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# READING BEFORE BUYING - EXPLORING CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD INFORMATIVE FUNCTION OF PACKAGING

## ABSTRACT

Oftentimes, packaging is the first and only marketing tool consumers encounter before a purchase, therefore it is considered to be the most important communication and informative tool (Behaegel, 1991; Peters, 1994). The aim of the research is to better understand food label usage of consumers. To make the identification of behaviour patterns possible and to understand the way consumers use labels on packaging **netnography** has been chosen as the research method. We identified market factors in our research which result in label use. Based on our results, two large consumer segments were identified: conscious and non-conscious consumer behaviours. Reading information on packaging can be classified in two ways, according to method of use (superficial, conditional, incidental) and place (home, or point of sale).

**KEYWORDS:** *netnography, food label, packaging, consumer behaviour*

## INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

Have you ever stood in front of a shelf deep in your thoughts about which cheese should get in your trolley? ‘*There are about 15 types of cottage cheese*’<sup>1</sup>, and you are welcome to choose. You take one in your hand, turn it, look at which producer has made it, then look at the country of origin on another packaging, to finally settle for a third one since that one contains no artificial colours. How do consumers use labels on food packaging while they are out shopping? How much and what type of information are they looking for? A reply to these

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<sup>1</sup> [http://homas.blog.hu/2010/04/15/jo\\_nagyot\\_hazudik\\_a\\_cimken\\_a\\_vezpremtelj](http://homas.blog.hu/2010/04/15/jo_nagyot_hazudik_a_cimken_a_vezpremtelj)

questions comes from a qualitative investigation of consumer food label usage behaviour, which is the topic of this paper.

Nowadays **food consumers** orientate themselves in order to make an informed decision therefore an investigation of information search with food products has a high relevance and is an interesting research topic (Moorman, 1990; 1996). Furthermore, the purchase of food is considered to be a high involvement decision, due to food industry, veterinary health, labelling scandals, health-conscious diets and environmental considerations (Lehota, 2001; Hofmeister, 2007; Simon, 2009).

The **aim of the research** is threefold. First goal, is to better understand information search behaviour and food label usage of consumers. The informative function of packaging is dwarfed by design in practice in corporate decision-making despite being essential for informing consumers at points of sale. The practical aim of the research is an understanding of labelling on packaging through the eyes of consumers, making it possible for corporate managers to plan packaging more easily and position products more accurately. The research also has a social-welfare goal insofar as it helps understand consumers' information seeking behaviour. Creating the necessary legislation for informing consumers and promoting access to product information is a task of the state. Consequently, the knowledge of consumers' information seeking behaviour is an essential precondition for legislators. Through a better understanding of behaviour patterns it becomes possible to make decisions about compulsory and voluntary information items and draw up recommendations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Packaging as a marketing tool**

Although the literature enumerates several categorisations of the **functions of packaging**, most of the sources agree that the main tasks of packages are logistical, marketing and managerial (Robertson, 2006; Prendergast, Pitt, 1996; Sándor, 2006; Rundh, 2005). Our focus is on marketing functions.

Figure 1 – Functions of packaging



Researchers are in unison as far as the increasing importance of packaging is concerned (Ampuero, Vila, 2006; Underwood, 2003, Underwood, Klein, Burke, 2001). Early studies focus primarily on the general features and roles of packaging design (Cheskin, 1971; Faison, 1961; 1962; Schucker, 1959), its communicational role (Gardner, 1967; Lincoln, 1965), or how it influences a brand (Banks, 1950; Brown, 1958; McDaniel, Baker, 1977; Miaoulis, d'Amato, 1978).

The **design elements** of packaging which raise attention have been categorised in a number of studies (Hine, 1995; Ampuero, Vila, 2006; Underwood, Klein, Burke, 2001; Silayoi, Speece, 2007), enabling readers to differentiate graphic and structural; visual and verbal elements. On many occasions the first and only marketing tool a consumer is faced before purchasing is packaging, therefore instead of advertising it is thought to be the most important **communication tool** (Behaegel, 1991; Peters, 1994). Packaging reaches every consumer, it is an active player of purchase and is present at the critical moment. Consumers touch it, take it and return home with it, it is present in their everyday lives at the point of sale, on the way back home, and while the product is stored, opened, applied, re-closed and disposed of (Deasy, 2000). Since consumers usually appreciate a hands-on experience more, using packages a more intimate relationship can be built between brand and consumers (Lindsay, 1997). The consequence of the communication function is to **gain consumer trust**, as they will only purchase the products which communicate product qualities properly and are authentic.

