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MAREK ANGOWSKI

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University
in Lublin, Poland

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1669-5073

TADEUSZ ZIENKIEWICZ

Lublin University of Technology, Poland

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-6941-6309

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE
PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR OF YOUNG
CONSUMERS IN POLAND AND
BELARUS ON THE ORGANIC FOOD
MARKET**

SUMMARY

The organic food market is growing rapidly. More and more consumers are becoming aware of the impact of the food production methods used on health and the environment, which translates into a dynamically growing interest in organic products. The main aim of this publication is to present, analyse and evaluate the behaviour of buyers in the organic market during the process of selection and purchase of products. The material used for the analysis comes from a survey of young consumers on their purchasing behaviour in the organic food market. The research was conducted on a group of 566 respondents, including 330 young buyers coming from Poland and 236 from Belarus. A purposive selection method was used in the research. The research was comparative and enabled the identification and analysis of differences in the market behaviour of individual groups of buyers coming from Poland and Belarus. The buyers' behaviours were studied and analysed in relation to the decision-making process concerning the purchase of organic products, taking into account: product selection criteria and the place and frequency of purchase in different types of retail units. On the basis of the research and analysis carried out, it can be observed that there are differences in the purchasing behaviour of buyers from Poland and Belarus. These are due, among other things, to differences in consumer awareness and perception of the benefits of consuming organic products. Factors related to the availability of organic food in organisational as well as economic terms are also important.

KEYWORDS: *analysis of buyer behaviour, comparative analysis of buyers, young consumers, organic food market, product selection process*

INTRODUCTION

Food is a specific product category as it is related to necessities. The primary function of food products is primarily related to satisfying the physiological need for hunger and also to the impact on human physical development. The selection and purchase of food is usually categorised as a routine activity, but as modern food products also allow psychological and socio-cultural needs to be satisfied, the purchasing process is becoming increasingly complex (Babicz-Zielinska, et al. 2017; Rejman, et al. 2019). In addition to the characteristics of the product itself and the purchaser influencing choice, socio-cultural, environmental,

technological, political and legal factors are also becoming increasingly important in the purchasing process (Gundala, et al. 2021; Lago, et al. 2020).

The dynamically changing environment makes the food market characterised by high volatility and unpredictability (Śmiglak-Krajewska, et al. 2012). Such a situation makes knowledge of the factors influencing buyers' choice of products and where they purchase them a key element in shaping the competitive strategy of entities operating in a given market (Hansmann, et al. 2020).

Food market trends depend on developments in different areas (e.g. technology, environment, nature, etc.) as well as being influenced by local regional or global tendencies. (Harasym. et al 2016) In recent years, the most significant changes are taking place in the following areas: the development of food technology as a result of technological advances, product innovations, increased interest in functional foods, the development of alternative and personalised foods, growing interest in healthy lifestyles, evolving diets and food preferences, sustainability issues and greater environmental awareness, consumer habits, cultural diversity and globalisation of world cuisines, the development of speciality foods, the development of e-commerce in the food industry (Bryła, 2016; Kamboj, et al. 2023; Küster-Boluda, et al. 2017; Vicentini, et al. 2016).

One of the aforementioned recent trends occurring in the food market is the ever-increasing environmental and nutritional awareness of the public (Frolova, et al, 2019; Sun, et al. 2021). Health concern combined with concern for the environment are key determinants of the ever-increasing greening of consumption. This is the result of growing consumer expectations regarding the quality and health-promoting qualities of food (Mazurek Łopacińska, et al. 2018), declining buyer confidence in conventional food, as well as the fashion for healthy lifestyles, manifested, among other things, in taking care of body condition and physical fitness (Dolgoplova et al. 2015; Rajeswari, et al. 2020; Vecchio, et al. 2016). An increasing group of consumers is looking for organic, low-processed food from certified organic farms (Sajdakowska, et al. 2018). Quantitative consumption is declining in importance in favour of qualitative consumption, meaning that product composition and health-promoting properties are becoming more important than product price and portion size (Jürkenbeck. 2023).

