

## ASPECTS REGARDING DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF ECOLOGICAL PRODUCTS

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### Abstract

Climate change, water and air pollution, global warming, the decline of fauna and flora, eutrophication, correlated with the demands of the modern consumer, led to the formation of a new, much more complex approach regarding the sector of ecological products and its main determinants. The purpose of this paper is to identify and analyze the factors that can influence the decision to buy organic products by consumers. In addition, this study provides recommendations that can be considered by consumers when increasing and reinforcing green behavior towards green products. The objectives of the study aim to evaluate the influence of different types of variables (related to person, environment, product and reference group) on the decision to purchase organic products. One of the concepts proposed in the management of environmental problems by involving consumer participation is sustainable consumption. The recommendations are hereby derived from the relevant academic research, theories and results of this research. Both purchasing and consumption behavior can be influenced by certain information received from internal or external sources manifested in the form of stimuli. Thus, the consumer becomes aware of the emergence of a need suggested by different internal stimuli, such as: hunger or thirst, stimuli that, at a given moment, reach a high enough level to become impulses. Knowing these ratios allows the anticipation of future market reactions, reactions that are difficult to predict without a full understanding of the economic and psychological processes underlying consumer behavior.

**Keywords:** analyze, determinants, consumer, behavior, ecological

In today's context, the ECO concept has become a "modus vivendi", so almost no one can afford to be ignorant of it. The increasingly frequent natural disasters, excessive pollution, global warming or unhealthy food are just as many opportunities to bring the "need to be eco" to the fore. We are overwhelmed by the ECO concept throughout mass media or by governmental and non-governmental organizations. In our country, full awareness for the need of living in harmony with the environment intensified the interest for Ecology due to the new perspectives which occurred at the start of the ninth decade of the last century that constantly developed, so that nowadays Ecology is no longer seen as "the snobs prerogative", but as an independent science, with a remarkable impact over people (in Western Europe, the concern for Ecology rooted immediately after the end of The Second World War). Various changes constantly occurring in the environment have a significant impact on changes in consumer attitudes and behavior both in the market and in other social spheres. Consumers continue to take action under the influence of

several factors. Some are loyal to a certain brand-product, others more or less consciously choose products that appeal to their beliefs, and others are ready to pay more for no particular reason. It is not clear exactly what causes people to engage in certain purchasing and consumption behaviors. According to Kaufman (1995), consumer behavior includes any human behavior that takes place at home, in a store or even on the street: where people think about buying, or using the products they buy.

Consumer behavior researchers, representing various scientific disciplines, deal with various aspects of these behaviors, from the decision-making process to consumer perception, the impact of different factors on purchase decisions or, finally, consumer reactions to a given product. In recent years, the concept of sustainable consumption has been of particular importance, which is based on: planning, know-how, ecology, ethics and local awareness. Dąbrowska and co-authors (Dąbrowska A. *et al*, 2015) identified consumer attitudes towards sustainable consumption in their work.

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## MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the research process, traditional research methods and techniques were also used: the analysis of scientific literature, the analysis of statistical data, the use of databases, surveys, measurement techniques used in marketing research (the semantic differential, the Likert scale, the correlation method ranks, Fishbein-Rosenberg model etc.). Statistical and graphic analysis methods will be used for data processing.

The informational basis of the thesis is the scientific and methodological literature in the researched field, some legislative and normative acts, data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania, as well as the results of own investigations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The consumption decision differs depending on the type of purchase decision. The way in which the purchase decision-making process is carried out induces certain behaviour of the client determined by the individual's temperament and cognitive abilities.

The buying behaviour can be: usual, complex, oriented towards the reduction of inconsistencies, oriented towards assortment variety. Thus, we consider that mode I induces a behavior aimed at reducing inconsistencies, which has become in the current conditions of economic type. If the purchase decision-making process takes place in the second way, the induced behaviour can be habitual, or oriented towards assortment variety. The third way of carrying out the decision-making process induces a complex behavior.

Perception is a mental process by which a person selects data or information from the environment, organizes it and then extracts the meaning from it. Perception is an attitudinal measure of how appropriate a particular distribution channel is for purchasing green products.

