

MARKETING RESEARCH ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE APPEARANCE OF VEGETABLES IN THE PURCHASE DECISION

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of the visual elements of agri-food products in consumer behavior, in the context of an increasing preference for products perceived as high-quality. The research aims to identify how the appearance of vegetables influences purchasing decisions and highlights the relationship between visual perception and purchase intent. The study is based on the hypothesis that an attractive appearance characterized by vibrant color, uniform shape, freshness, and the absence of defects leads consumers to associate products with superior quality and increases their likelihood of purchasing them.

The methodology used is a mixed-methods approach, based on a literature review and statistical analysis of the vegetable market, supplemented by quantitative research conducted via a questionnaire. The data collected made it possible to assess consumers' perceptions of visual attributes and their impact on purchasing decisions. The results confirm that visual appearance is an important factor in consumers' decision-making process, influencing their perception of product quality and freshness. Furthermore, most consumers prefer products that meet the aesthetic standards set by retailers, even if these do not directly affect nutritional value.

The study's findings highlight the importance of the appearance of vegetables in agri-food marketing strategies and the need to adapt presentation and marketing methods to consumer preferences.

Keywords: consumer behavior, visual appeal, purchase decision, consumer marketing, vegetables

JES Classification: M31

REL Classification: 14G

1. Introduction

The research topic – „Marketing research on the influence of the appearance of vegetables in the purchase decision” – is relevant to both the academic and business communities, as it highlights the role of visual factors in consumer behavior.

The research context is marked by significant shifts in consumer preferences, as consumers no longer evaluate agri-food products solely on the basis of functional criteria (price, nutritional value), but also through the lens of perceptual factors, particularly visual appearance. In this regard, the central research question is: How does the appearance of vegetables influence consumers' purchasing decisions?

Starting from this question, the research is based on the hypothesis that consumers associate an attractive visual appearance (intense color, uniform shape, lack of defects, perceived freshness) with a higher level of quality, which increases the likelihood of purchase. At the same time, it is believed that appearance can become a decisive factor, even outweighing other criteria such as price or product origin. The objectives of the paper include: defining the concept of the purchasing decision in an agri-food context, describing and classifying the attributes that define the appearance of vegetables, analyzing the Romanian vegetable market and relevant economic indicators, as well as identifying consumer perceptions regarding the influence of appearance on purchasing choices.

The relevance of the research lies in the practical application of the obtained results, which can be utilized by producers, retailers, and marketing specialists to optimize strategies for the presentation, packaging, and marketing of vegetables. Furthermore, the results can contribute to a

better understanding of consumer trends and help substantiate effective decision-making within the agri-food market.

The paper is structured into six parts: Introduction; Conceptual approaches regarding consumer behavior and the role of product appearance; Analysis of the vegetable market in Romania; Marketing research on the influence of vegetable appearance on the purchasing decision; Conclusions; and Bibliography.

2. Conceptual approaches to consumer behavior and the role of product appearance

Marketing research represents the process of collecting and analyzing information about the market, consumers, and competition, in order to substantiate strategic decisions (Kotler, Keller, 2016, p. 25). In the agri-food sector, this is essential due to the perishable and seasonal nature of food products (Balaure, 2003, p. 112). Market research aims to identify consumer needs and preferences, analyzing products, prices, packaging, and distribution (Cătoi, 2007, p. 45).

Consumer behavior includes the processes by which individuals choose and use products to satisfy their needs (Solomon, 2017, p. 87). In the case of agri-food products, the purchasing decision is influenced by both objective factors, such as price and food safety, and subjective factors, such as lifestyle and health perceptions (Florescu, 2020, p. 32).

Additionally, marketing research analyzes the value chain and the impact of transparency on consumers, as information about product origin influences the purchase intention (FAP, 2022, p. 14; Solomon, 2017, p. 91). At the same time, this allows for the anticipation of consumer trends, such as the orientation towards local, organic, and sustainable products (Balaure, 2003, p. 118).

The decision to purchase vegetables is determined by several categories of factors: psychological, personal, social, and marketing. Psychological factors include consumers' perceptions, motivations, and previous experiences. Thus, individuals concerned with a healthy lifestyle generally prefer fresh, high-quality vegetables, even if they have a higher price (Kotler, Keller, 2016, p. 134). In addition, the level of nutritional education and interest in health significantly influence purchasing behavior (Solomon, 2017, p. 92).

