ANALYSIS OF PURCHASING HABITS OF CONSUMERS OF FOOD SUPPLEMENTS

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Abstract:
Food supplements are foods whose purpose is to supplement the normal diet. They are concentrated sources of individual or combined nutrients, or other substances with a nutritional or physiological effect and are marketed in the form of capsules, pastilles, tablets and other similar forms, sachets of powder, ampoules of liquids, drop dispensing bottles, and other similar forms of liquids and powders designed to be taken in measured small unit quantities (Rules on Food Supplements, 2013). For different conditions, a different nutrient content is required to achieve a physiological effect (e.g. a healthy individual has a lower requirement for additional nutrients than patients, pregnant women, people with a compromised immune system). The purpose of the study was to establish whether consumers are interested in natural plant-based food supplements and whether consumers, who are already taking food supplements, are willing to accept a high-priced brand and what would convince them to do so.

Keywords: Food supplements, brand, positioning, food legislation, Slovenia

1. INTRODUCTION

The supply of safe food, which does not endanger the health of consumers through chemical, biological or other types of pollutants, is the foundation of a healthy diet and an important factor of the protection of health as a public interest. The prevention of food-borne diseases and the protection of consumers' interests are therefore two main elements of food legislation. Food legislation stipulates the general requirements, biological and chemical safety of foods, and establishes the requirements for food business operators as regards the labelling, presentation, and advertising of foods, including health and nutrition claims on foods. Due to the special manufacturing process, mode of action, and composition, Gematria food supplements are a unique brand of products. They are classified as products of a high quality and price. In addition to the price issue, there is the challenge that the products are manufactured in the USA, where a different food legislation applies.

Despite claims made by nutritionists that we receive all the required nutrients with a healthy diet, consumers are aware that the path from the garden to the plate is getting longer and the food is consequently losing its nutritional value. The modern lifestyle, environmental, psychological and physical stress increase the need to add nutrients. There are a number of food supplements in the Slovene market; however consumers are mostly not sufficiently informed to be able to choose products of the highest quality. They mostly settle for the opinion of the sellers, who usually offer a product of their choice (which depends on a number of factors). The fact is that different chemical forms of nutrients have a different bioavailability and the uptake can be substantially different.

Gematria food supplements are a unique product. The owner of Gematria Products Inc, a company based in Carlsbad, the USA, Dr Todd Ovokyatis, is an inventor and expert with excellent knowledge of the human body. Dr Ovokyatis participated in numerous studies on the workings of the immune system, which led him to persons afflicted with HIV infection. To help with conventional treatment, Dr Ovokyatis developed a line of food supplements which help strengthen the immune system. He also developed a special laser which enhances the energy of bonds in crystals, thus enabling better absorption of nutrients in the body. This laser optical technology has been patented worldwide. This invention is now being used in the potentiation of nutrients and for directing substances to a specific place in the body. Gematria food supplements are manufactured in accordance with pharmaceutical GMP (good manufacturing practices) standards (Gematria, 2017).

The strict food legislation is the main reason why Gematria has left the EU market, as of all the available products (approximately 40), only 5 or 6 (depending on the member state in question) meet the requirements of the EU legislation. Individual EU member states, which are more inclined towards the United States (Great Britain and Ireland), still allow the import of food supplements from the United States despite the incompatibility of products with the applicable legislation. Europe is a market with 500 million consumers and a high purchasing power and as such interesting for manufacturers from across the globe. As the market of self-treatment and prevention of diseases is constantly growing (including wellness, alternative medicine, etc.), there are realistic possibilities for Gematria to re-enter the Slovene and later the entire European market.

We wish to use the research results to analyse the opportunities and threats for this high-priced food supplement brand to enter the Slovene market. More detailed research results are published in the article Vukasović and Jalen (2018).

2. METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE

2.1 Methodology, Data Collection and Sample

The quantitative research method and the technique of online surveying were used. A survey was implemented among consumers of food supplements. The respondents were asked to participate in the survey by an e-invitation. The invitation/access to the survey was sent to our contacts, who were asked to fill it in and send it to their contacts – this way, snowball sampling was used for the survey. The survey was filled in by 80 respondents. The survey was active from 29 July 2017 to 29 August 2017. The sample is not representative and the study results cannot be generalised to the whole population. The obtained data have been analysed and are presented in the results of the analysis. Based on the obtained results, the research hypotheses were tested.

