

CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND TRUST IN TRADITIONAL ROMANIAN FOOD PRODUCTS: A STUDY ON LABEL INFORMATION AND PURCHASING DECISIONS

**Aurelia DEFTA (OSMAN), Gratiela-Victoria BAHACIU, Dănuț-Nicolae ENEA,
Andrada MOISE, Nicoleta DEFTA, Monica MARIN, Livia VIDU**

University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, 59 Mărăști Blvd,
District 1, Bucharest, Romania

Corresponding author email: nicoleta.defta@usamv.ro

Abstract

This study explores consumer behavior towards traditional Romanian food products, focusing on purchasing patterns, trust in product labelling, and the influence of socio-demographic factors. A sample of 238 Romanian consumers was surveyed, with results indicating a strong preference for Romanian produced traditional foods, while interest in similar products from the European Union and non-EU countries was lower. Age and education level were found to significantly influence purchasing decisions, with older and more educated consumers showing a higher tendency to buy traditional products. Trust in the truthfulness of label information was generally moderate, with many consumers actively verifying product details, including shelf life. The findings suggest the importance of promoting the authenticity of Romanian products and fostering consumer confidence through clear, transparent labelling. Marketing strategies should consider socio-demographic differences, with targeted campaigns for various age, education, and geographic segments to increase consumer engagement. By emphasizing quality, tradition, and transparency, producers can enhance brand loyalty and boost the market presence of traditional Romanian food products.

Key words: consumer preferences, European Union products, food authenticity, food labels, traditional product marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Geographical Indications (GIs), including the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), are essential tools for the protection of cultural and gastronomic heritage, but also for stimulating regional economic development. In a globalized world, these certifications not only provide consumers with a guarantee of the authenticity and quality of products, but are also an important means of differentiation in the market (European Commission, 2023).

The evolution and flexibility of GI regulations are topics of debate among researchers and practitioners. Crupi (2020) suggests that while there is a trend towards flexibility to enable innovation, this process may weaken the link between the product and the region of origin. Gangjee (2017) complements this perspective, highlighting the difficulties of certification and ambiguities in demonstrating provenance, which can affect the credibility of the GI system. On the other hand, the bibliometric analysis

carried out by Dias & Mendes (2018) indicates a growing academic interest in the economic and sustainable impact of GI, reflecting the need to rethink protection policies and strategies.

In terms of consumer perception, studies show significant variability. For example, Menozzi et al. (2022) demonstrate that products with GI labels, such as *Parmigiano Reggiano* and *Comté* cheeses, are perceived as of higher quality, but Goudis & Skuras (2021) show that awareness of GI logos among European consumers remains limited. This situation is accentuated by the ambiguity of terms such as "regionality", which mislead consumers, diminishing the impact of GI certifications (Herz et al., 2023).

The authenticity and traceability of GI products is another major challenge. Recent studies highlight the importance of advanced technologies, such as stable isotope analysis (Camin et al., 2016) and DNA-based methods for authenticating fermented products (Fusco et al., 2023). Di Pinto et al. (2019) highlight the risks of fraudulent substitution in e-commerce, underlining the need for transparency and

traceability throughout the supply chain, as suggested by Astill et al. (2019).

Economically, GI systems bring significant benefits to producers, increasing prices and access to international markets (European Commission, 2023). However, these advantages are accompanied by seasonal labor challenges, aspects detailed by Ikeshoji (2023), which emphasizes the importance of fair working conditions for the sustainability of these systems. In addition, integrating organic farming practices into GI systems is essential to protect the environment and ensure long-term viability (Dhiman, 2020).

Distribution models are evolving, with a significant shift towards direct sales and digitalization. González-Azcárate et al. (2021) demonstrate the added value of direct relations between producers and consumers, while Cristobal-Fransi et al. (2020) explore the untapped potential of e-commerce in the GI sector. This transition not only optimizes distribution, but also facilitates access to wider markets, and subsequently supporting the local economy.

Thus, in the current context, GI systems are not only symbols of tradition and quality, but also pillars of sustainable economic development and innovation. However, to ensure the viability of these systems, an integrated approach combining legal protection, consumer education, rigorous authentication and adaptation to new market models is needed.

Romania has a rich tradition in the production of food and beverages, many of which have a close connection with the regions they come from. Examples include cheeses (such as *Telemea de Ibănești* or *Brânză de burduf Păjorâta*), meat products (such as *Salam de Sibiu* or *Mici*), as well as traditional wines and spirits (e.g. *Tuica* and *Vin de Cotnari*). These products are protected and regulated by European Union legislation, which allows Romania to obtain the status of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PGI).

