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Case Study on Consumer Preferences for Fish Products: Trends and Influencing Factors

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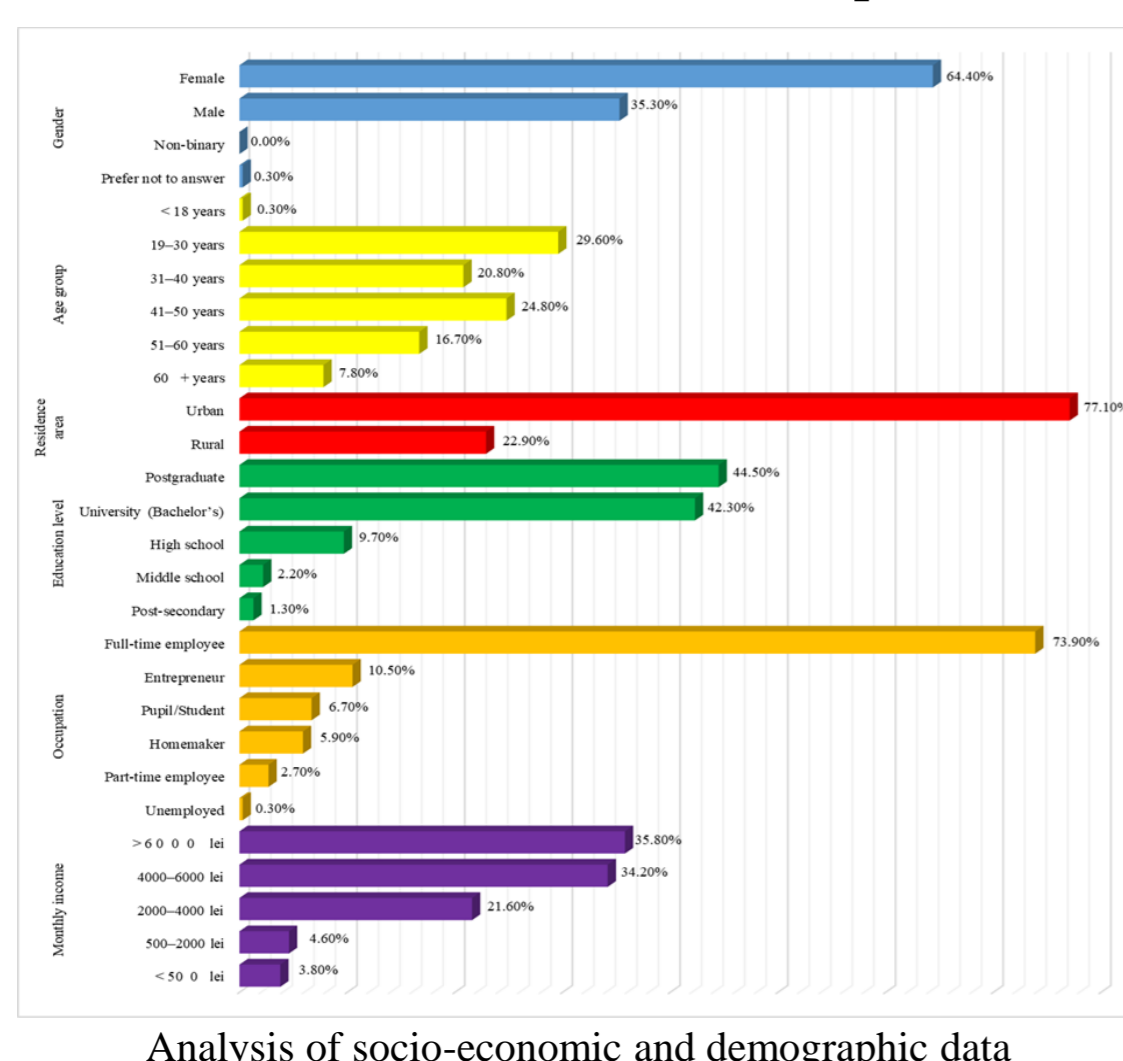
Abstract: The consumption of fish products represents an important segment of the human diet, with significant health benefits due to the high content of proteins, Omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins and essential minerals. The present study analyzes consumer preferences regarding the purchase and consumption of fish products, based on a case study conducted on a representative sample of consumers. The data were collected in July 2024, and 371 respondents answered the questionnaire. The paper investigates the factors that influence purchasing behavior, such as sensory and nutritional characteristics, price, and availability. According to the survey results, the majority of respondents prefer to buy fish products from supermarkets, especially preliminary processed ones, in order to make homemade products. Also, the purchase decision is highly influenced by sensory characteristics, while price and nutritional value are less important. The results of the study provide relevant perspectives for the food industry and decision-makers, highlighting current consumption trends and possible directions for optimizing the market offer.

