



What determines fresh fish consumption in Croatia?



Marina Tomić^{a,*}, Daniel Matulić^b, Margareta Jelić^c

^a Department of Agricultural Marketing, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Agriculture, Zagreb, Croatia

^b Department of Fisheries, Beekeeping, Game Management and Special Zoology, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Agriculture, Zagreb, Croatia

^c Department of Psychology, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia

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ABSTRACT

Although fresh fish is widely available, consumption still remains below the recommended intake levels among the majority of European consumers. The economic crisis affects consumer food behaviour, therefore fresh fish is perceived as healthy but expensive food product. The aim of this study was to determine the factors influencing fresh fish consumption using an expanded Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) as a theoretical framework. The survey was conducted on a heterogeneous sample of 1151 Croatian fresh fish consumers. The study investigated the relationship between attitudes, perceived behavioural control, subjective norm, moral obligation, involvement in health, availability, intention and consumption of fresh fish. Structural Equation Modeling by Partial Least Squares was used to analyse the collected data. The results indicated that attitudes are the strongest positive predictor of the intention to consume fresh fish. Other significant predictors of the intention to consume fresh fish were perceived behavioural control, subjective norm, health involvement and moral obligation. The intention to consume fresh fish showed a strong positive correlation with behaviour. This survey provides valuable information for food marketing professionals and for the food industry in general.

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1. Introduction

Consumer habits have changed significantly in recent decades, and food issues such as indulgence, convenience, health, ethics, variety, value for money, and safety are becoming increasingly important. Health and well-being are increasingly influencing consumption decisions, and fish has a particular prominence in this respect, as mounting evidence confirms the health benefits of eating fish (FAO, 2014).

At the same time, many World countries are in economic crisis, which affect consumers' food purchasing behaviour. According to Eyice Basev (2014) people do not spend much money during the economic crisis, as they did before; they only buy certain goods; they purchase according to the prices and certain advantages. Although food products display inelastic price elasticity, fish products are exception (Angulo, Gil, & Gracia, 1997; Gracia & Albisu, 1999). This shows that variations in prices affect the quantity

consumption of the fish. However, a healthy diet is becoming more significant, even through education and media promotion. Culinary training courses, TV culinary programs and magazines are in trend for the last 10 years. They promote home food preparation, with special emphasis on healthy food. World economic crisis has led to the reduction of consumer financial power so home cooking is one way to save the money.

Since fresh fish is considered highly valuable food with the price in restaurants several times higher, more consumers of fresh fish turns to its preparing at home (EFSA, 2014). To confirm previous, seafood, particularly fresh fish, is a widely available and nutrient-rich food source (IOM, 2007) that is recommended due to multiple nutritional benefits (AHO, 2014; ISSFAL, 2004). Compared to other seafood products, fish consumption in Europe is more frequent (FAOSTAT, 2005).

Fish is high in protein and low in saturated fats and contains a number of other healthy nutrients, such as vitamin D, selenium, and iodine. In particular, fish is the primary dietary source of n-3 long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids, including docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) (Oken et al., 2012), which are well known for their anti-inflammatory effect (Wall, Ross, Fitzgerald, & Stanton, 2010) and their protective role against

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: matomic@agr.hr (M. Tomić), dmatulic@agr.hr (D. Matulić), mjelic@ffzg.hr (M. Jelić).

chronic disease (Cole, Ma, & Frautschy, 2010). Consumption of fresh fish has a positive impact on human health when included at least twice a week in a normal diet (Mozaffarian & Rimm, 2006; Sioen, Matthys, De Backer, Van Camp, & De Henauw, 2007).

Burger and Gochfeld (2009) indicated that consumers today are aware of the health benefits of consuming fish. However, despite the predominantly healthy image of fish as a food product and the favourable consumer attitudes towards eating fish (Trondsen, Braaten, Lund, & Eggen, 2004b), fresh fish consumption remains below the recommended intake levels among the majority of European consumers (Welch et al., 2002). Although the average European fish consumption is around 20 kg (per capita per year) (FAO, 2011), there is great variation among countries, i.e., Portugal 61.6 kg, Spain 44.8 kg and France 34.2 kg (FAO, 2008). This occurs due to differences in the quantity and frequency of consumed fish among regions and countries, which reflects differences in the availability of fish and other foods, and the heterogeneity of consumer preferences (Welch et al., 2002).

