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## **FOOD PACKAGING DESIGN WITH DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN IDENTIFICATION OPAKOWANIA PRODUKTÓW SPOŻYWCZYCH Z RÓŻNYMI ELEMENTAMI IDENTYFIKUJĄCYMI KRAJ POCHODZENIA PRODUKTU**

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**Abstract:** The study aimed to assess the possibility of identifying the country of origin of a product by placing various cultural elements of a given country on their packaging. A quantitative research method was used to obtain primary data. 193 respondents from Slovakia took part in the study (71.5% women and 28.5% men). In the article, we describe the responses of respondents to 5 questions concerning: cultural elements on food packaging identifying the country of origin, respondents buying food products in packaging with cultural elements, reasons for not buying them, paying attention to the presence of cultural elements on some food packaging and the degree to which this packaging reminds respondents of Slovakia. The conducted research confirmed the authors' assumptions that approximately 80% of all respondents would be willing to buy a product with a cultural motif on the product packaging (the percentage of men preferring these motifs was smaller than women, i.e. 72% compared to 80%).

**Keywords:** design, food packaging, country of origin, product.

**Streszczenie:** Celem pracy była ocena możliwości identyfikacji pochodzenia produktu na podstawie umieszczonych na jego opakowaniu różnych elementów kulturowych danego kraju. Do uzyskania danych pierwotnych zastosowano ilościową metodę badawczą (kwestionariusz). W badaniu wzięło udział 193 respondentów ze Słowacji, w tym 71,5%

kobiet i 28,5% mężczyzn. W artykule opisano odpowiedzi respondentów na 5 pytań dotyczących: elementów kulturowych na opakowaniach żywności identyfikujących kraj ich pochodzenia, respondentów kupujących produkty spożywcze w opakowaniach z elementami kulturowymi, przyczyn ich niekupowania, zwrócenia uwagi na występowanie na niektórych opakowaniach żywności elementów kulturowych i stopnia, w jakim te opakowania przypominają respondentom Słowację. Przeprowadzone badania potwierdziły przypuszczenia autorów, że około 80% wszystkich respondentów chętnie zakupiłoby produkt z motywem kulturowym na opakowaniu (choć odsetek mężczyzn preferujących te motywy był mniejszy niż kobiet – 72% w porównaniu do 80%).

**Słowa kluczowe:** projekt, opakowanie żywności, kraj pochodzenia, produkt.

## 1. Introduction

Packaging is an important part of food and non-food products. They protect products from damage, spoilage and infection during storage, transport and distribution from the place of production to the place of consumption. As food is subject to complex biochemical processes compared to non-food products, resulting in a deterioration in its quality and often a negative impact on consumer health, the packaging of food products must meet more stringent packaging requirements. Thanks to the packaging, the original quality of the products are maintained, their durability is extended and microbiological or physio-chemical changes are prevented.

The packaging of products has gradually undergone a transformation and today, in addition to its protective and rationalization-handling function, it also primarily fulfils its marketing and communication function. As the number of self-service stores grows, the sales process changes and the seller's ability to influence the customer during his/her purchase is lost – and this function is also taken over by the packaging of goods (Jarossová & Gordanová, 2019; Kačėňák, 2011).

The communication function of the packaging combines an information function, the task of which is to provide information about the seller or the qualitative parameters of the product and a promotional function, within which the graphic design affects the feelings and subconsciousness of the customer (Mláká & Knošková, 2010).

The role of the packaging is therefore to present the product in the right way using an attractive design, to facilitate the customer's purchasing decision directly at the shelf and to persuade him to buy the product.

Packaging can help brand owners and other market participants to create a unique market position and differentiate their products from competing products, influence consumer perceptions, or be used to gain customer attention (Rundh, 2016).

In recent years, new food packaging concepts have been developed and successfully used to improve communication with the market. New trends in food packaging also include changes in the industrial design of packaging (Sharma &

Ghoshal, 2018). The origin of the word “design” comes from the Latin words *design* and *designare*, which can be translated as to label, display, arrange. By design, we also mean the artistic projection of an industrial product (Knošková, 2014).

Packaging design is a black horse in the world of marketing. It receives little attention compared to other marketing tools and its impact is significantly underestimated (*Obalový...*, 2016).

