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Analysis of the Purchase Behavior of Imported Organic Foodstuffs in Italy and Korea*

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| Contents |

| Abstract |

Despite the growth of the global market for organic agri-food products, studies focusing on the consumer purchase behavior towards imported organic goods are rather limited. This paper wishes to contribute to this research area by highlighting the differences and commonalities between Italian and Korean consumers in the process of decision making towards imported organic food products. Both countries have been promoting organic farming and boosting awareness and education towards climate change and the production and consumption of eco-friendly products. The demand for organic products is expected to increase further as a result. Italy and Korea can also count on the EU-ROK Organic Equivalency Agreement which provides a big advantage in terms of trading time and costs. Overall, the

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factors influencing the decision making of consumers of imported organic foodstuffs are trustworthiness, product attributes, country of origin, and ethical concern. The relative relevance and preference among these factors given by the two consumer groups in the process of decision making were analyzed using the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) methodology. The results suggest that Italian and Korean consumers value criteria similarly. Nevertheless, there is a difference of perception of the products' ethical dimension and the relevance given to brand and reputation. Korean consumers are generally more brand oriented and value green image comparatively more, while to Italian consumers distance to the country of origin, and animal welfare are comparatively more important. These new insights can be useful for marketers wishing to enter or strengthen their position in the Korean and / or the Italian markets. Finally, the conclusions drawn can serve as a basis for further research about purchase behavior towards imported organic products.

▪ Key words: Imported Organic Food, Purchase Behavior, Italy, Korea, AHP

Ⅰ. Introduction

Organic movements have developed since the 1920s in response to the industrialization of agriculture and the consequent large usage of synthetic fertilizers and agrochemicals in farming (Watson et al. 2008, 1; Kirchmann et al. 2016, 29-32). In the following years, wider disposal of information about organic production and agriculture led to further development of the concept of organic production (Watson et al. 2008, 1). In 1972, the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (hereinafter IFOAM) was founded (Kirchmann et al. 2016, 30). With growing concerns about environment, water, and soil pollution, the

organic movement spread worldwide contributing to the growth of the global organic products market. This led to the need for officially recognizing and regulating these products. Since the 1980s, IFOAM has established international organic standards and certification. Specific requirements are strengthened by national regulations on the basis of the internationally recognized principles; therefore, organic regulations vary from country to country.

In general, a product is considered as organic when a certain percentage of it is produced with organic methods and ingredients and this status is granted by a national, private, or regional organic certification body. In order to obtain an organic certificate or label, producers undergo inspections carried out by the certification bodies (Zezza et al. 2020, 3-4). The latest data available confirm that seventy-two countries have fully implemented organic regulations, and twenty-two have partially implemented them (Willer et al. 2021, 23). The increase in the number of countries regulating organic production reflects the growth of the global organic market. Global demand for organic agri-food has increased by 55 percent since 2013 and this growth trend is expected to continue (Sahota 2021, 136) resulting in an increase of trade.

The organic market is expected to keep growing in both Italy and the Republic of Korea (hereinafter Korea). There is a number of reasons for such a forecast. Firstly, there are strong interests in health, food safety and increased concerns towards climate change and environmental issues in both nations. The COVID-19 pandemic and the intensity of atmospheric phenomena in the two nations has led to increased interest in wholesome organic products. In addition, organic production and consumption can help the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals fixed by the Paris Agreement of 2015. To promote sustainability, various programs addressing the implementation of organic means have been launched. The European Union (hereinafter EU) has approved the Farm to Fork

program and the European Green Deal. Italy's program aims at improving the transparency and traceability of the ingredients, which has been the main obstacle to exporting Italian organic products. Therefore, it is likely that more Italian farmers will adopt organic agricultural methods. Korea recognized the need to reduce the usage of synthetic fertilizers in the Green New Deal. The implementation of eco-friendly, and organic farming and harvesting, is expected to help reduce the emissions coming from the farming sector (Government of the Republic of Korea 2020, 113-115). These initiatives would promote the production and consumption of eco-friendly products including organic foodstuffs. Furthermore, due to the increasing awareness towards climate change and environmental concern, more people are expected to show an ethical consumer behavior which positively influences the consumption of organic products. For these reasons, there is a need to analyze and understand the process of consumer decision making towards imported organic products.

This study aims at contributing to a better understanding of this topic by answering the following research questions: "What are the main commonalities and differences between Korean and Italian consumers in the process of decision-making towards imported organic foodstuffs?" and "What is the relevance of the drivers towards the purchase of imported organic foodstuffs in the two countries?" The Analytical Hierarchy Process (hereinafter AHP) helps researchers understand the relative relevance of non-numerical factors organized hierarchically in complex decision-making processes. Therefore, AHP was selected as the research methodology to uncover the more important purchase drivers of the decision-making process for the selected consumer groups.

