

Assegno di Ricerca

" EthicK - Ethical Food Consumption and Consumer Knowledge: labelling preferences and value perception "

Progetto di Ricerca

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness and concern about ethical practices in the food industry (Brom, 2000; DE PELSMACKER et al., 2005; De Pelsmacker et al., 2005; Schröder, 2003; Schröder & McEachern, 2004; Young et al., 2010). Consumers are becoming more conscious of their food choices' impact on the environment, animal welfare, and social justice. This shift in consumer behaviour has led to a rise in demand for ethically produced food, including and beyond organic, fair trade, and locally sourced products (Codron et al., 2006; Honkanen et al., 2006; Loureiro, 2011; McEachern & McClean, 2002; Schröder & McEachern, 2004; Troth, 2015; Wheale & Hinton, 2007; Zander & Hamm, 2010) As a result, businesses are increasingly implementing ethical labels and certifications to meet consumer demands and differentiate their products in the market. Consumer perception plays a crucial role in shaping purchasing decisions and behaviour. Consumers rely on their perceptions of a product's quality, safety, and ethical value to make informed choices. However, consumer perception varies with ethnicity, purchasing power, education level, and awareness. These factors influence how consumers prioritise ethical considerations when purchasing food. Therefore, it is essential to understand consumer perceptions and preferences regarding ethical food consumption to develop effective marketing strategies and meet consumer demands (Heise & Theuvsen, 2017; Honkanen et al., 2006; Memery et al., 2005, 2012).

Consumer knowledge about sustainability practices in the food industry is also a key factor in determining their purchasing decisions. Consumers who are knowledgeable about sustainability practices are more likely to prioritise ethical considerations when buying food products. Therefore, understanding consumer knowledge levels and preferences regarding ethical food consumption is crucial for businesses to communicate their sustainability practices effectively and attract ethically conscious consumers.

Labelling preferences and value perceptions are crucial in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours towards ethical food consumption. Consumers rely on labels and certifications to provide them with information about a product's ethical attributes, such as organic, fair trade, or sourced from providers not involved in illegal activities or using undocumented workers or child labour (Carrigan et al., 2004; Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection, 2006; Tagbata & Sirieix, 2008).

Understanding consumer preferences for specific "ethical labels" and their perceptions of their value can help businesses tailor their marketing strategies to effectively communicate their products' ethical attributes. The viability of the food industry depends on consumer demand and willingness to pay for products. As consumer awareness and concern for ethical and sustainable practices in the food industry continue to grow, businesses that fail to adapt may face negative consequences regarding reduced market share and profitability. Product labelling is crucial for ethical purchases as it provides consumers with the necessary information to align their values and preferences with purchasing decisions. Consumer behaviour and preferences continue to evolve, and businesses must stay abreast of these changes to remain competitive. With the growing emphasis on ethical food consumption, it becomes even more critical for businesses to understand and cater to consumer labeling and value perception preferences. Businesses must engage in comprehensive market research to gain insights into consumer behaviours and preferences and effectively communicate their products' ethical attributes. This includes understanding the labels and certifications consumers value most and the attributes they prioritise when making ethical purchasing decisions.

Moreover, businesses should consider the impact of consumer knowledge on sustainability practices and how it influences their purchasing decisions. By understanding consumers' level of awareness and knowledge regarding various ethical and sustainable practices in the food industry, businesses can tailor their marketing strategies to effectively communicate their products' value. In conclusion, as consumer awareness and demand for ethical food consumption continue to rise, businesses must prioritise understanding consumer behaviour, preferences, and knowledge to meet these demands effectively. Failure to do so may lead to negative consequences for companies within the food industry. Therefore, proactive

engagement with consumer preferences and the development of effective marketing strategies is paramount for businesses seeking to thrive in this evolving landscape of ethical food consumption.

Objective

The proposed research aims to analyse consumer perceptions, preferences, and behaviour towards food products claiming to perform better in terms of ethical aspects, test the effects of different ways to convey the labelling information about ethical performance, and consider different consumer cultural backgrounds.

Methods and data

The proposed methodology for this research project will involve a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative research will be conducted through surveys and questionnaires to gather data on consumer preferences and behaviours related to ethical food consumption. This will allow for collecting quantitative data on factors such as consumers' importance on specific ethical labels, their knowledge about sustainable food practices, and their purchasing patterns and behaviours. In addition, qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus groups will be utilised to gain deeper insights into the underlying motivations and values that drive consumer preferences for ethical food consumption.

The study will be performed according to the following work breakdown structure:

- A literature review focused on preference elicitation methods and tools and on previous studies on consumer WTP for sustainability labelled food.
- Qualitative study based on focus groups with consumers.
- Design of a specific survey/data collection tool based on the most suitable preference elicitation method and definition of the data analysis techniques and procedures, tested on simulated data.
- Collection and analysis of empirical data.
- Writing of the final report (in English or in Italian).

The survey will be administered in Italy.

Expected results

The expected results of the study are to provide information about the preference of consumers for food products claiming to be more ethically sound and evaluate the effectiveness of different ways to convey the information. The output will be a research report that provides valuable information for businesses and policymakers in the food industry. The study results will provide the basis for a manuscript written in English to be submitted to a scientific journal whose aims and scope include food consumer behaviour, preferably in the area of agriculture and food economics. Publications will consist of conference papers and journal articles that can contribute to the academic understanding of consumer behaviour concerning ethical food consumption.

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Piano di formazione dettagliato

Il progetto formativo, che accompagna quello di ricerca sopra descritto, ha due obiettivi principali:

- OF1 - fornire competenze sia generali, sia specifiche, riguardanti l'argomento della ricerca;
- OF2 - fornire competenze circa la gestione, l'organizzazione e la proposta di progetti di ricerca.

I due obiettivi formativi saranno perseguiti come segue.

L'OF1 consegue direttamente dall'obiettivo del progetto di ricerca e degli studi in esso previsti. Tali competenze saranno ottenute mediante lo studio di materiali appropriati, la collaborazione scientifica con i componenti del gruppo di ricerca, la partecipazione a corsi, a seminari e conferenze nazionali ed internazionali.

Le tematiche oggetto di approfondimento indicate nei seguenti punti saranno approfondite tramite documentazione bibliografica e la realizzazione di indagini dirette:

- 1) Conoscenze generali di comportamento dei consumatori
- 2) Conoscenze generali inerenti al marketing strategico ed alle ricerche di marketing
- 3) Metodi e strumenti della ricerca qualitativa
- 4) Metodi e strumenti per la realizzazione di consumer survey
- 5) Strumenti e metodi per la realizzazione anche di aste sperimentali
- 6) Strumenti di analisi multivariata dei dati

L'OF2 sarà ottenuto inserendo l'Assegnista di ricerca nelle attività scientifica del gruppo di ricerca del Tutor proponente. L'Assegnista sarà coinvolto nelle future attività di ricerca congiunta con ricercatori del settore economico-agrario, operanti presso il Dipartimento di Scienze e Tecnologie Agro-alimentari.