Studies show that the protection of traditional products through GIs has a significant impact on the economic development of regions. For example, a study highlights the importance of protected traditional products in increasing the added value of agricultural products, while promoting tourism and attracting funds for rural

development. In Romania, this process is supported by European policies that encourage the promotion and protection of local traditional products, contributing to the preservation of cultural diversity and the maintenance of regional identity (Stanciu, 2020).

The awareness and preferences of Romanian consumers for products with GI labels have also been investigated in a European context, being some of the most important aspects for the success of these certifications. A study by Petrescu et al. (2020) showed that in Romania, although there is a general appreciation for traditional products, consumer awareness of GI logos is still limited. Consumer education plays an important role in increasing the acceptance of these certifications (Goudis & Skuras, 2021; Menozzi et al., 2022). At the same time, Savelli et al. (2021) confirm that preferences for GI products are influenced by factors such as authenticity, transparency in the production process and provenance, aspects that are also essential for Romanian consumers.

Another important aspect within the GI system is the fight against fraud and the protection of the authenticity of traditional products. Romania, like other European countries, faces food fraud issues, such as the substitution of traditional products with inferior variants, a topic discussed in the works of Di Pinto et al. (2019) and Popping et al. (2022). A notable example is the fraud with *Tuica*, where cases of sale of alcoholic beverages that did not comply with the quality standards of the traditional product were reported, and consumers did not have the opportunity to verify their authenticity. Advanced technologies, such as DNA analysis (Fusco et al., 2023), could provide viable solutions for authenticating traditional Romanian products, such as *Telemea de Sibiu* or *Salam de Sibiu*, thus ensuring the protection of these products from fraudulent practices.

Traditional Romanian products, protected by GIs, have a significant economic impact on rural regions and local farmers. Economic studies suggest that by implementing the GI system, producers can obtain higher prices and benefit from international recognition, which helps to strengthen foreign markets. González-Azcárate et al. (2021) and Cristobal-Fransi et al. (2020) discuss the importance of direct selling and the digitalization of trade in increasing access to

international markets for traditional Romanian products, which can thus attract new segments of consumers interested in their quality and authenticity.

In this context, traditional Romanian products represent a concrete example of success and challenge within GI regulations, highlighting both the economic opportunities and the difficulties related to authentication, transparency and consumer education. As in other countries, an integrated approach is needed to promote traditional Romanian products, support local development and protect these products from fraudulent practices. It is important that public policies take into account market dynamics and support both innovation and the preservation of culinary traditions, while ensuring sustainability and environmental protection.

The certification and traceability of traditional food products have become essential in ensuring consumer trust and satisfaction in recent years. Research indicates that the dynamics of certification for traditional dairy products at the EU level, as well as in Romania, are integral to shaping consumer behavior and enhancing the market presence of these products (Defta (Osman) et al., 2024). In addition, studies have explored the impact of consumer preferences on various food categories, such as fish and fishery products, revealing that transparency and traceability significantly influence consumer choices (Nicolae et al., 2016). Furthermore, consumers' trust in food labeling plays a crucial role in their purchasing decisions, with studies highlighting how effective communication and mass media campaigns can influence food choices (Grapă et al., 2020; Defta et al., 2024). Similarly, research on consumer preferences for organic vegetable products has illustrated the role of socio-demographic factors in shaping food choices, pointing to the growing importance of consumer education and product transparency (Barbu et al., 2023; Defta et al., 2025). This paper aims to build on these insights by examining how labeling practices impact consumer decisions concerning traditional Romanian food products.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study sample consisted of 238 respondents, selected to reflect the socio-demographic diversity of the investigated population. The distribution by age groups showed that 71.1% of the respondents were between 20-30 years old, 12.1% were between 31-40 years old, 7.1% were between 41-50 years old, 7.5% were part of the 51-60 age category, and 2.1% mentioned that they are over 60 years old.

In terms of gender distribution, 68.9% of the participants were female, and 31.1% were male. The level of education of the respondents varied: 2.4% said they had secondary education, 30.7% high school education, 3.5% said they had professional studies. Over half of the respondents (52.4%) have university studies, and 11% have postgraduate studies.

In terms of monthly income, 33.6% of the participants earned less than 1500 RON, 21.4% were between 1501-3000 RON, about a fifth (20.6%) were in the monthly net income category 3001-5000 RON, 13.9% have a net income between 5001-8000 RON. Those with an income between 8001-10000 RON accounted for only 2.9%. and 20% had a monthly income of over 10000 RON.

