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**FEASTING ON FUNGI: EXPLORING FUTURE PERSPECTIVES OF
CONSUMERS PREFERENCES AND COMMERCIAL PRACTICES
ON THE GROWING MARKET OF PLANT-BASED FOODS**

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Justification of research topic

We share a common challenge that confronts the health of our global community.

From innovative ingredients and technological processes to ensuring adherence to security standards and assessing nutritional value, we analyse the end product against a set of criteria.

As students in the field of food science we perceive our responsibility to evaluate the feasibility and functionality of various food products.

Acting in both the capacities of analysts and consumers, our objective for this study was to evaluate the level of acceptance of mycelium-based meat products, with a specific focus on understanding the factors that could drive or influence the acceptance of such products among Romanian consumers.





Introduction

- Exploring marketing dynamics and collective perceptions linked to terms like plant proteins, alternative meat, and fungal proteins.
- Our goal is to uncover how these aspects influence consumer acceptance of final products and marketing behaviour. The study assesses the likelihood of Romanian consumers to integrate mycelium-based products in their diets.



Source: courtesy Meati.com



Modern dietary choices impact both health and the environment, prompting a need for sustainable alternatives to conventional agriculture.

The Fungal Game-Changer mycelium-based products offer a unique blend of texture, nutrition, and environmental friendliness, reshaping the protein argument.

Factors that determine consumer acceptance of fungal proteins, bridging cultural ties and global trends.

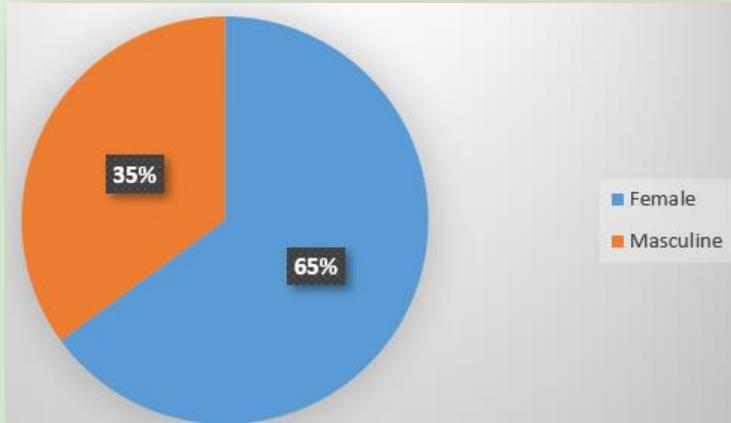


Plant-Powered Revolution
the food industry responds, with a surge in plant-based products, projecting a market growth to a staggering \$160 billion by 2030.

While the U.S. sees a plateau, Europe embraces alternative proteins

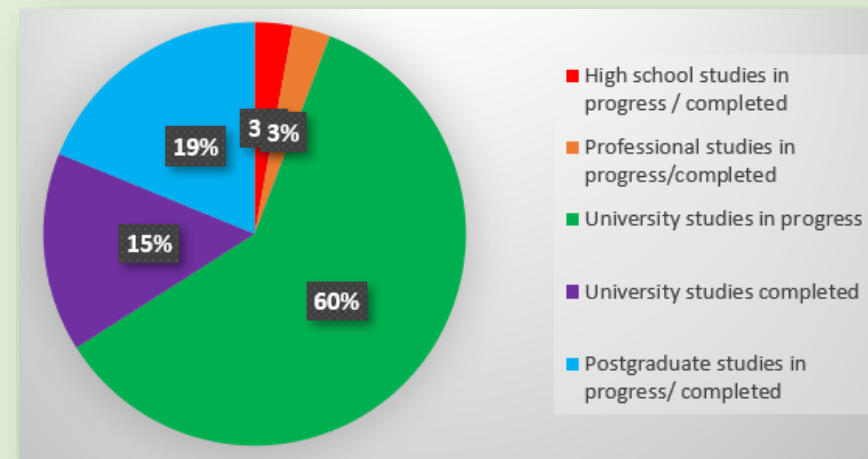


Materials and methods



- Diverse demographics involving 138 individuals from both urban and rural communities, showcased a gender distribution of 89 females, 48 males, and a range of age groups.

- Education level emerged as a significant factor, with 60.2% of participants having ongoing or completed university studies, indicating the influence of educational background on consumer profiles.
- Utilizing a questionnaire with 16 items, the research employed descriptive statistical methodology.
- Through categorical responses we identified clear patterns, emphasizing the spectrum from unequivocal engagement to decisive disinterest in the subject matter.