It is meaningful to compare these two groups of consumers for several reasons. First, there is a matter of uniqueness as no prior study about imported organic foodstuffs has compared Italian and Korean consumers. Second, despite the organic market growth in both Italy and Korea, these

two belong to different stages of market development. Moreover, there is an apparent difference in alimentary culture and habits between these two consumer groups that might be reflected in the research. Finally, the EU and Korea signed an Organic Equivalency Agreement according to which organic processed foodstuffs originated from the signatory countries are recognized as equivalent to the organic local ones. This will help reduce export processing time and costs with advantages for both signatories. On this basis, it is likely that producers from both countries would be willing to pursue further business in such markets.

The uniqueness of this paper is in the research methodology and selected consumer groups. In fact, no prior research on the topic used AHP to understand the relative importance of the various purchase factors in the process of decision-making towards imported organic foodstuffs. Moreover, no prior study has compared Italian and Korean consumers in the context of the consumers' purchase choice for imported organic products. Finally, the data set used was collected first-hand during a pandemic situation that is expected to have positive effects on the demand for organic foodstuffs.

This paper is structured into six sections. This section has provided an introduction to the global organic movement and the factors positively affecting the market for organic foodstuffs in Italy and Korea together with the research questions and uniqueness of the research. Section 2 includes the literature review on the basis of which the main factors influencing the purchase decision for imported organic foodstuffs are highlighted and organized hierarchically. This hierarchical relationship is fundamental to structuring the research problem according to AHP, the research methodology selected, which is presented in detail in Section 3. In Section 4 the data collected through online and offline questionnaires distributed among consumers in Italy and Korea is reported. In Section 5 the data results and limitations are discussed. Finally, the conclusion to

this study is reported in Section 6.

Ⅱ. Literature Review

Previous studies found that organic consumers generally completed tertiary education, have a middle-high income, and live in a family with one or more children including newborns (Fotopoulos & Krystallis 2002, 738-740). The relevance of income can be explained by the high prices of organic products and can be related to age group and educational level. Certain consumers, especially the regular ones, consider the high prices of organic products as an indicator of quality (Cicia et al. 2002, 211-212; Chinnici et al. 2002, 198-199; Massey et al. 2018, 420). On the other hand, other studies underlined how the high prices of organic products is one of the main barriers to increasing the market share and to determining the discrepancy between willingness to purchase and actual purchase (Hughner et al. 2007, 96; Lee et al. 2015, 1173). There is no agreement regarding price perception; it varies according to country and study.

Initially, most research about consumer behavior and purchase motives towards organic food focused on developed countries due to the high demand for organic food there. However, due to the recent growing interest in organic products, and the implementation of regulations for organic farming in more and more countries, studies concerning developing countries and cross-cultural studies comparing developed countries and developing countries have been increasing in number (Kushwah et al. 2019; Curvelo et al. 2019; Thøgersen et al. 2019). Overall, they show that the main factors determining the purchase of organic food are of altruistic (environmental and ethical concern, food safety, health) or hedonistic (product characteristics, perceived personal image) nature. Ethical concern, food safety and health are included among the altruistic purchase motives,

while product characteristics and perceived personal image are categorized as hedonistic (Maggi 2022). Moreover, as “Organic” is a credence attribute, meaning that consumers can not directly detect through experience and taste that a product is organic, when making purchase decisions and selecting an organic product over another one, consumers highly value the organic products’ perceived trust and safety (Cicia et al. 2002, 206; Hughner et al. 2007, 102; Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen 2017; Hemmerling et al. 2013). Trustworthiness plays an important role in the purchase decision. Previous studies focusing on consumer decision-making and behavior towards imported organic products focused mainly on the role of the country-of-origin effect (Lohr 2001; Lee & Cho 2011; Dekhili & Achabou 2015; Thøgersen et al. 2019). It was shown that geographical distance to the country of origin, knowledge, and cultural similarity to the country of origin, the country of origin’s level of socio-economic development, and the country of origin’s green image are all factors which affect decision-making towards purchase of imported organic products (Lee & Cho 2011; Thøgersen et al. 2018). On the basis of the aforementioned studies “Country of Origin”, “Ethical Concern”, “Product Attributes”, and “Trustworthiness” were selected as the main criteria influencing the purchase of imported organic foodstuffs. For each criterion, a certain number of sub-criteria found to influence the criteria has been selected and explained in the following sections. Despite these factors being common among consumers in different countries, the preference given to one factor or sub-factor over another one is expected to differ according to culture and consumers’ personal lifestyle and beliefs.

