



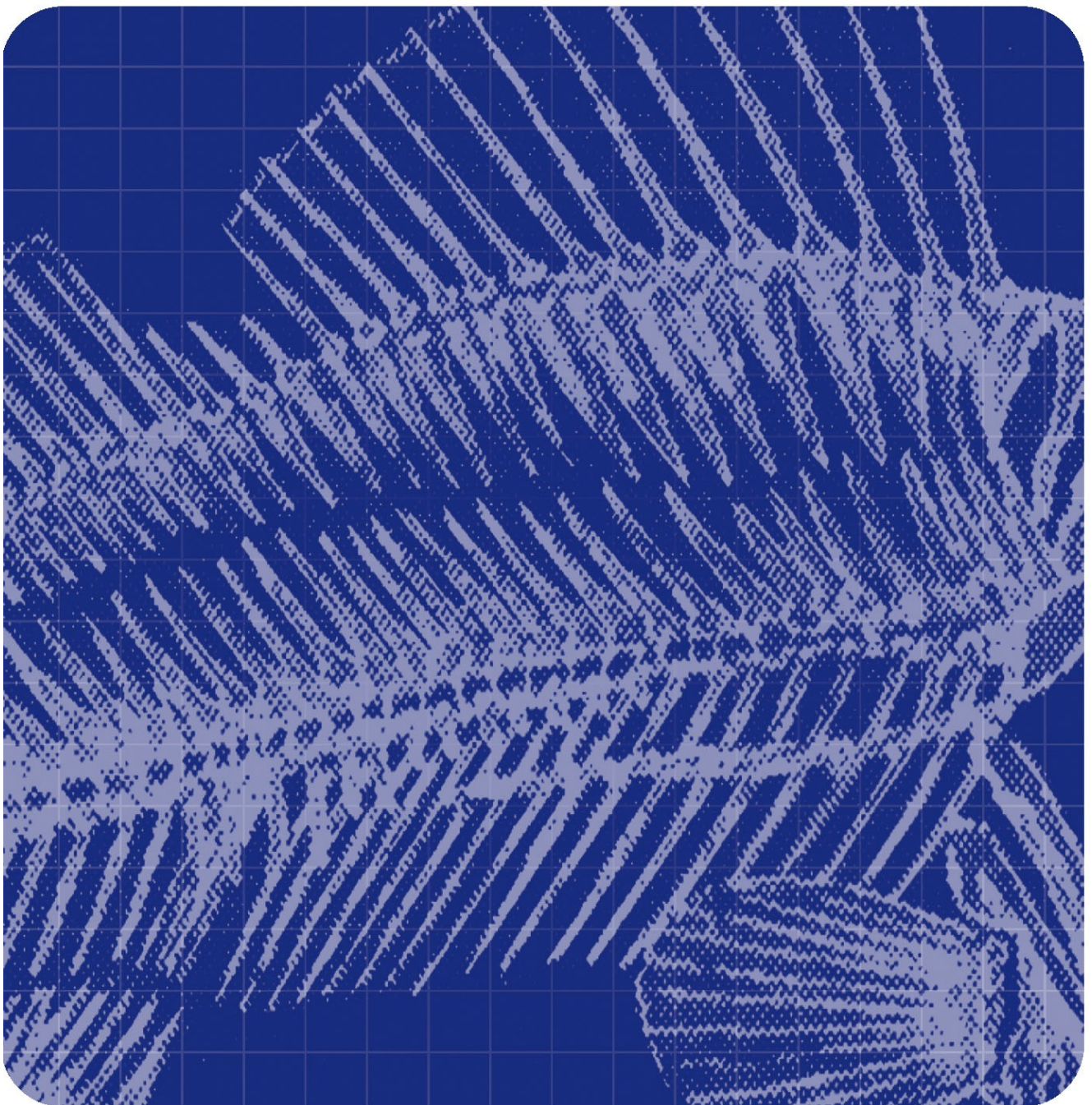
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Russian consumers' food habits

