

PURCHASE OF FOOD VIA THE INTERNET FROM CONSUMER'S POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract

The growing consumer interest in comfort and speed of food purchases can be currently considered as a trend in the food market. The aim of the paper is to point to the food purchase via the Internet in Slovakia. This paper deals with development of food purchase via the Internet and the position of the food in Internet purchases in the Slovak Republic. Secondary data from the database of Eurostat and Slovak Association of Electronic Commerce were used in the processing of the issue. The primary source of information were results of a questionnaire survey aimed at finding out how Slovak consumers perceive food purchase via the Internet. Based on the results, it can be stated that most of Slovak consumers consider pasta and sweets as suitable foods that can be purchased through Internet portals. On the other hand they consider meat and meat products as unsuitable products purchased via the Internet. Slovak consumers evaluate purchase of food via the Internet as advantageous due to the wider range and fast delivery, but on the other hand consumers are still limited by the impossibility to view the goods and relatively high price for delivery of the goods. Nowadays, approximately a quarter of Slovak consumers buy food via the Internet and majority of them use Internet portal of Tesco. Results of the questionnaire survey show that more than 60% Slovak consumers will purchase food via the Internet in the future and we can assume that buying food via the Internet is a perspective and trending area in the current food market.

Keywords: business, consumer, food, internet, internet shopping

JEL Classification: Q 13, M 31, O35

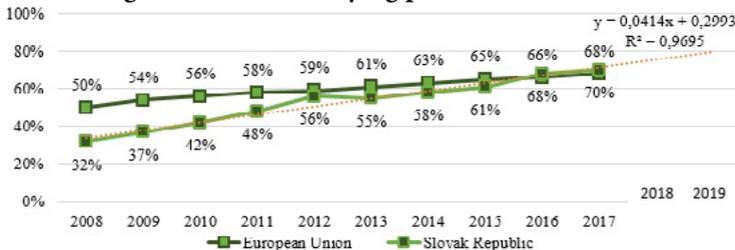
1 Introduction

Nowadays, consumers are in the middle of the digital revolution and the Internet has a significant impact on their everyday life, lifestyle and the way they make purchasing decisions. In the context of the mentioned, it is possible to assume that new digital technologies affect the thinking and behaviour of each consumer. Customers who buy products in stores are changing to online customers who buy products from comfort of home over the Internet (Miklenčíčová, 2015, Grunert, 2017). So buying products via the Internet is one of the most dynamic forms of business development (Ramus & Nielsen, 2005).

1.1 The development of purchase of food via the Internet

Since the late 1990s, online shopping has grown, resulting in an increasing number of consumers buying products through Internet portals (Zhou, Dai & Zhang, 2007). The growth in the number of customers using the Internet for ordering and purchasing products has been increasing steadily over the last ten years. Currently, in the European Union there is 68% of these customers (Eurostat, 2017). The number of users using the Internet for online shopping was lower in the comparison with the average of European Union in the years 2008 to 2015. In the last two years, the pace of development of the number of Slovak customers is faster than the average of European Union, and in Slovakia there is 70% of Internet users regularly buying products online. Based on data from Eurostat (2017) we point out the possible development of the percentage of Slovak consumers buying online with a prediction for the next two years. According to the determination index (R^2), it can be estimated that with 96.95% reliability, the percentage of consumers using the Internet for purchasing products will increase and will reach approximately 80% in the years 2018-2019 in Slovakia.

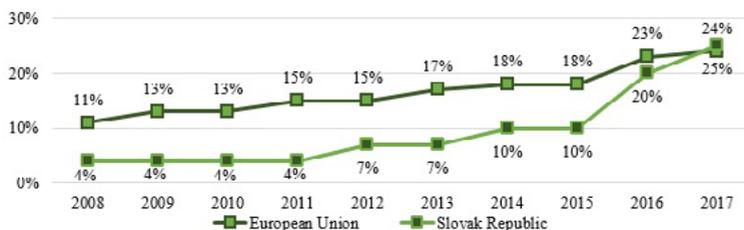
Figure 1 Percentage of consumers buying products via the Internet



Source: Own processing according to Eurostat, 2017, and SAEC, 2016.