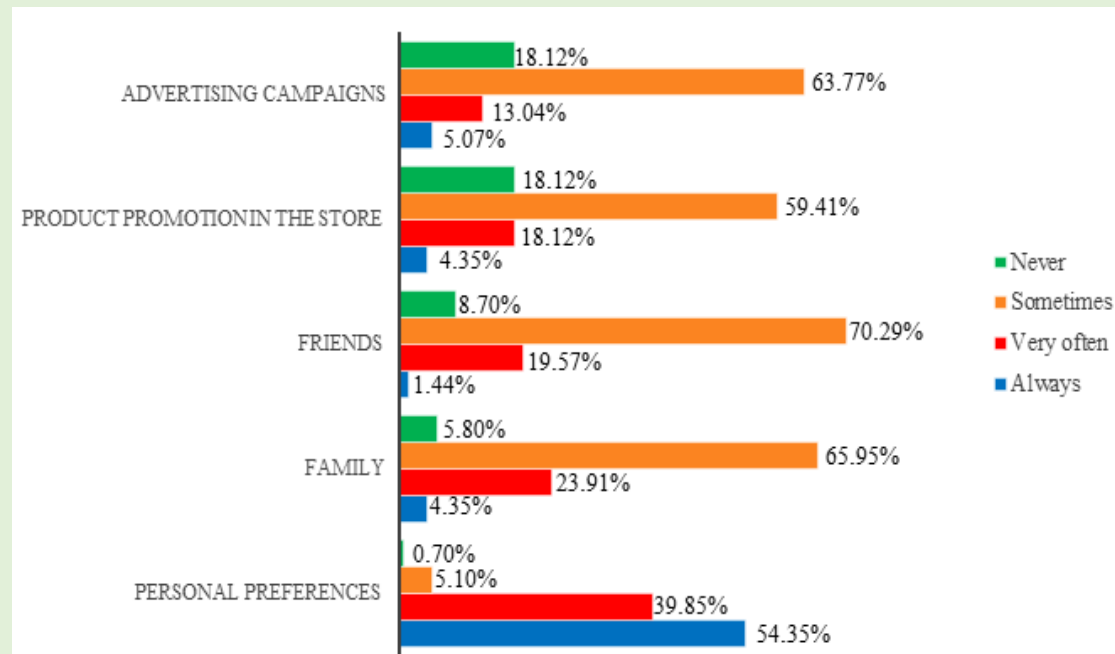




Results and discussions

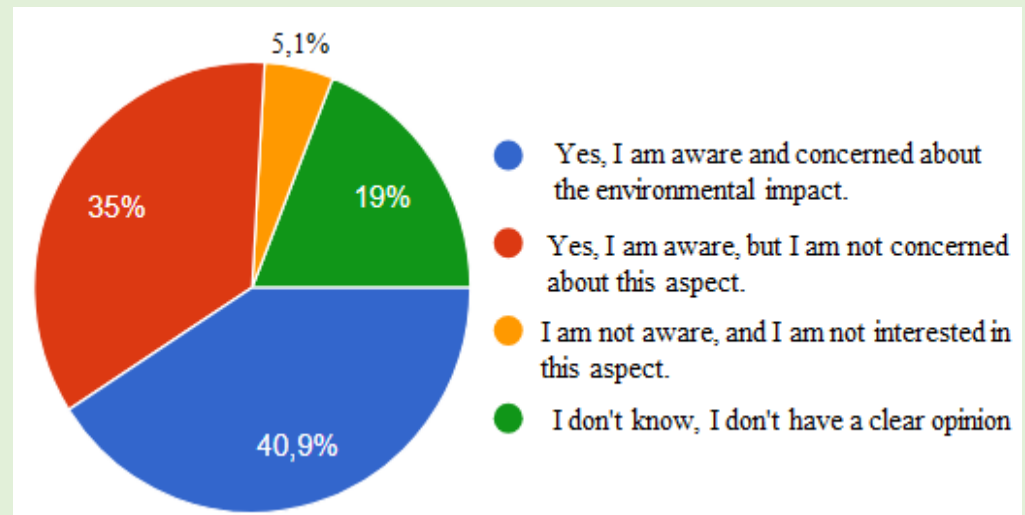
Consumer Choices Taste (54.34%) leads consumers' decisions, with personal experience and familiarity close behind (44.2%), highlighting the centrality of sensory satisfaction.

- Peer Pressure, **friends** impact product trials for 70.29%, showcasing the significant role of social circles in shaping eating behaviours.
- Traditional advertising scores low (18.12%), but public endorsements from trusted sources sway almost 75%, reflecting social media's influence.