Results from a qualitative study in Moscow

Pirjo Honkanen and Gøril Voldnes





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REPORT

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<i>Summary:</i> <p>This study is a part of an ongoing three year project aimed at exploring and explaining Russian consumers' meal structures, consumers' relative preferences, motives for food choice and the consumers' perceptions of risks and benefits with foods (with an emphasis on herring). A main point is also to uncover any differences between younger and older generations. We choose to mix qualitative and quantitative methods in the main project. This report is a description of the qualitative part. Qualitative interviews were conducted amongst 21 women in Moscow who were chosen from two age groups, under 30 years and 50 years or older, in order to uncover possible differences in preferences and meal patterns. The purpose of the study was to discover different meal patterns, preferences for herring and possible substitutes, and to explore consumer motivations for food choice. The findings will be used as an input for the design of a survey with larger samples in chosen cities in Russia.</p> <p>The study revealed that three meals per day is quite common in Moscow: breakfast, dinner (or lunch) and supper. The younger women tend to have lighter meals compared to the older generation, and they have adopted "exotic" foods like sushi. They also tend to go to cafés, which is not very common amongst the older women. Concern for weight is common for both groups. Many of the subjects try to avoid food that is fattening, and most of the women in the study seem to equate slimness with being healthy.</p> <p>Fish and herring are not mentioned when discussing Russian traditions, and herring is not mentioned in eating patterns. But when asked, everybody reports eating and liking herring, even the younger people. This would suggest that herring is not consumed very often by most of the subjects. Herring is mostly consumed for supper (salted herring with potatoes and onions) or for special occasions as an appetiser. The possible substitutes are thus numerous.</p> <p>Price, familiarity of products, natural content of food and weight control seem to be the most important motives when choosing food. Avoiding additives and e-ingredients seems to be a very common goal for the women. Health is also an important motive, and the subjects reported many healthy and unhealthy foods. They were, however, surprisingly little aware of why some foods are healthy or risky.</p>		

Preface

This report presents results from qualitative interviews of 21 women in Moscow about their food habits and preferences. The main purpose was to obtain background knowledge about Russian consumers' food-related attitudes, preferences, traditions, etc. with a special emphasis on herring. The information will be used in the design of a survey in 2007.

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1 Introduction

Herring has become more and more popular amongst Russian consumers during the last 10 years. Norwegian exports of herring to Russia have increased from about 50 thousand tonnes in 1995 to 210 thousand tonnes in 2005, in value from 175 million NOK to 13 billion NOK. Fiskeriforskning conducted a comprehensive study on Russian consumers in 1997-1999 (Honkanen, 1998). The 1998 survey studied herring consumption, purchase patterns and consumer attitudes towards herring in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Murmansk. Some of the same themes were followed in this study, but the main purpose was to obtain input for a consumer survey that will be conducted in 2007. The goal was to obtain an overview of consumers' relative food preferences and especially herring's position, meal patterns and food choice motives, focusing particularly on the relationship between food and health.

A working paper based on existing literature on Russian consumers written earlier this year (Honkanen & Voldnes, 2006) pointed out two main themes for further research at the consumer level: food choice motives and the relative preference for herring. The Russians like herring, as has been shown in many reports and studies. Our focus in the qualitative interviews, however, was to find indicators for the relative preferences for herring: We asked about other foods that are used for similar occasions. Food choice motives have not been studied in Russia to our knowledge, so an effort was made to uncover whether we can use an existing scale (Steptoe *et al.*, 1995) of food choice motives in the survey next year, or if a new one should be created. We have also tried to discover what people think about the relationship between health and food, and thus health as a food choice motive. A third major theme that we studied was general meal patterns, both to uncover any changes in the structure in recent years and to uncover herring's place in the meal structure.

This report is based on 21 qualitative interviews in Moscow. It is important to keep in mind that Moscow is not necessarily representative for the rest of the country. However, our purpose was not to quantify the results, but to interview women in different age groups and to obtain an overview and gather varied information about meal structure, preferences and motives for food choice.

1.1 Research questions

The first research question was related to meal patterns. The purpose was to explore Russian meal structure in order to identify differences in attitudes, preferences and behavioural patterns in food choice. We set out to find out which and how many meals are eaten on a usual day, whether there are differences between weekends and everyday, where and with whom the meals are consumed, and finally, what is consumed for the different meals. We also aimed to discover traditional Russian food as perceived by the subjects.

The second purpose of the study was to explore preferences for herring relative to other foods through revealing associations with herring, finding out which herring dishes are prepared most often and when, and which other dishes can be served for the same purpose. This is important because people might give a high score for herring in a survey, but they might like some other food even better, and choose that food. So, merely obtaining a preference score on one meal amongst many alternatives does not really provide much information.