Presenting the country of origin via using folk motifs on goods’ packaging in the praxis of Slovak food entrepreneurs is a new form of packaging design. The largest producer of meat products in Slovakia – Mecom – comes up with a new line of products called “Ours, Slovak” (Fig. 1.). These are products made exclusively from 100 % Slovak meat, which are also wrapped in a new folk dress. Mecom introduced the novelty through a new outer design, in which these pork products are packaged. It is clear to customers at the first glance that these are products that contain 100 % meat from Slovakia. Specifically, the Slovak elements shown on the new packaging of Mecom are the Slovak emblem, texts in the Slovak national colours (i.e. white, blue and red), including the brand logo, which is also created in the national tri-colour combination (*Mecom...*, 2020).



**Fig. 1.** Logo of organic farming in the Slovak Republic

Source: (*Mecom...*, 2020).

Another example of the innovation of food packaging through the application of Slovak elements or motifs are Lyra chocolate packaging. Their designer, Michal Slovák, won 3rd place at the 15th National Design Award (NCD) in the Professional Design category for his packaging design for the Slovak manufacturer of premium chocolates. During the design and production of chocolate packaging from the “Ours” edition (Fig. 2.), the author designed traditional folklore patterns in a modern way that complement the texts in several Slovak dialects. “An excellent example of how design can tell the story behind the creation of a product and thus qualitatively increase its value,” said the NCD expert jury, evaluating this packaging design (Bodnárová, 2018).

Michal Slovák also used Slovak motifs to create a visual identity for a new rye brandy, made according to a family recipe, called Morho. In the minimalist design (Fig. 3.), it is possible to find several good ideas, such as the Wallachian hidden in the symbol of a percent or the creative use of the Slovak double-cross (Bodnárová, 2018).



**Fig. 2.** Logo of organic farming in the Slovak Republic

Source: (Bodnárová, 2018).



**Fig. 3.** Logo of organic farming in the Slovak Republic

Source: (Bodnárová, 2018).

The COOP Jednota retail network has respect for traditions and folk culture for a long time. This is also confirmed by its latest marketing activity. The company commemorated the current 20th anniversary of founding its brand with a unique

limited edition (Fig. 4.). This edition includes 20 most popular products. The products were thus selected according to popularity, but COOP Jednota focused mainly on Slovak fresh foods, which are the best-selling category. Among the selected products decorated with a folklore motif, shoppers will find, for example, butter, milk, flour, semolina, gingerbread, whipping cream or bryndza (a special sort of Slovak sheep cheese) (COOP..., 2019b).



**Fig. 4.** Logo of organic farming in the Slovak Republic

Source: (COOP..., 2019a).

The limited-edition is based on the abstraction of folklore sources without a reference to a specific region, but with a strong ability to evoke a sense of tradition with a modern course. The tradition of the series is supported by the retro logo of COOP Jednota with a redesign appropriate to the 21st century. The design was carried out in cooperation with the court advertising agency of this merchant. The assignment seemed to be clear – the packaging should reflect the past and the main mission on the market – its look had to strike as Slovak, respect traditions and folk. At the same time, the design was meant to look “neat”, which was achieved with the chosen white background (COOP..., 2019a). The paper aimed to assess the ability of food packaging design to present the product country of origin.

## 2. Methodology

The goal of this article is to evaluate the ability of a packaging design to re/present the product country of origin. A quantitative research method (survey) was used to obtain primary data. The questionnaire was anonymous. In this study, we describe the respondents’ answers to 5 questions related to:

- elements evoking a product’s Slovak origin,
- purchasing products depicting Slovak national symbols,
- reason for not purchasing products depicting Slovak elements,
- noticed the cultural elements on the some food packaging.

