

CONSUMPTION OF ORGANIC AND GLUTEN-FREE PRODUCTS OF ABONETT KFT. (LTD.) - IN THE LIGHT OF A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

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ABSTRACT

The term healthy lifestyle is almost burned into our way of thinking. At the same time, diseases caused by certain allergens are also becoming more common. It is therefore inevitable that many people are looking for a new source of food instead of traditional bread. The Abonett product line offers them an alternative solution. In the course of our work, we tried to assess the familiarity and consumption of these products, as well as the opinions formed about them. To this end, we conducted an online questionnaire survey in the fall of 2021, which we shared on social media. In our opinion, opening to new segments, such as rice-based extruded products, soup pearls, or even sweet and salty snacks, is a possible option. The use of special ingredients and flavors can be interesting for customers. The information obtained during our research can be of help in the marketing strategy planning of the company, as well as in the analysis of the types of behavior related to consumers.

Keywords: Extruded products, Food consumption, Healthy lifestyle, Questionnaire survey

1. INTRODUCTION

Both internationally and domestically, it can be said that consumer awareness of the healthy food market is receiving more and more attention. Thanks to changed consumer habits, there is a growing demand for extruded products, which is mainly linked to the positive properties of the finished product.

During our research, we focused on these products, which can be linked to Abonett Ltd.. In the course of our work, we performed the following partial processes:

- conducting a structured interview with the director of the company
- competitor analysis
- online questionnaire survey among consumers.

In our study, we present the latter in detail.

1.1. Factors influencing consumer behavior

Consumer behavior is influenced by many factors, the following main theories have been collected in this regard.

Based on [1] research, the factors influencing consumer behavior can be divided into two large groups: individual characteristics, including motivation, attitude, and personality, and the social environment, which includes culture, family and the reference group includes.

According to [2] one of the most influential groups of factors is biological factors. This includes the relationship between food and diseases, as well as aspects related to the properties of food (e.g. color, size, taste). Social and sociological characteristics (e.g. belonging to social groups, classes, and strata) also have a significant impact on the consumer. In addition, there are economic and demographic factors as well as psychological factors, such as emotion, motivation, and the various attitudes of consumers.

The European Comisson identifies three trends in European food consumption: increasingly diverse food consumption, changing consumer habits, and the divergence between the diets of the rich and the poor. There are other factors that can influence the choice of food in addition to biological and economic factors: physical characteristics (easy access, education, special characteristics, time constraints), social factors (culture, family, age group pressure, diet), psychological factors (mood, stress, guilt), attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge about food [3].

In [4] distinguishes three large groups: the wider socio-economic environment, the narrower social environment, and individual influencing factors.

Today's trends are among the factors influencing eating behavior, of which 3 groups can be distinguished: megatrends, trends, and countertrends, as well as current trends. The majority of megatrends include changes that can be proven with statistical time series, which cannot be avoided and permanently affect the arenas of economic and social life. Megatrends are phenomena that affect broad aspects of society and whose effects can

be felt over a period of 40-50 years. The group of trends-countertrends is much more specific and less complex than the usual form of influence for megatrends. The aforementioned group investigates changes in consumer behavior, and we can also monitor changes in values with their help. However, the analysis of trends is complicated by the fact that if a trend becomes strong enough, a countertrend develops from it, so you have to think in terms of trends and countertrends in parallel. The current trends present the salient features of the given year, new or newly prominent phenomena. Current trends create an opportunity for companies to draw attention to their research and make their followers think about new phenomena.

1.2. Consumption trends

Nowadays, consumer needs and expectations of products change and take shape extremely quickly, which must be taken into account to a great extent during innovation. As it is highlighted by Kis, quality has become a key factor for the competitiveness of enterprises. Thus, businesses should keep up with customers' expectations, as their needs and wants continue to grow and evolve [5], some of them keep traditions and their habits either at home or in different touristic destinations [6].

Sloan's research conducted in 2006 draws attention to the fact that health and its impact on it will play an even more decisive role compared to previous experiences during food purchases in the coming years, as consumers will look for more convenient, tastier, and more efficient foods [7].