The third research task was to explore consumers' motivations for food choice by examining what is important for them when they choose food, and what type of information is used. Since health tends to be the most important motive in most earlier studies, we also elaborated explicitly on the relationship between health and food.

Fourth, we aimed at exploring the risks and benefits of different foods through asking which foods are perceived as good for the health, and which are perceived as unhealthy or even risky, and why.

Finally, it was also important to examine potential differences between two generations of women. We expect there to be differences in preferences and meal patterns – and perhaps food choice motives – as a result of the dramatic changes in the food supply situation in Moscow that have taken place during the last 10 to 15 years, moving from a lack or shortage of food to a very wide assortment today.

1.2 Method

We have used semi-structured interviews in our qualitative study. An interview guide was used during the interviews, but they were kept quite open, giving the respondents an opportunity to elaborate on issues of interest. Five of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian and one in English, while for others, an interpreter was used to translate from Norwegian to Russian.

The interviews took place in Moscow on 4-8 and 25-29 September. Sixteen interviews were conducted by the two authors, five by one. Although one of the researchers speaks Russian, an interpreter was used (Norwegian-Russian) in most of the interviews in order to ensure correct comprehension of the contents of the interviews. The data are by no means representative of all of Russia, as pointed out by the interviewees. Moscow is a very special case, but the purpose of qualitative interviews was not to achieve representative results; our purpose was to collect data that can be used to design a questionnaire later.

The recruitment of the interviewed women was done by one person at the Norwegian Embassy in Moscow. The women lived in different parts of the city, and they were in the low- or middle-income group, and all 21 were working (or studied and worked).

The interviews were mainly conducted in two different age groups (12 respondents were between 18 and 30 years, while 9 were around 50 years or older) in order to detect any potential differences between the two generations. The participants were assured of confidentiality, and they were given a small token for their willingness to participate.

2 Findings

2.1 Meal patterns

Most of the interviewees had three meals per day: breakfast (morning), dinner (between 12 pm and 4 pm) and supper (between 6 pm and 9 pm). The Russian dinner is what we in Norway would call lunch. For many, this is the main meal during the day. The interviewees were very eager to explain that they had very little time for cooking during the week – most of them live about one hour or more by metro from their work, and many have an additional job, so they often get home very late. Therefore, meals were sometimes skipped in both age groups. *“Sometimes I only drink tea and coffee till 4 pm” (woman, 50+ years).*

Most of the interviewees have their breakfast at home, with their family. There was no difference in this between the younger and older consumers. The usual breakfast consists of bread with butter and cheese, ham or sausage. Porridge, eggs, yoghurt and cottage cheese were also mentioned by both groups. The younger generation also consumes cereals with milk in the morning. Tea or coffee is commonly drunk for breakfast. One person mentioned herring as a breakfast ingredient.

Most of the subjects have dinner at work – they bring semi-processed or ready-made food with them from home. Porridge, soups, spaghetti, meatballs, fish, sandwiches, salads, potatoes, vegetables, yoghurt and meat were mentioned. Three of the younger subjects mostly had their dinner at a café. These mentioned salads, sushi, sandwiches, soups, meat or fish dishes and fruits. One subject mentioned that food has become so expensive at canteens at many workplaces that men bring sandwiches with them for dinner at work, which is a very untraditional Russian meal.

Supper is usually eaten at home, but two of the younger subjects often eat at cafés. Four subjects said that they do not have supper – three younger women and one older. Three subjects said that they have only a light meal (fruits, vegetables), while the rest of the subjects seem to have full meals after they come home from work: Italian food, kefir, meat with rice or potatoes, salads, fish, soups, vegetables, pasta with meat, sandwiches, milk, fruits, biscuits, porridge, sushi, meat balls, turkey and steamed salmon were mentioned.

Some of the subjects often have a snack between meals: Coffee/tea and cakes are eaten by both generations, as are fruits. Ice cream, chocolate, chips and yoghurt were mentioned by two of the younger subjects.

