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BELIEFS ABOUT EFFECTS OF ORGANIC PRODUCTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTENTION TO PURCHASE ORGANIC FOOD

ABSTRACT

Globally, there is a growing number of studies focused on discovering the factors that influence the intention to purchase organic products. The present research aims to investigate beliefs about the direct effects of organic food on health, lifestyle, enjoyment of food, environment and the local economy and their influence on the intention to purchase this type of products. It is expected that this relation will be stronger if those factors capture the consumers' beliefs on how effective organic food products are in contributing to specific important issues rather than capturing their general attitudes towards those issues, which were predominantly investigated in previous research.

The study is based on the results of a questionnaire completed by a sample of 411 primary household shoppers from Eastern Croatia. Regression analysis results reveal that intrinsic variables have a stronger influence on the intention to purchase organic food, meaning that it would be most beneficial for organic food marketers and other involved stakeholders to foster the consumers' beliefs regarding personal benefits gained from organic food consumption. The strongest influence thereby relates to health benefits, followed by enjoyment of food and positive influences on adopting a desired lifestyle. The results related to extrinsic variables reveal that organic food consumption may also be increased by emphasising multiple benefits to be gained by the local economy from this type of production. However, when it comes to the effects of individual consumption on the environment and society, it is obvious that consumers must be further educated.

Keywords: Organic food, intention to purchase, behavioural beliefs, attitudes, extrinsic variables, intrinsic variables

1. Introduction

The segment of environment-conscious and health-conscious consumers has proven to be highly attractive to modern marketers, especially in the food industry which supplies this segment with the increasingly desirable organic food. According to Martić Kuran and Mihić (2014: 181), *“organic food is food produced without the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, which does not contain any synthetic hormones. It is produced under legally defined methods, and its composition should match general laws and regulations on food quality”*. Organic food is one of the fastest-growing segments of agriculture and retail. The value of the European organic food market has grown from EUR 7 billion in 2000 to EUR 29.8 billion in 2015 (FIBL and IFOAM, 2017¹).

Because of many advantages and multiplicative positive effects on the economy and society as a whole, even national economic strategies of many countries strive to encourage the production of and demand for organic food. Scientists claim, and the modern practice confirms, that the best way to stimulate production is by stimulating consumption. Basic economic principles then give the necessary incentive to the supply side of the market and bring many benefits in the form of sustainable production, jobs, higher incomes, health benefits for the population, support to sustainable tourism, development of desirable social values, etc. Therefore, academic experts try to make a contribution by examining and discovering all the factors that influence the decision to purchase and consume organic food.

Globally, there is a substantial and growing number of studies focused on discovering the factors that influence the intention to purchase organic products. There is also a growing interest of interdisciplinary experts in Croatia looking into attitudes related to the purchase of environmentally friendly food products (Faletar et al., 2016; Brčić-Stipčević, Petljak, 2011; Renko, Bošnjak, 2009; Štefanić et al., 2001) The paper by Martić Kuran and Mihić (2014) was aimed at defining the factors which influence the intention of Croatian consumers to purchase organic food. That paper was based on the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), which has proved to be a highly applicable theoretical framework for

studying this issue. As such, it has been widely used by numerous authors around the globe (Salleh et al., 2010; Voon et al., 2011; Saleki et al., 2012; Saleki, Seydsaleki, 2012; Phuah et al., 2012; Shariff et al., 2012; Ham et al., 2015; Ham et al., 2018). TPB is based on the assumption that most human behaviour is a result of an individual's intention to adopt a particular behaviour and to make a conscious decision about it.

Some of the relations in previous research were found to be weak in spite of the strong assumption that the influence should be strong, which is based on common sense and everyday experience. Some experts claim that the reason for that could be the fact that research usually captures attitudes at a very general level (attitudes on health, environment, etc.) and tries to measure their influence on very specific behaviours. Due to the possibility that consumers could express, for example, highly positive attitudes towards the environment, but remain unconvinced that individual consumption decisions could make an actual impact on environmental issues, their attitudes could not be adequately reflected in their behaviour. Also, when it comes to other factors, for instance attitudes towards the local economy, consumers might lack sufficient information or education to fully understand the effects of organic food consumption on the local economy. They could be very ethnocentric, but, at the same time, that factor could be insignificant for forming their intention to purchase organic food.

