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Consumer Preferences in the Content of Loyalty to the Yoghurt Brand

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Abstract

The aim of submitted paper was to analyze customer preferences in the context of loyalty to the brand of selected food products in the segment of yoghurts. In order to achieve the mentioned aim, we used methods of survey, structured questionnaire (sample of 693 randomly chosen respondents) and blind test (sample of 100 respondents testing the four yoghurts – 2 yoghurts of traditional brands and 2 yoghurts of private labels). For a deeper analysis of the obtained results, totally four hypotheses were set out and tested by using the statistical methods of Contingency table chi-square test, Pearson´s chi-square test, Cramer's coefficient, Friedman test and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. The results of the survey proved that more than 30 % of respondents consume yoghurts on a daily basis, 30 % of respondents prefer to buy the yogurts of private labels, more than 64 % of respondents consider themselves as loyal consumers and based on the package, the tested sample of private label yoghurt (sample A) would be purchased by 56 % of respondents while the same sample of yoghurt (sample A) would be purchased for its taste just by 47 % of respondents.

Keywords

Yoghurt, private label, traditional brand, consumer preference, loyalty.

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Introduction

In today's modern and globalized world, the consumers live in an increasingly competitive and dynamic market environment (Smutka et al., 2016, Polakevičová, 2015; Džupina et al., 2016; Mach et al., 2018; Balcarová et al., 2014; Kádek, 2014), where the brand by itself either loses its power or strengthens it. One of the primary objectives of the brand's existence is to establish a relationship with the consumer. The choice of the right brand is made through two crucial moments, namely by selecting the product in the store, where the customer decides which of the brands to buy; and by an additional decision at consumer´s home, when the product of the given brand is used and then consumer realizes whether is satisfied with product or not (Animashaun et al., 2013; Alić et al., 2017).

Brands that win again in both of these critical cases gain a special place in the hearts and minds of consumers. The result can be the creation of so-called love brands, i.e. permanent even lifelong brand relationships with consumers (Das, 2019).

At a time when consumers are talking about brands, they often pay attention to only one of its aspects, either the name or the logo. However, in brand management, we are talking about an entire system that applies to the concept of the natural value of products and services defined by the name and set of characteristics (Kapferer, 2012; Hereźnia et al., 2018).

Brand management focuses on managing aspects of the company's offerings such as brand, logo, motto, character, product design or packaging to achieve the company's ultimate marketing goals. When we reconcile goals and marketing actions, we can talk about building a strong brand (Chernev, 2018; Urbancová and Hudáková, 2017).

Today, customers are surrounded by a large number of different brands. If consumers believe that most brands offer the same characteristics, that there are only minor quality differences between brands. This means that the consumer does not buy goods of just one particular brand, but rather purchases a group of acceptable brands. Purchasing decisions depend on criteria such as availability, price, or a particular product-specific offer, and hence the main criterion is not quality. As a result of this process, customer loyalty to a particular brand decreases significantly (Clow and Baack, 2008).

The brand contains basic visual elements such as logo, slogan or the name itself, on the basis of which consumers are able to identify the brand or company as well as to associate it with deeper values e.g. certain emotion, experience, story or relationship to lifestyle or status. The aim of the brand is to reach a potential target group of consumers in such a way that the brand becomes an integral and natural part of their being. To achieve this desired effect, it is necessary to use marketing tools designed to understand the needs of the market. (Banyár, 2017; Bartosik-Purgat, 2019).

A brand image is a multifunctional set of tangible and intangible elements that allows consumers to identify a product or service (Beverland, 2018). It has a complex and multidimensional nature and is the result of the consumer's mental process, respectively potential consumer receiving brand information. In this process, the individual gathers, evaluates, and combines brand-related information. The result is an image of a product, service or brand that plays an important role in its purchasing decisions (Singh and Duhan, 2016).