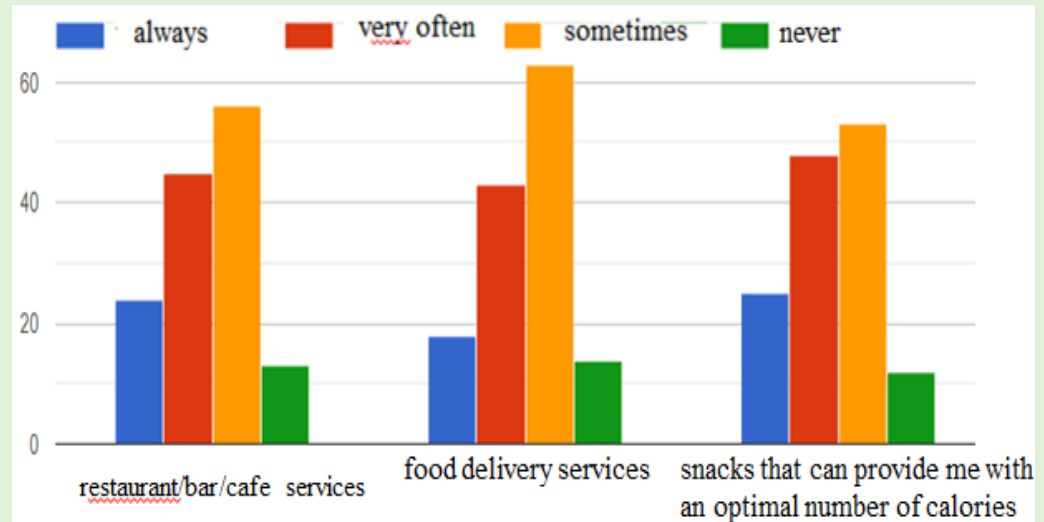




- **Eco-Conscious Consumers:** Over 40.9% express awareness and concern about the environmental impact of food choices, indicating a growing environmentally conscious segment.



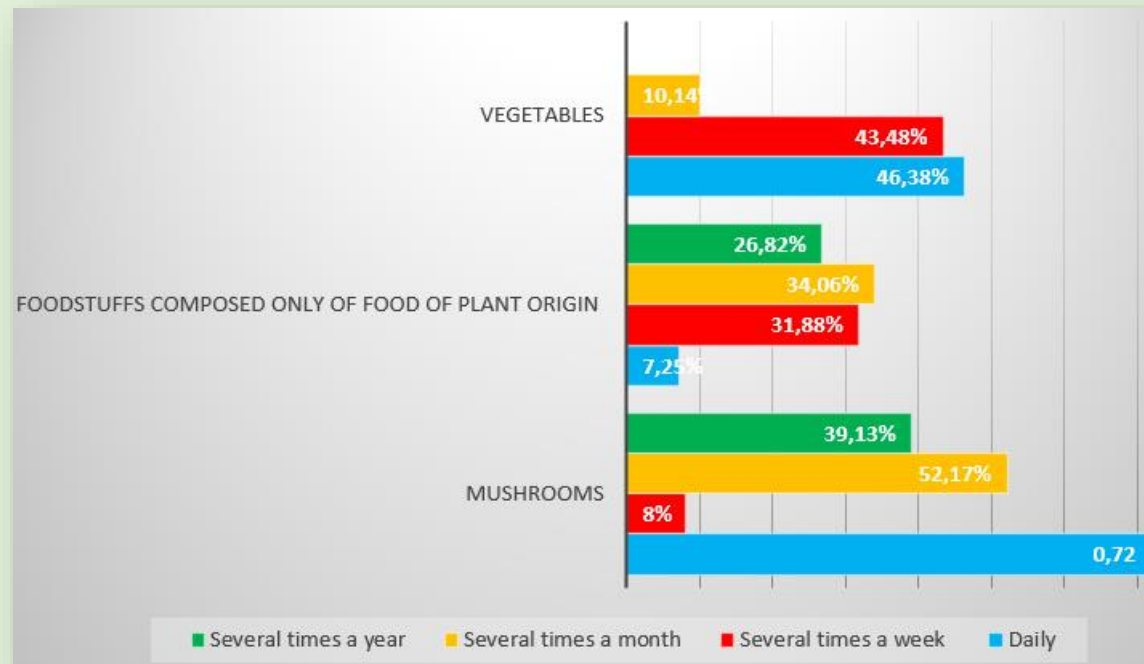
- **Workday Shifts:** Professional commitments alter eating habits, with 45.65% opting for food delivery and 17.39% choosing restaurants, highlighting evolving meal practices.





