

THE ROMANIAN CONSUMER UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE GLOBAL CRISIS

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Abstract

At present, consumers focus on meeting their higher needs, as opposed to previously meeting the base ones. However this trend is not among priorities for the Romanian consumer. He/she uses almost 43% of the total consumption expenditures for the purchase of food, being restricted in his/her choices by the income and the price of products. The food products analysed in the period 2001 – 2012 have an upward trend, but with no substantial differences. The only product category that has a downward trend is represented by wine and wine products. Consumption in Romania was negatively influenced by the effects of the global crisis for the products analysed, except for meat and meat products. Despite the fact that we are far from the average annual meat consumption, however, the highest quantity recorded in our country was in 2009.

Keywords: consumer, basic needs, global crisis

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1. Introduction

At present, consumers can choose from a variety of goods and services to meet their unlimited needs, while still conditioned by income and by the prices of goods and services desired. John Maynard Keynes considered the consumer as an economic actor and the consumer's behaviour theory starts from the hypothesis that he/she behaves rationally. (Popescu et al, 2007) Consumers' choices are different starting from their subjective and varied preferences.

The consumer, in the current period, has an important role on sustainable development, especially when this consumer makes his/her choices knowingly. Manufacturers have become aware of the consumers' power and therefore they seek confrontation with an increasingly demanding consumer. (Bostan et al, 2010) The consumer has become demanding due to the large variety of products and services from which he/she can choose.

Rational consumer behaviour is difficult to quantify given the fact that the decision to purchase a good or service is closely related to the complexity of the consumer's needs. At present, the consumer seeks not only to satisfy his/her basic needs, but he/she also wants to satisfy his/her higher needs, according to the social status. (Pelău, 2012)

In this context, this paper aims to analyse how consumption evolved in the most important categories of foods products in recent years, to see whether the impact of the global crisis has altered the dietary habits specific to the Romanian consumer. In conducting our research, we used information provided by the National Institute of Statistics on the average annual consumption for the following product categories:

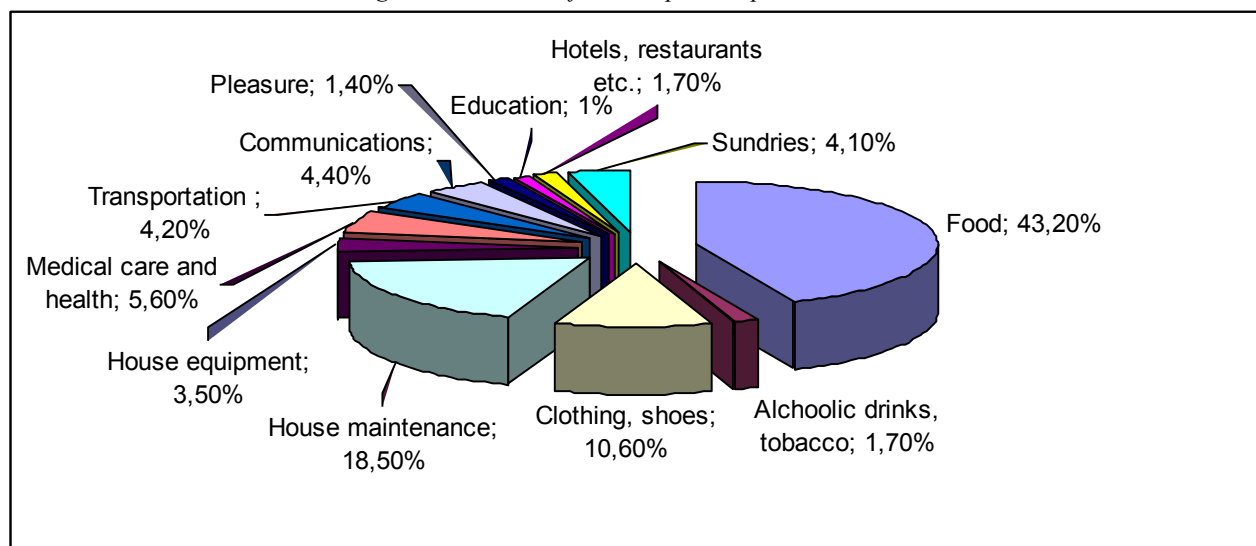
- vegetables and vegetables product
- fruits and fruit products
- milk and dairy
- meat, meat products and offal
- soft drinks
- beer
- wine and wine products

These product categories were considered to be the most important in the daily consumption and they are highlighted in the same way as they appear in the official sources. By choosing these product categories, this paper emphasises meeting the basic needs, leaving the possibility of analysing the higher needs' satisfaction in a forthcoming paper.