3. SURVEY RESULTS

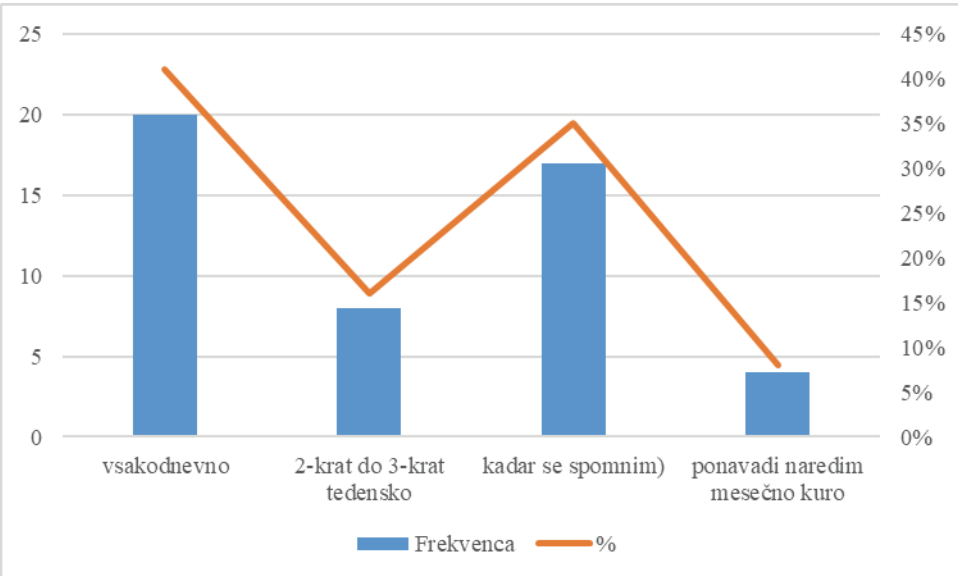
3.1. Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

The survey was filled in by 80 respondents, i.e. 49 women (61%) and 31 men (39%). The majority of the respondents were 40 to 49 years old, i.e. 38% (n=30), followed by respondents in the 30 to 39 age group, i.e. 28% (n=22), respondents in the 50 to 59 age group, i.e. 20% (n=16), 11% (n=9) were in the 20 to 29 age group, and the lowest number of respondents belonged to the 60 to 65 age group, i.e. only 4% (n=3). 95% of the respondents (n=76) are employed, 2.5% (n=2) are still in school, 1.25% (n=1) are retired, and the same percentage, i.e. 1.25% (n=1), are unemployed. The educational attainment of respondents is relatively high, as 49% (n=39) of respondents hold a university degree/2nd cycle Bologna degree, 24% (n=19) have a college diploma, and the remaining percentage have completed secondary school (10%, n=8), hold a master of science or PhD (9%, n=7), have completed a vocational school (5%, n=4), short-cycle college (3%, n=2), and 1 responded completed primary school.

3.2 Analysis of Purchasing Habits of Consumers of Food Supplements

We were first interested in the percentage of respondents who regularly or occasionally consume food supplements. The answer was interesting, as from the 80 respondents, 61% (n=49) said yes and 39% (n=31) said no. The 49 respondents who provided an affirmative answer participated in the continuation of the survey. From the 49 respondents who said that they consume food supplements, 25% (n=20) consume them daily, 21% (n=17) when they remember, 10% (n=8) twice to three times a week, and only 5% (n=4) usually make a monthly treatment using an individual food supplement (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Frequency of Consuming Food Supplements



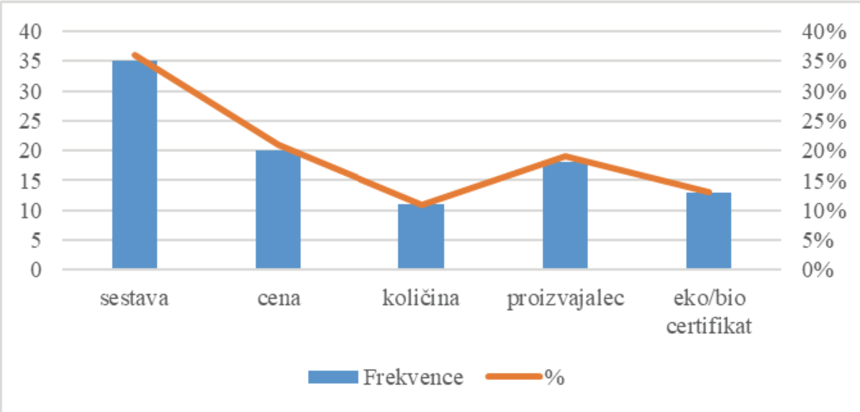
On average, the respondents consume 2.8 (standard deviation=1.8) different food supplements.