There seems to be a difference between weekends and weekdays in both what is consumed and when. The women have more time to cook on the weekends compared to weekdays, and most of the subjects said that they spend more time and effort to prepare a dinner (*“Better food”, “More exiting food”*). Breakfast is typically consumed later on the weekends compared to weekdays, but otherwise, there are no big differences although some said that they prepare warm breakfasts on Sundays. Soup is very commonly served as an appetiser for dinner, or a first course on the weekends. This tradition still seems to be very strong. The younger people eat more often at cafés or at friends’ homes on the weekends, and several of them said that there is no difference in what they eat between weekdays and weekends. This might be an effect of the young not being very interested in food and food traditions. The younger

generation also has dinner with their family more seldom (those who are not married but live with their parents). The women in the older generation often cook dinner for several days so they can take it with them for lunch.

In general, the women seemed to be very preoccupied with weight and staying slim – especially the younger generation, but also many of the older women. The younger generation is somewhat more likely to have light meals than the older generation. But the younger women also had more snacks between meals (chocolate, chips, etc.). One of the younger subjects eats very little during an ordinary day, but once a month, she goes to McDonalds and eats everything she wants – *“It’s a party”* (woman, 18 years). Another subject said that *“McDonalds is a catastrophe for Russia”* (woman, 50+ years).

It seems that the women in the younger generation are changing their meal structure in that they often prepare only one course for dinner, even for guests, while the customary Russian tradition is to serve soup or other first course, and other appetisers as well before the main course (1st, 2nd and 3rd courses).

Nobody mentioned herring as a part of their meal structure (until we asked). It seems that herring is not thought of as either “food” or “fish”, but rather as a category of its own. However, when asked, everybody reports eating it and liking it. It seems that most people eat their salted herring with potatoes and onions or just with dark bread for supper. The different herring salads are for special occasions; they are quite time-consuming to prepare.

One of the subjects, who has been in Norway several times, told us that throwing away food is not common in Russia: nobody does it. She seemed to be quite shocked at our tendencies to throw away even meat in Norway – *“This never happens in Russia”* (woman, 50+ years). This indicates that food is still quite expensive in Russia for “ordinary” people. Russian households spend up to 60 % of their income on food, although the estimates vary (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005).

2.1.1 Changes in meal patterns

Many of the subjects said that they have changed their eating habits: Some of the older women said that they have to eat less now because the prices have increased – even though the assortment is bigger. This seems to be a concern for the older generation, who were adults already during the Soviet regime, *“I use more money on food now”* (woman, 48 years).

Others claimed to have increased their consumption of fish, fruits and vegetables because the supply situation is much better now: *“There are more fruits and vegetables available: kiwi, mango, avocado, cauliflower, broccoli, etc. Earlier, we only had carrots, potatoes, onions and beetroots. We had to queue for bananas – and we could only buy one kilogram per person”* (woman, 50+ years). This is common for both younger and older women, but the younger women in particular seem to appreciate the broad assortment.

Yet others in both generations have begun to eat more healthy food such as vegetables and fruits. One of the older women claimed, however, that things were better under the Soviet regime: She used to shop directly from the collective farms, and the quality was better then, she said, and the food was more natural.

Convenience did not seem to be a major issue, except for two of the younger women: One preferred food that is fast to prepare, another bought a lot of ready meals.

2.1.2 Russian traditional meals

Soup is typical Russian food – it was said that there is no proper meal without a soup. “Borsch” (beetroot soup) and “schi” (cabbage soup with meat or fish) were mentioned by virtually everyone in our study. Others mentioned soups in general. “Blini” (pancakes), pastries/pie (“pirogue”) and “pelmini” (a kind of ravioli) were mentioned by many as typical Russian foods, as was porridge. Others mentioned potatoes, vegetables, salads with mayonnaise, cabbage rolls (“goluptsi”), meat and in general fatty foods. Fish was suggested by one person, herring by another, as traditional Russian food. However, as we come back to later, some herring courses were considered very traditional Russian dishes such as “selyodka pod shuby” (a salad consisting of salted herring, carrots, onions, potatoes, beetroot and mayonnaise, in layers). Some said that the traditional Russian food takes a long time to prepare; therefore, it is mainly prepared for the weekends or special occasions. Younger people said that they cannot prepare traditional food; one told us that she will try when she has children of her own, while another said that “*Traditional Russian food – that is everything I don’t eat*” (woman, 18 years). Another young woman said that she doesn’t like the traditional food because there is too much bread, pasta and flour in it. Many of the younger subjects did not think it is important to follow the traditions: “*It is not important to keep the traditions – I like to mix different food traditions*” (woman, 26 years). Others said that traditions are not important; the main point is that the food tastes good.

