

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD ATTRIBUTES AND MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS TO PURCHASE LOCAL PRODUCTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The importance of food attributes and motivational factors in the purchasing decision represents a particularly significant aspect in the current context. This theme reflects the growing interest in locally sourced food products and their influence on consumer preferences and choices. Studying these aspects is becoming increasingly important to better understand consumer buying behaviour and to develop effective marketing and promotion strategies for local products. The purpose of this research is to explore the significance of various food attributes and motivational factors that influence the purchasing decisions of Romanian consumers regarding local food products. By examining the key factors that drive consumers to choose locally sourced products, we can gather valuable information about their preferences, attitudes, and behaviours. Through comprehensive research in these areas, we can gain a better understanding of the dynamics of the local food market in Romania. This knowledge can be invaluable for food producers, marketers, decision-makers, and consumers alike. It can contribute to supporting the growth of the local food sector, promoting sustainable and healthy eating habits, and contributing to the overall well-being of consumers and the Romanian agricultural industry. Culture, through traditions, consumption habits, values, and norms, significantly influences purchasing and food consumption behaviour. A nation's culture refers to behavioural patterns, economic and social ideas and activities of individuals and remains stable in the short and medium term while changing slowly in the long term. Cultural changes from one generation to another are almost imperceptible. Consumption habits are influenced by a nation's cultural norms, which are passed down vertically from one generation to the next. Thus, we can appreciate that consumption habits change very slowly over time. Beyond the strong traditional nature of buying and food consumption behaviour, the influence of culture in shaping this behaviour varies in intensity depending on the age and even the living environment of individuals. In the era where "globalization of food" has become a fundamental component of the overall globalization process, a new concept, "locavorism," seeks to mitigate the wave of importing food from distant lands and countries.

Key words: motivational factors, products, premises, attributes, food, purchase decision

A consumer's decision to buy or not to buy a particular food product, especially a local one, is the result of a broad process that encompasses all the acts preceding and following the moment of purchase. It's a thinking process with numerous branches and feedback loops that experts have attempted to analyse by breaking it down into stages (Scheibehenne A. *et al*, 2007).

Across the world, more and more people are making efforts to eat healthier, and one way they do this is by participating in the locavore movement. The locavore movement involves consuming food that is both produced and sold locally. Locavores choose to consume food from their own community rather than from other regions or nations. Eating locally-sourced food offers significant benefits for both the environment and the health of the community's residents, which

are two critical factors for a functional community. If a community were to embrace the locavore movement, it would improve the economy and enhance nutrition and health.

The concept of "locavore" was founded in 2005 by Jessica Prentice, a student from San Francisco, who, along with a few colleagues, decided to consume only food produced locally for ecological reasons. They were motivated by the fact that food transported long distances generates significant pollution that affects the environment. This concept formed the basis of the "Locavore Movement," defined in the book "Freakonomics" (Spiller K., 2012,) as "encouraging people to consume locally produced food." A locavore is someone who primarily consumes food sourced from the area where they live. The concept initially defined a radius of 150-160 kilometres,

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considering that transporting food within this distance doesn't produce significant environmental externalities. Locavores encourage local consumers to obtain their food from local markets, fairs, or nearby farms. The Locavore Movement has rapidly spread from the USA to Canada, France, and many other countries. In Romania, this movement is known primarily at a conceptual level, and there are no declared adherents as of yet, although, in some opinions, subsistence agriculture, which is widely practiced in our country, is a form of locavorism. (Ardabili F.S., 2011). Romanian locavorism can develop as a new form of food culture, through a combination of ecological and patriotic efforts, with the slogan "Locavores eat local" potentially resonating with local communities.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methodological and scientific support in this paper was based on a series of direct and indirect documentation such as: observation, analysis (qualitative, quantitative, and historical), synthesis, comparison, systemic, monographic, statistical, figures and tables in the full and complex exposure and rendering of phenomena and economic processes studied. The significance of our work lies in the fact that we studied the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors of young consumers. We conducted a quantitative survey of consumers using a hybrid data collection method on a sample of 122 respondents aged 18 to 65. The questionnaire focused on product characteristics, personal requirements or needs, intrinsic and extrinsic motivational elements, and demographic characteristics. Our study results provide strong evidence that the attributes associated with local products include, but are not limited to, the following: quality, freshness, support for local agriculture, food safety, nutritional value, reliability, safety, evoking domestic aromas, naturalness, being healthy, and ecological considerations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This article is structured as follows. The next section investigates the definitions of local foods, the characteristics of these foods, and previous findings from Romanian research. It also examines the motivations that drive consumers to purchase local products. Our objectives were as follows:

