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### **Urban farming initiatives and Millennials: attitudes and behavioral intentions**

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#### **Abstract**

By 2045 over nine billion people will live in urban contexts worldwide (UN, 2015). The main drivers of this process are, on the one hand, the global population growth, and on the other hand, the steady increase in urbanization of rural people looking for better living conditions. This is likely to determine several consequences: first, conventional agriculture in rural areas is losing workforce; secondly, the expansion of urban areas is reducing the availability of agricultural land; third, rural people who heavily rely on self-production, once urbanized, will seek for alternative food sources. The broad impacts of these trends, from global food security and food safety to resource use and environmental impact (Seto & Ramankutty, 2016), are already redefining the relationship between humanity and food, and raise the necessity of integrated urban planning, resource management, and food production (Godfray & Garnett, 2014).

In developed countries, ethical and environmental concerns on these issues have pushed the diffusion of Alternative Food Networks (AFNs), to try to overcome inefficiency and lack of sustainability (Som Castellano, 2015). Among these, urban farming initiatives, that is food production within or next to urban areas, are drawing the attention of researchers, policy makers and urban planners, for their potential in terms of overall sustainability of food production and urban areas, as well as the ethical and economic considerations that underpin these initiatives (Erwein, 2014). Indeed, the impacts of urban agriculture, in terms of food production, provision of ecosystem services, and occupation, are widely explored in scientific literature (McClintock, 2010; Colding & Barthel, 2013). However, few studies focus on Millennials' attitudes towards these phenomena, despite this generation's well-known propensity to sustainable and environmentally friendly behaviors.

Using data from a cross-sectional survey, this study proposes a theoretical model that imposes the relationships between latent constructs in consumer behavior, investigating the applicability of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), with special emphasis on measuring the mediator effect of attitude on the relationship between subjective norms and buying

intention with respect to possible urban farming initiatives. A structured questionnaire based on the theory of planned behavior to measure its components (behavioral intentions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) in relation to an urban farming initiative was devised and randomly administered to university students in Friuli Venezia Giulia region, in the North East part of Italy. Construct validity is assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) in the measurement model stage. Subsequently, structural modeling is implemented to test the hypotheses and model fit. The results of this study allow us to test the proposed model hypothesis in supporting the mediation role of attitude in the relationship between subjective norms and buying intention. Most previous studies overlooked the role of subjective norms in determining buying intentions with respect to different contexts. The value of this pioneer study lies in an in-depth exploration of direct and mediating effects of attitude towards urban farming initiatives in the North East of Italy.

**Keywords:** Alternative Food Networks, Urban farming, Structural equation modeling, Millennials, Behavioral intention

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