Understanding how health factors are influencing consumption behaviour and seafood demand is important both for seafood marketers and public health agents who want to promote a healthier eating and lifestyle (Trondsen, Braaten, Lund, & Eggen, 2004a). In Belgium, where fish consumption remains below the recommendations at around 25.9 kg per capita per year, Verbeke and Vackier (2005) suggested that a more positive attitude towards eating fish and higher social pressure could yield a stronger intention to eat fish. Birch and Lawley (2010) and Sioen, Van camp, et al. (2007) identified taste, convenience, diet variety and health benefits as the key drivers for seafood consumption in Australia. Also, price was the most frequently reported barrier for finfish consumption among older Australians (≥ 51 years of age) (Grieger, Miller, & Cobiac, 2012). On the other hand, Leek, Maddock, and Foxall (2000) suggest that individuals may be averse to consuming fish because of a perceived difficulty in buying, preparing and cooking fish, the belief that it is expensive, or the unpleasant physical properties of some varieties of fish, such as small bones and the smell. In Spain and Belgium, Brunso, Verbeke, Olsen, and Fruensgaard Jeppesen (2009) indicated that health and taste are the main motives for eating fish, while the main barriers were price perception, smell when cooking fish, and perception of consumers that fish does not deliver the same level of satiety as compared to meat. The perceived barriers for increased fish consumption in a random sample of Norwegian women aged 45–69 were the lack of available fresh fish, poor quality, and high price (Trondsen, Scholderer, Lund, & Eggen, 2003). Examining the attitudinal determinants of fish consumption in Spain and Poland, Pérez-Cueto, Pieniak, and Verbeke (2011) determined more positive attitudes towards fish in Poland than in Spain. It seems that determinants of fish consumption may vary across different countries and that more research is needed to shed light on the underlying factors of fish consumption.

Croatia is specific country due to its locational complexity. Composed of two large natural-geographic regions (Continental and Coastal) Croatia has been an intersection of different cultures, which also reflected in gastronomy.

The Coastal (Dalmatian) cuisine was mostly influenced by the Italian cuisine, while Continental part was influenced by the Hungarian and Central European cuisine from the west, and by Turkish and Arabian from the east. Characteristics of Croatian continental cuisine are “concrete” meals and ingredients such as meat, different kinds of vegetables, fruit cereals, dairy products, eggs and traditional bright and dense soup. Croatian coast and island cuisine is a typical Mediterranean, and is based on fish and seafood, grapes and wine, olives and olive oil, sheep and goats, figs, wild herbs and aromatic spices (Puharić & Perasović, 2014). Although the Adriatic

coastal belt is part of the Mediterranean, compared to some other Mediterranean countries, fish consumption in Croatia is surprisingly low (8–10 kg per capita per year, CBS, 2012).

To our knowledge, no research has identified key determinants in relation to fresh fish consumption.

Although Pieniak, Verbeke, and Scholderer (2010) identified cultural differences in potential determinants of fish consumption at home and out of home, there is no research about determinants of fresh fish focused only on consumption at home. Consumption of fresh fish at home is specific because of previously mentioned perceived difficulty in buying, preparing and cooking fish. Consumer has to spend some time to go to fish market and to buy fresh fish. Freshness is important factor so consumer has to know how to buy a fish. Fresh fish is not ready-to-eat product so consumer has to spend some time in kitchen to clean fish and to prepare meal with fish, which require, with regard to today's way of life, too much time. Determinants of fresh fish consumption maybe different from determinants of other seafood products because consumers prefer fresh fish compare to frozen fish. Fresh fish is also less available compared to frozen fish.

To our knowledge, no research has been conducted in any Mediterranean country on the determinants of fresh fish consumption using an extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Existing data on the determinants of seafood consumption using TPB have primarily been collected in northern European countries. Thus, the underlying factors remain unclear and more research is needed to determine the key drivers and barriers to fresh fish consumption, so as the causes of differences between Croatia and other Mediterranean countries, such as Italy or Greece.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate intention and behaviour in fresh fish consumption using the TPB as a theoretical framework. The second objective was to examine the influence of additional constructs (moral obligation and health involvement) on intention and availability on perceived behavioural control.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Theory of Planned Behaviour

A number of theoretical models have been used to predict health behaviours. One of the most dominant and commonly used models is the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991). This is a major framework for understanding, predicting and changing human behaviour that is widely accepted by scientific community. Theory of planned behaviour is well-supported by empirical evidence; has more than 1200 research bibliographies in academic databases (Al-Lozi & Papazafeiropoulou, 2012). Empirical support for the theory comes from a host of correlation studies demonstrating its ability to predict intention and behaviour, as well as from interventions showing that changes in behavioural, normative and control beliefs can produce changes in intention, and that these changes in intentions are reflected in subsequent behaviour (Ajzen, 2012). Previous use of a theory showed high understandability and utility (Reynolds, 1971).

According to TPB, human behaviour is determined by three independent predictors: attitudes, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. Attitude toward the behaviour refers to the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question. Subjective norm refers to the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour, while perceived behavioural control (PBC) refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour, and it is assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles (Ajzen, 1991). The more positive the

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