Organic food is a specific product category. This is because it belongs to necessities, but it also responds to human psychological and socio-cultural needs. In addition to sustaining metabolic processes, organic food contributes to the maintenance of good health, which makes it an important element of preventive health care for society (Pappalardo, et al. 2016; Witek and Kuzniar, 2021). It is associated with healthiness, safety and negligible chemical contaminants. Furthermore, organic food is produced through natural production processes (e.g. no artificial additives, no GMOs, no pesticides and using sustainable practices that minimise environmental impact (Hüppe, et al. 2012; Vågsholm. et al. 2020). Additionally, many organic food producers are local farmers and producers, and consumers choosing these products support local farms and can contribute to the local community (Bentsen, et al. 2021; Saraiva, et al. 2021).

The development of the organic food market is a process in which organic products are becoming more widely recognised and more readily purchased by consumers. They increasingly represent an alternative to conventionally produced products. The organic food market is developing relatively dynamically, but it is still not a mass market. Trends in the organic market are mainly determined by changing consumer preferences and changes related to the increasing availability of organic food products (Kamenidou et al. 2020; Rana, et al. 2017). The organic food market can be considered forward-looking and with a high potential for growth, which makes knowledge of its functioning and future directions of change important for producers and marketers in the context of creating future market strategies (Moons, et al., 2018).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The main objective of the study is to analyse and evaluate the purchasing behaviour of buyers in the purchase process on the market of organic products taking into account the differences between groups of buyers coming from Poland and Belarus. The analysis was carried out using survey research among representatives of Generation Z. The Age of the buyer, as one of the demographic factors, is one of the main determinants of consumer behaviour formation. The criterion of buyer age is associated with different buyer needs

and ways of satisfying them (Cavite et al.2022). Age significantly influences the market decision-making process, the amount of spending and consumption, as well as consumption styles and the range of goods and services purchased (Su et al.2019; Tan, et al, 2022). In the literature, most theories describing purchasing behaviour in the market indicate that age, together with acquired experience, life events and circumstances, has a significant impact on consumer awareness, motivations and preferences, which translates into specific consumer behaviour (Azamussan, et al. 2020; Puhakka, et al. 2018). Therefore, proper identification, analysis and assessment of the determinants of consumer behaviour in different age groups and understanding the typical characteristics of members of different age categories can be helpful in developing effective market strategies targeting specific segments (Garai-Fodor, 2021; Melovic et al. 2020). Generation Z was selected for the research as the group of buyers that will be crucial as the most 'effective' target market in the near future. On the other hand, generation Z will create the development of the market from the point of view of how needs are satisfied. An additional advantage of the conducted research is the comparative analysis of buyers from two countries: Poland (an EU country) and Belarus (a non-EU country).

An extra statistical analysis using the U-Mann-Whitney test was also carried out to see if there were statistically significant differences between the behaviour of respondents from each country. The U-Mann-Whitney test confirms statistically significant differences between the ratings of respondents representing the different buyer groups on their purchasing behaviour.

The research section is based on an analysis of the results of a survey of 566 young buyers conducted in 2022. A purposive sampling method was used to select the sample. The main selection criteria were the age of the respondents (representatives of Generation Z) and their knowledge of the organic food market related to their previous purchasing experiences. The research was carried out using a standardised interview questionnaire. The interview was conducted using a web-based survey questionnaire (CAWI) developed on SurveyMonkey. The interview questionnaire consisted of problem questions using complex scales to assess the behaviour and attitudes of buyers in the organic food market (describing, among other things: determinants of the product selection and purchase process, volume and method of purchase,

attitudes towards the concept of organic food) and metric questions describing the respondents surveyed. The research was conducted among respondents from Poland and Belarus using the same survey questionnaire, in two language versions. The enquiry was carried out during the aggression of Russia and Ukraine, but the surveyed respondents mostly declared that they had not noticed any significant changes in the analysed market during the survey period.