The present research aims to investigate the beliefs about direct effects of organic food products on health, lifestyle, enjoyment of food, environment and the local economy and their influence on the intention to purchase and consume this type of products. It is expected that this relation will be stronger if attitudes capture the consumers' beliefs on how effective organic food products are in contributing to specific important issues. Thereby, this research attempts to broaden the knowledge on the facts relevant for promoting and fostering purchases of organic food.

2. Theoretical background

Based on a widely used and confirmed theory of planned behaviour proposed by Ajzen (1991), intention is the best predictor of actual behaviour. Intention to buy represents a plan to purchase a particular good or service in the future (Business dictionary, 2016²). Intention to buy can be further operationalised as a related behaviour, while on the other hand, potential buyers may experience some obstacles that will prevent them from making the actual purchase. The final decision depends on whether the motives for purchase or barriers to purchase had a more powerful impact on the potential buyer. It has been confirmed that the relation between attitude and intention is stronger than the relation between intentions and actual behaviour (Kim, Hunter, 1993). This is expected, considering that the relation between intentions and behaviour is under the powerful influence of external factors. Some authors, for example Stone and associates (1995), refer to this variable as “willingness to act”, while Maloney and Ward (1973) named it “verbal commitment” and defined it as a measure of probability of an individual’s future actions. In this paper, the intention to buy relates to the purchase of organic food.

Fishbein and Ajzen’s theory of attitudes and values (Ajzen, Fishbein, 1975) states that an attitude is formed based on the beliefs that an individual has about a particular object (other person, object, place or event) and is represented by attributes that are tied with the observed object. In the case of an attitude towards a certain behaviour, each belief links a particular behaviour with a specific outcome, consequence, or some other attribute (such as the cost of adopting a specific behaviour). Since each attribute is evaluated in advance as positive or negative (emotional component of the attitude), the behaviour is therefore automatically perceived as desirable (if it has predominantly positive outcomes) or undesirable (if it is linked with predominantly negative outcomes).

Previous studies have associated organic food consumption with behavioural attitudes such as health consciousness, environmental consciousness, trust in organic food claims, desirability of organic food attributes, such as taste, texture, freshness (Michaelidou, Hassan, 2008; First, Brozina, 2009; Salleh et

al., 2010; Voon et al., 2011), and other attitudes, such as attitudes about the local origin of products, fair trade (Tanner et al., 2003) and reference knowledge (Amran, Nee, 2012; Saleki et al., 2012).

As organic food is generally believed to be more nutritious, healthier and safer than conventional food, it is likely that a health-conscious consumer will have positive attitudes towards organic food, which will drive a greater demand for this type of products. Żakowska-Biemans (2009: 770) conducted a research in Poland about the motives and barriers related to organic foods. The survey, besides the motive of health, also discussed five other factors that should be mentioned: safety, taste, environmental impact, contribution to animal welfare and appearance. In that paper, the author concluded that health and safety concerns are the primary motives.

Intention to eat healthily is determined by intrinsic motives, including “feeling better” and “staying healthy” (Michaelidou et al., 2011: 20). According to their research, motives to eat healthily can be classified as intrinsic or extrinsic and they comprise three categories of motives, including self-image (e.g. looking attractive), health (e.g. enhancing health, preventing disease) and social pressure (e.g. pressure of others to eat healthily).

Numerous studies have found that health benefits are the main motives for buying organic food products (Wier, Calverly, 2002; Roitner-Schobesberger et al., 2008). Salleh and his associates (2010) determined that the impact of health consciousness on customers’ purchase intention to buy organic food products is stronger than the impact of environmental concerns. According to the research by Voon and associates (2011), health and environmental concerns, combined with trust in organic food claims and desirability of organic food attributes, form the attitude of Malaysian consumers towards organic food. The importance of health and environmental concerns reflects the growing affluence of consumers. Rising educational levels coupled with better access to worldwide communication and information channels have raised their awareness of health and environmental issues.