- What motivates young people to purchase local food products?
- Can these motivational factors distinguish young consumers and categorize them into identifiable consumer groups? What are the

distinctive motivational characteristics of each segment?

- Are there variations in the consumption behaviour of local foods among these different consumer groups?
- Which socioeconomic and demographic factors are associated with specific consumer segments? Local foods do not have a concrete definition. According to the 2008 Farm Bill, foods can be considered "local" if they are within 400 kilometres of their place of origin or in the same state in which they were produced. Although this definition may seem limited, consumers' qualitative analysis of the meaning of "local food" reveals a wide range of definitions, from food produced in a neighbor's garden to food produced in the United States. Ambiguity in the definition of local foods goes beyond the distance from production to consumption. Qualitative research by Zepeda and Leviten-Reid (2004) revealed that consumers define "local food" based on the health benefits it brings, environmental impact, and support for local farmers. (Glanz K. *et al*, 1998).

The importance of food attributes and motivational factors in the decision-making process regarding the purchase of local products in Romania is a critical subject worthy of in-depth examination. This topic explores the dynamics that guide consumers in their choices and highlights the key factors that play crucial roles in the selection of locally sourced products. Let's explore this in more detail:

1. **Quality and Freshness:** One of the key aspects of food products that influence buying decisions is the quality and freshness of local products.
2. **Cultural and Traditional Significance:** Local products often carry cultural and traditional significance. They are considered a reflection of the country's culinary heritage and can evoke a sense of nostalgia, reminding consumers of family traditions and local customs.
3. **Sustainability and Environmental Considerations:** Many consumers in Romania, like elsewhere, are increasingly aware of their impact on the environment. Purchasing local products is often viewed as a more sustainable option, as it reduces the carbon footprint associated with long-distance transportation and supports local farming practices.
4. **Support for Local Communities:** Motivational factors often include the desire to support local economies and communities.

5. **Price and Accessibility:** While quality and local support are essential aspects, the price and accessibility of local products are also significant factors in buying decisions.
6. **Marketing and Branding:** Effective marketing strategies and branding can significantly influence consumer decisions.
7. **Access and Availability:** The accessibility and availability of local products in various regions of Romania can significantly affect consumer choices. The easier it is to access these products, the more likely consumers are to choose them.
8. **Health and Well-being:** Perceived health benefits of local products can be a strong

motivator, especially in a society where healthy eating is becoming a growing concern. This allows for the development of strategies to promote and strengthen the local food market, benefiting the economy, the environment, and overall consumer satisfaction. (Scheibehenne A. *et al*, 2007).

9. The perception of behavioural control differs from the locus of control in that it can vary depending on situations and actions rather than remaining stable across different contexts and forms of action. *Figure 1* represents the basic model of the buying decision.