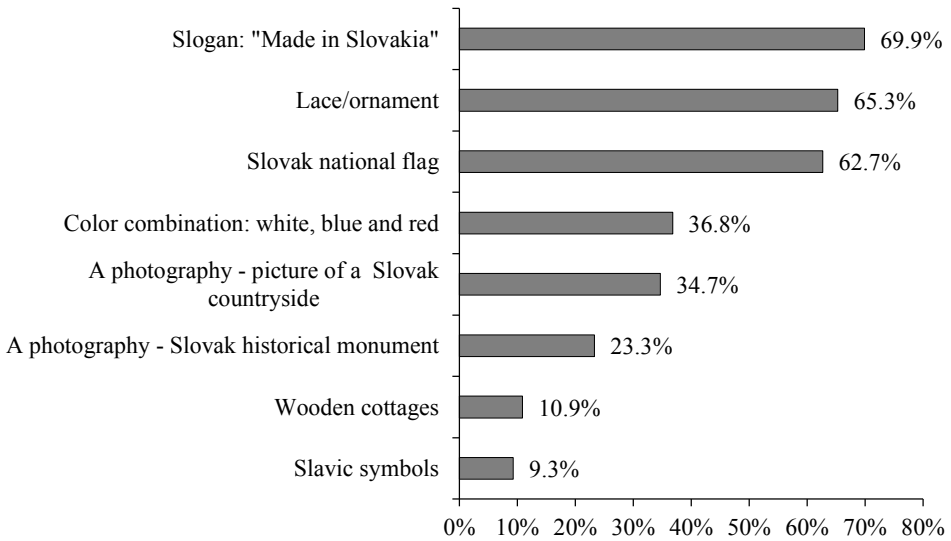
In the next question, we asked respondents the extent to which product packaging designs remind respondents of Slovakia. The respondents were asked to use the five-point Likert scale assessing the product packaging. The inquiry took the form of an electronic questionnaire created in the Google Forms program within 3 weeks (from 1.3.2019 to 22.3.2019).

The survey involved 193 respondents from Slovakia: including 71.5% women and 28.5% men. The respondents ranged from 16 to 69 years in age. The survey was attended by most respondents aged 19 to 24 years (52.85%) and 25 to 34 years (25.91%). The group of respondents aged 45 to 54 represented 3.63% of all respondents. Respondents under the age of 18 (1.04%) and over 55 (2.06%) were the least represented. The largest group of respondents were respondents from the Bratislava Region (32.6%), the Prešov Region (24.9%) and the Trnava Region (15%). 6.7% of respondents stated that they came from the Žilina region, 6.2% of respondents were from the Trenčín region and 5.2% of respondents came from the Košice region. The least numerous groups were respondents from the Banská Bystrica and Nitra regions with the same percentage of 4.7% of all respondents.

### 3. Results

Our first question aimed to find out which symbols placed on the product packaging indicate that the product came from Slovakia. To the question: *Which of the following elements do you associate with the Slovak product?* the respondents could choose from several options. 69.9% of respondents stated that when they see the slogan on the product packaging “Made in Slovakia” they automatically know that it is a Slovak product. 65.3% of respondents associated an ornament or lace with a Slovak product and 62.7% of respondents associated a Slovak flag or any other state symbol placed on the product packaging with a Slovak product. Over a third of the respondents (36.8%) mentioned the option of combining the colours white, blue and red, which are the colours used on the Slovak state symbols. Furthermore, 34.7% of respondents confirmed the answer of “looking at the Slovak landscape”, e.g. a photo of grazing sheep, a mountain hut or a photo of the Tatra mountains. Proximity to each fifth respondent (23.3%), a photograph of a historical monument placed on the product packaging evoked that the product came from Slovakia – specifically from the exact region where the depicted monument was located. The least of respondents associated wooden dwellings (10.9%) and Slavic symbols (9.3%) with a Slovak product.

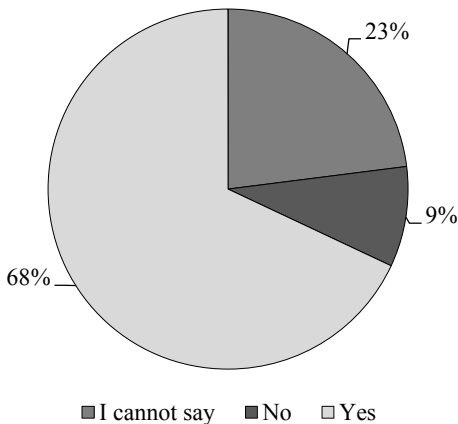
Option: “colour combination: gold and blue” was not chosen by any of the respondents. These colours are a symbol of mining, which has been known in Slovakia since the arrival of the Celts in the territory. Fig. 5 shows how many respondents chose the individual options in a percentage.