The characteristics of the buyers taking part in the survey, including age, gender, place of residence, household size and perceived financial situation, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents $N=566$

Variables		PL n=330	BY n=236
Origin of respondents		58,3%	41,7%
Gender	Female	57,6%	54,2%
	Male	42,4%	45,8%
Age	is 18	0,6%	3,4%
	19-22	40,6%	62,7%
	23-25	38,8%	6,8%
	over 25	20,0%	27,1%
Place of residence (size of Community)	to 15 thous. residents	41,2%	5,9%
	16 to 25 thous. residents	6,1%	0, %8
	26 to 35 thous. residents	3,0%	8,5%
	36 to 50 thous. residents	0,6%	9,3
	over 50,000 inhabitants	49,1%	75,4%
Families income per person	to 120 EUR	6,1%	20,3%
	121-178 EUR	14,5%	6,8%
	179-240 EUR	9,1%	11,0%
	241-300 EUR	20,6%	8,5%
	301-360 EUR	13,3%	11,0%
	361-475 EUR	10,9%	8,5%
	over 476 EUR	25,5%	33,9%

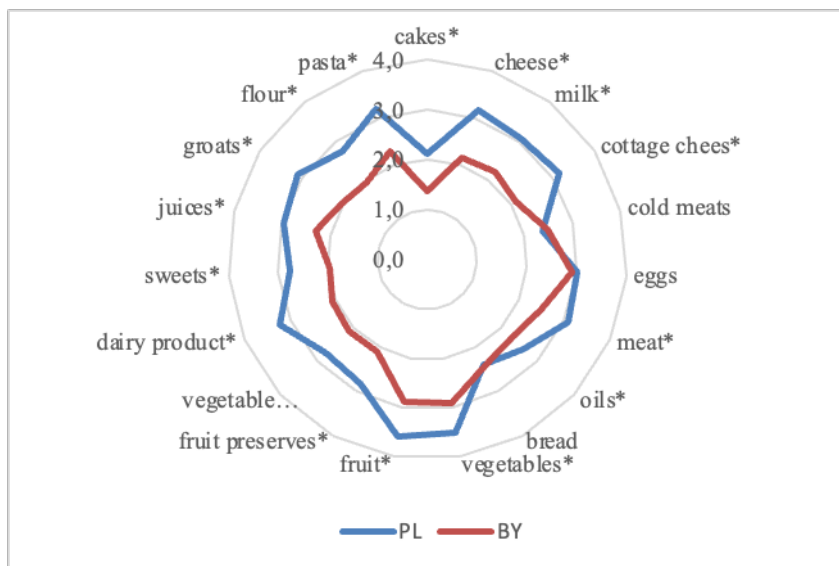
Source: own calculation

RESULTS

To find out the opinions on purchasing behaviour in the organic food market, people with experience and knowledge of the market were invited. In the process of purposive sampling, people who had previously purchased organic food were qualified for the interview.

One of the research problems was the structure and frequency of buyers' purchases in the organic food market. Respondents were asked to identify the selected product categories and the frequency of their purchases on a 6-degree scale (1-very rarely; 6-very often), with the option to indicate the answer 'I do not buy'. To make it easier for respondents to answer, the scale was made more specific by adding the shopping frequency scale to each degree: 1-daily, 2 – a few times a week, 3-once a week, 4 – 2-3 times a month, 5-once a month, 6-less than once a month.

Analysing the responses of the surveyed buyers, it can be concluded that purchases of organic food are not very frequent. In general, buyers buy organic food on average once a week. Buyers from Poland purchase the analysed products more often than from Belarus. The most frequently purchased product categories are fruit, vegetables and eggs. The least frequently purchased products are cakes and sweets. Polish buyers most often buy fruit and vegetables and buyers from Belarus buy vegetables, eggs and fruit. The least frequent buyers from both countries purchased cakes and cold cuts and bread, and Belarusians also bought sweets. Statistically significant differences between buyers' declarations were identified in most of the compared product categories, except for such products as cured meat, eggs and bread. The greatest differences in respondents' choices between the two groups can be observed in the case of products from the following categories: dairy products, groats, cottage cheese and cheese.