The residence environment of the respondents was also analyzed, the results indicating that 68.9% of the participants came from urban areas, while 31.1% lived in rural areas.

This socio-demographic structure of the sample (Table 1) allows a detailed analysis of consumers' perceptions and behavior in relation to the research objectives.

The study used a cross-sectional, exploratory design that was correlational and descriptive in approach.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the purchasing behavior of consumers towards traditional food products, both Romanian and from other regions, while investigating the interest in information on labels and the level of trust given to them. The study aims to highlight the factors that influence purchasing decisions, as well as the degree of information and consumers' perception of the authenticity and quality of traditional products.

Table 1. Structure of the sample

Characteristics	Share in the Sample	N	Ratio
Gender	Female	164	68.9
	Male	74	31.1
Age (years)	20-30	169	71.1
	31-40	29	12.1
	41-50	17	7.1
	51-60	18	7.5
	over 60	5	2.1
Residence	Urban	164	68.9
	Rural	74	31.1
Education level	high school education	69	28.9
	post-secondary education	8	3.4
	university education	133	55.9
	postgraduate education	28	11.8
Household monthly net income (RON)	under 1500	83	34.9
	1501-3000	51	21.4
	3001-5000	49	20.6
	5501-8000	33	13.9
	8001-10000	7	2.9
	Over 10000	6	2.5
	No monthly net income	9	3.8

In order to achieve this goal, 4 objectives have been formulated:

O₁. Analysis of consumers' purchasing behavior towards traditional food products

Corresponding items:

Do you buy traditional food products (produced in Romania)?

Do you buy traditional food products (produced in the European Union – except Romania)?

Do you buy traditional food products produced in countries outside the European Union?

O₂. Investigation of consumer interest and behaviour in the labelling of traditional food products.

Corresponding items:

Do you read the information on the label of traditional products?

When buying a traditional food product, check the label: the list of ingredients; the weight of ingredients; substances that cause allergies or intolerance; energy value; the name or trade name and address of the manufacturer?

Do you check the shelf life when buying traditional Romanian food products?

O₃. Assessing consumers' level of confidence in the authenticity of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products

Corresponding items:

Do you consider the information on the labels of traditional Romanian food products to be truthful?

O₄. Testing the significance of differences between the categories of socio-demographic factors in relation to the items: *Do you buy traditional food products (produced in Romania)?* and *Do you think the information on the labels of traditional Romanian food products is truthful?*

For this objective, four null hypotheses were formulated for each item. These are presented in the research design (Figure 1).

