The Quality Mark SK and Its Impact on The Shopping Behavior of Slovak Consumers

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Abstract

The Quality Mark SK was put into practise in 2004 to support the consumption of domestic food products after Slovakia joined the European Union. The main objective was to inform Slovak consumers about the quality of domestic foods and thus support the consumption of domestic food products. Currently 85 Slovak producers are the holders of the Quality Mark SK and 625 quality Slovak products are labelled with this logo. The article deals with the presentation of the Quality Mark SK and conditions for its granting of Slovak products. It informs about the results of the marketing research, which tried to find out the level of knowledge and satisfaction of Slovak consumers with Quality Mark SK. Based on the research, it was found out that the Slovak consumers considered the quality as important impact on their final purchasing decision, but Quality Mark SK had no important impact on their shopping behaviour. The reason may be poor mediatisation of this mark, thereby the author outlines proposals, which could help to increase knowledge of Slovak consumers about the Quality Mark SK and improve their awareness of the mark.

1. Introduction

Due to media campaign, which promotes a healthy lifestyle in recent years, not only Slovak consumers began in their purchase decision oriented more on quality than on lower cost products (National Program “Quality Mark SK”
Also, many retailers and supermarket chains are trying to reach customers through publicity campaigns emphasizing the quality and originality of its products (Chen & Green, 2009). For Slovak consumers negative experiences with goods imported from Poland, China and other countries have significant proportion on that (Kicová & Kramárová, 2013c; Cisko & Klieštik, 2013).

The article deals with the presentation of the Quality Mark SK and conditions for its granting of Slovak products. A part of the article is the evaluation of the marketing research. The purpose of the research was to identify the level of knowledge and satisfaction of Slovak consumers with Quality Mark SK and also potential brand influence on shopping behavior (Štefániková & Masárová, 2013). The research was descriptive and the method of personal questioning was employed as a research method. In this method, a questionnaire of 14 questions was used as a tool. Based on the research, it was found out that Slovak consumers were recently not sufficiently informed that Slovakia has quality guarantee in the form of a Quality Mark SK. The reason for this was poor media presentation of this brand, which has been narrowed substantially only to promote at trade fairs and on the website of Quality Mark SK.

2. The Quality Mark SK

The owner of the Quality Mark SK is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic. It was put into practise in 2004, when created the National Program for agricultural products and foodstuffs "Quality Mark SK". The main objective was to inform Slovak consumers about the quality of domestic foods and thus support the consumption of domestic food products (NPQMSK, 2009).

Currently 85 Slovak producers are the holders of the Quality Mark SK and 625 quality Slovak products are labelled with this logo (see Fig. 1.). This includes products such as dairy products (mostly cheese, yogurt, products from sheep and goat's milk), fish products, meat products and poultry, confectionery, bakery, canning products, frozen foods, natural mineral waters and curative waters, beer, wine, distillates, spirits and others (Kicová & Kramárová, 2013b).

The Quality Mark SK is the guarantee of the highest quality of agricultural and food products. It informs consumers that every product labelled with the logo of the Quality Mark SK, has fulfilled requirements placed on the granting thereof, complied declared technological process and higher quality parameters. Therefore, these products are clearly different from competing products (NPQMSK, 2009).

3. Conditions for granting the Quality Mark SK

The precondition for granting the Quality Mark SK should be ensuring a high quality of Slovak products placed on the Slovak market. High product quality must be assured by respecting the declared technological process, quality parameters, and a high quality of raw materials used in the manufacture of food and products. Any product with the Quality Mark SK must have at least one of the features of superior quality characteristics (Križanová & Majerová, 2013; Mikáčová & Rypáková, 2014).
The Quality Mark SK is allocated to registered products within competence of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, it appoints the Expert committee for assessment and awarding quality mark. Condition for the award of the Quality Mark SK is that the product must contain at least 75 percent of original domestic raw materials. Expert committee is constituted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Economy, Food Research Institute, State Veterinary and Food Administration, Office of Public Health and other stakeholders in the field of quality agricultural and food products (NPQMSK, 2009).

