Chapter 9

Food Safety From Consumer Perspective: Consumer Confidence in Food Safety

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ABSTRACT

Consumer perception is one of the aspects from which food safety can be considered. This view of food safety, named in the literature as subjective safety, does not necessarily correspond to objective food safety and is also considered as not being easily influenced by education of consumers. Having that in mind, the first goal of this chapter is to examine different approaches to food safety and the results of previous research dealing with consumer perspective of food safety. Besides giving broad literature review of the topic, the goal of this chapter is to implement Consumer confidence in food safety scale in Serbian consumer research. The validity, reliability, and one-dimensionality of this scale, which consists of optimism and pessimism (two dimensions of confidence), are tested and determinants of different rating on it are examined. The research from 2016 includes 300 participants in the main survey. Finally, starting from profiling consumers with different levels of general confidence in food safety, managerial recommendations are provided.

INTRODUCTION

The importance given to food safety and quality can be understood as a part of competition among actors in agribusiness based upon adding value rather than relying only on efficiency and quality control, what is caused by a number of food scares in the focus of public attention, segments of the general public paying greater attention to manners of producing food at the farm and processing level as well as by consumers becoming more fragmented in their food choices, especially in developed countries, according to Grunert (2005, pp. 369–391).

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Ritson and Mai (1998) give a broad interpretation of food safety, which includes nutritional quality of the diet and concerns about novel foods, as well as chemical and microbiological safety, then what binds these characteristics together from an economics perspective is that they all reflect a potentially adverse impact on an individual as a consequence of the consumption of food. Hereby, such impact is structured of two components: hazard, which represent the severity of the impact, and risk, which considers the probability of the hazard occurring. Hazards can be classified into sources of risk: microbiological, chemical, and technological (Yeung & Morris, 2001).

Ritson and Mai (1998) identify four manners for potential market economy “failures” in providing the optimum degree of food safety: asymmetry in the knowledge of risks, aspects of food safety (public goods), social costs of food safety, and the divergence between objective scientific evidence and consumer perception of food safety risks. When it comes to consumer behavior in regard to food safety risk, Verbeke, Frewer, Scholderer, & De Brabander (2007) point out that they tend to systematically overestimate risks in connection to the technical probability of harm occurring, while to underestimate in a large extent other risks. Despite distinguishing broad categories of risks, they do not find enough differences between various types of risk within a particular food group. Even in conditions of existence of information focused on reducing food safety uncertainty, consumers do not process this information.

It is in accordance with differentiation of objective food safety (assessment of the risk of consuming a certain food by scientists and food experts) and subjective food safety (in the mind of the consumer), their mutual deviation and failures of attempts to educate consumers in regard to these questions (Grunert, 2005). It is also in accordance with Yeung and Morris (2001) pointing out consumer risk perception of food safety not being largely determined by the hazard per se, but more with its social and psychological characteristics. Finally, this is similar to suggestions of Frewer, De Jonge, & Van Kleef (2010) that evaluation performed by consumers regarding the severity of different risks appear actually differ from valuations given by persons with knowledge about a specific hazard domain.

Having all this in mind, there are several goals of this chapter:

1. Examine different approaches to food safety and the results of previous research dealing with consumer perspective of food safety,
2. Implement consumer confidence in food safety scale, developed by de jonge et al. (2008a), in serbian consumer research,
3. Provide managerial implications (when considering the results of the research conducted in serbia, as well as considering similar researches abroad).

The first goal is implemented in the Background section of the chapter, the second in the Main Focus section, and the third in Solutions and Recommendations and Conclusions sections.

**BACKGROUND**

As for the consumer relation to food safety, De Jonge et al. (2004) argue that in the conditions characterized by the absence of any incidents in regard to food products, food safety will be “taken for granted” by consumers. Ritson and Mai (1998) stress that even if food safety was easily identifiable when existing the inverse relationship between it and some positive attribute (e.g. taste, appearance, price), consumers are not seeking for 100% safety. Grunert (2005) points out that a way in which food safety affects con-
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