

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ON ROMANIAN CONSUMER PREFERENCES OF CERTIFIED ORGANIC FOOD

Natalia Manea¹
Iuliana Cetinǎ²

ABSTRACT: This paper aims to analyze consumer behavior Romanian certified organic products. The importance of this study is because in Romania, consumption of certified organic food is only 2% of total volume of the foods eaten. For it was used primary information through direct research, performed on a number of 130 respondents from Bucharest. The instrument used was a questionnaire which contained a number of 21 questions, opened, closed, dichotomous and multihotomice. Were considered the following variables: the category of persons who purchase organic products, products price, purchase frequency, respondents' preferences on the place of purchase, perception on the quality of these products. It was found that price is one of the reasons why Romanians do not buy certified organic food.

KEYWORDS: research, preferences, organic food, Romanian consumer

Aims and background

In this article the author aims to investigate the Romanian consumer preferences for organic products and factors that lead to reduced consumption of these products. This study falls into the category conclusive research, collected data is subjected to quantitative analysis. Their purpose is to test hypotheses and analyze relationships between marketing variables.

Certified organic products are very popular in the EU market, and although Romania has a huge agricultural potential, Romanian consumers can afford to buy relatively small number of such products primarily because of the price. Organic foods are on average 20-40% more expensive than conventional ones, so their consumption in our country is lower than the EU average. In the category of food organic products included meat, eggs, vegetables, fruit and dairy products. Organic products are marked and labeled according to regulations in the field, quality certificate and logo on the packaging, the certification body.

Consumer preferences are a positive motivation expressed by emotional compatibility to a product, service or marketing form. Preference appears only in conditions of strong motivations¹. Motivation for consuming certified organic food is their own quality, because they are produced without the use of synthetic chemicals. Also used of GMOs and their derivatives are prohibited.

The research objectives are considering knowledge of several aspects of Romanian consumer preferences for organic products, namely:

- Q1 Awareness determination of certified organic products;
- Q2 Determination of the most important criteria by which they are acquired certified organic;
- Q3 Determining why respondents do not often buy certified organic products;
- Q4 Consumer perception of the quality of organic products;
- Q5 Place from where respondents prefer to buy organic products.

Research hypotheses are formulated as an anticipation of the answers on the issues

¹ University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest, School of Entrepreneurship, BusinessEngineering and Management Department of Economic Engineering, 313 Splaiul Independentei, 060042, Bucharest, Romania, Email: natalia.manea@upb.ro

² The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Faculty of Marketing, Department of Marketing, Romana Square no 6, 010371, Bucharest, Romania

investigated:

- H1 Respondents known for more than 80% certified organic products;
- H2 Organic products are purchased mainly in appearance, taste and for being healthy;
- H3 Price is the main factor for which so often respondents do not buy organic products;
- H4 Romanian consumers are very satisfied with the quality of organic products;
- H5 Specialty stores are the main location for purchasing organic products.

Experimental research methodology

This research follows the usual phases of research: preliminary phase, design phase and implementation phase². After choosing sources of information is necessary to proceed to completion of new stages that take into account the definition of variables, their classification, choice of scales used to measure variables and the research instruments used. Defining variables takes into account their design to reflect the issues researched and is consistent with trends in the field of literature³⁻⁵.

This research works with various categories of variables: basic variables (main considerations underlying the choice of an organic product) descriptive variables (age, gender), situational variables (financial situation of respondents), independent variables (level of education) dependent variables (perception of quality)⁶.

Data were collected between November 2014 and January 2015 through face to face interviews in supermarkets, farmers' markets and specialty stores around the research instrument used was a questionnaire. The interview is a formalized set of questions designed to generate the data necessary for the implementation of the objectives of marketing research². The 21 questions of the questionnaire were closed, dichotomy, trichotomy and multihotomice and covered all possibilities. The scale used was Likert scale of 5 levels, scale where 1 equals "very dissatisfied" and 5 with "very satisfied". The questionnaire began with a filter question namely "Are you a certified organic food consumer?". A number of 130 valid questionnaires were analyzed from 150 completed questionnaires.

Results and discution

The data is as follows: of the 130 respondents, 75.62% are female and 25.38% are male. Respondents aged 18-55 years have residence in Bucharest. In regard to studies, these, more than half have completed higher education (Table 1).