Personal factors, such as age, income, occupation, and education level, contribute to shaping consumer preferences. Studies show that individuals with higher incomes are more willing to purchase premium or organic products (Balaure, 2003, p. 118). Social and cultural factors, such as family, culinary traditions, and living environment, also influence food choices, and in urban areas, there is a greater preference for convenient and well-packaged products (Florescu, 2020, p. 37).

At the same time, marketing factors, such as price, packaging, and visual appearance, play an important role in the purchasing decision. Vegetables with an attractive appearance and informative labels are perceived as fresher and safer (FAO, 2022, p. 22).

The visual appearance of agri-food products represents one of the most important factors in consumers' perception of quality. In the case of vegetables, which are perishable products, the evaluation is mainly done through direct observation, and elements such as intense color, uniform shape, and the absence of defects suggest freshness and superior quality (Kotler, Keller, 2016, p. 142). Even if the nutritional value is not affected, aesthetic imperfections can lead consumers to reject the product (Solomon, 2017, p. 95).

Visual appearance influences both the immediate choice of products and long-term consumer loyalty. Vegetables with an attractive presentation are bought more often and contribute to strengthening the image of the brand or the producer (Balaure, 2003, p. 125). Furthermore, packaging, labels, and the method of presentation increase the perceived value, especially in the case of traditional or local products, where authenticity plays an important role (FAO, 2022, p. 30).

Research shows that visual perception strongly influences the purchase intention, sometimes even more than the information on the label, especially in quick-purchase situations (Florescu,

2020, p. 40; Cătoi, 2007, p. 63). Thus, the aesthetic aspect becomes an essential element of agri-food marketing.

3. Analysis of the vegetable market in Romania

The vegetable market in Romania is influenced both by the evolution of agri-food production and by changes in consumer behavior and existing international trends. The vegetable sector plays an important role in the Romanian agricultural economy, being supported by favorable climatic conditions, the existence of extensive agricultural areas, and the development of companies specialized in production, processing, and distribution. The supply of vegetables is influenced by seasonality, weather conditions, production costs, and the level of technology, as well as by investments made in logistics, storage, and distribution.

Regarding the supply on the vegetable market, in Romania, the vegetable category is found within 5 CAEN (NACE) codes, which are:

- NACE code 0113 „Growing of vegetables and melons, roots and tubers” includes 1,750 economic agents, a turnover of 1.4 billion lei (308.8 million euros), 3,165 employees, and a profit of 229.4 million lei (52.1 million euros).
- NACE code 1032 „Manufacture of fruit and vegetables juice” includes 374 economic agents, a turnover of 107.9 billion lei (24.5 million euros), 498 employees, and a profit of 14.4 million lei (3.3 million euros).
- NACE code 1039 "Other processing and preserving of fruit and vegetables (n.e.c.)" includes 717 economic agents, a turnover of 2.1 billion lei (478.6 million euros), 3,862 employees, and a profit of 162.3 million lei (36.9 million euros).
- NACE code 4631 "Wholesale of fruit and vegetables" includes 1,815 economic agents, a turnover of 10.5 billion lei (2.4 billion euros), 5,072 employees, and a profit of 368.5 million lei (83.8 million euros).
- NACE code 4721 "Retail sale of fresh fruit and vegetables in specialised stores" includes 1,462 economic agents, a turnover of 707 million lei (160.7 million euros), 1,543 employees, and a profit of 45.4 million lei (10.3 million euros).

Following the analysis of each NACE code, one representative economic agent was chosen; the financial data for each is analyzed below.

Table No. 1. Financial data of BOGLAR CHAMP SRL

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Net revenue – lei	94.897.761	99.534.488	111.716.668	134.289.201	149.796.063
Total revenue – lei	99.703.849	109.371.334	178.547.030	145.038.767	160.288.583
Total expenses – lei	80.816.856	86.486.647	151.685.951	125.891.436	143.450.611
Net profit or loss – lei	16.478.051	20.110.767	23.422.492	16.874.202	14.550.670
Average number of employees – persons	329	330	354	402	448

Source: Ministry of Finance

Between 2020 and 2024, the turnover increased from 94.9 million lei to 149.8 million lei, which highlights the continuous development of BOGLAR CHAMP SRL's activity. The net profit remained at a high level throughout the entire period, reaching a peak of 23.4 million lei in 2022, and in 2024, the company recorded a profit of 14.5 million lei. At the same time, the average number of employees increased from 329 to 448 people, reflecting the expansion of operations and the growing need for personnel.

