

Identification of the Reasons for Buying and Consuming BIO Products by the Romanian Consumers

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Abstract

The BIO products in Romania are continually expanding; more and more companies are consuming organic products for various reasons. The general opinion was that in the days when the level of pollution, the working conditions of the stress level are becoming increasingly difficult and harmful for the state of health, so the people still have the most to maintain it. The consumption of ecological products and the people's impression that in this way, the improvement of the health status diminishes the adverse effects. With all this, we can ask ourselves that the people who choose to consume organic products have searched for information and have knowledge about the fundamentally scientifically beneficial effects they have or are relying on information used informally.

The purpose of this article was to determine the motives for which people choose to consume certain products, and the objectives were found to identify the information sources regarding the consumed food products, to identify the procurement allocations of the eco-friendly products, and to identify the advantages recognized by consumers.

Within the article, quantitative research was carried out, using it as a questionnaire research tool. In the quadrant sample, the questionnaire was applied to only 120 people, being a pilot study, and the obtained results indicated that most of the respondents chose to consume BIO products for the fact that they considered them to be the most beneficial to the processed products.

Key words: marketing, consumer behavior, BIO products;

J.E.L. classification: M31

1. Introduction

Consumer behavior is a topic of great interest in the marketing literature, both because of the many influencing factors that have been generalized and defined so far, and because of the individual factors that differentiate one individual from another, as there is no natural bridge between these. In the specialty literature, there are two categories of influences on consumer behavior, namely: endogenous and exogenous factors (Catoiu, Teodorescu, 2007, p. 87). The factors that determine consumer behavior are psycho-social and economically representative, irrespective of the field of research and for which we want to find out whether or not there are significant differences, and even more so if they are essential in terms of food preferences, nutrition and diet. In Hindu culture, for example, "If McDonald's wants to sell a Big Mac with beef in Nepal, it will hit not only residents' refusal to buy it but also legislative issues" (Pop, 2011, p.115). Moreover, in this example, we are talking about a single exogenous type factor without affecting personal preferences, attitudes, or other aspects.

Food style and preferences have always been a topic of interest, but as time went by, more and more ideologies regarding the healthy food lifestyle and approaches to nutrition and diet were developed. If some of the specialists in the field consider that vegetarianism is the solution, another

part contradicts them with solid arguments. If a category of nutritionists strongly recommends carbohydrate intake and limiting animal fats and proteins, another party is adept at animal feed and protein, avoiding carbohydrates as much as possible.

2. Theoretical approaches regarding consumer behavior towards organic products

Since ancient times, human behavior has been a topic of interest to researchers or specialists in various fields, with no general solid basis for interpreting reactions, decisions, behaviors.

In the field of marketing, consumer behavior analysis explicitly deals with how preferences are formed in the consumer's mind and how they can become priorities in consumer decisions (Ozguven, 2012). It is well-known that the basic need of man is that of food, also called the primary need, but far from the desire to satisfy this need, in the decision-making process for choosing certain foods, there are many factors, more or more. They are little identified by the researchers.

At the center of the consumer, the decision is the preference for a particular food or brand, an attribute followed by the factors of utility, needs, and benefits. More and more consumers tend to adopt a healthy lifestyle, correlating their choices with the idea of a healthy product that helps to mention the well-being of the body. In this context, we can consider that people who intend to consume healthy foods can identify the risk of eating unhealthy foods, perceive expected results of behavior change, and exercise control over consumption decisions and actions taken (Van Bull. Et al., 2017). Furthermore, this is possible both by prior information on the quality of the products and their health benefits, as well as by reading and analyzing the information on the product labels. Including information on nutritional values on product packaging to be more readable and easy to interpret is one of the public policies that have been implemented to enable consumers to identify unhealthy foods and to avoid or reduce their consumption (Machin, et al., 2017).