It is useful to point out that, although the health aspect of organic food is the most common motive for buying organic food among respondents in that type of research, other research has shown that the correlation between attitudes about organic products and health awareness is insignificant (Tomić et al., 2015: 12).

Besides the already mentioned elements which affect the intention to buy organic food and other organic products, safety of food, nutritional value, taste, freshness, appearance and other sensory characteristics also affect consumer's preferences of organic food (Gil et al., 2000). The choice of organic over conventional food is usually driven by many motives, including those related to social and environmental responsibility, economic incentives and barriers and factors related to one's own well-being and altruistic concerns for the well-being of family members (Urban et al., 2012: 728).

Following Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003), it is also important to consider attitudes towards the local origin of products. According to Plummer (1974: 36), in predicting consumer behaviour, experts argued that a person's lifestyle will determine his/her consumption behaviour.

On a general level, it is important to point out that, according to research, measures of specific attitudes (e.g. opinions about products or behaviours) are more likely to be manifested in environmental behaviour than general measures of environmental concern (e.g. opinions about environmental problems) (Tanner, Wölfling Kast, 2003). According to Newhouse (1990), inconsistency between attitudes and behaviour occurs most frequently when measurement of general attitudes is applied for predicting specific (concrete) behaviours. Namely, variables used for measuring attitudes about specific behaviours (attitudes about activities) are better predictors of environmentally oriented behaviour than those variables used for measuring general attitudes about the environment (Bodur, Sarigöllü, 2005: 504). Furthermore, it must be taken into account that consumers' attitudes about various environmental issues, as well as about various environmental behaviours may vary.

What is more, it is often indicated that certain discrepancies between attitudes towards the environment and behaviour can be described by cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a mental state, often a conflict, in which a person experiences two

or more contradictory beliefs or cognitively processes a lot of information. In an individual, it usually leads to a feeling of psychological discomfort that lasts until the person resolves the issue. Based on research results, we can conclude that people often experience cognitive dissonance with regard to their behaviour towards environmental issues (Ham et al., 2016). If the conflict between environmental attitudes and behaviour does lead to perceived dissonance, a potential strategy for its reduction could be to channel one's concern for the environment through specific behaviours that require less or no special sacrifice, thus creating an alibi for one's own consciousness (Bratt, 1999: 28).

Finally, as stated earlier, consumers may be sceptic or simply not educated enough to understand the effects of a certain behaviour on a relevant issue. It is therefore important to also investigate the beliefs on the actual effects of certain behaviours on a specific environmental issue. The research question could thereby be stated as: Which beliefs about effects of organic products have the strongest impact on the intention to purchase organic food?

3. Research methodology

3.1 Participants and procedure

The research is based on an in-person survey conducted on a convenience sample of 411 primary household shoppers from five counties in the Slavonia and Baranja regions in Croatia. According to Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003: 85), primary household shoppers are defined as "*the people who make purchasing decisions and regulate what the other members of the household eat*", therefore representing the most relevant source of information. In this research, primary shoppers were selected by placing a filter question (Are you the person who does the most grocery shopping for your household?) at the very beginning of the questionnaire.

The information obtained was analysed using the SPSS statistical software package version 18.0. Statistical techniques of univariate analysis (frequency distribution, central tendency measures), multivariate analysis (reliability analysis, linear regression) and comparative analysis (ANOVA, t-test) were used. Table 1 shows the sample description.

Table 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (N=411)

		%
Gender	M	20.7
	F	75.2
Age at the time of the survey (years)	<30	25.4
	30-39	14.3
	40-49	31.8
	50-59	22.3
	>60	6.2
Education	Primary school	10
	Secondary school	56.9
	University degree	10.2
	Master's degree	17.5
	Doctorate	3.9
Place of residence	Village	29.2
	Suburb	17
	Town/city	51.6
Standard of living in a household	Below the country's average	20.2
	At the country's average	69.6
	Above the country's average	9.2
Employment status	Student	6.6
	Unemployed	24.8
	Employed	56.4
	Retired	11.7
Household size	1-2	22.7
	3-4	53.5
	>5	23.9
Children in the household under 15 years of age	0	70.8
	1	15.8
	2	9.5
	>3	3.9
Household income (EUR/month)	<500	16.1
	501-1000	31.9
	1001-1500	25.5
	1501-2000	14.4
	2001-2500	6.6
	>2500	5.1

