

THE PROFILE OF THE ORGANIC FOOD CONSUMER IN ROMANIA: A REVIEW

Mihai Stoica¹

¹The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

E-mail: mihai.stoica.91@gmail.com

Please cite this paper as:

Stoica, M., 2020. The Profile of the Organic Food Consumer in Romania: A Review. In: R. Pamfilie, V. Dinu, L. Tăchiciu, D. Pleșea, C. Vasiliu eds. *6th BASIQ International Conference on New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption*. Messina, Italy, 4-6 June 2020. Bucharest: ASE, pp. 160-167

Abstract

This paper reports on the latest contributions of research on organic food consumers in Romania. In order to summarize and systematize the information gained in the last years, it was advisable to make a short literature review on this topic. Subsequently, using only the contributions that investigate the Romanian market, an analysis was performed to synthesize the observed results. Based on the information collected, the consumer profile was defined according to the demographic, socioeconomic, psychographic and behavioral characteristics. In this regard, it was noted that the specialists' concern was especially to research the demographic and behavioral characteristics. Following this analysis, the Romanian consumer is between the ages of 35-45, is a woman rather than a man, with an above-average income and with higher education. He has an active life, he tries to strike a balance between family and professional life, and he takes care of his health. In general, he buys basic products, wholemeal or less processed, usually from hypermarkets/supermarkets and specialized stores. The article ends with highlighting the gaps noted in the research up to this moment and with proposals for future research on this topic

Keywords

green marketing, green consumer profile, organic food, Romanian market

JEL Classification

M31, D12

Introduction

The marketing of the future needs to pay greater attention to research for sustainable consumption, as a result of the consumer's increasing desire for pure, non-counterfeit and sustainable products. These products are designed to be in harmony with nature and are the guarantee for a healthier lifestyle, without forgetting about taking care of the environment.

From a niche market to a mainstream industry, the organic market is constantly growing (Willer and Lernoud, 2019), thus having a significant economic and social impact. However, the consumption of organic products is still at a low level (12.2 euros per capita worldwide, in 2017) (Willer and Lernoud, 2019) with a significant gap between countries.

A decrease in this gap can be achieved through a series of actions pointed toward the potential consumers of organic products. Identifying and understanding the organic consumer's profile represents an essential point in the development of this sector (Toma et al., 2017). Also, knowing the distinct characteristics and dimensions of the consumption segments can help companies to design an appropriate offer and determine the most appropriate way to educate and persuade consumers to change their consumption behavior (Yilmazsoy et al., 2015).

The consumer of organic food

The green consumer is generally defined as one who adopts environmentally friendly behaviors and/or who purchases green products over the standard alternatives (Boztepe, 2012). Green consumers seem to become a driving force behind how companies do business, and they are creating a new economy (Papadopoulos et al., 2010).

The researchers have investigated numerous questions related to the consumption of organic food, including the evaluation of consumers' characteristics and the development of a profile for the typical consumer. The first studies revealed that green consumers are middle-aged women, with a high level of education and economic status above average. Subsequently, the conducted research has not always yielded robustly indicative results, and the results produced in one study have been often contradicted in another (do Paco and Raposo, 2009).

In order to identify and characterize green consumers, the use of demographic and socio-economic criteria is attractive because it provides an easy and useful method for segmenting consumer groups and allows researchers to better understand the profile of a particular group of individuals (Royne et al., 2016). The demographic characteristics most often included in the researches are age, gender, education and income, which are important for understanding and modeling the profile of organic products' consumers (do Paco and Raposo, 2009). Such variables, when significant, provide effective ways for companies to segment the market and capitalize on attitudes and behavior towards organic products (Awad, 2011).

Socio-demographic variables can be used, to some extent, to achieve the profile of consumers, but they are not sufficient to form a precise profile of the green consumer (Diamantopoulos, et al., 2003). Straughan and Roberts (1999) found that psychographic criteria are more effective than demographic criteria for explaining variation in consumers' behavior concerning environmental conservation. Psychographic variables have been highly effective in characterizing the green consumer (Mostafa, 2009; Awad, 2011). Lifestyle, personality and values are most often used to outline the psychological profile of the green consumer.

