

RESEARCH ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH THE SALE OF FOOD AND ITS QUALITY IN THE CZECH CONSUMER MARKET

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Abstract

The article presents selected problems of customer satisfaction with the food quality on the basis of secondary and primary research and a brief outline of the current state of knowledge of the issues examined. Customer satisfaction is related to the quality of products. Customers have expectations that are influenced by their experience, advice, competition information and financial capabilities. The quality of food products has specific aspects and is currently in the centre of attention of the inspecting authority. The issue of the quality of food is extensive and may have different points of view. Realized secondary research focuses on selected problems of monitoring food quality on the Czech consumer market. Primary research checks up the customer satisfaction with food products on a selected sample of respondents with regard to their income level.

Introduction

Transformation of retail in the Czech Republic after 1989 reflected in the whole past period in the growth of the width and depth of trading range and its quality. The concept of quality has lately often been pronounced in terms of quality of food, which the supervisory authorities monitor directly in the stores. Certain negative results of inspections lead to questions whether the sale of low-quality food products is only a failure of an individual or a system error in the management of business enterprises and their stores. Both effects contribute to the deterioration of the image of companies and reduce customer satisfaction with the purchase of food products. For companies that are associated with violations of the principles in the sale of food, it can lead to customer migration to the competition. We have already registered this effect around year 2003. Supervisory authorities in the Czech Republic recently contributed to higher customer awareness of the inspections at stores and the findings related to the quality of food. This information may induce changes in the behavior of consumers when buying food, and their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

There is no doubt that it is necessary to take care of customers to be satisfied with the products companies. Some companies, even though they present themselves as customer-oriented companies, are in fact only trying to sell the highest number of products even though the product quality does not match the required standards. Satisfied customer, says Cooper Lane in his book, tells his positive experience to others [2, p. 133]. A satisfied customer is becoming one of the most effective ways of attracting new customers.

The main goal of our article is to present the partial results of primary research conducted through a questionnaire survey focused, amongst other things, on the level of satisfaction of Czech consumers when purchasing food. Partial goals are a brief outline of the current state of theoretical knowledge and secondary research on food quality in their purchase and based on available statistical data and information from the control of supervisory authorities.

1 Brief outline of the current state of knowledge on the examined issues

In literature, there are many definitions of customer satisfaction [3, p. 11]. Satisfaction in general can be defined as “the degree of fulfilment of customer expectations, which is associated with how the customer perceives and evaluates purchased product” [7, p. 849].

How do customers form their expectations? Expectations are partly the result of customer experience, friendly advices and competitive information and promises [8, p. 150]. Many organizations systematically measure how customers act, identify factors influencing shopping satisfaction, and operatively change it. Companies with experience measure customer satisfaction and customer loyalty regularly, because it is one of the keys to maintaining a customer focus and success of the company. Data on customer satisfaction do not work long term [9, p. 539]. Competition can overcome us, our satisfied customers soon become dissatisfied, and they leave us. Many methods are used during monitoring the level of customer satisfaction. Examples of the used methods are: hotline, polls, wishes and complaints, analysis of lost customers, mystery shopping, customer satisfaction surveys, etc.

As stated by Zamazalová, between satisfaction and loyalty there is a link, but unfortunately not the case that every satisfied customer will automatically become regular customer [16, p. 214].

Customer satisfaction and business profitability are closely linked with the quality of products and services, which are provided to the entire value chain, which is the main tool for identifying ways to create more value for the customer [9, p. 542, p. 544]. Quality is defined in different ways (ability to use, fulfilling requirements, exemptions to the variations). Kotler uses the definition of the American Society for Quality Management, which is characterized by quality as the sum of the elements and characteristics of the product or service that create the ability to satisfy expressed or implied needs [9, p. 545].

Quality is, in terms of three layers of product, included in genuine, real and tangible product [5, p. 159]. Besides quality, other generally considered categories are: brand, style, packaging, preparation, manufacturer name etc. In the broadest context, a quality of product represents capability to perform its functions. It defines the specific characteristics, such as durability, reliability, accuracy, etc. [5, p. 167].

The requirements for adequate quality for food products are very specific. It is a multi-criteria parameter [14], which includes hygienic, nutritional, technological, sensory and information aspects. It also includes own use value based on the ease of culinary preparation, consumption, durability and economic aspects. Quality is created throughout the entire food chain. The most basic terms of food quality are food safety and hygiene, which are related to health of customer.