While the brand image is a tactical element that brings short-term results thanks to advertising and promotion experts; on the other hand, brand value is a strategic asset of the company that can underpin competitive advantage and long-term profitability and must therefore be closely monitored by the top management of the organization (Joachimsthaler and Aaker, 2009). In essence, brand value is an added value that affects each customers´ purchasing decision and motivates them to purchase. It is demonstrated by knowing the brand name and responding to the product. It depends on customer loyalty, as it reflects the brand's identification with product quality (Jakubíková, 2009; Janoskova and Kliestikova, 2018).

The consumer is considered to be the end user of the product, unlike the one who buys goods or services but does not consume them himself (Bulanda et al., 2018a; Bulanda et al., 2018b; Pilar et al., 2018). Attracting customers is the primary goal of any business, as the customer creates demand for goods and services and is very likely to become a loyal consumer who becomes loyal to brand. Companies compete in particular by promoting and reducing prices to attract the largest customer base (Kenton, 2018; Světlík and Bulanda, 2019; Janková and Strbová, 2017; Kaliji et al., 2014).

The strategy of foreign, but also of domestic companies is to reach all groups of customers − to satisfy those customers, who are critical for low costs, but also those who prefer the purchase of high quality products. All designated requirements have to be satisfied by private label products, whose share in Europe, particularly in Slovakia, is constantly increasing (Košičiarová, et al., 2014). Private labels, very simply explained, represent a strategy for branding traditional brand products, but with a retailer's brand (whether by his own name or with a name which he owns) (Košičiarová and Nagyová, 2014). Private label brands have established their market in the United Stated and Europe in the past few decades. In their beginnings, consumers tended to perceive them just as a substitute or option to the traditional brands because of their white − black packs, location somewhere on the bottom shelves and low price. However, over the time, there have been several significant changes, which have made private labels acceptable alternatives for the purchase (Nagyová and Košičiarová, 2014). Development of private labels is now a global phenomenon, which brings both − advantages as well as disadvantages. The most apparent expansion of private labels, for the year 2013, was noticed in Switzerland with 37.7 %, unchanged in USA and the lowest one in China (0.4 %) (blog.euromonitor.com, 2014; IRi Growth delivered, 2013).

Submitted paper focuses on consumer preferences in the context of loyalty to the brand of selected food products in the dairy yoghurt segment. There have been investigated the consumers' preferences between the traditional brand or a private one in the segment of yoghurts, namely two traditional-brand of yoghurts and two private-brand of yoghurts, which were tested in the form of a blank test.

Milk and dairy products, including yoghurt, rank among the commodities produced by food businesses and are thus integrated into the agro sector. Manufacture of dairy products is one of the key sectors within the food industry in the Czech Republic (Naglova et al., 2017) which is declared also by the fact, that dairy products are the export pillars of Czech agrarian foreign trade (Špička et al., 2015). Also in the Slovak Republic, the history of production and consumption of milk and dairy products has a very long tradition (Špička, 2015). In 1989, there was consumed 260 kg milk per person per year in Czechoslovakia and in that time there were 166 centrally managed dairies. After the Slovak Republic joined the EU, milk quota was allocated for milk production, which was set at the level of 1,061.6 mil.kg in 2009/2010 (Kubicová, 2012) and further increased to the level of 1,115.6 mil.kg in 2014/2015 (Kubicová, 2014); and after five years of a preparatory increase in their level, milk quotas disappeared on April 1th 2015 (Eurostat, 2015). Nowadays trend shows, that the of milk and dairy products consumption declines (Košičiarová et al., 2017).As presented in the part Results and discussion, the current consumption of milk and dairy products in the Slovak Republic is about 174 kg per person per year, which represents lower consumption by 20% compared to the recommended intake (Kubicová et al, 2019).

Materials and methods

The aim of the present paper was to analyze customer preferences in the context of loyalty to the brand of selected food products in the segment of dairy yoghurt. In order to achieve the above mentioned aim, there had been used the methods of survey, structured questionnaire and blind test. The questionnaire survey was conducted from April to May 2019 on a sample of 693 respondents chosen randomly, their basic characteristics are given in the Table 1. The sample can be considered as a representative on the 95% confidence level and 4% error margin, since n ≥ 600.25. The blind test was then realized in May 2019 on a sample of 100 respondents, who were testing totally four yoghurts – 2 yoghurts of traditional brands (Pribináčik as the sample B and Bánoveský jogurt as the sample C) and 2 yoghurts of private labels (K classic as the sample A and Clever as the sample D).