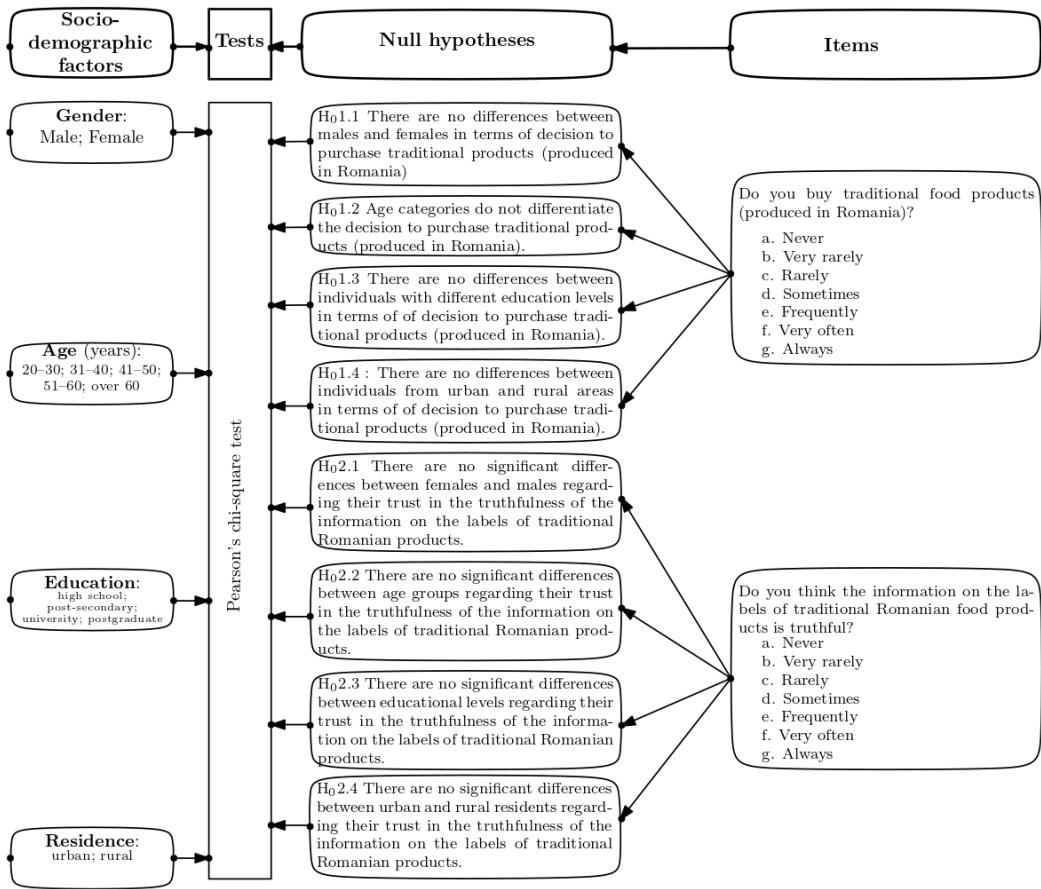


Figure 1. Flowchart for research (O4)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study was conducted on a sample of 238 Romanian consumers. The questionnaire was designed in alignment with the research objectives to facilitate both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses of the respondents' answers. Through descriptive statistical processing, the interpretation of the survey responses provided insights into the consumer profile, particularly in relation to the impact of promotions on food purchasing decisions.

O1. Analysis of consumers' purchasing behavior towards traditional food products

Do you buy traditional food products (produced in Romania)?

The results indicate that the majority of respondents purchase traditional food products produced in Romania with some regularity,

though the frequency varies significantly. Nearly half of the respondents (45.80%) buy these products sometimes, suggesting a moderate level of interest but not a strong commitment to regular consumption. A smaller yet notable percentage (15.97%) purchase them frequently, demonstrating a more consistent preference for such products, while only 7.98% always include them in their shopping habits, highlighting a dedicated consumer segment. On the other hand, a very small proportion of respondents either rarely (2.52%) or never (0.42%) purchase traditional Romanian food products, indicating minimal outright rejection. These findings suggest that while traditional Romanian food products are relatively well integrated into consumer habits, they are not necessarily the primary choice for most shoppers. The high percentage of respondents who buy them only occasionally may indicate

that factors such as price, availability, or marketing influence purchasing behavior. Previous studies have highlighted that consumer awareness, trust in certification labels, and perceived authenticity significantly impact the purchasing decision for traditional food products (Savelli et al., 2021). Strengthening promotional efforts, increasing awareness, and emphasizing authenticity or health benefits could potentially encourage more frequent consumption.

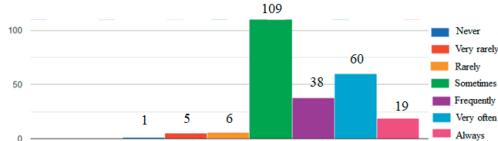


Figure 2. Frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania

Do you buy traditional food products (produced in the European Union - except Romania)?

The results indicate varying levels of consumer engagement with traditional food products produced in the European Union (excluding Romania). Among the 238 respondents, 2.1% reported that they never purchase such products, while 1.3% stated they very rarely do so. A slightly higher proportion, 7.1%, mentioned that they rarely buy these products, whereas the largest segment of respondents, 39.9%, indicated that they sometimes purchase them. Additionally, 8.0% stated they frequently buy such products, while 31.9% reported doing so very often. Finally, 9.7% of respondents claimed they always purchase traditional food products from the EU, except Romania (Figure 3).

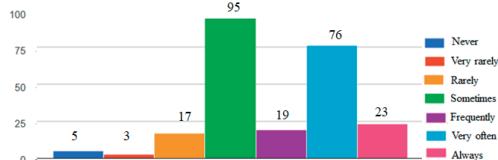


Figure 3. Frequency of purchasing traditional food products from the European Union (except Romania)

These findings suggest that a significant portion of Romanian consumers exhibit a moderate to high level of interest in traditional food products from other EU countries, with more than half of the respondents (57.6%) stating they purchase them frequently, very often, or always. This

consumer behavior aligns with previous research indicating that geographical indications (GIs) and protected designation of origin (PDO) labels contribute to consumer trust and willingness to buy traditional foods from different regions (Mazzocchi et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies have shown that European consumers value the authenticity and quality assurance provided by certification labels, which influences their purchasing decisions (Papoutsi, 2023; Lang & Conroy, 2022).