2. The trends in consumption in recent years

The purchase of the necessary products for consumption is closely related to the Romanian consumer's available income. Thus, the population's average monthly consumption expenditure in 2012 calculated on average per person was of 1598.6 lei, increasing by 4.2% as compared to the previous year. In real terms (adjusted to the Consumer Price Index), the population spent on average 0.4% less than compared with 2011, according to the National Statistics Institute.

Figure 1 Structure of consumption expenditures in 2012



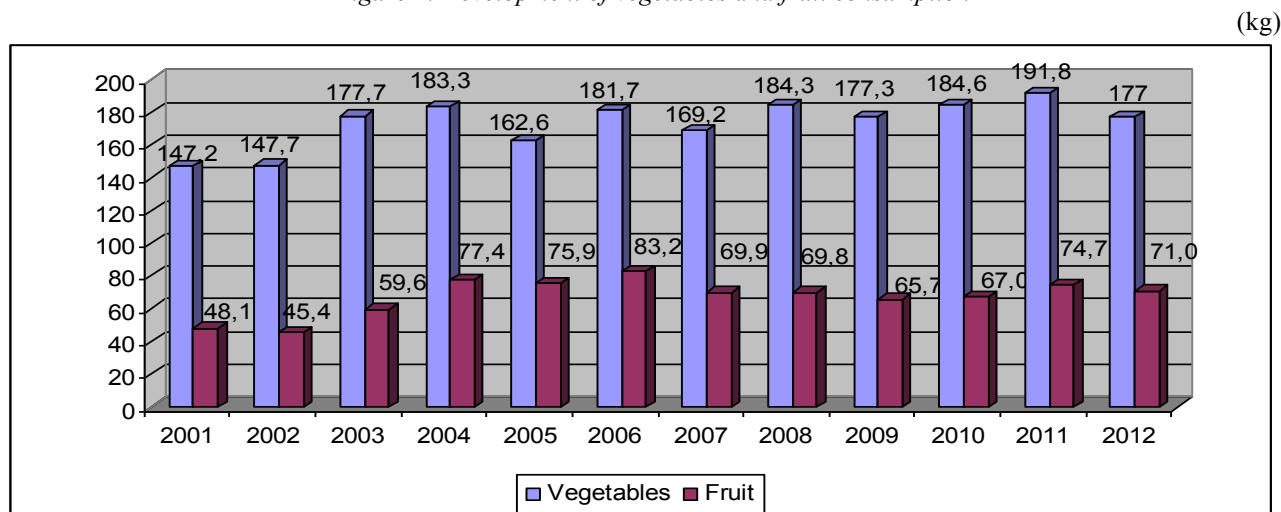
Source: <http://www.statistica.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=4039>

The structure of the consumption expenditures gives us a picture of consumption in our country (figure no. 1, so that we see that most of the spending goes towards food consumption, with 42.8%. Clearly, the tendency of meeting the basic needs occurs.

Presenting the average annual consumption specific to the Romanian consumer is performed to observe the changes that occurred in the period 2001 – 2012. In order to facilitate the analysis of the Romanian consumer's behaviour, the official data are shown by graphs. We chose to use Microsoft Excel because it is currently the most widely used spreadsheet programme. (Teselios, 2014)

First we present the average annual consumption of vegetables and fruit and we mention that for each category we also include the products made from them, that is to say for the consumption of vegetables we calculate the vegetables products too. We calculate in the same way the consumption of fruit, with fruit products included.

Figure 2. Development of vegetables and fruit consumption



Source: Developed by the authors based on data from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2013

The data from the National Statistics Institute through the Romanian Statistical Yearbook (figure no. 2) reveals a higher consumption of vegetables and vegetable products as compared to fruits and fruit products. The consumption of a larger quantity of vegetables as compared to fruits is explained by using them in the preparation of various daily foods.