Often, the psychographic profile is analyzed separately from the behavioral profile (Straughan and Roberts, 1999; do Paço and Raposo, 2009; Banytè et al., 2010), although they are very similar. The particularities of the consumer's behavior are closely related to their psychological characteristics, which has an impact on their purchase reasons and other variables (Banytè et al., 2010). Frequently, the attitudes, knowledge, reasons for buying/not buying, benefits, brand loyalty, etc. are analyzed (do Paço and Raposo, 2009).

Consumption of organic food in Romania

Sales of organic food were €41 million, but this figure is valid for 2016 (Willer and Lernoud, 2019). Unofficial data, based on industry sources, shows that organic food sales in 2018 reached \$65 million (Dobrescu, 2019). In terms of total retail trade, sales of organic products represent about 1% of the total market (Toma, 2015; Dobrescu, 2019).

The level of consumption regarding organic food in Romania is low compared to other European countries. In the EU countries the average consumption of organic food is 67 euros per capita, while at the European level is 47 euros, in 2017. Also, the individual consumption in Europe has reached values over 200 euros/inhabitant in four countries. The average consumption in Romania is two euros per capita (FiBL, 2019; Willer and Lernoud, 2019).

Drăghici et al. (2016) consider that the dynamics of the organic market in Romania is moderate and restricted by economic, social and even by political factors. Thus, the small number of consumers with a strong purchasing and consumption behavior-oriented in this direction and also, the existence of different consumption preferences and habits among them, determine difficulties in shaping a general profile for the consumer of organic products.

Methodology

The objective of this paper is to outline the typical consumer profile of organic food in Romania. The volume of researches in the direction of understanding the green consumer and identifying their characteristics has increased in recent years.

The paper is based on secondary data sources, namely the literature on the buying and consumption behavior. There has been a wide and interdisciplinary search on researches concerning organic farming and the organic food market in Romania, published in the last 15 years. 16 studies were selected based on their relevance to the research topic (see Table no. 1). The analysis focused on defining the characteristics of Romanian green consumer based on demographic, socioeconomic, psychographic and behavioral profiles.

Table no. 1 Research regarding the consumer of organic food in Romania

Reference	Year	Method	Purpose
Stănculescu and Marin	2008	Survey: 1165 respondents from all urban areas	the green typology of the urban population
Dumea	2012	Survey: 110 respondents (convenience sample)	factors that influence purchase decision
Pagalea and Uta	2012	Survey	the importance of lifestyle variables and impact on purchase behavior
Bozga	2015	Survey: 1000 respondents, nationwide for urban areas	buying behavior and consumption of organic products
Petrescu and Petrescu-Mag	2015	Survey: 420 respondents from the NW Region	consumers' perceptions of organic food
Roman, et al.	2015	Survey: 150 respondents	green consumption of consumers
Voicu and Iliescu	2015	Survey: 385 respondents from Bucharest	consumers attitudes concerning organic food
Voinea, et al.	2015	Survey: 62 respondents	consumers' perceptions
Draghici et al.	2016	Survey: 1300 respondents from Bucharest	factors that influence the consumers' behavior
Vietoris et al.	2016	Survey: 350 respondents (several cities)	consumer preference and buying behavior
Oroian et al.	2017	Survey: 540 respondents from the NW Region	consumers' perceptions towards organic food products
Petrescu et al.	2017	Survey: 420 respondents from the NW Region	consumer profile of organic food based on behavioral characteristics
Roșca and Tănase	2017	Secondary data analysis	the profile evolution of the persons with a healthy lifestyle
Sandu	2017	Survey: 182 respondents from Iași city	consumer psychology profile of organic food products
Ceylan et al.	2018	Survey: 53 respondents from Timișoara city	consumer preferences on consumption
Dabija et al.	2018	Survey: 3400 respondents from three regions	'green' loyalty towards retail formats