Table No. 2. Financial data of MICROFRESH SRL

	2022	2023	2024
Net revenue – lei	976.704	14.632.551	17.616.526
Total revenue – lei	978.961	14.651.764	17.926.905
Total expenses – lei	936.345	12.842.531	17.307.478
Net profit or loss – lei	33.044	1.581.667	544.188
Average number of employees – persons	10	29	36

Source: Ministry of Finance

Between 2020 and 2024, MICROFRESH SRL recorded a significant increase in economic activity. The turnover increased from approximately 976 thousand lei in 2022 to 17.6 million lei in 2024, which highlights the rapid development of the company. The net profit reached its maximum value in 2023, at over 1.5 million lei, and in 2024 the company remained profitable, recording a profit of 544 thousand lei. At the same time, the average number of employees increased from 10 to 36 people, reflecting the expansion of operations and operational capacity.

Table No. 3. Financial data of CONTEC FOODS SRL

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Net revenue – lei	141.213.070	147.113.742	177.831.526	208.444.701	200.949.419
Total revenue – lei	142.266.611	154.230.588	188.572.376	224.294.912	199.701.777
Total expenses – lei	119.163.425	133.824.202	156.986.528	196.716.619	176.691.440
Net profit or loss – lei	20.484.326	17.939.468	28.055.358	24.681.620	20.472.956
Average number of employees – persons	447	415	383	419	432

Source: Ministry of Finance

The financial data of CONTEC FOODS SRL highlights a constant development of activity between 2020 and 2024. The turnover increased from 141.2 million lei in 2020 to over 200.9 million lei in 2024, with the maximum value recorded in 2023, when it reached 208.4 million lei. The net profit remained at a high level throughout the entire period, with a maximum of 28 million lei in 2022, which indicates an efficient and profitable activity. The average number of employees showed minor variations, ranging between 383 and 447 people, an aspect that reflects the stability of the company's personnel.

Table No. 4. Financial data of DECO FRUCHT SRL

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Net revenue – lei	308.038.544	389.821.095	429.247.573	554.481.775	560.123.983
Total revenue – lei	308.930.179	390.207.551	430.756.943	555.951.900	561.143.737
Total expenses – lei	299.014.730	384.218.979	412.542.392	546.879.050	557.451.627
Net profit or loss – lei	7.460.451	3.303.327	13.674.103	5.234.524	-1.914.996
Average number of employees – persons	88	103	110	124	125

Source: Ministry of Finance

The evolution of the financial indicators of DECO FRUCHT SRL shows a significant increase in activity during the 2020-2024 period. The turnover increased from 308 million lei in 2020 to over 560 million lei in 2024, which reflects the expansion of the company's activity.

However, the net profit experienced significant fluctuations, with the company recording a loss of approximately 1.9 million lei in 2024, driven by a sharp increase in expenses. Additionally, the average number of employees grew steadily, from 88 to 125 people, highlighting the development of the company's operational capacity.

Table No. 5. Financial data of DAMAL FRESH SRL

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Net revenue – lei	28.518.110	27.777.277	32.357.605	28.938.403	32.163.254
Total revenue – lei	28.788.118	27.934.900	32.442.736	29.043.791	32.266.192
Total expenses – lei	27.751.589	26.810.326	30.703.146	27.691.718	30.494.747
Net profit or loss – lei	907.042	981.452	1.511.036	1.190.421	1.538.101
Average number of employees – persons	25	24	23	22	22

Source: Ministry of Finance

The economic and financial indicators of DAMAL FRESH SRL show a stable evolution during the 2020-2024 period. The turnover varied between 27.7 million lei and 32.3 million lei, reaching its maximum value in 2022. The net profit remained positive throughout the entire period, increasing from approximately 907 thousand lei in 2020 to over 1.5 million lei in 2024, which highlights a profitable activity. Additionally, the average number of employees slightly decreased, from 25 to 22 people, an aspect that may indicate a streamlining of the company's operations.