Some of the subjects also mentioned that it is a Russian tradition to eat a lot – especially by the men.

2.1.3 Fish in meal structure

It turns out that all except two of the subjects liked fish very much (when asked), but they had different reasons for not eating it very often. Some said that the availability of fresh fish is non-existent in Moscow, and the frozen fish is of very poor quality. Most of the subjects would like a greater availability of fresh fish. This is probably a reflection of the income level amongst the respondents: The “Western-style” supermarkets do offer a wide selection of fresh seafood, but it is quite expensive and out of reach to “ordinary” Russians. Salmon and trout are sometimes bought for special occasions.

Two of the subjects said that they like fish but the family prefers meat, so they serve meat. One young subject said that she does not like fish, but when she was reminded that she claimed that she often eats sushi, she replied: “*Yes, but sushi is raw, without bones...it is not like fish*” (woman, 18 years). She also mentioned liking smoked salmon as well, so she actually liked fish, but not fried fish the way her mother serves it. There might also be an issue of lack of skills amongst the younger generation: Fish is perceived as difficult to prepare. There was almost unanimous agreement that frozen fish is of very poor quality. One of the younger subjects, however, said that she buys frozen fish only because it is of better quality. This might be an issue of income as well: Most of the women buy their food in the shops or markets near their homes, where the supply of high-quality frozen fish and food is not good. The Western-style supermarkets offer a wide variety of high-quality frozen seafood.

It is quite clear that the Russians are meat eaters – fish was not mentioned as a traditional Russian food by anyone in our sample.

2.2 Preferences

2.2.1 Associations with herring

The only association that was common for many of the subjects was that herring tastes good. Other associations were: Natural herring, herring and potatoes, fat, black bread, slices on a plate, salted herring, salad, fried herring, herring roe, fish, ocean, party food, vodka, onions, salty, North, Far East. Most of these associations were only mentioned once or twice. There was quite a big difference in these associations compared to those in an earlier project in 1997-1999 (Honkanen, 1999): Only two subjects mentioned vodka as an immediate association with herring in the present study, while in 1998, 23 of 24 interviewees had this association. This could indicate that the consumption of vodka as a party drink has been reduced, and herring consumption as a snack along with it. Another reason might be that vodka consumption can be a somewhat sensitive subject for many Russian women – we know from many sources that alcohol abuse is quite extensive in Russia. It is also possible that herring is increasingly consumed on other occasions than parties, thus without vodka.

2.2.2 Herring and food preferences

All subjects liked herring, but some of them consume it quite seldom. There was no difference in age groups in liking. Many of the women mentioned that their husbands like herring very much. Herring is mostly eaten for supper, seldom for dinner; it is often served with raw onions, and many of the women hesitate to eat it at work because of the smell. Herring is also eaten as an appetiser (“zakuska”) in most households. This is in accordance with our previous study (Honkanen, 1998). When we started talking about how herring is prepared, most of the interviewees mentioned “selodka pod shuby” (which means “herring under fur coat”), a herring dish that is usually prepared for parties and holidays. Many of the subjects also mentioned that this is a very traditional Russian food/dish (but not when asked about food traditions). Salted herring with boiled potatoes and onions was often mentioned, as was marinated herring. This was somewhat surprising, because all statistics show a very modest market share for marinated products. But in our discussions, it turned out that some respondents marinate the herring themselves. Otherwise, herring is eaten with onions, on black bread, blini and as a spread (salted herring, butter, carrots). Herring is also used in different salads such as “vinaigrette”, “beetroot salad” and others. “Forschmak” is another popular herring dish, which is basically a spread made of salted herring, butter and spices.