As we mentioned, nowadays consumers can buy every product through Internet portals. Food products are not the exception and their purchase via the Internet is becoming more popular (Hanus, 2016). In connection with the above, it is important to point to the development of the percentage of Internet users purchasing food online. Based on the data from Eurostat (2017), it can be stated that in the monitored period 2008-2017, online purchases of food increased in the countries of the European Union. In the last year, 24% of consumers preferred to order food products via the Internet. In Slovak Republic, only 10 % of Slovak consumers purchased food products by 2015. Since 2016, there has been a rapid increase in the number of consumers buying food products, and currently 25% of consumers buy food online.

Figure 2 **Percentage of consumers buying food via the Internet**



Source: Own processing according to Eurostat, 2017, and SAEC, 2016, own calculations.

Based on the above charts, we can conclude that the number of Internet users buying food through the Internet is gradually increasing, suggesting that Internet portals become an actual and attractive place to buy food products for Slovak consumers.

1.2 Consumer decision to buy food via the Internet

Muhammad, Sujak and Rahman (2016) emphasize that buying food online has the potential to replace traditional food stores in the future. Moreover, sellers who offer food online know the main reasons why consumers buy food via the Internet

1.2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of buying food via the Internet

The possibility of purchasing food products via the Internet brings different benefits to consumers. The most important determinant is the convenience of online shopping. It is necessary to point out that there are different types of

convenience of online shopping, such as access, search, rating, transactions and comfortable operation (Hanus, 2016). We can consider buying time as the next benefit of online grocery shopping. Consumers order food products from the house and save time for traveling, parking and waiting in long checkout queues (Jiang, Yang & Jun, 2013, Huang & Oppewal, 2006). The next advantage of buying food via the Internet is a selection from a wide range of food products (Ramus & Nielsen, 2005).

On the other hand, it is necessary to point out possible barriers that influence consumers in buying food via the Internet. The first major disadvantage is the risk of an incorrect assessment of a particular product. This is a result of the lack of opportunity to taste the product and to perceive its sensory properties (Karpińska-Krakowiak, 2014). Other examples of the disadvantages of online purchase of food can be higher search costs or longer delivery times for products (Verhoef & Langerak, 2001). The fear of buying can be an important determinant that discourages consumers from buying food online. Consumers are afraid of the selection and handling of perishable goods such as vegetables, eggs and meat products. In connection of the above, the online purchase of fresh food is limited due to the date of minimum consumption (Galante, López & Monroe, 2013, Toomey & Wysocki, 2009).

Final decisions about the online purchase of food are influenced by the advantages and disadvantages of buying food via the Internet which are perceived by consumers.

1.2.2 Rational and irrational consumer behaviour in buying food online

Consumers who have chosen an alternative to buying food via the Internet have to make several choices. These choices include selecting a specific Internet portal, taking into account financial aspects, compiling shopping lists and selecting specific brands of food. These can be done by consumers in two ways, based on a rational and irrational approach.

Hanus (2016) and Horská et al. (2009) emphasize that the first approach is connected with the rationality of consumer behaviour. According to this theory, consumers behave rationally, so it means that their goal is to maximize their satisfaction or utility. Consumer behaviour is characterized by cautiousness, awareness, experience, and appreciation of alternatives (Nagyová et al., 2012, Rovný et al., 2010). In the case of buying food via the Internet, consumers compare Internet portals, food prices, payment and delivery terms.

The second approach is related to the irrationality of consumer decisions. Karpińska-Krakowiak (2014) focuses on the factors that limit the optimal

purchasing option. These factors include, for example, uncertainty, risk, limited time and access to information. In the context of mentioned, consumer behaviour is characterized by unpredictability, emotionality, impulsiveness or subconsciousness (Komárková, Rymeš, Vysekalová, 1998). Karpińska-Krakowiak (2014) also emphasizes that a relatively high share of impulses and emotions are recorded when purchasing frequently used products such as food. At present, Internet portals are designed to influence the consumer in order to trigger an instantaneous impulse purchase. These sales methods include, for example, coupons, additional discounts with a short expiration date or a free service such as, for example, delivery.

