YOUNG CONSUMERS' ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS INNOVATIVE FOOD PRODUCTS

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Abstract

In the recent decades innovation has evolved worldwide as the main driver and accelerator of sustainable business development in almost any sphere of economic activity including food and drink industry. Plainly any new or significantly improved food product, created by a producer as specified set of functional features in order to be introduced to the market, can be entitled as innovative food product. Hence it is essential for an innovative food product to be considered from the perspective of a consumer. Researches of consumers' attitude and behaviour towards particular innovative food products were conducted internationally in various segments of consumers. However, there is still a lack of appropriate inquiries into attitude and behaviour of young consumers towards innovative food products. This paper is worked out as a pilot investigation in the frame of tailored research concerning demand on innovative food products in the Lithuanian market. The purpose of the paper is to explore the attitude and behaviour of young Lithuanian consumers towards innovative food products. Consequently, noticeable prior researches on essential concepts and measuring approaches of consumers' attitude and behaviour towards innovative food products – those have been introduced in relevant international resources – are discussed. Jointly carried out survey of attitude and behaviour of young Lithuanian consumers towards innovative food products is introduced. Finally, the paper provides conclusions and insights for further research.

Keywords: innovation, consumer innovativeness, innovative-food products.

Introduction

In the recent decades innovation has evolved worldwide as the main driver and accelerator of sustainable business development in almost any sphere of economic activity including food and drink industry. Plainly any new or significantly improved food product, created by a producer as specified set of functional features in order to be introduced to the market, can be entitled as innovative food product (hereinafter IFP). Hence it is essential for an IFP to be considered from the perspective of a consumer. Quite a few researches of consumers' attitude and behaviour towards particular IFPs were conducted internationally in various segments of consumers during the last three decades. However, there is still a lack of appropriate inquiries into attitude and behaviour of young consumers towards IFPs. This paper is worked out as a pilot investigation in the frame of tailored research concerning demand on IFPs in the Lithuanian market.

The purpose of the paper is to explore the attitude and behaviour of young Lithuanian consumers towards IFPs. Accordingly, the main objectives of the paper are:

- to investigate noticeable prior researches on essential concepts and measuring approaches of consumers' attitude and behaviour towards IFPs those have been introduced in relevant international resources.
- to carry out a survey of attitude and behaviour of young Lithuanian consumers towards IFPs.

Thus, in following parts of the paper relevant international resources are investigated as well as design, methods and results of the carried out survey are discussed. Finally, conclusions and insights for the further research in the study area are provided.

Theoretical Background

As it has been pointed in a number of resources (including Costa & Jongen, 2006; Info entrepreneurs, n.d.; Investopedia, 2018), innovation activities commonly are intended to maintain growth, reduce the market risk, enhance the stock market value and increase competitiveness of a business firm. However, the European food and drink industry being in 2015 the largest manufacturing sector in the EU with 1,098 billion € turnover and 4.2 million people employed in 289 thousand firms had been quiet on a scale of innovations introduced to the market comparing with industries in other economic sectors of the EU. Partly it is related to a lower R&D investment intensity (i.e. 0.20 % of the industry output, on average 2012-2014) for instance compared to Japan (0.65 %), the USA (0.44 %) and Norway (0.39 %). The Lithuanian food and drink industry's innovation related achievements had been yet modest considering even lower R&D investment intensity (0.04 %) in the same period (FoodDrinkEurope, 2017). Another substantial reason is that many new food product launches naturally fail due to consumers' rejection to accept them. It was estimated that around 40 % to 50 % of new food product launches as a rule are off of retailers' shelves within a year (Huotilainen at al., 2006). Hence, consumers indeed play an essential role in success of IFPs by legitimizing them at the market thus encouraging innovativeness in food manufacturing firms.

With reference to relevant international resources (for instance OECD & Eurostat, 2005; OECD, 2015; Peciuriene, 2016), it is evident that the concept of *innovativeness* is linked up not only with the *supply side* of IFPs – innovation-active business firms – but also with the *demand side* – consumers of IFPs. In this paper, the term *innovativeness* is applicable namely to the latter dimension which is denoted as *consumer innovativeness*.