**Fig. 5.** Elements evoking a product's Slovak origin (%)

Source: own research.

By question no. 2: *Do you buy products with the above-mentioned elements evoking a Slovak product?* we wanted to find out how many of the respondents were aware that they had already bought such products in the past and noticed Slovak elements on the food packaging. According to Fig. 6, more than half of the respondents (67.9%) stated that they had already bought products with elements evoking a Slovak product, 8.8% of the respondents stated that they had not yet bought such products and 23.3% of respondents could not comment on the issue.

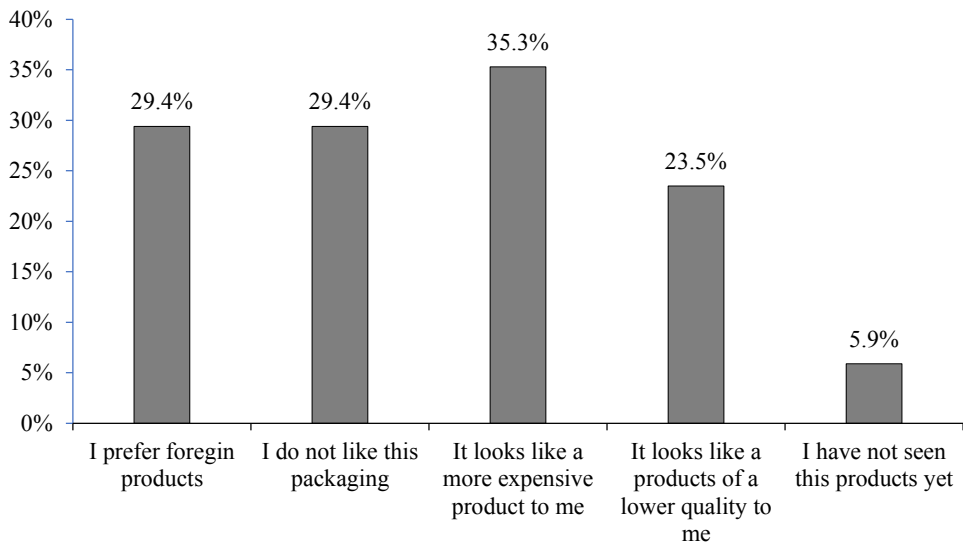


**Fig. 6.** Purchasing products depicting Slovak national symbols (%)

Source: own research.



The aim of the next question (no. 3): *Why don't you buy products with the above-mentioned elements evoking a Slovak product?* was to find out the reasons for not being interested in buying these products. This question was answered by 17 respondents who – in the previous question – stated that they did not buy products that had some of the elements evoking a Slovak product placed on their packaging. All the respondents could choose among several answers. The most common reason was the association of such a product with a higher price (35.3%). every third of the respondents (29.4%) preferred foreign products, and the same number of respondents stated that they did not like the look of such packaging. One respondent (5.9%) mentioned that he had not yet encountered such a product. Various answers are shown in Fig. 7.



**Fig. 7.** Reason for not purchasing products depicting Slovak elements (%)

Source: own research.

Recently, the marketing communication of many well-known Slovak brands has been based on Slovak traditions, customs and – very often – has been the design of their products connected to folk motifs.

The aim of the fourth question *Have you noticed the cultural elements on the packaging of any of the following products?* was to find out whether the respondents noticed folk motifs, Slovak elements or any other cultural elements on a range of specifically given products. Photos of the products mentioned in the respondents' answers can be found in the authors' article entitled "Folk Motifs as a New Trend in Foods and Beverages Packaging Design" and some of them are also shown later in this article. Up to 76.7% of the respondents noticed the presence of cultural element



on the packaging of the “Liptov” brand products. The second most frequent answer was the “Zvolen yoghurt” (43%), the third “TATRATEA” (42%). Products of the COOP Jednota brand – “Mother’s goodies” were mentioned by 36.3% of the respondents and “Šariš beer” (32.1%). A brand new product on the market, Rajo’s “Traditional thick yoghurt” – the marketing of which is fundamentally based on Slovak customs and folk motifs – was identified by only 29 % of the respondents. Also, the latest product of the KARLOFF company, “Czechoslovakia vodka”, which depicts the Slovak nature on its packaging, was noticed by only 28.5 % of the respondents.