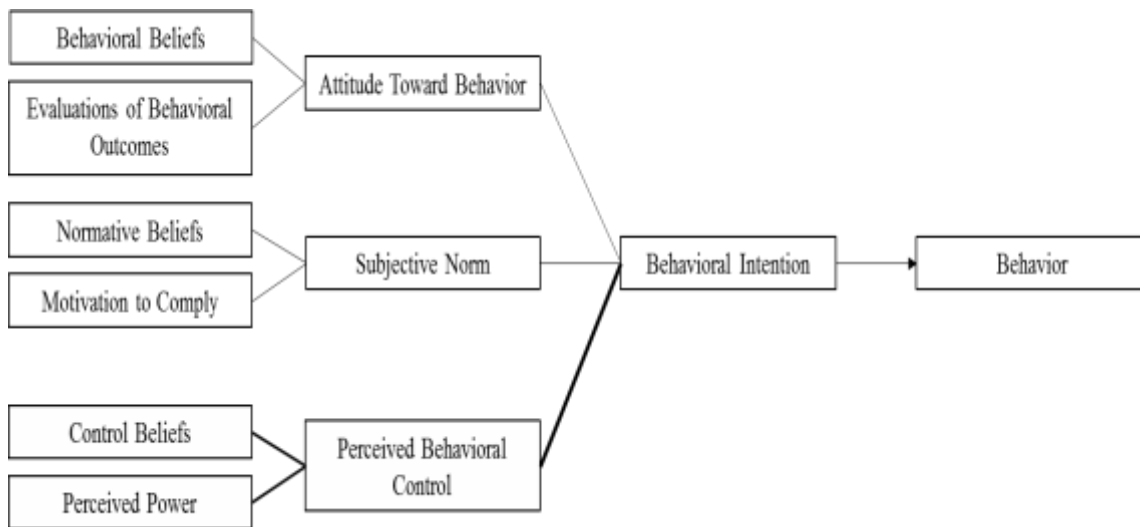


Figure 1 **The basic model of the purchase decision**

Source: European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN, Quarterly Report December 2007. http://www.sd-network.eu/?k=quarterly%20reports&report_id=7)

The cultural and traditional significance of local products in Romania is profound and plays a vital role in promoting the country's cultural identity and diversity. Both consumers and producers value these aspects and consider them essential in preserving and promoting Romania's cultural heritage. (Glanz K. *et al*, 1998).

Price and accessibility are two important factors in the decision to purchase local products in Romania. These factors can significantly influence consumer preferences and the success of the local products market. Let's explore these aspects in detail:

1. **Price:** Price is a key factor in the purchasing decisions of most consumers. Local products may be perceived as more expensive than imported alternatives or mass-produced items. However, many consumers are willing to pay a higher price for local products because they associate them with quality, freshness, and support for the local community.

2. **Quality and Value:** Price can be evaluated in the context of quality and value. Consumers may be willing to pay more for local products because they perceive them to offer superior quality, freshness, and nutritional value. Thus, price can be a strong motivator when correlated with quality. (Steptoe A. *et al*, 1995).
3. **Cost Awareness and Budget:** For some consumers, price remains a major factor in their purchasing decisions. They may be constrained by a tight budget and may choose local products only if the price is competitive compared to available alternatives.
4. **Promotions and Discounts:** Promotions, discounts, and special offers can influence the purchase of local products.
5. **Distribution and Logistics:** The accessibility of local products in various regions of Romania can significantly affect consumer choices. If local products are only available in certain

geographic areas, this can limit access for consumers in other regions.

6. Market Availability: Local products need to be widely available to meet consumer demands. Consistent market availability can build trust and loyalty towards local products.
7. Efficient Transportation and Logistics: Transportation costs can impact the price of local products. To maintain competitive prices, local producers may need efficient logistics solutions that minimize transportation costs.
8. Consumer Awareness: Consumer education and awareness of the benefits of local products can influence their understanding of the quality-to-price ratio and stimulate demand for these products.

In conclusion, price and accessibility are important factors that can influence purchasing

decisions for local products in Romania. A balanced approach that considers quality, value, and consumer needs is essential to ensure the success of the local products market and to satisfy the diverse requirements of consumers. *table 1.*

The adoption of the locavore movement in a community can bring about a better economic situation. Instead of going to the nearest supermarket, where "money leaves the community with every transaction," spending money at local farmers' markets allows profits to stay within the community (Scheibehenne A. *et al*, 2007). Allowing more profits to be reinvested in the community will benefit small farms, creating more local jobs that will enable the economy to grow and prosper.(Hall C.M., Sharples L., 2008).

