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Consumer behaviour in the Ukrainian food market under current conditions

Abstract. The purpose of this study was to determine how economic instability, inflation, war, and socio-demographic changes affected the consumer behaviour of the population of Ukraine in the food market. The average per capita income, dynamics of food costs, changes in prices for basic products, and demand for Ukrainian and imported goods were analysed. An analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of current marketing strategies was also conducted. The

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study found that the average salary increased from 11,600 UAH in 2020 to 21,473 UAH in 2024, but in USD it fluctuated due to inflation – from 430 USD to 371 USD in 2022 and to 532 USD in 2024. In 2024, inflation was 12%, and food prices increased by 14.1%, including vegetables – by 48.3%, butter – by 33.9%, milk – by 18.8%, bread – by 18.2%. The share of food costs remained high – from 47% to 53%. In the period from 2020 to 2024, inflation in Ukraine experienced significant fluctuations: from 5% in 2020 to a peak value of 26.6% in 2022, followed by a decrease to 12% in 2024. About 25% of consumers reduced their food costs, and 6 out of 10 Ukrainians chose promotional products. Online food sales rose from 6% in 2021 to 19.4% in 2023. Food exports in 2024 increased by 13% and reached 24.6 billion USD. It was found that urbanisation (73% of the population), average household size (2.9 people) and high level of education (73% with higher education) significantly influenced the transformation of consumer habits. The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that its results can be used to adapt companies' marketing strategies to changes in consumer behaviour in conditions of economic instability

Keywords: inflation; demand; food; costs; marketing strategies

INTRODUCTION

In conditions of economic instability, inflationary processes and socio-political changes, consumers are forced to adapt their habits to new realities, in particular, the demand for food is changing. Given the increase in prices for basic products and the increase in interest in healthy food and organic products, there is a need for an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing consumer behaviour in Ukraine. In addition, the digitalisation of shopping processes, the development of online trading and the changed role of advertising in the context of information congestion create new opportunities for understanding trends and adapting businesses to the needs of consumers.

Changes in consumer behaviour in the Ukrainian food market in conditions of economic instability are caused by higher prices, lower incomes of the population and the war, which led to a decrease in demand for luxury goods and an increase in interest in essential products. N.S. Kosar *et al.* (2022) revealed an increase in demand for health and safety products, and an increase in the role of online trading, in particular, due to mobility restrictions. However, the research did not cover the influence of psychological and cultural factors on consumer behaviour in war conditions, which requires additional study. Consumer behaviour in the food market is an important aspect for understanding demand and optimising marketing strategies. T.V. Chernychko *et al.* (2023) investigated these factors, finding that price,

quality, packaging, and brand reputation are key when choosing products. The majority of respondents prefer Ukrainian brands, and the main places for shopping are large retail chains. However, the impact of cultural and social factors on consumer habits remains poorly understood and requires further research.

Consumer behaviour in the market of goods for outdoor activities during the war became an important aspect of the study, considering the changes that have taken place in Ukraine. N. Mashchak & D. Vorona (2023) investigated how the war changed the buying habits of Ukrainians, in particular, in the category of goods for outdoor activities. The researchers found that demand for these products has declined due to economic instability, but support for Ukrainian producers is growing, and the use of online purchases is increasing. A more detailed study of the factors that influence consumer behaviour in war conditions, in particular psychological and social aspects, and the study of changes in consumer motivation under the influence of support for Ukrainian producers, are issues that require additional investigation.

Studying consumer behaviour in international trade is important for understanding market changes. N.V. Dziubanovska (2024) studied modelling of consumer behaviour considering globalisation and international trade, focusing on the impact of economic, social, and cultural factors on demand in international markets. The results of the study show the importance

of adapting companies' strategies to changes in consumer preferences. On the other hand, forecasting demand and adapting supply to the local context need to be improved.

The study of the Ukrainian vegetable market during the war became necessary due to the negative impact of military operations on production and sales. O.V. Semenda & I.I. Korman (2024) analysed changes in the vegetable market caused by the fighting, in particular, the loss of export potential, the destruction of infrastructure, and the reduction of production due to the occupation of territories. The researchers paid attention to the adaptation of agricultural enterprises to new conditions, the development of marketing strategies to ensure efficiency in crisis conditions. The study did not sufficiently consider the impact of social changes and adaptation of consumer preferences in war conditions, which requires additional analysis.

Changes in the socio-economic environment significantly influence consumer behaviour, which requires research into the theoretical foundations of this behaviour in the new conditions. V.A. Litynska (2024) analysed various approaches to the concept of "consumer behaviour" and suggested types of behaviour that correspond to current consumer trends. Models of consumer behaviour, in particular, the need and motivation model and the decision-making model, were considered. These models helped companies to predict consumer behaviour and develop marketing strategies. However, more attention needs to be paid to the impact of digital technologies and social media on consumer habits.

Consumer behaviour undergoes significant changes due to socio-economic factors such as income levels, changes in prices, employment, social context, and consumer culture. G. Lopushnyak *et al.* (2025) examined these factors and identified three main strategies for consumer behaviour in Ukraine: focusing on current consumption using own and credit resources, minimising current consumption, and limiting consumption for future investment. The study also showed how war has transformed consumer patterns among different populations. However, the study did not fully cover the impact of new

technologies and psychological aspects, which requires further study. Analysing consumer behaviour in the face of constant socio-economic changes is important for understanding how factors such as economic instability, changes in income and prices affect consumer decisions and their consumption strategies. L. Kvasnii *et al.* (2024) examined the impact of factors such as income levels, price changes, and social context on consumer behaviour strategies. They identified key strategies, including focusing on current consumption and investing in the future. However, the impact of psychological factors and digitalisation on consumer habits requires further study.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of modern economic and social conditions on consumer behaviour in the food market in Ukraine. The objectives of the study were: analysis of factors that determine the change in consumer preferences in the food market in conditions of economic instability; assessment of the impact of war and changes in the social environment on the supply and demand of food products in Ukraine.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study applied a practical approach with a focus on the analysis of actual changes in the behaviour of Ukrainian consumers in the food market during 2020-2024, considering the circumstances of the war, economic challenges, political tensions, rising inflation, and a decrease in the purchasing power of the population during this period. In the course of the study, the influence of economic instability on changes in consumer preferences was studied, in particular, the following indicators were considered: average per capita income of the population in Ukraine (Labyak, 2025), dynamics of household spending on food (AgroPortal, 2023), changes in prices for basic foodstuffs and demand for basic necessities (Inflation in Ukraine in 2024..., 2025).