The demand for vegetables is determined by the income level, lifestyle, and dietary preferences of consumers. Increasing numbers of consumers are shifting towards natural products, placing a high importance on freshness, visual appearance, and product quality. Aesthetic elements, such as color, uniform shape, and the lack of defects, significantly influence the perception of quality and the purchasing decision. The development of modern retail networks and the diversification of distribution channels contribute to increasing consumer access to a diverse range of agri-food products. Regarding the demand for vegetables, we will analyze the following indicators: the average annual consumption per capita for the main food products and beverages, and the value of fruit and vegetable production.

Table No. 6. Average annual consumption per capita for the main food products and beverages

Main food products - unit of measurement	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Potatoes - kg	92.2	93.4	98.1	97.7	102.4
Legumes - kg	4	3.6	3.8	3.9	4.2
Vegetables and vegetable products, expressed as fresh vegetable equivalents - kg	170.2	175	180.2	156	152.9
Tomatoes - kg	41.4	41.8	45.1	36.4	31.8
Onion- kg	22.8	23	22.3	17.6	19
Cabbage - kg	43.8	42.9	44.2	45.1	46.9
Edible root vegetables - kg	14.8	14.5	15.4	14.6	13.2
Peppers - kg	13.3	14.1	15.3	12.4	11.9
Green peas - kg	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.1	1.2
Green beans - kg	3.3	3.5	3.4	2.8	2.8
Cucumbers - kg	9.9	12	11.2	7.7	7.7
Other vegetables - kg	19.5	21.6	21.8	18.3	18.4

Source: TEMPO ONLINE

The data regarding the consumption of the main food products highlight fluctuations in the quantities consumed during the 2019-2023 period. Potato consumption recorded a steady increase, from 92.2 kg to 102.4 kg, while cabbage consumption increased slightly, reaching 46.9 kg in 2023.

In contrast, the total consumption of vegetables and vegetable products decreased after 2021, from 180.2 kg to 152.9 kg in 2023. Furthermore, the consumption of tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers has recorded significant decreases in recent years, which may reflect changes in consumer preferences or the influence of economic and climatic factors on production and consumption.

Table No. 7. Value of fruit and vegetable production

Common food items - units of measurement	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Vegetables - millions of RON	8512.08	9524.73	11016.3	11528.5	11880.6

Source: TEMPO ONLINE

Between 2016 and 2020, the value of vegetable production recorded an upward trend, increasing from 8,512 million lei to 11,880.6 million lei. This evolution highlights the constant development of the vegetable sector and its increasingly important contribution to the agricultural economy.

In an international context, Romania has a significant agricultural potential for vegetable cultivation, but the level of productivity and consumption remains below that of developed countries in the European Union. Western European countries record a higher consumption of vegetables due to a higher standard of living, nutritional education, and an orientation towards a healthy lifestyle. Romania faces challenges related to the modernization of agriculture, logistical infrastructure, competition from imports, and the volatility of production costs. However, the growing interest in healthy products and the development of the agri-food market offer important opportunities for increasing the competitiveness of the Romanian vegetable sector on the European market.

Table No. 8. Quantity of food supply (kg/capita/year) – based on a selection of five countries out of 39 (Germany, Italy, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria)

No.	Country	Amount of food supplied (kg per capita per year)				
		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1	Germany	120	125,9	126,5	125,2	118,7
2	Italy	89,7	92,2	94,3	95,1	101,8
3	Romania	106,3	105,8	112,3	90,3	84,6
4	Hungary	66	64,3	65	58,8	74,1
5	Bulgaria	65,6	58,5	63,4	59,7	62,3

Source: FAOSTAT

The evolution of the food supply quantity highlights significant differences among the analyzed countries during the 2019-2023 period. Germany had the highest values, remaining consistently above 118 kg/capita/year, while Italy recorded a gradual increase, reaching 101.8 kg in 2023. In the case of Romania, the indicator decreased after 2021, adjusting to 84.6 kg/capita/year in 2023. Hungary and Bulgaria recorded the lowest values, experiencing moderate fluctuations throughout the analyzed period.