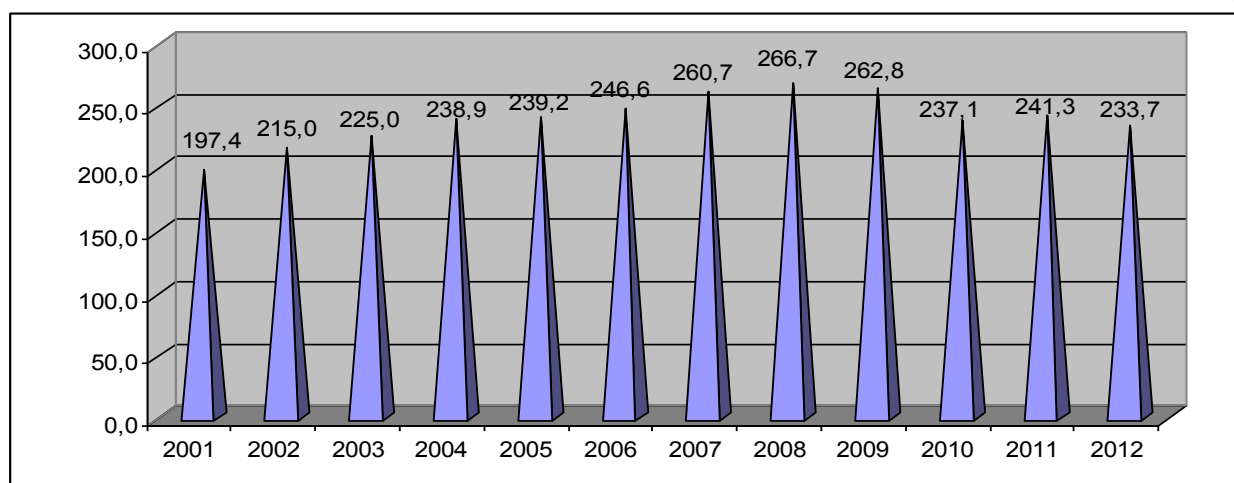
For the period 2001 – 2012 the consumption of vegetables and vegetable products registered an upward trend, but which does not exclude fluctuations. If in 2001 people consumed 147.2 kg of vegetables and vegetable products, in the last year presented we recorded 177 kg. The first year of the period analysed is the one with the lowest consumption of vegetables. The highest consumption of vegetables was recorded in 2011, reaching 191.8 kg.

The consumption of fruits and fruit products is similar in trend to that of the consumption of vegetables; however, the changes from year to year are smoother, with no significant changes. The year 2001 recorded a consumption of 48.1 kg of fruits and fruit products, and 2012 reached 71 kg according to the period analysed, 2002 shows the lowest consumption of fruits and fruit products, and 2006 recorded the highest consumption of fruits, reaching 83.2 kg.

In 2010, the estimated consumption of fruits per capita was 219 g/capita/day, and the vegetable consumption of 228.1 g /capita/day for EU-27.

Figure 3. Evolution of milk consumption

(l)