From the above table we can see that the women are the most interested in organic food. Also, young people are more interested in buying organic products because they want a healthy lifestyle. Family income of respondents is in excess of 41.54% between 1501 and 3000 lei. Because we do not know the number of members of a household we cannot know with certainty whether the income is small, medium or large.

Table 1.

Demographic profile of respondents		
Variable	Operational variable	Respondents distribution, Number (%)
Sex	Male	33 (25.38)
	Female	97 (75.62)
Age	18 – 25 years old	21 (16.15)
	26 – 39 years old	58 (44.62)
	40 – 55 years old	51 (39.23)
	More than 55 years old	0 (0.00)

Net income	Less than 900 lei	0 (0.00)
	9001 – 1500 lei	32 (24.61)
	1501 – 3000 lei	54 (41.54)
	Over 3000 lei	44 (33.85)
Education level	Vocational school	7 (5.38)
	High school	35 (26.92)
	University degree	57 (43.85)
	Post graduated	31 (23.85)

Also, we can see that people who have graduate and postgraduate studies represent more than 68% of all respondents. This shows that educated people are more interested in a healthy lifestyle, seeking information about these products and read the labels carefully. Table 2 present the research results.

Table 2.

Study results		
Objective	Hypothesis	Conclusion
Q1 Awareness determination of certified organic products	H1 More than 80% from respondents known certified organic products	Invalidated
Q2 Determination of the most important criteria by which are acquired certified organic products	H2 Organic products are purchased mainly for appearance, taste and for being healthy	Confirmed
Q3 Determining why respondents do not often buy certified organic products	H3 Price is the main factor for why the respondents do not buy often organic products	Confirmed
Q4 Consumer perception of the quality of certified organic products	H4 Romanian consumers are very satisfied with the quality of organic products	Confirmed
Q5 Place from where respondents prefer to buy organic products	H5 Specialty stores are the main location for purchasing organic products	Partially confirmed

From Table 2 we can see that the research objectives were achieved. The first hypothesis, respondents know that for more than 80% certified organic products have been invalidated. Less than 60% of respondents really know what certified organic product, carefully read the label and the manufacturer's data and if all pay more for these products prefer to be of the highest quality. The rest, 40% of respondents have the feeling that everything is sold in food markets and organic product, which is false.

The second hypothesis which organic products are purchased mainly in appearance, taste and for being healthy is fully confirmed even if it is not necessarily the order.

The hypothesis that price is the main factor for the respondents do not buy organic products so often confirmed. Although the consumption of these products is most often once a week (over 51% of respondents), they want to be able to buy several times a week organic products, but cannot afford due to their high price. However, respondents are aware that the price of such products should be greater than the conventional ones that are much tastier, healthier and do not contain food additives.

A fourth hypothesis is that Romanian consumers are very satisfied with the quality of organic products and it is confirmed. Although a significant proportion of those who responded to

the questionnaire do not know exactly what certified organic produce, they are very satisfied with the quality of products they purchase. Organic products are made according to law, without using chemicals without genetic interventions and in harmony with nature and the environment, and certified by a recognized body (agointel.ro). Natural products may also contain various preservatives and food additives.

Last hypothesis, specialty stores are the main location for purchasing organic products partially confirmed. Over 40% of respondents buy organic products in food markets, 20% of hypermarkets, the rest preferring online stores that deliver products directly home. The fact that a high percentage of respondents buy food products markets means that they do not differentiate between organic and natural products.

Conclusion

The results of this research revealed that most purchased organic food fruits and vegetables, followed by dairy and meat products. They are purchased that are tasty, healthy and looks good. Some respondents take into account the information on the label and the manufacturer. Price is the main impediment to purchase organic products. If their price would be lower, consumers could afford to buy several times a week organic products.

Romanian consumers are very satisfied with the quality of these products, even if most of the respondents do not differentiate between organic and natural products. In terms of location, organic products are purchased from food markets, supermarkets and specialty stores, especially online. The latter is preferred because of home delivery of these products and favorable references related to organic farming that “owns” these online stores.

The results of this research show that public education is needed on organic products and to clarify the concepts of ecological and natural product, so as not to create an image that does not correspond with reality.

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