

CONSUMER INVOLVEMENT IN THE PURCHASING PROCESS: CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE CHOICE

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Abstract

Research purpose. Consumer is becoming demanded one in the purchasing process. Thus, consumer behaviour analyses thinking about his or her involvement in the purchase process could be a solution for marketers. This article concentrates on the consumer's choice of food products in the purchase process because the author is interested to clarify the connection amongst choice, purchase and wasting of food. The research purpose is to evaluate the consumer's consciousness in choosing food product in the purchase process.

Design/Methodology/Approach. Quantitative method using questionnaire was applied to 643 respondents whilst implementing formulated aim. Cronbach's alpha analyses of 35 items (0.870) showed reliability of the research.

Findings. The research results indicated that consumer in the food purchase process is low conscious because he or she does not understand that he or she is buying more than what he or she needs and thus some of his or her purchase becomes waste. Consumer's consciousness could be seen in the consumer's lifestyle such as preferences for homemade food.

Originality/Value/Practical implications. The research results could be used in practice and science. Food-producing companies might use some research results making their packaging solutions. The research results could give incites for scientists for future research.

Keywords: Consumer; Involvement; Purchasing process; Customer; Consciousness.

JEL codes: M310; M370.

Introduction

Relevance of the research. Consumer is becoming demanded one in the purchasing process. Thus, consumer behaviour analyses thinking about his or her involvement in the purchase process could be a solution for marketers. Scientist in different countries analysed different consumer's behaviour aspects. Scientists have been researching consumer's behaviour depending on hedonic and utilitarian aspects (Lee *et al.* 2013; Filho, 2012) and have been trying to define how consumer decides and what kind of profile, values and benefits influences their decision to make purchase. Other surveys analysed consumer's decisions, consciousness and preference regarding green purchases (Schuitema & de Groot, 2015). Some researches (Filho & Brito, 2017) analysed rational or emotional decision of consumer choosing eco-friendly green technologies.

Regarding food market, scientists analysed consumer behaviour in choosing certain products such as olive oil (Ghali, 2019), yogurt (Sarti *et al.* 2018; Kytö *et al.* 2019), protein quarks (Kytö *et al.* 2019), and technologies (Filho & Brito, 2017). Some researches indicate (Kytö *et al.* 2019) that package picture in-store, simulations in-store and tasting at home influence to intentions to purchase product. Lithuanian case of green purchase research (Liobikiene *et al.* 2017) was more focused on external factors such as price, green purchase and environment friendly behaviour than on internal factors such as organic foods or healthy nutrition. However, this article concentrates on the consumer's choice of food products in the purchase process because the author is interested to clarify the connection amongst choice, purchase and wastage of food. Another important difference from this research is that Lithuanian case (Liobikiene *et al.* 2017) was analysed using data collected by Eurobarometer but the author of this article conducted this survey by herself. The research of this article is not based on certain food group but is focused on consumer's behaviour according to his or her lifestyle whilst choosing cook at home or purchasing semi-finished products in the store that is directly related with consumer's consciousness to the healthy food.

The research purpose is to evaluate consumer consciousness in choosing food product in the purchase process. Two main tasks are chosen for research purpose implementation:

- To determine how consumer's involvement in the purchase process is related with lifestyle activities such as cooking at home, buying semi-finished products or purchasing food cooked at shop;
- To find out how consumer's involvement is related with eco/green purchase, importance of food product country of origin and food wastage.

The research purpose has intention to search for prevalence of consumer behaviour. Thus, quantitative method using questionnaire was applied to 643 respondents whilst implementing the formulated aim. Cronbach's alpha analyses of 35 items (0.870) showed the reliability of the research.

The research results indicated that consumer in the food purchase process is low consciousness because he or she does not understand that he or she is buying more than what he or she needs and thus some of his or her purchase becomes waste. Consumer's consciousness could be seen in the consumer's lifestyle such as preferences for home-made food.

Literature Review

Consumer's consciousness. Consumer consciousness in choosing food products in the purchase process could be explained in terms of consumer's values related to their lifestyle and influencing their purchase process. Nowadays, consumer is under pressure of group behaviour because collectivists are more interested in a healthy label (Sarti *et al.* 2018). Recent industrial survey reports show that 90% of online shoppers read consumer product reviews and 83% reported that their purchase decisions are directly affected by the reviews (Weisstein *et al.* 2017). However, consumer is influenced by great amounts of information on the food labels and it makes difficult for consumers to make consciousness in food purchasing decisions (Montandon *et al.* 2017).