Figure 1. Categories of organic food products purchased by buyers

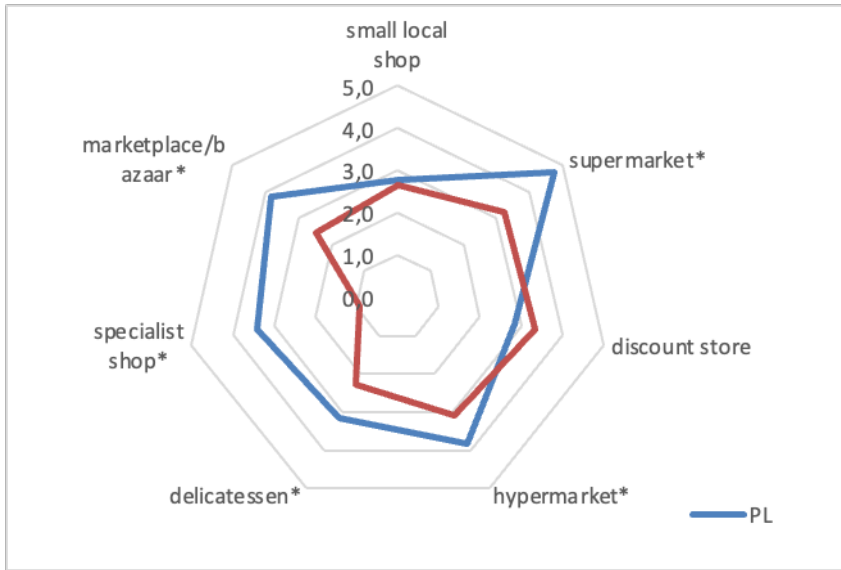
6-level scale (1 – I buy very rarely; 6 – I buy very often)

* Statistically significant differences, Mann-Whitney U test, significance level: $p < 0.05$

Comparison of respondents' attitudes by country of origin.

Source: own elaboration.

Another research problem analysed during the survey was the choice of where to buy organic food. Buyers from Poland most often bought in supermarkets, markets and hypermarkets, while Belarusians bought in supermarkets and discount stores. The greatest differences in purchasing behaviour regarding the choice of place of purchase can be observed in the use of specialised shops (with healthy food), supermarkets and markets/bazaars (shopping directly from the producer). Poles shopped there significantly more often.

Figure 3. *The place and frequency of organic food products purchasing*

6-level scale (1 – I buy very rarely; 6 – I buy very often)

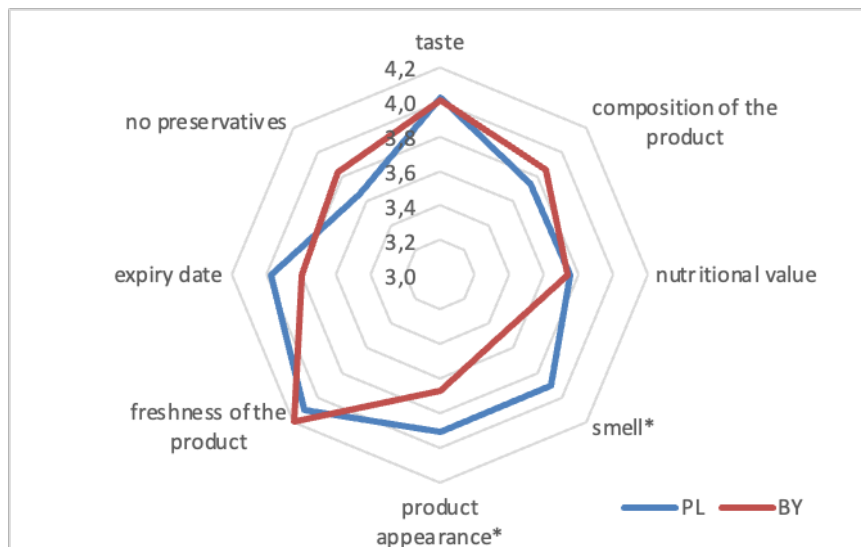
* Statistically significant differences, Mann-Whitney U test, significance level: $p < 0.05$

Comparison of respondents' attitudes by country of origin.

Source: own elaboration

The behaviour of buyers in the organic food market is determined by many different factors. The factors determining the choice and purchase of organic products and the surveyed buyers' assessment of their importance are presented in Figure 3.