1. Product Attributes

Product attributes are features that define a certain good. They are either tangible or intangible. Both categories affect the customers’

perception of quality and the process of decision-making. In the case of organic foodstuffs, tangible attributes such as appearance do not influence the decision making. However, intangible attributes such as freshness, naturalness, and taste are highly rewarded as quality indicators affecting the purchase choice (Doležalová et al. 2016, 90). For these reasons such attributes together with "availability of a local organic alternative product" were selected as the sub-criteria of "Product Attributes".

It has not been scientifically proven that organic foods differ from conventional ones in terms of taste, however, consumers associate the attribute "organic" with better flavor qualities, safety, and healthiness (Fotopoulos & Krystallis 2002, 737). Naturalness is defined as the limited presence of food additives, colorants, chemicals, preservatives, and GMO ingredients in the entire process of production of organic foods (Sirieix et al. 2011, 674). Naturalness was linked to healthiness, genuine taste, and food safety (Loebnitz & Ashemann-Witzel 2016; Curvelo et al. 2019).

On the other hand, the importance of freshness as a factor orienting the purchase of organic food varies from one consumer group to another. Regular consumers of organic food in Italy value freshness as one of the features they pay most attention to at the time of purchase (Pellegrini 2009) especially when purchasing fruits, vegetables, and meat. (Chinnici et al. 2002) On the other hand, freshness is perceived as less important than taste and naturalness by consumers of organic foodstuffs in South Bohemia (Doležalová et al. 2016, 90). Freshness was associated with local organic foods by Chinese consumers (Sirieix et al. 2011, 675), while consumers in Hong Kong valued imported and local organic foods equally (Yip & Janssen 2015, 76).

Consumers of organic products generally prefer to purchase local goods over the imported ones, especially when it comes to meat, fruits and vegetables, except when local organic regulations are perceived as unsafe and weak (Janssen & Hamm 2011; Yip & Janssen 2015; Thøgersen et al.

2019). The product category is relevant in the decision making towards local or imported organic products and in certain cases, the fact that a product is produced locally is perceived as an added value. As such, the availability of a local organic alternative plays an important role. Collectivist cultures tend to exhibit stronger ethnocentrism. Therefore, they are more likely to prefer the local organic product over the imports (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran 2000). Korea is generally considered a collectivist culture while Italy is a more individualistic culture especially in the Northern regions. Therefore, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: It is expected that Korean consumers value the sub-criteria "Availability of Local Organic Substitute Product" as more important compared to their Italian counterparts.

2. Trustworthiness

Trust can be defined as a belief, expectation, and sense of loyalty towards the producer and / or the reseller as perceived by the buyer (Curvelo et al. 2019). Organic foodstuffs are credence-based goods as customers find it difficult to verify that the selected product was indeed produced through organic means and following organic regulations (Thøgersen et al. 2016). Organic regulations, certification bodies and organic labels / logos were established to build trust in the organic system. As organic logos and certificates serve as a product assurance, they influence consumer confidence in the product, their willingness to pay and the purchase decision (Canova et al. 2020; Sønderskov & Daugbjerg 2011). The presence of an organic label and the reputation of the certification body influences the perceived quality and value of the organic product (Hamzaoui-Essoussi et al. 2013; Kyriakopoulos & Oude 1997). The trust dimension is valued by consumers also through brand

image and reputation (Hamzaoui-Essoussi et al. 2013). Therefore, “Organic Labels / Logos” and “Brand Image and Reputation” were selected as the sub-criteria of “Trust”. Janssen and Hamm (2012) found that the organic label / logo offers added value to consumers of organic food, who appreciate a scheme’s stricter standards. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 was formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 2: “Organic Label” is more important compared to “Brand Image and Reputation” for organic consumers in both Italy and Korea.

3. Ethical Concern

Ethical purchase behavior happens when an individual’s moral judgments and ideas are reflected in his or her purchase behavior (Burke et al. 1993, 119). It represents a shift towards purchasing goods based on non-price criteria that affect the moral aspects of the value chain. Ethical consumption consists of a number of purchase initiatives motivated by ethical concerns of a societal, political, and ecological nature (Kushwah et al. 2019; Szmigin & Carrigan 2006). Ethical issues include human and workers’ rights, environmental protection, animal welfare, local community initiatives, and social justice issues (Carrigan et al. 2004). The organic system embodies such ethical values in its founding principles. Prior studies showed that consumers of organic products do care about sustainability issues and engage in ethical consumption (Honkanen et al. 2006; Lee et al. 2015; Kushwah et al. 2019).