Based on [8], we learn that organic products were primarily purchased in connection with the birth of small children, and the appearance of illness and the pursuit of a healthy lifestyle were the most important motivations. Others came to a similar conclusion, the authors also indicated an interest in a healthy lifestyle as a reason, and sustainability appeared as a root cause [9]. Compared to this, based on previous research, the following result appears as a novelty: consumers see organic food as the so-called they are chosen because of altruistic motivations [10]. Other authors emphasize the freshness and taste of organic foods - based on the results of their surveys [11]. We must also mention the main obstacle to the consumption of these products, which is none other than the high price [12].

Research conducted by [13] summarized the most comprehensive trends of 2021. 2020 brought a lot of changes in the life of humanity in terms of food and health culture. Compared to previous years, the demand for healthy nutrition and the development of an appropriate sense of well-being received significantly more attention. Interest in functional foods became important, the importance of local foods increased, and the role of environmental protection came to the fore.

The consumption of gluten-free products is primarily related to those who actually have a disease, but at the same time there are also consumers who do not want to consume gluten just out of fashion, but experts do not recommend this at all, as these products typically contain more fat, sugar, and salt, which can lead to obesity and the development of diabetes can lead to their consumption [14]. Thus, it is unnecessary to go around the consumption of these products in the above way.

1.3. Presentation of Abonett Ltd.

Today, Abonett Kft. (Ltd.), which enjoys great success and can look back on nearly 70 years of history. The Abony company, founded by Hungarian individuals in 1949, was then known as *Újvilág Mezőgazdasági és Élelmiszeripari Szövetkezet*. At that time, the company mostly only had a crop and animal breeding profile, but this gradually receded and was replaced by the increasingly successful branch of the food industry. The development of the food industry line began in 1980 with the production of confectionery products, including mallomar, which burst into the consumer consciousness almost immediately. The production of more health-conscious products took place for the first time in 1986. The French model was used as a basis for the production of the innovative extruded bread. The company stopped producing confectionery products in 2016. After that, the focus was on extruded products, which today, in addition to the classic appearance, can also be found in organic and gluten-free packaging on store shelves (abonett.hu, novekedes.hu). At Abonett Kft. (Ltd.), we can currently separate 2 product lines in terms of product strategy. The focus of production is the production of extruded bread, but in addition, a great emphasis is also placed on sandwiches in the on-the-go category. These products are fully adapted to the current accelerated way of life, as nowadays there is an increasing demand for meals that can be prepared in a short time, as well as ready-made meals that can be conveniently eaten on the go [15].

1.4. The extrusion

In the first step of processing, the crop is cleaned of possible impurities, but it is important that the grain is not determined and the husk is not removed, as this will make the ground flour whole grain. During grinding, flour grains of approximately 350-500 microns are produced. The ground raw material goes through another sieve, and then the raw material is blown through a tube and the extrusion process begins, during which the kernel of the grain explodes using the appropriate temperature and pressure. Due to the pressure difference, the dough with a loose, mesh structure is formed. The water content of the finished product is approx. It is between 3-10%, which is why it has a crisp, dry structure. The process of the procedure takes place very quickly in 10-15 seconds at 100-160 °C, as a result of which it preserves its full nutritional value [16].

Before packaging, the finished pieces of bread must be cooled to 20-22 °C. The products should be stored in a cool, dry place, in which case the shelf life of extruded bread is 480 days, and that of sandwiches is between 180 and 240 days [17].

1.5. The extruded bread

The range of extruded bread has a wide flavor palette, within which we can distinguish classic, gluten-free, and organic product lines. Among consumers, the name Abonett almost serves as the name of the product category. The aim of the products is to replace traditional bakery bread, thereby helping dieters and those suffering from other food intolerances and illnesses. Based on the summary in Table 1, it can be said that in addition to their numerous beneficial effects, they have outstanding high fiber content, are free of artificial additives and preservatives, and have a reduced salt and calorie content [18].