2.2.3 Substitutes for herring

There seem to be numerous dishes served as “zakuska” (appetisers) in Russia, which can replace herring. Serving “zakuska” on ordinary weekdays is rather uncommon (people don’t have time), but it is still served on special occasions, and can be served when entertaining guests. “Zakuska” can be either cold or warm dishes. Cold dishes can be sandwiches, canapés, salads (vegetables, fish, meat, vinaigrettes), vegetables and mushrooms (fresh, pickled, marinated, etc.), cold fish (caviar, salted fish, smoked fish), shellfish, cold meat, sausages, eggs, cheese. Our subjects mentioned together 32 dishes, of which salads were most often mentioned (vegetables, meat and fish); salted salmon, smoked mackerel and smoked salmon were also mentioned by several respondents. Meat (chicken, pork, beef) in small slices and cheese were also commonly used as “zakuska”. Other “zakuski”: Vegetables, mushrooms, shrimp, lobster, pickled cucumbers and tomatoes, different pastries, sausages, ham, pelmini, cabbage rolls, olives, cheese, caviar. Most of these, however, are not everyday foods, so as a

substitute for herring on ordinary weekdays, as supper, all the dishes are mentioned in chapter 2.1.

2.3 Food choice motives

The purpose of this part of the interviews was to try to reveal some deeper motives for food choice. This proved to be a very difficult task, as expected: Most of the subjects thought of tangible features of food at first, but it was quite clear that most of them had health, taste and price as the most important motives.

The most often mentioned motives were: Price (11 of the subjects), health (11), sensory properties like quality, appearance, freshness, taste (11), avoidance of additives (10), and familiarity of products (8). Other factors were: Weight control (6), origin (8) (preferably Russian), natural food (9). One of the young interviewees seemed to have a purely hedonic motive, or rather, for her, food purchase was an impulse act. Translating these motives into Steptoe's food choice motives (Steptoe *et al.*, 1995), we can see that **health** was the number one motive: The subjects try to buy food with vitamins and other nutrients, they try to avoid additives and they try to avoid fat and sugar. **Price** was another important motive, as was the **familiarity** of the products. **Natural content** was also important for many people, together with **weight control**. **Sensory appeal** seemed also to have importance. Nobody mentioned ethical concerns about food, and only two of the younger women mentioned convenience. On the contrary, most of the interviewees were very sceptical to processed and semi-processed foods, claiming that they contain a lot of additives to prolong the shelf life. Also, they do not trust the labels: *"The ingredients on the labels are not always in agreement with the actual ingredients in the product"* (woman, 50+ years). Another said that she thinks imported food contains more additives than Russian products.

One of the younger women said that she did her food purchases on an impulse basis – she buys whatever she desires there and then. This is difficult to relate to any of Steptoe's motives. It should be considered a possibility in our survey: There are actually people who buy on impulse (Verplanken *et al.*, 2005), and it might be more widespread amongst younger people. Origin of the products was also mentioned by many. Most of the subjects preferred Russian meat and vegetables, and some also Russian fish. A clear majority of the subjects also preferred fresh products, which implies that the products are Russian. Also, the fact that people are trying to avoid additives and "e-ingredients" implies that Russian food is preferred because imported products are perceived to be "full of additives".

2.3.1 Information sought in the purchasing process

The women were very focused on price, ingredients and shelf life of the products: Thirteen of twenty-one said they always study the list of ingredients, while 10 study the price and 10 study the label carefully. Also, appearance was important for many (six mentioned it explicitly – these mainly looked at the appearance, not using other information). Four of the subjects mentioned brand or manufacturer's name, or rather the factory name. Others mentioned calories, fat contents, sugar contents and nutrition. Although price was mentioned by many of the women, most of them do not buy the cheapest products, which are considered to be of poor quality. Rather, they go for the middle-priced products. One of the younger women preferred imported products because she considered them to have higher quality.

Products with a long shelf life are not particularly popular in Russia – people suspect them to contain a lot of additives, and they think additives are bad for their health. *“Imported products have a very long shelf life and thus they contain lots of additives” (woman, 48 years).*

2.4 Food and health

The consumers were asked about the possible relationship between food and health. All of them said that there is a relationship, but one of the young women hesitated greatly: *“There is perhaps a relationship” (woman, 28 years).* Fresh food often means healthy food for the subjects (not frozen, not processed, not old). A majority of the subjects also said that one should try to avoid food with additives – such food is considered risky food:

“Russian products contain less additives and e-ingredients than imported food. The reason for this, I think, is that Russian technology is less developed which means that the producers are not able to put additives into the food. Or they don’t bother to inform about them on the labels” (woman, 25 years)

Others thought that there is no unhealthy food – on the contrary, we need a little of everything: A balanced diet is important.

