

THE INFLUENCE OF FAST-FOOD PRODUCTS ON CONSUMERS

Buculei A., Constantinescu (Pop) C. G.

Stefan cel Mare” University of Suceava, Suceava, Romania

Buculei Amelia: ameliab@fia.usv.ro

Abstract: Globalization specific to the century we are living in seems to contain even the foods we consume. This statement is even more veracious if the specialists’ estimations on imports and exports of food products as well as those on franchise and restaurant chains are taken into consideration.

The concept of fast-food exists since the oldest times, ambulant traders used to sell homemade food or drinks. This concept is closely related to urban development. Fast-food nutrition is full of empty, mendacious calories (most of them deriving from saturated fats and sugar) which give the sensation of satiety for short time, but without being capable of sustaining the effort daily made. This is one of the reasons for which the consumer feels the need to eat more and more. Many of the raw materials included in the menus of fast-food restaurants contain highly significant quantities of fats (French fries, meat, processed cheese). Having in view that traditional food is always healthy, it is recommended to choose a homemade sandwich even if it is available in fast-food restaurants because there are great differences between them. Fast-food menus are difficult to deal with especially when people are concerned with their weight and health. Having a healthy, well-balanced meal in most fast-food restaurants is a real challenge. But there are healthier options always hidden. People should know where they can find them and what order.

Keywords: fast-food, quality, consumers, technologies

Introduction

Fast-food, unknown phenomenon in our country until the ‘90s has strongly influenced the Romanians’ consumption habits and become a very profitable business for the restaurant chains in the field.

The occurrence and development of fast-food industry are closely related to well-known products which are usually found in the menu of any fast-food restaurant. Each one of these two products has its own story, which probably for most of us is still unknown.

Sandwich- relates its name to a certain Lord Sandwich. This character, impassioned by different ways of gambling refused to leave the game and his co-gamblers to taste something. As the name suggests, the product made from tender and raw ground meat, called *hamburger* is born in the German town of Hamburg, along with the Germans’ migration to the North America in the 19th century, but over the time different ingredients, spices have been added to this raw mincemeat.

Fast-food style is very popular among teenagers all over the world. Approached from the perspective of food behavior, teenager hood may be considered as being a transition one, from that when parents’ control is predominant to one characterized by young’s personal control of the type of foods consumed, frequency and quantity. From

this point of view, children brought up in mono-parental families or families where both parents are actively engaged in their work, “enjoy” of a weaker monitoring of their eating habits. A study made by Richard J. George, Thomas E. McDuffie (2008) emphasizes the teenagers’ significant influence on their food options. Having in view to identify the decisive factors when teenagers make choices of food products, the previously mentioned study emphasized the fact that taste is the decisive characteristic. This statement is encountered in many studies (Beasley, L., Hackett, A., Maxwell, S. (2004); Louis, W., Davies, S., Smith, J., Terry, D. (2007); Davis, B., Carpenter, C. (2009)) which show that the attempt of changing visibly or not the teenagers’ food behavior is highly unsuccessful when taste compromises are being made. Another study made by Popescu *et al.* (2010) underlines the fact that the new generation of consumers tends to generalize the role of sensorial characteristics and neglect or even disdain the nutritional value, when choosing and assessing the quality of food included in the daily diet. The authors explain that this dominant of teenagers’ food behavior by the fact that these ones have already got their eating habits in the period of maximum bloom of food industry, being used to consume generally highly-processed and over added foods made by the modern food industries, characterized by special sensorial properties, but having most of the times a non-balanced nutritional profile. These images are stored in the memory of the young generation. Consequently, the possibility of knowing them which involves the comparison of the images perceived about the food product in question and those memorized is obviously limited. Therefore, the young prefer foods with artificial taste over healthy ones as they form the preponderant offer nowadays.

Materials and methods

The analyses made of three fast-food type products (Pizza, Crispy Stripes, Big Mac) are: water content sodium chlorine; ash content; pH; easily hydrolysable nitrogen; fat content; Sensorial analysis according with AOAC methods.

Results and discussion

First of all it was determinate the physical-chemical characteristics (figure 1) and the nutritional values for all the products (table 1).

Table 1 Nutritional value of the products studied

Product name	Kcalories/100 g product	Proteins	Carbohydrates	Fats	Fibers
Big Mac	495	27	40	25	3
Crispy	327	14.2	9,5	16.4	1.3
Pizza	280	12.6	34.8	9,2	0

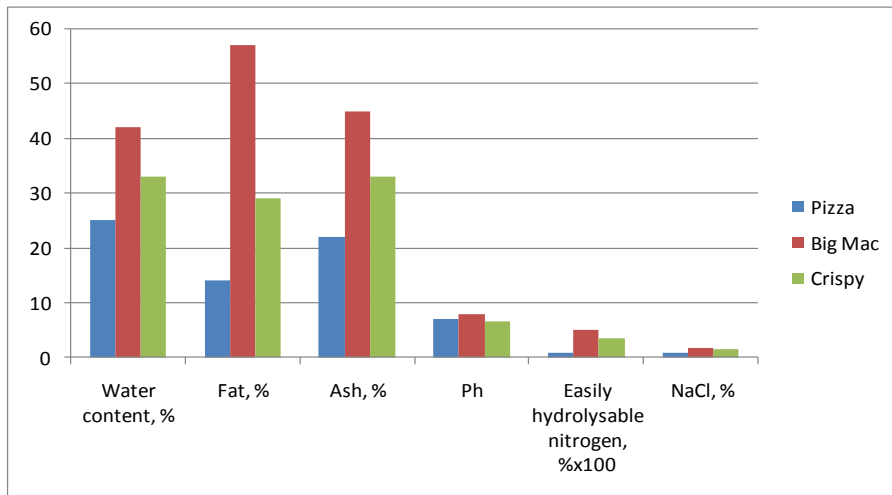


Fig. 1. Physical-chemical characteristics for samples

In the figure 1, there is an imbalance between nutrient values: excess water, salt and saturated fat compared to extremely small amounts of fiber and other nutrients essential for all samples. Pizza product fits into standard rules and other evidence provided in the normal limits.