Source: Developed by the author

Results: Profile of organic food consumer in Romania

Demographic and socio-economic profile

Age. Most studies indicate that people between the ages of 35 - 45 are the most representative for the organic food consumer. Thus, Petrescu and Petrescu-Mag (2015) observed that people between the ages of 36 and 45 have the strongest beliefs regarding the ability of organic food to protect the environment and their health benefits, while the youngest group (18-25 years) has the weakest beliefs about these two benefits. However, other specialists (Draghici et al., 2016) consider from another perspective the degree of involvement of young people. On the one hand, people between the ages of 18 and 24 are more curious and open to trying new things, and on the other hand, they are the most financially constrained, which is the main reason why they are in a percentage high in the non-consumer group.

Gender. Most studies demonstrated that women have a greater predilection for the purchase and the consumption of organic food. Oroian et al. (2017) observed that the group of “environmentally concerned” consumers is made up of the largest number of women, compared to the other two groups resulting from the research carried out. In fact, women are considered the main caretaker of the family, being responsible for food purchases and usually willing to pay more for premium products. Along the same lines, there are also the opinions of Pagalea and Uta (2012), who concluded that women are more likely to buy organic food due to their interest in work, family, and food. Dabija et al. (2018) place these results on the fact that women spend more time shopping and carry out more careful planning compared to men. Also, women pay more attention to certain types of ecological behavior, which means they are more inclined to adopt ecological purchasing behavior (Roman, et al., 2015).

Education. People with higher education are the most likely to buy organic products at least to try them (Pagalea and Uta, 2012). However, due to the fact that they usually have a certain social status, this aspect allows them to consolidate such behavior. The results of a study (Petrescu and Petrescu-Mag, 2015) show that higher-educated subjects perceive organic food as fashionable and, at the same time, have less trust in the environmental benefits of organic food (compared with people with less education). Also, Stănculescu and Marin (2008) found that in the case of the four identified eco-types of consumers, the level of education plays a significant role, as opposed to the gender or age of the individuals.

Income. Regarding the impact of the economic situation on the consumption of organic food, Ceylan et al. (2018) found that there is a considerable effect. Thus, it has been found that with the increase of the level of income, consumers could accept a price up to 10 to 20% higher for organic food, compared to conventional products. This confirms that most consumers would be willing to buy and consume more organic products if their income increased.

Psychographic profile

Psychological factors help to a more efficient segmentation of green consumers (Sandu, 2017), which leads to a more precise definition of their profile. Pagalea and Uta (2012) say that lifestyle impacts significantly the purchase of organic food. However, the psychographic characteristics have not been sufficiently studied in the research conducted in Romania.

Pagalea and Uta (2012) found that work, hobbies, recreation, and entertainment are among their priorities, and community and shopping activities are considered relatively important. Therefore, the green consumer is a dynamic person, focusing on both career and personal life, trying to strike a balance between the two plans. The expressed opinions reveal that a consumer of organic products is a person who places a special emphasis on education and wants to know himself very well but also to understand the world in which he lives.

Roșca and Tănase (2017) have created a profile of people adopting a healthy lifestyle, based on data collected by BRAT. There are people who are future-oriented, work hard to gain a foothold in society, are always looking for new challenges and are optimistic about the future.

The car is part of their life, although it is considered an important source of pollution. These people are keeping up with the technological trends, buying the latest gadgets and any device that makes their life easier. They are informed consumers who do not consider the price an important criterion when choosing products, while the quality is an important feature.

Behavioral profile

Product usage. Most of the studies that investigated the characteristics of the behavior of the Romanian consumer of organic food products included among the variables investigated and the product usage (Pagalea and Uta, 2012; Draghici et al., 2016; Petrescu et al., 2017). Analyzing the mentioned studies, it is noteworthy that a small number of consumers buy with a very high frequency and high organic products, as a rule, most of them are occasional consumers of organic products, who buy products every 2-3 days. The causes of this phenomenon could be the high price and/or the reduced availability. However, it is obvious that these people would like to adopt an ecological lifestyle, but have not yet taken this step (Pagalea and Uta, 2012). In addition, Draghici et al. (2016) pointed out that occasional users seem to be the most receptive to the promotion of organic products at the point of sale, which may indicate that they buy organic products from the impulsion.