• Introduction

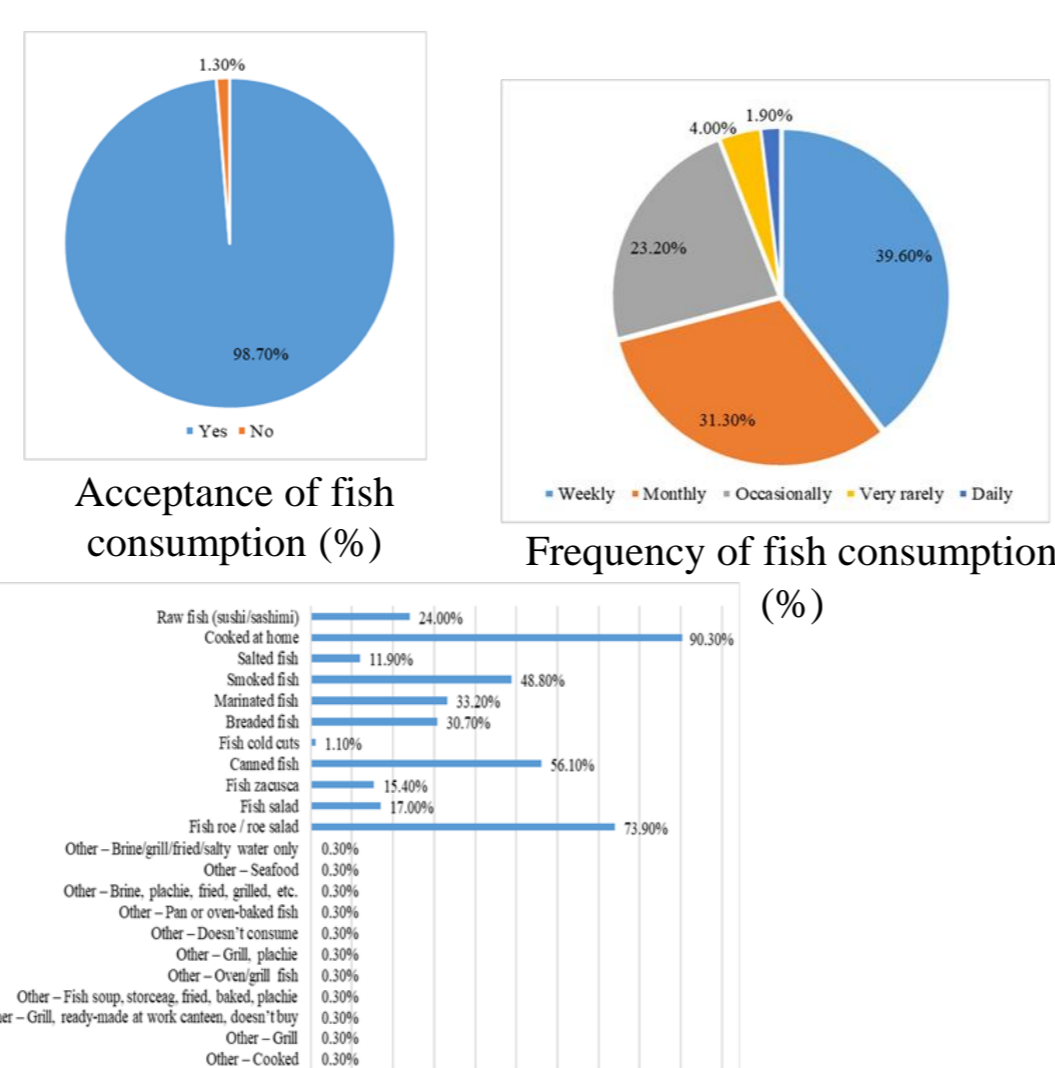
Fish is a nutritionally valuable food with multiple health benefits. It is recognized as a rich source of essential nutrients, offering various advantages for human health. Regular fish consumption provides high-quality proteins, omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals essential for cardiovascular health, immune system function, and bone maintenance. Omega-3s, particularly EPA and DHA, help reduce inflammation, blood pressure, and the risk of cardiovascular and neurodegenerative diseases. Fish is a globally appreciated but highly perishable food, requiring efficient processing technologies. Consumption preferences vary based on socio-economic factors such as education and income, while purchasing decisions are influenced by quality, nutritional value, price, and sustainability.