The consumer's decision to buy food is influenced by a number of factors, including cultural, social, psychological, and personable (Géci, Nagyová & Rybanská, 2017, Nagyová et al., 2012). The behaviour of online shoppers is primarily influenced by psychological factors that can be crucial for repeated purchase of food through the Internet portal. According to Smith and Ruth (2003), the motivational aspect as a psychological factor is to look for and buy a product with higher quality at lower prices through online stores. Motivation encourages consumers to ask questions about regular online food purchases. Another factor is perception. Consumers in the online environment perceive the incentives and objects that are on the Internet portal. For this reason, Constantinides (2004) argues that online marketers should be aware of the elements that increase or doubt the trust of potential customers and should try to understand how trust affects the perception of a particular website by customers on the Internet. Personality also affects the behaviour of consumers on the Internet. In the online environment, consumers may be different personalities in the comparison with their everyday life. The virtual environment gives the individual an opportunity to try different types of personalities or different identities (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2009). The last factor is the emotions that influence consumers, and according to Lakshmi (2016) they may change, depending on the recent experience of buying food online (Horská & Berčík, 2017).

2 Data and Methods

The aim of the paper is to focus on the possibility of purchasing food through Internet portals as a trend in the food market. In connection with its fulfilment, methods of collecting and obtaining information and methods of information processing were used.

Within the scope of data collecting methods we used secondary and primary data. Secondary data represent information from domestic and foreign literature

and web pages focused on processed issues. Primary data were obtained from survey questionnaire conducted on a random sample of 228 respondents in November, December 2017 and January 2018. Respondents were divided into 6 categories by gender, age, education, residence, economic status and monthly income. The classification is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 **The segmentation of respondents from the aspect of selected criteria**

Gender	n	%	Working status	n	%
Men	110	48.25	Student	26	11.40
Women	118	51.75	Employed	116	50.87
Age	n	%	Unemployed	22	9.65
Less than 24 years	66	28.95	Retired	22	9.65
25 – 34 years	40	17.54	Maternity leave	2	0.88
35 – 44 years	40	17.54	Self-employed	40	17.54
45 – 54 years	38	16.67	Monthly income	n	%
More than 55 years	44	19.30	Less than 400 eur	90	39.47
Education	N	%	401 – 700 eur	64	28.07
Elementary	14	6.14	701 – 1 000 eur	40	17.54
Secondary without maturity	40	17.54	More than 1001 eur	34	14.91
Secondary with maturity	80	35.09	Residence	n	%
University	94	41.23	City	138	60.53
			Village	90	39.47

Source: Questionnaire survey, 2018.

Obtained data were processed and analysed in Excel. Furthermore, for hypothesis testing, following statistical tests were applied:

- Chi-Square Test of Independence
- Cramer 'V coefficient
- Test of hypothesis for a proportion

In relation to the objective and methods, the following hypotheses were formulated:

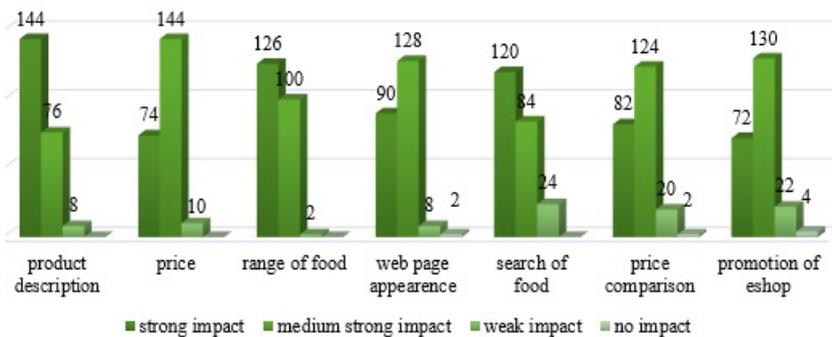
- Hypothesis 1: We assume that more than 10% of respondents consider the wider range of food as the main advantage of purchase of food via the Internet.