Differences in consumptions exist amongst different kinds of products. For example, research of technological products indicates (Filho & Brito, 2017) that if a consumer is becoming a part of green perception groups, his or her utilitarian values are higher than the hedonic ones. Another example could be given from food endorsement programmes. Nutritional endorsement programmes have been applied to raise consumer's consciousness about the role of food to healthy lifestyle, and according to some research (Montandon *et al.* 2017), these programmes do play a role in consumer's decision-making in the purchasing process. This research is focused on food consumption decisions. Thus, consumers' consciousness related to healthy nutrition and sustainability is analysed further.

Sustainability and health-related information on the labels is supplied for consumers to raise their consciousness of healthy nutrition (Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2017). This is how government and other stakeholders are endorsing products to credence the goods (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Sarti *et al.* 2018). Consumers frequently self-report having sustainability or health-related preferences (Ha & Janda, 2012; Sarti *et al.* 2018). Furthermore, consumers are diverse because they might choose special products based on the quality of a single item, and also in some cases, they prefer products with the diversity of use and the number of benefits, even if the base product is inferior in quality compared with an alternative (Filho & Brito, 2017). Consumers are purchasing products because of values such as their enjoyment and social status (Schuitema & de Groot, 2015), their interests and preferences (Filho & Brito, 2017). However, consumer's self-reports and actual behaviour might be different because of information, awareness and personal capabilities depended on their lifestyle (Chekima *et al.* 2017; Fischer *et al.* 2017; Sarti *et al.* 2018). Consumers' perception of sustainability and healthy food could be based on individuals' motivations (Prothero *et al.* 2010), socio-demographics (Verain *et al.* 2012), cognitions (Verain *et al.* 2012) and lifestyles (Sarti *et al.* 2018).

Research indicates (Popa *et al.* 2019) that consumer perceive organic foods as safe and nutritious (Ghali, 2019). The consumers prefer to acquire regional organic foods (Lorenz *et al.* 2015). They believe such food to be more reliable, fresh and better tasting (Costanigro *et al.* 2014). Consumers are becoming more interested in the environment and human health (Laureti & Benedetti, 2018; Ghali, 2019). Consumers'

intentions to buy organic product depended on the country of origin of the product (Lorenz *et al.*, 2015; Rahman, 2018; Ghali, 2019).

Consumers' involvement. Involvement could be described as consumer's perception of product importance (Zaichkowsky, 1985) that is influenced by his or her values and interests in long term (Rahman, 2018; Ghali, 2019). Involvement with the product could differ from low to high (Park & Keil, 2019). Low involvement means minimum effort from consumer, and oppositely, high involvement is related with consumers' intentions of searching for various information and careful considerations and comparison of different brands concerning motivation and values (Handriana & Wisandiko, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2019) in the purchase process.

Consumers' purchase process depends on their reaction to different stimuli under different involvement cases (Montandon *et al.* 2017). Consumer involvement with different levels is related with consumer's purchase purpose (Xia & Monroe, 2009). As some scientists observed (Weisstein *et al.* 2017), goal-directed consumers give preference to utilitarian benefits or value, prepare shopping plan and trust on extrinsic motives for their choices. Oppositely, experiential consumers concentrate on hedonic value and internal motives. Thus, consumer's involvement with the product could be understood as important part of consumer's decision processes during supermarket visits (Montandon *et al.* 2017). Taking in account the theoretical consumptions about consumer's consciousness, it could be seen that consumer's involvement depends on consumer's interests or lifestyle and values. Consumer's lifestyle determines priorities of purchasing choice (Sarti *et al.* 2018), and it in some way relates with consumer's consciousness.