Special attention was paid to the analysis of social and demographic factors, which included the age structure of the population (Ukraine population, n.d), the level of urbanisation (Sinko, 2024), average household size (Ukraine

Longitudinal Survey, 2023). And social changes, in particular, internal and external migration (But *et al.*, 2023). In addition, data on the level of education of the population and existing social programmes and initiatives aimed at supporting families with children were considered, with a particular focus on those categories affected by military operations. The study of social support covered government events, and projects implemented with the participation of international organisations, in particular, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, n.d.), and the initiative for internally displaced persons "Support and integration of internally displaced persons for 2025-2027" (Project "On the approval of the National Target...", 2023) and orphans together with the Foundations "Children of Heroes" and "Together We are Stronger" (Children of Heroes, 2023).

The analysis of the impact of inflation and changes in prices on consumer behaviour was carried out based on statistics of the National Bank of Ukraine (National Bank of Ukraine, 2021; Ekonomichna pravda, 2022; National Bank of Ukraine, 2023), which allowed tracking the dynamics of changes in the cost of basic consumer goods during the study period. Separately, data on changes in the average monthly income of Ukrainians in both UAH and USD terms were considered to identify the relationship between the level of income and consumer habits.

The study also analysed changes in demand for food products, in particular, in the context of partial replacement of Ukrainian products with imported ones (In the first half of 2024, imports..., n.d.). These aspects were considered in light of war-related constraints, logistical difficulties, and changing consumer priorities. In addition, based on the collected information, SWOT analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was carried out – an analysis of current marketing strategies used to adapt businesses to changes in consumer behaviour. Based on this analysis, reasonable recommendations were formed to improve approaches to interaction with target consumer groups. The last step was to predict consumer trends based on statistical data and the results of previous studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of current economic and social factors influencing consumer behaviour in the food market in Ukraine

Economic instability in Ukraine, caused by the war, high inflation, and falling real incomes, directly affected the consumer preferences of the population. In the context of the economic crisis, declining purchasing power, high inflation rates, and job shortages, Ukrainians are forced to change their habits and adapt to new realities. In 2020, the average per capita income in Ukraine amounted to 74,688 UAH, which was 4.5% more compared to 2019. However, in 2021, despite the fact that 50.8% of the population received incomes above the minimum wage, rising inflation (to 8.6% in 2024) began to limit purchasing power (State Statistics Service..., 2022). In 2022-2023, due to a full-scale invasion, real incomes of the population fell, in particular, due to the destruction of infrastructure, rising unemployment, and migration of the working-age population. The decline in purchasing power became apparent: about 44% of Ukrainians were forced to reduce food costs by changing the consumer basket (Dudka, 2024). In 2024, despite the increase in the minimum wage and subsistence level, inflation and instability remained important factors. As social standards were frozen and inflation was projected at 10%, real income growth remained minimal. This has further affected the low-income segments of the population, who are trying to save on basic needs (Labyak, 2025).

In response to economic difficulties and changes in the financial situation, consumers began to show greater sensitivity to prices, in particular for food. The dynamics of food spending, in particular the share of food spending, remained one of the highest in Europe from 2020 to 2024. In 2020, the share of food expenditures was 53.2%, in 2021 it decreased to 50.1% (Structure of total expenditures..., n.d.), and in 2022 it accounted for about 41% of the average Ukrainian's income. In 2023, this figure was 41.6%, while in 2024, food products remained the second largest item of expenditure after mandatory payments, accounting for 34% of the household budget (Kikhtenko, 2023; Kozhemyakin, 2025).

This decrease in the share of spending is conditioned by both inflation and structural adjustment of the consumer basket due to war and economic pressure (Fig. 1). Demand for affordable products remained high, especially bread, meat, and dairy products, which shows a tendency to save money and avoid more expensive goods (AgroPortal, 2023).

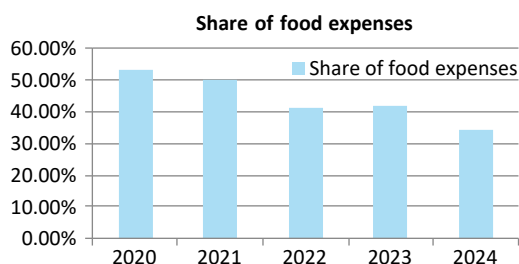


Figure 1. Dynamics of food spending in 2020-2024

Source: compiled by the authors based on the AgroPortal (2023), V. Kikhtenko (2023), S. Kozhemyakin (2025)

One of the important factors influencing changes in consumer preferences is the increase in prices for basic foodstuffs. According to data for 2024, food prices in Ukraine increased by 14.1% compared to 2023, which significantly exceeded the inflation rate (12%). Most of all, vegetables (+48.3%), butter (+33.9%), sunflower oil (+20.9%), milk (+18.8%), bread (+18.2%), and fruits (+16.4%) rose in price. As a result of rising prices, consumers were forced to adapt their purchases, choosing more affordable alternatives or reducing the volume of consumption of certain goods (Inflation in Ukraine in 2024..., 2025).

