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**CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN THE GREEK LOCAL FOOD MARKET:
THE CASE OF YOGURT**

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ABSTRACT

In the last years, yogurt has become a major trend in the food market. The demand for yogurt increases in the market, as the consumer's awareness increases. According to several researches there is a world trend on consuming healthy eco-friendly products that are connected with the territory of production, also called as local nutrition products or local food products. Furthermore, there is an increasing amount of local products all over the world and also a number of various specific shops and restaurants that the consumer can buy or taste those local products (Theodossiou G., Goulas A., and Duquenne M.N., 2017). This trend on buying healthy local products affects the behavior of the consumers on the food market.

For the present research paper, a literature review on consumer behavior theories has been done. Also, based on that literature review a questionnaire was made. The research is based on a representative sample of 500 adult persons and the questionnaires distribution covers the country.

The results help the researcher investigate the consumer behavior in the Greek market for yogurt (Greek yogurt, or simple yogurt) and the factors that influencing them.

INTRODUCTION

As consumer demand for local and healthy products has grown, so has the number of special markets and the number of agro – companies that uses that markets for direct or indirect sales of their products. According to Theodossiou et al., (2017) the last 20 years the local products market is growing and is characterized of high competitiveness. Also, Van Loo E.J., Hoang Diem M.N., Pieniak Z., and Verbeke W., (2013), claim that the segment of organic products occupies an increasingly important place in dairy assortments. In recent years, Raza I., Asif Masood A., Shaukat M.H., Hassan M., Abid S., and Usman T., (2020), underline that yogurt consumption is gradually increasing with customer consciousness on a healthy diet. The reasons for that increase on the demand for local products aren't clear yet and many academics try to investigate them. For instance, Morris C., and Young C., (2000), consider as responsible for that increase on the demand the several food crises of the past, the higher consumer income and the growing environmental concerns and worries about the quality of the food they consume. According to Hodges A.W., and Stevens T.J., (2013), consumption of local foods has developed rapidly in response to concerns about food safety, quality and local

development. Furthermore, according to Thilmany D., Bond C., and Bond J., (2008) they claim that the best evidence of momentum in consumption of local food is the recognition of 'Locavores' as the 2007 word of the year by the New Oxford America Dictionary. Moreover, Darby, Batte, Ernst and Roe (2008), on their research for locally produced foods among consumers in Ohio USA, they underline the fact that consumers prefer locally grown products over U.S. grown products. Also, Hu, Woods and Bastin (2009), examined consumer behavior on local products and their willingness to pay more on local products, rather than other products.

The economic, environmental and health impact of local and regional food systems depend on how consumers' purchasing decisions are altered (Theodossiou et. al., 2017). Implications for marketing and public policy strategies to promote organic and local foods include: emphasizing taste, value, fitness, freshness and providing ethnic foods for adventurous consumers (Onozaka Y., Nurse G., and McFadden D.T., 2010). Van Loo et. al., (2013), claim that organic food industry's expansion is the result of the growing demand for organic food, and they underline consumer concerns about the conventional food production, as one of the reasons for that increase on organic food demand. Moreover to that, there are many academics to underline as a key driver for organic food consumption, the main belief that organic food is healthier and safer compared to conventional food (Magnusson, Arvola, Hursti, Alberg and Sjoden, 2003; Padel and Foster, 2005; Yiridoe, Bonti – Ankomah and Martin, 2005).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research is based on primary data collected with the use of a survey. The survey was delivered to the individuals through telephone interviews. The period for the research was from 1 September until 30 November and the respondents were from all over the country. The sample used for the present research was 500 adults, residents of Greece. The research strategy on first level had interviews on the 13 regions of Greece and on second level the distinction on rural and urban centers of those 13 regions. All of the individuals that took part on the research and answered the questionnaire were considered as representative sample of the population of the area. The chance of those individuals that answered the survey not to be residents of the regions is not significant and does not affect the results research. The frame of the data collection is the data provided by the Hellenic Telecommunication Service, that is the country national communication provider. At this point should be mentioned that on the international literature a similar research method is used and is proved that there is no correlation between the names chosen randomly and the consumer behavior (Oppenheim, 1992; Stathakopoulos 1997).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the present section the results of the questionnaire will be presented in order to understand the consumer perception on local foods and yogurt in specific.

