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Determinants of organic food purchase intentions: an empirical study among Italian consumers

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Abstract

The organic market has recently increased considerably, and is widely regarded as one of the biggest growth markets in the agri-food sector, also in Italy (IFOAM, 2016). So understanding the critical factors that influence consumer organic food purchasing behavior is essential for the whole supply chain's actors (Aarset et al., 2004; Gracia and Magistris, 2008; Vindigni et al., 2002). Organic foods are generally perceived as more nutritious, as well as healthier, safer, and more environmentally friendly (Cicia et al., 2009; Zanolì et al., 2012). Also animal rights issues and political motives can have a positive influence on consumers' attitudes towards organic food. So several studies indicated that consumers are more likely to pay a premium price for organic food or, more probably for some specific attributes of these. But at the same time literature clearly indicates that the word "organic" has many meanings, that consumers of organic foods are not homogeneous in demographics or in beliefs. The main objective of this study is to understand consumer knowledge structures with regard to organic foods, to identify the variety of beliefs, motivations perceptions, and attitudes regarding these products and their characteristics, and, therefore, the consumers' buying intention.

This paper presents, in particular the results of an empirical study conducted among Italian consumers based on the models and findings of a wide literature that embraces economic, marketing and psychological approaches. In fact, a lot of literature is available that discusses personal determinants of organic food consumption and different models and determinants are used for the analysis. In particular, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), proposed by Ajzen (1991), stresses in the link between beliefs and behavior. Based on the TPB model, the immediate antecedent of behavior is the intention to perform the behavior. Therefore, when the consumers have greater intention to engage in behavior, they are more likely to perform it. Likewise, the TPB had been used in many studies that have investigated motivations for buying organic foods (Aertsens et al., 2011; Honkanen et al., 2005; Hughner et al., 2007; Magnusson et al., 2011; Padel and Foster, 2005). They show that the determinants of organic food purchase include issues concerning health, environment, food safety, animal welfare, desires for supporting the local economy and a wholesome lifestyle, nostalgia for the past, and pursuit of fashion. This study examines seven factors (food safety, healthy,

knowledge, attitudes and habits, environment concerns, government support and policy, perceived values,) as determinants of intention to purchase organic food. The method used for the data collection was both a face-to-face interview both on-line, using a structured questionnaire with multi-item scales adopted from previously validated scales as the survey instrument. The questionnaires were distributed among some hundreds of consumers as respondents in Italy. Data were collected between the summer of 2017 and the beginning of 2018. As suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the data analysis proposed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine whether all indicator variables (items) appropriately reflect their underlying constructs. The outcome proposed the calculated reliability of all constructs to assess construct internal consistency. We conclude with implications and suggestions for further researches.

Keywords : Buying Intention, Organic food, Environmental concern, Purchasing behavior, Food safety