With reference to Caricati & Raimondi (2015), the construct of consumer innovativeness remains not yet well defined and structured by scholars. Due to cohesion with innovations, "consumer innovativeness can be defined as the extent to which an individual is oriented to buy and use new and different products, rather than to maintain previous consumption styles". This definition is comprised of both the attitude toward a new product and the actual behaviour of buying an innovation" (Caricati & Raimondi, 2015).

For purposes of its measuring, consumer innovativeness practically is tied with willingness to adopt or reject product innovation. A substantial body of research (including Backstrom at al., 2004; Barcellos at al., 2009; Barska & Wojciech, 2014), has identified that consumers' willingness to adopt or reject IFPs mainly could be related to their personality traits, cultural habits, socio-demographic profile, lifestyle or stage of life. Moreover, the rejection of IFPs may also be related to food neophobia, or phenomenon denotative "a strong avoidance to try novel, unfamiliar foods" (Pliner & Hobden, 1992). Heretofore it was found by researchers that familiarity with food products may be a central determinant of their acceptance for food-neophobic consumers. That naturally constitutes a barrier to the successful acceptance of IFPs in the market. Although food neophobia mainly is affected by personality traits, cultural and socio-economic influences have been stressed as well (Barcellos at al., 2009). Therefore, various surveys of consumers' willingness to adopt or reject IFPs have become prevailing nowadays. Accordingly, a number of expedient scales have been developed in pursuance of measuring certain aspects of consumer innovativeness.

Goldsmith & Hofacker (1991) in the paper *Measuring consumer innovativeness* proposed a 6-items Domain Specific Innovativeness Scale (hereafter the DSIS) that is aimed at measuring consumer innovativeness for a particular product category, thus reflecting consumer's tendency to learn about and adopt innovations within a specific domain of interest. According to Roehrich (2004), the DSIS has proved to be unidimentional, highly reliable and presented with a high predictive validity. In the food and drink industry the DSIS has been effectively employed for instance to measure innovation in delicatessen-type ham and wine (Huotilainen at al., 2006).

Pliner and Hobden (1992) in the paper *Development of a scale to measure the trait food neophobia* introduced a 10-items Food Neophobia Scale (hereafter the FNS) in order to quantify food neophobia trait of an individual consumer. Since then the FNS has been used in a good many studies in food consumption field, appearing to be a valid instrument for characterization of consumer responses to unfamiliar foods (including Barcellos at al., 2009; Zabrocki, 2017).

Research Design

On purpose of exploring the attitude and behaviour of young Lithuanian consumers towards IFPs pilot research was accomplished by surveying of students enrolled in Professional Bachelor of Business, Management and Marketing degrees at the Business Management Faculty of Vilniaus Kolegija/ University of Applied Sciences in 2017-2018 academic year.

The data used in this research was collected via a survey instrument completed by 108 full-time and part-time students aged between 18 and 29 years old. It should be noted that a sample of 96 respondents is considered sufficient to reflect with 95 % probability and 10 % confidence interval ("Creative", n.d.) the target population of 554 715 young Lithuanian people within 14–29 age bracket estimated in 2017 by the Lithuanian Department of Statistics ("Jaunimo", 2017).

The survey instrument consisted of three sections. The first section comprised of a range of socio-demographic profiling questions as well as questions measuring the level of respondents' familiarity with and buying behaviour towards IFPs.

The second section of the survey instrument collected information on respondents' attitudes towards willingness to adopt IFPs. The modified 6-items DSIS was applied for this purpose. Originally developed by Goldsmith & Hofacker (1991) the DSIS reverse statements were inverted in the survey instrument. Upon filling the DSIS respondents were requested to tick an appropriate number on the 5-point Likert scale to express the strength of their opinion on each of the six statements. The five-point Likert scale items were anchored from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree', with neutral position (3) 'neither agree nor disagree'. So, possible theoretical range of scores on the modified DSIS was from 6 to 30 with a higher score indicating a higher level of certain consumer's domain-specific innovativeness.