Source: Author's work

3.2 Instrument and measurement

To explore the relation between the beliefs on the direct effects of organic food products on one hand, and organic food purchase intention on the other, six measurement scales were employed to capture an individual's beliefs on the effects of organic products on health, lifestyle, enjoyment of food, environment and society and the local economy, as well as an individual's intention to purchase organic food products. Measurement scales were created by the author or adapted from previous studies in this field (Tanner et al., 2003; Voon

et al., 2011). Each scale comprised a set of statements presented in a Likert-type format with a five-point scale to capture the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with the statements in the questionnaire. Mejovšek (2003: 42) states that a five-point Likert-type scale is especially suitable for collecting data on populations that have educational systems with grades from 1 to 5, as individuals are used to thinking about and evaluating things in terms of that range. The list of items included in each construct and the reliability measure Cronbach's Alpha are provided in Table 2.

Table 2 List of items and reliability measures

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Intention to purchase organic food products	I will definitely purchase some organic food in the next few months.	.902
	I will actively seek organic food in the stores so I could purchase it.	
	I intend to purchase organic food in the near future.	
	I am willing to do what it takes to get to organic food.	
	My personal goal is to consume as much organic food as possible.	
Effects of organic products on health	Purchasing organic food enables me to contribute to my health and my family's health.	.721
	Purchasing organic food makes me feel sure that the food I eat will not harm me with chemicals and pesticides.	
	I am willing to buy organic food because the health benefits outweigh the cost.	
	When making purchases, the fact that organic food products do not contain unhealthy substances is important to me.	
	Organic food does not contain genetic modifications, additives, artificial flavouring or pesticides.	
Effects of organic products on lifestyle	Purchasing organic products enables me to be consistent with the modern lifestyle.	.842
	Purchasing organic products enables me to be different from others and makes me stand out with my different lifestyle.	
	Purchasing organic food is an important part of my personality.	
	Organic food is a part of my desired lifestyle.	
Effects of organic products on enjoyment of food	Organic food tastes better.	.702
	Purchasing organic food enables me to eat tastier food and enjoy it more.	
	Consuming organic food would give me great pleasure.	
	Consuming organic food seems attractive to me.	
Effects of organic products on the environment and society	Purchasing organic food enables me to be socially responsible.	.848
	Purchasing organic food enables me to make an impact on environmental protection.	
	Purchasing organic food enables me to calm my conscience regarding the harm we are doing to plant and animal life.	
	Purchasing organic food enables me to calm my conscience in relation to the harm we are doing to future generations.	
Effects of organic products on the local economy	Supporting local farmers when making a purchase is important to me.	.834
	It is good to support Croatian agriculture by buying regional products.	
	When it comes to food, it is extremely important to me that it is produced in Croatia.	
	If there is a Croatian alternative of a product, I will always choose a Croatian instead of a foreign product.	
	I will buy a Croatian product even if a particular foreign product is on sale.	

Source: Author's work

Cronbach's Alpha coefficient indicates that all constructs have an adequate level of internal consistency, in accordance with the Nunnally's (1978) suggestion that the value of the said coefficient should be above 0.7.

4. Research results

The aim of the paper was to determine the beliefs on the effects of organic food products or the fac-

tors that positively influence the intention to buy this type of products. Linear regression tests using the standard regression method were subsequently conducted to find out which determinants could influence the intention to purchase organic food products according to their level of importance.

The proportion of explained variance as measured by R-Squared for the regression is 61.5%, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3 Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.784 ^a	.615	.610	.62896	.615	126.186	5	395	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), effect_economy, effect_lifestyle, effect_enjoyment, effect_environment, effect_health
Source: Authors' work

ANOVA results in Table 4 show that the model reaches statistical significance (Sig = 0.000).