- Hypothesis 2: We assume that more than 25% of respondents consider the lack of opportunity to view the food before buying as the main disadvantage of online shopping.
- Hypothesis 3: We assume that there is a dependence between the use of the Internet for buying food in the future and the age of the respondents.
- Hypothesis 4: We assume that there is a dependence between the current use of Internet portals for purchase of food and the age of respondents.
- Hypothesis 5: We assume that there is a dependence between evaluating the experience of buying food via the Internet and the respondents' gender.

3 Results and Discussion

In the questionnaire survey, we were interested in how the selected criteria influence consumers and their decision to buy food online. Based on the results we can state that respondents prefer buying food via the Internet, because of the detailed description of the food product, easier search and wider range of products. On the other hand, shop promotion, the possibility of price comparison and the appearance of the website have almost no impact on consumer. During purchasing it is possible to observe both rational and emotional motivational factors in consumer behaviour that influence the decision of the respondents to buy food online.

Figure 3 The impact of certain criteria on purchasing decisions

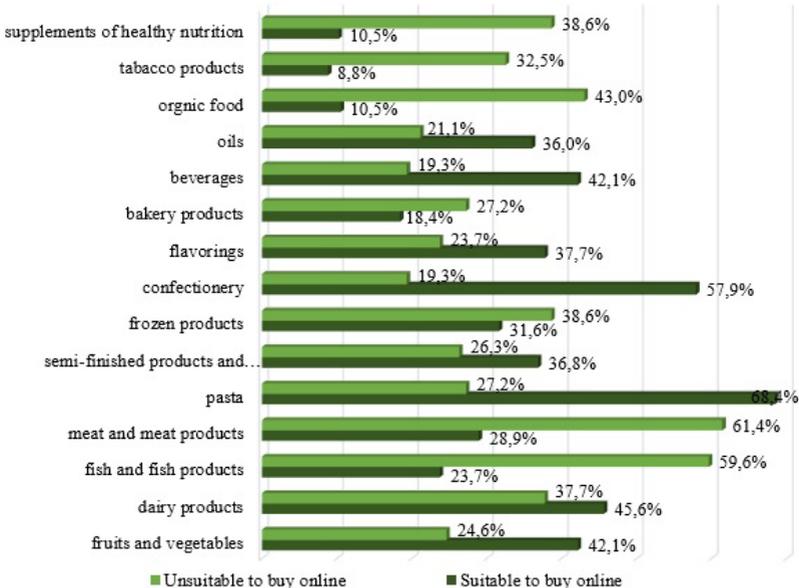


Source: Questionnaire survey, 2018.

The questionnaire survey shows that 68.4% of the total number of respondents consider pasta as a suitable food purchased via the Internet. Of all respondents,

57.9% of respondents consider confectionery as a good product purchased online. 37.7% of respondents would buy dairy products via the Internet. 18.4% of respondents consider fresh bakery products as a good food bought online, 10.5% of consumers consider organic food and healthy food supplements and only 8.8% of respondents consider tobacco products as suitable products to buy online. On the other hand, most respondents stated that they would not buy fish and fish products (59.6%) via the Internet. Other foods that consumers do not consider to be appropriate to buy online are meat and meat products and 61.4% of the total number of respondents would not buy them, 43% of respondents perceive organic food as the least preferred foods purchased online. Frozen foods and healthy food supplements are considered by 38.6% of respondents as not suitable products purchased via the Internet. Hanus (2016) finds meat and vegetables unsuitable for online purchase, due to the high risk of their degradation caused by limited shelf life.

Figure 4 Food that are suitable and unsuitable for purchase via the Internet

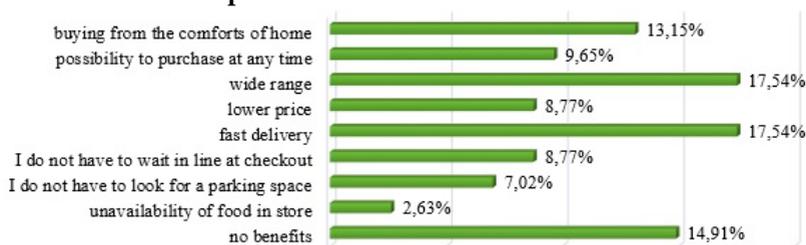


Source: Questionnaire survey, 2018.