Weight and slimness are related to health by many of the subjects. *“There is clearly a relationship between food and health: If I eat lots of bread and pastry, I gain weight; therefore, I try to avoid pastry” (woman, 50+).* Some of the subjects claim that the Russians in general eat too much: According to them, there is no such thing as unhealthy food, as long as one eats it in moderate portions.

Foods that are considered healthy are (the number of respondents in brackets): Fish (18), vegetables (16), fruits (12), juice (6), milk products (9), meat (5), berries (3), fresh products in general (3). Mentioned once or twice were: Olive oil, porridge, nuts, honey, foods with vitamins, low fat foods, unprocessed foods, corn/grain products, chicken, natural products and soups. One subject also mentioned two cooking methods: Baked in the oven and boiled/steamed food. These methods were considered healthy because you retain the vitamins in the food and avoid using fats like in fried foods.

Many of the subjects did not know why these foods are healthy. One young subject mentioned fruits, juices and fresh products, and when asked why they are healthy, she said: *“I don’t know, they say so” (woman, 28).* Others provide some explanations: One mentioned Omega-3 fatty acids in fish (but not why this is healthy). It also seems that fish and seafood are more often related to **iodine** (good for the metabolism), **calcium** (bones, nails, teeth) and **phosphorous** (good for the brain) than Omega-3 fatty acids. Milk products were considered good for the stomach and bones. Also, vegetables were mentioned as good for the stomach and the skin. Fruits provide important vitamins, while carbohydrates are good for the brain, said one subject.

Foods considered unhealthy or risky were: Sweets (4), chips (6), fast foods (4), fatty foods (4), cakes (3), flour (3), foods with additives (5). It is noteworthy that only three of the respondents mentioned alcohol as risky or unhealthy. Other unhealthy/risky foods: Coffee, processed foods, sugar, soda, sushi (risky if not fresh), pizza, pork, sausages, imported foods (contain additives), genetically modified foods (GM foods), semi-processed foods, preserves, too much meat, salty products (including fish), mushrooms (can contain environmental

pollutants). The most risky and unhealthy foods, however, were related to preparation method: Seven of the subjects considered fried foods as unhealthy/risky (loss of vitamins and other nutrients). Also, grilled and smoked foods were considered unhealthy by two of the subjects.

Some of the subjects were extremely uncertain about healthy and unhealthy foods, but gave some explanations anyway: *“Salted herring in cans or trays is perhaps not healthy. But the products that are sold have been approved by doctors, and doctors are not stupid, so the products that are on sale have to be OK”* (woman, 26 years).

One subject said that GM foods are in abundance at the market, while another claimed that GM food is dangerous because *“GM foods can transfer genes into your body”* (woman, 51).

Also, artificial colour was considered quite risky by some: *“A friend bought a red-coloured soda, which she spilled on the table. The stain did not go away, so imagine what it can do to your body when that happened to the table”* (woman, 27 years). In general, 13 of the 21 respondents were concerned about the additives in food, but no one was able to explain why they are risky for the health.

“Fatty foods are harmful to internal organs” (woman, 30 years); *“Conserved food can cause cancer”* (woman, 30 years).

Balance in the diet was considered important by many of the subjects – these claimed that there is no unhealthy or risky food. Four of the subjects said this.

3 Summary and conclusions

Meal patterns

Most of the subjects usually have three meals per day, although meals are sometimes skipped when they are busy. The subjects seemed to be extremely concerned about the lack of time on the weekdays. Many have a long way to work or have additional jobs, which results in long working hours and little time for cooking any big dinners or suppers at home. Weekends, however, are often different, and meals are more elaborate. Young people, on the other hand, say there is no difference in their eating patterns in the weekends compared to weekdays. Younger people also tend to have lighter meals compared to the older women, most likely because they want to control their weight. But they have also adopted foods like sushi, which is very different from the traditional Russian food, which is rather fatty.

There seems to be a difference between the younger and older subjects in the social meal structure as well: Having dinner with family was not important for the young women (unmarried); they also eat at cafés more often. Younger people also seemed to drop soup as a dinner course, which is a major deviation from the traditional Russian meal structure.