Other studies regard packaging an extrinsic cue such as price or brand and have measured its impact on the **quality perception of products** (Bonner, Nelson, 1985; Rigaux-Bricmont, 1982). Results show that consumers are more likely to use packaging as an extrinsic attribute with products they have no experience with, i.e. the product's intrinsic features are unknown to them (Zeithaml, 1988). Still other research has concentrated on how consumer attention is raised and evaluated (Garber, Raymond, Jones, 2000; Plasschaet, 1995; Pieters, Warlop, 1999) by packaging size (Wansink, 1996) and the impact of the visual appearance and design of packaging (Mitev, Horváth, 2003). Often referred to as the silent salesman, packaging is a means of 'eye-contact communication' as it communicates with consumers through shapes and colours (Sándor, 2006).

Packaging is at the same time a **promotion and sales stimulating** tool suitable for transmitting offers and advertisements promoted in other channels — it may be the source of game rules, contacts, and presents. Catching attention is key with mass products as they must stand out from the massive merchandise somehow.

Consumers do not only want to purchase a product, but obtain information about them as well, for which the **informative function** (also known as labelling) of packaging is responsible. Our study focuses on this function of packaging.

### **Product labelling – the informative function of packaging**

Product packaging is the source of a range of information about food. According to the Food Standards Agency in the UK the term food label 'refers to all information on the packaging', including statements, ingredient lists and best before dates (FSA, 2007). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, one of the biggest specialised organisations of the UN, Food labelling is 'the primary means of communication between the producer and seller of food on one hand, and the purchaser and consumer on the other (FAO/WHO, 2007). Labelling on packaging refers to, from an advertising point of view, a communication tool between producer or seller and consumer including all compulsory and

voluntary information found on product packaging, which may be brand name and sign and descriptive or classification information.

In scientific publications the first definition of labelling is found in Dameron (1944). He differentiates between informative, descriptive and grade labels. Informative/Information labelling is 'the practice of marking merchandise, the tags attached to it or the containers in which it is packed for sale at retail with names, marks, descriptive materials, grade designations or other symbols indicating quality (...) and use of the merchandise'. Part of it is a descriptive label, with written or illustrative material designed to inform prospective purchasers about some or all of the characteristics of the product, giving details of quality, desirability and conditions and methods of use. Grade labels make it easier for consumers based on some product attribute to compare and categorise a product and usually a mark, a symbol given by a responsible organisation certifies that the product or company meets certain conditions established out of a specific goal. A third type of label is a brand label, including names and symbols which indicate a product's origin, identify producer or distributor and indicate quality in a general sense. Brand label is not presented in this paper in greater detail due to the extensive literature there has been written about it.

Using earlier definitions in this paper the following **definition** is proposed: *information content found on packaging, also known as labelling is a communicative tool between producer/distributor and consumer, including all compulsory and voluntary information content on or next to product packaging, amongst which a brand name and sign, descriptive or grade information can be distinguished.*

The information displayed is governed by legislation and it includes information about ingredients, nutritional and energy values as well as certifications, organisations' logos environment and health related statements, country of origin (Papp-Váry, 2007), and country of destination (Malota, Nádasí, 2007). Besides this essential information enabling them to choose the right food, consumers more and more frequently make their purchase decisions on impulse based on point of sale advertisements (Józsa, Keller, 2008) and packaging. If we regard the informative function (signs, symbols, colours and information) as a decisive source of consumer decision-making, it is important in the marketing and corporate management tool inventory, provided consumers understand background information and do not find it misleading (D'Souza, 2004).

Labels may be **grouped** according to the obligation of what to display. Compulsory information includes facts of ingredients, amount, sell-by date, special conditions, name of producer, distributor, origin, nutrition facts and energy value. Nutrition Facts Labels, whose stricter regulation was started in the early 1990s when Directive 90/496/EEC on nutrition labelling for food was adopted in the European Union, is one of the most researched compulsory element. Several studies have experimented with the different layouts of nutrition facts labels trying to find an optimal layout (Humphries, 1998; Sadler, 1999; Shannon, 1994; Williams, 1993). According to US regulations a nutrition facts panel must be displayed, which became mandatory when the National Labelling and Education Act (NLEA) in 1990 entered into force (Shank, 1992; Petrucelli, 1996). Using labelling, although a bigger effort from companies, has long-term benefits through quality improvement because of health preservation, compulsory information display and comparability (Silverglade, 1996).