The justification and selection of the above mentioned yoghurts can be justified by the fact that according to the results of several surveys (GfK Slovakia, 2010; TNS Slovakia, 2015), as well as according to the opinion of the most important retail chains operating in Slovakia, interest of Slovak consumers in private labels is constantly growing. Among the most frequently purchased private label categories can be clearly ranked milk and dairy products, juices, lemonades and mineral waters, respectively salty snacks (Košičiarová and Nagyová, 2014).

The questionnaire covered the entire territory of Slovakia, representing all regions. The questionnaire was conducted over the internet and consisted of 13 questions divided into two parts – the first part consisted of questions on the subject and the second part consisted of the classification questions. In order to ensure the representativeness of the results, we applied the random selection and geographic diversification of our respondents. The questionnaire was evaluated using the contingency tables prepared by Microsoft Office Excel, under which they were subsequently created the graphs.

Characteristics of the respondents		Number
Category of respondents	Male	321
	Female	372
Age structure of respondents	Up to 26 years	197
	27 - 35 years	245
	36 - 45 years	158
	46 - 55 years	67
	56 years and more years	26
Educational structure of respondents	Primary education	5
	Secondary education without A level	49
	Secondary education	84
	Higher education I degree	227
	Higher education II degree	302
	Other	26
Economic activity of respondents	Student	282
	On maternity leave	15
	Unemployed	21
	Employed	305
	Retired	4
	Other	56
Region	Banská Bystrica	99
	Bratislava	93
	Košice	58
	Nitra	118
	Prešov	64
	Trenčín	98
	Trnava	96
	Žilina	67

Source: Results of the research

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents.

The collected data were processed out with the use of Microsoft Excel and then evaluated in the statistical program XL Stat. The formulated hypotheses were tested by applying the statistical methods of Contingency table chi-square test, Pearson´s chi-square test, Cramer's coefficient, Friedman test and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test.

In hypothesis testing, if the p-value is lower than significant level, in case of XL Stat software, it is 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is confirmed (Witek, 2016).

For a deeper analysis of the research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: We assume that there is a relationship between the kind of preferred brand of purchased yogurts and the age category of respondents.

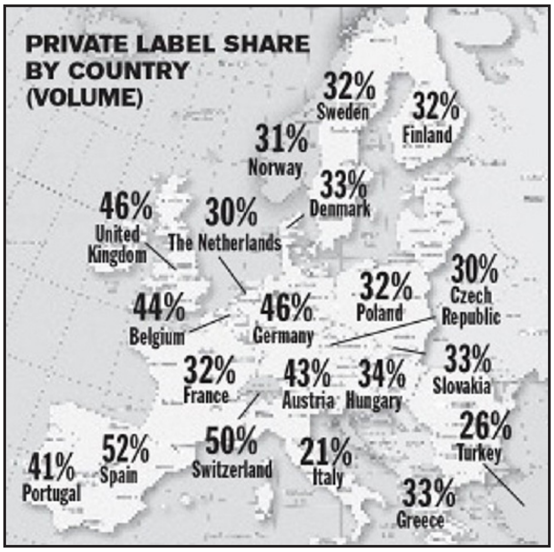
Hypothesis 2: We assume that there is a relationship between the kind of preferred brand of purchased yogurts and the gender of respondents.

Hypothesis 3: We assume that there is a statistically significant difference in the purchasing preferences of the product based on the packaging.

Hypothesis 4: We assume that there is a statistically significant difference in the evaluation of yogurt flavors.