4. Marketing research on the influence of vegetables' appearance on purchasing decisions

The research was conducted through a quantitative survey, using a questionnaire distributed online, in which a sample of 150 individuals participated. The survey was based on the general hypothesis that consumers are influenced by the visual appearance of vegetables when they intend to purchase them.

The structure of the sample is as follows:

- a. Based on gender, 74.7% are female and 25.3% are male (Fig. No. 1).

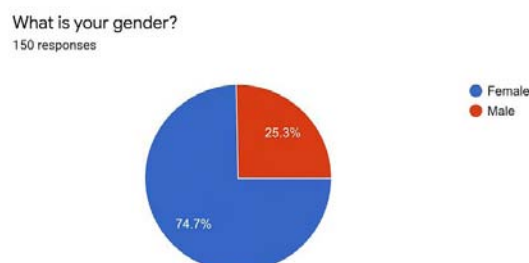


Figure no. 1 – Sample structure - gender

- b. By age, the sample is distributed as follows: 47.3% are aged between 18 and 25 years, followed by those aged between 26 and 35 years, representing 19.3%, then 17.3% are aged between 46 and 55 years, 14% are between 36 and 45 years, and in the last places are those aged over 56 and under 18 years, who together account for 2.1% of the total sample (Fig. No. 2).

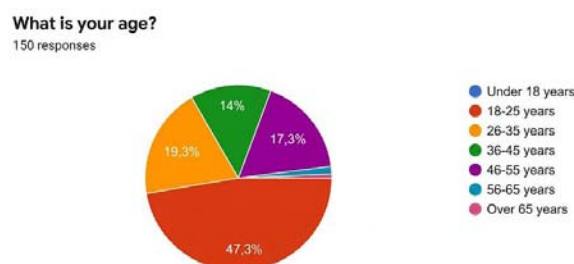


Figure no. 2 – Sample structure - age

- c. By area of residence, the sample is divided into 57.3% from urban areas and 42.7% from rural areas (Fig. No. 3).

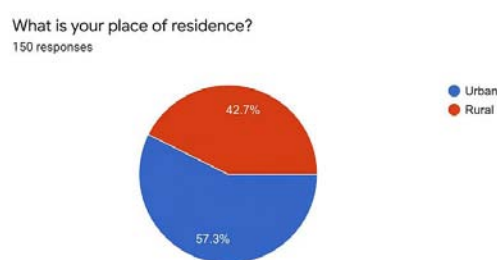


Figure no. 3 – Sample structure – area of residence

- d. The individuals who participated in the survey have a predominantly university level of education, representing 50.7%, followed by those with master's/doctoral degrees, making up 31.3% of the total sample. Additionally, 13.3% of the respondents have a high school education, and in the last places are respondents with post-secondary and middle school education, who together account for 4.7% (Fig. No. 4).

What is your level of education?
150 responses

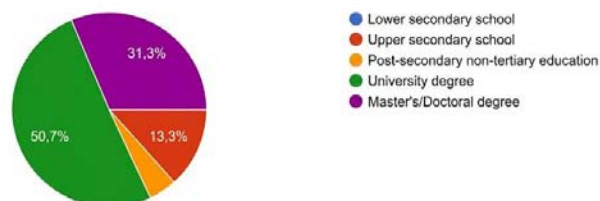


Figure no. 4 – Sample structure – education level

- e. The average monthly incomes of the respondents are distributed as follows: 35.3% have incomes between 3,000 and 5,000 lei, 19.3% have incomes under 3,000 lei, 18.7% of the respondents have average monthly incomes of 5,001-6,500 lei, 10.7% of the total sample have incomes between 6,501 and 8,000 lei, 11.3% have between 8,001 and 10,000 lei, and in the last place are individuals with average monthly incomes of over 10,000 lei, representing 4.7% of the respondents (Fig. No. 5).

What is your average monthly income?
150 responses

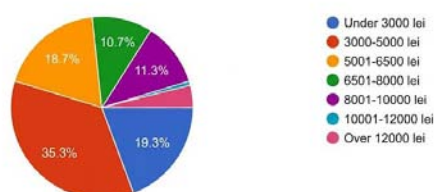


Figure no. 5 – Sample structure – average monthly income

Interpretation of the survey results:

- a. Out of the 150 respondents, 98.7% consume vegetables, while 1.3% are non-consumers (Fig. No. 6).