Based on the results of questionnaire survey, 17.54 % of respondents consider a wider range of food products and their relatively fast delivery as the most important benefits of buying food via the Internet. 13.15% of respondents perceive

buying via the Internet as beneficial due to the convenience of buying from home. On the other hand, it is important to note that almost 15% of consumers do not consider Internet shopping to be beneficial and do not perceive advantages of this form of purchase. Grzybowska-Brzezinska and Rudzewicz (2016), based on the results of the survey, concluded that purchasing food from the comforts of home and delivering food products can be considered as the main benefits of online grocery shopping.

Figure 5 **The benefits of purchase of food via the Internet**



Source: Questionnaire survey, 2018.

In the context of the question, the following hypothesis was formulated and statistical test of hypothesis for a proportion was applied:

H0: It is assumed that 10% of respondents consider the wider range of food as the main advantage of purchase of food via the Internet.

H1: It is assumed that more than 10% of respondents consider the wider range of food as the main advantage of purchase of food via the Internet.

Results showed that p - value (0.175439) is not in confidence interval $<0, 0.13268>$, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and it can be concluded that more than 10 % of respondents consider the wider range of food as the main advantage of Internet shopping.

In addition, questionnaire survey was focused on the perceived disadvantages by consumers. Based on the results, 29.82% of respondents do not prefer buying food via the Internet due to the lack of opportunity to view the product. 25.44% of respondents consider a high delivery price as one of the main disadvantages of buying food online. 21.93% of consumers are afraid that food will be delivered after the date of consumption or after the date of minimum durability. Hanus (2016) also considers this risk as a disadvantage of online food purchases.

Figure 6 The disadvantages of purchase of food via the Internet



Source: Questionnaire survey, 2018.

In the context of the question, the following hypothesis was formulated and statistical test of hypothesis for a proportion was applied:

H0: It is assumed that 25% of respondents consider the lack of opportunity to view the food before buying as the main disadvantage of online shopping.

H1: It is assumed that more than 25% of respondents consider the lack of opportunity to view the food before buying as the main disadvantage of online shopping.

Results showed that p – value (0.298246) is not in confidence interval $<0, 0.297169>$, therefore the null hypothesis was rejected and it can be concluded that more than 25% of respondents consider the lack of opportunity to view the food before buying as the main disadvantage of online shopping.

In the issue of the advantages and disadvantages of buying food via the Internet, we have seen the high impact of online consumer perception. On the one hand, we see consumers' trust in Internet sellers in the wide range of food and speed of delivery of food products. On the other hand, there is a fear that food will be delivered after the date of consumption, which represents a significant risk for the consumer.

The purpose of our survey was also to find out if respondents will plan to buy food online in the future. 66.67% of the respondents indicated that they will plan to buy food online via the Internet, and the remaining 32.33% stated that they will prefer buying food in traditional grocery stores. Kitsikoglou, Chatzis, Panagiotopoulos and Mardiris (2014) has made a similar conclusion of research, so consumers will probably change their behaviour and will buy food via the Internet.

Figure 7 Respondents' opinion on purchase of food via the Internet in the future



Source: Questionnaire survey, 2018.

Regarding the question of the possibility of buying food via the Internet in the future depending on respondent's age the following hypotheses were formulated:

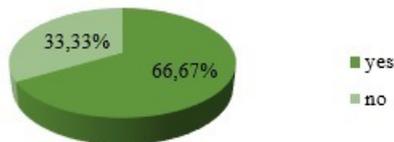
H0: It is assumed that there is no dependence between the use of the Internet for buying food in the future and the age of the respondents.

H1: It is assumed that there is a dependence between the use of the Internet for buying food in the future and the age of the respondents.

Based on the results of Chi-Square Test of Independence we can conclude, that the calculated value of Chi (14.91) is higher than the table value of Chi (5.99), therefore the null hypothesis was rejected, so age has statistically significant impact on purchase of food products via the Internet. According to Cramer's V coefficient there is only weak correlation (0.26).