Table 4 ANOVA results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	249.592	5	49.918	126.186	.000 ^b
Residual	156.260	395	.396		
Total	405.852	400			

a. Dependent Variable: intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), effect_economy, effect_lifestyle, effect_enjoyment, effect_environment, effect_health
Source: Authors' work

Regression analysis results are presented in Table 5. Based upon the results, the predictive power of the following constructs was confirmed: beliefs on the effects of organic products on lifestyle, on enjoy-

ment of food, on health and on the local economy. Only the influence of the beliefs on the effects of organic products on the environment and society was found to be insignificant.

Table 5 Regression coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.591	.177		-3.342	.001
Effect_lifestyle	.137	.030	.190	4.601	.000
Effect_environment	.052	.046	.049	1.120	.264
Effect_enjoyment	.344	.054	.298	6.374	.000
Effect_health	.433	.065	.329	6.708	.000
Effect_economy	.087	.040	.077	2.173	.030

a. Dependent Variable: intention

Source: Authors' work

The overall multiple regression model worked well for explaining the variation in the effects of organic food products ($F=126.186$; $d.f.=5$; $p=.000$).

As presented in Table 5, Effects on health were found to have the largest significant positive influence on the intention to purchase organic food ($t=6.708$; $p=0.000$; $\beta=0.329$), followed by Effects on enjoyment of food ($t=6.374$; $p=0.000$; $\beta=0.298$). Significant positive effect was also found in other independent variables: Effects on lifestyle ($t=4.601$; $p=0.000$; $\beta=0.190$) and Effects on local economy ($t=2.173$; $p=0.030$; $\beta=0.077$). The influence of the variable Effects on environment and society was found to be weak and insignificant ($t=1.120$; $p=0.264$; $\beta=0.049$).

5. Discussion

Study findings reveal that the most important predictors of the intention to purchase organic food products are the beliefs about the effects of organic food products on health. This means that, in order to foster purchasing and consuming of organic food, the most important task is to educate consumers and convince them that food without pesticides and other toxic substances has many positive effects on their health and the health of their family.

In addition to health aspects, people will be inclined to switch their dietary preferences to organic and environmentally friendly food if they are convinced that they will enjoy organic food more and that it will suit their taste. Since previous experience with organic products will presumably have the greatest influence on the beliefs regarding enjoyment of food, this finding stresses the point that quality control is extremely important in the marketing of organic food products. As proven in extensive previous research, people are ready to pay more for an organic product, but are usually not ready to give up the standard of living and enjoyment of food and life in general. They expect environmentally-friendly products to perform equally well or better than conventional products. The above is also related to the third construct according to the strength of the influence – Effects on lifestyle.

This study proves that the intention to purchase organic products will be stronger if consumers believe that such products will enable them to adopt a desired lifestyle and demonstrate their environmental awareness and/or wellness-oriented lifestyle to the members of their reference group. Organic prod-

ucts can also be a factor for demonstrating social status and wealth. Here lies the connection with the previously mentioned enjoyment of food and life.

The first three constructs represent internally or self-oriented variables (intrinsic), while the remaining two are externally oriented (extrinsic). Effect on local economy was found to have the weakest, but a statistically significant influence on the intention to purchase organic food products. This finding strengthens the view that promoting locally grown foods and educating consumers on how organic production contributes to the development of local economy can foster the intention to purchase organic food products.

The final proposed construct, Effects on environment and society, was found to be insignificant. This finding suggests that the intention to purchase organic food products will not be directly influenced by the conviction that organic products have a positive effect on society and the environment. This influence is probably moderated by other factors. Moreover, this could be also caused by the fact that consumers are not convinced that individual purchasing behaviour can make a significant difference in resolving current environmental and social issues.

Based on the overall results, it can be concluded that consumers will be more interested in organic products if they are convinced that those products provide personal benefits rather than benefits to the society as a whole.

6. Conclusion

In order to foster organic food consumption and consequently achieve economic, environmental and societal benefits, it is necessary to deeply understand the factors influencing the decision to purchase organic food products. Besides the influence of general attitudes (i.e. about health, environment, local products, etc.) that were proven to be relevant in previous research, it is also necessary to look into beliefs on how purchasing and consuming organic food actually affects specific important issues.