• Material and method

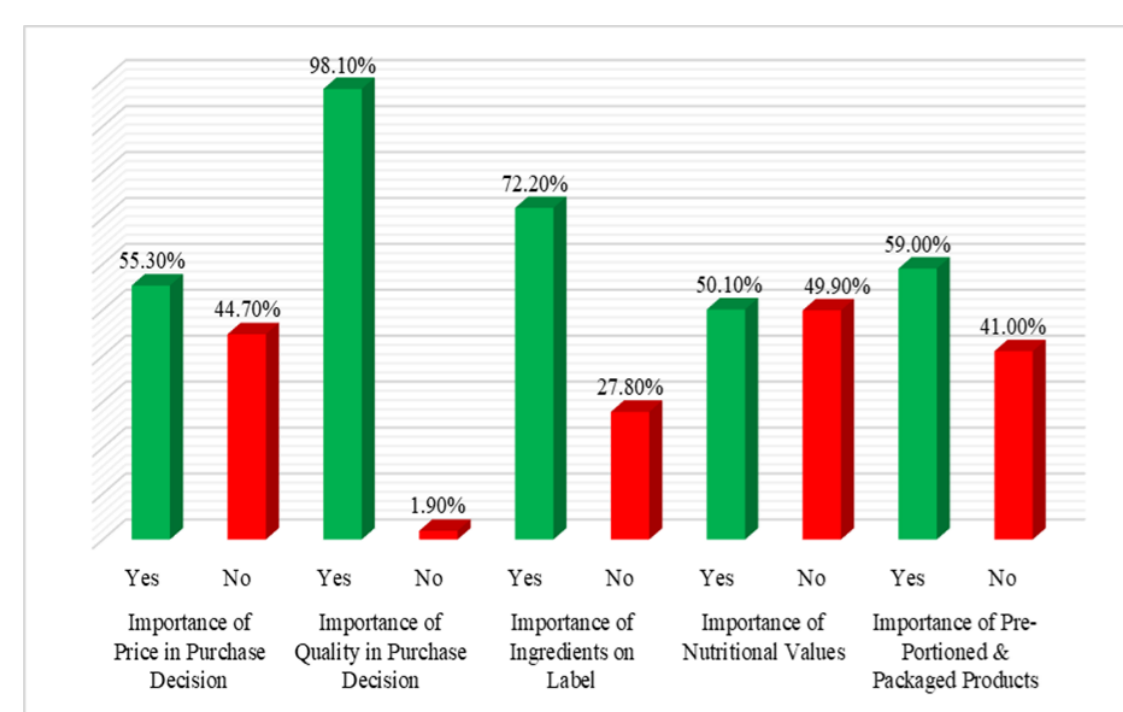
To understand the development directions of the food industry regarding fish products, it's essential to analyze consumer behavior. This study used a questionnaire focused on fish consumption behaviors and preferences, covering aspects like consumption frequency, sources, product form, and factors such as price, quality, and nutritional value. The questionnaire was distributed online for 30 days and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The study emphasizes the role of demographic factors in shaping consumption behavior, providing valuable insights for market segmentation and marketing strategies. This research contributes to a better understanding of consumer motivations, aiding commercial decisions and product development in the food industry.



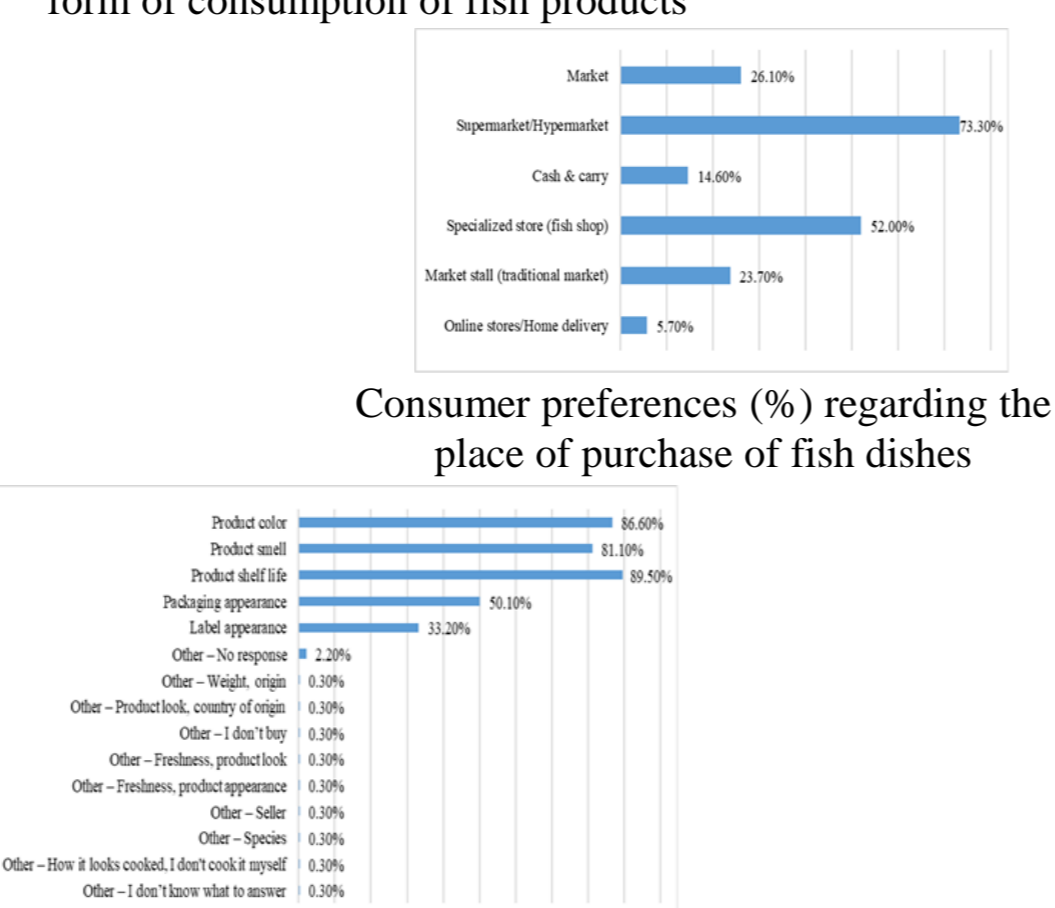
Analysis of socio-economic and demographic data



