

# **Consumer Perceptions of Organic Foods in Romania: A Qualitative Approach**



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# Outline

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- **Why this research?**
- **Objectives**
- **Keller's Theory of Brand Equity**
- **Qualitative Method: Focus Groups**
- **Results**
- **Conclusions**

# Why this research?

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- **International growth & an increase demand for organic food**
- **Romanian growth in organic production but export driven**
- **A gap in the literature regarding Romanian consumer behaviour**
- **Need to understand the constraints of the domestic market, similar with other CEECs**
- **Wider lessons on consumer behaviour in CEECs organic markets**

# Objectives

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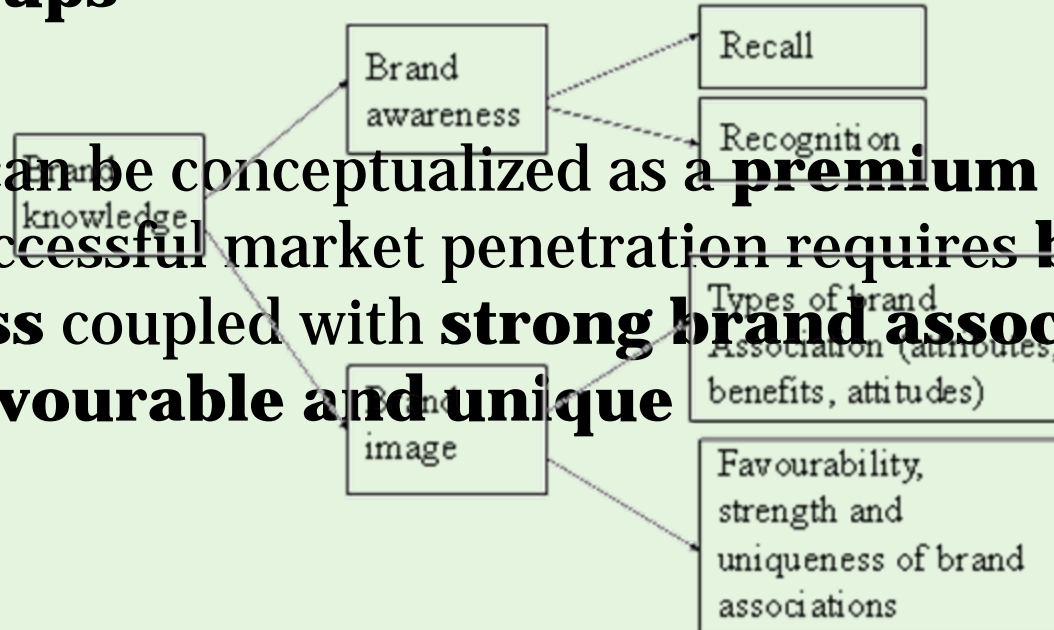
- **General objective:**
  - **To investigate attitudes and perceptions of Romanian consumers and their understanding of organic food**
- **Specific objectives:**
  - **What are the factors driving organic food consumption?**
  - **What are the barriers to organic consumption?**
  - **Who is the Romanian organic consumer?**
  - **What policies should be implemented to support this market?**

# Keller's Theory of Brand Equity

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- It provides the theoretical basis for the empirical research and informs the themes covered in the focus groups

- **Organic** can be conceptualized as a **premium brand** that for successful market penetration requires **brand awareness** coupled with **strong brand associations** that are **favourable and unique**



Source: adapted from Keller, 1993, p.7

# Focus Groups

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- **Exploratory piece of research ... allowing “the researcher to develop an understanding about why people feel the way they do”**  
**Major themes covered:**
  1. **General knowledge and awareness of organic food**
- **4 focus groups, Bucharest, March 2009**
- **25 participants: 2 groups of organic consumers and 2 groups of non-organic consumers**
  2. **Associations of organic produce**
- **Selection criteria: food shoppers, living in the city**
  3. **Major barriers to purchasing organic food, and**
- **Content analysis**
  4. **Sources of information and the role of various stakeholders in promoting organic food**