The present study investigated two groups of factors. The first group of factors represents intrinsic variables, while the remaining two factors are extrinsic or externally oriented variables. The findings reveal that intrinsic variables have a stronger

influence on the intention to purchase organic food products, meaning that it would be most beneficial for organic food marketers and other involved stakeholders to foster the consumers' beliefs regarding personal benefits gained from organic food consumption. The strongest influence thereby relates to health benefits, followed by enjoyment of food and positive influences on adopting a desired lifestyle. The results related to extrinsic variables reveal that organic food consumption may also be increased by emphasising multiple benefits to be gained by the local economy from this type of production. However, when it comes to the effects of individual consumption on the environment and society as a whole, it is obvious that consumers must be further educated.

Regarding theoretical implications, relatively high indicators of internal reliability of the measurement scales used in this study indicate that there is potential for these measurement scales to be retested and further amended to create an instrument that will provide a reliable and valid tool for assessing attitudes and intentions for this type of behaviour. Also, this paper puts forward the suggestion that, besides general attitudes on relevant issues, re-

search should encompass beliefs on the effects of certain behaviours on resolving those issues.

Future research could be directed towards resolving some of the main limitations of the present research regarding its sample and scope. Cross-cultural research would enable testing and revealing the differences that could possibly stem from an educational or experiential background. In addition, other factors could also be tested to increase the percentage of explained variance of the model. To provide marketers with further insights relevant for designing appropriate marketing strategies, future research could encompass the variables influencing the measured beliefs (i.e. the influence of experience or other sources of information on beliefs about enjoyment of food). Furthermore, establishing the main sources of information relevant for forming other measured beliefs would also be beneficial. Future research could also include a different methodology to discover some mediating or moderation effects and, finally, it could introduce demographics as a control variable, which could also reveal particular differences (i.e. differences in various age or income groups).

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ŠTAVOVI O UČINCIMA EKOLOŠKIH PROIZVODA I UTJECAJ NA NAMJERU KUPNJE ORGANSKI UZGOJENE HRANE

SAŽETAK

Na globalnoj razini sve je više istraživanja usmjerenih na identificiranje čimbenika koji utječu na namjeru kupnje organski uzgojene hrane. Cilj je ovoga rada istražiti stavove o izravnim učincima organski uzgojene hrane na zdravlje, životni stil, uživanje u hrani, okoliš i lokalno gospodarstvo te utjecaj ovih čimbenika na namjeru kupnje i konzumiranja ove vrste proizvoda. Pretpostavka je da je moguće očekivati kako će utjecaj biti jači u slučaju kada se mjere stavovi o učinkovitosti organski uzgojene hrane na specifična važna područja, nego u slučaju kada se mjere općeniti stavovi o tim područjima, a koji su predmet većine istraživanja.

Istraživanje je provedeno na uzorku od 411 ispitanika iz istočne Hrvatske koji predstavljaju osobe koje obavljaju kupovinu većine namirnica za kućanstvo. Rezultati provedene regresijske analize pokazali su da intrinzične varijable imaju jači učinak na namjeru kupnje organske hrane, što znači da je za marketere organske hrane i druge dionike najučinkovitije poticati stavove vezane uz osobne koristi koje proizlaze iz konzumiranja organske hrane. Pri tome najjači učinak odnosi se na koristi za zdravlje, a slijede ih koristi vezane uz uživanje u hrani i pozitivni učinci na izgradnju željenog životnog stila. Rezultati koji se odnose na ekstrinzične varijable dovode do zaključka da bi se potrošnja organske hrane mogla povećati isticanjem višestrukih koristi za lokalno gospodarstvo koje proizlaze iz ovakve proizvodnje. Međutim, kada je riječ o učincima pojedinačne potrošnje na okoliš i društvo u cjelini, očigledno je potrošače potrebno dodatno educirati.

Ključne riječi: organska hrana, namjera kupnje, stavovi o ponašanju, stavovi, ekstrinzične varijable, intrinzične varijable