Asked which food supplements they consume, the respondents reported the use of different vitamins (multivitamins: n=11, vitamins B: n=6, vitamin C: n=5, vitamin D: n=4, vitamin E: n=1), minerals (calcium: n=2, magnesium: n=16), omega-3 fatty acids (n=6), Bilobil (n=2), maca (n=1), MSM (n=3), hemp protein (n= 1), algae (n=2), probiotics (n=1), and coenzyme Q10 (n=2).

Asked where they buy food supplements (several different answers were possible), the majority of the respondents, i.e. 37% (n=30) answered that they buy them in the pharmacy, 22% (n=18) buy them in specialised stores, 21% (n=17) buy them in shops, 13% (n=11) online, 6% (n=5) said that other people buy the food supplements for them, and 1% (n=1) buy them in sports nutrition stores(Figure 2).

When choosing the food supplement (several answers were possible), the respondents mainly focus on the composition (36%, n=35), price (21%, n=20), 19% (n=18) of respondents find it important who the manufacturer is, for 13% (n=13) it is important whether the product has an organic/biological certification, and the least important criterion for the decision to buy a food supplement is the quantity of the food supplement (11%, n=11) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Criteria Affecting the Choice of the Food Supplement



We were further interested who they ask for advice on which food supplement is appropriate or which food supplement to choose. The highest share of the respondents, i.e. 21% (n=19), believe that they get the best advice from the people they know, 19% (n=17) of the respondents search for information on the manufacturers' websites, 18% (n=16) study different literature, 16% (n=14) ask the pharmacist for advice, 10% (n=9) seek the information from a nutritionist, 7% (n=6) ask their personal trainer, 6% (n=5) search for information in blogs, only 2% (n=2) consult their doctor, and 1% (n=1) do not ask anyone for advice.

Slightly more than one half (56%, n=27) always check the ingredients prior to purchasing the food supplement, 42% (n=20) check them sometimes, and 2% (n=1) never check the ingredients.

56% (n=27) find it important that food supplements contain plant ingredients, while 44% (n=21) believe that this is not important.

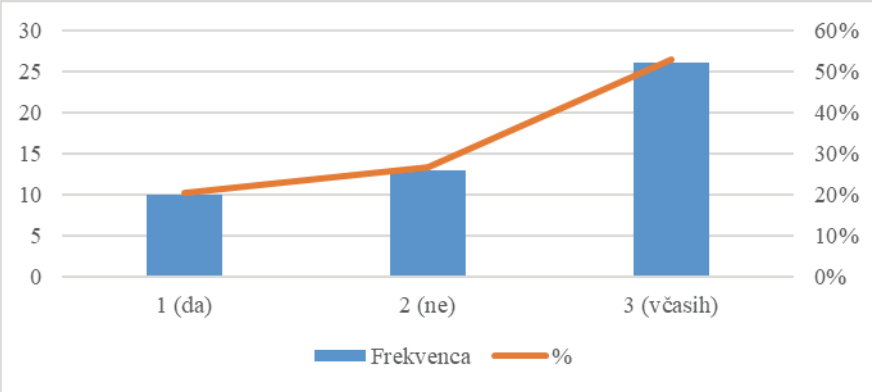
From the 27 respondents who answered in the affirmative as regards plant ingredients, 56% (n=15) believe that it is important that the plants come from organic farming and the remaining 44% (n=12) believe that this is only sometimes important.

In order for the absorption of nutrients to be effective, the chemical forms of vitamins and minerals are important. 57% (n=28) of the respondents never check the chemical form of the product, while 43% (n=21) do so at the time of purchase.

Almost two thirds of the respondents (59%, n=29) occasionally use a combination of natural plant ingredients, vitamins and minerals, 27% (n=13) always use such a combination, while 14% (n=7) do not use such combinations.

The price as a decisive purchasing factor is occasionally important for slightly more than one half of the respondents (53%, n=26), it is always important for 20% (n=10) of the respondents, and not important for 27% (n=13) of the respondents (Figure 3).