# Results

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- **Brand Awareness: general knowledge of organics**
- **Organic (O) and non-organic (NO) consumers defined it similarly**
- **...but they used different terms: ecologic, eco, biologic, bio, natural**

*Natural food means that it isn't helped to grow, while **ecologic food is controlled to be natural**. Still natural isn't necessarily bio [NO/F, 18-24]*

- **Link with traditional low input farming = the 'unintentional' organic foods**

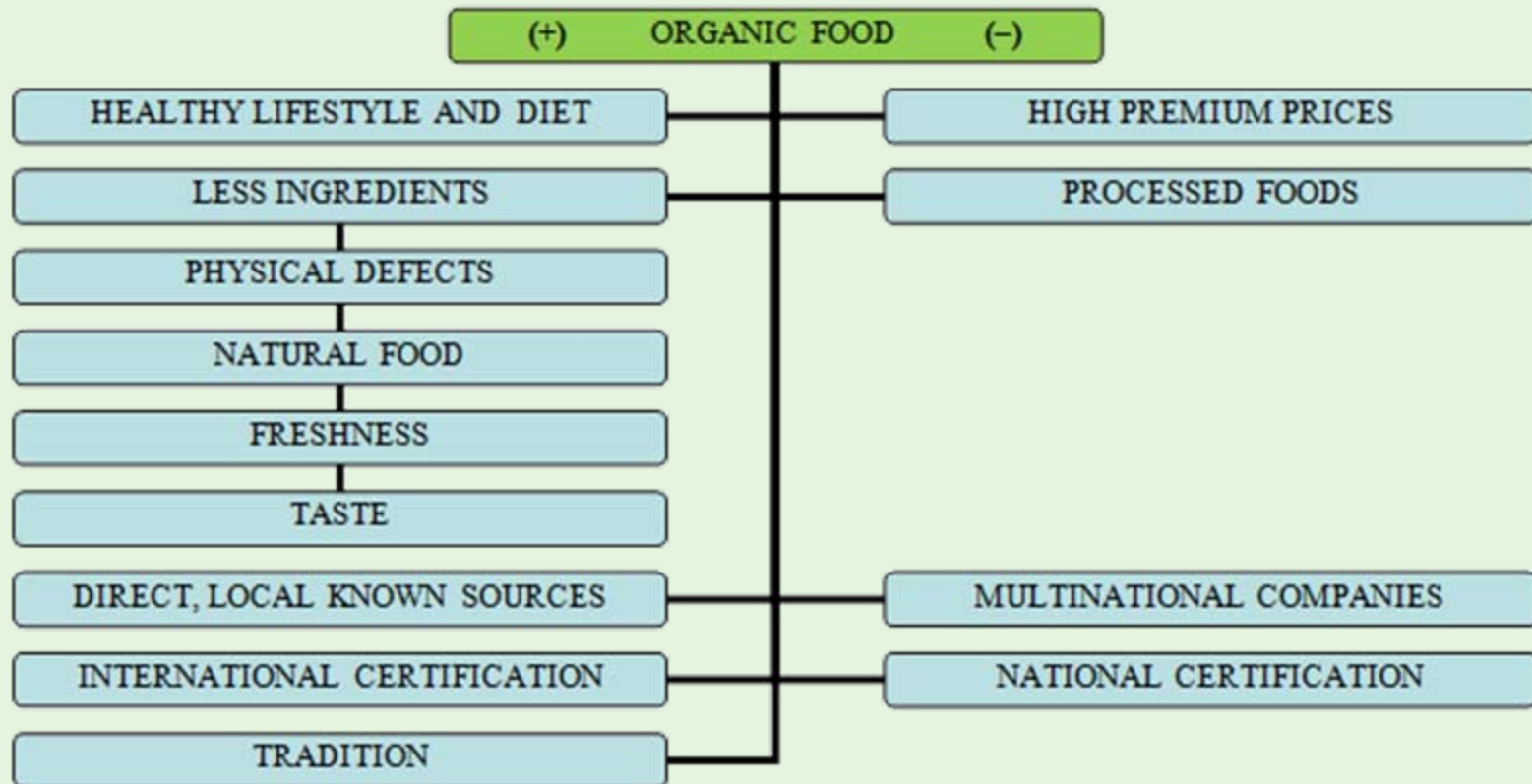
*I am aware that there are **bio foods without any certification**, in open markets, for instance [O/M, 18-24]*