The Russians are clearly meat eaters: Only one of the subjects mentioned fish as traditional Russian food. Some of the respondents said that they like fish, but their husbands do not because they don't feel full after eating fish. There are some indications that the women would prefer to buy fresh fish. The subjects say that fresh fish is currently not available in Moscow (apart from the supermarkets, but they are rather expensive). Several of the women mentioned that they would eat more fish if the availability of fresh fish was better.

Another interesting issue was that herring was not mentioned as traditional Russian food as such, but later, when herring was discussed, most of the respondents said that herring, especially a dish called “selyodka pod shuby” is a traditional Russian dish. In general, herring is not eaten very often in Moscow, although the frequency varies quite a bit: from once a week to almost never. But nobody mentioned herring as a part of their meal patterns when these were discussed in general.

Herring and preferences

Herring was liked by virtually all subjects in the study. It is consumed for supper during the week (herring pieces with bread or potatoes and onions). On weekends and special occasions, herring is served as an appetiser, and the variety of herring courses is quite large. But, as mentioned earlier, herring does not seem to be on the top of the mind of the consumers when asked about their meal patterns.

Thus, there seem to be two main occasions for herring use that can be used as a starting point for relative preference occasions in the questionnaire: for supper and for special occasions. For supper, herring with potatoes and onions is often consumed. For parties, a number of different herring dishes can be served. There also seem to be numerous other dishes that can be used for the same occasions as herring (“zakuska”).

An interesting observation is that vodka is no longer associated with herring to the degree it was only nine years ago. This might indicate a change in meal patterns in general: People have less time for visits and parties compared to before. Or people might be going out more

(especially the young people). It would be interesting to study this in a smaller, more traditional town.

Food choice motives

Price seemed to be the number one motive for food choice. This does not mean that people are looking for the cheapest products: They seem to choose a middle-priced product, which they feel gives most value for the money. Health is another important issue. It also seems that health was very closely related to weight: The respondents try to avoid foods that make them gain weight. The preference for natural products is also related to health. Almost every respondent was concerned about additives in foods, and there seems to be a widespread perception that imported products (with long shelf lives) contain large quantities of additives.

Taste and familiarity of the products were other important motives. A possible reason for choosing familiar products can be that food is rather expensive in Russia and constitutes a relatively large part of the household budget amongst most people: They don't want to buy something they may be forced to throw away. But, it can also be a sign of lack of trust in labels.

Health

We were interested in the respondents' perceptions of the relationship between food and health. Although the women seemed to be extremely concerned about health and healthy foods, they obviously thought that thin = healthy. It was also interesting that several women couldn't think of any food that is risky or unhealthy: They thought that we need all foodstuffs, as long as we have a balance in what we eat and how much we eat.

The women seemed to be extremely concerned about additives in food and e-ingredients in particular, regarding them as dangerous for their health. But when asked, no one could really tell why they are dangerous and which of them are. Also, there seemed to be a lack of trust in the labels and manufacturers: People suspect that all ingredients are not listed on the label. On the other hand, imported products (especially American) are considered even worse when it comes to additives. So most respondents preferred Russian products, especially products they or their friends are familiar with.

Genetically modified foods were also mentioned as a risk by a few women, but they do not know why it is risky to eat it: "*GM food can transfer genes into my body*" (woman, 51 years); "*There are lots of GM products in the shops*" (woman, 30 years).

Further work

In order to obtain a picture of the relative preferences for herring, we need to consider the occasions when herring is most commonly used: supper on weekdays and for parties and other special occasions. We think it would be wise to use dishes (e.g., selyodka pod shuby, smoked salmon, caviar, etc.) in the survey next year instead of just a food category like herring, meat, fish, salmon, chicken, etc. because it is difficult to compare raw materials when they can be used in such a variety of ways.

The qualitative study showed that the Steptoe et al. (1995) food choice questionnaire can be used for detecting food choice motives. We could, however, also add an impulsive buying scale as it seems quite possible that the younger people in particular might decide what to buy in the purchase situation, without any deeper motives.

It is important to study the health issue further, in a larger sample. In addition to elaborating on health knowledge, it would be interesting to measure the health locus of control: Do people feel that they have the control over their health?

Also, the risk and benefit issue seems to be quite diffuse for the consumers, perhaps a result of a low knowledge level about why food is healthy or can harm you. Another issue that our study showed was the lack of trust in labels, which could be studied further.

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