The third section of the survey instrument was used to measure respondents' food neophobia with the modified 10-items FNS. Similarly, to the DSIS appliance case, originally developed by Pliner & Hobden (1992) FNS reverse statements were inverted in the survey instrument. While completing the FNS respondents were requested to tick an appropriate number on the 5-point Likert scale to express the strength of their opinion on each of the ten statements. The 5-point Likert scale items were anchored from (1) 'totally disagree' to (5) 'totally agree', with neutral position (3) 'neither agree nor disagree'. So, possible theoretical range of scores on the modified FNS was from 10 to 50 with a higher score indicating a higher level of certain consumer's food neophobia.

Frequency, graphical and reliability analyses in the accomplished research have been prosecuted using SPSS Statistics and Microsoft Excel software.

Research Methods and Findings

The sample of 108 surveyed students was composed of 83 females (76.9 % of total respondents) and 25 males (23.1 % of total respondents). It is noteworthy that gender structure of surveyed students is incommensurate to actual structure of young Lithuanian people aged between 18 and 29 years old in 2017, i.e. 51.4 % females and 48.6% males ("Jaunimo", 2017). In order to eliminate the influence of gender structure on the research certain ratio data analysis was applied. Thus, summary of the estimated percentage ratios on the surveyed students' behaviour towards purchasing IFPs in relation to their gender and gross income per month is provided in the 1 table. It should be noted that *% of 'No'* means percentage of certain respondents actually not purchasing IFPs

and, respectively, *% of 'Yes'* – percentage of certain respondents indeed purchasing IFPs. Amounts of minimum and approximate average monthly salary usable in the second half-year of 2017 were applied for individual gross income segmentation.

1 table. Surveyed students' behaviour towards purchasing IFPs in relation to gender and income per month.

|	Females' income per month				Males' income per month			
	< 380 €	380-840 €	> 840 €	Sub-total	< 380 €	380-840 €	> 840 €	Sub-total
% of 'No'	49.4	14.5	3.6	67.5	32.0	24.0	16.0	72.0
% of 'Yes'	19.3	12.0	1.2	32.5	16.0	8.0	4.0	28.0
Sub-total	68.7	26.5	4.8	100.0	48.0	32.0	20.0	100.0

(Source: concluded by authors)

As it is seen from the 1 table, in overall irrespective of amount of gross income per month surveyed female students were more inclined towards purchasing IFPs (32.5 % of female respondents) than male (28.0 % of male respondents). Withal majority of surveyed both gender students (68.5 % of total respondents) declared entirely not purchasing IFPs. Therefore, considering the applicable confidence interval of the obtained data, it can be concluded that overall majority of young Lithuanian consumers yet are not inclined towards purchasing IFPs.

As it is evident from 1 picture IFPs expensiveness was underscored the foremost reason not to purchase and consume IFPs both by females (62.5 %) and males (55.6 %). Moreover, females were by 6.9 percentage points more negatively influenced by this factor than males. Poor assortment, small variety of IFPs appeared to be the reason most differently motivated not purchasing behaviour of surveyed females (10.8 %) and males (19.6 %). Thus, females were by 8.8 percentage points less negatively influenced by the abovementioned factor than males.
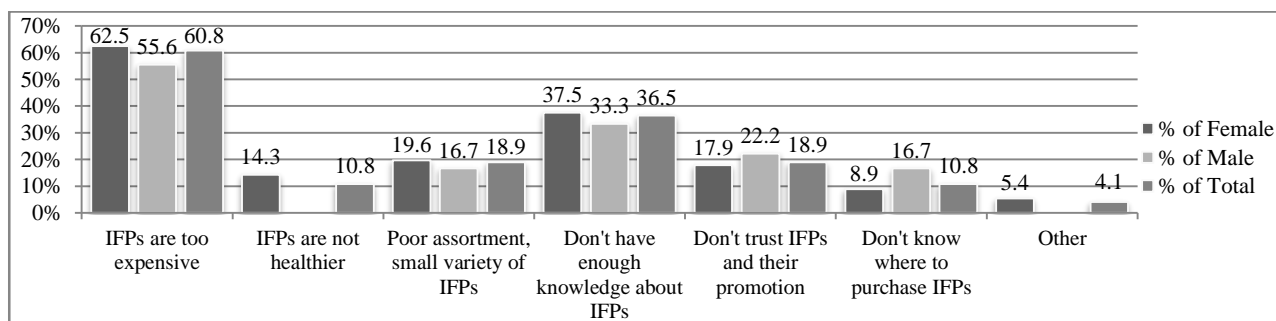