Table 1

Intrinsic and extrinsic factors

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Social qualities and benefits | Intrinsic (quality, appearance, freshness, taste, healthy, safety and being associated with selfish motivations or self-interest) | Extrinsic (savings, preserving farmland, increasing food security with altruistic motivations, or contributing to the "greater good.") |
| Motivational factors | The desire to recreate nostalgic moments, full of shopping, fun and memories of the past, nostalgia for shopping, | Support for local farmers, producers and retailers |
| | health consciousness, quality of life and well-being values and emotional motivations | Environmental and social motivation |
| | Hedonic: culinary tourism, association and food novelty, | Environmental concerns |
| | Health consciousness egg nutritional value | Animal welfare, environmental sustainability, supporting rural communities, animal welfare |
| | The taste, freshness, association and novelty of food tourism products as purely hedonic consumption experiences, effective ways to create hedonistic and memorable experiences | Community-oriented motivations and motivations for participating in a community-supported agriculture scheme |
| | An experience that brings intrinsic reward or satisfaction without the need for external incentives. | Local heritage |

Sources: Own interpretation

The solution for the factorial analysis consisted of three separate factors that partially met the Kaiser-Guttman Rule for retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (KMO=0.86), explaining 75.6% of the total variance of the model. The first factor in this solution included three items and individually explained 52.9% of the model's variance (eigenvalue=4.23). This factor was labeled "Health, Natural, and Nutrition." The second factor included three items and individually explained 12.6% of the model's variance (eigenvalue=1.00) and was labeled "Fresh, Taste, Appearance." The third factor included two items and individually explained 10.1% of the model's variance (eigenvalue=0.81). This third factor had a cross-loading. "Safer" had a factor loading of 0.51 for factor one "Health, Natural, and Nutrition" as well as for factor three. A low eigenvalue accompanied

by cross-loading prompted a second factor analysis of Consumption with a 2-factor solution instead of the current 3-factor solution. This second analysis had a lower explanation of the total variance, and the 2-factor solution was conceptually and logically unclear in terms of factor labels. Keeping the 3-factor solution, it was decided that "Safer" refers more to confidence in knowing how food is produced, as suggested by factor three, than to how healthy, natural, or nutritious local food is, as suggested for factor one (Risku-Norja and Muukka, 2013). The third factor was labeled "Safety and Trust."

Table 2 summarizes the three factor solutions for participant attitudes.

Table 2

Three factor solutions for participant attitudes

| Nr .crt | Community - Variable | Safety and Trust | Fresh, Taste, and Look | Health, Natural, and Nutrition |
|---------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | More healthful | 0.16 | 0.32 | 0.88 |
| 2 | More natural | 0.19 | 0.17 | 0.93 |
| 3 | More nutritious | 0.13 | 0.29 | 0.24 |
| 4 | More fresh | 0.24 | 0.82 | 0.20 |
| 5 | Better tasting | 0.13 | 0.94 | 0.29 |
| 6 | Better looking | 0.08 | 0.78 | 0.56 |
| 7 | Safer | 0.56 | 0.48 | 0.19 |
| 9 | More trustful | 0.93 | 0.17 | 0.88 |
| 10 | Eigen value | 4.240 | 1 | 0.81 |
| | % var/cov exp. | 52.9% | 12.6 | |

Attitudes

The solution for the Community of Factorial Analysis consisted of two factors that met the Kaiser-Guttman Rule for retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (KMO=0.86), explaining 75.2% of the total variance of the model. The first factor in this solution included four items and individually explained 61.1% of the model's variance (eigenvalue=4.28). This factor was labelled "Community - Social Well-being." The second factor included three items and individually explained 14.1% of the model's variance

(Eigenvalue=0.99) and was labeled "Community - Economic Well-being."