Examples of main aspects of food quality: [14]

- Sensorial quality is given by appearance, color, shape, smell, taste and consistency, which are the main criteria for choosing a customer.
- Nutrition quality is represented by nutritionally desirable and undesirable ingredients. Among the desirable components belong nutrients, including proteins, carbohydrates,

fats, vitamins, antioxidants, fibre and dry matter according to the recommended doses. Unwanted components are residues of pesticides, nitrates, heavy metals, mycotoxins, drug residues, pathogenic organisms and allergens.

- Utility value (functional suitability) decides on the suitability of the food for commercial or industrial purposes. Information about functional suitability gets consumer from product packaging or labels. The customer then finds out whether the product is suitable for cooking, frying or baking. What is the storage life, way of preparation and how much it costs?

Food quality is currently the center of attention of supervisory bodies. Let us have a closer look at how it is in practice.

2 Secondary research results and discussion

Research work was carried out by secondary research, which was focused on selected studies conducted in the Czech Republic on consumer satisfaction with food quality and monitoring examples of the Czech Agricultural and Food Inspection Authority, as the main supervisory authority. It was followed by primary research using questionnaires.

2.1 Monitoring customer satisfaction with quality of food

Companies are not the only ones who are dealing with monitoring satisfaction, but it is also a focus of various research agencies or universities. Many factors influence customer satisfaction, such as satisfaction with purchases, satisfaction with services, satisfaction with retail environment or satisfaction with the company as a whole [16, p. 215]. There may be other areas, like the possibility of financing, price/quality ratio, company image, etc. Results of renowned research agencies related to customer satisfaction conducted long term can be generalized and represent a theoretical contribution to the researched issues. For example according to GfK Praha, the following topics belong to monitoring of customer satisfaction [11, 16, p. 216]:

- overall satisfaction with the product, service, company,
- overall satisfaction with the place of sale/environment,
- overall satisfaction with the sales staff,
- overall satisfaction with the use/availability of information.

If we want to look at how satisfied with the quality of goods in selected types of stores customers are [4, p. 22], we find that most customers are satisfied with the quality in supermarkets (95%), then in hypermarkets (94%), discount stores (94%) and smaller convenience stores (90%).

According to the TOP C, customer satisfaction is important for the following reasons [1]:

- customers are the only source of income for the company,
- customers bring company turnovers, which company needs for its successful operation,
- satisfied customers will buy from you again and recommend you to potential customers.

Heses's researches [4, p. 26-27], dealing with the behavior of consumers when buying food, pointed out that before the year 2000 Czech consumers favored price and only thereafter

quality. After 2000, Czech consumers changed system of shopping for food. They are looking for a large shopping center with wide range of goods, and favor quality, then price.

2.2 Monitoring quality of food in the Czech Republic

Official checks of food quality at the retail level is performed in the Czech Republic mainly by the Czech Agriculture and Food Inspection Authority (hereinafter CAFIA). Requirements for quality of food are laid down in the Czech national legislation, rarely in European regulations. For some foods are not directly determined, but inspection checks verify the information on the product placed on the packaging, with its real content. Controls were focused on hygiene, critical control points, labeling, documentation, and data usability. Therefore, inspections can also check the quality of those products for which quality criteria are not explicitly required by law. However, you cannot compare the results, the number of inputs in longer period because CAFIA annual report for each year does not provide completely comparable information. In any case, it is possible positively rate the increased information to consumers.

In 2009 [17], 34,806 entries to businesses were carried out. Whole 73.1% of these entries took place at the retail level. Number of non-conforming lots was worth a total of 4,581, of which were 88.1% in retail trade. If we look at the country of origin of unsatisfactory samples, then we can say that 54.4% were originally from the Czech Republic, from EU 27.2%, 9.41% were from third countries. For 8.92% of the samples their origin was not determined. In 2010 [18], 37,536 entries to businesses were carried out. Most entries had again been in the retail (76.02%). Number of non-conforming lots was 4483, again in retail it was a significant majority (87.6%). Primarily the retail level is adversely affected by the quality of food products. The main results of the checks are seen in Table 1. Report from the year 2011 [19] does not follow completely the indicators monitored in the previous two years, as previously mentioned, so we cannot make the comparison of the data. The report contains a much more intense focus at controls. Official controls were influenced by two food crises that took place in Germany and France, and partly related to the unauthorized components used in livestock feed. Fortunately, the Czech Republic confirmed no defective batch of meat in this regard.