Results and discussion

One of the most successful strategies of retailers is the sale of goods under the private label (Adamson, 2007). The purpose of this kind of sale is to attract new customers, which will later become loyal customers, and to build the image of the corresponding retail chain. In many cases, private labels are described and perceived as a global phenomenon (Herstein and Gamliel, 2004; Smith and Bashaw, 2009; Kakkos et al., 2015), which are constantly competing for the market position. Despite the fact that traditional brands are still dominant in today's competitive market, private labels are gradually progressing and tend to take over (Chimhundu, 2011; Ruiz-Real et al., 2016). Private label research shows that while 7 out of 10 buyers have already purchased a private label product in the US and considers it to be comparable to traditional brands or even higher quality (Park City Group, 2000). In the case of Europe, this share is even greater as the private label purchases in its individual countries increases year by year – actually, it has increased in 12 out of 19 European countries, and in 17 of them reached levels equal or greater than 30 % (PLMA, 2018).



Source: PLMA. Industry news. Private label today (2018).

Figure 1: The share of private label chain purchases in household expenditures in 2018 (in %).

Milk and dairy products represent one of the most elemental foods for all age categories of the population because of its biological component (Michaelidou, 2008; Maitah and Smutka, 2012; Pereira, 2014), but also a valuable food that have a beneficial effect on consumer health (Habánová, 2010; Dudriková et al., 2017; Kubicová et al., 2019). We classify them as functional foods that provide the consumer with a range of beneficial substances for immunity and vitality in addition to satiety. The benefits of this key nutritional food should motivate consumers to their daily consumption. In the Slovak Republic, the recommended dose of milk and dairy products is declared at 220 kg per person per year (Košičiarová et al., 2018). Figure 2 presents real consumption figures, which, unfortunately, have been lower than recommended over recent years - the last value meeting the recommended dose of consumption was recorded in 1990.

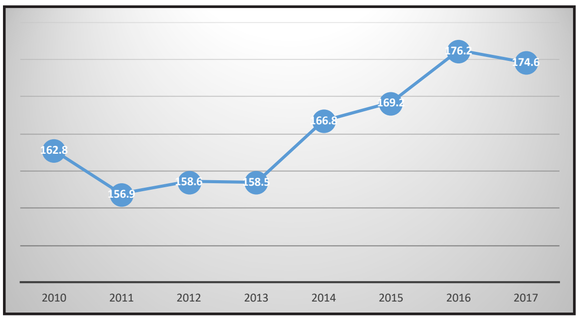


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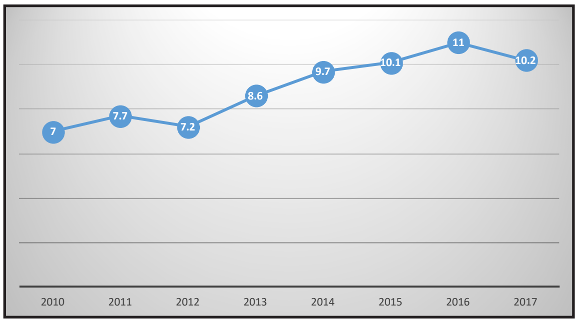
Figure 2: Development of milk and dairy products consumption in the Slovak Republic (per person in kg).



Source: NPPC

Figure 3: Average annual consumption of yoghurts in the Slovak Republic (per person in kg).

Despite the consumption of milk and dairy products, which has generally declining trend in recent decades, the average consumption of yoghurt in kilograms per person has been on an upward trend almost annually. Figure 3 shows the development of this consumption, which has increased by 4 kg per person per year (by 57%) over six years, which, despite the non-compliance with the recommended dose of dairy products, shows the increasing interest of yoghurts.

For this reason, milk yoghurts were the object of the study of submitted paper, where we focused on two samples of yoghurts sold under the traditional brand (samples B and C) and two samples of yoghurts sold under the private label (samples A and D).

As explained in the part Materials and methods, the choice of samples can be clearly explained by the increasing interest of Slovak consumers in the purchase of private label products, as well as by the fact that milk and dairy products are among the most frequently purchased private label categories in the food segment (Košičiarová, Nagyová, 2014). In terms of interest in the purchase of private label products of individual retail chains, respectively advantageous purchases and better customer orientation in stores, based on a survey conducted by TNS Slovakia in June 2012, the most popular private brands include brands by TESCO (49% of respondents), COOP Jednota (44% of respondents), Kaufland (32% respondents) and Billa (23%). According to the research, the products sold under private labels of COOP Jednota and TESCO are bought by women rather than men, and only 14% of respondents stated they do not buy any private label products (Fedorková, 2012).