The biggest challenge facing companies today is holding and growing their market share and value. This is always a tiring exercise and one of the tools for it is represented by marketing. There is no specific rule of the game available for using these marketing tools. The reason is: each promotional tool has its own characteristics. According to the latest data provided by FIBL-IFOAM, worldwide, there are 160 countries practicing certified organic agriculture. Also, 37 million hectares of land (0.85% of agricultural land) were certified organic at the end of 2018 (Helga Willer, et all, 2023). Since the introduction of the concept and its promotion, most authors in the literature have tried to demonstrate that sustainable development may or may not be achieved, considering different approaches and visions (Sharachchandra M. L., 1991)

- the concepts of strategies for environmental sustainability, consumption and sustainable social and cultural development. These scholarly investigations delve into diverse perspectives, approaches, and visions, exploring the intricate interplay of factors that either facilitate or hinder the realization of sustainable development goals. The discourse surrounding sustainable development has evolved into a dynamic dialogue, encompassing a spectrum of viewpoints that analyze, critique, and propose strategies to navigate the complexities inherent in the pursuit of sustainability.

The concept of "sustainable development and consumption" is believed to have gained global recognition with its introduction around the year 1980. This pivotal moment marked the emergence of a discourse that aimed to reconcile economic progress with environmental preservation and social equity. The pre-eminent continents, in terms of agricultural areas cultivated in the ecological system, are Oceania (over 12,100,000 ha), Europe (over 10 million ha) and Latin America (table 1.).

Table 1

**Certified ecological agricultural lands by continent (2016-2018)**

Continent	Total ecologically certified area (ha)			Percentage of total agricultural area (%)
	2016	2017	2018	
Africa	486674	880898	1075830	2,90
Asia	2678716	3293945	2778291	7,50
Europe	6669468	8176075	10002087	27,00
Latin America	5072158	8065890	8389459	22,65
North America	2219643	2577575	2652624	7,16
Oceania	11811868	12140107	12144984	32,79
TOTAL	28938527	35134490	37041005	100,00

Sources: <https://www.fibl.org/en/shop-en/1254-organic-world-2023>

Table 2 presents the situation of the first ten countries whose activity regarding ecological agriculture is important, analysing the following

indicators: the average area of a farm, the percentage of the area.

Table 2

The situation of ecological farming in the world (top ten countries) 2020

Nr. crt.	Country	Average farm area (thousands ha)	Eologically managed area from the total agricultural area (%)	Number of farms
0	1	2	3	4
1	Australia	12020	2,8	1832
2	Argentine	4010	3,0	1824
3	China	1850	0,3	1560
4	USA	1820	0,6	8035
5	Brazil	1770	0,7	14003
6	Spain	1130	4,5	21291
7	India	1020	0,6	340000
8	Italy	1000	7,9	44371
9	Uruguay	930	6,3	46230
10	Germany	910	5,4	17856

Sources: <https://www.fibl.org/en/shop-en/1254-organic-world-2023>

If we refer to the European continent, vegetable areas must be studied taking into account a number of demographic factors. For example, according to Eurostat, the population of the 27 EU member states had reached, on 01.01.2019, the threshold of 502.5 million, compared to 501.1 million as of 01.01.2018. Substantial natural increases were recorded in Ireland, Cyprus, France, Luxembourg and Great Britain. This denotes an increasing demographic trend, despite the period of

acute uncertainty that Europe and the entire world map is going through (it is known that, as a rule, in periods of crisis, natural growth registers negative values).

At the level of 2019, the situation of organically cultivated areas in each European country, expressed in ha, as well as the percentage level occupied by organic agriculture from the total agricultural area, was as shown in figure 1.



Figure 1 The ecological cultivated areas in Europe, 2019 (Source: The European market for organic food at Biofach. <https://www.organic-world.net/index.html>)

The increase in cultivated areas in the ecological system is directly proportional to the demands of consumers in countries with a tradition in this sense (Munteanu and Rominger, 2001). Moreover, for better openness and to facilitate

collaboration between producers and consumers, associations or cooperatives have been created in many states. The benefits of such collaborations are on both sides: the group of buyers benefits from better prices considering the large quantity of

goods purchased (eliminating on this occasion also the intermediaries from the commercial flow), and the producer has the guarantee of the utilization of the entire goods. An analysis of the evolution of certified areas in Romanian organic agriculture in the last decade highlights the dynamism of this sector. Both the total area and the area cultivated

with vegetables experienced an upward trend during these years.

