intrinsic cues for quality selection.

Each label conveys a set of characteristics (such as text, color, shape, etc.) that provides information about the product; however, the space available is always limited by the size of the package as well as by the regulations set out by law. In today's modern, globalized market, these limitations can be partially overcome by using Mobile Marketing, such as the QR Code (Quick Response Code), that combines the possibility to provide information with that of promoting and enhancing the value of the product and/or the brand. (S. Bacarella L. A., 2015)

Nevertheless, consumers' choices are influenced by many factors that ultimately shape purchasing decisions. Font- i- Furnols and Guerrero (2014) identified consumers' behavior as depending on interrelated factors that included psychological influences (willingness, risk, expectations, sociocultural factors, lifestyle, and values), sensory qualities (visual appearance, texture, flavor, and odor), and marketing factors (price, label, brand, and availability).

As mention Shiang et al. and Kwak, (SHIANG-YEN T., 2010); (KWAK S.B., 2013), in order to record traceability of food products was used QR Mobile Marketing, which transforms the physical identifiers (adhesives and labels on products, packaging, price tags, etc.) into something new and interactive, which can provide much information about the product's production process and general information about the Company .

Also, Grunert, Bredahl, and Brunsø (2004) used the Total Food Quality model to analyze consumers' perception and decision- making in determining meat quality. The model showed that consumers form expectations about quality at the point of purchase, based on their own experience and informational cues available in the shopping environment. These preferences are influenced not only by quality and consumer- related factors but also by context, culture, and information (Kanerva, 2013; York & Gossards, 2004).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Based on the literature and various studies made, it was constructed and conducted a survey which will figure out the socio – demography and economic data situation of the interviewers, their desire to consume meat products especially poultry meat, type of poultry meat, through the poultry meat attributes.

The selection of the poultry meat attributes was made based on what other studies investigated and what different author has said regarding the products attributes.

This survey was conducted in Tirana area with around 250 interviewers.

Conjoint analysis has been used extensively in marketing research to estimate the impact of selected product (service) characteristics on customer preferences for products (services) (Louvier, January 1988)

Based on the above, we select the conjoint choice method to analyze the results of the surveys. Within this method, is easy to understand the experience of the consumer and in the meantime to provide reliable information for the consumer but mostly to provide useful information which should oriented the producers towards the buyers’ demands and socio – demographic situation of the consumer.

As well, the approach aims to show the impact of attributes in the buyers decision and correlation of poultry meat attributes as: country of origin, price, age, gender, and color, place of purchase, type of product and for sue how important is the information on the labeling of meat products.

The perception of products, including perception of its attributes means the starting point for the consumer decision. So, the combination of these indicators will give the necessary information needed to identify buyer’s preferences for a detailed product label on the poultry meat.

**4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

The survey covered a sample of population in two main, biggest cities Tirana and Durres Region. The results of 250 samples of consumers in these areas, demonstrate that 89% of the participants evaluate as very important the product labelling of poultry meat product, 36% has an average assessment of the labelling presence in the meat product.

It is important to underline that there is 1.6 % of interviewer indiferent of reading the product labelling. (table 1)

**Table 1: How do you evaluate the detailed information on product?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Little	4	1,6	1,6	1,6
Average	86	34,4	34,4	36,0
A lot	134	53,6	53,6	89,6
Mostly	26	10,4	10,4	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own data

Meanwhile, there was a statistically significant correlation between customer confidence in the predominance of labels and the frequency of reading labels ( $p = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). This relationship is

positive and relatively strong ( $r = 0.697 > 0.6$ ). This means that the more buyers believe in label the more they will read them and vice versa.

To the question if the consumers read the product labelling before buying poultry meat product, 83.2% of the participants answer that they read often the labelling; 51.2% read sometimes the product labelling and 14.4 % read the labelling rarely.