It could be expected that consumers would use a greater range of product choice factors if they were highly involved with a product (Montandon *et al.* 2017). Product choice might depend on country of origin, health claims, product endorsements, quality certification, appearance of the food, consumer's claims, health endorsements and green or eco aspects of production (Montandon *et al.* 2017). The results of the research (Montandon *et al.* 2017) showed that for low-involvement purchase, brand played the most important role in consumer decision-making (55.1%), followed by price (26.6%) and the presence of the health endorsement (18.3%) relative to each other. In consumers' decision-making preferences for the high-involvement product (Montandon *et al.* 2017), price was determined to have played the most important role (50.72%), followed by brand (26.84%) and the presence of the health endorsement (22.43%). Thus, there could be assumed that low involvement is related with external influence such as brand rather than health endorsement, which is more inherent for high involvement. Perception of health endorsement could be understood as quality of food for consumer, and it could be counted as consumer's consciousness in the purchase process.

Consumers with no experience or low positive attitude about green attributes could have a positive perception about the convergence and even a higher desire to purchase a product with many attributes, differently from consumers with a negative attitude (Filho & Brito, 2017). Thus, products that qualify for these labels typically must meet externally determined criteria such as third-party certification (Darnall & Potoski, 2017; Sarti *et al.* 2018).

Some research (Sarti *et al.*, 2018) focuses on consumers' macro/micro motivations, demographics, cognition and lifestyles. Studies suggest (Verain *et al.* 2012) that product label influences the purchase of consumer described by demographics such as individual's age, gender, income, education, occupation, social class and place of residence. Even more, consumer's cognition of healthy food is related with labelled products (Verain *et al.* 2012). Thus, external factors should be analysed. External factors influencing consumer's involvement in the purchase process could be pricing, branding, shape and size of the packaging, country of origin, health claims, sustainability claims, product endorsements, quality certification, look and texture of the food, production claims and health endorsements (Montandon *et al.* 2017). Accordingly, consumer's buying motives (Hüttel *et al.* 2018) are micro such as supporting local businesses or individual concerns related to personal or family health and macro such as societal and environmental concern (Kareklas *et al.* 2014). Consumers are interested in information such as the origin of the product (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015). This research is focusing on micro-level motives such as related to organic foods or healthy nutrition, sometimes-signed eco or green. As consumer perceive an organic labelled food as being safer and healthier (Kareklas *et al.* 2014), for

this research, it will serve as consumer's consciousness in choosing the healthy food product in the purchase process.

Sustainable consumption. Sustainable consumption has been understood as consumers' usage of goods and services responding to basic needs. This consumption brings a better quality of life whilst minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product, saving the world for future generations (Kilbourne *et al.* 1997; Joshi & Rahman, 2019).

The results indicate that the drive for environmental responsibility, spirituality and perceived consumer effectiveness are the key psychological determinants of consumers' sustainable purchase decisions (Joshi & Rahman, 2019). According to Italian market research (Sarti *et al.* 2018), just 7% of all market (27.5% collectivists, 10.0% individualists and 3.6% indifferent) are interested in the health-related labels and sustainability of purchased product.

Sustainable purchase is important for the reduction of environmental degradation (Biswas & Roy, 2015) and studies (Liobikiene *et al.* 2017; Cerri *et al.* 2018; Nguyen *et al.* 2018; Joshi & Rahman, 2019) show importance to endorse sustainable purchase behaviour. Consumers tend to ignore the outcomes of their purchase results (Liobikiene *et al.* 2017; Joshi & Rahman, 2019), for example, wasting food and buying larger amount of food than actually needed. This inequality of consumer's perception and actual behaviour about sustainable purchase is called attitude-behaviour gap (Padel & Foster, 2005).

This study is particularly interested just in eco or green aspect and country of origin as quality of product with high involvement and external factors such as commercial influence to bigger amount of purchasing products. At the same time, this research focuses on sustainable consumption factors such as consciousness in choosing the amount of food and food wastage.

Methodology

Consumer's consciousness in choosing food products in the purchase process was researched using quantitative questionnaire. This type of survey is frequently used to find out the prevalence of some consumers' behaviour factors (Montandon *et al.* 2017). Regarding determined purpose of this article, two research questions are raised:

- To determine how consumer's involvement in the purchase process is related with lifestyle activities such as cooking at home, buying semi-finished products or purchasing food cooked at shop;
- To find out how consumer's involvement is related with eco/green purchase, importance of food product country of origin and food wastage.

