

Editorial

Sustainable Food Consumption Practices: Insights into Consumers' Experiences

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In recent years, the increasing consumer concern towards food safety, environmental sustainability, and social justice issues have stimulated new consumption practices more oriented towards social, economic, and environmental sustainability [1–3].

This includes the growing consumers' preference towards organic food, local food, and other sustainable food and beverage consumption (Contribution 1) [4], as well as the spread of alternative distribution chains, which emphasize the importance of local food productions [5], the short-distance transportation of food, and the direct relationship between consumers and producers, although, as Kwil and colleagues (Contribution 2) highlighted in this Special Issue, "local" is still an ambiguous term in the food domain.

Relatively to organic consumption, which represents one of the main examples of sustainable consumption practices, Rizzo, and colleagues (Contribution 3) emphasized, in this Special Issue, how the growing consumers' interest in organic products is not only due to their desire to protect the environment or sustain rural areas, but the perceived positive impact on human health of organic food consumption has been shown as the main driver of consumer preferences for organic extra-virgin olive oil. The preference for health attribute has also been highlighted by Butcher and colleagues (Contribution 4), as well as by Butu and colleagues (Contribution 5), among Romanian urban consumers of ecological food products, and by Nagy-Pércsi and Fogarassy (Contribution 6) for organic consumers in the Hungarian market. In addition, Testa and colleagues (Contribution 7) showed that the trend towards the preference for the health attribute also involved the consumer's convenient orientation and is not linked only to green products. In particular, the authors also found that the category of ready-to-eat products, especially fresh-cut fruits, is affected by health-conscious consumers.

The importance of a product's health attribute as an important driver of sustainable consumption practices among consumers was also highlighted by Estell and colleagues (Contribution 1), who highlighted that consumers' interest in a plant-based diet is driven by the perception that these products promote good health, while also being environmentally friendly. Furthermore, in their study, they highlighted that the trend towards a plant-based diet is also sustained by ethical reasons, as declared by the growing number of vegan consumers in their sample. In line with this, Sanchez-Sabate et al (Contribution 8), in their review aimed at understanding consumers' attitudes towards reducing meat consumption, found that vegetarians and vegans perceive the environment as simply another reason, among others, to maintain a meatless diet. Furthermore, they found that consumer awareness is hampered by beliefs about food, meat, and personal behaviour. Nutrition, health, and taste were found to be both enablers and barriers with regard to consumers' willingness to buy a food product. This highlighted how the trend towards sustainable consumption practices is the result of an overlap of hedonistic and altruistic reasons, the latter supported by ethical values linked to the protection of the environment and society. Ethical reasons also seem to drive the trend towards sustainable consumption practices in Italy. In this regard, Tempesta and colleagues (Contribution 9) found that 74% of consumers in their sample were willing to pay a price premium for eggs produced



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by disadvantaged people in social farms, emphasizing that social protection is also an important driver of the trend towards sustainable consumption. However, this trend is not only powered by specific quality attributes of the products, such as products that are environmental-friendly, fair, and healthy. Consumers also pay attention to the channels in which they buy food products. Short supply chains have received much attention in many countries during the last few years. This is emphasized in this Special Issue by the study on the farmers' markets of Tsai (Contribution 10) in Taiwan, which highlighted how consumers interest in farmers' markets includes both economic and social aspects. The economic aspect deals with transaction issues, including purchase motives, quality, satisfaction, purchase behaviour, and post-purchase behaviour. Similarly, social aspects focus on the social relations between producers and consumers, as well as psychological feelings when consumers go to markets, created by the quality of these interactions.

In addition, these sustainable consumption practices also seem to involve tourist destination choice [6], rural tourism and gastronomy interest [7]. This was emphasized by Testa and colleagues (Contribution 11) in this Special Issue, who underlined how agri-tourism represents one of the most important places where culinary tourists can experience local food and beverages. The choice of these tourist destinations seems affected by different criteria, among which the healthiness of food productions and the cultural experience are linked to local food consumption. Furthermore, this study highlighted how the culinary tourism experience is also affected by the trend towards social and environmental sustainability, that is support for rural community and environmental protection. This highlights that sustainability could play a crucial role in the competitiveness of agri-tourism destinations.

This Special Issue aimed to contribute to the literature on sustainable consumption practices, by enriching discussions on consumer's experiences and by emphasizing the motivational and demographic factors, as well as the cultural and situational factors, that guide consumer behaviour towards these practices. The studies included in this Special Issue shed light on some aspects of sustainable consumption practices, however, further comparative research is obviously needed to overcome the limits to the external validity of the results published here, in many cases based on convenient samples of consumers, and to investigate the analytical effort proposed in this Special Issue. Finally, future research should incorporate different theories to better understand the complex issue of individual behaviour, in order to deepen the understanding of the complex world of the consumer and his/her effort to power the trend of sustainable consumption practices.

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