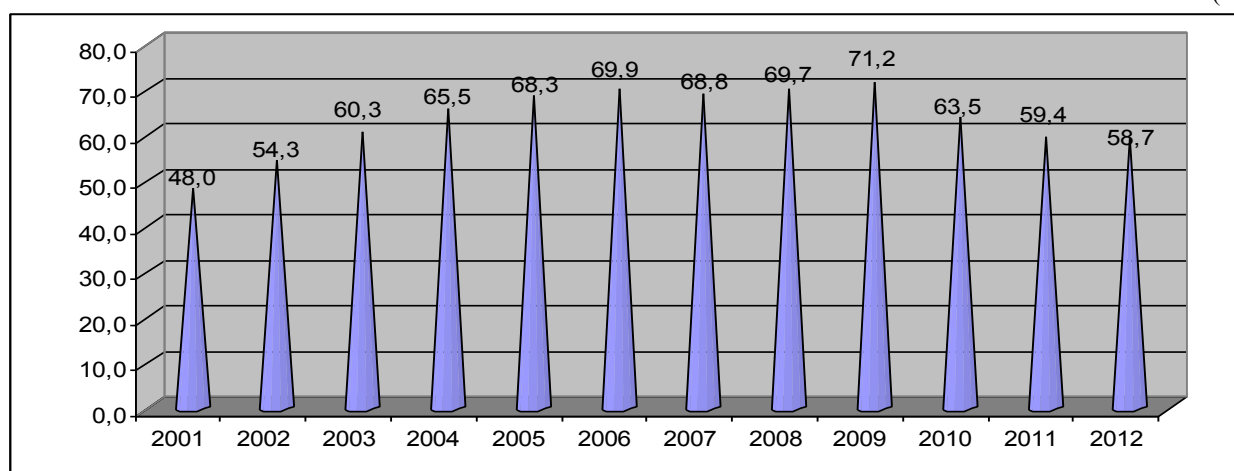


Source: Developed by the authors based on data from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2013

The consumption of milk and milk products is characterised (figure no. 3) by an increase from 2001 until 2008, and then from 2009 to 2012 the evolution is fluctuating. Despite this, the trend of milk and milk products consumption is increasing. The first year of the period under review has the lowest consumption, 197.4 litres, and the highest consumption was achieved in 2008, being 266.7 liters of milk.

Figure 4. Evolution of meat consumption

(kg)



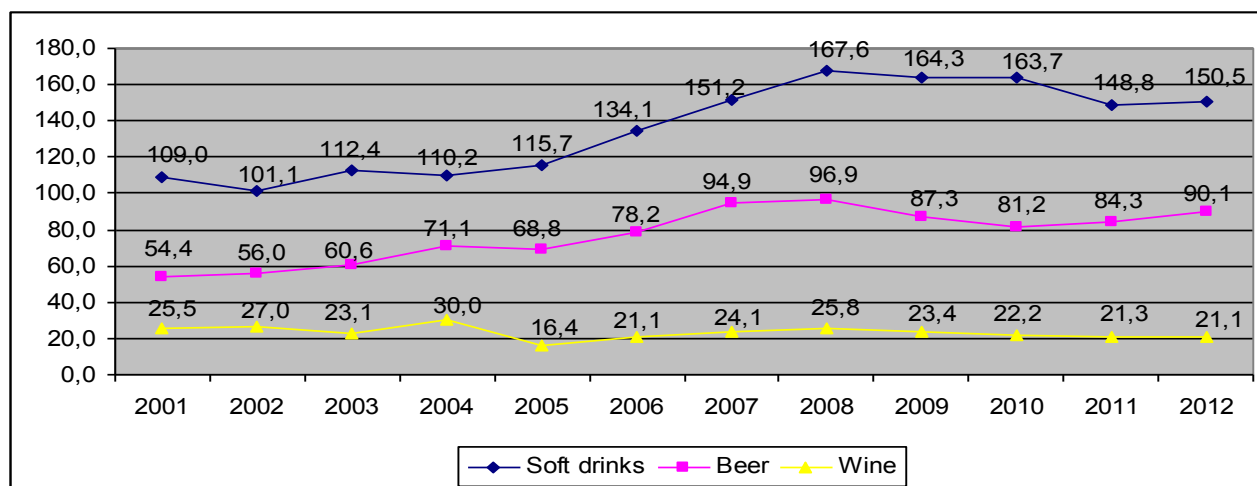
Source: Developed by the authors based on data from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2013

The Romanians' diet has a well established place for meat, next to milk, vegetables and fruits. Concerning this aspect, the Romanian Statistical Yearbook gives us information about the average annual consumption of meat, meat products and offal. The trend is similar to the other product categories used by the Romanian consumer, with small fluctuations in the range analysed (figure no. 4). In 2001 we recorded the lowest consumption of meat, 48 kg, and in 2009 we had the highest consumption, reaching 71.2 kg.

In 2012 a Romanian ate 58.7 kg of meat. Depending on the type of meat consumed, the first place is held by poultry with 18.5 kg/year, followed by pork with 11.8 kg/year, fish and fish products with 7.5 kg/year, and beef a little over 3 kg/year. At European level, people eat 90 kg of meat per year, and the first position in terms of type of meat is held by pork with almost 40 kg/year. Beef consumption in the European Union is 6 times higher than in Romania.