By type of all controlled food products was the situation in 2009-2011 as follows (see Table 1). It is interesting to note that Table 1 does not show alcohol at all (except wine), which is a source of huge problems in the Czech Republic from September 2012 and unfortunately even cost human lives. We may speculate that the checks were performed mainly in the constant retail network. Ambulatory network apparently was ignored.

As mentioned above, consumer information about the food quality increased. Aside from the CAFIA, many other institutions informed about it and websites on the internet as well. The question is what the validity of these resources is. We may agree with the President of the Association of Commerce and Tourism in the Czech Republic, who evaluates the CAFIA reports as “a mixture of poorly sorted reports” [6]. Their information is not entirely clear and understandable. Investigation of problems with methyl alcohol also shows that the control system will have to be reconsidered.

Tab. 1: Order of non-conforming lots in % in the total volume of the samples in 2009-2011

2009	2010	2011
Chocolate and sweets (59%)	Chocolate and sweets (58%)	Chocolate and sweets (64%)
Wine (49%)	Pasta (44%)	Starch and starch products (60%)
Fish and aquatic life (41%)	Wine (41%)	Ice cream and frozen products (52%)
Pasta (39%)	Processed vegetables and fruit (39%)	Wines other than grape (50%)
Vegetables (38%)	Dehydrated products (38%)	Pasta (47%)
Frozen products (38%)	Coffee, coffee substitutes and tea (36%)	Honey (39%)
Ice cream and frozen products (37%)	Fresh fruit (35%)	Wine (38%)
Mushrooms (35%)	Fresh vegetables and mushrooms (34%)	Fish and aquatic life (37%)
Meat and meat products (35%)	Eggs and egg products (32%)	Fresh fruit (28%)
Dehydrated products and flavoring (34%)	Ice cream and frozen products (30%)	Fresh vegetables (25%)

Source: [17, 18, 19]

3 Primary research results and discussion

Primary research using a questionnaire survey was conducted during March and May 2012 mainly in the Moravian-Silesian region (more than 90% of respondents). The sample included 518 valid questionnaires.

Structure of the questionnaire focused on the broader issue of the sale of food products. Questions for respondents were oriented on the purchasing behavior of consumers when buying food, quality of food, buying regional food and organic food.

3.1 Primary research issues, methodology and sample characteristics

Given the focus of the article, we choose only relevant answers concerning these main areas:

- satisfaction with the quality of food purchased in the preferred store,
- degree of satisfaction with the main assortment types,
- sale of expired food products,
- expiry date forgery,
- quality of domestic and foreign food, relation to foreign goods.

The obtained data were evaluated in the MS EXCEL. Starting point is descriptive statistics, relative frequency of responses and creation of contingency mostly two-dimensional relational tables. Answers of respondents are related yet to another criterion, which is the average monthly household income. To get research results with higher informative value, we conducted the sorting of the second grade.

In the sample structure, the consumers with the household income less than 20 thousand CZK (33.40%) prevail, followed closely by the households with the income of 21 to 30 thousand CZK (32.63%), and lastly households with the income of 31 to 40 thousand CZK (22.39%).

Part of the sample are also two small groups, the first one with the household income of 41 to 50 thousand CZK (7.53%) and the second with over 50 thousand CZK (2.7%). According to the income level structure of the sample, we might see that the research results are affected greatly by the households with the average monthly income up to 30 thousand CZK (66.03%). The highest amount of respondents preferred purchase in supermarket (46.09%), followed by hypermarket (28.07%) and small convenient store (13.91%).

3.2 Evaluation of the selected research areas

Satisfaction with the quality of food in preferred store

Let us see how the respondents are satisfied with their preferred store (see Table 2). Definitely satisfied are most households with the highest income (42.86%), although the proportion of rather satisfied represents half of the respondents. Most of the other income groups, as shown in Table 2, are usually more satisfied. Given that there is a competitive environment, the customer has the option to choose the store. It depends on what stores are available in the surrounding area. If all the preferred mass retail units committed offenses relating to food quality, then the choice of customers has been to some extent limited.

