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Socio-demographic profile of organic food consumers in the Republic of Srpska

Социо-демографски профил потрошача органске хране у Републици Српској

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to determine the profile of organic food consumers in the Republic of Srpska according their socio-demographic characteristics and to analyse if there is a significant relation between consumer education level and intention to purchase organic food. For this purpose, a questionnaire was developed and a survey was conducted on a random representative sample. Consumers were segmented according to their purchase habits and a profile was developed for each segment. The results show that different socio-demographic characteristics partly determine each profile and that education level has a positive and low significant relation with intention to purchase organic food.
Keywords: organic food, consumer behaviour, education, socio-demographic profile, the Republic of Srpska
JEL classification: M30, M31

Сажетак: Циљ овог истраживања је да утврди профил потрошача органске хране у Републици Српској и његове социо-демографске карактеристике и да утврди да ли постоји значајна релациона веза између нивоа образовања потрошача и намјере за куповину органске хране. За ову сврху израђен је упитник и извршено испитивање на случајном и репрезентативном узорку. Потрошачи су сегментирани у складу са њиховим куповним навикама и израђен је профил потрошача за сваки сегмент. Резултати показују да социо-демографске карактеристике дјелимично одређују различите профиле потрошача и да ниво образовања има позитивну и слабу релацију са намјером куповине органске хране.

Кључне речи: органска храна, понашање потрошача, образовање, социо-демографски профил, Република Српска
ЈЕЛ класификација: М30, М31

Introduction

Food safety is considered as one of the most important issues in food production and processing. For that purpose, organic products are produced based on the use of renewable resources and protection the quality of land and water (Tankosić & Hanić, 2019). In

Republic of Srpska, organic production rules are set up by law in 2013[1] to regulate the production of agricultural and other products by organic production methods, define goals and principles of organic production, control and certification, as well as all other actions and issues necessary for this type of production (processing, marking and packages, storage, transport, trade, import, export, etc.) Additionally, a set of rulebooks in the form of a bylaws was adopted with the purpose of defining organic production in more detail.

Data for 2018 show that 28 producers of organic food are registered in Republic of Srpska, the largest number of which is the collective production of forest fruits, medicinal herbs and mushrooms. Large producers with a wide range of organic food offerings are not registered. In the same year, eight organic producers and processors exported to the European Union countries, Switzerland and Canada. Considering geographical position, climate and land quality, the Republic of Srpska has a significant potential for organic production, but the current volume of production shows its initial phase of development. In the same phase of the development are market, supply and demand, implementation of certificates and declarations, as well as educating consumers about the importance of organic food in healthy eating. The aim of this paper is to perform consumer segmentation through empirical research based on a representative sample, to determine the consumer profile based on their socio-demographic characteristics and examine the impact of consumer education level on organic food consumption frequency. Attitudes about the reasons why consumers buy organic food, the organic food consumption frequency and the level of price they are willing to pay for organic food will be also examined. The research results are applicable in practice and can be used in marketing strategies or managerial decision making.

1. Literature review

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture in Switzerland (FIBL) publishes reports with status and capacities of organic agriculture worldwide. According to the data, organic production is in progress and in 2018 includes 2.8 million producers. Most producers are located in Asia (47%), followed by Africa (28%), Europe (15%) and Latin America (8%). The countries with the most producers are India. Uganda and Ethiopia (FIBL, 2020). There are 71.5 million hectares of land under organic agricultural production in 2018 and the region with the largest areas of agricultural land for organic production is Oceania (36 million hectares, which is half of the world's agricultural land for organic production), then Europe (22 million hectares, 22%), Latin America (11%) and Asia (9%). At the level of Europe, Spain has the most agricultural land for organic production, followed by France, Italy and Germany, while Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks the 40th place (FIBL, 2020).

According to FIBL data, organic production in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2016 was present on 659ha, which makes 0.03% of the total arable land, while the collection of wild plant species took place on 50.250 ha (Ministry of Foreign Trade and External relations of BiH, 2018). Data for 2018 shows that the area of organic agricultural land is 896ha, which

[1] The Organic Production Law, *The Official Gazette of the Republic od Srpska*

is 26.5% more than in 2016 (FIBL, 2020). 546ha out of 896ha have been fully converted and 350ha are currently under conversion (FIBL, 2020). The value of exported organic products from Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2017 to foreign markets was valued in the amount of EUR 4 million, which is 14% more than the value of export in the previous year, but doubled compared to the value of export in 2015 (Ministry of Foreign Trade and External relations of BiH, 2018). In 2018, Bosnia and Herzegovina had 251 registered organic producers. The trend of growth is present in both production and export, but it is still below the limit of its possibilities. Global sales of organic food and beverages have had significant growth in the last 15-20 years, and the demand for organic food products is higher than supply (Tankosić & Hanić, 2019). Organic food consumption is brought to a connection with socio-demographic characteristics of consumers in a number of studies. Profiling organic food consumers using such characteristics has significant repercussions when determining other elements of marketing strategy (Đokić & Milićević, 2016, p. 66).