From the total 500 individuals that participated in the questionnaire 49% were men and 51% were women. (Figure 1)

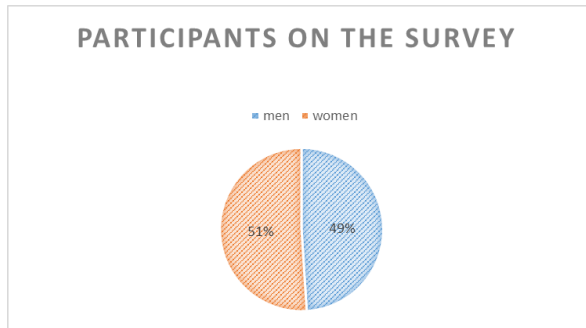


Figure 1. Participants on the survey

In the question if they buy local products 42% answered that they buy very often, 33% answered that they buy local products often, 17% answered that they buy local products sometimes, 5% answered that they buy local products occasionally and only 2% answered that they never buy local products. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. If they buy local products

In the question how often they consume yogurt, 18% answered that they consume yogurt on a daily basis, 26% answered that they consume up to 5 times per week, 38% answered that they consume yogurt up to 3 times per week, 15% answered that they consume yogurt 1 time per week and 3% answered that they do not consume yogurt during the week. (Figure 3)

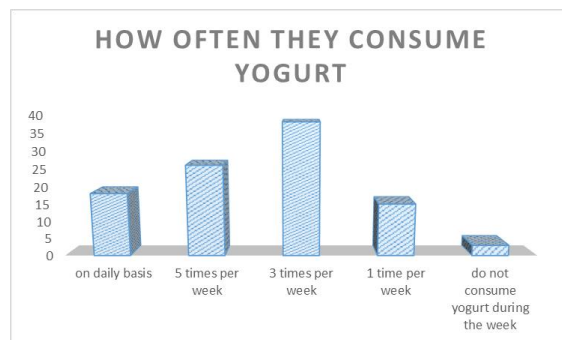


Figure 3. How often they consume yogurt

In the question why they consume yogurt 26% answered because they consider it as a healthy product, 24% because they follow a diet that includes yogurt consumption, 20% answered because they consider it as an easy meal to prepare and have during the day, 16% because it is tasty and 14% answered because it is tradition/habit for them. (Figure 4)

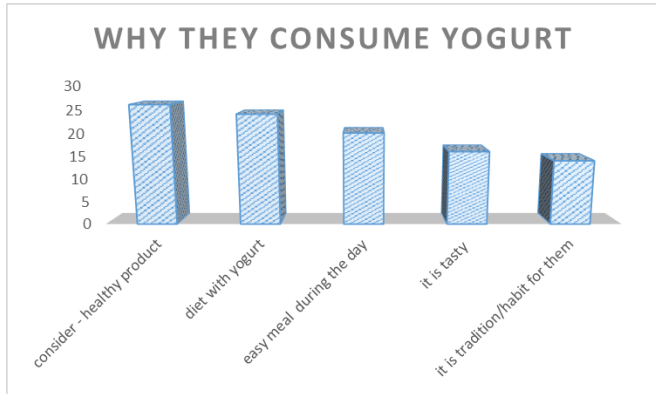


Figure 4. Why they consume yogurt

The following question that was given to the consumers of the present research was to give the main criteria for their purchase of yogurt. 28% answered that the price is the most important criteria for them before they choose what yogurt they will buy. 34% answered that the brand of the yogurt is the most important criteria for them before they make their choice. 38% answered that the most important criteria for them is for the yogurt to be produced from small traditional yogurt industry. (Figure 5)