The structure of the research is shown in Figure 1. The research questions were formed using operationalised thoughts of literature review:

- Socio-demographics (Verain *et al.* 2012);
- Consumer's involvement (Montandon *et al.* 2017);
- Consumer's lifestyle activities (Sarti *et al.* 2018) such as cooking at home, buying semi-finished products or purchasing food cooked at shop as goal-related motivation (Weisstein *et al.* 2017) and family-related motivation (Kareklas *et al.* 2014);
- Eco/green purchase, importance of food product country of origin (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Lorenz *et al.*, 2015; Rahman, 2018; Ghali, 2019), external factors from marketing (Montandon *et al.* 2017) and food wastage (Joshi & Rahman, 2019).

Research questions were formed using Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means 'totally disagree', 2 'disagree', 3 'partly agree', 4 'agree' and 5 'totally agree'. The same scale was used to identify the frequency of purchase, where 1 means 'never', 2 'less than once a week', 3 'once a week', 4 'every second day' and 5 'every day'.

People who are shopping for food in their life were selected as the research's respondents. This research is not dividing respondents who are regularly shopping in the store and those who do online shopping.

Accordingly, 385 sample size of respondents were calculated using 2,808,901 population in Lithuania (Statistics, 2018), 95% of confidence level, 5% of error level and 50% of response distribution (Raosoft, 2019).

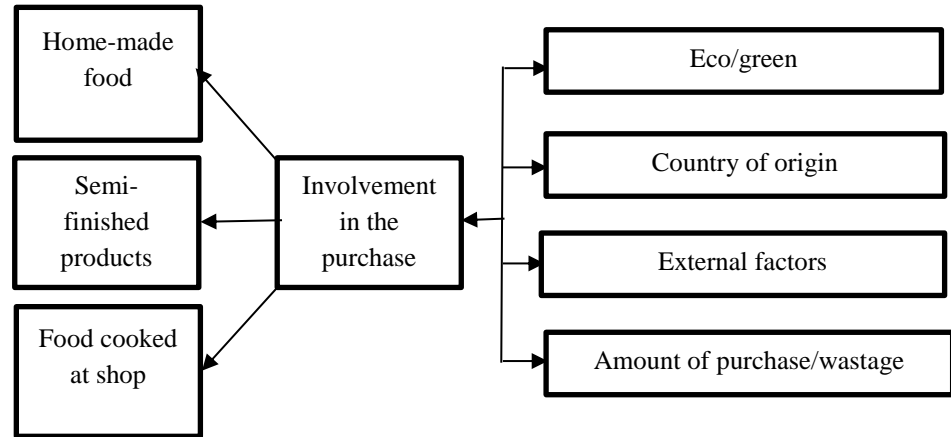


Fig. 1. Structure of the research (Source: made by the author)

The research was conducted in 2018 autumn together with the help of students from the Department of Business, Kauno Kolegija University of Applied Science. Students were printing, distributing and collecting the filled questionnaires. The sample consists of 643 filled questionnaires. Data were analysed using SPSS program and methods such as descriptive statistics and Spearman correlation were used for reliability analyses. Cronbach's alpha analyses of 35 items (0.870) showed the reliability of the research.

Demographic data of the research (Table 1) show that 64.2% of research respondents were women and 36.5% were men. The research data give information about respondents who are Lithuanians with low or average income. These kinds of incomes cover about 60% of Lithuanian working people (Statistics, 2019). Thus, research data are consistent with Lithuanian situation. About 5.8% of the research respondents were with basic education, 41.7% with secondary education, 28.5% with higher education and 22.7% with university education.

Table 1. Demographic data of the research (Source: author's compilation)

Gender		Incomes			Education			
Female	Male	Till 400 Euro	401–800 Euro	More than 801 Euro	Basic	Secondary	Higher	University
64.2	36.5	36.5	40.7	21.6	5.8	41.7	28.5	22.7

Results

The results indicate low involvement of respondents in the food purchase process. Data in Table 2 shows that consumer is hardly paying attention to the information on the product's label (3.00). The biggest involvement of consumer is shown just with checking the date of expiry (4.02) or checking for product condition if this product is on sale (3.55).

Table 2. Consumer's involvement into food purchase (Source: author's compilation)

Research scale	Mean	StDev	Skewness
Consumer is reading information on products' label	3.00	1.189	-0.033
Consumer is checking the date of expiry	4.02	1.155	-1.158
Checking for product condition during sales	3.49	1.195	-0.529
Checking the condition of product package	3.55	1.261	-0.639
Checking for mistakes in the receipt	3.06	1.324	-0.118

Regarding complied data in Table 2, 'consumer is reading information on product's label' was taken as indicator of low involvement. This choice was made after the evaluation of correlation with other researched factors. It showed stronger correlation with other items shown in Table 2.