There is also a possibility to display voluntary information on packaging, and literature mostly deals with claims concerning nutrient content and health as their EU level regulation is an ongoing procedure at present (Biacs, 2009). Voluntary information includes all statements or illustrations (such as images, graphics or symbolic illustrations), which are not compulsory by any community or national legislation and which state, or suggest that the food has special attributes. There are two types of it, one is nutrient content claims, stating that the food will have certain specific favourable properties from a nutrition point of view. The other group is that of health claims, which may be a functional attribute, a relationship between an ingredient and health or a statement connected to a disease.

There is some more voluntary information, to which, if they do not belong to any of the above categories, apart from general provisions of regulations nothing further applies, although there have been steps in the EU to regulate them as well (FSA, 2006). These include special offers or promotions, marketing expressions/statements (e.g. 'new formula' or '2in1'), recommendations, marks of companies approving the product, and certifications (see for example the signs of organic foods, or Fair Trade labels).

## **The reason and method of using labelling**

A range of research has studied the role of labels and the impact they make on consumers (Feick, Herrmann, Warland, 1986; Mueller, 1991; Caswell, 1992). When asked about it, consumers say that half of them often read labelling, a large proportion of them sometimes read it. Food labels, as sources of information about food fare well (11%) when it comes where consumers obtain information about food from. Other such sources include school (34%), newspapers, magazines, books (20.3%), parents (13%) and the media (8.8%) (Abbott, 1997, Byrd-Bredbenner, Wong, Cottee, 2000). Most studies describing labelling use argue that consumers need labels on products (Lenahan et al., 1973; Daly, 1976; Bender, Derby, 1992), and judge products without nutrition facts information unfavourably (Frieden, 1981; Huber, McCann, 1982; Dick, Chakravarti, Biehal, 1990; Zarkin, Anderson, 1992; Burke, 1996). 55.5% of consumers would like to see more extensive and detailed information on packaging (Abbott, 1997).

The main reason for using labels is that consumers want to avoid negative effects. They want to know what they eat, they want to make the most of the selection available, or they follow a certain diet. 40% read labels to get information about what the product contains and what nutritional value it has, while 24% read it to make the most of the food. 9% are forced to do so due to following a specific diet, 7% use it for comparing different brands, 3% read it when purchasing new products and 1% expect the reinforcement of information heard earlier (Shine, O'Reilly, O'Sullivan, 1997). Reading labels affects purchase decisions, as 89% are willing to change their decisions after having read the label (Shine, O'Reilly, O'Sullivan, 1997). Other sources say that 26% are always, 66% are sometimes and 8% are never affected by labelling (Byrd-Bredbenner, Wong, Cottee, 2000).

The types of information looked for include nutritional value (37%), artificial additives (28%), ingredients (17%), sell-by date (12%), price and brand (4%), place of origin and amount (3%), suggestions for use and environmental information (1-2%). Somehow contradictory to that when choosing food the following factors play a role in this order: habit, brand, price, nutritional value, taste and quality (Shine, O'Reilly, O'Sullivan, 1997).



Consumers on numerous occasions do not use labelling as it is sufficient to read it once and they remember it later (Kreuter et al., 1997; Miller, Probart, Achterberg, 1997). Besides, its use is complicated (Wandel, 1999), or the format is conducive to misinterpretation (Levy, Fein, Schucker, 1991; Levy, Fein, 1998; Burton, Andrews, 1996), technical terms make it more difficult to use (Eves et al., 1994), time is too little, or an inappropriate display and label may also hinder reading labelling (Miller, Probart, Achterberg, 1997). Besides, knowing a product and the frequency of purchasing certain products is in inverse proportion to reading frequency.