The challenge to confirm interest and login of the product for the award of the mark precedes the labelling of the Quality Mark SK, which takes place during the exhibition Agrokomplex in Nitra and Danubius Gastro in Bratislava. The mark is awarded for three years, in the case of seasonal products for one year.

"We should have the Quality Mark SK as Slovak flagship of food quality," says Peter Siekel, Director of Food Research Institute. He adds that this mark deserves at least 75 percent of Slovak foodstuffs (NPQMSK, 2009).

"We will continue to work with the Quality Mark SK, it is for us an icon, in a certain way" emphasizes Zuzana Novozovská, General Director of the Division of Food industry and Trade (NPQMSK, 2009).

Products having the high quality standards and exceeds comparable products on the market can obtain the Quality Mark SK GOLD and they have the right to use the gold logo of the mark. Currently 55 producers can label their products with the Quality Mark SK GOLD (Quality Mark SK, 2003)

4. The model of decision-making process in consumers shopping behaviour

In marketing, we understand purchasing decisions as the process of solving some problem. The consumer feels a lack, it means he has some need and he tries to satisfy it through the exchange (Chen & Green, 2009).

The whole process of the purchasing decision can be summarized in a model consisting of five steps (Kotler & Keller, 2007; Richterová et. al., 2009):

- Knowledge of the problem - identifying needs and requirements
- Pre-purchase information search about opportunities to satisfy needs
- Evaluation and selection of possible alternatives
- Decision to make the purchase
- After-purchase behaviour and evaluation

Shopping decision-making process thus begins even before buying the product and the purchase consequences manifest themselves long after. However, consumers do not have to go through all stages of the purchasing decision process (Kotler & Keller, 2007)

Consumers shopping behaviour influence the following factors (Kotler & Keller, 2007; Richterová et. al., 2009):

- Cultural factors - culture, subculture, social class
- Social factors - family, social roles, social status, reference groups
- Personal factors - age, lifestyle, economic situation, employment, personality
- Psychological factors - motivation, perception, learning, beliefs and attitudes

Based on the above we can say that these factors, which influence the shopping decision-making process, companies can at perfect knowledge of its customer segments used in its commercial marketing efforts. Ultimately, in this way they can influence consumers shopping behaviour with the suitable marketing strategy (Kicová & Kramárová, 2013a; Križanová et al., 2013).

Regarding the impact of the brand (e.g. the Quality Mark SK) to consumers shopping behaviour, in order to stabilise the relationship, it is necessary to build the brand in the minds of customers. In order to build a brand, a company must know the tools that will affect his activity. The choice of tools depends on the brand influence on the customers purchasing decisions and the factors that increase such influence (Križanová & Štefániková, 2012; Meyvis et al., 2012; Tylor, 2007).
5. The analysis of knowledge and satisfaction of Slovak consumers with the Quality Mark SK

As was mentioned in the introduction, Slovak consumer awareness of the existence and products with the logo Quality Mark SK is relatively weak. To this fact points out the marketing research which was conducted in 2013 on a selected sample of Slovak consumers. The aim of the research was to find out the level of knowledge and satisfaction of Slovak consumers with Quality Mark SK and also with Slovak food products (Majerová, 2014).

The research was descriptive and the method of personal questioning was employed as a research method. The place of research implementation was whole Slovakia and the selected sample included consumers over 17 years. In this method, a questionnaire of 14 questions was used as a tool, included 3 identification questions, 6 questions focused on shopping behaviour and 5 questions focused on knowledge of Slovak consumers with Quality Mark SK.

The research results showed that the majority of Slovak consumers shop several times a week (67%). 76% of respondents indicated that by food choices they prefer Slovakia as a country of origin. Products from Germany, Austria and Czech Republic were next in order.