However, the presence of 10.5% respondents who rarely or never purchase such products suggests that certain barriers, such as price, availability, or preference for local Romanian products, may limit consumer interest in imported traditional foods (Goudis & Skuras, 2021). Consumer education regarding EU quality labels and their benefits may further enhance acceptance and trust in traditional food products from other member states (Petrescu et al., 2020).

Do you buy traditional food products produced in countries outside the European Union?

Among the 238 respondents, a notable 5.0% stated they never purchase such products, while 18.1% reported doing so very rarely. Similarly, 17.6% mentioned that they rarely buy traditional foods from non-EU countries. The largest segment, 44.5%, indicated that they sometimes purchase these products, showing a moderate level of engagement. Meanwhile, a smaller proportion of respondents - 3.4% frequently, 5.9% very often, and 5.5% always - reported a higher frequency of consumption (Figure 4).

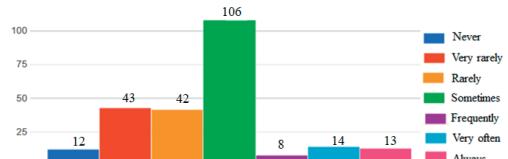


Figure 4. Frequency of purchasing traditional food products from non-EU countries

These findings suggest that while a portion of Romanian consumers is open to purchasing traditional food products from outside the EU, only 14.8% (frequently, very often, or always) show consistent buying habits, compared to 40.7% (never, very rarely, or rarely) who exhibit low interest. This could be attributed to limited availability, higher prices, and concerns over

authenticity, or a preference for European and Romanian-certified traditional foods (Papoutsi, 2023; Goudis & Skuras, 2021). Research has shown that geographical indications (GIs) and PDO labels play a crucial role in consumer trust and purchasing decisions (Lang & Conroy, 2022), and the lack of familiar certifications on non-EU products may reduce their attractiveness to Romanian consumers.

Furthermore, studies indicate that consumer education and awareness of quality certification labels influence trust in foreign food products (Petrescu et al., 2020). This suggests that better marketing and clearer labeling of traditional foods from outside the EU may enhance their acceptance among European consumers, particularly if linked to recognized international quality certifications (Mazzocchi et al., 2022).

O₂. Investigation of consumer interest and behaviour in the labelling of traditional food products.

Do you read the information on the label of traditional products?

A significant portion of respondents (66.97%) demonstrates a positive attitude toward reading product labels, with 16.81% always checking the information and 13.45% doing so very often. Additionally, 35.71% of respondents occasionally review the labels, reflecting a moderate engagement with product details (Figure 5).

On the other hand, a smaller segment of consumers (15.12%) rarely or never engages with labels, indicating room for improvement in consumer behavior. These findings suggest that while a majority of consumers show awareness regarding product information, more emphasis on educating consumers and clearer labeling could enhance trust and purchasing behavior (Savelli et al., 2021).

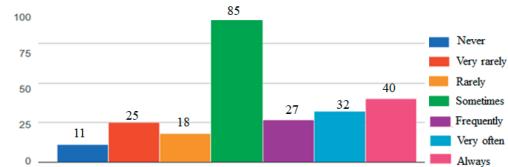


Figure 5. Consumer habits regarding reading labels on traditional products

When buying a traditional food product, check the label: the list of ingredients; the weight of ingredients; substances that cause allergies or intolerance; energy value; the name or trade name and address of the manufacturer?

The results show varied levels of attention to specific information on traditional food product labels. For the list of ingredients, a majority of 45.79% of respondents sometimes, frequently, or always check the label, with 23.73% always doing so. A similar trend is observed for the weight of ingredients, where 51.26% check the label sometimes or more often, while 38.99% never or rarely do so. When it comes to allergens or intolerance-causing substances, 49.57% of respondents sometimes or more frequently check this information, although 31.93% rarely or never do so. For energy value, 43.28% of respondents read this information with moderate frequency, with 29.41% never or rarely doing so. The manufacturer's name and address also show a significant engagement, as 50.42% check the label at least sometimes, while 27.69% rarely or never check (Table 2). Overall, there seems to be a moderate level of consumer awareness regarding key label information, but improvements in consumer education and clearer labeling practices could further enhance label scrutiny and purchasing confidence (Savelli et al., 2021).

Table 2. Label information checked when purchasing traditional food products

	Never	Very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very often	Always
List of ingredients	16	20	14	73	19	40	56
Weight of ingredients	30	35	17	85	13	27	31
Substances that cause allergies or intolerance	44	32	24	62	8	33	35
Energy value	35	26	19	72	12	28	46
Name or trade name and address of the manufacturer	34	23	20	68	13	39	44

Do you check the shelf life when buying traditional Romanian food products?