The sensorial analyses were conducted by ten students, and the results are shown in the table 2.

For the exterior and in section aspect, 5 out of 10 gave the maximum score, 3 out of 10 gave average score as they did not like the product too much and 2 out of 10 gave the minimum score, making observations as well.

As regards consistency 4 out of 10 gave the maximum score, 4 out of 10 gave the average score as they did not like the product too much and 2 out of 10 gave the minimum score, afterwards observations being made.

For color 5 out of 10 gave average score as they did not like the product too much and 2 out of 10 gave the minimum one, afterwards observations being made.

For flavor 5 out of 10 gave the maximum score, 3 out of 10 gave the average score as they did not like the product too much and 2 out of 10 gave the minimum one, afterwards observations being made.

For taste 5 out of 10 gave maximum score, 3 out of 10 gave average score as they did not like the product too much and 2 out of 10 gave the minimum one, afterwards observations being made.

From the above tables one can notice that there is a major unbalance between the values of nutrients: sugar in excess, salt and saturated fats as compared with the extremely low amounts of fibers and other essential nutrients.

Table 2 Average of sensorial evaluation

Sensorial characteristic	Scoring scale	Description of the characteristics	Points awarded		
			Pizza	Big Mac	Crispy
Appearance and in a section (at a temperature of $20 \pm 2C$) and form	0...4	Regular shape, glossy, spotless, without cracks, uniform;	3	4	2
		The surface is slightly stiff, show small cracks slightly modified form;	3	2	1
		Surface cracks, traces of burns, very hard shell.	0	0	1
The consistency (to a temperature of $20 \pm 2C$)	0...4	On the outside: fluffy, soft. Filling: consistent, all ingredients, fresh;	4	4	1
		On the outside: less soft stuffing have small gaps	0	2	1
		On the outside: hard, dry. Filling: inconsistent, lacking essential ingredients.	0	0	2
Colour	0...4	Adequate description of the menu,	4	4	3
		Too weak / intensive;	0	2	1
		Stains, burn marks, inadequate shade.	1	0	1
Flavour	0...4	Well defined, acceptable, according to the ingredients used;	3	4	2
		Specific but weak / strong expressed;	3	2	2
		Lack flavour, unpleasant or foreign	1	0	2
Taste	0...4	Well defined, pleasant specific flavor used;	4	4	3
		Too fragrant stuffing / less specific;	1	2	0
		Uncharacteristically sour / astringent, unpleasant rancid	0	0	0

Conclusions

After having analyzed this topic of Fast-Food nourishment, we can state that it is not a very healthy one, having in view that the age sector it is appealing to, consists of children and teenagers who need a balanced diet in order to grow and develop harmoniously. Hence, there are some solutions of improving both menus and public benefit.

According to our observations, the biggest problem of fast-food products is freshness, processing and food additives used in them for a longer shelf-life.

The national production might be a solution to this problem: the Romanian farms might prosper by breeding animals to be used in the famous hamburgers, thus the meat provided by these farms is not treated with additives and other chemical substances for longer storage, such a meat being fresh and much healthier. This solution is valid for peasants as well, as these ones could provide fast-food restaurants with vegetables and fruits and thus developing their own activity. Therefore, the food in such public food units might be healthier by providing really the daily intake of fibers, vitamins, potassium, iron etc. Also, the Romanian government should offer subventions for the national production, cooperating with the big fast-food restaurant chains, thus leading to cost decrease, having benefits not only the State (the producer) and the restaurant but the consumer as well who should be considered from the very beginning the main actor.

As can be seen, a big problem of fast-food restaurants is the nutritional unbalance, exaggerated quantities of salt, sugar and fats found in the menus in question. A solution to get back to a food balance might be: food substitutes of salt and sugar, the change of vegetable oil at each frying or its thicker filtration, maybe the use of another way of cooking, instead of frying, the grill, rotisserie or boiling might be used, thus leading to the improvement and enrichment of the culinary methods and recipes.

In the making of hamburgers in the fast-food industry the following food additives (E numbers) are used: sodium (salt), palm oil, and low quality flour, due to more than affordable price, all leading to a disaster recipe.

Autochthonous factories might give special offers (alternatives) to these types of restaurants, increasing thus their own productivity, and the specific roll will not be frozen any longer before reaching the consumer.

References

1. **Parasecoli, F.** Slow Food, in Allen, G. and Albala, K. (coord.), *The Business of Food. Encyclopedia of the Food and Drink Industries*, Greenwood Press, 2007
2. **Parker-Pape Tara**, *A high price for Heathy FOOD*, 2007
3. **Pascu E.**, *Food goods and consumer's safety*, University Publishing House, Bucharest 2009
4. **Paul R.N.**, *Status and out look of the chain-restaurant industry*, 1994
5. **Petrini, C.**, *Terra Madre Come non farci mangiare dal cibo*, Editura Giunti, Firenze, Italia, 2009
6. **Raoult-Wack, A. L.**, *Food – Tell me what you eat to tell you who you are*, Universe Publishing House, Bucharest, 2007
7. **Davis, B.** și **Carpenter, C.** Proximity of Fast-Food Restaurants to Schools and Adolescent Obesity, in *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 99, Nr.3, 2009
8. **Currier Janet, Moretti Enrica**, *The effect of Fast food Restaurants on Obesity and Weight Gain*, 2010.