Against the background of high prices, there is an increase in the popularity of food products that are affordable, nutritious, and easy to prepare. For example, dumplings, traditional dough products with a variety of fillings, remain popular due to their availability and satiety. Sour-dough products that have better digestibility and better taste qualities are also gaining popularity. In times of economic instability, there is also a growing demand for protein products, especially meat organs, which are advertised as sources of protein and vitamins. Consumption

of plant-based foods such as legumes, tofu, vegetables, and lentils is increasing, which not only support health, but are also more economical food options (Asoyan, 2024).

Against the backdrop of the economic crisis and war, there is also a change in the structure of household spending. Consumers are increasingly choosing economically affordable food products. The share of food expenditures in 2024 was 48-49% of the family budget, which is the highest among all major categories of expenditures and significantly exceeds the European average (12-18%). The war also affected consumer habits, forcing people to focus on more affordable and cost-effective products. These changes in consumer preferences have become important for marketers, who must adapt their strategies to the new environment, given the increased sensitivity to prices. However, businesses consider these changes and adapt their sales strategies to meet the new needs of consumers (Ukrainian consumer sentiment..., 2025).

Economic instability, inflation, and war have also led to a significant decline in the purchasing power of the population. In 2024, 25% of Ukrainians were forced to save on food and choose cheaper products due to rising prices and lower real incomes. Along with this, discounts have become an important tool for maintaining demand for food products. About 6 out of 10 Ukrainians choose promotional products during the crisis, which indicates an increase in sensitivity to prices. However, while discounts and promotions help to drive demand, they often do not generate new customers, but only redistribute existing sales (Samoiliuk, n.d.). Consequently, economic instability, war, and inflation significantly affect the consumer behaviour of Ukrainians. Changes in income, price sensitivity, and a shift in consumer preferences in favour of economically affordable goods are important aspects that need to be considered when forming marketing strategies and price policies in the food sector. In times of crisis and war, consumer habits change, and the main strategies are aimed at saving and adapting to new conditions.

Social and demographic changes are important factors that significantly affect consumer behaviour, as they change the needs, preferences, and priorities of consumers. In the current

conditions of economic instability, war and migration, the demographic structure of the population of Ukraine has undergone significant changes, which in turn determines the types of demand and consumer habits. One of the main factors influencing consumer preferences is the age distribution of the population. In 2025, 57% of the population of Ukraine was made up of people aged 25 to 64 years, which was the main working age group. 15% are people over 65 years of age, which indicates an increase in the share of older people in the total population, and this creates demand for medical services, medicines, and goods for older people. In 2025, the median age of the population of Ukraine was 41.8 years, which confirms a significant share of the average age in a society marked by pragmatism in shopping and a tendency to choose more durable goods (Ukraine population, n.d.).

In 2024, 73% of the population of Ukraine lived in urban conditions, which indicates a steady trend towards urbanisation. The urban lifestyle, which includes greater mobility, access to technology, and convenience of shopping, affects consumer preferences. Urban residents are more focused on the latest technologies, innovative products, and convenient online shopping platforms (Sinko, 2024). Therefore, the needs of consumers in urban and rural areas differ significantly: rural areas have more demand for household goods and durable goods, while urban areas are dominated by technology, mobility, and entertainment.

Household size also determines consumer behaviour. In 2024, the average household size in Ukraine was 2.9 people, which is an indicator of significant changes in the structure of families compared to previous years. Reducing the size of families contributes to an increase in demand for individual goods, including products suitable for small households, such as ready meals, personal gadgets and appliances. In addition, households of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have a slightly smaller average size – about 2.5 people, which may be a consequence of the need to live together in war conditions and temporary resettlement (Ukraine Longitudinal Survey, 2023).

Social changes, in particular migration trends, also affect consumer preferences. Since

2022, more than 6 million Ukrainians have gone abroad, which has significantly affected the demographic situation and demand for goods. In particular, the consumer behaviour of Ukrainians abroad may differ greatly from the behaviour of people who stayed in Ukraine. Young people who are actively migrating may be more focused on fashionable and innovative products than older people who stay at home and try to save money. The level of education is also an important factor determining consumer behaviour. As of 2022, 73% of the adult population of Ukraine had higher education. This indicates a high level of education among the population, which affects the demand for more intelligent goods and services, such as books, educational platforms, popular science materials, and technologies for self-education (But et al., 2023).

During the full-scale war in Ukraine, a number of social programmes and initiatives were implemented to support families with children, especially those affected by military operations. Families of fallen servicemen receive one-time monetary assistance, which is an important support for affected families. Family support programmes are also actively implemented, including assistance in matters of paternity, prevention of family problems, and support in difficult life situations. The UNICEF “Jointly” programme (UNICEF, n.d.) – a humanitarian initiative that provided monetary assistance to families with children, internally displaced persons, large and low-income families. It allowed such categories of citizens to support the consumption of essential products, compensating for the growing cost of food. Given significant inflation, this support played a stabilising role for food demand among the most vulnerable groups. The comprehensive programme of social support for veterans and their families (Comprehensive programme..., 2023), adopted in 2023, covered not only psychological adaptation, but also financial assistance. In particular, it provided for subsidies, direct financial support, and employment assistance. This allowed veterans’ families to maintain basic economic stability and not be excluded from the food consumption market. And the initiative “Support and integration of internally displaced persons for 2025-2027” (Project “On the approval of the National

Target..., 2023) provided for monetary assistance, temporary housing, access to education and health services. Through financial benefits and humanitarian kits, IDPs were able to cover food costs while maintaining their participation in the domestic consumer market, despite losing their permanent place of residence or work. Charitable foundations “Children of Heroes” and “Together We are Stronger” (Children of Heroes, 2023) implemented programmes to support orphaned children and families who lost their breadwinner. These programmes provided both regular financial assistance and product certificates. Such targeted support ensured the consumption of a minimum set of food products, even in households that found themselves in extremely difficult living conditions. In general, these programmes played a stabilising role in the food consumption system. They reduced the burden on local budgets, supported the purchasing power of vulnerable categories of the population, and prevented the final collapse of demand for basic food products in the face of war, inflation, and mass migration.

