
GENERATION Z CONSUMERS' MOTIVES AND BARRIERS TO PURCHASING ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS IN SERBIA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the main motives and barriers for purchasing organic food in the Generation Z market segment in Serbia. A quantitative study was conducted through a survey questionnaire filled out by 213 students from three universities. The results are based on descriptive statistics, the independent samples t-test and the analysis of variance. Quality and health protection and improvement are identified as the primary motives for purchasing organic food, proving that egoistic motives prevail over altruistic ones. The most important barriers hindering organic food consumption are high price, lack of information, and limited availability. The willingness of Generation Z members to accept high market prices for organic food depends on their monthly household income. These findings could be used by organic food producers and retailers to predict buying behavior and adapt their promotional activities on the Serbian market.

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Introduction

The world's organic food and drink retail sector reached a value of 106.4 billion euros in 2019 (US 44.7 billion €, Germany 12.0 billion €, France 11.3 billion €). The greatest per capita consumption of organic food was noted in Denmark (344 €), Switzerland (338 €), and Luxembourg (265 €) (Willer et al., 2021). Unlike the markets of more developed European countries, the organic food market in Serbia is in its initial stages of development. In 2019, the area of 21,265 ha (0.6% of utilized agricultural area) and over 6,000 producers (including cooperants from group production) were engaged in organic production in Serbia. From 2012 to 2019 the organic agricultural area tripled (MAFWM, 2019a). Almost 90% of the total 513 organic certificate holders produce plant products, while only 10% opted for animal products (MAFWM, 2019b). Most of the national organic production is focused on export, amounting to 27,4 million euros

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in 2018. The main export markets for producers from Serbia are Germany, Holland, Austria, and Italy (MAFWM, 2018).

There are various motives for purchasing organic food, such as health protection, food safety, environmental protection and ethical motives, but there are also specific product attributes that contribute to them, such as taste, freshness and appearance.

Numerous studies identified health as the primary motive for purchasing and consuming organic food (Hutchins & Greenhalgh, 1997; Chinnici et al., 2002; Magnusson et al. 2003; Padel & Foster, 2005; Radman, 2005; Roitner-Schoesberger et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2013; Bryla, 2016). Consumers often claim that organic products are healthier than conventional products, which is why they believe that organic food is richer in vitamins and nutrients (Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002; Zagata, 2012). Also, we can expect that the pandemic will result in an additional increase in demand for nutritively rich organic/healthy food that contributes to strengthening the immune system.

Food safety was identified as the main reason for purchasing organic food in several studies (Schifferstein & Oude Ophuis, 1998; Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008; Sondhi, 2014; Teng & Lu, 2016). Caring about food safety is especially important for new parents who purchase organic food motivated by a feeling of responsibility for their children (Hartman Group, 2010, pp. 8-9). In addition, food safety concerns have a significant effect on the attitudes and buying intentions of occasional consumers (Pino, et al. 2012).

After health protection, caring about the environment is the most frequently cited reason for consuming organic food (Davies, et al., 1995; De Magistris & Gracia, 2008; González, 2009; Nikolić et al., 2014; Xie et al., 2015; Janssen, 2018). Considering that organic production precludes the use of pesticides and other pollutants, consumers perceive methods of organic production to be environmentally friendly (Jolly, 1991; Roitner-Schobesberger et al., 2008; Hoefkens et al., 2009). Wandel and Bugge (1997) point out that younger consumers choose organic products more based on ecological motives, while older consumers are more influenced by care about their health. Certain studies indicate that consumers purchase organic food because they believe it is better for animal welfare, while it simultaneously supports the local economy (Essoussi & Zahaf, 2008; Sangkumchaliang & Huang, 2012; Moser, 2016; Schrank & Running, 2018).

The decision to purchase organic food could be influenced by product attributes such as taste, appearance, and freshness (Zepeda et al., 2006; Zakowska-Biemans, 2011; Vukasović, 2016). Taste is the main motive for the consumption of organic food in Sweden, Italy and Holland (Magnusson et al., 2001; Zanolli & Nasperti, 2002; Stobbelaar et al., 2007). Taste and freshness significantly increase the intent to purchase organic food (Wier et al., 2008). Appearance is especially important for occasional buyers who would like the organic food that they purchase to be tasty, but also have an appealing appearance (Zanolli & Nasperti, 2002).

Barriers which hinder organic food consumption include high prices, limited availability, satisfaction with conventional food and lack of trust in organic products.