The results reveal that when purchasing traditional Romanian food products, a significant majority of consumers pay attention to the shelf life. Among the 238 respondents, 62.2% stated that they always check the shelf life, while 13.0% do so very often, indicating a strong habit of checking expiration dates. Additionally, 10.5% reported checking the shelf life frequently, suggesting that checking product dates is a regular practice for a substantial portion of respondents. A smaller proportion of respondents, 12.6%, check less often, with 1.3% never or very rarely checking it.

This high percentage of respondents who consistently check the shelf life aligns with previous studies indicating that expiration date verification is one of the most important factors for consumers in ensuring food safety and quality (Di Pinto et al., 2019). Moreover, this behavior reflects a growing consumer awareness of the importance of product freshness and its direct link to quality, particularly for traditional food products, which may often be seen as more perishable due to their natural or artisanal production methods (Popping et al., 2022). The findings suggest that consumers are diligent in evaluating product validity, which could also indicate a higher level of trust in traditional food labels when coupled with verified certifications (Figure 6).

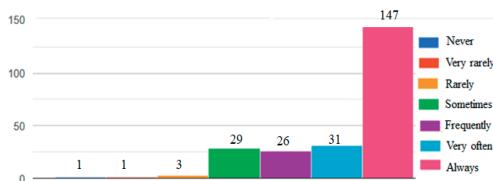


Figure 6. Consumer behavior in checking shelf life of traditional Romanian food products

O3. Assessing consumers' level of confidence in the authenticity of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products

Do you consider the information on the labels of traditional Romanian food products to be truthful?

The results of this item show a mixed perception regarding the truthfulness of information on labels of traditional Romanian food products. Among the 238 respondents, 12.2% (n = 29)

disagreed or completely disagreed with the statement that the information on the labels is truthful, indicating a certain level of skepticism. On the other hand, 49.6% (n = 115) respondents expressed a neutral stance, suggesting that they are neither confident nor doubtful about the authenticity of the information presented on labels.

A larger proportion of respondents, 48.7% (n = 115), agreed or completely agreed that the information on labels is truthful, which indicates a general trust in the accuracy of labeling. This trend could reflect the growing awareness and recognition of certification schemes, as well as efforts by Romanian producers to comply with quality control and transparency standards. However, the neutral responses highlight that there may be some level of uncertainty among consumers, which suggests that further efforts are needed to enhance consumer confidence in label veracity (Goudis & Skuras, 2021). The trust in product labels might also vary depending on the visibility and effectiveness of geographical indication (GI) schemes and other quality certifications (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Perception of the truthfulness of information on traditional Romanian food product labels

O4. Testing the significance of differences between the categories of socio-demographic factors in relation to the items:

a. Do you buy traditional food products (produced in Romania)?

H_0 1.1. There are no differences between males and females in terms of decision to purchase traditional products (produced in Romania).

The results of the Pearson Chi-Square test indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between males and females regarding their decision to purchase traditional food products produced in Romania. The chi-square value ($\chi^2_{[6]} = 3.004$, $p = 0.808$) suggests that the observed differences in purchasing behavior across gender groups are likely due to chance rather than a meaningful association.

Additionally, the effect size measured by Cramer's V (0.112) indicates a very weak association between gender and the decision to purchase traditional Romanian food products. According to conventional interpretation guidelines, a Cramer's V value below 0.1-0.2 represents a negligible or weak effect (Cohen, 1988). Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, confirming that gender does not play a significant role in influencing the purchase of traditional Romanian food products. This aligns with existing research suggesting that other factors - such as cultural values, product awareness, and personal preferences - may have a stronger impact on purchasing decisions than gender alone (Mazzocchi et al., 2022).

The contingency table 2 (gender) x 7 (frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania) corresponding to the Pearson chi-square test is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency of purchase traditional products (produced in Romania) in relation to gen

Frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania							Total Lines		
Never	Very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very often	Always			
Gen	Female	0	3	4	75	27	43	12	164
	Male	1	2	2	34	11	17	7	74
Total lines		1	5	6	109	38	60	19	238

H₀1.2. Age categories do not differentiate the decision to purchase traditional products (produced in Romania).