Buyers from both countries similarly assess the importance of selected characteristics of an organic product in the buying process. The main criteria they take into account are the taste and freshness of the product. Polish respondents additionally indicated the best-before date, smell and appearance of the product. The biggest differences between Polish and Belarusian respondents are visible in their evaluation of the importance in the product selection process of such features as aroma, appearance and lack of artificial preservatives and best-before date.

Figure 3. *Determinants of selection and purchase of organic food products (Product features)*

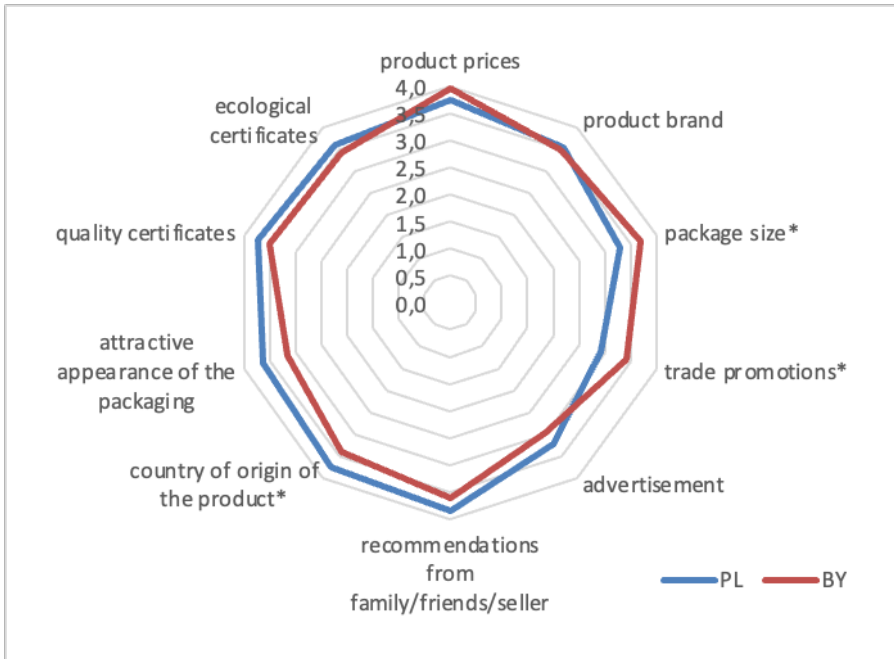
* Statistically significant differences, Mann-Whitney U test, significance level: $p < 0.05$

Attitudes of purchasers were evaluated according to a 5-point Likert scale (from 1-strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree).

Comparison of respondents' attitudes by country of origin.

Source: own elaboration.

Considering the choice factors related to retailers' actions (Figure 4), the biggest differences between the two surveyed groups can be seen in the ratings of the impact on purchase of factors such as trade promotions and package size. Price was a fairly important factor influencing the purchase decision for both Polish and Belarusian respondents. For Polish buyers, recommendations, country of origin and quality certificates were important. On the other hand, Belarusian buyers were mainly guided by trade promotions and pack size, and paid more attention to the economic benefits of the purchase.

Figure 4. *Determinants of selection and purchase of organic food products (Sales activities)*

* Statistically significant differences, Mann-Whitney U test, significance level: $p < 0.05$

Attitudes of purchasers were evaluated according to a 5-point Likert scale (from 1-strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree).

Comparison of respondents' attitudes by country of origin.

Source: own elaboration.

In the next part of the survey, respondents evaluated their attitudes towards selected opinions on organic food (Table 1). Analysing their declarations, it can be seen that Polish buyers indicated greater knowledge, openness to new dietary trends and associated less fear in seeking and trying novelties of organic products. In contrast, buyers from Belarus declared less knowledge, lack of belief in the effectiveness of the impact of organic food on their health and low acceptance of novelties. However, despite this, both groups of buyers indicated a willingness to seek new information about organic food products.