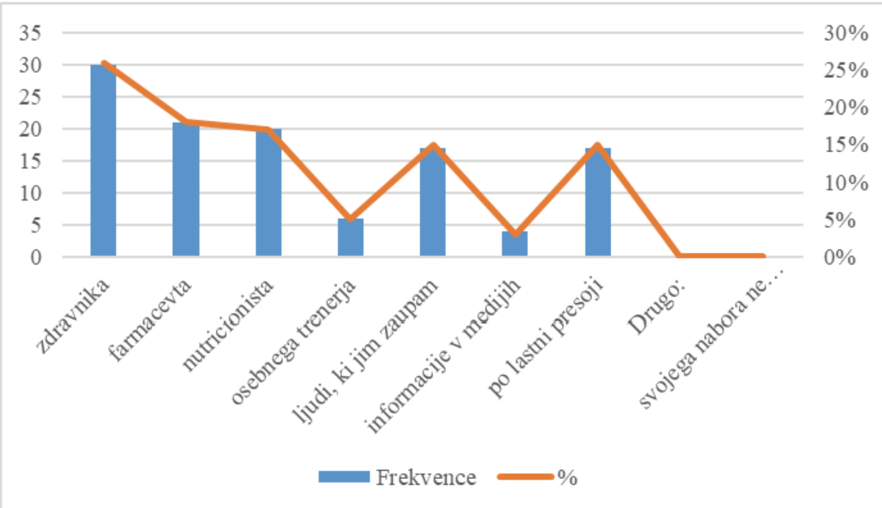
Figure 3: Importance of Price as a Choice Criterion



The respondents spend an average of €28.90 (standard deviation=19.99, min.=2, max.=85) monthly on food supplements and they would be prepared to spend an average of no more than €53.40 (standard deviation=50, min.=5, max.=250).

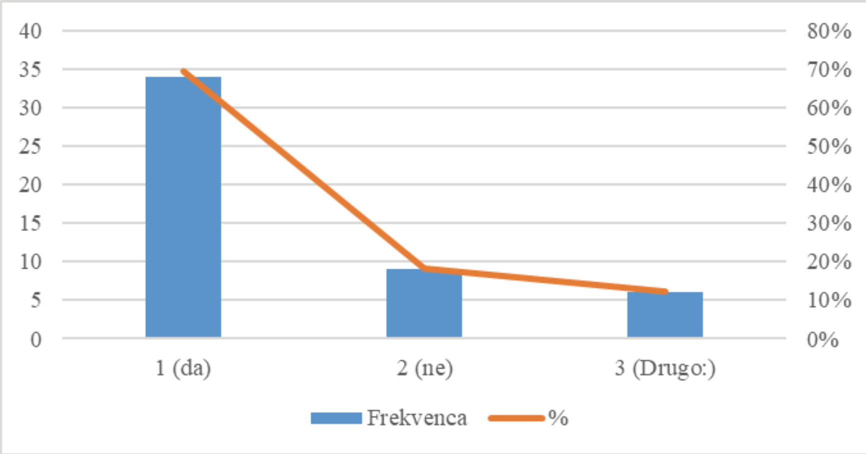
26% (n=30) of the respondents would make the decision to change the currently used food supplements if advised to do so by a doctor, 18% (n=21) if it was recommended by a pharmacist, 17% (n=20) if recommended by a nutritionist, 15% (n=17) if recommended by people they trust, and the same percentage also by their own choice, 5% (n=6) would do so if this was recommended by their personal trainer, and only 3% (n=4) would be convinced to change the food supplements on the basis of information from the media (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Changing Food Supplements Following Advice



69% (n=34) of the respondents would decide for the change despitea higher price, 18% (n=9) would not decide for the change because of a higher price, and 12% (n=6) believe that they would decide for the change in specific cases, depending on the difference in the price, the quality of the other product, and the person who recommended the change (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Effect of the Price on Changing the Currently Used Food Supplement



5. CONCLUSION

We believe that the unique nature of Gematria products represents an excellent starting point for successfully positioning the brand in the Slovene market. It is necessary to shape clear messages which will present all benefits of the products for the buyer. We are convinced that financial incentives when introducing a product to the market are sensible, however these products are of such a high quality that excess sales below value are not justifiable. The fact remains that after the recent economic crisis, consumption is growing and people are ready to invest in their health and well-being. More than financial incentives, information needs to be provided to all involved parties (professional public, consumers, and distributors). An advantage in the marketing of food supplements (with the assumption that we comply with the legislation) is that we can use the marketing mix to influence the final users and the professional public.

The study results allow us to conclude that the Slovene market is ready for the entry of new and previously unknown food supplement brands, which offer high-quality products made of high-quality ingredients and in accordance with Good Manufacturing Practices. The higher price is not an obstacle to succeeding in the market, however the right distribution channels have to be chosen which, in light of the survey results, are pharmacies and specialised stores. An appropriate market approach has to be prepared, which would be based on raising the awareness of the professional public (doctors and pharmacists) and the use of social networks, as consumers usually ask advice from people that they know and trust.

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