1 picture. Main reasons not to purchase and consume IFPs noted by surveyed not purchasing students.
(Source: concluded by authors)

It is demonstrated in 2 picture that price level of IFPs was denoted the foremost reason that may motivate both not purchasing females (35.7 %) and males (38.9 %) to purchase and consume IFPs. Bigger assortment of IFPs in shopping centres and more information about IFPs selling places would equally encourage males (22.2 %) to purchase and consume IFPs. It is worthy of remark that bigger assortment of IFPs at market-places would not encourage neither females no males to purchase and consume IFPs.
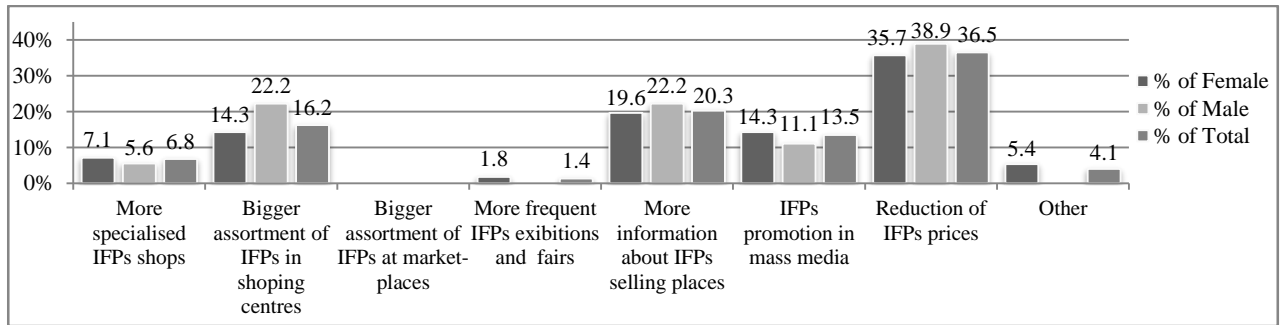
2 picture. *Main reasons those may motivate to purchase and consume IFPs noted by surveyed not purchasing students. (Source: concluded by authors)*

3 picture illustrates that shopping centres were equally named the most popular places of purchasing IFPs by overall majority of surveyed purchasing females (88.9 %) and males (85.7 %).
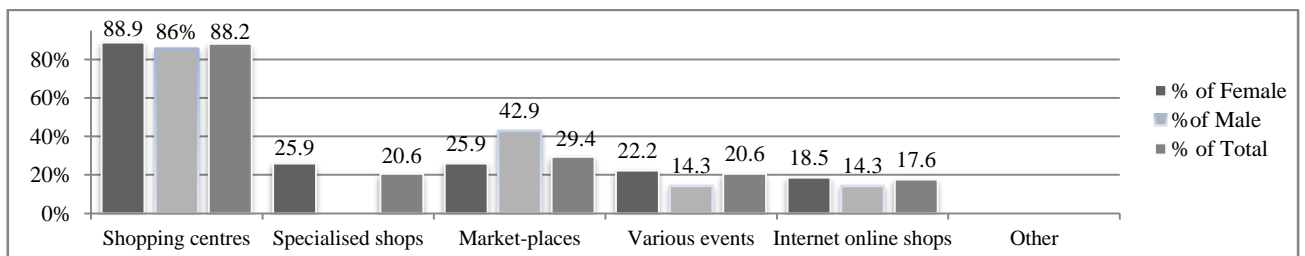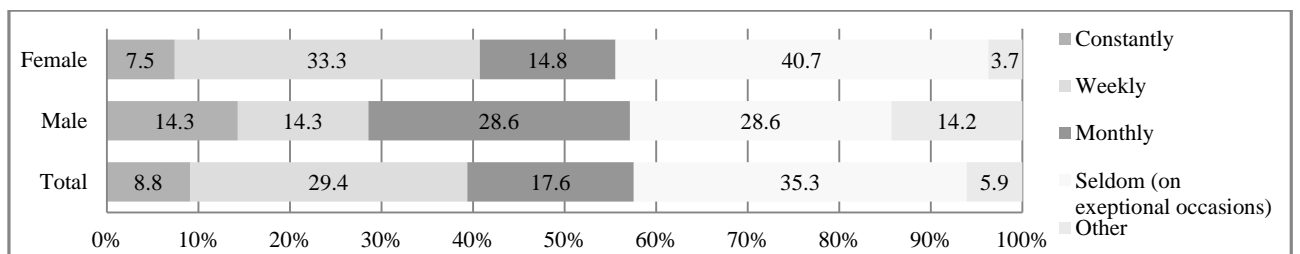