Reasons to buy. The still small number of organic products’ consumers from Romania determines a reduced diversity in terms of the purchase reasons that underlie this decision. Thus, consumers are motivated more by obtaining personal benefits, than by the concerns for the welfare of the society and the concern for the environment. In Table no. 2 are presented the reasons that were identified by researchers among Romanian consumers. As we can see, the main reason identified in most of the studies is related to health, which consumers believe they can maintain or regain by consuming organic products.

Table no. 2 Reasons to buy organic food

Reference	Year	Reasons to buy organic food*
Bozga	2015	1. health, 2. superior quality; better taste; 3. do not contain chemicals/hormones/antibiotics/GMO; 4. product safety; quality guarantee; 5. care for the environment;
Voicu and Iliescu	2015	1. tastier products; 2. healthier products; 3. are in trend; 4. protects the environment;
Roman et al.	2015	1. healthy products; 2. reduce long-term expenses; 3. positive impact on the environment; 4. fashion products;
Voinea et al.	2015	1.consumption safety; 2. quality/price ratio; 3. high nutritional value;
Vietoris et al.	2016	1.health care; 2. own health problems; 3.environmental concern; 4. vegetarian diet; 5.randomly;
Oroian et al.	2017	1. natural and sustainable consumption; 2. extrinsic attributes; 3. health; 4. sensory appeal; 5. weight concern; 6.social statute;

Note: *the reasons are placed in the order of the importance assigned by the respondents;

Source: Developed by the author

Benefits. In general, most research has shown that the benefits related to maintaining health and those related to environmental protection are most associated with organic products (Dumea, 2012; Pagalea and Uta, 2012; Draghici, et al., 2016; Oroian, et al., 2017). As a rule, the benefits of organic products are presented in comparison to conventional products. In this regard, some specialists (Petrescu and Petrescu-Mag, 2015) have identified that most consumers consider organic food to be healthier than conventional food (87%) and that they contribute more to environmental protection than conventional food (75%). Also, Voicu and Iliescu (2015) observed that 86% of the consumers in Bucharest, respectively 82.67%,

consider that organic food are "much better" and "the best" in terms of content and, respectively, in terms of taste, compared to conventional food.

Categories of organic food bought/consumed. Table no. 3 presents the main categories of organic food that Romanian consumers declare to buy and/or consume frequently. We note that the results are somehow similar to the analyzed, the main categories mentioned being vegetables and fruits, dairy products and cheeses, eggs, meat, cereals and seeds, but also bakery products. We can consider that due to the high prices specific to organic products, people concerned with the adoption of pro-ecological behavior are trying to purchase from ecological sources especially the basic food products.

Table no. 3 Main categories of organic food bought/consumed

Reference	Year	Categories of organic food*
Voinea et al.	2015	1. fresh fruit; 2. fresh vegetables and cheeses; 3. dairy acid products; 4. legumes and seeds; 5. breakfast cereals
Voicu and Iliescu	2015	1. fruits and/or vegetables; 2. bakery products; 3. milk and/or dairy products; 4. meat and/or meat products; 5. eggs;
Victoris et al.	2016	1. products made from cereals; 2. potatoes; 3. eggs; 4. fresh and processed vegetables; 5. legumes and meat and/or meat products;
Oroian et al.	2017	1. fruits and vegetables; 2. dairy products; 3. meat and meat products; 4. bakery products; 5. sweets;
Petrescu et al.	2017	1. fresh vegetables; 2. fresh fruit; 3. eggs; 4. meat and/or meat products; 5. milk, dairy;

Note: *the first five product categories mentioned in studies are presented;

Source: Developed by the author

Place of purchase. Petrescu et al. (2017) showed that the most common places of purchase for organic food are specialized stores and supermarkets. These results are due to the fact that the certified products are available to a greater extent and diversity in these sales spaces. The same results were obtained by Pagalea and Uta (2012), who mentioned that when they asked the respondents to mention other places, they noticed that consumers are experiencing a major confusion between the certified organic products and the products purchased from the food markets or from domestic producers. Also, Bozga (2015) obtained in his research that a very large percentage of buyers buy "organic" products from the markets, but he states that in the food markets in Romania the certified organic products are almost non-existent.