Numerous studies discovered that the high price of organic food is the major obstacle to its purchase (Tregear et al., 1994; Magnusson et al., 2001; Chinnici et al., 2002; Zagata, 2014; Vega-Zamora et al., 2014; Janssen, 2018). Such findings have motivated many authors to study the willingness of consumers to pay for organic food. Pellegrini and Farinello (2009) estimate that Italian consumers are willing to pay a 20% to 40% greater price for organic eggs and cookies and Tsakiridou et al. (2006) that consumers in Greece a 35% higher price for various organic products when compared to the price of conventional products. Some studies calculate price elasticities for organic food and find that the demand for organic milk decreases with the increase in its price (Jones & Rosen, 2008; Alviola & Capps, 2010).

The next most frequently cited barrier to purchasing organic food is limited availability (Gonzalez, 2009; Jensen et al. 2011; Pomsanam et al. 2014; Bryla, 2018). In emerging markets, consumers cite that they are not satisfied with the number of purchase points for organic food, and that they are willing to purchase more organic food if its availability were to increase (Cerjak et al. 2010; Zakowska-Biemans, 2011). Consumers in the US also believe that the variety of organic products is smaller compared to conventional products found in supermarkets and at other purchase points (Govindasamy et al., 2006). There are consumers who do not purchase organic food because they are satisfied with conventional food (Botonaki et al., 2006) while numerous consumers are still struggling with recognizing organic products and are skeptical about the credibility of certification systems (Tung et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2014; Brusci et al., 2015).

Most studies on organic food consumer behavior have focused on Generation Y/the Millennials (Molinillo et al., 2020; Leerattanakorn, 2017; Muposhi et al., 2015; Thambiah et al., 2015; Regine, 2011). Unlike the Millennials, Generation Z is understudied in terms of organic food buying behavior. Generation Z includes individuals born in the period 1995-2012 and they make up 32% of the world's 7.7 billion global population (Manghiuc & Petrescu, 2020, p. 418). Generation Z knows more about a sustainable way of life than previous generations, and exhibit a strong sense of social responsibility (Su et al., 2019). When making decisions on their choice of food they prioritize their health and quality of life and are willing to pay premium price for food which they perceive to be healthier (Nielsen, 2015).

Bearing in mind the low consumption of organic food in Serbia and the fact that Generation Z represents a sustainable food market segment, the aim of this study was to discover the most important motives and barriers which affect the consumption of organic food among members of Generation Z in Serbia, in order to select and implement the most appropriate marketing strategies for them, primarily the marketing communications strategies.

Materials and methods

In order to realize the above aim, the following research questions were formulated:

- What are the main motives for purchasing organic food among Generation Z consumers? How much has the hierarchy of motives determined in this study changed compared to previous research carried out in Serbia? Does Generation Z assign greater importance to egoistic motives than to altruistic motives? Is there a significant difference between the noted motives in terms of the gender and income characteristics of the respondents?
- What are the main barriers hindering young consumers from purchasing organic food, or hindering them from purchasing greater amounts of it? Are members of Generation Z sensitive to the higher price of organic food? How much has the importance of certain barriers changed compared to previous research carried out in Serbia? Is there a significant difference between the noted barriers in terms of the gender and income characteristics of the respondents?

Study was realized using a structured questionnaire based on a literature review and previous studies on the motivation of organic food consumers in Serbia (Vehapi, 2015). A survey conducted in 2019, which included a sample of 213 students from three universities from Serbia, was used for data collection. The students who participated in the research were enrolled in the third or fourth year of their studies, which means that they were born in 1997 or 1998. The structure of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The structure of the sample

Characteristics of respondents		Number of respondents	% of respondents
	Total	213	100
Gender	Female	146	68.5
	Male	67	31.5
Location	Large city	77	36.2
	Suburb of a large city	37	17.4
	Medium or small city	72	33.8
	Rural area	27	12.7
Household income	No income	4	1.9
	Less than 50.000 RSD	34	16.0
	Between 50.000 and 100.000 RSD	79	37.1
	Between 100.000 and 150.000 RSD	55	25.8
	Between 150.000 and 200.000 RSD	24	11.3
	More than 200.000 RSD	17	8.0
Size of a household	One member	3	1.4
	Two members	15	7.0
	Three members	33	15.5
	Four members	83	39.0
	Five members	48	22.5
	Six members and more	31	14.5

Characteristics of respondents		Number of respondents	% of respondents
Number of children under 12 years age in household	No children	188	88.3
	One child	17	8.0
	Two children	4	1.9
	Three children	3	1.4
	Four and more children	1	0.5