Data in Table 3 show that low or high involvement in the purchase process is weakly but statistically significantly correlating with lifestyle such as cooking at home. Very poor and negative correlation is indicated with consumer's lifestyle such as buying cooked food. Analysing such results could state that consumer's lifestyle is related with purchasing involvement but deeper analyses is required; thus, mean value comparison analysis is provided.

Table 3. Involvement into lifestyle activities such as cooking at home, buying semi-finished products or purchasing food cooked at shop (Source: author's compilation)

Spearman correlation between:	Consumer is reading information on products' label (low involvement)	Consumer is checking the date of expiry (high involvement)
Cooking food at home	0.250**	0.303**
Buying semi-finished food products	0.008	-0.206**
Buying food cooked at shop	-0.122**	-0.133**

Note: 643 respondents; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ level.

The results show that those consumers who read information on the product's label care about healthy nutrition (mean value of totally agree is 3.88 in Table 4), include lots of vegetables and fruits in their nutrition (3.72 in Table 4) and intend to buy healthy food (4.06 in Table 4). Thus, consumers' interested into healthy lifestyle are making them higher involved in the purchase process.

Table 4. Consumers' involvement in the healthy food (Source: author's compilation)

Consumer is reading information on products' label											
Consumer care about healthy nutrition	Mean	N	StDev	Consumer include lots of vegetables and fruits in his nutrition	Mean	N	StDev	Consumer is buying healthy food	Mean	N	StDev
Totally disagree	1.82	22	1.259	Totally disagree	2.66	29	1.289	Totally disagree	2.09	33	1.071
Disagree	2.41	75	1.015	Disagree	2.63	94	1.057	Disagree	2.68	117	1.056
Partly agree	2.75	251	0.941	Partly agree	2.77	205	1.077	Partly agree	2.79	254	0.990
Agree	3.31	185	1.026	Agree	3.09	178	1.043	Agree	3.34	149	1.144
Totally agree	3.88	104	1.244	Totally agree	3.72	129	1.179	Totally agree	4.06	82	1.010

Analyses of consumer's involvement in the country of origin shows that those consumers who are more interested in the origin of the product (totally agree mean value of 3.9 in Table 5) and chooses to consume Lithuanian product (3.94 in Table 5) are more involved in the purchase process. Spearman correlation analyses is used for analysing the consumer's involvement with consumer's care about country of origin (0.452, $p < 0.01$) and consumer's choice for Lithuanian product (0.420, $p < 0.01$). This medium-strength but statistically important correlation confirms that consumers' involvement is higher if we assume that the consumers' interests are related with their lifestyle factors.

Table 5. Consumers' involvement in the country of origin (Source: author's compilation)

Consumer is reading information on products' label							
Consumer cares about country of origin	Mean	N	StDev	Consumer chooses Lithuanian product	Mean	N	StDev
Totally disagree	2.15	74	1.143	Totally disagree	2.07	56	1.189
Disagree	2.66	167	0.916	Disagree	2.66	143	1.027
Partly agree	3.01	213	0.988	Partly agree	2.99	261	0.977
Agree	3.66	119	1.061	Agree	3.54	108	1.131
Totally agree	3.90	60	1.337	Totally agree	3.94	64	1.180

Consumers' involvement into the purchase process regarding external factors such as advertisement (discounts or sales) was analysed. Actually, data in Table 6 show that consumers are not buying more because of discount or consumers are not more involved in the purchase process because they are checking for sales' adverts before shopping or because consumer are taking the advert journal before leaving the shopping place.