In the next part of the research, we examined the extent to which individual product packaging designs (6 products, packages) remind respondents of Slovakia. All the respondents rated 6 products on a 5-point Likert scale. Coefficients from 1 to 5 were assigned to the individual levels of the scale as follows: 1 = reminds me the most, 2 = reminds me, 3 = I cannot decide, 4 = does not remind me and 5 = reminds me the least. Fig. 14 shows the summary results.

Product 1 – cottage cheese from the Rajo brand (Fig. 8). Its design includes a combination of white, blue and red with a reference to Slovak customs. Every fifth of the respondents (22.2%) answered that the product reminded them of Slovakia the most and 8.29 % of respondents stated that they did not associate this product with Slovakia at all. On average, our respondents rated this product with a coefficient of 2.7 which means they could not decide whether the product reminded them of Slovakia.



**Fig. 8.** Cottage cheese from the Rajo brand

Source: (Metro, n.d.a).



**Fig. 9.** Organic camembert from the Tami brand

Source: (Metro n.d.b).

Product 2 – Organic camembert from the Tami brand (Fig. 9). This product’s packaging shows a picture of a Slovak landscape, a mountain hut and a view of the Tatra mountains. 22.8 % of the respondents marked this product with number 1, which means that this product strongly reminded them of Slovakia, while only 6.22 % of the respondents did not associate this product with Slovakia at all. According to the respondents (average coefficient 2.4 – product 2 did evoke that it was originated in the Slovak Republic.

Product 3 – traditional thick yoghurt from the Rajo brand (Fig. 7). The design of its package was inspired by folk motifs – specifically by the Čičmian pattern. 19.17 % of the respondents claimed that this product reminded them of Slovakia the most while, on the contrary, 7.25 % of the respondents did not bind its packaging design with Slovakia at all. An overall coefficient was 2.5, which means that they could not decide whether this product reminded them of Slovakia.



**Fig. 10.** Traditional thick yoghurt from the Rajo brand

Source: (Metro, n.d.c).



**Fig. 11.** Malokarpatská salami from the Pikok brand

Source: (Zlaceně, 2021).

Product 4 – Malokarpatská salami from the Pikok brand (Fig. 11). Although this product has a motif similar to the Slovak folk element on its packaging, the similarity is purely coincidental, as this is a Czech product. Only 9.84 % of the respondents associated this product with Slovakia. 29.02 % of the respondents mentioned that they associated this product with Slovakia the least. According to the average coefficient (3.5), the respondents did not associate the fourth product with the fact that it came from Slovakia.

Product 5 – Slovakia herbal tea from the Elixír brand (Fig. 12). At the first glance, respondents were able to notice several Slovak national elements on the product's packaging: the folk motif along the edges, the name of the tea itself, the typeface containing the Čičmian pattern, the "Slovak food" logo, the folk costumes and the traditional Slovak dwellings. On the question: *To what extent does this product remind you of Slovakia?*, 37.82 % of the respondents answered it reminded the most, while 9.33 % of the respondents did not associate this product with Slovakia at all. According to the average coefficient (2.2), the fifth product reminded the respondents Slovakia the most.



Fig. 12. Slovakia herbal tea from the Elixir brand

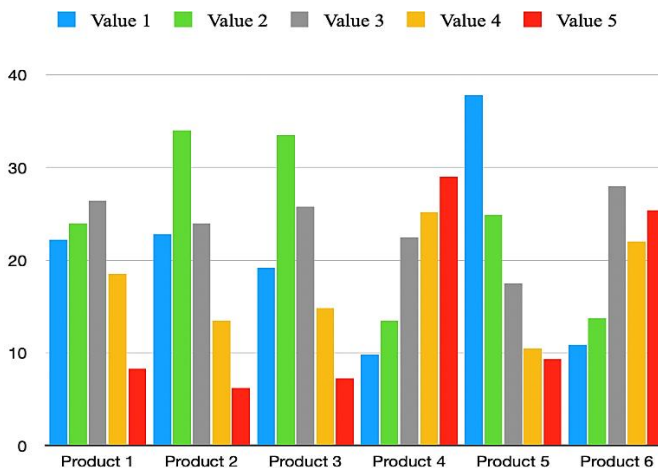
Source: (*Bylinný čaj Slovakia*, n.d.).