Conclusions

The organic food market in Romania is still considered a niche market, characterized by low consumption, but increasing from year to year. The identification of the consumer profile of organic food is an essential point in the development of this market. Research in this area can provide an important direction for decision-makers regarding marketing strategies that may prove useful for informing and educating the public, but also for several initiatives regarding product packaging, pricing, choice of methods suitable for distribution and others.

The research carried out on the Romanian market focused mainly on the definition of the consumer based on demographic, socio-economic and behavioral criteria, and less on the identification of specific psychographic characteristics. Most studies are quantitative research, having as a research method the survey.

The Romanian consumer is between 35-45 years old, but there is a high potential among younger consumers, especially those who already have a family and/or are concerned about the health. The green consumer is rather a woman, with above-average income and with higher education. This type of consumer is an active and dynamic person, trying to achieve a

balance between family and professional life. He is a person concerned with physical and mental development, who cares about his health and those close to him.

This study wants to affirm the need for further research to better understand the organic consumer in Romania. The reduced number of qualitative research carried out is also observed regarding the type of information available. Understanding the buying and consumption behavior, some attitudes, motivations and deep feelings of these consumers, are still topics that are not addressed by the specialists in the field. Also, establishing the importance for consumers regarding the various behavioral or psychological variables, such as consumers' opinions and beliefs, lifestyle, value, etc., may represent future research directions.

The lack of representative research carried out at the national level, leads to difficulties in shaping a representative profile for the consumer of organic products in Romania. Besides, the lack of investigation of all the mentioned criteria in large research leads to the same problem. These two reported research goals could also be exploited in future studies.

Finally, it is important to mention the limitations of this analysis. This secondary data research did not include all the studies carried out on the organic food market that address the topic of the organic consumer. The selection of the studies was made based on subjective criteria, but taking into account the relevance in relation to the studied subject. Also, not all the variables specific to the three categories of criteria mentioned in the literature review were analyzed.

Acknowledgement

This paper was co-financed by The Bucharest University of Economic Studies during the PhD program.

References

- Awad, T. A., 2011. Environmental segmentation alternatives: buyers' profiles and implications. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 2(1), pp.55-73.
- Banytė, J., Brazionienė, L. and Gadeikienė, A., 2010. Investigation of green consumer profile: a case of Lithuanian market of eco-friendly food products. *Ekonomika ir vadyba*, 15, pp.374-383.
- Bozga, N. A., 2015. Consumers behavior features upon the organic products in Romania. *International Conference on Marketing and Business Development Journal*, 1(1), pp.209-217.
- Boztepe, A., 2012. Green marketing and its impact on consumer buying behavior. *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, 5(1), pp.5-21.
- Ceylan, R. F. et al., 2018. Consumer preferences of organic products for Romania. *International Journal of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences*, 2(2), pp.47-55.
- Dabija, D.C., Bejan, B.M. and Grant, D.B., 2018. The impact of consumer green behaviour on green loyalty among retail formats: A Romanian case study. *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 26(3), pp.173-185.
- Diamantopoulos, A., Schlegelmilch, B.B., Sinkovics, R.R. and Bohlen, G.M., 2003. Can socio-demographics still play a role in profiling green consumers? A review of the evidence and an empirical investigation. *Journal of Business Research*, 56(6), pp.465-480.
- do Paco, A. and Raposo, M., 2009. "Green" segmentation: an application to the Portuguese. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 27(3), pp.364-379.
- Drăghici, M.C., Popa, E.E., Popa, M.E. and Miteluț, A.C., 2016. Romanian Organic Food – Study On Consumer Behaviour. *Journal of EcoAgriTourism*, 12(2), pp.160-167.
- Dumea, A.C., 2012. Factors influencing consumption of organic food in Romania. *The USV Annals of Economics and Public Administration*, 12(15), pp.107-113.
- FiBL, 2019. *Organic per capita consumption [€/person] in Europe 2017*, [online] Available at: <<https://statistics.fibl.org/europe/retail-sales-europe.html>> [Accessed at 10 January 2020].