Demographic changes and social transformations that are taking place in Ukraine significantly affect consumer habits. Changes in the age and family structure of the population, the level of urbanisation, migration trends, and the level of education form new trends in the market and determine the demand for goods and services. Adapting to these changes is an important aspect for businesses, as understanding social and demographic factors allows them to more effectively meet the needs of consumers and anticipate the development of the market in the future.

The study by C. Richartz *et al.* (2025) and the present study focused on analysing changes in consumer behaviour in the context of crisis factors. C. Richartz *et al.* investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer preferences in Germany, in particular, on the growth of demand for sustainable goods and local brands, while this study analysed the impact of the war in Ukraine on consumer habits, in particular, contributing to the support of Ukrainian producers not only through economic, but also patriotic motives. Both studies highlighted an increase in demand for basic necessities, especially food

products, due to high prices and lower incomes. However, the main difference was that research by C. Richartz *et al.* used sophisticated methods to assess willingness to pay for sustainable products, while the current study focused more on changes in consumer demand for basic products and services.

As for the comparison with study by A.-K. Jacobs *et al.* (2024), both studies analysed changes in consumer behaviour due to socio-economic changes. However, the research contexts varied significantly. This study focused on Ukraine, where war and economic instability forced consumers to reduce spending on food and focus on more affordable goods. Research by A.-K. Jacobs *et al.* focused on Germany and considered the attitude of consumers to innovative products, in particular artificial meat, focusing on environmental, ethical, and health-oriented motivations. Both studies emphasised the impact of external crises on consumer habits, but this study focused on the economic crisis and the war in Ukraine, and study by A.-K. Jacobs *et al.* – on innovative products, such as artificial meat, in Germany. This study also addressed support for Ukrainian goods, while A.-K. Jacobs *et al.* paid more attention to sustainable products because of ethical beliefs.

The study by J. Żurek & M. Rudy (2024) and O. Duralia (2023) and the present study focused on changing consumer behaviour under the influence of socio-economic shocks, in particular, a pandemic or war. In the study by J. Żurek & M. Rudy, changes were related to COVID-19 and panic purchases, a reduction in the frequency of store visits, and a reorientation to online channels. The study by O. Duralia considered the pandemic as the cause of a global restructuring of economic and consumer models, but without focusing on social consequences. But this study examined the consequences of the war in Ukraine, where changes in consumer behaviour were accompanied not only by economic factors, but also by social support for affected groups. Compared to previous study, this paper covered demographic changes and the impact of government programmes more deeply.

The current study and the paper by W. Chen *et al.* (2024) had a general focus on changing consumer preferences under the

influence of socio-economic factors. The current study considered how the war and the economic crisis in Ukraine changed consumer habits, in particular, shifted the demand for affordable products. However, W. Chen *et al.* focused on the impact of health insurance programmes in China, which contributed to the growing interest in healthy eating among consumers. Both studies highlighted the importance of social and economic factors in changing consumer habits. In this study, economic difficulties, in particular declining incomes, forced consumers to reduce spending on expensive products. In the study by W. Chen *et al.*, social programmes allowed consumers to choose healthier foods through economic incentives.

Economic instability in Ukraine, caused by war, inflation, and declining incomes, has significantly affected consumer preferences. During the crisis, Ukrainians were forced to adapt their habits, reducing spending on expensive products and focusing on basic necessities. Rising prices and falling incomes contributed to increased demand for local products, which was conditioned not only by economic, but also by patriotic reasons. Demand for affordable and fast-cooked food has increased, while spending on expensive imported goods has declined. Changes in the cost structure showed that consumers became more sensitive to prices, which affected the demand for cheaper products. Social initiatives and support programmes also helped to adapt consumer preferences during the economic crisis.

Investigation of supply and demand in the food market in Ukraine: Statistics and trends

Between 2020 and 2024, the average income of Ukrainians experienced significant fluctuations caused by economic instability, inflation, and war. In 2020, the average monthly income was about 11,600 UAH, which is equivalent to 430 USD. Already in 2021, this figure increased to 14,000 UAH (514 USD), which indicated a certain improvement in income. However, in 2022, against the background of a full-scale war, the average salary increased to 14,857 UAH, but in dollar terms it fell to 371 USD due to the devaluation of the hryvnia and significant inflation. In 2023, there was a gradual recovery in

the average salary, which reached 17,442 UAH (477 USD), but purchasing power remained lower than before the war. In 2024, the average salary increased to 21,473 UAH (532 USD), but inflation and high prices still limited the real income of the population, in particular, in the low-income segments of the population (Minfin, n.d.). This increase in income was only partly due to inflationary processes. Figure 2 shows the dynamics of the average salary in Ukraine in the period from 2020 to 2024.

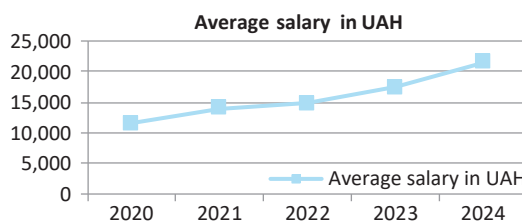


Figure 2. Dynamics of average wages in 2020-2024 in UAH

Source: compiled by the authors based on Minfin (n.d)

During 2020-2024, the average salary in Ukraine grew steadily. This indicates a gradual economic recovery, despite external and internal challenges, in particular war and inflation. From 2020, when the average salary was 11,600 UAH, by 2024 it reached 21,473 UAH, which indicates a significant increase in income in nominal terms. However, it is important to note that this growth was not unhindered, as it was accompanied by high inflation, which reduced the real purchasing power of the population. Figure 3 shows the actual fluctuations in average wages in relation to the USD exchange rate.