Results and discussions

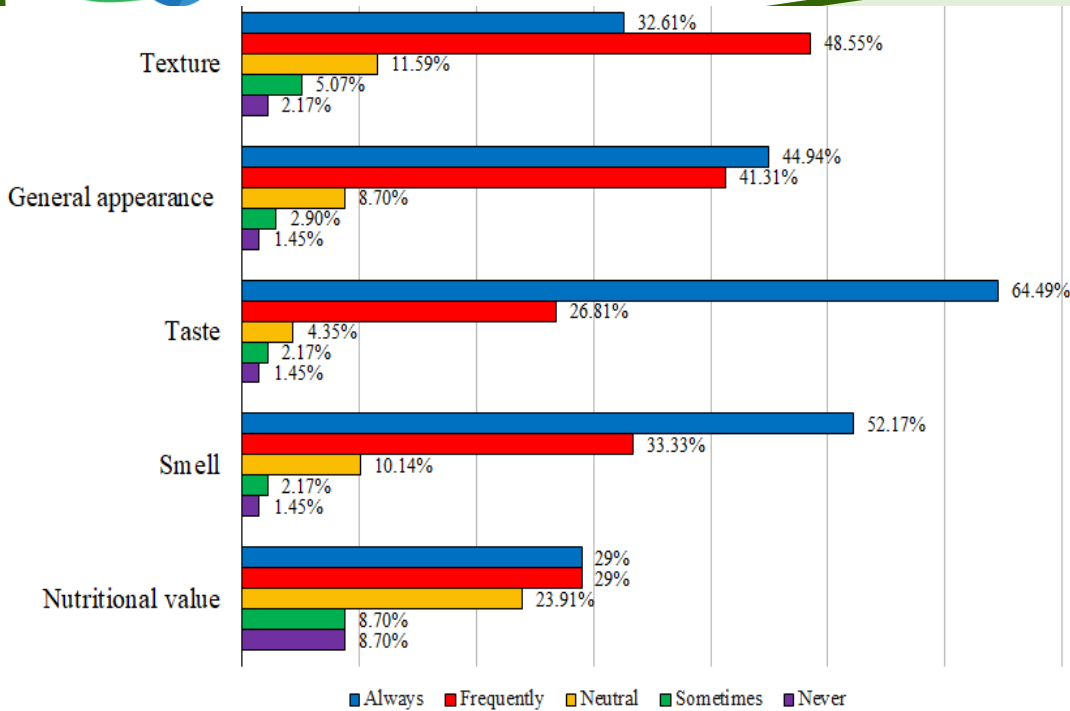
- Nearly half (46.38%) eat vegetables daily, showcasing a substantial market for plant-based alternatives.





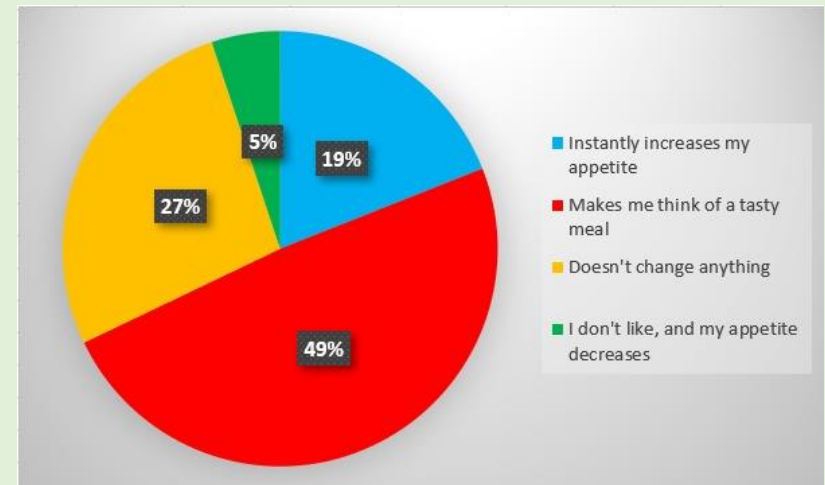
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For item 15, respondents viewed an enticing image of a tender, juicy steak and were asked about its impact on their appetite. Recognizing the profound connection between appetite and sensory experience—we considered the insights from item 14. This previous item highlighted that taste, smell, and texture are the predominant characteristics for consumers.