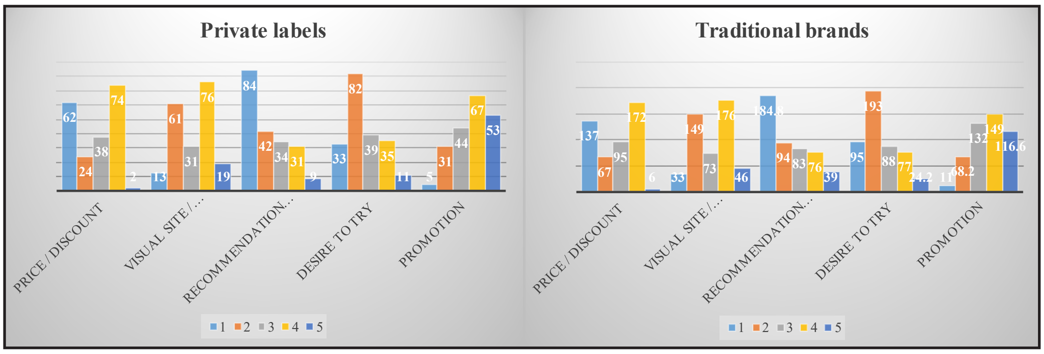
As outlined above, research, questionnaire and blind test methods were chosen to investigate consumer preferences in the context of loyalty to the brand of selected food products in the segment of yoghurts. As can be seen from Table 1, a total of 693 respondents participated in the research, of which the majority were women (53.68%), 27-35 years old respondents (35.35%), employed (44.01%)), with higher secondary education (43.58%) and respondents from the Nitra region (17.03% of respondents).

The questionnaire survey focused mainly on their purchase and frequency of purchase, brand loyalty, brand preference (i.e. traditional brand or private label), as well as motives for purchase of individual types of brands. The survey was then supplemented by a blind test to examine the sensory properties of yogurts as well as the subsequent buying preference without knowing the real brand.

Research results point to many interesting findings - in terms of yogurt consumption, up to 33% of respondents (out of 677 respondents who eat yoghurts) consume yoghurts on a daily basis (18% once a day and 15% several times a day), up to 30% of respondents prefer to buy private label yoghurts and up to 64.21% of respondents consider themselves as loyal customers.

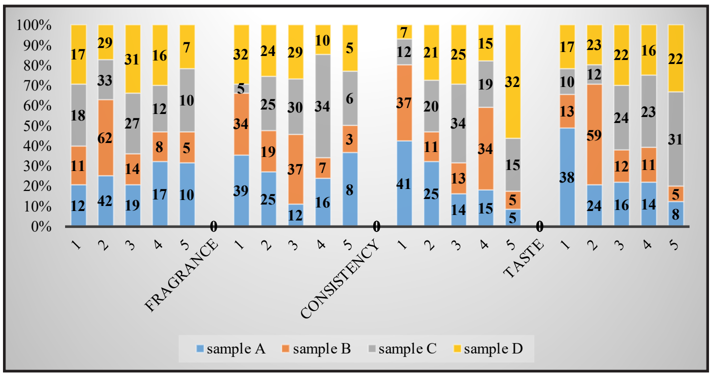
Consumer behavior does not only mean the behavior when purchasing a product or service, it is a sequence of several steps that the customer's mind goes through before buying something (Kumar, 2016). Consumers make this type of decision in average of 200 times a day, it is unlikely that they invest a lot of cognitive power in purchasing decisions (Wansink, 2010). Moreover, even if they are willing to think carefully about all their food choices, they have limited capacity to process all available information (Mawad et al., 2015). For this reason, they usually invest only a few seconds in purchasing decisions, paying attention only to some information (Mormann, Cerf, 2008).