Fig. 13. Gin Gin Slovakia

Source: (*Svet Napojov*, n.d.).

Product 6 – Gin Gin (Fig. 13). This is the first Slovak gin and its design should remind customers of Slovakia, mostly due to the combination of blue, silver and gold colours (as a symbol of mining). Nevertheless, only 10.88 % of the respondents associated this product packaging with Slovakia and 25.39 % of the respondents stated that this product did not evoke at all that the country of its origin was the Slovak Republic. According to the average coefficient (3.4), the respondents did not associate the sixth product with the fact that it came from Slovakia.



- value 1 – reminds me the most, value 2 – reminds me, value 3 – I cannot decide, value 4 = does not remind, value 5 – reminds me the least

Fig. 14. The ability of a packaging design to present the product's country of origin (%)

Source: own research.

The last question of our survey was as following: Which of these two products in Fig. 15 would you prefer? This question aimed to find out the respondents’ interest in placing a folklore motif on the packaging of the products. As shown in Table 1, the respondents were given a choice of two options. The first option was to design a product’s packaging without a folklore motif, the second option was to design a product’s packaging with a folklore motif. Up to 78.3% of the respondents chose the second option. The first option was indicated only by 21.7% of the respondents.



**Fig. 15.** Beer packaging without and with folk motifs  
 Source: (Chlebek.sk, n.d.; Stratégie, 2018).

**Table 1.** Respondents’ interest in folk motifs on products packaging according to Slovakia regions

Region	Quantity/ Percentage (%)	Without a folk theme	With a folk theme	Overall
<b>Eastern Slovakia</b>	Quantity	12	46	58
	Percentage (%)	20.69 %	79.31 %	100 %
<b>Central Slovakia</b>	Quantity	4	18	22
	Percentage (%)	18.18 %	81.82 %	100 %
<b>Western Slovakia</b>	Quantity	26	87	113
	Percentage (%)	23.01 %	76.99 %	100 %
<b>Overall</b>	Quantity	42	151	193
	Percentage (%)	21.76 %	78.24 %	100 %

Source: own research.

**Table 2.** Respondents’ interest in folk motifs on products packaging according to gender

Gender	Quantity/ Percentage (%)	Without a folk theme	With a folk theme	Overall
<b>Male</b>	Quantity	15	40	55
	Percentage (%)	27.28 %	72.72 %	100 %
<b>Female</b>	Quantity	27	111	138
	Percentage (%)	19.57 %	80.43 %	100 %

Source: own research.

Table 1 shows the answers of the respondents according to the regions of Slovakia they come from. This table proves that it does not matter where the respondents come from, as the option “With a folklore motif” prevailed by more than 50% in each region. This option was mostly chosen by respondents from central Slovakia (81.8%), then from eastern Slovakia (79.3%) and lastly by respondents from western Slovakia (76.9%). According to table 2, up to 80.43 % of women and (72.2%) of men prefer a product with a folk/folklore motif.

## 4. Conclusion

The packaging industry keeps constantly evolving. Today, the packaging is no longer just boxes or cartons, but rather a system for preparing goods for safe, cost-effective logistics throughout the supply chain, leading to maximising both consumers’ and market value. Packaging not only protects a product from potential damage but communicates with consumers (through its design), it plays the role of a leading promoter on today’s competitive market and creates a brand identity.

Using folk and folklore motifs on goods’ packaging has become a popular praxis of many Slovak food entrepreneurs in recent years. And as the results of our consumer survey – presented in this article – indicate, it is a valuable tool of delegating one of the most important and sale-effective messages to our potential customers: the country of a product’s origin being their home country. The consumer survey confirmed that around 80% of all the respondents would prefer/would be willing to buy a product with a folk design depicted on its packaging – both men and women (though the percentage of male respondents preferring the folk or folklore motifs was slightly lower than the female ratio regarding the same query; specifically 72% in comparison to 80%).

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