The questionnaire included 3 segments related to 1) demographic characteristics of the respondents and their 2) motives and 3) barriers for purchasing organic food. The respondents (187 consumers who had stated that they were familiar with organic food and that they purchased organic food products) were asked to, on a five-point Likert-type scale, evaluate the importance of the following ten motives: health protection, environmental protection, safety, quality, taste, freshness, absence of pesticides and GMO, animal welfare, preserving resources for future generations, and support for the local/small farmers. Then, 206 respondents familiar with organic food, both consumers and those who do not purchase organic food, had the task to evaluate, on a five-point Likert-type scale, the importance of the following seven barriers: high price, limited availability, less appealing appearance, mistrust in organic labels, limited offer, lack of information, and lack of interest. The results are based on descriptive statistics, the independent samples t-test and the analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Results and discussions

The main motives for purchasing organic food

The results indicated that Quality (4.27) and Health protection (4.25) were the main motives for purchasing organic food among Serbian Generation Z consumers, followed by the remaining dimensions of quality such as Absence of pesticides and GMO (4.16), Freshness (4.02) and Taste (3.58). Environmental protection (3.33), along with Animal welfare (3.32) and Preserving resources for future generations (3.12), were low-ranked motives for purchasing organic food on the national market of young consumers (Table 2).

Table 2. Hierarchy of motives for purchasing organic food

	Motives	Mean
1	Quality	4.27
2	Health protection	4.25
3	Absence of pesticides and GMO	4.16
4	Freshness	4.02
5	Taste	3.58
6	Safety	3.53
7	Support for the local/small farmers	3.43
8	Environmental protection	3.33
9	Animal welfare	3.32
10	Preserving resources for future generationS	3.12

These results are mostly congruent with the results of previous studies carried out on the market in Serbia, with the addition that previous studies listed quality as the second most important motive for consuming organic food, after health (Vlahović et al, 2011; Vehapi, 2015; Vlahović & Šojić, 2016; Ćendić & Zarić, 2019). According to Grubor and Đokić (2016), consumers who prefer organic food are aware of the importance of food for health and believe that a proper diet could help prevent illness.

Low-ranked environmental protection and ethical motives indicate that Serbian Z generation consumers assign greater importance to egoistic motives compared to altruistic ones. The advantage of egoistic motives over altruistic ones was proven in other studies (Padel & Foster, 2005; Durham & Andrade, 2005), but these motives coexist to various extents, depending on the country. Generation Z from developed countries shows significant interest for ecological issues, green consumption and green products (Kitchen & Proctor, 2015), which is not the case in Serbia.

The Independent samples t-test was used to compare the results obtained for the motives of men and women. The results of the T-test indicate a statistically significant difference between male and female organic food consumers in the case of one variable, and that is Animal welfare ($t=-2.360$; $p=0.019$). Female organic food consumers ($M=3.46$) are more motivated by Animal welfare than male consumers ($M=3.00$) (Table 3). Despite the statistical significance, the actual difference between the means of the groups is small ($\text{Eta-squared}=0.04$).

Table 3. T-tests for Purchasing Motives and Gender

Dependent Variable	Gender				t-value	Sig.
	Male		Female			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Health protection	4.07	1.197	4.33	0.782	-1.495	0.139
Environmental protection	3.17	1.201	3.40	1.101	-1.288	0.199
Safety	3.41	1.093	3.58	1.150	-0.936	0.351
Quality	4.12	1.044	4.33	0.700	-1.637	0.103
Taste	3.50	1.174	3.61	1.091	-0.645	0.520
Freshness	4.00	0.937	4.03	0.951	-0.207	0.836
Absence of pesticides and GMO	4.14	1.099	4.16	0.950	-0.157	0.875
Animal welfare	3.00	1.325	3.46	1.179	-2.360	0.019
Preserving resources for future generations	2.98	1.235	3.19	1.273	-1.019	0.309
Support for the local/ small farmers	3.43	1.244	3.43	1.242	0.024	0.981

Similar findings were presented by Stobbelaar et al. (2007), which proves that women assign greater importance to the association between organic food and animal welfare. For example, women are more sensitive to animal welfare aspects when purchasing fresh beef meat (Blanc et al., 2020).