Thus, at the level of 2001, the total ecologically certified area was 28,800 ha, so that in 2019 this would be approximately 568,000 hectares (*table 3*). Regarding the areas cultivated with organic vegetables, they increased from 100 ha in 2001 to 1087 ha in 2019.

Table 3

**The evolution of ecological certified areas in Romania (2001-2019)**

Specifications	UM	Accomplished					
		2001	2003	2016	2007	2017	2019
Total area	ha	28.800	57.200	110.400	190129	221411	567996,68
from which:	ha	8.000	16.000	22.100	32222	51273	99434,17
Cereals	ha	14.000	24.000	42.300	57600	46006	78197,51
Fodder crops	ha	6.300	15.600	22.614	26491	34658	52314
and meadows	ha	100	200	440	310	523	1087
Oleaginous and proteinaceous	ha	-	100	432	650	1518	4166,62
Vegetables	ha	100	400	17.630	58728	81279	325706
Trees, vines	ha	300	900	4.884	14128	6154	12345

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (M.A.D.R.)

Long time ago, Shamdasani, ChonLin and Richmond (1993), while describing the profile and purchase decision of consumers of green products, found that they showed favorable attitudes towards the environment, are internally controlled, open-minded, socially integrated and cosmopolitan. Other studies that have attempted to examine the factors that determine the decision to purchase organic products are briefly touched upon below:

- Chan's (2001) study demonstrated that Chinese adult consumers' green shopping attitude and purchase intention will be greatly influenced by human-nature orientation, degree of

collectivism, green affect, and green knowledge.

- Paço *et al*'s study (2009) confirmed that there was a relationship between environmental values, attitudes and behaviors and that these can also be related to green consumer behavior.
- Certain studies (Dabroska A., 2015) found that there is a link between motivational factors and pro-environmental purchasing decision.

Table 4

**Food ratio for human consumption in Romania (2022)**

No. crt.	Name of food	Kg / inhabitant / year
1.	Meat and meat products	47,5
2.	Fish and fish products	5,0
3.	Milk and dairy products (excluding butter)	96,0
4.	Eggs - pcs.	226,0
5.	Butter	2,0
6.	Other fats	7,5
7.	Cereals in flour equivalent, of which:	131,5
8.	Corn	2,0
9.	Bread	11,5
10.	Beans	20,0
11.	Oil, of which:	67,0
12.	Sunflower	132,0

- Wu and Chen (2014) considered that the availability of time and money can influence the green consumption decision, and consumers, when they have confidence in their capabilities, are more likely to be involved in green consumption.

Frequently and especially in the case of durable and high value goods, family members, in the process of making the purchase decision, can fulfill the following roles:

- initiator (the person who triggers the purchase idea);
- influencer (the person who can influence, through experiences and the authority he enjoys the evaluation of alternatives);
- decision maker (the person who makes the final purchase decision);
- buyer (the person who directly carries out the respective transaction);
- user (the person who owns or uses the product).

Several authors define consumer behavior as a result of the interaction of some psychological and elementary processes:

- perception – knowledge of the world with the help of the senses, has two dimensions:
- physics (what we feel);
- cognitive (what we see, hear).

- learning or information – the ability of the brain to accumulate knowledge, information;
- the attitude – the totality or syndrome of reactions that appears in individuals in connection with the object of the attitude;
- affective – mood towards a product or service (positive, negative, neutral).

Most of the aspects of consumer behavior mentioned above belong to a "classical" conception. The profound transformations experienced by markets, consumers, marketing and advertising theories have led to the emergence of new approaches and theories on consumer behavior.

Thus, a first significant trend is the attempt to "unify" the great theories of consumer behavior into one, making considerable efforts in the direction of an "integrated theory of consumer behavior".