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey we found out that 26.32% of the respondents regularly buy food via the Internet. 58.77% of respondents from the total number of respondents occasionally buy food online. 14.91% of consumers have not had any experience with buying food online yet, and they purchase food in the traditional brick and mortar stores.

Figure 8 Purchase of food via the Internet



Source: Questionnaire survey, 2018.

In the context of this question, we found the dependence between current food purchases via the Internet and age of respondents and following hypothesis was examined and formulated:

H0: It is assumed that there is no dependence between the current use of Internet portals for purchase of food and the age of respondents.

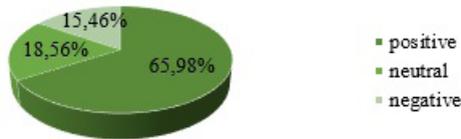
H1: It is assumed that there is a dependence between the current use of Internet portals for purchase of food and the age of respondents.

Based on the results of Chi-Square Test of Independence we can conclude, that the calculated value of Chi (31.32) is higher than the table value of Chi (9.49), therefore the null hypothesis was rejected, so age has statistically significant impact on the current use of Internet portals for food purchasing. According to Cramer's V coefficient there is medium correlation (0.31).

Within the questionnaire survey, we were interested in which Internet portals consumers most often to buy food. Only respondents who have ever used online grocery shopping answered the question. Of the total number of these respondents, 50.52% buy food online via Tesco Groceries Home Delivery, 29.89% use Metro's services, 15.46% respondents purchase food at dopo.sk, 4.12% of respondents prefer to buy food online on the website of KORUNA.

The aim of the questionnaire survey was to find out the satisfaction of consumers with buying food via the Internet. More than 56.70% of the total number of respondents have a positive experience with buying food online, 30.92% claim that they have a neutral experience with online shopping, and 12.37% of respondents have a negative experience with this type of shopping. According to the survey conducted by Svatošová (2013), the results showed that 17% of respondents are dissatisfied with online food purchases.

Figure 9 Experience of respondents with buying food via the Internet



Source: Questionnaire survey, 2018.

In the context of this question, we found the dependence between the gender of respondents and satisfaction with buying food via the Internet and following hypothesis was formulated:

H0: It is assumed that there is no dependence between evaluating the experience of buying food via the Internet and the respondents' gender.

H1: It is assumed that there is a dependence between evaluating the experience of buying food via the Internet and the respondents' gender.

Based on the results of Chi-Square Test of Independence we can conclude, that the calculated value of Chi (0.09) is lower than the table value of Chi (5.59),

therefore the null hypothesis was accepted, it means that gender does not have statistically significant impact on the experience of buying food via the Internet.

4 Conclusion

Nowadays, consumers are looking for a faster and more convenient way to buy food. For this reason, internet portals, which are focused on the sale of food products, have an irreplaceable position on the food market. The objective of the paper was to point out the food purchase via the Internet as a trend that is used by an increasing number of Slovak consumers. Consumers are affected by rational and irrational factors, of which psychological ones are the most important. In the context of online purchases, it is necessary to emphasize online perception and emotions of consumers, which Internet portals use. The results of realised questionnaire survey have shown that consumers are determined by the wide range, the product description and the portal appearance, which can be considered as examples of both groups of factors. Slovak consumers consider fast delivery as the benefit of Internet purchase, and on the other hand they identify the impossibility of seeing the product as the most significant disadvantage. In connection with mentioned, it is important to note that more than 60% of respondents will plan to buy food online in the future, while currently only about 26% of respondents regularly buy food online and use, in particular, Internet portal of Tesco. The majority of consumers have claimed they have a positive experience with buying food via the Internet, which has a significant impact on the emotional side of the consumer's personality, and it is a precondition for repeated online purchases of food in the future. Based on the results, we expect that buying food via the Internet will become popular among Slovak consumers. We also think that more retails will offer food online and online shopping will replace the grocery shopping in the store. This will be possible after the change in the shopping habits of Slovak consumers, which will be formed mostly by the influence of Internet portals acting on the personality side of the consumer. In the future we will monitor these changes in the shopping habits of Slovak consumers and study the further development of food purchases via the Internet.

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