3 picture. *Main places of purchasing IFPs noted by surveyed purchasing students. (Source: concluded by authors)*

Market-places appeared to be locations where males (42.9 %) claimed purchasing IFPs 1.7 times more often than females (25.9 %). Also, it should be noted that males did not mention specialised shops as the places of purchasing IFPs, whereas 25.9 % of females marked them.

Similarly, shopping centres were equally named the most desirable places of purchasing IFPs by overall majority of surveyed purchasing females (60.0 %) and males (57.1 %).

As it is seen from 4 picture, majority of surveyed IFPs purchasing females used to purchase IFPs seldom or on exceptional occasions (40.7 %) or weekly (33.3 %). Simultaneously majority of surveyed IFPs purchasing males claimed equally often purchasing IFPs seldom (on exceptional occasions) or monthly (28.6 % each). Thus, majority of IFPs purchasing respondents in total indicated purchasing IFPs not more frequently than monthly.

4 picture. *Rhythm of purchasing IFPs noted by surveyed purchasing students. (Source: concluded by authors)*

5 picture demonstrates the shape of distribution of individual DSIS scores of all surveyed students. Frequency analysis prosecuted on the surveyed students' individual DSIS scores data enables pointing out that the individual DSIS scores' histogram is positively skewed with skewness 0.637 and standard error of skewness 0.233. Individual DSIS scores range from 6 to 26 with mode 6, median 11, mean 12.11 and standard deviation 4.094.
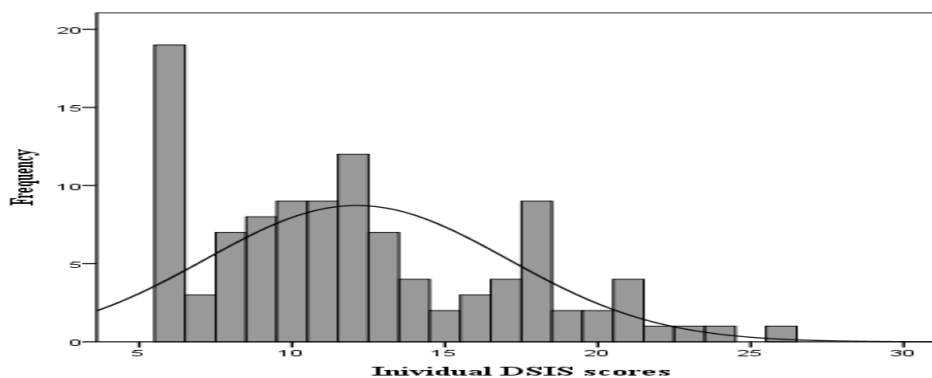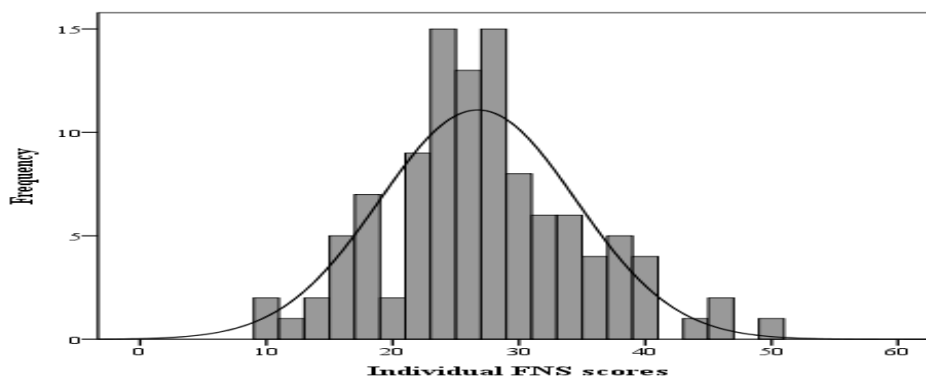
5 picture. *Distribution of individual DSIS scores of surveyed students.*
(Source: concluded by authors)