According to previous research, consumers who use traditional and organic food in Bosnia and Herzegovina are most often women aged between 36 and 55, with secondary education who live in large households (with two children) and with average income (Nikolić et al., 2014). Women are more frequent producers of organic food, too (Mujčinović et al., 2017). The most consumers in the Republic of Srpska buy fresh fruits and vegetables in markets and supermarkets (53.7%), then in grocery stores (35.6%) and fresh produce markets are in the last place (25.7%) (Sudarević & Galić, 2021). Consumers in Croatia most often purchase organic fruits and vegetables compared to the other organic products (Radman, 2005).

In Serbia, organic food market is dominated by female consumers, aged under 40, university-educated respondents that live in household up to four members, with monthly income between EUR 500 and EUR 1,000, and the most numerous are those living in the city (Tankosić & Hanić, 2019, p. 189-190). Women who prefer organic food are most often married and have children; they strongly value the importance of diet for health and many of them encountered the disease of a close person, which is believed that could have been prevented by proper diet (Grubor & Djokic, 2016). Of the total number of respondents, 78.1% already use organic agricultural products, 85.2% live in cities, 74.6% buy products for the whole family once or several times a month and they are willing to pay between 10% and 20% higher price if they estimate that the nutritional value of organic products is higher (Kranjac et al., 2017; Tankosić & Hanić, 2019). Consumers buy organic products because they are generally estimated to have a positive effect on the health of consumers (and their families) and because of belief that organic food has no pesticide residues of has very few (Sudarević & Radojević, 2018).

Some studies point that the gender of the respondents has no influence on the propensity to consume organic food or provides completely different consumer profile than previously mentioned, as it is most often a middle-aged or older, well-educated family man (Peric et al., 2017). The differences are result of sampling primarily from different sources and then due to application of different research instruments and methods, so there is no unique conclusion about who are actually consumers of this type of food (Grubor, Đokić, et al., 2018).

H1: Profile of organic food consumers in the Republic of Srpska is dependent on their socio-demographic characteristics.

With the growth of variables such as the amount of income (Witek & Kuźniar, 2021) and level of education (Radman, 2005; Grubor, Milicevic, et al., 2018) the frequency of using organic food products in the diet is also growing (Sudarević & Radojević, 2018). Both actual and potential organic food consumers can be associated with the increased income and especially with a higher level of education (Đokić & Milićević, 2016). Consumers with higher education point out friends and relatives as the most common source of information about organic products and engage in conversation with the retail staff (Peric et al., 2017). Therefore, consumer education must become one of the first goals of organic producers (Radman, 2005).

H2: The level of education is in a positive and significant relation with intention to purchase organic food products.

A number of studies emphasize the importance of geographical origin labels and organic production certificates (Končar et al., 2019; Mujčinović et al., 2016; Končar et al., 2018; Filipovic et al., 2021). More than half consumers in Bosnia and Herzegovina are familiar with the labels that indicate organic (Mujčinović et al., 2016) and express a high probability that they would buy more often at the fresh produce markets if the stalls with domestic and organic food would be labelled and if products would have declarations of origin and health certificates (Sudarević & Galić, 2021).

Also there are consumers who are either not sufficiently familiar with the labelling of organic origin products or they are familiar, but give more confidence to their own assessment and procurement from safe sources (such as local farms – well known small producers) (Filipovic et al., 2019). Some consumers state that there is no significant confidence in the conversation with the seller of organic food (Peric et al., 2017). Related to this, it could be assumed that consumers made their own assessment that purchased products were organically grown (Radman, 2005).

2. Methodology

A survey based on questionnaire has central role in this research and it consists of several parts. Most of the questions are closed with one option answer, but some of them are combined giving space to respondents to choose multiple answers or write their own answers.