The results of the Pearson chi-square test ($\chi^2_{[24]} = 93.94$, $p = 3.177 \times 10^{-10}$) indicate a statistically significant association between age categories and the decision to purchase traditional products produced in Romania. Since the p-value is much lower than the conventional threshold of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis, meaning that age significantly influences purchasing decisions.

Additionally, the Cramér's V effect size of 0,314 suggests a moderate association between the two variables (Cohen, 1988). This implies that age plays an important role in shaping consumer preferences for traditional Romanian products, aligning with previous studies that highlight demographic factors as key determinants in food purchasing behavior (Menozzi et al., 2022; Savelli et al., 2021).

The contingency table 5 (age) x 7 (frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania) corresponding to the Pearson chi-square test is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of purchase traditional products (produced in Romania) in relation to age

Frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania							Total Lines		
	Never	Very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very often	Always		
Age (years)	20-30	1	3	3	86	16	53	7	169
	31-40	0	1	1	12	10	3	2	29
	41-50	0	0	0	5	9	3	0	17
	51-60	0	1	1	6	3	0	7	18
	over 60	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	5
Total lines	1	5	6	109	38	60	19	238	

H₀1.3. There are no differences between individuals with different education levels in terms of decision to purchase traditional products (produced in Romania).

The Pearson chi-square test results ($\chi^2_{[18]} = 40.45$, $p=0.002$) indicate a statistically significant relationship between education level and the decision to purchase traditional Romanian products. Since the p-value is below 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis, meaning education influences purchasing behavior. The Cramér's V value of 0,238 suggests a weak to moderate association.

The contingency table 4 (education level) x 7 (frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania) corresponding to the Pearson chi-square test is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Frequency of purchase traditional products (produced in Romania) in relation to education level

Frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania							Total Lines		
	Never	Very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very often	Always		
Education level	high school education	0	1	1	29	13	19	6	69
	post-secondary education	0	1	0	4	0	1	2	8
	university education	1	3	5	67	14	38	5	133
	postgraduate education	0	0	0	9	11	2	6	28
Total lines	1	5	6	109	38	60	19	238	

H₀1.4. There are no differences between individuals from urban and rural areas in terms of decision to purchase traditional products (produced in Romania).

The Pearson chi-square test results ($\chi^2_{[6]} = 13.69$, $p = 0.033$) indicate a statistically significant relationship between residence (urban vs. rural) and the decision to purchase traditional Romanian products. Since the p-value is below 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that individuals from urban and rural differ in their purchasing behavior for traditional products.

The Cramér's V effect size of 0.24 suggests a weak to moderate association between these variables. This result aligns with prior research indicating that rural consumers are often more familiar with and inclined to buy traditional food products due to cultural heritage and accessibility (Cavallo et al., 2018).

These findings highlight the importance of tailoring marketing and educational campaigns based on regional consumer preferences to enhance the appeal of traditional products in both urban and rural residences.

The contingency table 2 (residence) x 7 (frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania) corresponding to the Pearson chi-square test is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Frequency of purchase traditional products (produced in Romania) in relation to residence

		Frequency of purchasing traditional food products from Romania							Total Lines
		Never	Very rarely	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Very often	Always	
Residence	urban	0	2	5	79	30	40	8	164
	rural	1	3	1	30	8	20	11	74
Total lines	1	5	6	109	38	60	19	238	

b. Do you think the information on the labels of traditional Romanian food products is truthful?
 $H_02.1$. There are no significant differences between females and males regarding their trust in the truthfulness of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products.

The Pearson chi-square test results ($\chi^2_{[4]} = 1.642$, $p = 0.801$) indicate that there is no statistically significant association between gender and trust in the truthfulness of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products. Since the p-value is much higher than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, meaning that males and females exhibit similar levels of trust in label information.

Additionally, the Cramér's V effect size of 0.083 suggests a very weak association between gender and trust levels, reinforcing the conclusion that gender does not play a notable role in shaping consumers' perceptions of label truthfulness.

This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that trust in food labelling tends to be influenced more by factors such as prior experience, knowledge, and brand reputation rather than demographic variables like gender (Papoutsi, 2023; Lang & Conroy, 2022).

$H_02.2$. There are no significant differences between age groups regarding their trust in the truthfulness of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products.

The Pearson chi-square test results ($\chi^2_{[16]} = 15.385$, $p = 0.497$) indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between age

groups and trust in the truthfulness of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products. The high p-value (greater than 0.05) suggests that age does not significantly influence consumers' perceptions of label truthfulness.