Table 1 Ingredients of natural extruded bread Source: www.abonett.hu (b)

NUTRIENTS	100 g in product	1 slice 4.8 g	*RI% 1 slice
Energy	1674 kJ 396 kcal	80 kJ 19 kcal	1 1
Fat	2,7 g	0 g	0
of which saturated fatty acids	0 g	0 g	0
Carbohydrate	72 g	3,5 g	1
of which sugars	2,2 g	0 g	0
Fiber	14 g	0,7 g	1
Protein	14 g	0,7 g	1
Salt	0,93 g	0,04 g	1

*Reference intake value for an average adult

2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

During our research - among other things, we conducted an online questionnaire survey, which is briefly described below: The questionnaire was available for participants to fill out from 25.10.2021 to 31.10.2021, which was completed by a total of 271 people of different age groups. The data were collected not on a representative sample. Regarding the structure of the questionnaire, we used single and multiple-choice options, but there was also a short explanatory answer option and an evaluation scale [19]. We tried to formulate questions for the respondents that would help us get accurate information about the consumers' knowledge of the products manufactured by Abonett Kft. (Ltd.), as well as about changes in consumer habits. The questionnaire consisted of 3 stages, which could only be completed by the questionnaire that is familiar with one of the extruded products produced by the company. The use of Excel often appears during research [20]. Based on the received data, it was possible to draw a conclusion and create diagrams with the Microsoft Excel 2016 application [21].

¹Regulation 1169/2011/EU does not specify a harmonized intake reference value for fiber ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018XC0608\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/HU/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018XC0608(01)&from=EN)) The Commission's announcement on consumer information related to food arising in connection with the application of European Parliament and Council Regulation 1169/2011/EU about questions and answers

3. RESULTS AND THEIR EVALUATION

A total of 271 people filled out the published questionnaire. Fortunately, all answers were usable, there was no need to delete them.

The respondents, a significant proportion of whom were women (79%), represented all age groups, although not in equal proportions, the vast majority were between the ages of 18-25, 57%, while the least, only 5 people, represented those over 65. The other age groups were present in roughly the same proportion (12-3%). About ¾ of the respondents thought that nutrition is important to their health, and in fact, 14% think this factor is very important. This is also positive because only 66 of those who completed the survey said that they had some kind of food-related problem, the majority of them being lactose intolerant. Despite this, or because of this, 17% follow some kind of special diet, for example, they are forced to eat a low-carbohydrate, lactose- or gluten-free diet.

Regarding the consumption of Abonett products, we learned that 72% consume extruded bread, 7% sandwiches, and 21% both. The frequency is illustrated in Figure 1.

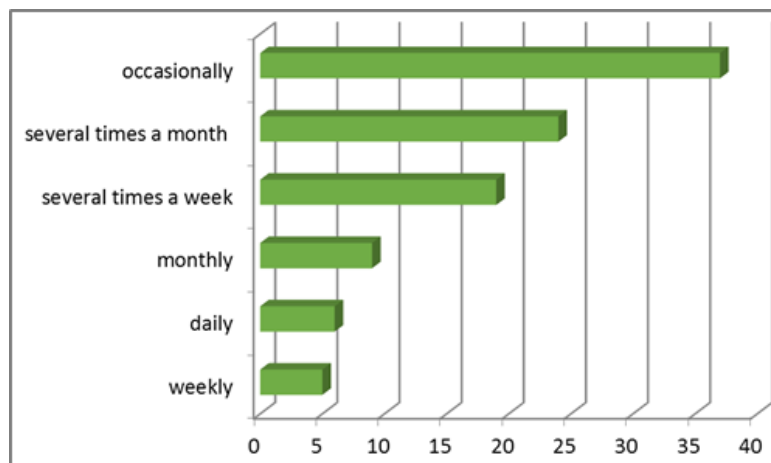


Figure 1. Distribution of customers based on consumption of Abonett products (N=271, %)

We see that, unfortunately, occasional consumers predominate, which is not very favorable from the point of view of the product line.

We asked them about when they would most often consume the factory's products.

The largest part of the 95 people (45.3%) chose the option of a lower price, and 30.5% the option that other flavored sandwiches would appear on the market. 20% do not buy or consume more often because it is not available everywhere get the products and sandwiches you almost never see on store shelves. Some answered that they would definitely not consume more of the products.

Advertisements, information, and information related to products reach customers primarily through social networking sites (33%), which is not surprising, considering the age of the respondents, in addition, advertising newspapers (30%) and television commercials also provide information. It is interesting that the Abonett webshop was mentioned by only a few %. We would like to note that on this page you can also find prize games and promotions, as well as share recipes with those interested. The negative is that the delivery fee is HUF 1,500 for orders under HUF 5,000.