Figure 5. Evolution of soft drinks, beer and wine consumption

(l)



Source: Developed by the authors based on data from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2013

For the beverage category, we emphasised soft drinks, beer, wine and wine products. Soft drinks and beer have the same upward trend specific to the product categories above (figure no. 5). For soft drinks, the year 2002 was the lowest, being of 101.1 litres, while 2008 is the year with the highest consumption, of 167.6 litres. The smallest quantity of beer was consumed in 2001, being of 54.4 litres and the highest amount consumed was recorded in 2008, namely 96.9 litres.

In the year 2012, Romania was ranked on the 6th place in Europe in beer consumption, preceded by the Czechs, Austrians, Germans and Poles. The average annual beer consumption specific to Romania for the year 2012 was of 90 litres, while the European average is of 70 litres. The evolution of beer consumption in our country lately has been influenced by the increasing excise at the beginning of 2013 and 2014.

The category of wine and wine products is the only one of those presented which registers a downward trend, with relatively small fluctuations in the range shown. The year with the lowest consumption is 2005, with 16.4 litres, while the year with the highest consumption is 2014, with 30 litres.

In the year 2011, a Romanian drank 21.3 litres of wine, but he was not among the largest consumers of wine in Europe. On the first places in Europe we meet France with 47.4 litres, Portugal with 42.6 litres and Italy with 37.9 litres a year.

GfK Romania has conducted a study on the main activities that contribute most to a healthy lifestyle on a sample of 1,000 respondents across the country, aged over 15 years old. The questionnaires were filled in by face to face interviews. The results of the study state that Romanians consider eating fruits and vegetables or fresh, unprocessed food, as well as regular exercise as the most important in determining a healthy lifestyle.

7 out of 10 Romanians identify healthy lifestyle by eating fruits and vegetables, emphasising the importance of eating fresh food. Structuring the responses according to the gender classification criterion shows that women are more aware of the impact of a healthy diet on health.

The identification of answers according to the regions of the country shows that Romanians from Banat – Crișana – Maramureș pay more attention to nutrition, 8 out of 10 people considering that a healthy lifestyle is achieved by eating fruits and vegetables. The population from Dobrogea and Bucharest does not consider that health is influenced by fruit and vegetable consumption.

This study aimed not only Romania, GfK conducted a similar survey in 23 countries. The results obtained in our country are very close to those recorded globally, demonstrating that Romanians know what a healthy lifestyle requires.

3. Conclusions

The consumer's choices are restricted by income and the price of the goods and services desired. Consequently, the period immediately following the occurrence of the global crisis in Romania led to a reduction in the quantities consumed in terms of the main categories of the products presented. The upward trend for the product categories presented, except for wine and wine products recorded for the period 2001 – 2012, offers us information about the amount consumed and less about the nutritional value.

The effects of the global crisis influenced the average annual consumption of the products presented. Vegetable consumption was of 184.3 kg in 2008, and in 2009 it fell to 177.3 kg. The next two years are characterised by increases in the amount of vegetables consumed, the very year 2011 representing the highest consumption from the period analysed with 191.8 kg. Fruit consumption was of 69.8 kg in 2008, and in 2009 it fell to 65.7 kg. The next two years are characterised by increases in the amount of fruit consumed.

Milk consumption was of 266.7 litres in 2008, and in 2009 it fell to 262.8 litres. The decline continued in 2010, reaching 237.1 litres of milk. Meat consumption does not fall in the same category; it increased from 69.7 kg in 2008 to 71.2 kg in 2009. The year 2009 had the highest meat consumption in the period analysed. For this product category the downward trend started in 2010.

The consumption of soft drinks decreased from 167.6 litres in 2008 to 164.3 litres in 2009, maintaining the trend in the next period. Beer consumption fell from 96.9 litres in 2008 to 87.3 litres in 2009, the decline continued in 2010, and then we noticed an increase in the amount of beer consumed. Wine consumption is still atypical as compared to other product categories presented because it had a decreasing trend in the period under review. This trend is maintained for 2008 and 2009, when the amount of wine consumed decreased from 25 litres to 23.4 litres.

4. References

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