- Mostafa, M., 2009. Shades of green: A psychographic segmentation of the green consumer in Kuwait using self-organizing maps. *Expert Systems with Applications*, 36, pp.11030-38.
- Oroian, C., Safirescu, C., Harun, R., Chiciudean, G., Arion, F., Muresan, I. and Bordeanu, B., 2017. Consumers' Attitudes towards Organic Products and Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Romania. *Sustainability*, 9(9), Article Number: 1559.
- Pagalea, A. and Uta, D.S.V., 2012. Romanian consumer lifestyle and attitude towards bio products purchase. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 62, pp.1308-1312.
- Papadopoulos, I., Karagouni, G., Trigkas, M. and Platogianni, E., 2010. Green marketing: The case of Greece in certified and sustainably managed timber products. *EuroMed Journal of Business*, 5(2), pp.166-190.
- Petrescu, D.C., Petrescu-Mag, R.M., Burny, P. and Azadi, H., 2017. A new wave in Romania: organic food. Consumers' motivations, perceptions, and habits. *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, 41(1), pp.46-75.
- Petrescu, D. and Petrescu-Mag, R.M., 2015. Organic food perception: fad, or healthy and environmentally friendly? A case on Romanian consumers. *Sustainability*, 7(9), pp.12017-31.
- Roman, T., Bostan, I., Manolică, A. and Mitrica, I., 2015. Profile of green consumers in Romania in light of sustainability challenges and opportunities. *Sustainability*, 7(6), pp.6394-411.
- Roșca, M.I. and Tănase, L.D., 2017. Profile Evolution Analysis of the Persons with a Healthy Lifestyle. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management*, 1(1), pp.152-163.
- Royne, M. B. et al., 2016. From thinking green to buying green: consumer motivation makes the difference. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 37(3), pp.37-43.
- Sandu, R.M., 2017. *Profilul psihografic al consumatorului român de produse ecologice alimentare*. PhD. Universitatea „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Iași.
- Stănculescu, M.S. and Marin, M., 2008. *Barometrul verde. Raport de cercetare*. București: Institutul de Cercetare a Calității Vieții, Academia Română.
- Straughan, R.D. and Roberts, J.A., 1999. Environmental segmentation alternatives: a look at green consumer behavior in the new millennium. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 16(6), pp.558-575.
- Toma, M., Bobe, M. and Procopie, R., 2017. Organic vs Conventional Food. A Sustainable Consumption Approach. In: *BASIQ International Conference: New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption*. Graz, Austria, 31 May - 3 June 2017. București: ASE.
- Toma, M.A., 2015. Romania's Organic Food Market: The Role of Information in an Emerging Sector. *International Journal of Economic Practices and Theories*, 5(3), pp.296-301.
- Vietoris, V. et al., 2016. Analysis of consumer preferences at organic food purchase in Romania. *Polish journal of food and nutrition sciences*, 66(2), pp.139-146.
- Voicu, M.C. and Iliescu, E.M., 2015. Consumer's Attitude Concerning Organic Foods. *National Strategies Observer*, 3(2), pp.139-149.
- Voinea, L., Popescu, D.V. and Negrea, M.T., 2015. Bune practici în educarea și informarea noii generații de consumatori privind produsele alimentare ecologice. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 17(38), pp.357-375.
- Yilmazsoy, B., Schmidbauer, H. and Rösch, A., 2015. Green segmentation: cross-national study. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 33(7), pp.981-1003.