A significant part of the respondents, 60%, believe that you have to pay for high-quality products, and only 14% feel that the products are expensive, and therefore rarely buy them.

Table 2 summarizes the popularity of each product.

It is clear that for each type of product there is one that is of particular interest, and its popularity stands out from the rest. such as the cheese-chive sandwich, corn gluten-free bread, and spelled wheat bio-extruded bread. In addition, it is necessary to mention quite a few respondents who have not tasted any of them yet.

Table 2. Distribution of the questionnaire respondents based on their preference for each product (N=271, %).

Gluten-free sandwich	%	Gluten-free extruded bread	%	Organic extruded bread	%
strawberry	5	millet	12	milk thistle	2
hazelnut	8	corn	39	buckwheat	18
cheese-chive	22	quinoa	10	spelled wheat	37
pumpkin seed cream	8	linseed	6	Didn't taste it	43
Didn't taste it	57	grocery	13		
		VeganPro	1		
		Didn't taste it	19		

In addition to taste, obviously, other factors play a significant role when choosing a product. These are shown in Figure 2.

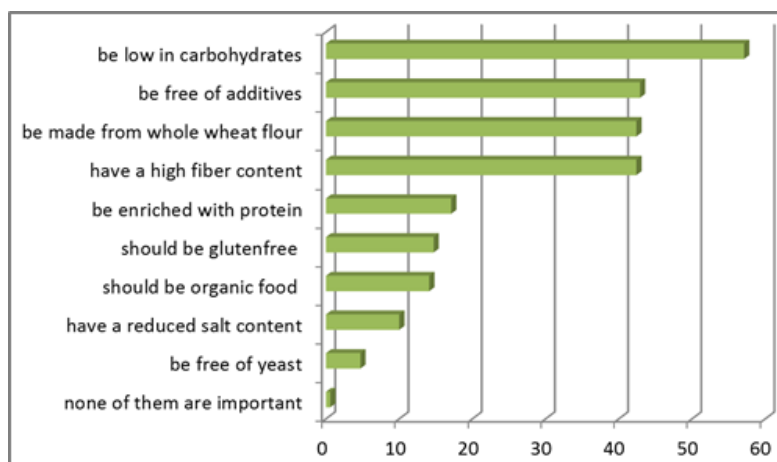


Figure 2. Distribution of our respondents based on the importance of each aspect (N=271, %)

On the basis of the diagram above, 4 factors can be clearly defined which are extremely important: the reduced carbohydrate content, the absence of additives, the whole grain flour content, and the high fiber content are what customers choose the product on the basis of.

During the purchase, in addition to the above components, other factors can also motivate our decisions. We listed six of them and offered to decide the degree of agreement, on a scale of 1-5, where 5 indicated the expression, I completely agree. Thus, the following results were obtained (Table 3).

Table 3. Degree of agreement with the importance of aspects when purchasing individual products (N=271).

Statement	degree of agreement (arithmetic mean)	median	mode	standard deviation
Role of promotions	2,62	3	2	1,1254
Appearance	3,06	3	3	0,9895
Easy to store	3,62	3	4	0,8956
Long warranty period	3,65	3	4	1,2325
Various flavors	3,84	4	4	1,1205
The role of prices and promotions	3,90	4	4	0,8752
Presence of healthy ingredients	4,29	4	5	1,4514

We asked our respondents to name some of the negative experiences they had with the consumption and purchase of the products.

They pointed out that the products are not available in many places, they typically look for them in smaller stores in vain, and even if they are available, they are only available in one flavor. The other problem, which was mentioned in a relatively larger number, was that the packaging was not suitable. Because once the package is opened, it can

no longer be resealed, and the extruded bread quickly loses its crispness due to the humidity in the air. Not too many people gave an answer to this question, which could be partly due to positive product experiences, but we can attribute the phenomenon to laziness.