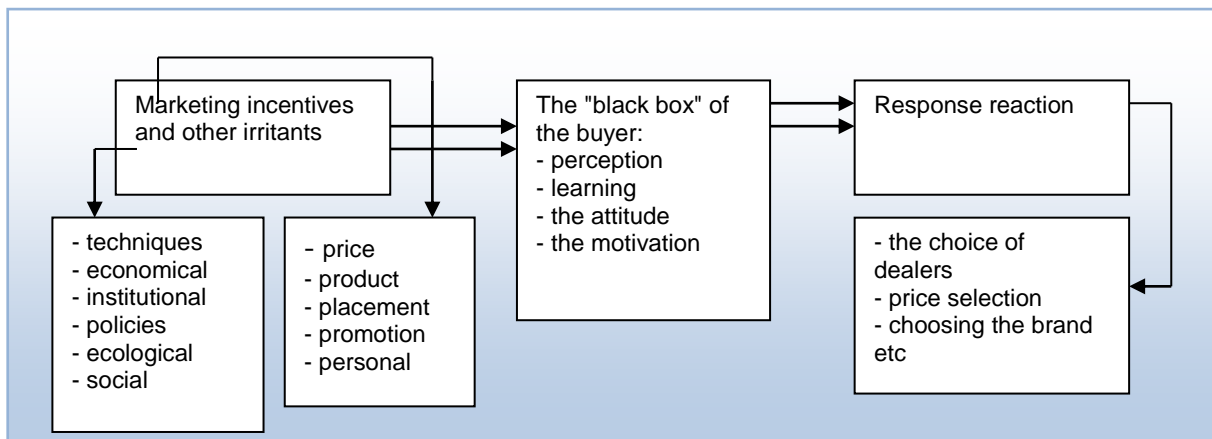


Figure 2 The model of consumer behavior according to Ph. Kotler

On the other hand, consumers have become more and more familiar with marketing and advertising strategies, more "educated" on these aspects, "suffering" from the "dissatisfaction syndrome", have developed new decision-making strategies purchase, they learned to "hide", to develop "chameleon behaviors", their degree of control over the acts of purchase and consumption increasing considerably.

These new trends, specific to developed markets, exposed for a long time to the advertising phenomenon are increasingly influential, and that is why new theories, even paradigms, subsequently marketing and advertising strategies are forced to respond to these new realities and challenges.

One of the "myths" of modern marketing is that individuals, consumers, are increasingly informed, more educated, more self-confident, more cynical, more skeptical, and even wiser. Postmodern cultures are largely responsible for this situation. The postmodern consumer is no longer a simple object on which various influences are

exerted, he is an active participant in the marketing and advertising process. For marketing and advertising professionals, this means new professional challenges, but especially particular ones, that of having at least one step ahead of this new player: the conscious consumer.

The conscious and informed consumer "knows" above all else (Barker, Haynes, Nancarrow, 2002). Certainly, in educated markets, consumers have access to much more information, many more ways to learn about brands, services, manufacturers, promotions etc. The high level of access to information, as well as the increase in confidence in one's own forces in the act of its quality and relevance, inevitably lead to an attitude purchase, in the degree of control they can exercise over brands and manufacturers (Barker, Haynes, Nancarrow, 2002).

This new concept of the conscious and informed consumer has both a reality dimension and an "image" dimension of perception.

By knowledge, the authors understand especially the "militant" attitude of the consumer, his active involvement in the relationship with brands and advertising in general, the fact that he seeks and accumulates knowledge about brands and their advertising, knowledge that he also uses in an active way to make purchase decisions. At the same time, he knows the elements of marketing, knows various things about certain brands and is therefore qualified to some extent to make quasi-professional judgments about them.

## CONCLUSIONS

The profound transformations experienced by markets, consumers, marketing and advertising theories have led to the emergence of new approaches and theories on the consumer behavior of ecological products.

The consumer of ecological products is often seen as a business opportunity. Customer surveys show that approximately 44% of customers state their willingness to pay a premium price for green products.

The consumer knows "what's new" in terms of marketing for ecological product categories, has access to an impressive amount of information about the products, brands and services they use as well as the sales tactics used by manufacturers. This knowledge-related reality has considerable implications for advertising research and especially for qualitative research. For example, one of the important conditions for the selection of participants in focus groups or group interviews is that they are somewhat "naïve", i.e., not active in fields such as marketing and advertising, so that knowledge of the principles of these fields and "inside" information" on topics are not intended to influence other participants or even the conclusions of the discussions.

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