In order to find out what leads the respondents to purchase a particular type of yoghurt brand, the questionnaire survey formulated questions about the motives for buying private labels and then the motives for buying traditional brands. Respondents were asked to assess individual motives on a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 was the most and 5 was the least). As can be seen in Figure 4, the motives for buying either private yogurt label or traditional yogurt brands are essentially perceived the same. The most important motive for the purchase are recommendations from friends and acquaintances, the desire to try the product and then the promotion, price and visual site of the packaging.



Source: results of own research

Figure 4: Motives for purchasing the yoghurts of private labels and traditional brands.



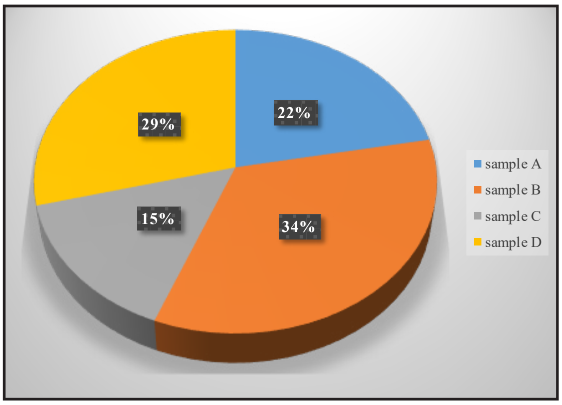
Source: results of own research

Figure 5: Evaluation of the sensory properties of the examined yogurt samples.

As we wanted to find out which of the examined yoghurt respondents prefer in their purchase (samples A to D, or none of them), which sample they would buy only on the basis of packaging and then on the basis of taste, in the questionnaire survey were also formulated these questions. Research results show that respondents prefer Sample A (private label sample) 34 % of respondents, and sample B (traditional brand sample) 23% of respondents. Based on the packaging they mainly buy sample A (private label sample) 56% of respondents, and sample B (traditional label sample) 32% of respondents. On the basis of taste, they would prefer to buy sample A (private label sample) 47% of respondents, and sample B (traditional brand sample) 24% of respondents.

In the case of evaluating the sensory properties of the examined yogurt samples as color, fragrance, consistency and taste can be said that respondents rated most positively samples A and B - one sample of a private yogurt label and one sample of a traditional yogurt brand. If we focused on the individual sensory properties, we would find that the best scent had Sample C- sample of the traditional yoghurt brand; while the sample A- the private yogurt label was then best rated for its consistency and taste (Figure 5).

An interesting finding of the research is that when the respondents had been asked to determine whether it was a traditional or private brand of yogurt based on the flavor, the most respondents did not identify it correctly - see Figure 6. The most respondents correctly identified only sample D, which was truly a private yogurt label. The remaining samples were identified incorrectly.



Source: results of own research

Figure 6: Identification of traditional brand and private label flavor of yoghurts.

As mentioned above, the survey also focused on evaluating a total of four statistical hypotheses, which were verified and statistically evaluated using the chosen statistical tests. Research shows that three of them have been confirmed, hypothesis 1, 2 and 4.

Hypothesis 1: We assume that there is a relationship between the kind of preferred brand of purchased yogurts and the age category of respondents.

	Type of preferred brand		Total
Age category	Private label	Traditional brand	
Up to 26 years	31	166	197
27-35 years	76	169	245
36-45 years	67	91	158
46-55 years	18	49	67
56 years and more	8	18	26
Total	200	493	693

Source: Results of own research

Table 2: Chi square test for two independent sets for preferred yogurt brand type and respondent age.

Test characteristics (TCH) – 31.373

Table value (TH) – 9.488

TCH > TV

H_0 rejected, H_1 accepted

Based on these calculations we accept the hypothesis H_1, with 95% probability can be said that the type of preferred brand when buying yoghurt depends on the age category of the respondents. Since the dependence was found, we also examined the strength of the dependence. Based on the results of the Cramer coefficient, it can be said that this is a weak but statistically significant dependence (the Cramer coefficient was 0.0347).