Studies comparing types of labelling show that consumers tend to pay more attention to information warning for negative, or harmful consequence than positive (Burton, Biswas, 1993; Moorman, 1990). If there is a statement on nutritional value displayed on the product, it may seem a time-saving and easy to read solution, but consumers may regard it a marketing ploy (Reid, Hendricks, 1993). Researchers widely agree on the usefulness of a nutritional fact label and suggest that it is of great help for consumers when choosing healthier food options (Kreuter et al., 1997; Neuhouser, Kristal, Patterson, 1999) and affects the relationship between diet-oriented consumption and purchasing (Ippolito, Mathios, 1990; Jensen, Kesevan, 1993), although there exist some research results contradicting this (Ford et al., 1996; Keller et al., 1997; Mazis, Raymond 1997; Szykman, Bloom, Levy, 1997). If there is a panel with specific details available, statements are not used (Ford et al., 1996; Garretson, Burton, 2000), but others argue that statements motivate consumers to have them proved so they do read the panel too (Roe, Levy, Derby, 1999).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

However there are many international studies dealing with consumer label usage, there are few about hungarian consumes. In this paper we intend to examine the way hungarian consumers use informative function of packaging. Our research focus is on why and how do consumers use labels.

To make the identification of behaviour patterns possible and to understand the way consumers use labels on packaging **netnography** has been chosen as the research method.

which adapts ethnography research techniques to the examination of the culture of online communities (Kozinets, 1999, 2002, 2006; Langer, Beckman, 2005; Maclaran, Catterall, 2002). This method can be effectively used in this area since there are plenty of data available on food buying behaviour. Due to increasing Internet penetration consumers use online communities and forums to discuss their purchase experience, opinion about food products and food choice preferences.

As the source of the examination blog posts and related comments were used on a Hungarian consumer protection blog published between December 2009 and June 2010<sup>2</sup>. Data collection took place in June 2010. After selecting the relevant sections of sources (42,000 characters) they were labelled and sorted in order that the patterns can be explored with the help of a qualitative analytical program (Nvivo 7 Program Package).

## **FINDINGS**

Presenting the results was done as usual with qualitative research, by using quotes. The examples are given only for illustration as (due to the nature of the method, i.e. comments coming from anonymous individuals) we were not able to establish what kind of consumer a statement belongs to, therefore it is only patterns that can be observed.

Before the main analysis we analysed the words and terms used by the bloggers and commenters. Technical terms are rarely used and products are more often described with the slang and standard terms of informal language use. The expressions consumers use, refer to the general features of the food, its ingredients or its origin. Among those the most important ones are the latter two, i.e. origin and ingredients but it very often depends on the product category what exactly consumers will read. 'Good' food is described as healthy, natural, fresh, authentic, traditional and originating from Hungary (Made in Hungary), while 'bad' food is thought to be unnatural, of low quality, of low nutritional value and imported.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hoxa.hu/>, <http://forum.index.hu/Topic/showTopicList>, <http://homar.blog.hu/>

There are expressions in the source text referring to ingredients, marketing notices, fantasy names and places of origin. Also, there are accurate expressions and general everyday vocabulary, sometimes slang words (a characteristic of online environment). This varying language use is explained by the different levels of prior knowledge and involvement. Consumers with more accurate knowledge or higher involvement will use more accurate and more technical terms, while those with a low level of knowledge will use general expressions and slang terms. Label use is noted in both groups. Oftentimes umbrella terms are used, when the exact content meant is not clarified, which was the case in many times.

### **Market environment indicating label usage**

It is not an easy task for consumers to select the right food during their purchase, since assortment is both becoming wider and is undergoing continuous change. On the one hand it is good as it gives an opportunity for selecting the best possible product, on the other hand it may be a burden as sometimes you have to be very smart to have the right food in your basket in the face of the assortment and all the marketing ploys.

**Figure 2 – Marketing environment**

MARKET ENVIRONMENT

*'There are about 15 types of cottage cheese on the shelf. Help yourself.'*  
*'Like this, everybody had a chance to decide if they'd eat it or not.'*  
*'so what, marketing is a profession and slowly so is shopping'*

In order to make an optimal decision consumers use different decision making mechanisms. Beharrell and Denison's (1995) earlier research suggests that consumer food purchase is a low involvement decision. It still holds for a number of consumers nowadays as they do not regard meals and food purchases an important task just something unavoidable, and incidentally, essential for survival. Juhl and Poulsen (2000), however, argue that food purchase is a high involvement decision for consumers and it is underpinned by numerous consumer opinions saying that sufficient time and energy should be devoted to selecting food as it is one of the most important decisions in life. Both consumer attitudes could be identified on the basis of our source text. Conscious consumption leads to increased information hunger, something not at all characteristic of non-conscious consumers.