Do you consume fresh vegetables?
150 responses



Figure no. 6 – Segmentation of respondents according to consumption

- b. The non-consumers stated that they do not consume vegetables due to a lack of preference for their taste, without further mentions. It seems that digestive issues, dietary habits, or high prices are not factors that deter them from consuming vegetables (Fig. No. 7).

What is the main reason you don't eat vegetables?
2 responses



Figure no. 7 – Identification of reasons for non-consumption

- c. Among the non-consumers, 50% said they would not consume vegetables if they had a more attractive appearance, and 50% said they do not know if they would consume them (Fig. No. 8).

Would you consume vegetables if they had a more attractive appearance?
2 responses

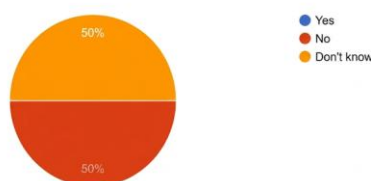


Figure no. 8 – Testing the conversion possibilities of non-consumers

- d. The non-consumers were also asked if they would consume vegetables if they had a more affordable price, but 50% said no and 50% said it depends (Fig. No. 9).

Would you consume vegetables if they were cheaper?
2 responses

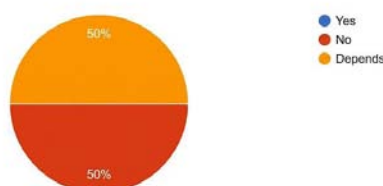


Figure no. 9 – Testing the price sensitivity of non-consumers

- e. The two individuals who do not consume vegetables were asked if they would be influenced to consume them if they were more informed about the benefits of vegetables or recipes that include them. One of these individuals said "No" and the other said "Maybe" (Fig. No. 10).

Do you think better information (recipes, benefits) would influence your consumption of vegetables?
2 responses

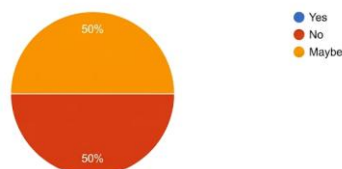


Figure no. 10 – Influence of food information/education on non-consumers

- f. Regarding the consumers, they purchase vegetables a few times a week (56.1%), once a week (28.4%), and daily (12.8%), while those who purchase once a month or less frequently account for 2.7% (Fig. No. 11).

How often do you buy fresh vegetables?
148 responses

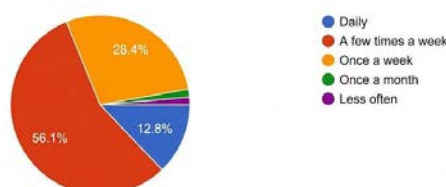


Figura nr. 11 – Determinarea frecvenței de cumpărare a legumelor

- g. Most often, they purchase vegetables from the supermarket/hypermarket (60.1%) and from the farmers' market (28.4%), while from neighborhood stores, directly from the producer, and online, they purchase a cumulative total of 11.5% (Fig. No. 12).

Where do you buy vegetables most often?
148 responses

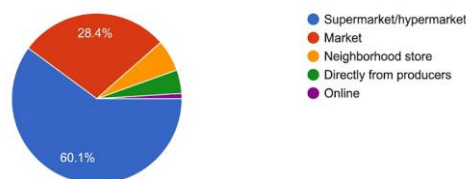


Figure no. 11 – Determining the frequency of purchasing vegetables

- h. The distribution of expenses indicates that over half of the respondents allocate between 50 and 100 lei weekly (50.7%), under 50 lei (22.3%), and 101-150 lei (13.5%), while the remaining 13.5% is divided among those who allocate 151-200 lei, 201-250 lei, and over 250 lei, with the latter having a marginal share (Fig. No. 13).