Satisfaction of Slovak consumers with the quality of Slovak food products is shown in Fig. 2. It follows that only a small percentage of respondents had the negative experience of Slovak products.

![Graph showing satisfaction of Slovak consumers with the quality of Slovak food products.](image)

Marketing research results also showed that Slovak consumers are not adequately satisfied with the diversity of the Slovak food products offer and they would appreciate more variety. Knowledge of the Quality Mark SK showed 84% of respondents who answered positively to the question of whether they have already met with this mark.

Table 1 gives how Slovak consumers perceive products marked with the Quality Mark SK.

| Characteristics of products labelled with the Quality Mark SK | Number of respondents (%) |
|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Quality foods                                              | 35 %                      |
| Domestic foods                                             | 48 %                      |
| Cheap foods                                                | 4 %                       |
| High standard of products characteristics                  | 13 %                      |
| Junk foods                                                 | 0 %                       |
| Other                                                      | 0 %                       |
Based on Table 1, we can conclude that respondents perceive products marked by the logo Quality Mark SK primarily as home food and quality food.

In the last part of the marketing research, we examined which products marked with the logo Quality Mark SK prefer Slovak consumers, see Table 2. They prefer mainly dairy products, meat products and poultry, as well as bakery products.

| Kind of food products                  | Number of respondents (%) |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Dairy products                        | 41 %                      |
| Canning Foods                         | 6 %                       |
| Meat products and poultry             | 25 %                      |
| Bakery Products                       | 19 %                      |
| Confectionery products                | 6 %                       |
| Manufacture of coffee substitutes     | 1 %                       |
| Others                                | 2 %                       |

The questionnaire survey shows that our respondents are currently focusing on the quality of food offered in the market because many countries are importing to us foods, which are not always in accordance with the conditions required by our Veterinary and Food Administration. Consumers are worried about various diseases and infections therefore they are oriented themselves to the Slovak foods, although in many cases more expensive but definitely better than imported foods e.g. from Poland. The price also affects the food choices.

Respondents are informed about what the Quality Mark SK means and what they can expect from products marked with the Quality Mark SK. However, Slovak consumers do not consider the Quality Mark SK as a main preference when they are shopping food products. Although many of respondents met this mark when buying, they do not seek this mark.

This is due to the low media coverage of the Quality Mark SK, because this quality mark has been narrowed substantially only to promote at trade fairs and on the website.

6. Conclusion

The paper aimed to evaluate knowledge of the Quality Mark SK and its impact on shopping behaviour of Slovak consumers. As mentioned in Chapter 5, there are many factors that influence the shopping behaviour and also decision-making process of consumer. Based on the marketing research we can conclude that Slovak consumers when purchasing food products, they are oriented on products quality, price, brand, country of origin and recommendations from friends. Due the Quality Mark SK was recently not adequately promoted, Slovak consumers did not considered as priority the products marked with logo of the Quality Mark SK. The reason lies in the fact that Slovak consumers are not sufficiently informed about the value of the quality of the mark, some consumers do not even know of its existence.

Recently, during processing the marketing research and this article, the Ministry of Agriculture was working on better media coverage of the Quality Mark SK. Its promotion also appeared in commercial radio and television. The Quality Mark SK has since the beginning of summer 2013, its own fan page on Facebook (NPQMSK, 2009).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development maintains in this way narrower contact with the community, which is more than other groups of people interested in quality foodstuffs. The social network presents the objectives of the Quality Mark SK, promotes producers which have been awarded this mark and helps those producers who wish to apply for it.

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development should continue to sustainable massive promotional campaign and also informative campaign for the development of the Quality Mark SK. It can also increase the marketability of products marked with logo of the Quality Mark SK in Slovakia, thus gradually dominate in the Slovak market and also expand the range of these products to neighbouring countries. The Quality Mark SK should be priority for
Slovak consumers shopping behaviour. It would be appropriate to link the promotion of the Quality Mark SK with the promotion of particular food brands and thus unite the Slovak agricultural market.

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