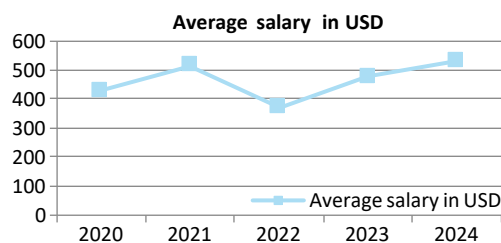


Figure 3. Dynamics of average wages in 2020-2024 in USD

Source: compiled by the authors based on Minfin (n.d)

The chart (Fig. 3) of the average salary in USD indicates significant fluctuations due to the devaluation of the UAH. In 2020, the average salary in dollars was 430 USD, but due to economic instability, devaluation of the hryvnia and high inflation, in 2022 it decreased to 371 USD. This suggests that although nominal wages have increased, real purchasing power has fallen significantly. Only in 2024, wages in dollars recovered to the level of 532 USD, but it still remained lower than before the war, which confirms the existence of economic difficulties for the population.

During this period, the inflation rate also experienced significant fluctuations. In 2020, inflation was 5%, which corresponded to the target range of the NBU (National Bank of Ukraine, 2021). In 2021, inflation accelerated to 10%, mainly due to rising energy prices and increased consumer demand (Ekonomichna pravda, 2022). In 2022, inflation reached a record 26.6%, driven by the effects of war, infrastructure destruction, and significant spending on security and military needs (National Bank of Ukraine, 2023). However, in 2023, inflation slowed to 5.1%, due to the stabilisation of the economy and tough measures taken by the National Bank (National Bank of Ukraine, 2024). In 2024, inflation rose again to 12%, which was conditioned by inflationary pressures and a recovery in consumer demand (National Bank of Ukraine, n.d.). The graph of inflation dynamics for 2020-2024 is shown in Figure 4.

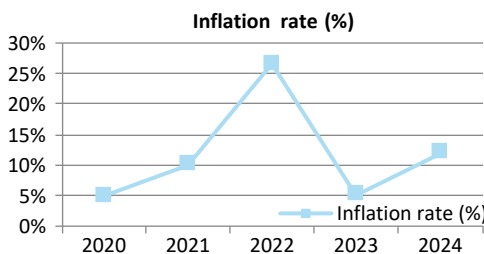


Figure 4. Dynamics of the inflation rate in Ukraine in 2020-2024

Source: compiled by the authors based on National Bank of Ukraine (2021), Ekonomichna pravda (2022), National Bank of Ukraine (2023)

In general, the inflation rate was marked by sharp fluctuations, reflecting the impact of both

internal and external factors, in particular war and economic instability, which highlights the complexity of the economic situation in Ukraine during this period. In response to economic difficulties, Ukrainians began to change their consumption habits. Demand for food products has changed, in particular, there was an increase in spending on food, which accounted for 37% of Ukrainians who increased their spending due to higher prices. The average grocery bill increased by 19% in offline stores and by 18% in online stores compared to the pre-war period. Consumers began to focus more on affordable products and promotional offers, and reduced purchases of expensive delicacies and premium products (Ukrainians increased their..., 2025). Demand for expensive delicacies and alcoholic beverages decreased by about 9%. One of the important trends was the growth of online food purchases, the share of online purchases increased from 6% in 2021 to 19.4% in 2023, which demonstrates the desire of consumers to find favourable offers and ease of delivery (Main trends of grocery..., 2024).

From 2022 to 2024, the consumer perception of ready meals also changed. In 2023, sales of cooking increased by 24%, among the most popular dishes were salads, grilled chicken, homemade patties, pizza, and sausages in dough. This indicates the desire of consumers for fast, convenient and affordable food options, which is especially important in the context of the economic crisis. With food prices rising 14.4% in 2024, consumers were forced to reconsider their purchases, reducing spending on less important products and choosing more cost-effective alternatives. This process became necessary due to the fall in real incomes, which, in turn, forced 25% of Ukrainians to save on food (Gertseva, 2024).

One of the most important aspects of this period was the stable growth of demand for Ukrainian food products, while the demand for imported products also increased. Ukrainian consumers preferred Ukrainian goods because of their availability, lower price, and logistical difficulties with imports. Exports of Ukrainian food products increased by 13% and amounted to 24.6 billion USD in 2024, which confirmed the high demand for Ukrainian agricultural

products both in the domestic and foreign markets. Demand for imported products also increased, in particular, for fish, seafood, alcoholic beverages, and ready meals, which indicates a change in the structure of demand for food due to wars and economic challenges (Tarasovsky, 2025).

Due to the decline in production capacity in Ukraine and interruptions in logistics, part of the demand for food was covered by imports, especially in large cities and regions where there was a shortage of certain goods. Imports of agri-food products increased by 10% in the first half of 2024 compared to 2023. The growth in demand for imported products is also confirmed by the trend of growth in imports of finished food products by 23% in 2023 compared to 2022 (In the first half of 2024, imports..., n.d.). In general, the demand for Ukrainian food products remained consistently high, but due to logistics challenges and infrastructure destruction, the demand for imported products also increased, especially in specific categories such as seafood, alcohol, and ready meals. However, total consumption has not yet returned to pre-war levels.

Thus, economic instability in Ukraine, in particular the war and high inflation rates, have significantly changed the consumer preferences and habits of the population. Increased sensitivity to prices, reduced costs for expensive products and the advantage of economically affordable goods became the defining aspects of consumer behaviour of Ukrainians during this period. These changes not only reflect economic difficulties, but also define new trends that require adaptation of marketing strategies in the market.