The ethical values that were proven to affect the purchase decision for organic foodstuffs are of an ecological and / or political nature (Honkanen et al. 2006; Pellegrini 2009) and they were selected as sub-criteria of the criterion “Ethical Concern”. The political factors include fair trade and respect of workers and human rights (Lohr 2001; Guido et al. 2010;

McCarthy & Murphy 2013). Fair trade is a trading arrangement based on a new trade system that by sustaining workers' rights and fair wages promotes sustainable development in the product's country of origin. In this sense, fair-trade movements and organic movements share a common view of development and production. This is shown by the fact that 65 to 85 percent of the fair-traded goods are also organic. Consumers of imported organic products in France were found to prefer and highly value fair traded goods because they want to promote a new trade system, equitable income, and sustainable development in the country of origin (Sirieix et al. 2007, 8).

The ecological motives positively affecting the purchase decision for organic foodstuffs are environmental concerns related to climate change (Grunert & Juhl 1995; Idda et al. 2008; Lee et al. 2015, 1162) and animal welfare (Hughner et al. 2007, 102). Ethical-driven consumers are concerned about the effects of global climate change, and they value the environmentally friendly dimension of organic products. Environmental concern was found to be particularly important to consumers of fair-traded coffee in Korea (Lee et al. 2015) as well as to Italian regular consumers of organic food (Idda et al. 2008). On the other hand, animal welfare was found to be one of the main drivers towards the purchase of organic choice especially in well-developed organic markets such as Germany and England (Fotopoulos & Krystallis 2002, 736). As the Italian organic market is larger than the Korean one, on the base of prior findings, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: The sub-criterion "Animal Welfare" is more important to Italian consumers compared to their Korean counterparts.

4. Country of Origin

Country-of-origin effects have been widely explored in international marketing and consumer behavior studies. The country of origin expressed on the label impacts the perceived product quality and attributes affecting consumers' product evaluation, preference, and purchase decision. Country-of-Origin effect was defined by Wang and Lamb (1983) as "intangible barriers to enter new markets in the form of negative consumer bias toward imported products". The country of origin was found to play a role on the purchase decision for imported organic foodstuffs. However, the country-of-origin effect was found to be weaker on organic products compared to conventional goods due to the moderating role of perceived trust in the organic certification system (Thøgersen 2019). It was found that "Knowledge of and Cultural Proximity to the Country of Origin", "Geographic Distance to the Country of Origin", "Socio-Economic Development of the Country of Origin" and, "Green Image of the Country of Origin" influence the perception and preference towards imported goods originating from a certain country (Thøgersen et al. 2016). Therefore, these factors were selected as the sub-criteria of "County of Origin".

Regarding "Geographic Distance to the Country of Origin", it was found that a short geographic distance to the country of origin of the organic food product is particularly valued by European consumers (Thøgersen et al. 2018) due to the concerns towards transport emissions and animal welfare during transportation. However, Chinese and Thai consumers do not consider a short geographic distance to the county of origin as much relevant (Thøgersen et al. 2019).

The preference for organic products from certain countries of origin was found to be affected by the knowledge of and cultural proximity to the country of origin as well. In fact, personal emotions and feelings

towards a country can affect the decision to purchase an imported product (Gurhan-Canli and Maheswaran 2000). The stereotypical beliefs and product-country associations are influenced by the consumer's personal experience with the country of origin (Thøgersen et al. 2018, 142). Countries that are located geographically closer are also more likely to be better known, culturally similar, and emotionally linked to the consumer (Thøgersen et al. 2016). Indeed, Italian consumers prefer products labeled with the EU organic label, containing ingredients from the EU to products with Non-EU ingredients.

The level of economic and social development of the "Country of Origin" affects the preference and evaluation of an imported organic product. In developed countries, studies confirm that there is a domestic country bias, but when a local product is not available, they choose imported organic goods preferably from other developed countries (Thøgersen et al. 2016). However, it was found that in Hong Kong that the imported organic option is preferred over the local one due to the general dependence on imported foods (Yip & Jansson 2015, 78-79). On the other hand, consumers in developing countries generally prefer imported organic foods from developed countries as the level of development of the country of origin is associated with higher safety and trust in the organic control bodies (Thøgersen et al. 2019). However, in certain developing countries with high ethnocentrism, such as Brazil, consumers feel the need to promote and support local products despite linking them with lower safety compared to the imported option.

Finally, the general perception consumers build about products originated from a certain country is "based on their prior perception of the country's production and marketing structures" (Roth & Romeo 1992, 80) in terms of environmental friendliness, food safety and trustworthiness which influence the preference for country-of-origin and purchase. This phenomenon can be defined as the green image of the country of origin.