Table 1. Respondents' opinions on selected features of organic food

	PL	BY	PL/BY differences
I have knowledge about the impact of nutrition on health*	3,885	3,475	0,410
I am interested in healthy eating	3,624	3,500	0,124
I read food labels carefully	3,321	3,373	-0,052
I have knowledge of the characteristics of organic food	3,139	3,305	-0,166
I actively seek information on organic food	2,715	2,797	-0,081
I am open to new food trends*	3,727	3,458	0,270
I know little about organic food products*	2,958	3,508	-0,551
I do not believe in the positive effects of organic food on my health*.	2,600	2,966	-0,366
I am afraid to buy foods I have not tried before*.	2,885	3,186	-0,302

* Statistically significant differences, Mann-Whitney U test, significance level: $p < 0.05$

Factors and attitudes of purchasers were evaluated according to a 5-point Likert scale (from 1-strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree).

Source: own elaboration

The next responses concerned the opinions of the surveyed buyers on selected statements about the organic food market (Table 2). Both groups surveyed confirm the higher quality of organic food and its naturalness compared to conventional food. On the other hand, the biggest differences between Polish and Belarusian consumers are seen in the perception of the 'competitiveness' of organic food in terms of: price, taste, content of artificial preservatives and more favourable effects on their health,

Table 2. Respondents' opinions on selected features of the organic food market

	PL	BY	PL/BY differences
Organic food products are of better quality than other food products	3,475	3,473	0,002
Organic food products are more natural than other foods	3,678	3,691	-0,013
Organic food products taste better than other foods	3,492	3,212	0,279*
Organic food products have a better appearance than other food products	3,458	3,061	0,397*
Organic food products contain fewer preservatives than other foods	3,695	3,945	-0,250*
Organic food products have a positive impact on my health	3,568	3,812	-0,244*
Lack of organic food products in the shops where I do my food shopping	3,280	3,382	-0,102
There are high prices for organic food products in the shops	3,534	3,836	-0,302*
There is little choice of food products in the shops	3,186	3,309	-0,123

* Statistically significant differences, Mann-Whitney U test, significance level: $p < 0.05$
 Statistically significant differences, Mann-Whitney U test, significance level: $p < 0.05$.

Factors and attitudes of purchasers were evaluated according to a 5-point Likert scale (from 1-strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree).

Source: own elaboration

CONCLUSIONS

The issue of researching buyer behaviour and the resulting development opportunities seems to be of particular importance to both academic researchers and business practitioners. The results of the conducted research can signal consumer trends in the organic food market with confidence. The main findings are:

- Surveyed young buyers from Poland and Belarus of generation Z show similar preferences and behaviours on the organic food market

- Polish buyers are relatively more likely to buy healthy food than buyers from Belarus. Organic products from the fruit and vegetable category are the most popular in both groups, while products from the flour, sweets and cakes groups are the least popular. There are differences in purchases of dairy products, groats, cottage cheese and cheese.
- For the Belarusian customer, the main sources of supply are retail chains (supermarkets and discount stores). Polish shoppers also use specialist health food shops and try to buy directly from producers.
- When choosing organic products based on criteria related to product characteristics, the main differences between Poles and Belarusians are apparent in the perceived importance of smell, appearance and durability in the purchasing process.
- Price is important to buyers of both buyer groups surveyed, but 'economic benefits' are more likely to be sought by buyers from Belarus.
- Buyers from Poland declare greater knowledge and market awareness of the organic food market and are more open to new trends and product innovations. In contrast, buyers from Belarus, despite being characterised by a lack of confidence and doubts about the strengths of organic food, perceive a problem with insufficient knowledge of the market and signal a willingness to supplement their knowledge on the subject.
- The development of the organic food market, both in Poland and Belarus, depends primarily on increasing consumer awareness of the benefits associated with these products. This is particularly important in the Belarusian market, where respondents indicated in their opinions not only a lack of knowledge but also prejudices associated with changing eating styles.

The research and analysis carried out can complement existing research on buying behaviour in the organic food market in terms of factors shaping the buying process by young buyers. The results and conclusions obtained can also be used as starting material for the development of future, more in-depth research and analysis concerning not only the purchasing behaviour of Generation Z, but also the differences in the purchasing behaviour of consumers with different economic realities.

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