Tab. 2: Satisfaction of respondents with the quality of food

The level of satisfaction	Relative frequency (in %)				
	under 20	20-30	31-40	41-50	above 50
Yes	14.45	18.34	18.10	7.69	42.86
Rather yes	69.95	70.42	60.35	66.67	50.00
No	8.09	4.14	7.76	5.13	0.00
Rather no	7.51	6.51	12.07	20.51	7.14
No answer	0.00	0.59	1.72	0.00	0.00
Σ	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: own calculations

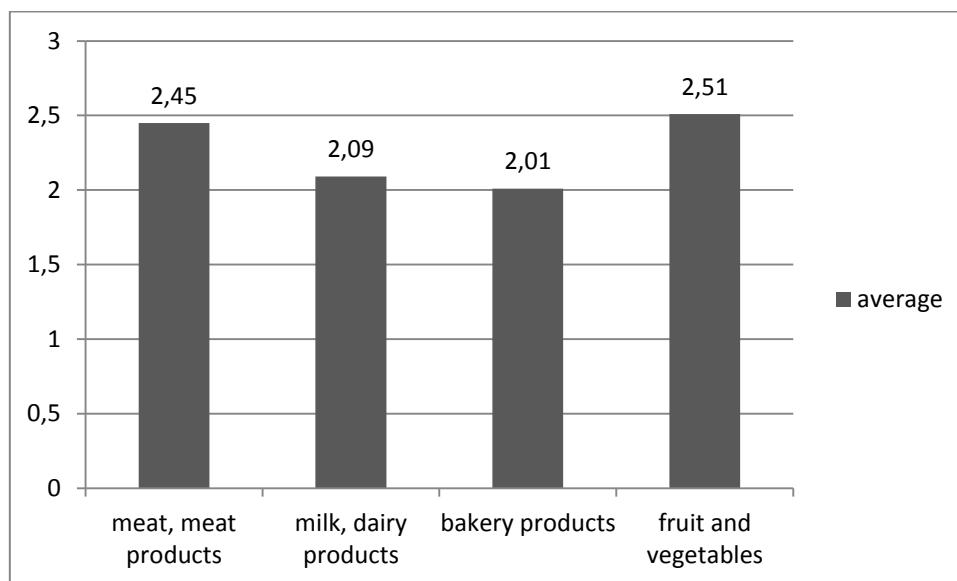
Satisfaction rate with main types of assortment

For satisfaction with the main types of assortment, we used five-point rating 1-5, corresponding to the school qualification, which was used to calculate the average values (Figure 1). The most frequently occurring value (modus) is 2 for all kinds of assortment. The calculation of the average values shows that respondents are least satisfied with fruits and vegetables, the second position is the meat and meat products, in third place milk and milk products, and the fourth position are bakery products. Bakery products are therefore best rated. It would be interesting to see how the respondents answer after the publication of traders, whether their products are prepared from the frozen stock. This duty to inform customers was scheduled to start from August 1, 2012.

Expired food sales

The following proportions can be observed in the structure of the sample. The largest shares of respondents (47.68%) are the ones, who did not notice that their preferred store is selling expired food. The second largest group is respondents who noticed sold food had been expired. Those who believe their store does not sell expired food are about one fifth of the sample (21.43%). In Table 3, we see how the respondents of different household income levels answered. Most respondents in the group with income level above 50 thousand CZK (35.71%) have noticed the sale of expired food. The same proportion of respondents in this income group claimed that they do not see expired food in their store, which was most of all income groups. In the other income groups was the highest proportion of those who did not notice the sale of such food, the highest value was recorded in the income group between 41-

50 thousand CZK. These respondents were in this income group more than half (53.85%). More than half of the respondents admitted that answer even within income groups 20 to 30 thousand CZK (51.48%).



Source: own calculations

Fig. 1: Graph 1 Satisfaction rate with the main assortment types

Tab. 3: Sales of the expired food

Expired food	Relative frequency (in %)				
	under 20	20-30	31-40	41-50	Above 50
Yes	33.53	31.36	27.59	20.51	35.71
No	21.96	16.57	25.86	25.64	35.71
I did not notice	44.51	51.48	45.69	53.85	28.58
No answer	0.00	0.59	0.86	0.00	0.00
Σ	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: own calculations