Another critical factor in the decision of consumption is the desire of the packages, which, through the graphics and colors, induce the idea of "healthier." A study of parents purchasing baby cereals showed that visual information suggestive of "health" (natural cereals, wheatears, cereal chains) was more important than the nutritional statements on the product packaging when these elements were evaluated concurrently

The evolution of technology in all fields and the desire of the producers to sell as much as possible makes few foods on the market natural or even organic. Stimulating quantities through chemical processes that harm both final consumers and the environment is a problem that society is currently facing. Starting from this problem, some producers understood that they could offer people a healthier alternative and began to produce without using substances to stimulate the number of products or their structure, this being the category of organic products, the category in the composition. Which includes products made according to specific preset standards (Rana and Paul, 2017).

The purchase of products of this kind seems to be influenced by the values of the consumers, their interest in the environment, and the desire to maintain their health and those close to them. However, choosing to buy an organic product seems to be a more expensive alternative for potential customers, the majority of those who can afford to make this choice are those from the middle socio-economic class. The purchase decision is also made according to the way each customer perceives the product, the values, and principles of consumers, all these aspects motivating whether or not the potential customer to buy an organic product (Shafie and Rennie, 2012).

Demographic characteristics are often used to define the status of the ideal consumer of organic products. Criteria such as living environment, education level, or income are those that shape the attitude of this type of consumer. People's awareness of organic products is enhanced if they have received a high level of formal education. Formal education connects people by generating a more significant amount of information exchange, while providing them with the opportunity to document on issues in various fields, different from the one chosen for specialization, due to the information resources they have. Educational institutions benefit (Shafie and Rennie, 2012).

Specific to most goods and services, the customer structure of organic products is composed of 3 subcategories, depending on the frequency of purchases : regular consumers, occasional consumers, and non-consumers. According to Shafie and Rennie (2012), ordinary consumers are those who make at least two purchases of organic products per week and represent 12% of the sample analyzed. They are available to pay about 15% more for organic products compared to ordinary products. The second category of consumers, the occasional ones, represents 42% of the sample, for them not being established a particular frequency of purchase. Non-consumers represent 46% of the respondents analyzed, 25% of non-consumers expressing their intention to buy organic products in the future. Given these percentages, it can be concluded that approximately 65% of the respondents purchase or plan to purchase organic products. Therefore, the tendency in the market is to choose organic products to the detriment of conventional products (whose composition also includes chemical compounds), however, there is a significant category of people who do not consider the possibility of having a healthier consumption.

Initially considered a better alternative, increasing food production with chemicals and pesticides has now become a practice people are accusing. The adverse effects on the environment and the consumers have made people realize that not the price, but the quality is the criterion that must first take into account when deciding to buy. Therefore, the consumers' attitude was to return to the specific products of the period before the discovery of the chemical incentives, to the organic products. Also, the emergence of consumer education campaigns on how to live a healthier life and increasing financial opportunities compared to the last century have influenced people's attitudes towards consumption, making them aware what are the effects of foods with chemical compounds. In this context, large companies understood that promoting healthy products would have a more significant effect than promoting right looking products (Rana and Paul, 2017).

Many specialized studies have concluded that consumers' attitudes and behavior are positively influenced by their health awareness and knowledge about the environment and how it is influenced. In other words, the reason why people buy organic products is the existence of a solid knowledge base about the environment, about ecology and about the positive effect that organic products have on nature and their health. Even if there is knowledge about organic products and their positive effects, consumers' intention to buy them may be diminished by inaccessibility to the product. Often the market does not come with many solutions for those who want to buy organic products. Even if the price is affordable, the long time of obtaining organic products is often a problem for consumers and thus makes them choose less healthy but faster (Singh and Verma, 2017).

Even though the market for organic products is not yet as developed as that of conventional products, statistics show that this (the market for organic products) is increasing; between 2000 and 2010, its size has tripled. The figures show that the largest markets for organic products are in the US, Germany, and France, but the countries with the highest per capita consumption are Switzerland, Denmark, and Luxembourg. In 2011, for example, in Germany, sales of organic products reached a total value of 6.6 billion euros. Of this total, 54% were sales in the chains of supermarkets specialized in the sale of conventional products, 31% were sales registered in stores specialized in the sale of organic products, and 15% were sales made by other categories of merchants. It was also found that marketing strategies played a significant role in increasing demand for organic products on the German market. The chains of stores specialized in the sale of such products and that have made efforts to popularize the organic products have registered an increase of the demand, whereas the chains of supermarkets that only made available to the customers the organic products without promoting and have registered a stagnation of the request. The same study also shows that 3% of households in Germany generate about 39% of their income from sales of organic products, thus suggesting that a tiny part of the population perceives this range of products as a first consumer option. These results cannot be extended worldwide, but they are significant when the consumers represent the analyzed community in a state with one of the largest markets in the world in this regard (Buder, Feldmann and Hamm, 2014).