**Figure 3 – Two segments**

CONSCIOUS PURCHASE	NON-CONSCIOUS PURCHASE
<i>'a conscious purchase is obligatory' 'being a conscious shopper [...]'</i>	<i>'there are people for whom food is not a central issue [...]. some people will just eat because they're hungry and take pleasure in other things than that'</i>

Conscious shoppers argue that they are entitled to purchasing quality food. Nevertheless, they often have a low self-confidence along with prior knowledge and beliefs from unauthentic sources. They need information and unless they get it in the appropriate form and manner they give an emotional response together with a sense of helplessness, disappointment and strong feelings.

**Figure 4 – Emotional response**

HELPLESSNESS, DISAPPOINTMENT, STRONG FEELINGS
<i>'you have be like a detective if you want to find food that may be authentic. And there are less and less of those. Bread is plastic, milk is plastic, meat is plastic. Even ham isn't real, although it sometimes appears to be. The larger portion of all food is plastic. And they even explain to you that they put all that shit in so it's better. Bullshit.'</i>
<i>'I'm so fed up with having to spend the larger part of shopping with decoding the small print labels of all that shit.'</i>

Not everybody is in the position to be able to be a conscious shopper; sometimes you just do not have the possibility to think about which excellent product to put in your basket. The reason for non-conscious purchases is mostly lack of time, the result of hard work and a hectic lifestyle. For others conscious purchases would not be worth even if they had the time since their decision is defined by other preferences, e.g. taste or the look of the product. If the assumed quality of the product is low then there may not be a conscious decision, either, as it is not worth obtaining information about food products failing to meet needs.

**Figure 5 – Non-use of labels**

LACK OF TIME	<i>'Conscious shopping is for time millionaires and the unemployed'</i>
OTHER IMPORTANT FACTOR	<i>'you leave home in the morning, have no time for shopping, come home in the evening, pop in that supermarket close to your route for home, open 24 hours a day and selling not very shitty stuff and staff are not that rude and the whole thing is not that dilapidated and get what they sell there.'</i>

UNNECESSARY  
ACTIVITY

*'It's not worth for me. Whatever tastes good, get it and goodbye.'*

## Explanations and characteristics of information search behaviour

The reasons for reading labels can be divided into four groups. Consumers have a general antipathy towards new and seemingly 'unnatural' products. They have no specific counter-argument but express their contempt mostly towards the ingredients of a product. Also, they are afraid that the product will cause a disease, or they obtain information out of prevention. In a small number of cases labels are read out of patriotism and protecting local farmers, meaning that these consumers will primarily purchase products of Hungarian origin.

Figure 6 – Reason of label usage

GENERAL ANTIPATHY AND FEAR	THE POSSIBILITY OF DEVELOPING A DISEASE
<i>'Why buy some shit polluted by stabilisators and guar gum?'</i> <i>'it'd be so great if u didn't have to go around scared of what shitty additives they put in your food'</i>	<i>'your child could get ill from it'</i> <i>'well, you may develop liver cancer or leukaemia in a few years' but who cares, there're so many of us right?'</i>
PATRIOTISM	EXISTING ILLNESS
<i>'Those who want to buy Hungarian products, want to do so because it is genuinely Hungarian, because it's not being transported there from 7000 miles and Hungarian farmers make a living out of it and do not have be on the lookout for the benefits'</i>	<i>'I haven't really bought anything containing too many suspicious "E" letter stuff so far either, but now on the recovery from a serious illness I pay even more attention to what I eat.'</i>

Label use can be differentiated in terms of its way and its place. There are consumers who regard label reading as part of the purchase process and never buy anything without first having read the label. Reading is, however, more frequent when purchasing a product or product category for the first time, consumers tend to get informed more thoroughly then. Those who want a secure bet and have a possibility to do so will use several sources of information not just the label on the packaging but other in-store sources, e.g. product displays, shop assistants. There are some 'at-home', 'leisure' label readers who take a better look at products before starting to cook, eat or whenever they have the time to do so. Conditional label use is frequent, meaning an interest taken only in one certain product

attribute or category, or looking at the front of packaging only or reading only easy-to-understand content (marketing texts or big emblems). Labels are quite frequently read superficially. Accidental reading or a casual glimpse is often followed by surprise on the part of consumers who then recognize their incomplete knowledge about the product.