R. Mudrak *et al.* (2022) pointed out that changes in the structure of agri-food production affect the growth of consumer prices, which, in turn, shapes new consumer behaviour in the food market. Comparison with the study by E. Anastasiadou *et al.* (2020) showed similarities in recording changes in consumer behaviour under the influence of crises, but the causes and contexts of these changes differed significantly. While in Europe COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns caused a surge in demand for basic products and hygiene items due to fear and stress, in Ukraine it was the war that drove the transformation. Ukrainian consumers focused

not only on price availability, but also on supporting a local producer, which was formed under the influence of patriotic sentiments. Thus, although both situations caused adaptation, in the European experience the emphasis shifted to safety and health care, while in the Ukrainian experience – to survival and solidarity.

E. Costa *et al.* (2024) also talked about the impact of economic instability on consumer decisions with the focus on seafood choices in Sweden. Swedish respondents showed sensitivity to price, but simultaneously sought a healthy diet. The Ukrainian case, on the other hand, showed a shift in favour of simple, nutritious, and affordable basic necessities – bread, meat, milk. Thus, while in Sweden economic uncertainty has stimulated prudent but still proactive food decisions, in Ukraine it is mainly reactive adaptation to harsh reality. A different vision of consumer change was presented by T. Hu *et al.* (2024), who examined the voluntary choice of young Chinese people in favour of organic products. The main determinants were environmental values, health care, and the impact of marketing. On the contrary, in Ukrainian conditions, the motivation was forced: reducing costs, switching to promotional offers, and searching for cheaper alternatives. As a result, although both studies recorded an increase in interest in healthy eating, in China it was a conscious choice, and in Ukraine it was a consequence of socio-economic pressure.

The study by F. Fernqvist *et al.* (2024) was distinguished by an attempt to integrate a multi-level model of influence on food choices – from individual to cultural. Based on a systematic review, the idea of eating behaviour as a result of multifactorial interaction was formed. This is significantly different from the Ukrainian case, where immediate survival factors dominated: accessibility, simplicity, and discounts. If the analysis by F. Fernqvist *et al.* was based on the influence of norms and attitudes, then it was about adaptation in conditions of scarcity and uncertainty. The study by H. Moshtaghian *et al.* (2023) examined the behaviour of Swedish consumers in relation to upcycled products, where the main motives were ethics, naturalness, taste, and price. Proponents of such nutrition showed conscious environmental responsibility. But the study of the Ukrainian market analysed forced

reactions to inflation and declining incomes: the choice of simpler and cheaper goods, a decrease in consumption volumes. That is, although both studies dealt with the ethical component of consumption, in Sweden it was the engine of choice, and in Ukraine it was a secondary factor against the background of survival.

In 2020-2024, the economic situation in Ukraine remained unstable, which affected the level of income and consumer behaviour of the population. Rising inflation and the war have led to increased price sensitivity and a reorientation of consumers to affordable goods. There was a reduction in spending on non-priority products and an increase in the role of discounts and online trading. In general, consumer habits have been transformed under the influence of economic challenges and the need to adapt to new conditions.

Marketing strategies and recommendations for adapting businesses to changes in consumer behaviour

In 2020-2024, the food market in Ukraine underwent significant changes under the

influence of the economic crisis, war, inflation, and changes in consumer preferences. The effectiveness of current marketing strategies used by companies in the face of economic instability depends on the ability to respond quickly to changes in demand, especially for basic necessities such as bread, milk, meat, and groceries.

One of the main strategies is to focus on reducing costs and offering economically affordable products. The market is experiencing an increase in demand for local products, which is also an important element of companies' strategies aimed at supporting the Ukrainian manufacturer. As inflation and declining purchasing power significantly affected income levels, consumers began to pay more attention to discounts, promotions, and cost-effective alternatives. Moreover, changes in consumer preferences, in particular, the growing popularity of online shopping, required the adaptation of marketing strategies to new sales channels and new formats of communication with customers. Table 1 shows a SWOT analysis of current marketing strategies.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of current marketing strategies for adapting businesses to changes in consumer behaviour

Strengths	Weaknesses
■ Well-developed sales network in online channels. ■ Increased demand for local products due to patriotic sentiments ■ Focus on essential products ■ Positive attitude to promotions and discounts that stimulate demand	■ Need for significant investment in the transition to digital platforms ■ High competition in the market of affordable goods. ■ Lack of strategies to support the premium segment in the face of falling purchasing power ■ Uncertainty about the stability of the economy and exchange rates
Opportunities	Threats
■ Expansion of the product range in online stores. ■ Introduction of new loyalty strategies and programmes for regular customers ■ Development of new marketing channels, such as social networks and mobile applications	■ Constant growth in raw material prices and inflation ■ Reduced solvency of the population, which leads to a reduction in demand ■ Reduced confidence in imported goods due to the political situation

Source: compiled by the authors based on R. Rijitha (2021)

SWOT analysis indicates that there is a significant potential for developing marketing strategies in the food market, even in conditions of economic instability. Among the strengths, it is especially worth noting the active use of online sales channels, focus on the basic needs of the population, and the growth of loyalty to

local brands, which creates a favourable basis for the development of stable demand. There are internal limitations – in particular, the need for financial investment for digital transformation and the lack of strategies for the premium segment, which is losing ground against the background of declining purchasing power.

The existing opportunities open up prospects for introducing new loyalty tools, expanding the range in the online space, and actively using advanced digital channels, in particular social networks. However, these opportunities are accompanied by serious threats – rising inflation, falling real incomes of the population and foreign policy risks that affect import supplies and overall market stability. These risks include the introduction of new trade restrictions, sanctions against individual supplier countries, blocking of sea routes or threats to logistics security as a result of military operations, which significantly complicates the provision of constant commodity circulation and creates price fluctuations. Thus, the key task of a business is to turn its own strengths into competitive advantages, effectively using external opportunities and minimising the impact of threats through flexible strategic planning.