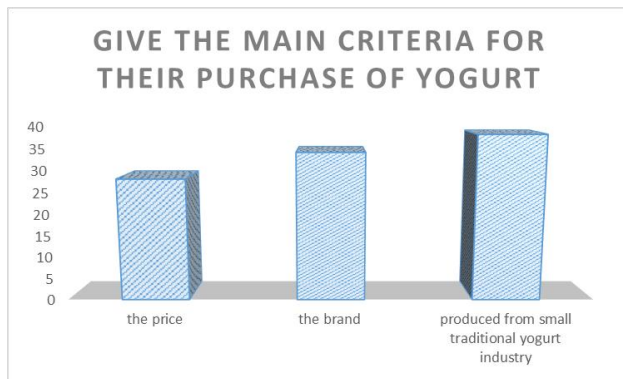


Figure 5. Give the main criteria for their purchase

In the question when they purchase yogurt what they choose Greek style yogurt or yogurt 46% answered that they choose Greek style yogurt and 54% answered that they choose yogurt. (Figure 6)

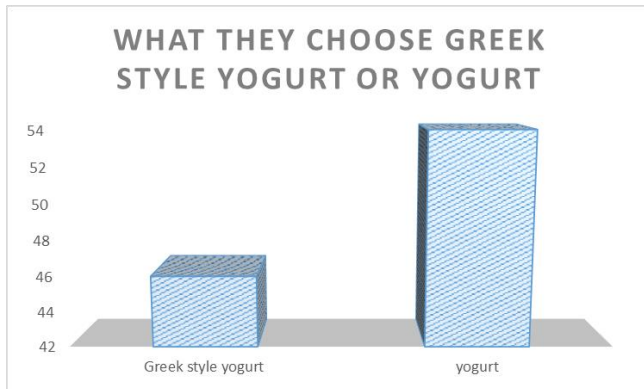


Figure 6. What they choose: Greek style yogurt or yogurt

In the question where they purchase their yogurt, 64% answered on super markets, 28% answered on mini markets and only 8% answered that they buy yogurt on other markets or shops (e.g. traditional local shops, markets without middlemen, ecc). (Figure 7)

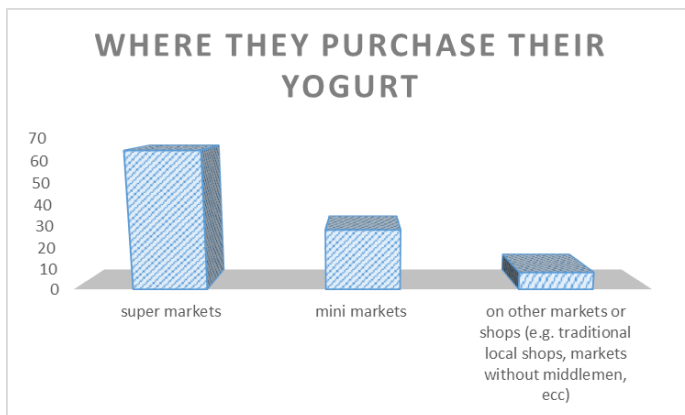


Figure 7. Where they purchase their yogurt

CONCLUSIONS

The present research was made on a sample of 500 consumers and tried to identify their behavior and attitude on consuming yogurt. Taken it as a whole, this research results provide some insights into the vast variety of factors that influence the consumption of yogurt. The research findings show that the market of yogurt in Greece is increasing and more consumers are willing to buy healthy products. As the concern on consuming healthy grows on the community, the more grows the consumption on that kind of products. The research underlines that a very significant number of the sample, 75% claims that they buy local products very often and often. It is also important to mention that the price of the yogurt is an important factor that affects consumers. Also another important finding of the present research is that it was proved that yogurt is a product that is consumed very often during the week for the consumers. Also yogurt as a product is considered as healthy, tasty, tradition,

habit, easy meal during the day. It is quite important the fact that yogurt consumption is connected with a healthy life style and with tradition. It is quite important to mention that the research sample chooses almost equally Greek style yogurt and yogurt, and that shows the dynamic of the Greek style yogurt in the market and the perspectives that exist for the traditional local yogurt industries.

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