**Figure 7 – Method of label usage**

WAY		PLACE	
ENJOYMENT	<i>'well, I always look at what comes from where, even out of fun'</i>	POINT OF SALE	<i>'Please turn the product around while it is still on the shelf and if the ingredients are right, go on to look at its price. Brand name is only good for knowing which box to turn around next time and read again. The rest is just decoration.'</i>
BY CHANCE	<i>'I was just putting them in the bag when my partner says these were not home-grown 'cause they're too big and nice and out of season. So I look at the box and bingo, Morocco.'</i>	NEW PRODUCT	<i>'I always check the ingredients when trying something new, so I'm not surprised at home.:'</i> <i>'It's not that demanding to read when you buy something new. 30 seconds of your life.'</i>
SUPERFICIAL	<i>'We've got used to them being sold with different signs, and didn't read the ingredients. The big lettered 100% sign reassured us.'</i>	AT HOME	<i>'At home – luckily before dinner – my wife noticed its sell-by date expired three months ago'</i> <i>'I often read something while having my sandwich, if nothing else, then the boxes of products lying in front of me.'</i>

## DISCUSSION

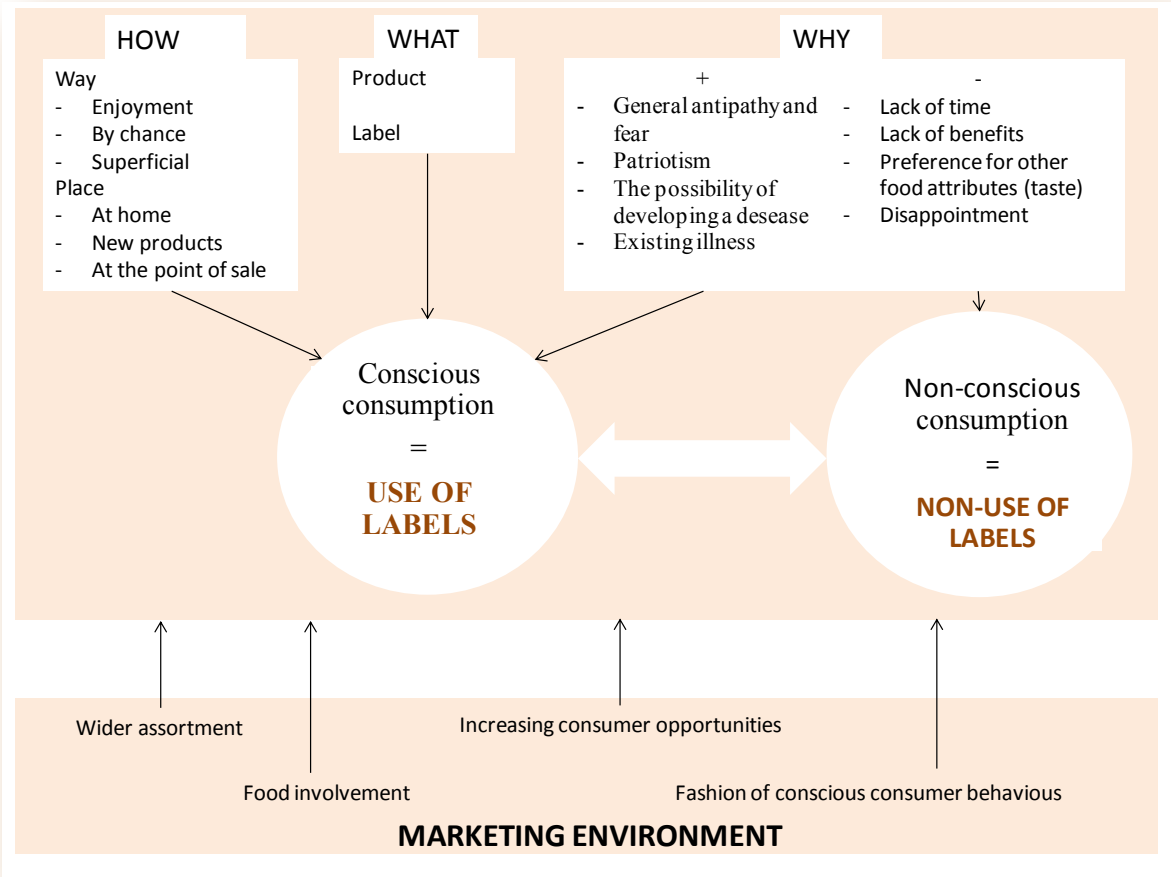
The antecedent of a purchase decision is information search, which is of key importance for marketing science from both a practical and a scientific point of view (Bettman, 1979). And although it has been the subject of studies since the 1920s, (Copeland, 1923), it has not lost its significance, on the contrary, it is a hotter issue than ever due to the free movement of goods, the ever faster turnover and larger merchandise, the large amount of information provided by the Internet and media and the changing trends of consumer behaviour (Guo, 2001).