The DSIS mean score (12.11) is not consistent with the DSIS mean scores estimated by Barcellos at al. (2009) in similar surveys conducted in Brazil (20.57) and in the UK (19.93). In general, the DSIS mean scores indicate that surveyed students in Lithuania have lower level of innovativeness in regard to consumption of IFPs than in Brazil and in the UK. The calculated mean value for each variable in the DSIS was around 2, although individual values for 5 items varied from 1 to 5. Only for the item *If new, different or innovative foods are available in shops and supermarkets I always purchase them* there were no respondents strongly agreed with the statement (individual values varied from 1 to 4). It all goes to show that young Lithuanian consumers in the mass are distantly inclined to adopt IFPs.

The Cronbach's Alpha test was carried out to measure the reliability of the obtained DSIS data. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient in Lithuanian sample amounted to 0.874. On comparison it is quite higher than acceptable level of 0.7 as well as the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients estimated by Barcellos at al. (2009) in Brazilian sample (0.798) and in the UK sample (0.782).

In order to analyse individual DSIS scores of the surveyed Lithuanian students in more detail, a DSIS cut-off point amounted to 20 was calculated by subtracting the lowest individual DSIS score from the highest. This indicator is consistent with the DSIS cut-off points calculated by Barcellos at al. (2009) based on respondents' data in Brazil (30-7=23) and in the UK (29-9=20). Accordingly, young consumers with individual DSIS scores of 20 (Lithuania and the UK) or 23 (Brazil) and over were identified as *food innovators* and the rest – as *adopters* (or *non-food innovators*). Only 9.3 % of the surveyed Lithuanian respondents were assigned to food innovators. That is 4.2 times less than in the Brazilian sample with 39.4 % of food innovators and 6.3 times less than in the UK sample with 58.4 % of food innovators (Barcellos at al., 2009).

6 picture demonstrates the shape of distribution of individual FNS scores of all surveyed students. Frequency analysis prosecuted on the students' individual FNS scores data enables pointing out that the individual FNS scores' histogram is about normally distributed with positively skewness 0.370 and standard error of skewness 0.233. Individual FNS scores range from 10 to 50 with mode 24, median 26, mean 26.74 and standard deviation 7.772.

6 picture. *Distribution of individual FNS scores of surveyed students.*
(Source: concluded by authors)

The FNS mean score (26.74) estimated in the survey is somewhat higher than the FNS mean scores obtained by Barcellos at al. (2009) in similar surveys conducted in Brazil (25.35) and in the UK (23.54). Given mean scores show that average surveyed young Lithuanian consumer was more food neophobic, than suchlike consumer in Brazil and the UK.

The Cronbach's Alpha test was carried out to measure reliability of the collected FNS data. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient amounted to 0.825. Thus, it is fairly higher than acceptable level of 0.7 as well as the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients estimated by Barcellos at al. (2009) in similar surveys conducted in Brazil (0.770) and in the UK (0.804).