Table 6. Consumers' involvement in the purchase regarding external factors (Source: author's compilation)

Consumer is reading information on products' label											
Consumer usually is buying more products because of advertising	Mean	N	StDev	Consumer is checking for sales' adverts before shopping	Mean	N	StDev	Consumer takes advert journal before leaving the shopping	Mean	N	StDev
Totally disagree	2.98	42	1.370	Totally disagree	3.04	74	1.297	Totally disagree	2.93	167	1.200
Disagree	2.95	103	1.115	Disagree	2.81	141	1.127	Disagree	2.83	155	1.056
Partly agree	2.97	194	1.115	Partly agree	2.98	173	1.048	Partly agree	3.10	149	1.101
Agree	3.12	183	1.073	Agree	3.22	146	1.020	Agree	3.24	86	1.127
Totally agree	3.05	115	1.317	Totally agree	3.10	102	1.404	Totally agree	3.22	79	1.374

Spearman correlation analyses between respondents' statements about wasting of food with purchasing amount (0.229, $p < 0.01$) and shopping frequency (0.293, $p < 0.01$) show weak but statistically significant relation. Accordingly, the results (Table 7) show that those respondents who are buying more food than their family is able to consume, at least once a week and even more frequently, are wasting food.

Table 7. Purchasing amounts and food wastage (Source: author's compilation)

Consumer is buying more food than he/she/family is able to consume								Consumer's food shopping frequency			
Consumer's food shopping frequency	Mean	N	StDev	Wasting of food frequency	Mean	N	StDev	Wasting of food frequency	Mean	N	StDev
Never	2.77	13	1.536	Never	2.68	88	1.402	Never	3.02	88	1.114
Less than once a week	2.87	60	1.346	Less than once a week	3.09	288	1.092	Less than once a week	3.5	288	0.868
Once a week	3.11	236	1.107	Once a week	3.38	175	1.163	Once a week	3.67	175	0.825
Every second day	3.28	222	1.194	Every second day	3.67	49	1.197	Every second day	3.94	49	0.876
Every day	3.32	103	1.23	Every day	3.42	31	1.177	Every day	3.97	31	1.169

The results of this research (Table 8) indicate weak (0.221, $p < 0.01$) but statistically significant Spearman correlation between consumers 'cooking at home' and 'caring about healthy nutrition'. At the same time, negative correlation is indicated between 'cooking at home' and buying semi-finished (-0.275 , $p < 0.01$) or cooked products in the shop (-0.244 , $p < 0.01$). These results show that cooking-at-home consumers perceive homemade food as healthy nutrition and do not relate health with semi-finished products. The results of this study allow assuming that cooking-at-home consumers are more consciousness consumer and more involved in the purchasing process than those buying semi-finished or cooked products.

Table 8. Lifestyle related with consumption of food and its wastage (Source: author's compilation)

Spearman correlation between:	Cooking at home	Buying semi-finished products	Buying cooked food in the shop
Consumer care about healthy nutrition	0.221**	-0.036	-0.153**
Consumer is buying more food than he/she/family is able to consume	0.024	0.129**	0.097*
Consumer's food shopping frequency	0.024	0.161**	0.107**
Wasting of food frequency	0.014	0.203**	0.084*
Cooking at home	1.000	-0.275**	-0.244**
Buying semi-finished products	-0.275**	1.000	0.439**
Buying cooked food in the shop	-0.244**	0.439**	1.000

Note: 643 respondents; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ level.

Conclusions

The results obtained from this research are consistent with those of some researches, (Kytö *et al.* 2019) indicating that food consumptions are low involvement products. However, this research supplements past research by explaining that consumers' interests into healthy food are related with higher involvement in the food product purchase process. Thus, lifestyle studies are important for analysing consumers' involvement.

The results of this research is consistent with those of some other researches (Sarti *et al.* 2018), stating that consumer's involvement depends on consumer's interests or lifestyle and that consumer's lifestyle determines priorities of purchasing choice (Sarti *et al.* 2018). However, the results of this research specifically indicate consumer's lifestyle related with food consumption. The results state that cooking

at home consumers are more consciousness consumer and more involved in the purchase process than those consumers who are buying semi-finished or cooked products.

The research results indicated that consumers of semi-finished products and cooked products in the shop are low conscious because they do not understand that they are buying more than what they needs and thus some of their purchase becomes waste. Consumer's consciousness could be seen in the consumer's lifestyle such as preferences for homemade food.

It should be mentioned that this research focused on Lithuanian consumers and their involvement into the purchase process, their consciousness in choosing healthy products and product amount and consequences regarding bought amounts of food such as wasting food. Deeper research could be made specifying the certain food groups such as grain, vegetables, fruits, meat and fish. This type of research has been conducted in Korea (Kim *et al.* 2019). This could be a purpose for the future research in Lithuania.

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