Consumer preferences (%) regarding the form of consumption of fish products



Importance of Factors in Consumer Purchase Decisions (%)



Consumer preferences (%) regarding the place of purchase of fish dishes

Consumer preferences (%) regarding additional criteria in the purchasing decision

• Results and discussions

The study, based on responses from 371 participants, outlines the profile of the fish consumer, highlighting a female majority (64.4%), an urban predominance (77.1%), a high level of education (44.5% postgraduate and 42.3% university graduates), incomes above 6000 RON (35.8%), and full-time employment (73.9%), with the largest age group being 19–30 years (29.6%). These data reflect a growing interest in healthy eating and the financial ability to invest in high-quality food products.

In the study, 98.7% of respondents stated that they consume fish, indicating a broad and diverse market with significant potential for the launch of new products in the food industry.

Fish consumption is regular for the majority of respondents: 39.6% consume it weekly, 31.3% monthly, and 23.2% occasionally, while only 4% consume it very rarely and 1.9% daily, highlighting a stable consumer base and opportunities for product diversification.

Among respondents, 90.3% prefer home-cooked fish, followed by fish roe salad (73.9%), canned fish (56.1%), smoked fish (48.8%), marinated fish (33.2%), breaded fish (30.7%), and raw fish such as sushi/sashimi (24%). Less common options include fish salad (17%), fish zacusca (15.4%), and salted fish (11.9%), while traditional dishes like brined fish, fish stew, grilled or baked fish are individually mentioned by 0.3% each. Only 0.3% do not consume fish at all, confirming a strong interest in this food in various forms.

The main source of fish product purchases is represented by supermarkets and hypermarkets, preferred by 73.3% of respondents, followed by fishmongers (specialized stores), which attract consumers interested in product freshness. Other sources include small markets (26.1%), traditional markets (23.7%), and cash & carry networks (14.6%), while online purchases are less common (5.7%), highlighting the importance of direct contact with the product.

Regarding purchasing decisions, 55.3% of respondents are not influenced by price, while 44.7% do consider it.

However, quality remains the dominant factor, guiding the choices of 98.1% of consumers. Additionally, 72.2% select products based on label-listed ingredients, and 50.1% are concerned with nutritional values. Packaged and portioned products are preferred by 59% of respondents, while 41% opt for loose fish, indicating a balance between convenience and the desire to control quantity and freshness.

The main criteria for selecting fish-based products are expiration date (89.5%), color (86.6%), and smell (81.1%), reflecting consumers' focus on freshness and food safety.

Other factors such as the appearance of the packaging (50.1%) and the label (33.2%) are considered less important.

• Conclusions

At the regional level, an increased frequency of fish products consumption is observed, along with a focus on product quality and nutritional value.

The survey highlighted a strong interest in fish consumption, with consumers showing a heightened concern for ingredients and their health effects.

The expiration date emerged as an important factor, considering the perishable nature of fish products. Additionally, packaging is essential for food safety, and regionally, consumption focuses on quality and nutritional value.

The results can inform production, marketing strategies, and public policies tailored to regional specifics, providing a solid foundation for strategic decisions in the food industry.

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