In order to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of the dependent variables in terms of the monthly household income, a One-Way ANOVA was calculated. The results of the One-Way ANOVA tests indicate that

there is a statistically significant difference between consumers of organic food with different monthly household incomes regarding variables such as:

- Environmental protection ($F=2.422$; $p=0.037$) – subsequent comparisons through Tukey's HSD test indicate that the means of group 3 ($M=3.49$) differ significantly from the means of group 6 ($M=2.50$), and
- Preserving resources for future generations ($F=2.416$; $p=0.038$) – the results of Tukey's HSD test indicate that the means of group 6 ($M=2.07$) differ significantly from the means of group 3 ($M=3.30$) and group 4 ($M=3.21$) (Table 4).

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA tests for Purchasing Motives and Household Income

Dependent Variable	Mean						F	Sig.
	1. No income	2. <50.000	3. 50.000-100.000	4. 100.000-150.000	5. 150.000-200.000	6. >200.000		
Health	4.00	4.14	4.29	4.33	4.25	4.00	0.419	0.835
Environmental protection	2.50	3.32	3.49	3.44	3.25	2.50	2.422	0.037
Safety	3.25	3.61	3.61	3.65	3.45	2.71	1.774	0.120
Quality	5.00	4.11	4.32	4.25	4.05	4.50	1.416	0.220
Taste	4.00	3.21	3.62	3.67	3.53	3.71	0.843	0.521
Freshness	4.50	3.89	4.04	4.12	3.80	4.00	0.635	0.674
Absence of pesticides and GMO	4.50	4.11	4.09	4.37	3.80	4.21	1.160	0.330
Animal welfare	3.00	3.32	3.38	3.46	3.30	2.57	1.245	0.290
Preserving resources for future generations	3.00	3.14	3.30	3.21	3.00	2.07	2.416	0.038
Support for the local/ small farmers	3.75	3.29	3.57	3.38	3.50	3.00	0.651	0.661

Therefore, consumers with a monthly household income greater than 200.000 RSD are less motivated by Environmental protection than consumers with a monthly household income between 50.000 and 100.000 RSD. Also, this income group is less motivated by Preserving resources for future generations than consumers with a monthly household income between 50.000 and 150.000 RSD. The size of these differences, expressed through eta squared, in both cases is 0.06 (a medium effect).

The results obtained are in part concordant with a previous study carried out in Italy, which discovered that consumers with a middle to upper-middle high income are to a greater extent motivated by ecological sustainability, ethical and responsible consumption compared to other categories of consumers (Schifani & Magliore, 2011). However, it is important to point out that our respondents in the majority of cases do not have an independent income, so that the household income probably does not have a direct impact on their motives when purchasing food.

The main barriers to purchasing organic food

According to the survey results, generation Z consumers in Serbia do not purchase organic food, or only purchase limited amounts of it mainly because of High price (3.68), Lack of information (3.45) and Limited availability (3.32) (Table 5).

Table 5. Hierarchy of barriers to purchasing organic food

	Barriers	Mean
1	High price	3.68
2	Lack of information	3.45
3	Limited availability	3.32
4	Limited offer	3.05
5	Mistrust in organic labels	2.67
6	Lack of interest	2.60
7	Less appealing appearance	2.45

Studies carried out in Serbia also point out that the high price is the main reason hindering them from purchasing organic food (Vehapi, 2015; Vlahović & Šojić, 2016; Ćendić & Zarić, 2019). Vapa-Tankosić et al. (2018) measured the willingness to pay premium price for organic food on the national market, and discovered that most respondents are willing to pay 10-20% more for organic products. Studies by other national authors discovered that limited availability is an important barrier for purchasing products on the national market (Vlahović & Šojić, 2016; Ćendić & Zarić, 2019). Generation Z members in Serbia have a higher level of trust in food labels and organic certificates. That is an indication of different attitudes of young consumers toward food labeling compared to previous studies in Serbia, which showed a high level of consumers' skepticism (Žeželj et al., 2012; Mitic & Gligorijević, 2015).

In the following section, we analyzed the differences in the barriers to purchasing organic food with regard to gender and monthly household income. The results of the T-test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between male and female respondents along two variables, High price ($t=-3.501$; $p=0.001$) and Limited availability ($t=-2.064$; $p=0.04$). In terms of price, for female respondents a high price ($M=3.88$) is a more important barrier to purchasing organic food than for male respondents ($M=3.22$). When it comes to availability, the female respondents ($M=3.42$) consider limited availability a more important barrier to purchasing organic food than male respondents ($M=3.10$) (Table 6). In terms of price, the value of eta squared (0.06) indicates that the difference between the means is medium while in terms of availability the difference between the means is small (Eta-squared=0.02).