The analysis of the results was performed by mathematical and statistical calculations, and the conclusions were drawn by the methods of synthesis and induction. Descriptive analysis was performed to describe the used sample. Then, consumers were segmented into 3 segments according to previous buying behaviour related to organic food purchase. All segments were tested with Chi-Square Test and Kruskal-Wallis Test, depending on variable types. To examine importance of past and future purchase behaviour, segments were tested with Chi-Square Test and Mann-Whitney Test depending on variable

types. Spearman's Correlation Coefficient Test was used for testing H2. Significance is p=0.05. Calculations were done in IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

The research was conducted in the period from 21st January to 1st February 2021. Answers were collected online and the sample contains answers from the Republic of Srpska respondents only. The sample is random and contains 564 respondents that can be considered as representative sample. Of the total number of respondents, 66.7% are female and 33.3% are male. All age groups are represented and the largest part of the sample (37.9%) are respondents between 30 and 40 years old. Geographically, all regions from the Republic of Srpska are not equally represented, the most of respondents are from the city of Gradiška (53.0%) and Banja Luka (24.9%). The respondents were questioned about different socio-demographic variables and the most common answer based on employment – mostly employed in the private sector 49.8%; education – 53% secondary and 44.3% higher education; household size – with four members 33% and with three members 24.1%; 42.40% of all respondents have a total household income between BAM 1,000 and BAM 2,000.

Disadvantages and limitations of the sample are reflected in the fact that a large part is respondents with higher level of education, due to the way that the research was conducted (online) and computes are most often used by educated people.

3. Data analysis and discussion

Based on attribute characteristics and the answer to the question: "Do you buy organic food products?" respondents are segmented into three clusters The survey showed that 88.12% of respondents know what organic products are, 11.70% have heard of organic products but do not fully know what organic products are and 0.18% of all respondents said they do not know what organic products are (Table 1):

- S1 – the first segment consists of respondents who buy organic food products,
- S2 – the second segment consists of respondents who occasionally buy organic food products and
- S3 – the third segment consists of respondents who stated that they do not buy organic food products.

Table 1: Segmentation of respondents

	S1	**S2**	**S3**
Segment population:	176	333	55
Percentage in total number of respondents:	31.04%	58.73%	9.70%

Source: the authors' research

The most numerous segment is S2 with a share of 58.73% of the total number of respondents. In line with this is research conducted in Croatia, where about 35% of respondents claimed to buy organically-grown foods either "often" or "very often", 43%

buy such products “rarely” and 22% of respondents either did not buy or they buy organic food very rarely (Radman, 2005).

Table 2: The results of socio-demographic variables that differ by segments

variable	S1		S2		S3		Tests
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	
Gender:							Chi-Square Test
Female	121	**68.75%**	228	**68.47%**	27	49.09%	χ^2 (df=2) =8.476; **p=0.014**
Male	55	31.25%	105	31.53%	28	**50.91%**	**significant**
	176	**100%**	**333**	**100%**	**55**	**100%**	
Age							
less than 20 years	5	2.84%	5	1.50%	2	3.64%	Kruskal-Wallis Test
							c^2 (2, n=564) = 3.735;
20-30 years	35	19.89%	62	18.62%	5	9.09%	**p=0.154**
30-40 years	63	**35.80%**	134	**40.24%**	17	30.91%	S1: Md=3
40-50 years	43	24.43%	90	27.03%	23	**41.82%**	S2: Md=3
50+ years	30	17.05%	42	12.61%	8	14.55%	S3: Md=4
	176	**100%**	**333**	**100%**	**55**	**100%**	**Not significant**
Education level							Kruskal-Wallis Test
							c^2 (2, n=564) = 4.307;
Primary	3	1.70%	6	1,80%	0	0.00%	**p=0.116**
Secondary	84	47.73%	179	**53.75%**	36	**65.45%**	S1: Md=3
University	86	**48.86%**	145	43.54%	19	34.55%	S2: Md=2
Scientific titles	3	1.70%	3	0.90%	0	0.00%	S3: Md=2
	176	**100%**	**333**	**100%**	**55**	**100%**	**Not significant**
Household size:							Kruskal-Wallis Test
							c^2 (2, n=564) =1.173;
1 member	12	6.82%	18	5.41%	1	1.82%	**p=0.556**
2 members	30	17.05%	54	16.22%	8	14.55%	S1: Md=4
3 members	42	23.86%	78	23.42%	16	**29.09%**	S2: Md=4
4 members	53	**30.11%**	119	**35.74%**	14	25.45%	S3: Md=4
5 or more members	39	22.16%	64	19.22%	16	**29.09%**	**Not significant**
	176	**100%**	**333**	**100%**	**55**	**100%**	
Frequency of food purchase							Kruskal-Wallis Test
							c^2 (2, n=564) =5.413;
Every day	67	38.07%	131	**39.34%**	14	25.45%	**p=0,067**
1 time a week	29	16.48%	64	19.22%	15	27.27%	S1: Md=2
2-3 times a week	75	**42.61%**	128	38.44%	23	**41.82%**	S2: Md=2
rare or never	5	2.84%	10	3.00%	3	5.45%	S3: Md=2
	176	**100%**	**333**	**100%**	**55**	**100%**	**Not significant**