At the end of our questionnaire, we discussed possible changes in shopping habits caused by the pandemic. 82% of the respondents were not affected by the period in question, but 18% radically changed their consumer habits. Based on the answers received, most people switched to online shopping, preferring durable foods with a longer warranty period. Storing products has become more and more common, thereby reducing the number of purchases.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSAL

Based on the above research, we prepared our SWOT analysis, which is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. SWOT analysis of the extruded products manufactured by Abonett Kft.

Strengths	Weaknesses
strong brand name Hungarian product healthy, natural ingredients established market, established clientele recyclable packaging long-term warranty good packaging, easy to store wide range of products foreign presence intensive promotional campaign brand communication own webshop Opportunities	relatively high price category it is difficult to find the entire range in stores non-resealable packaging
resealable packaging to appear as an private brand on the foreign market expansion with a snack product the appearance of new flavors taking advantage of calls for tenders	Threats competitors in the domestic market lack of skilled labor adverse environmental effects regarding the raw material rules for shrinkable plastic packaging appearance of cross-contamination change in consumer habits

Source: own editing

4.1. Strengths

One of the most defining strengths of the company is its outstanding quality, as well as its Hungarian ownership and strong brand name. Thanks to their well-developed marketing activities, they can count on a stable clientele, which, due to the expansion of the trade network, is increasingly affecting the foreign market as well. Through its own website, consumers can easily access the wide range of products, they can also find preparation suggestions, and if they have any questions, they can also get information from the company's own dietician. Another advantage of the company is that it actively communicates compared to its competitors (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, periodic television appearances). In addition to encouraging healthy eating, the products appeal to a wide range of customers, as they are recommended not only for dieters and more health-conscious diners but also for diabetics and gluten-sensitive people.

4.2. Weaknesses

Among the company's weaknesses, I would highlight the high price, but this goes hand in hand with the outstanding quality of the products and the monopolistic pricing method resulting from the lack of competitors. The entire range is currently only available through the webshop, the delivery of which becomes free with the purchase of a certain amount. In some stores, the availability of the Abonett product line varies and is difficult to find in the existing range.

4.3. Opportunities

By developing new flavors, new customers could be won for the products. In addition, it would be worthwhile to expand the product portfolio, it would also be possible to enter the field of today's fashionable snacks. It would be worthwhile to conduct marketing research regarding both flavors and snacks, for example in the context of a focus group discussion. The development of resealable packaging would serve as an additional advantage since adverse structural changes caused by possible humidity could be prevented after opening the product. The expansion of the export market, as well as the resulting profit increase, with product development that prioritizes foreign needs. Of course, this will also require an investment, which must also be carefully planned financially [22]. In connection with sales, marketing communication about the webshop should be strengthened, which could be used to draw people's attention to this shopping opportunity.

4.4. Threats

The appearance of similar products on the market, which are priced more favorably and show similar quality, can serve as a source of danger. From the point of view of production, the most common danger is the lack of raw materials, which can also be caused by an adverse environmental impact. This would mean difficulties in serving partners, and the production rate should also be reduced, which could also entail layoffs. In relation to plastic packaging, stricter and stricter requirements apply to all branches of the food industry, and the use of recycled materials or the implementation of recyclable packaging is becoming more and more prominent.

In addition to the above, we make the following suggestions: A possible option is to open to new segments, such as rice-based extruded products, soup pearls, or even sweet-salty snacks, which would be made using an extrusion process. The use of special ingredients and flavors can also be interesting for customers. For example, the use of graham flour, rice flour, chickpeas, black rice, or brown rice base can serve as a new ingredient. In terms of the change in shape, the products could also be marketed as dips by creating a thinner texture. It would be worthwhile to prioritize sweet flavoring, in the case of sandwiches, the application of the chocolate coating, in the case of extruded bread, and the appearance of seasonal flavors (e.g.: gingerbread, chestnut, beetroot) could promote their products. Following consumer trends, the development of a new product line focused on athletes could also be a feasible path for Abonett, since athletes pay particular attention to their nutrition and health. Considering the fast-paced lifestyle, products in smaller packages, which can be conveniently stored, are more and more important in the design of the packaging, which can be useful for the company in terms of the development of slices and sandwiches. Marking the exemption with symbols would help customers and provide easier transparency. Resealable packaging, which would prevent the product from changing its structure, can also serve as a suitable starting point.

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