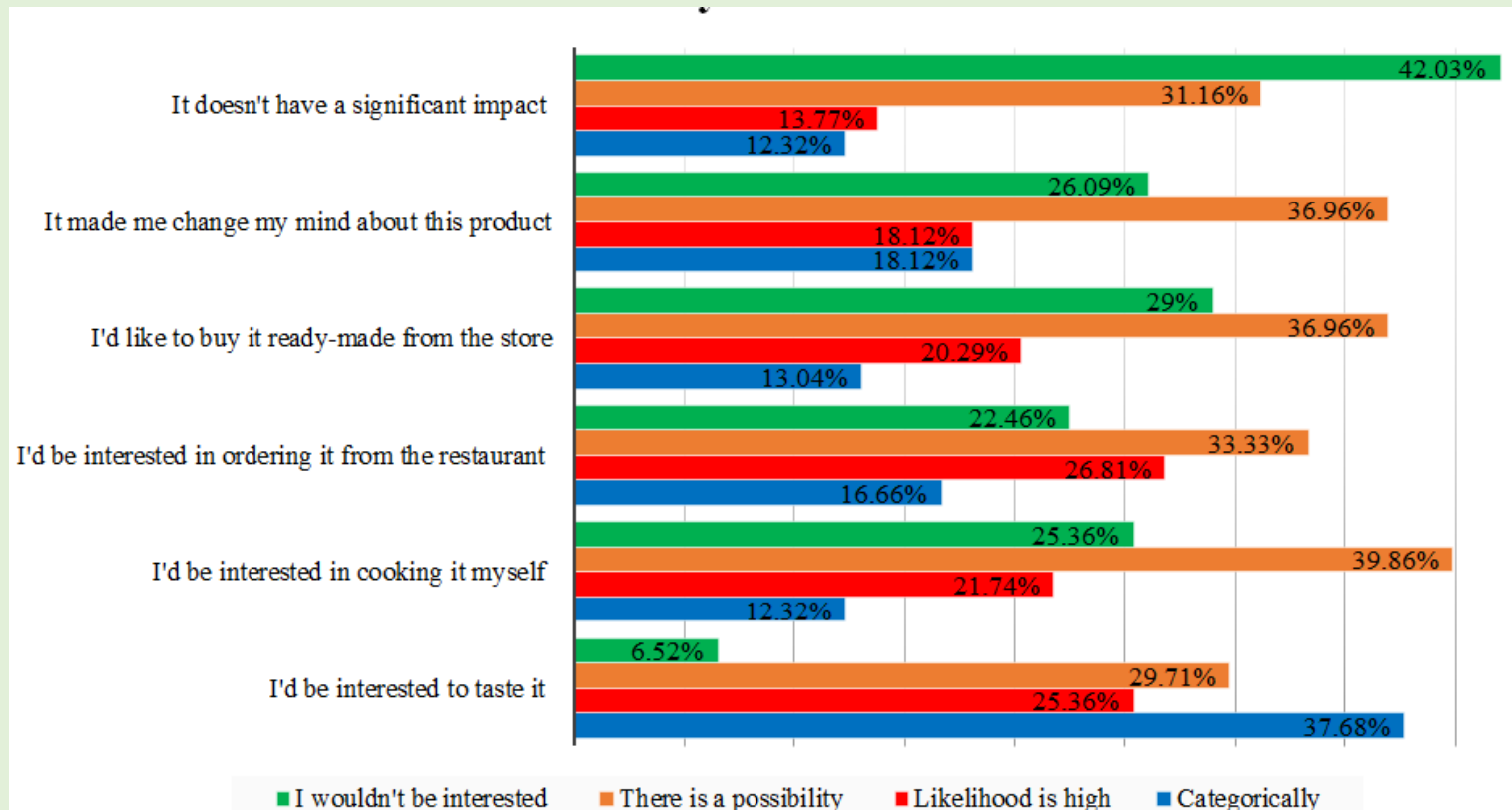
This combination of sensory attributes is likely to intensify the appetite sensation among consumers, with almost half (50%, or 67 respondents) associating it with a savoury meal.





Results and discussions

- Mycelium Acceptance - 38% express categorical interest, while 55% consider it likely to cook or purchase, indicating a substantial willingness to embrace innovative plant-based options.





Conclusions and recommendations

- The results show that more than 50% of respondents eat mushrooms at least once a month. A significant number of people are concerned about the environmental effects of their food choices, reflecting a trend towards eco-consciousness.
- However, taste preferences continue to be the deciding factor.
- Strategic positioning can be as a low-cost or high-end alternative product, and social endorsement is key to product acceptance.
- Finally, the study provides useful information, but acknowledges limitations related to sample size and demographic representation.
- We remain optimistic about the introduction of mycelium-based products on the Romanian market, advising for an integrative approach to address current challenges in the food industry.





Selective references

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Images

<https://www.istockphoto.com>

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Thank you for your attention!

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