Source: the authors' research

In order to obtain a consumer profile, socio-demographic variables were associated with each segment to which respondents belong and out of eight total variables, five gave different results by segments (Table 2) and three gave the same results in all three segments (Table 3). Segments S1, S2 and S3 provided three consumer profiles P1, P2 and P3, which differ by gender, age, level of education, number of household members in which they live, as well as frequency of food purchases, while the results of following variables are identical: employment status, the amount household income and percentage of utilization of the household budget for the purchase of foodstuff.

The first profile – P1 – is a consumer who buys organic food products. According to the results it is a female person with age between 30 to 40 and high education level, lives in four-member household and buys food 2-3 times a week. The second profile – P2 – is a consumer who occasionally buys organic food products. According to the results it is a female person with age between 30 to 40 and secondary school education, lives in a four-member household and buys food every day. The female is most often organic food buyer according to previous research (Witek & Kuźniar, 2021; Tankosić & Hanić, 2019). It is shown that age have effect on shopping decisions and that occasional and frequent buyers of organic food are younger and middle-aged people (Tankosić & Hanić, 2019). Members of Generation Y are aware of the importance of environmental and social characteristics of products (Marić & Milovanov, 2015).

The third profile – P3 – is a consumer who does not buy organic food products. According to the results it is a male person with age 40 to 50 and secondary school education who lives in large family and buys food 2-3 times a week.

The common feature of all three profiles is that a consumer is employed (works in the private sector), their monthly income of household is between BAM 1,000 and BAM 2,000, and they spend from 31% to 50% of the household budget on food. According to the test results (Table 2 and Table 3) the gender has significance as socio-demographic variable, but age, education, household size and frequency of food purchase do not have statistical significance, as well as employment status, the amount of household income and utilization percentage of the household budget for the purchase of foodstuffs. Variables do differ by segments, but its differences are not statistically significant in all variables.

Hypothesis H1: Profile of organic food consumers in the Republic of Srpska is dependent on their socio-demographic characteristics is partly confirmed.

Past organic food purchase behaviour and consumers intention related to organic food purchase are also analyzed by segments (Table 4). For this part of the research, only two segments, S1 and S2, were tested. Segment S3 was not considered because these consumers stated that they do not buy organic food. Both consumer profiles (P1 and P2) stated that the most common reason for purchasing organic food is health (P1: 44.54%, P2: 49.73% of the segment population).

The variability of the answers to this question is 47.90%. The Chi-Square Test showed that there is no statistically significant difference between segments regarding the reasons why consumers purchase organic food. Health is the most common reason for

consuming organic food, which is confirmed in numerous previous studies (Aertsens et al., 2009; Sudarević & Radojević, 2018; Thøgersen et al., 2015).

Table 3: The results of socio-demographic variables that do not differ in segments

variable	S1		S2		S3		Tests
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	
Employment status:							
Unemployed	34	19.32%	51	15.32%	8	14.55%	Chi-Square Test
							χ^2 (df=8) =8.150;
Student	5	2.84%	19	5.71%	2	3.64%	**p=0.419**
Employed/private sector	84	**47.73%**	167	**50.15%**	30	**54.55%**	S1: Md=3
Employed/government	38	21.59%	82	24.62%	12	21.82%	S2: Md=3
Retired	15	8.52%	14	4.20%	3	5.45%	S3: Md=3
	176	**100%**	**333**	**100%**	**55**	**100%**	**Not significant**
Household income:							
up to BAM 1,000	44	25.00%	90	27.03%	19	34.55%	Kruskal-Wallis Test
							c^2 (2, n=564) =2.288;
BAM 1,001-2,000	77	**43.75%**	138	**41.44%**	24	**43.64%**	**p=0.318**
BAM 2,001-3,000	39	22.16%	64	19.22%	6	10.91%	S1: Md=2
							S2: Md=2
BAM 3.001 and more	16	9.09%	41	12.31%	6	10.91%	S3: Md=2
	176	**100%**	**333**	**100%**	**55**	**100%**	**Not significant**
Percentage of budget used for food purchase							Kruskal-Wallis Test
							c^2 (2, n=564) =3.437;
up to 30%	52	29.55%	92	27.63%	20	36.36%	**p=0.179**
31%-50%	71	**40.34%**	168	**50.45%**	26	**47.27%**	S1: Md=2
51%-70%	44	25.00%	64	19.22%	8	14.55%	S2: Md=2
70% and more	9	5.11%	9	2.70%	1	1.82%	S3: Md=2
	176	**100%**	**333**	**100%**	**55**	**100%**	**Not significant**