In order to expound on investigation of the FNS individual scores of the surveyed Lithuanian students, a FNS cut-off point amounted to 40 was calculated by subtracting the lowest individual FNS score from the highest. This indicator is consistent with the FNS cut-off points calculated by Barcellos at al. (2009) based on respondents' data in Brazil (45-10=35) and in the UK (48-11=37). Accordingly, respondents with FNS individual scores of 40 (Lithuania), 37 (the UK) or 35 (Brazil) and over were identified as *neophobics* and the rest – *non-neophobics*. Only 5.6 % of the surveyed Lithuanian respondents were assigned to food neophobics. That is 2.1 times less than in the Brazilian sample with 11.5 % of food neophobics and almost coincident with the UK sample wherein 5.0 % were non-neofobics (Barcellos at al., 2009). Thus, it can be stated that in mass young Lithuanian consumers are *non-neophobics* and at the minimum not averse to IFPs.

Conclusions

With reference to the relevant international resources on IFPs related innovativeness, it is evident that the concept of *innovativeness* when is applicable to the *demand side* of IFPs – consumers of IFPs – is denoted as *consumer innovativeness*. Due to the fact that the concept of consumer innovativeness is not unambiguous, the construct of consumer innovativeness remains not yet well defined and structured by scholars. The most adequate definition of consumer innovativeness is comprised of both the attitude and behaviour toward an innovative product.

For purposes of its measuring consumer innovativeness practically is tied with willingness to adopt or reject product innovation. Accordingly, a number of expedient scales have been developed during the last three decades in pursuance of measuring certain aspects of consumer innovativeness. Two of them with certain modifications were applied in the accomplished research. Appliance of the DSIS and the FNS in this research enabled making certain comparisons with particular results of similar prior studies.

In overall irrespective of amount of gross income per month surveyed female students were more inclined towards purchasing and consuming IFPs than male. Withal majority of surveyed both gender students declared entirely not purchasing IFPs. Therefore, considering the applicable

confidence interval of the obtained data, it can be concluded that overall majority of young Lithuanian consumers yet are not inclined towards purchasing IFPs.

IFPs expensiveness was underscored the foremost reason not to purchase and consume IFPs both by females and males. It is worthy of remark that price level of IFPs was denoted the foremost reason that may motivate both not purchasing females and males to purchase and consume IFPs.

Shopping centres were equally named the most popular places as well as the most desirable places of purchasing IFPs by overall majority of surveyed purchasing females and males. It is noticeable that majority of IFPs purchasing respondents in total indicated purchasing IFPs not more frequently than monthly.

The DSIS mean score estimated in the accomplished research is fairly lower than DSIS mean scores calculated in similar surveys conducted in Brazil and in the UK. In general, the DSIS mean scores indicate that surveyed students in Lithuania have fairly lower level of innovativeness in regard to consumption of IFPs than young consumers in Brazil and in the UK. Moreover, the DSIS cut-off point calculated based on individual DSIS scores showed that share of food innovators among surveyed Lithuanian respondents was several times less than in Brazil and in the UK.

The FNS mean score estimated in the implemented survey is somewhat higher than FNS mean scores obtained in similar surveys conducted in Brazil and in the UK. Given mean scores show that average surveyed young Lithuanian consumer was more food neophobic, than suchlike consumer in Brazil and the UK. The FNS cut-off point calculated based on individual FNS scores showed that share of food neophobics among surveyed Lithuanian respondents was two times less than in Brazil and almost the same as in the UK. So, in mass young Lithuanian consumers are *non-neophobics* and at the minimum not averse to IFPs.

Insights

Taking into the mind that all measures were self-reported by respondents, it is possible that some of the students may knowingly reported inaccurate or embellished information. In order to reduce the risk of bias, the research issues would benefit from further replication. It is expedient to deliberate upon further expanded study arising from limitations of this pilot research related to deficient number of surveyed young consumers only at one faculty of the particular Lithuanian HEI.

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