How much, on average, do you spend on fresh vegetables per week?
148 responses

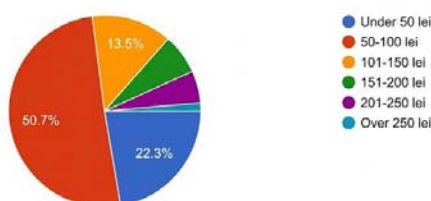


Figure no. 13 – Determining the weekly budget for vegetables

- i. The results show that visual appearance strongly influences the purchasing decision for vegetables: 55.4% of the respondents chose a score of 5, and 27% chose a score of 4. At the same time, 12.2% indicated a moderate influence, and only 5.5% chose the lower values of the scale. In total, 82.4% consider that the appearance of vegetables greatly or very greatly influences their choice of products (Fig. No. 14).

To what extent does the appearance of vegetables influence your decision to purchase?
148 responses

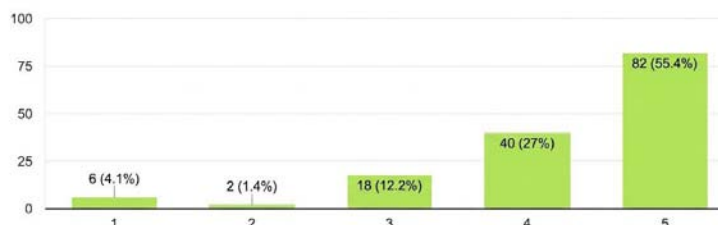


Figure no. 14 – Determining the influence of appearance on the purchase decision

- j. The results show that freshness is the most important visual criterion in choosing vegetables, being mentioned by 87.8% of the respondents. Other important elements are firmness/texture (50%), color (45.3%), and the lack of visual defects (37.2%), which highlights the importance of perceived quality indicators. In contrast, criteria such as uniform size (6.1%), packaging (7.4%), and shape (2.7%) had a low influence, with consumers being primarily interested in freshness and food safety (Fig. No. 15).

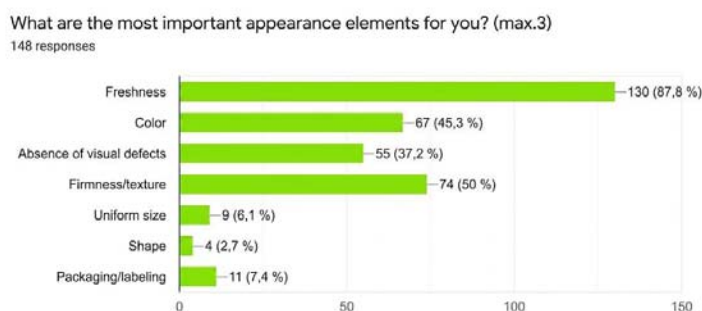


Figure no. 15 – Identification of decisive visual criteria

- k. The results show that 54.1% of the respondents avoid buying vegetables with visual defects, which highlights the importance of the aesthetic aspect in the purchasing decision. At the same time, 25.7% would buy the product if the price is reduced, and 20.3% would purchase it regardless of defects, provided they consider it to be of high quality. Overall, visual defects significantly influence consumer behavior, with appearance being a decisive criterion for many in product selection (Fig. No. 16).

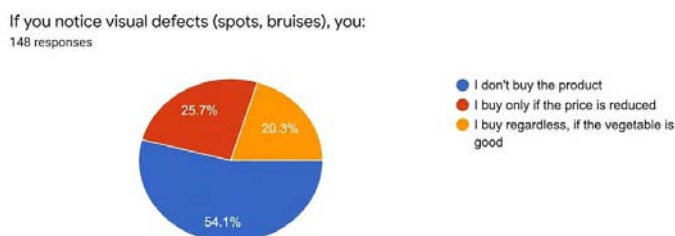


Figure no. 16 – Determining the reaction to visual defects

- l. The results show that 48% of the respondents would buy imperfect vegetables at a lower price, and 20.9% say the decision depends on the discount. In contrast, 31.1% would not buy such products regardless of the price. Overall, 68.9% would consider this option under certain conditions (Fig. No. 17).