In the last century, there has been a considerable evolution of technology and an evolution of medicine and people's awareness of their health. Under these conditions, people increasingly understand how their health can be affected and at the same time, have the opportunity to protect themselves from certain medical conditions. Health and maintaining an excellent physical

condition make people have a sense of well-being, feel safe, and genuinely enjoy life. Most people understand that health, and therefore well-being, can very quickly disappear if the adopted lifestyle is not an adequate one, thus trying to maintain these conditions through consumption that does not have adverse effects. This tendency is called "health concern" and appears at a different intensity from case to case. Whether it is a difference in intensity caused by a lack of knowledge or an inability to understand the seriousness of this aspect, the relationship between consumer health concern and the intention to buy organic products is positive. In other words, the more a consumer is aware of how important his or her health is and understands that his / her physical condition is directly influenced by consumption, the more the intention to consume organic products and to have a healthier diet is higher (Apaolaza et al., 2018).

3. Research methodology

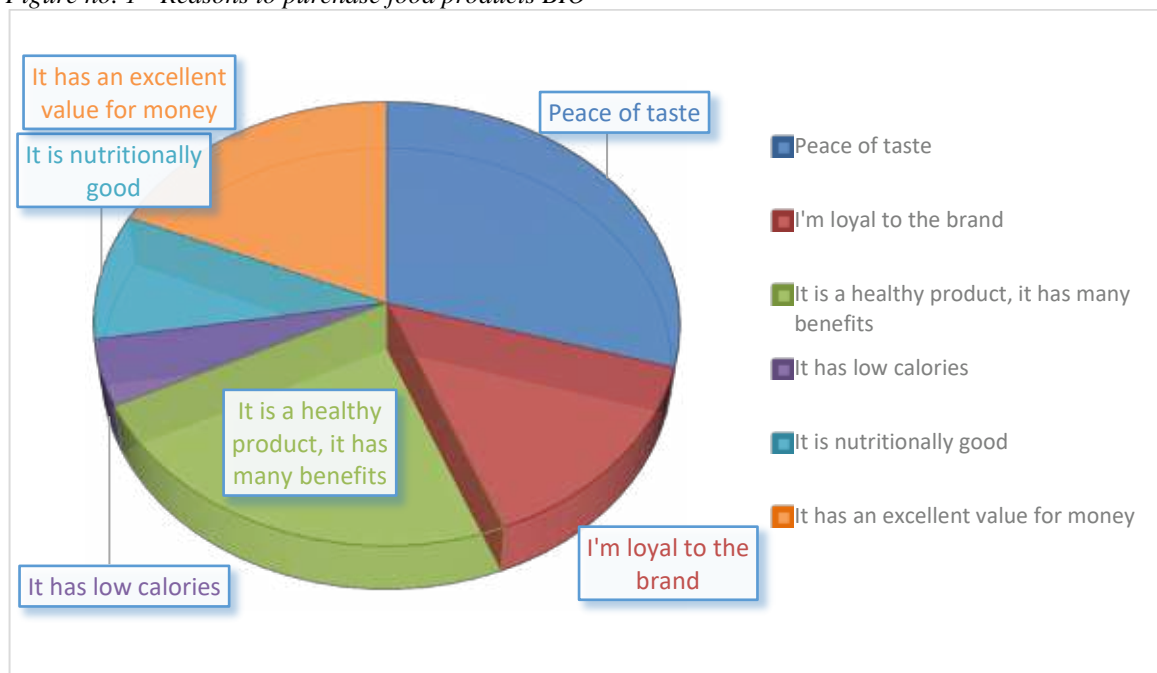
In order to identify the motives for which people choose to consume certain products, and the objectives were found to identify the information sources regarding the consumed food products, to identify the procurement allocations of the eco-friendly products, and to identify the advantages recognized by consumers.