Marketing strategies in conditions of economic instability should be flexible and adapted to new realities, in particular, to the decline in the purchasing power of the population and the transformation of consumer preferences. During a crisis, consumers change their priorities, preferring essential goods, discounts, promotions, and cost-effective purchase formats. In this regard, businesses should actively use online platforms, which have become an important channel of interaction with the client. For example, in 2023, the volume of online sales of food and alcohol increased by 65% in USD and by 85% in UAH compared to 2021 (In 2023, the amount of online..., 2024). This indicates a significant increase in demand for online shopping in this category. Due to economic difficulties, it is important to provide favourable offers for consumers, focusing on discounts and promotions to support the demand for essential products (Dekimpe *et al.*, 2023).

In addition, companies should focus on supporting local manufacturers and offering cost-effective products that meet changing consumer preferences. Ukrainian products are more attractive, not only because of the price, but also because of the support of local producers, especially in war conditions. The share of Ukrainians who claim to buy goods/services of Ukrainian manufacturers increased from 69%

in December 2022 to 74% in 2024. The main motives are the desire to support the national producer (57% of respondents) (Gradus Research Plus, 2024). Another important area is the development of loyalty programmes that can help to retain customers in difficult economic conditions. Loyalty programmes should be aimed at attracting regular customers and creating personalised offers. The VARUS PERFECT loyalty programme has shown high efficiency – 82% of customers choose a network based on this programme. About 30,000 new members join it every month, and the number of active users of the mobile application has exceeded 170,000. The share of checks using the loyalty programme is 57%. The average receipt with a loyalty card is 35% higher than the total online receipt. The programme contributed to an increase in the frequency of purchases and customer retention (Retailers, 2024).

An important step is to expand the range of products and innovative products that meet the requirements of a healthy diet and sustainability. Healthy foods and eco-friendly products are becoming increasingly popular with consumers, and companies need to focus on these trends. The inclusion of organic and sustainable products in the range really contributes to improving the brand image and attractiveness of products in the market. This is confirmed by the growing demand for local and environmentally friendly products in Ukraine. In particular, according to Gradus Research, 74% of Ukrainians prefer Ukrainian products, and 37% are ready to experiment with new brands, which opens up opportunities for the development of organic and sustainable products. In addition, the growing popularity of private label brands, which often include organic and eco-friendly products, also indicates a tendency to choose more sustainable products. For example, in the ATB chain, private label products already account for 26% of the product range, and this share is growing, especially in categories where quality and affordability are important (Melnyk, 2024).

It is predicted that in the coming years, consumer behaviour in Ukraine will remain focused on economy and availability of goods. Inflation and the economic crisis will continue to determine consumer choice, so demand for essential

goods will remain consistently high. In 2023–2024, 77% of the budget of Ukrainians accounted for housing, food, medical services and transport, which significantly exceeds similar figures in Poland (46%) and Germany (51%). Moreover, vacation expenses did not exceed 3% – several times less than the European average of 15–20%. Demand for premium products may continue to decline due to falling real incomes: 37% of Ukrainians have already increased spending exclusively on food and medicine, while reducing spending on children's goods (by 39%) and building materials (by 48%). E-commerce will continue to grow, although currently 72% of Ukrainians still prefer traditional shopping in stores. Electronics (17%) and cosmetics (15%) have the largest share of online sales. Companies that can adapt their strategies to the demand for healthy food and environmental friendliness will gain competitive advantages: 28% of consumers are willing to pay a higher price for products of companies that support the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and 62% avoid brands operating in the Russian market. This shows the new priorities of Ukrainians – economy, sustainability, and social responsibility (Ukrainian consumer sentiment..., 2025).

Marketing strategies in the food market in Ukraine should be adapted to the new economic realities. In the face of economic instability, it is important to focus on economically affordable products, develop online trading, and focus on supporting local producers. The development of loyalty programmes, promotions, and discounts will help to retain regular customers and attract new ones. Simultaneously, focus on healthy food and sustainable products can become an important element of companies' strategy for the future. S.D. Rietz & A. Kremel (2024) examined barriers and motivational factors that influenced the consumption of products in circular packaging. The researchers concluded that despite the positive attitude towards reusable packaging, the actual behaviour of consumers often did not coincide with their intentions. This has created challenges for sustainable initiatives. In contrast, this study did not record a gap between intentions and actions, but a forced restructuring of eating habits in response to a crisis – war, inflation, and scarcity. The sustainability of

consumption faded into the background, giving way to pragmatic solutions.

The study by S. Labiad & S. Marso (2024) focused on emerging markets and consumer sentiment towards organic products. The researchers emphasised the high potential of organics, which was held back by distrust, prices, and lack of information. Both in Ukraine and in developing countries, health remained an important motive. However, if S. Labiad & S. Marso saw prospects for the growth of this segment with the right marketing strategy, in the Ukrainian reality, financial restrictions often made organic products inaccessible. C. Varghese *et al.* (2024) focused on consumers' willingness to pay more for recycled products. Their research showed that customers' decisions were influenced by brand, labelling, and environmental messages. In the Ukrainian context, price, basic quality and stable availability of goods remained key. Thus, although both studies focused on the influence of external factors on behaviour, motivations differed significantly: conscious choice in a stable environment versus forced adaptation to a crisis.

The study by A. Dudziak *et al.* (2023) indicated an increase in interest in local products in Poland, which was explained by ethnocentrism and support for the national manufacturer. In Ukrainian conditions, there was also an increase in demand for Ukrainian goods, but it was caused by savings and logistical difficulties. Thus, similar behavioural manifestations were formed for various reasons: in Poland – for patriotic identification reasons, in Ukraine – for the purpose of survival. R. Stotten (2024) proposed a sophisticated analytical framework for analysing Switzerland's food regime, in which global, regional, and local sub-regimes interacted. This helped to understand how culture, economics, and politics affect consumer habits. The Ukrainian study showed a different dynamic – the dominance of short-term economic factors that replaced the structural transformations of the system.