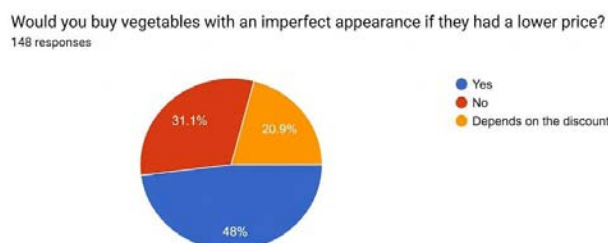


Figure no. 17 – Determining the willingness to buy imperfect vegetables

- m. The results show that expected taste is the most important criterion in choosing vegetables (4.12), followed by visual appearance (3.73). Price (3.45), product origin (3.36), and seasonality (3.37) have a moderate importance, while organic certification obtained the lowest score (3.03) (Fig. No. 18).

How important is it when choosing vegetables?

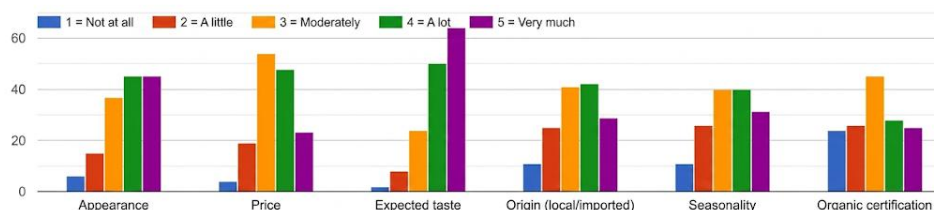


Figure no. 18 – Comparing the importance of appearance with other factors

- n. The results show that the majority of respondents throw away vegetables due to appearance deterioration at a moderate level (32.4%). Significant percentages also appear at levels 2 (25.7%) and 5 (15.5%), while only 12.8% state that they never throw away vegetables. The data confirm that visual appearance influences not only purchasing but also food waste (Fig. No. 19).

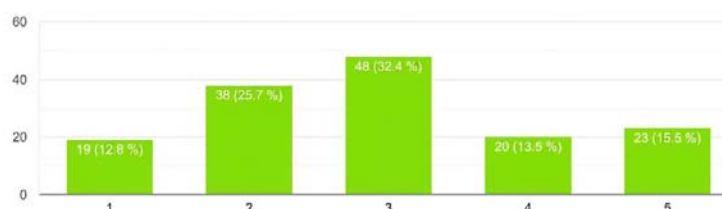
How often do you throw away vegetables because of appearance deterioration?
148 responses

Figure no. 19 – Determining the frequency of waste

- o. The results show that the majority of respondents consider that the appearance of vegetables greatly (26.7%) or very greatly (54%) influences consumer behavior. Only 5.8% perceive the influence as low, and 14% consider it moderate. Overall, over 80% of the participants confirm the importance of visual appearance in the purchasing decision (Fig. No. 20).

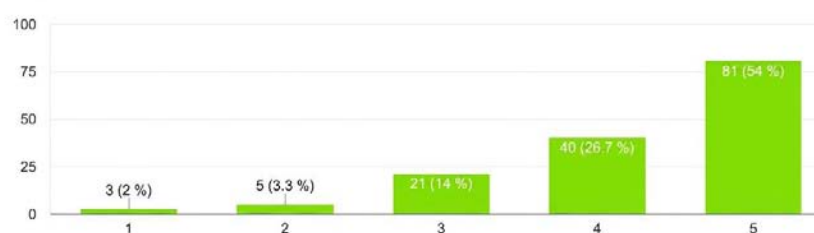
Do you consider that the appearance of vegetables influences consumers, in general?
150 responses

Figure no. 20 – Identification of reasons for non-consumption

Conclusions

The paper analyzed the influence of vegetable appearance on the purchasing decision, demonstrating that visual appearance represents an essential factor in the perception of quality and in the choice of products. Characteristics such as color, shape, uniformity, and freshness are directly associated with the concept of quality, and consumers tend to prefer vegetables with an attractive appearance. The marketing research conducted through the questionnaire confirmed that the majority of respondents choose products based on their visual appearance, and aesthetic defects reduce the purchase intention, even if the nutritional value is not affected.

The analysis of the agri-food market in Romania highlighted the importance of maintaining product quality, distribution efficiency, and the method of presentation on the shelf. At the same

time, the emergence of a trend towards accepting products with an imperfect appearance ("ugly food") was observed, especially among consumers concerned with sustainability.

The results emphasize the need to integrate visual appearance into marketing strategies and highlight opportunities for reducing food waste and promoting responsible consumption.

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