Furthermore, the Cramér's V effect size of 0.127 points to a weak association, reinforcing the idea that trust in labelling is relatively consistent across different age groups. These findings align with previous research suggesting that factors such as personal experiences with traditional products, media influence, and overall awareness of food certifications have a greater impact on trust than sociodemographic characteristics like age (Lang & Conroy, 2022; Papoutsi, 2023).

$H_02.3$. There are no significant differences between educational levels regarding their trust in the truthfulness of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products.

The Pearson chi-square test results ($\chi^2_{[12]} = 7.789$, $p = 0.801$) show no statistically significant association between education level and trust in the truthfulness of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products. The high p-value (above 0.05) suggests that education level does not play a determining role in shaping consumers' perceptions of label credibility.

Additionally, the Cramér's V effect size of 0.104 suggests a very weak association between education level and trust in labelling. These results imply that trust in product labels is likely influenced more by other factors, such as previous experiences with traditional food, cultural perceptions, or broader consumer attitudes toward food certification (Lang & Conroy, 2022; Papoutsi, 2023).

$H_02.4$. There are no significant differences between urban and rural residents regarding their trust in the truthfulness of the information on the labels of traditional Romanian products.

The Pearson chi-square test ($\chi^2_{[4]} = 5.047$, $p = 0.282$) shows no significant difference in trust toward the truthfulness of information on traditional Romanian product labels between urban and rural residents. The small effect size (Cramer's V = 0.146) further supports the weak association between these variables.

The contingency table data corresponding to the Pearson chi-square test is presented in Table 7, for all socio-demographic factors.

Table 7. Perception of the truthfulness of information on traditional Romanian food product labels in relation to socio-demographic factors

		Perception of the truthfulness of information on traditional Romanian food product labels					Total Lines
		Completely disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Completely agree	
Gender	Female	2	12	70	61	19	164
	Male	0	4	35	28	7	74
Age	20-30	1	8	77	64	19	169
	31-40	0	4	11	10	4	29
	41-50	1	3	6	6	1	17
	51-60	0	1	8	8	1	18
Education level	over 60	0	0	3	1	1	5
	high school education	1	3	38	22	5	69
	post-secondary education	0	1	4	2	1	8
	university education	1	9	53	54	16	133
Residence	postgraduate education	0	3	10	11	4	28
	urban	2	14	69	59	20	164
	rural	0	2	36	30	6	74
Total columns		2	16	105	89	26	238

The study highlights the growing importance of transparency, certification, and labeling in influencing consumer behavior towards traditional Romanian food products. As demonstrated by the research on the dynamics of cattle livestock and milk production in Romania (Defta et al., 2023), the agricultural sector plays a vital role in the supply of quality traditional products. Furthermore, consumer confidence in food labeling systems is important, as it directly affects purchasing decisions (Grapă et al., 2022). The findings from the dynamics of certification for traditional dairy products in the EU, especially in Romania, emphasize the need for effective certification processes to ensure product authenticity and quality (Defta (Osman) et al., 2024). These findings are supported by studies on the resilience of Romania's milk sector, which highlight both the challenges and opportunities in sustaining high-quality food production (Hodoşan et al., 2023; Maloş et al., 2014; Maloş & Maloş 2016, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of consumer behavior towards traditional Romanian products reveals valuable insights for marketing strategies. Most consumers purchase traditional Romanian products with moderate to high frequency,

while interest in similar products from other EU countries or beyond is considerably lower. This highlights the strong preference for locally

produced goods, emphasizing the importance of authenticity and origin in marketing approaches. Socio-demographic factors also play a role in purchasing behavior. While gender does not significantly influence decisions, age and education levels do. Older and more educated consumers show a greater inclination towards traditional products, suggesting that marketing efforts should be tailored to these segments. Additionally, urban and rural consumers exhibit different purchasing patterns, which calls for targeted messaging - urban consumers may respond more to health and sustainability aspects, while rural consumers might be more influenced by tradition and authenticity.

Trust in labeling is another important aspect. A significant portion of consumers remain neutral regarding the truthfulness of information on product labels, yet many actively check details before making a purchase. This indicates a need for greater transparency, clear certifications, and educational campaigns to reinforce consumer confidence. Furthermore, the fact that most buyers verify the shelf life of traditional Romanian products reflects a cautious and quality-conscious approach, reinforcing the importance of clear and informative labelling. To enhance market positioning, marketing strategies should focus on promoting authenticity, strengthening consumer trust through transparency, and tailoring communication efforts based on demographic factors. By addressing these aspects effectively, producers and retailers can strengthen consumer

loyalty and encourage a broader adoption of traditional Romanian products.

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