In the study conducted by S. Xu *et al.* (2024), examined how digital financial instruments affect consumption levels in rural areas of China. They showed that digital services have helped to expand consumer opportunities and improve the quality of life. In Ukraine, households were forced to save money, limit non-basic

expenses and adapt to external pressure. That is, if in one case digitalisation opened up new horizons, in the other – narrowed the choice. The study by M.C. Onwezen & H. Dagevos (2024) analysed factors that contributed to reduced meat consumption and the adoption of alternative proteins. The researchers found that motivation, awareness, and social norms played a crucial role. In the Ukrainian case, changes in food habits were determined by inflation, lower incomes, and logistics barriers. If voluntary transformation dominated Europe, then forced adaptation dominated Ukraine.

V. Haider *et al.* (2022) focused on the potential of environmental beliefs to transform the diet. The researchers examined how consumers in Austria can voluntarily change their habits for the sake of sustainability. In the Ukrainian reality, such a transformation has not become a priority – consumers have focused on minimising costs, reducing the share of premium and non-essential goods. The study by D.C. Petrescu *et al.* (2020) analysed how consumers in Romania and Belgium rated the quality of products, their safety and environmental friendliness. The focus was on labels, composition, origin, and packaging. In Ukraine, due to the crisis conditions, the choice was based on price, promotion, ease of preparation – there was a simplification of consumer evaluation criteria.

Thus, companies' marketing strategies are effective only if they are flexible, digitalised, and adapted to new sales channels, in particular online trading. Approaches that combined support for local brands, loyalty programmes, and promotional offers remained successful. In the future, the strategic advantage will be for those businesses that can simultaneously meet the need for accessibility and meet the demand for healthy and sustainable consumption.

CONCLUSIONS

In 2020-2024, the consumer behaviour of Ukrainians was significantly transformed under the influence of war, inflation, and the socio-economic crisis. Although the nominal average salary increased from 11,600 UAH to 21,473 UAH, in USD it ranged from 430 USD in 2020 to 371 USD in 2022, with a recovery to 532 USD in 2024. Due to high inflation (up to 26.6% in 2022),

purchasing power remained low. About 25% of Ukrainians have reduced food costs, focusing on affordable products – bread, milk, meat. The demand for local brands has increased not only because of the price, but also for patriotic reasons. The share of food costs in the cost structure was 47-53%, one of the highest in Europe. In 2024, food prices increased by 14.1%, including vegetables (+48.3%) and butter (+33.9%). This forced consumers to look for cheaper alternatives and buy promotional items. Demand for ready meals has increased: in 2023, culinary sales increased by 24%. Online grocery purchases increased from 6% in 2021 to 19.4% in 2023.

Demographic factors also affected the market. In 2025, 57% of the population belonged to the working-age group, and 73% lived in cities. The average household size fell to 2.9 people, which increased demand for portioned goods. The increase in the level of education (73% with higher education) contributed to interest in healthy eating, but prices remained a constraint. Ukraine's food exports in 2024 increased by 13% and reached 24.6 billion USD. The study of marketing strategies in the field of food trade has shown their key role in maintaining stable demand in conditions of economic instability. In particular, the use of online channels, promotions, loyalty programmes, and a focus on the local manufacturer allowed companies to adapt to new conditions and maintain consumer activity, despite the fall in purchasing power. This study focused mainly on the economic and statistical aspects of consumer behaviour, leaving out an in-depth analysis of psychological motives and cultural factors in consumer decision-making. Further research should focus on studying the impact of digitalisation, social media, and patriotic sentiments on the transformation of consumer preferences in the context of a prolonged crisis.

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Поведінка споживачів на ринку продовольчих товарів України в сучасних умовах

Анотація. Метою даного дослідження було визначити, як економічна нестабільність, інфляція, війна та соціально-демографічні зміни вплинули на споживчу поведінку населення України на ринку продовольчих товарів. Було проаналізовано середньодушовий дохід, динаміку витрат на харчування, зміну цін на основні продукти, попит на українські та імпортні товари. А також було проведено аналіз сильних, слабких сторін, можливостей та загроз поточних маркетингових стратегій. У ході дослідження встановлено, що середня зарплата зросла з 11 600 грн у 2020 році до 21 473 грн у 2024 році, але в доларах США вона коливалася через інфляцію – з \$430 до \$371 у 2022 році і до \$532 у 2024 році. У 2024 році інфляція склала 12 %, а ціни на продукти зросли на 14,1 %, зокрема на овочі – на 48,3 %, масло – на 33,9 %, молоко – на 18,8 %, хліб – на 18,2 %. Частка витрат на харчування залишалася високою – від 47 % до 53 %. У період з 2020 по 2024 рік інфляція в Україні зазнавала суттєвих коливань: від 5 % у 2020 році до пікового значення 26,6 % у 2022 році, з подальшим зниженням до 12 % у 2024 році. Близько 25 % споживачів скоротили витрати на харчування, а 6 з 10 українців обирали акційні товари. Онлайн-продажі продовольства зросли з 6 % у 2021 до 19,4 % у 2023 році. Експорт харчових товарів у 2024 році зріс на 13 % і сягнув \$24,6 млрд.

Виявлено, що урбанізація (73 % населення), середній розмір домогосподарств (2,9 особи) та високий рівень освіти (73 % з вищою освітою) істотно вплинули на трансформацію споживчих звичок. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в тому, що його результати можуть бути використані для адаптації маркетингових стратегій компаній до змін у споживчій поведінці в умовах економічної нестабільності

Ключові слова: інфляція; попит; харчування; витрати; маркетингові стратегії