***Why should we pay a premium for ... a product that we can get cheaper from the countryside?** [NO/M, 25-34]*

# Results

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- **Associations of Organic Food**





# Results

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- **Barriers to purchasing organic food**

- **Premium price**

*They will always be **luxury goods** for a **small segment** of the population who can afford them [O/F, 45-54]*

- **Accessibility and convenience**

***Hard to find...**you should be lucky to find any [O/M, 35-44]*

- **Diversity of products**

*There aren't **any labelled fruit or vegetables** on the market [O/F, 25-34]*

- **Lack of trust in the organic label**

***I'm not sure if I can trust all the eco labelled products** on the market to comply with all these standards [NO/F, 18-24]*

# Results

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- **Sources of information and the role of various stakeholders in promoting organic food**

- **Mass media**

*We need an **education campaign**, solid, through **television** because it has the greatest impact [NO/F, 45-54]*

- **Internet**

*I started to look around [...] on the **Internet**, as the first source [O/M, 18-24]*

- **Large grocery retailers**

*labelled products ...in **supermarkets** and I tend to trust them [O/F, 45-55]*

- **Need for better information, linked to the lack of trust in organics**

*There are a lot of rich people in Bucharest, but [...] **They aren't informed** [O/F, 35-44]*

*I think **we aren't informed well enough** about their benefits, about the method of production [NO/P3]*

# Results

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- **Greater involvement of the Romanian Government ... or not?**

*Even though there should be a **government interest** to have a healthy population, we don't have it [O/M, 18-24]*

*I'm not sure that the ecologic standards are **applied in our country** [O/F, 55+]*

**Public authorities should do more to promote organics**

**vs.**

**Public authorities are not trusted as messengers**

# Results

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- **The profile of Romanian organic food consumers**

**The urban consumer:**

- **Informed person with clear knowledge about organics**
- **With an income above the average and no time constraints**
- **...and selfish**

*You go and buy ecologic food from supermarkets because you are **educated** enough and you know it's better for you [O/F, 45-54]*

***With money, but informed** [NO/F, 25-34]*

*The ecologic consumer has **time**, first of all, because usually ecologic foods have short use-by-dates [NO/F, 18-24]*

*The ecologic consumer is a little bit **selfish** [NO/F, 18-24]*

# Results

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- **The profile of Romanian organic food consumers**

**But...**

*There are clearly **two types of ecologic consumers**. Most of them are in rural areas and they consume eco food because they produce themselves only for their own consumption [NO/M, 35-44]*

**The rural ‘unintentional organic’ consumer:**

- **Produces for own consumption**

# Conclusions

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- **2 distinct types of organic foods:**
  - **certified, labelled products**
  - **'unintentional organic' food from the countryside or open markets**
  
- **...associated with 2 types of organic consumers:**
  - **the urban consumer**
  - **the rural 'unintentional organic' consumer**

# Conclusions

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- **Prefer 'unintentional' organics**
- **Physical defects are good!**
- **Processed foods jarred with the spirit of 'organic'**
- **Ecologic = Natural & niche products**
- **Selfish motivations, no ethics!**

# Conclusions

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- **Exploratory, qualitative research**
- **Localized character of results**
- **Further research needed**
- **We welcome suggestions!**



# Q&A

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**Thank you for your attention!**