The purpose of the research was: Identification of the influencing factors in the choice of food, and among the objectives we can list: The degree of importance given to the label of the products, Awareness of the reasons of purchase by the consumers, the degree of knowledge of the nutritional information on the packaging of the products, .

The research was based on a questionnaire consisting of 20 closed and open questions, both demographic and meant to determine consumption intentions, the degree of attention, of importance given to certain factors (eg. Do you consider that you have a healthy lifestyle? what do you consider this food to be healthy?) and was addressed to a number of 120 respondents.

The research started by trying to identify the reasons why consumers choose a particular product, and the results showed that most consumers choose the products they consider healthy, which benefits the body. The next reason for the purchase is the one based on personal preferences, a large part of the consumers choosing a product just because they like its taste, reasons followed by the favorable quality-price ratio, the brand's fidelity, or other nutritional benefits.

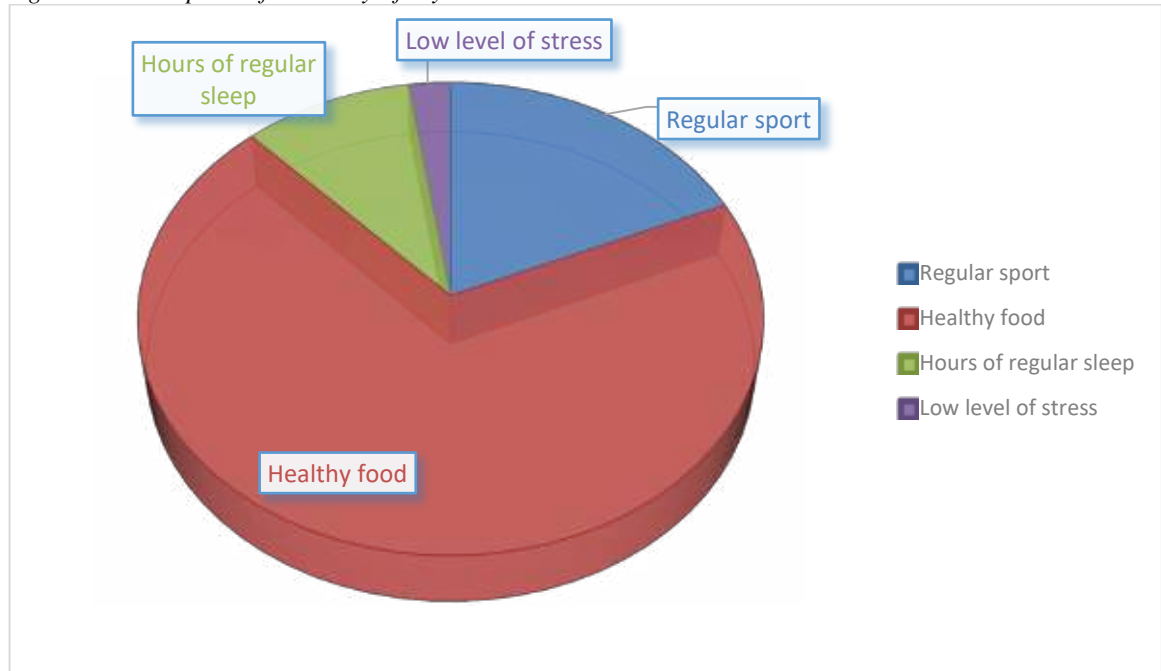
Figure no. 1 - Reasons to purchase food products BIO



Source: made by the author for the research

Subsequently, consumers were asked if they consider that they have a healthy lifestyle, and following the answers, I asked them to detail why they have these considerations. Following the analysis and organization of the answers, the results showed that most of the respondents consider that they follow a healthy lifestyle, because they consume healthy foods, or they do regular sports.