Relabeled expiry date of food

Supervisory authorities found in their inspections that the stores relabeled expiry date of food, so that they can sell it to customers without any problems and had thus no financial loss. In terms of the surveyed sample, almost 70% of respondents monitor the expiry date of food purchased but only 22.01% of respondents have noticed the fact of relabeling. Let us see if somehow responses varied according to income groups (Table 4). At first glance, we can see that the higher the household income, the smaller the proportion of respondents who confirmed that they noticed relabeled expiry date of food. The largest proportion of respondents is in the income group of less than 20 thousand CZK and the smallest share has the group above 50 thousand CZK. These numbers are not that crucial. Respondents from all income groups usually confirm that they have not seen relabeled expiry dates. Here we can observe opposite relation to the positive question. The higher the income group of households, the higher the proportion of negative responses is. The proportion of respondents having a negative response ranges from 71.68% for less than 20 thousand CZK, up to 92.86% with the highest incomes, as seen in Table 4.

Tab. 4: Relabeled expiry date

Relabeled expiry date	Relative frequency (in %)				
	under 20	20-30	31-40	41-50	Above 50
Yes	28.32	21.89	18.10	10.26	7.14
No	71.68	78.11	81.90	89.74	92.86
Σ	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: own calculations

Evaluation of the sales staff expertise

Buying food is usually carried out quickly and often stereotyped. The customer does not make a long decision. The main role is played by the price and quality advantage. Yet we cannot say that it could work entirely without sales staff. Even in food products, we can find new products that we do not know and we need advice. The answers of respondents we see in Table 5. For a positive reply, we can notice a downward trend with household income increasing. High score has the rather yes answer, it even is the highest in the group above 50 thousand CZK income (71.43%). If we look at the negative responses (no, rather no), for groups of 31-40 and 41-50 thousand CZK majority of respondents believe that staff would not be able to advise expertly. President of the Association of Commerce and Tourism in the Czech Republic believes that the quality of the staff plays a key role. Unfortunately, it has not improved and has not the potential either because of low wages in the retail and high staff fluctuation. [6]

Tab. 5: The ability of staff to give professional advice

Staff suggestion	Relative frequency (in %)				
	under 20	20-30	31-40	41-50	above 50
Yes	13.29	10.06	7.76	7.69	7.14
Rather yes	41.04	42.01	37.07	30.77	71.43
No	20.81	16.57	16.38	23.08	14.29
Rather no	24.86	31.36	38.79	38.46	7.14
Σ	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: own calculations

Tab. 6: Is the quality of domestic food lower?

Quality of domestic food	Relative frequency (in %)				
	under 20	20-30	31-40	41-50	above 50
Yes	13.88	13.02	14.66	15.38	7.14
Rather yes	19.65	7.10	19.82	12.82	35.72
No	52.02	60.36	50.00	53.85	57.14
Rather no	14.45	19.52	14.66	17.95	0.00
No answer	0.00	0.00	0.86	0.00	0.00
Σ	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: own calculations

The quality of domestic and foreign food, relation to foreign goods

What respondents think about the quality of domestic and foreign food is shown in Table 6. Most respondents incline to the view that domestic food has a lower level of quality. In addition to their own experience, this view might have been confirmed by many scandals abroad, which we have mentioned previously. The level of household income did not manifest itself for negative responses in any definite trend. Unequivocally positive answers basically mean the preference of foreign quality. With the growth of income level, however, the

proportion of respondents who think that the quality of domestic resources is at a lower level than that of foreign ones.

Conclusion

Generally, it can be said that customer satisfaction with the preferred store and the company is closely linked with the quality of food. Even though, as some experts admit, this relationship is not entirely proportional. According to recent researches, the quality is in the first place when buying food. Consumer awareness of food quality increases, but that does not mean that our food is of a worse quality, as our primary research reflects. There are many unanswered questions. The scope of the article does not allow for that. For example, we did not address the problem of substitutes in food products at all. We assume that the food quality will provoke discussion, especially the quality of alcohol.

Summing up all the results, we come to the following conclusions:

- most income groups are satisfied with purchase and food quality in preferred store, however, prevails answer rather yes than definite satisfaction,
- the quality of fruit and vegetables is evaluated the worst (2.51), the second position is the meat and meat products (2.45),
- most income groups have not noticed the sale of expired food, with the exception of households with income above 50 thousand (35.71%),
- most income groups did not notice relabeled expired food in their preferred store, the response rate is relatively high, the smallest share represents income group of under 20 thousand CZK (71%), the largest proportion are the most affluent customers (92.86%),
- the ability of staff to give professional advice when buying food is not clearly positively viewed in all income groups, in addition, their share is low and decreases with the growing income,
- most income groups tend to think that domestic food does not have a lower level of quality.