Table 6. T-tests for Purchasing Barriers and Gender

Dependent Variable	Gender				t-value	Sig.
	Male		Female			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
High price	3.22	1.325	3.88	1.038	-3.501	0.001
Limited availability	3.10	1.058	3.42	1.031	-2.064	0.040

Dependent Variable	Gender				t-value	Sig.
	Male		Female			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Less appealing appearance	2.38	1.142	2.48	1.162	-0.541	0.589
Mistrust in organic labels	2.60	1.289	2.71	1.131	-0.549	0.584
Limited offer	3.13	1.070	3.01	1.187	0.648	0.517
Lack of information	3.49	1.091	3.43	1.172	0.337	0.736
Lack of interest	2.57	1.279	2.61	1.245	0.195	0.846

Similar results were obtained by Bryla (2016) in a study according to which women assign greater importance to barriers such as the expiration date, high price and limited availability. Considering that numerous studies proved that women purchase organic food more often than men, this could be the reason why they are more sensitive to the limited availability and high price of organic food (Davies et al., 1995; Wandel & Bugge, 1997; Radman, 2005).

The One-way ANOVA test results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference among respondents with different monthly household incomes for variables such as High price ($F=4.587$; $p=0.001$). Subsequent comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicate that the means of group 5 ($M=2.83$) significantly differs from the means of three other groups: group 2 ($M=4.15$), group 3 ($M=3.78$), and group 4 ($M=3.75$) (Table 7).

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA tests for Purchasing Barriers and Household Income

Dependent Variable	Mean						F	Sig.
	1. No income	2. <50.000	3. 50.000-100.000	4. 100.000-150.000	5. 150.000-200.000	6. >200.000		
High price	3.00	4.15	3.78	3.75	2.83	3.33	4.587	0.001
Limited availability	3.00	3.50	3.39	3.08	3.26	3.60	1.155	0.333
Less appealing appearance	3.25	2.76	2.56	2.25	2.17	2.07	2.002	0.080
Mistrust in organic labels	1.50	2.88	2.62	2.60	2.74	2.93	1.237	0.293
Limited offer	2.50	3.24	3.04	3.00	3.13	2.87	0.473	0.796
Lack of information	3.25	3.50	3.48	3.51	3.35	3.20	0.252	0.939
Lack of interest	2.50	2.97	2.42	2.57	2.91	2.33	1.378	0.234

Therefore, for respondents with a monthly household income from 150.000 to 200.000 RSD the high price is less barrier to consuming organic food than for respondents with a lower monthly household income. The size of that difference, expressed through eta squared, is 0.1 which is a significant effect. Similar conclusions were reached by other national authors who pointed out that individuals with a higher monthly income consume organic food more often and are willing to pay a higher price for these products (Đokić & Milićević, 2016; Vapa-Tankosić et al., 2018).

The analysis of the impact of the household size, location, and the presence of children under the age of 12 in the household on the motives and barriers to purchasing organic food did not indicate any statistically significant results.

Conclusions

This study deals with motives and barriers to purchasing organic food products of Generation Z in Serbia. This is the first study that investigates consumer behavior regarding the organic food market of the Z generation cohort in Serbia. The results presented in this paper confirm the dominance of quality and health motives for the purchase of organic products. Generation Z in Serbia expressed low interest in altruistic motives compared to egoistic ones. That is not in line with the research in developed countries where Generation Z members are more interested in ecological issues, sustainable consumption and animal welfare and can indicate that consumers from mature organic markets are more altruistic motivated compared to consumers from emerging organic markets. The main barriers that hinder purchasing organic food on the Generation Z market segment in Serbia are: high price, lack of information, and limited availability. The price and availability are more important to female respondents, who were often recognized as main buyers of organic food. An important contribution of this research represents the finding that members of Generation Z did not express skepticism toward organic labels.

Knowledge of motives and barriers of younger consumers for purchasing organic food is vital for the realization of public policy goals and the creation of marketing strategies. Since quality and health are the dominant motives, promotional campaigns should include opinion leaders, such as doctors and nutritionists, who will testify to the nutritive and health benefits of consuming organic food. Organic food producers are expected to promote various dimensions of quality such as taste, freshness and appearance. It is important to improve the level of information and to educate young consumers, especially women on available channels of distribution and the advantages of organic food consumption. With the aim of decreasing the premium price of organic food, which has been identified as the main purchasing barriers, it is important to stimulate a further increase the volume of organic production through greater subventions for organic producers, to take measures to decrease the costs of certification and to encourage the development of direct marketing channels. Greater production and supply would positively influence the availability of organic food, which is also recognized as one of the important purchasing barriers.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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