Consumers make their decision before purchase based on information from internal sources (stored in memory) and external sources (advertisements, in-store information, friends,

experts) (Bauer, Berács, 2006). When purchasing food labels on packaging is an extensively used source of external information (Dörnyei, 2010), as they display a description of the product’s attributes. Labelling is a source of information and apart from being useful for consumers, its presence is an obligation stipulated by law. A proactive corporate behaviour requires the conscious design of the informative function of packaging as it is the basis of consumers’ purchase decisions.

Through the use of the method of netnography we aimed at exploring the general use of labelling on packaging and related consumer behaviours. Labelling on packaging plays an important part in the information search stage of a purchase decision process and affects the purchase decision itself, too. Based on the research we can conclude that labelling is needed, consumers use it both during their point of sale information search and home product use.

Figure 8 –Summary of results



Nevertheless, we identified market factors in our research which result in label use. A widening assortment and increasing consumer choices, involvement in food and the fashion of conscious purchases are the factors due to which point of sale consumer information seeking is on the increase and consequently, labels on packaging are read and used in the decision making process.

Based on our results, two large consumer segments were identified: we called them conscious and non-conscious consumers. Conscious behaviour strongly correlates with label use and reading the information displayed on packaging, while the non-conscious segment ignores labelling, explaining it with lack of time, disappointment and preference for other food attributes. Reading information on packaging can be classified in two ways, according to method (superficial, conditional, incidental) of use and place (home, or point of sale).

## **LIMITATIONS, FURTHER RESEARCH**

Some important limitations of this study must be emphasized. The results of the exploratory research are limited due to both the nature of the method and its application: the outcome reflects the opinion of an active online population. Also, the results do not make the exact values of behaviours and patterns identified clear, and fail to show how often and with which consumers these patterns surface. The basis of the qualitative research were coming from anonymous individuals and we were not able to establish what kind of consumer a statement belongs to, therefore it is only patterns that can be observed.

Consumer information search, packaging and label use has been relatively little studied in Hungary on an academic level and the few existing studies are not complete. Increasing consumer interest indicates the need for a further study in this field.

## **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**



In this research information search was studied using the labelling found on packaging since packaging is becoming an increasingly relevant factor in corporate marketing due to the increasing supply, advertising avoidance and narrowing marketing budgets (Ampuero, Vila, 2006; Underwood, 2003, Underwood, Klein, Burke, 2001). The research is unique in Hungary as it focuses on the informative function of packaging looking at its role in the information search a decision making process.

Based on the results we state that for a growing number of consumers packaging is also a source of information, and oftentimes the only one in the case of foods. Consumers read the labelling, it influences their decisions therefore corporate actors should take care when creating it. Information search may be differentiated across products, place and activity.

To create the informative function of packaging is the task of manufacturers and distributors, along with regulators since rules and regulations aim at the widest possible information service. However, because of the information oversupply the number of product attributes appearing on packaging should be given some thought. When there are too many compulsory elements displayed it impedes consumers' efficient information search. Alternative information solutions may be more practical than filling up packaging with information.

Ideally for a consumer, the right label is simple and familiar, possibly uses adjectives or images, does not use technical terms, or specific vocabulary. The quality and quantity of information on products' packaging may not be suit each and every consumer's palate but the general direction is that information displayed should be easy to use and understand for an average consumer and it should help the choice of food (Byrd-Bredbenner, Wong, Cottee, 2000). According to an organisation specialising in environmental labels the basic principles of a good label are: easy to understand, low information cost, voluntary certifications, authenticity, scientific background, abolishing unnecessary commercial barriers, an entire life cycle attitude, support for innovation, keeping administration to the minimum and open discussions looking to agree (GEN, 2004).

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