Source: the authors' research

Consumers from S1 stated that it is necessary that all food in diet should have organic origin (55.68% of the segment, Md=1), while consumers from S2 stated that it is desirable to eat organic food products as much as possible (66.07% of the segment, Md=2). Mann-Whitney Test showed that there is statistically significant difference between segments regarding consumers' opinion how many organic products should be included in daily diet.

Table 4: Past organic food purchase behaviour and purchase intentions

	S1		S2		
The reason why you purchase organic food.					
better taste	57	16.38%	77	13.97%	Chi-Square Test
health	155	**44.54%**	274	**49.73%**	$\chi 2$ (df=5) =10.102; **p=0.072**
freshness	37	10.63%	59	10.71%	
nutrition	65	18.68%	75	13.61%	
environment	34	9.77%	60	10.89%	**Not significant**
other	0	0.00%	6	1.09%	
variability		47.34%		47.39%	
		47.90%			
Your intention to purchase organic food is:					Mann-Whitney Test Z=-5.096; **p=0,001**
Yes, it is necessary that all diet is organic	98	**55.68%**	108	32.43%	S1: Md=1 S2: Md=2
Yes, it is preferable to consume organic products in diet as much as possible	78	44.32%	220	**66.07%**	**Significant**
no, it is not necessary	0	0.00%	5	1.50%	
variability		34.42%		27.94%	
		32.69%			
Your intention to pay higher price for organic food?					Mann-Whitney Test Z=-4.244; **p=0.001**
No	5	2.84%	17	5.11%	S1: Md=3
Yes, up to 10% higher	60	34.09%	153	**45.95%**	S2: Md=2
Yes, up to 20% higher	43	24.43%	100	30.03%	
Yes, no matter how high price	68	**38.64%**	63	18.92%	**Significant**
variability		30.68%		32.16%	
		33.53%			

Source: the authors' research

S1 consumers are willing to purchase organic food regardless the price (38.64% of the segment, Md=3), while S2 are usually willing to pay up to 10% higher price compared to the price of commercial products (45.95% of the segment, Md=2). Mann-Whitney Test showed that there is statistically significant difference between segments regarding consumers' willingness to pay higher price for organic food. This results are in line with previous research, indicating that there is a niche on every market where consumers are willing to pay higher price for organic products (Sudarević & Radojević, 2018).

For testing hypothesis H2, education level of the total number of respondents (n=564) was compared with intention to purchase organic food and to pay higher price for organic products. In previous testing, these variables showed significant differences in segments. Spearman's Correlation Coefficient Test resulted in positive weak and

statistically significant correlation between variables “education level” and “intention to pay higher price for organic products” $\rho=0.162$, $n=564$, $p<0.05$ and no statistically significant correlation between variables “education level” and “intention to purchase organic products” $\rho=0.007$, $n=564$, $p>0.05$. The level of consumer education has proven to be significant descriptor in a way that people with higher education are more prone to frequent purchases of organic food (Đokić & Milićević, 2016; Peric et al., 2017; Vapa-Tankosić et al., 2018; Radojević et al., 2021; Radman, 2005), but there are also research results that contradict this (Nikolić et al., 2014).

Hypothesis H2: The level of education is in a positive and significant relation with intention to purchase organic food products is partly confirmed.

Conclusion

Constant changes in our environment impose the need for frequent research in consumer behaviour. Most of the consumers in the Republic of Srpska purchase organic food occasionally and mostly for health. Pandemic caused by COVID-19 virus and increasing climate change is the cause for changes in certain consumer habits. In order to reduce contamination risks, consumers avoided markets during lock-down (Akdemir et al., 2020). In Serbia, home cooking (Lazarević & Marinković, 2021) and online purchase of organic food is increased (Ćirić et al., 2020), but consumers are not prone to keep diet during a pandemic (Lazarević & Marinković, 2021). There are no many research on this topics in the Republic of Srpska, so this paper may be a departure point for all future research. In order to obtain more complete profile, it is necessary to expand the variables as well as examine their further interaction. This paper is also practically applicable for marketing decisions.

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