Below are presented the relations between variable gender (female – male) and the reading and believing in product labelling (table 2)

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

Gender		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	Did you read labelling before buying a product?	99	2,00	5,00	3,4545	,91777
	Valid N (listwise)	99				
Female	Did you read labelling before buying a product?	151	2,00	5,00	3,5497	,95001
	Valid N (listwise)	151				

Source: Own data

Both female and male pay attention in reading labelling of meat products. Thus, female read more often the labelling of product (average=3.5) compared with male (average=2.4)

Our data show that the interviewer of urban area read more often (average= 3.6) the labelling of poultry products than, the interviewer from rural areas (average= 3.2) (table 3)

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

Birthday Place		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Urban habitant	Did you read labelling before buying a product?	156	2,00	5,00	3,6538	,96823
	Valid N (listwise)	156				
Rural habitant	Did you read labelling before buying a product?	94	2,00	5,00	3,2766	,83478
	Valid N (listwise)	94				

Also, the rural consumers of our study compared with them of urban area expressed low confidence in the meat labelling.

The relation between age and the reading labelling of poultry product show that older age get more intention of reading the labelling than the younger age. (  $r = 0.208 < 0.3$ ).(table4). On the same trend is the confidence level on the labelling description of the poultry product. Older ages believe more than younger people. This relation is positive but weak (  $r = 0.210 < 0.3$ ) table 4.

**Table 4: Correlations**

		Did you read labelling before buying a product?	Age
Did you read labelling before buying a product?	Pearson Correlation	1	.208**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	250	250
Age	Pearson Correlation	.208**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	250	250

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Own data

Our study results show that there is a positive but weak relation between education level and the reading of the poultry labelling ((  $r = 0.288 < 0.3$ ).(table 5). So, consumers with higher levels of education are more careful to read the poultry meat labelling.

**Table 5: Correlations**

		Did you read labelling before buying a product?	Highest education level
Did you read labelling before buying a product?	Pearson Correlation	1	.288**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
Highest education level	Pearson Correlation	.288**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Own Data

**Table 6: Did you believe on the labeling description?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1,00	58	23,2	23,2	23,2
2,00	122	48,8	48,8	72,0
3,00	43	17,2	17,2	89,2
4,00	26	10,4	10,4	99,6
5,00	1	,4	,4	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	

Source: Own Data

Our interviewers 48.8% believe very little in the poultry labelling and only 0.4% of them believing on labelling of the poultry product. 2.4% average of interviewers believe in the labelling poultry product.

Table 7, figure out the assessment of different attributes that are described in the label

**Table 7: Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
How do you evaluate the lower (sale) price when you buy the product?	250	1,00	5,00	2,8320	,83820
How do you evaluate the product package?	250	1,00	5,00	3,2560	,81061
How do you evaluate fat % of the product?	250	1,00	5,00	3,2760	,72797
How do you evaluate the written message in the product?	250	2,00	5,00	3,7280	,66316
How do you evaluate the brand of the product?	250	2,00	5,00	4,0120	,87574
How do you evaluate the appearance of the product (color)?	250	1,00	5,00	4,3680	,75022
How do you evaluate the origin of the poultry product	250	2,00	5,00	4,3760	,70185
How do you evaluate a certifying product?	250	2,00	5,00	4,4320	,72628
How do you evaluate the taste of the product?	250	2,00	5,00	4,8920	,43944
How do you evaluate the freshness ?	250	3,00	5,00	4,9280	,28835
Valid N (listwise)	250				

Source: Own Data

Our customers value product freshness (mean = 4.92), product taste (mean = 4.89), certification or product safety villa (mean = 4.4) and then on origin, appearance / color, licensing stamp, brand etc. The least appreciated feature is the low price (sales) (mean = 2.8).

Consumers are progressively more and more aware regarding the issues related to safety food consumption, and health impacts. For sure, it is important for consumers to know about the technology used and its influences on the environment.

The meat market actors should ensure the truthfulness and accuracy in labeling of meat and poultry products. Knowing the meaning of labeling terms can make purchasing of meat and poultry products less confusing.

They should be informed about meat characteristics, condition of the conservation, the origin, % of the fat and for sure a detailed nutritive information on calories of the product.

More and more, consumers are raising awareness regarding the food they consume. Safe products for the human health is now a days in the focus of the consumers and marketing strategy of the producers.

This study, aims to be an orientation for the producers and for other market actors that consumers should be protect and be safe producing and selling healthy food. A detailed and secure nutrition information on the labelling products should always be on the product.

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