When buying food, behavior of consumers can generally be affected by many factors, including their personal characteristics such as age, education, social status and economic conditions. Looking at the results of the primary research, we find that the income level of the customer does not always play an important role in the evaluation of individual situations and issues. We believe that the social stratification of our society is not as clear-cut as it is in established market economies. The greatest differences were observed in some areas between the groups with the lowest and the highest incomes.

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VÝZKUM SPOKOJENOSTI ZÁKAZNÍKŮ S PRODEJEM POTRAVIN A JEJICH KVALITOU NA ČESKÉM SPOTŘEBITELSKÉM TRHU

Článek prezentuje vybrané problémy spokojenosti českých zákazníků s kvalitou potravin na základě sekundárního a primárního výzkumu i stručného nástinu současného stavu poznání zkoumané problematiky. Spokojenost zákazníků souvisí s kvalitou výrobků. Zákazníci mají svá očekávání, která jsou ovlivněna jejich zkušenostmi, radami, informacemi konkurence i finančními možnostmi. Kvalita potravinářských výrobků má specifické aspekty a je v současnosti středem pozornosti dozorových orgánů. Problematika kvality potravin je rozsáhlá a může mít různé úhly pohledu. Realizovaný sekundární výzkum se zaměřuje na vybrané problémy monitorování kvality potravin na českém spotřebitelském trhu. Primární výzkum ověřuje spokojenost zákazníků s potravinami na vybraném vzorku respondentů s ohledem na jejich příjmovou úroveň.

FORSCHUNG DER ZUFRIEDENHEIT DER KUNDEN MIT DEM LEBENSMITTELVERKAUF UND DER LEBENSMITTELQUALITÄT AUF DEM TSCHECHISCHEN VERBRAUCHERMARKT

Der Artikel präsentiert ausgewählte Probleme mit der Zufriedenheit der tschechischen Kunden mit der Lebensmittelqualität aufgrund einer Sekundär- und Primärforschung und eines kurzen Skizzierens des gegenwärtigen Erkenntnisstandes der geforschten Problematik. Die Zufriedenheit der Kunden hängt mit der Qualität der Produkte zusammen. Die Kunden haben ihre Erwartungen, die mit ihren Erfahrungen, Konkurrenzinformationen, Ratschlägen und finanziellen Möglichkeiten zusammenhängen. Die Qualität der Lebensmittelprodukte hat ihre spezifischen Aspekte und steht in der Gegenwart im Mittelpunkt der Aufsichtsorgane. Die Problematik der Lebensmittelqualität ist umfangreich und kann verschiedene Betrachtungsweisen haben. Die umgesetzte Sekundärforschung richtet sich auf ausgewählte Probleme bei der Beobachtung der Qualität auf dem tschechischen Verbrauchermarkt. Die Primärforschung überprüft die Zufriedenheit der Kunden mit den Lebensmitteln auf Grundlage eines ausgewählten Musters der Studienteilnehmer in Bezug auf ihr Gehaltsniveau.

BADANIE ZADOWOLENIA KLIENTÓW ZE SPRZEDAŻY ARTYKUŁÓW SPOŻYWCZYCH I ICH JAKOŚCI NA CZESKIM RYNKU KONSUMPCYJNYM

Artykuł przedstawia wybrane zagadnienia związane z zadowoleniem czeskich klientów z jakości artykułów spożywczych, oparte na badaniach pierwotnych i wtórnych oraz krótkiej charakterystyce obecnego stanu wiedzy nt. badanego zagadnienia. Zadowolenie klientów związane jest z jakością produktów. Klienci mają swoje oczekiwania, na które wpływają ich doświadczenia, porady, informacje konkurencji oraz możliwości finansowe. Jakość artykułów spożywczych ma swoje specyficzne aspekty i jest obecnie w centrum zainteresowania organów nadzoru. Kwestie dotyczące jakości artykułów żywnościowych są obszerne i można je rozpatrywać z różnych punktów widzenia. Podjęte wtórne badania zorientowane są na wybrane problemy monitorowania jakości artykułów spożywczych na czeskim rynku konsumpcyjnym. W ramach badań pierwotnych sprawdzano na wybranej próbie respondentów zadowolenie klientów z artykułów spożywczych przy uwzględnieniu wysokości ich dochodów.