The solution for the Environment/Sustainability of Factorial Analysis consisted of a single factor that met the Kaiser-Guttman Rule for retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (KMO=0.85), explaining 65.3% of the total variance of the model. This factor included six items and was labelled "Environment" (eigenvalue=3.92).

Table 3

Factor solutions for environment participant attitude

| Nr .crt | Environment -Variable | Social Wellbeing | Economic Wellbeing |
|---------|---|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | More money stays in my community | 0.24 | 0.92 |
| 2 | A more economically viable community | 0.36 | 0.92 |
| 3 | Stimulating rural employment | 0.25 | 0.90 |
| 4 | Providing a fair income for the farmer/producer | 0.75 | 0.51 |
| 5 | Establishing relationships with farmers/producers who provide my food | 0.95 | 0.39 |
| 6 | Supporting economically sustainable farming practice | 0.93 | 0.35 |
| 7 | Supporting socially sustainable farming practices | 0.99 | 0.17 |
| 8 | Eigen value | 4.28 | 0.99 |
| | % var/cov exp. | 61.1% | 14.1% |
| | KMO=0.85 | Total % var exp.=65.3% | |

Table 4

Factor solutions for sustainable farming practices

| Nr .crt | Sustainable farming practices -Variable | Environment |
|---------|---|-------------|
| 1 | Promoting greater biodiversity | 0.74 |
| 2 | Production practices that are better for the environment | 0.86 |
| 3 | Food less likely to be treated with chemicals or contain residues from pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers | 0.72 |
| 4 | Supporting environmentally sustainable farming practices | 0.91 |
| 5 | Support animal health and welfare | 0.84 |
| 6 | Improving soil and water quality | 0.84 |
| 7 | Eigen value | 3.92 |
| | % var/cov exp. | 65.3% |

Subjective Norms

The Influence EFA solution consisted of three factors that partially met the Kaiser-Guttman Rule to retain factors with Eigen values over 1 (KMO=0.73) accounting for 67.0% of the total model variance explained. The first factor of this solution consisted of four items and individually accounted for 35.8% of the variance in the model (Eigen value=2.51). This factor was labelled 'Others.' The second factor consisted of two items and individually accounted for 18.9% of the variance in the model (Eigen value=1.32). This factor was labelled 'Parent(s) and Kid(s).' The third factor solution consisted of one item and accounted for 12.3% of the variance in the model (Eigen value=0.86). Concern with an Eigen value under 1 prompted a second factor analysis of influence with a 2-factor solution rather than the current 3-factor solution. The 2-factor solutions of influence had lower total model variance explained (54.7%) as well as a cross-loading on item 'My children.' A 3-factor solution was retained for this analysis. This factor was labelled 'Partner or Spouse.'

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the cultural and traditional significance of local products in Romania holds a profound importance, serving as a key element in preserving and promoting the country's rich cultural heritage and diversity. Both consumers and producers recognize and value these aspects, contributing to the preservation of Romania's cultural identity.

Price and accessibility emerge as critical factors shaping consumer preferences and the success of the local products market. Price considerations are complex, involving perceptions of quality, freshness, and support for the local community. Many consumers are willing to pay a premium for local products due to their association with superior quality and a commitment to community support.

The interplay of quality, value, and consumer needs is vital in influencing purchasing decisions. While some consumers prioritize cost and budget constraints, others may be motivated by promotions, discounts, and special offers. Market availability, efficient logistics, and consumer

awareness further impact the success of local products.

The adoption of the locavore movement in Romania has the potential to bolster the local economy by keeping profits within the community.

By choosing local products over mass-produced alternatives, consumers contribute to reinvesting profits locally, fostering economic growth, and creating more jobs.

In essence, a balanced and comprehensive approach that considers various factors such as price, accessibility, quality, and consumer awareness is crucial for ensuring the sustained success of the local products market in Romania. This approach not only supports local traditions but also contributes to economic development and community prosperity.

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