Hypothesis 2: We assume that there is a relationship between the kind of preferred brand of purchased yogurts and the gender of respondents.

	Category of respondents		Total
Type of preferred brand	Woman	Man	
Private label	145	55	200
Traditional brand	270	223	493
Total	372	321	693

Source: Results of own research

Table 3: Chi square test for two independent sets for the preferred yogurt brand type and category of respondents .

Test characteristics (TCH) – 40.047

Table value (TV) – 3.841

TCH > TV

H_0 rejected, H_1 accepted

Based on these calculations, we accept the hypothesis H1, with 95% probability can be said that the type of preferred brand when buying yoghurt depends on the category of respondents. Since the dependence was found, we also examined the strength of the dependence. Based on the results of the Cramer coefficient, it can be said that it is a weak but statistically significant dependence (Cramer coefficient value was equal to 0.0118).

Hypothesis 3: We assume that there is a statistically significant difference in the purchasing preferences of the product based on the packaging.

	Number of respondents
sample A	378
sample B	221
sample C	65
sample D	14
Total	677

Source: Results of own research

Table 4: Purchase of selected brand of yogurts on the basis of packaging.

The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows, that the value of the K-S test statistic (D) is 0.28759.; the p-value is 0.71235. Based on the written we can say, that the data does not differ significantly from that which is normally distributed - we do not reject the null hypothesis

Hypothesis 4: We assume that there is a statistically significant difference in the evaluation of yogurt flavors.

Average value	
A	0.05
F (TCH)	11.36
TV	0.022

Source: Results of own research

Table 5: Friedman test for yogurt flavor evaluation.

Test characteristics (TCH) – 11.36

Table value (TV) – 0.022

TCH > TV

H_0 rejected, H_1 accepted

Based on the results of Friedman's test, with 95% probability can be said that there is at least one pair of yogurts with a statistically significant difference in appraisal of flavors.

Conclusion

Despite the fact, that the overall consumption of milk and dairy products has been rather negative and declining in recent decades, the average consumption of yoghurt (in kg per capita) has increased almost annually (increased by 4 kg per year over the past six years). Mentioned is the reason why yoghurts, both traditional and private-brand yoghurts, have gradually become the object of our research. As we have pointed out in the introduction of the submitted paper, the results of our research can be used as a material for further research in this field as well as a guide to increase the attractiveness of yoghurt and thus increase its consumption by Slovak consumers. The results of our research point to many interesting findings – from the point of view of yogurt consumption, up to 33% of respondents consume yoghurts on a daily basis, up to 30% of them prefer in their purchase the private label yoghurts, up to 64% of respondents consider themselves as loyal customers, up to 34% of respondents prefer in their purchase exactly that sample of private label yoghurt, which was tested by us, also 23% of respondents prefer in their purchase that sample of traditional brand yoghurt, which was tested by us, and only on the basis of the package, as well as on the basis of taste, exactly 56 % of respondents and 47% of respondents would buy the tested sample of private label product (sample A). Regarding the motives leading to the purchase of both yogurts (traditional brands and private labels), it can be concluded these motives are essentially the same – at first the recommendations from friends and acquaintances, the desire to try it and just then their promotion, respectively price and visual aspect of the packaging. Indeed, the results are surprising, as we would expect respondents to clearly prefer traditional brand yoghurts over private label yoghurts, but this has not been confirmed. On the basis of the above mentioned it can be said that the boundaries between traditional and private labels are gradually blurring and customers begin to realize that the private label products are a suitable alternative to their purchase. Possibilities of increasing the attractiveness of private label yoghurts (as we consider them as adequate alternatives to buying traditional brands of yoghurts) could be based in raising awareness about private labels and their real producers among Slovak consumers. In many cases, we find that Slovak consumers still hesitate to buy the private label products, because they do not have any experience with these products, respectively do not know their real producer. For this reason, the submitted paper can also serve as a tool to raise awareness of both the professional and general public, especially about the existence of private labels, their meaning, advantages and potential pitfalls.

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