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10 February 2012

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/36865/>

MPRA Paper No. 36865, posted 24 Feb 2012 14:16 UTC

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Abstract

Food consumption patterns are rapidly changing nowadays as a result of environmental issues, concern about the nutritional value of food and health issues. Issues such as quality and safety in food attract consumer interest in organic food that is free from pesticides and chemical residues (Childs and Polyzees, 1997; Zotos et al., 1999; Baltas, 2001; Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2002).

This study is attempted to gain knowledge about organic food consumer demographic characteristics and purchase behaviour of organic food in Romania. The research method used was online survey. A structured questionnaire was used which employed with true-false questions, multiple-choice questions and Likert scale questions. A convenience sample was used for this research.

Keywords: organic food, organic consumer, demographics profile

JEL Classification: D12, M30

Introduction

Various researchers aimed to distinguish organic consumers by looking at the demographics characteristics like age, sex, income, presence of children and education. Classifications can be diverse depending on the researchers. Most studies use terms of regular and occasional buyers (Davies et al., 1995; Zanolli and Naspetti 2002) while other uses terms; unaware consumers, unaware non-buyers, buyers of organic food. Fotopoulos and Krystallis separate Greek organic consumers into four groups such as; *explorers* who are highly exploratory and married older female buyers; *greens* who are environmental conscious, educated and belonging young middle age groups; *motivated* people are in young middle age groups very motivated towards organic idea; *price sensitive* are young, low educated and married female (Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2002).

This study is attempted to gain knowledge about organic food consumer demographic characteristics and purchase behaviour of organic food in Romania.

Methodology

The research method used was online survey. A structured questionnaire was used which employed with true-false questions, multiple-choice questions and Likert scale questions. The design of the questionnaire was developed using tools provided by the site <https://students.sgizmo.com>. A pretest of questionnaire was conducted with 10 respondents prior to avoid ambiguous wording and inapplicable questions in the questionnaire.

A convenience sample was used for this research. Convenience sample consists of all customers or potential customers (individuals) enrolled in the database of one company from Romania who sells organic food.

Data collection period was between 1 to 20 December 2011. A total of 110 questionnaires were completed during this period. To gather and analyze data collected, we used SPSS 14. Frequency counts and Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent answers.

Findings

A description of respondents' demographic profile is shown in Table 1. The sample consists of 60 women (54.5%) and 50 men (45.5%). Age group under 25 is the largest (37.3%), followed by age group between 36 and 45 (22.7%), at the opposite pole there are over 66 years age group formed by 2 respondents (1.8%). High school group is the largest (40%) followed by university graduates group (28.2%). The number of unmarried is higher (51.8%) than those married (45.5%). Most respondents have children to support (61.8%) and most families have 3 members (29.1%). Regarding the occupation of respondents, most have a job (58.2%). Personal income of most people is up to 2,000 RON (less than 500 RON - 36.4%, between 500-999 RON - 14.5%, from 1000 to 1499 RON - 20% and between 1500 to 1999 RON - 16, 4%). Monthly household income of most respondents is between 500 and 2499 RON.

From 110 respondents, 22 replied that they had never bought organic food products which are considered non-buyers. Of the 88 buyers (80%), majority (44.5%) rarely buy organic food.

Table 1: Demographics profile of overall sample

Variables		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	50	45,5
	Female	60	54,5
Age	25 or under	41	37,3
	26 - 35	19	17,3
	36 - 45	25	22,7
	46 - 55	17	15,5
	56 - 65	6	5,5
	66 or above	2	1,8
Education	Primary school	3	2,7
	Secondary school	11	10,0
	High school	44	40,0
	Undergraduate	31	28,2
	Postgraduate	21	19,1
Marital Status	Single	57	51,8
	Married	50	45,5
	Others	3	2,7
Children in household	Yes	42	38,2
	No	68	61,8
Members in household	1	5	4,5
	2	24	21,8
	3	32	29,1
	4	28	25,5
	5	15	13,6
	> 5	6	5,5
Occupation	High school student	3	2,7
	Student	17	15,5
	Employee	64	58,2
	Unemployed	20	18,2
	Retired	6	5,5
Monthly personal income (RON)	less than 500	40	36,4
	500-999	16	14,5
	1000-1499	22	20,0
	1500-1999	18	16,4
	2000-2499	6	5,5
	2500-2999	3	2,7
	3000-3499	2	1,8
	3500-3999	1	0,9
	4000-4499	1	0,9
	4500-4999	1	0,9
	5000 or more	0	0
Monthly Total Family income (RON)	less than 500	5	4,5
	500-999	23	20,9
	1000-1499	20	18,2
	1500-1999	23	20,9
	2000-2499	18	16,4
	2500-2999	7	6,4
	3000-3499	4	3,6
	3500-3999	1	,9
	4000-4499	6	5,5
	4500-4999	2	1,8
	5000 or more	1	,9
Frequency of consumption	Never	22	20,0
	Seldom	49	44,5
	Sometimes	17	15,5
	Usually	12	10,9
	Always	10	9,1
Consumption of organic food	Buyers	88	80,0
	Non-buyers	22	20,0