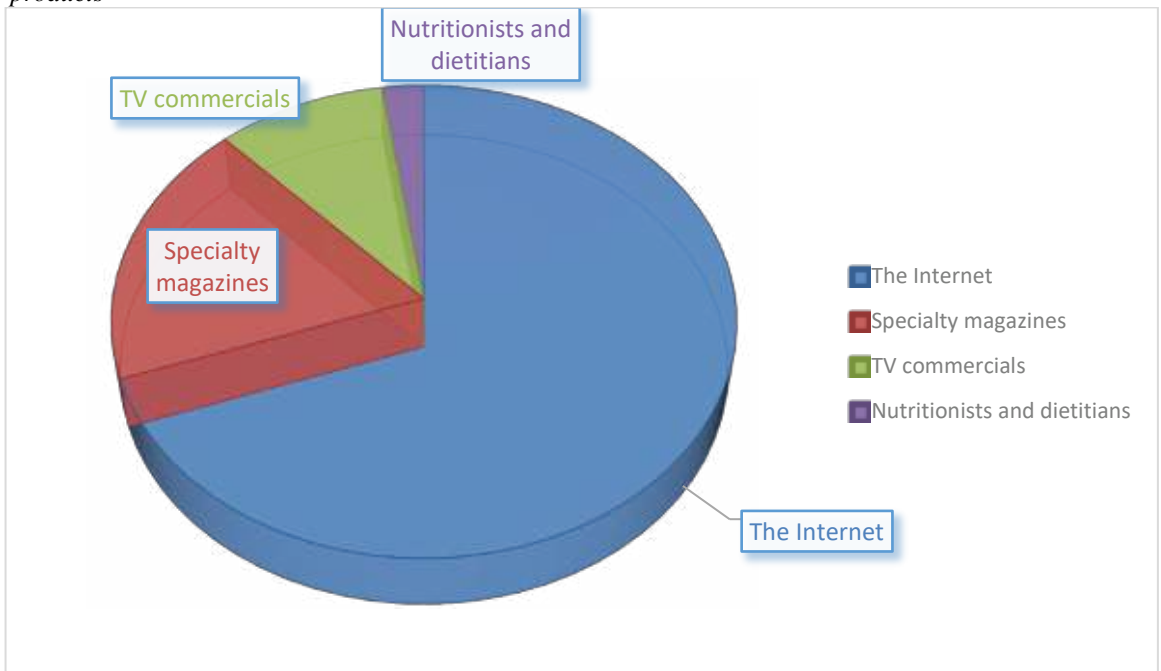
Figure no. 2 - Aspects of a healthy lifestyle



Source: made by the author for the research

Another question in the questionnaire was to identify the sources of information that consumers use in identifying the advantages of consuming BIO products, but also in determining the most qualitative products or brands of this type.

Figure no. 3 - Sources of information that consumers use in identifying the advantages of consuming BIO products



Source: made by the author for the research

The results showed that the primary source of information for both areas of interest is the internet, most consumers searching online for the information they need. A small part of them replied that sometimes they also read specialized magazines.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the market for organic products is growing, but far from the level of the conventional product's market. People are willing to go more and more towards this healthier alternative, even if it is often more expensive, but few are ready to give up conventional products altogether. Consumers seek to lead a healthy life, but often organic products are inaccessible to them. The attitude of consumers towards organic products reflects the correlation between the variety of consumer decisions regarding meeting the essential needs and the influences of the social-demographic environment in which he lives, learns, manifests, and behaves.

It is worth noting that the correct information of the consumers is beneficial, being the critical factor that determines in advance the final choice of the consumer regarding the purchase of the products. In the case of the existence of a developed economy, there is a high consumption of organic food, this type of purchase is based on economic, ecological, and social factors. Thus, there is worldwide misinformation regarding organic products, and their characteristics are not well understood. Their purchase leads to higher costs, which in the eyes of most customers is not justified, despite the taste or health benefits. A good state of health is considered by some consumers to be dependent on the constant consumption of organic foods, especially fruits and vegetables. Thus, we can conclude that it is vital for consumers at the moment to educate them from a food point of view and to convert them to a lifestyle that requires the correct consumption of organic products.

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