Results related to consumption behavior of buyers are summarized in Table 2. Most have spent in the past, monthly, amounts between 51 and 200 RON (29.1%) or more than 50 RON (23.6%). Also, the amounts that are willing to spend in the future, every month, are similar, majority declared that would spend between 51 and 200 RON (29.1%). Most (35.5%) said they had purchased processed products (eg. coffee, biscuits, bread, dairy, pasta, olive oil, tomato sauce, sausages, jams, pickles, ready meals, breakfast cereals breakfast, beer, wine, etc.), and the place to do their shopping more often is supermarket (37.3%). Also, 32.7% declared that always pay attention to information found on product labels. Most buyers are willing to buy organic food when their price is 25% higher than the price of conventional products (37.3%) or the prices are similar (23.6%).

Table 2: Consumption Pattern of Organic Food Buyers

Variables		Frequency	%
Past spending on organic food	50 or less	26	23,6
	51 – 200 lei	32	29,1
	201 – 500 lei	12	10,9
	501 – 700 lei	9	8,2
	701 – 1000 lei	5	4,5
	1001 or more	4	3,6
Planned future spending on organic food	50 or less	19	17,3
	51 – 200 lei	32	29,1
	201 – 500 lei	17	15,5
	501 – 700 lei	10	9,1
	701 – 1000 lei	5	4,5
	1001 or more	5	4,5
Type of organic food bought most often	Fruits and vegetables	21	19,1
	Meat, fish, eggs	15	13,6
	Processed products	39	35,5
	Raw material	13	11,8
	Total	88	80,0
Shopping place	Market	11	10,0
	Supermarket	41	37,3
	Convenient store	4	3,6
	Organic food shop	13	11,8
	Online shop	17	15,5
	Others	2	1,8
Frequency to read organic food labels	Never	4	3,6
	Seldom	9	8,2
	Sometimes	16	14,5
	Usually	23	20,9
	Always	36	32,7
Price premium willing to pay (compared with conventional food)	Organic products are cheaper than conventional	3	2,7
	Organic and conventional products have similar prices	26	23,6
	Organic products are more expensive by 25%	41	37,3
	Organic products are more expensive by 50%	14	12,7
	Organic products have a double price	4	3,6

Conclusions

Most respondents have a positive attitude towards organic food. Buyers group spent in the past, amounts between 51 and 200 RON or less than 50 RON. Amounts that are willing to spend in the future, are similar, majority declared that it would spend between 51 and 200 RON suggesting that the organic food market in Romania will remain at niche level. Most said they had purchased processed products, and the place to do their shopping more often is supermarket. These results are consistent with the realities of the Romanian market. Although production is increasing, consumption of organic food remained at 1% of total food consumption in Romania, most of organic food is imported processed products.

Socio-demographic profile of buyers found that women buy organic food more often than men. Several studies have shown that women are more interested in organic food than men and often buy such products (Davies et al., 1995, Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2002, Zanoli et al., 2002) .

Only 53.6% of respondents declared that would be willing to pay more for organic food compared to conventional foods, majority are willing to buy organic food that are priced 25% higher. Most Europeans are willing to pay a premium price around 5-10%. When it increases, decreases rapidly buying desire. Danish consumers show a particularly high interest to pay significant premium prices for organic products (Wier and Calverley, 2002).

Limitations and Further Research

This search focuses on demographics variables in relation to the frequency of organic food consumption. However, it may have ignored other possible factors like taste, origin, animal welfare, psychographic variables, health status, etc.. that could be analyzed. Our study shows the need for further research to better understand the organic consumer in Romania. Knowing the characteristics of individuals who purchase organic food is a critical part of the organic food consumption analysis. Yet, a key question still remains as why customers buy or not buy organic food in Romania. Further research should extend this study and determine the factors influencing consumers' purchase decision.

As the global and also romanian production of organic food is expected to grow substantially, what appears clear from our study is that further research is important to be done for generating insights into understanding the organic consumer and the marketing system in which they must make purchase decisions and consume organic products. This information may then be utilized to notice consumers, the food industry, policy makers, and

special interest groups. Research will be useful in helping consumers, retailers, and producers to understand what organic means in the public sphere. Research can also inform the industry and policy makers on what marketing strategies will be useful in educating and informing the public.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [grant POSDRU/88/1.5/S/47646].

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