A negative green image influences the decision-making more than a positive one (Thøgersen et al. 2018; Dekhili & Achabou 2015) because it strongly affects the perceived product's trustworthiness. For example, despite Hong Kong consumers having a positive image of and preference for imported organic foods, they negatively perceive organic goods from China (Yip & Janssen 2015, 82). Korean consumers were found to be highly sensitive to green image (Lee & Cho 2011). Moreover, when purchasing organic food, they prefer domestic branded products with ingredients originating from developed countries they are familiar with if the domestic alternative is not available (Lee et al. 2015). Due to the negative green image of the neighboring countries, and to the negative historical experiences and current tensions with neighboring nations, they are expected to consider the sub-criteria "Geographic Distance to the Country of Origin" and "Knowledge of and Cultural Proximity to the Country of Origin" as being relatively less important compared to their Italian counterparts.

Hypothesis 4: The role of "Geographic Distance to the Country of Origin" is expected to be relatively less important for Korean consumers compared to their Italian counterparts.
Hypothesis 5: The role of "Knowledge of and Cultural Proximity to the Country of Origin" is expected to be relatively less important for Korean consumers compared to their Italian counterparts.

Ⅲ. Research Methodology

The objective of this paper is to highlight the main commonalities and differences between the Italian and Korean consumers of imported organic foodstuffs. The two groups were asked to pair-wise compare the

various factors involved in the decision-making process of purchasing imported organic foodstuffs. The relative importance and weights Italian and Korean consumers assign to intangible criteria and sub-criteria involved in the decision-making process for imported organic foodstuffs were derived through the use of AHP.

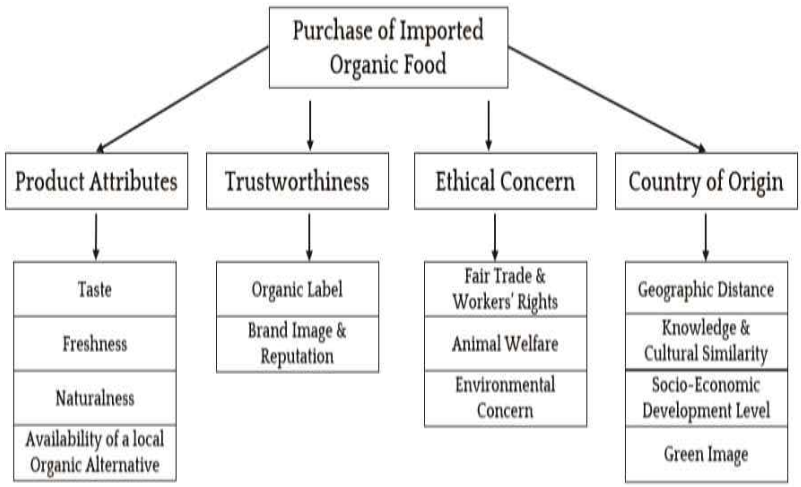
AHP is an analytical tool developed to solve multiple criteria decisions by combining qualitative and quantitative analysis (Xu & Xu 2020, 360). In the process of decision-making, people take account of, evaluate, and compare different factors and alternatives related to the problem. These factors and alternatives are intangible in nature, so despite having a certain weight on decisions, they are difficult to be numerically quantified (Pizzinato & Kim 2020, 140). AHP enables the conversion of intangible factors influencing the process of decision making in a certain field, into quantitative factors through the hierarchical deconstruction of the problem into criteria, sub-criteria, and alternatives and their pair-wise comparison using a 1-9 points scale, or Saaty Scale, operated by experts in the selected field. The relative measurement allows one to understand how much one intangible criterion or sub-criterion is more or less important compared to another one (Saaty 1993, 1-2). Through this system, AHP permits the understanding of relative weights and rankings of the intangible factors involved in the process of decision-making. The fields of application of AHP vary from decision-making in economic allocations, resource management, public administration, and conflict analysis (Waris et al. 2019, 4; Vaidya & Kumar 2006, 1-2).

AHP is based on a step-by-step approach. The steps derived from different studies by Saaty (1980; 1990; 1995, 82-92) and Vaidya & Kumar (2006, 2) are presented below. The first step consists of stating the problem and identifying the main factors which influence the problem. In the second step, the problem must be hierarchically structured into an Overall Objective (Level 1), Criteria (Level 2), and Sub-criteria (Level 3).

The elements at each level are decompositions or refinements of the elements in the level above. The second step for the decision-making process towards the purchase of imported organic foodstuffs is shown in <Figure 1>.

During the third step, experts on the identified decision-making problem are asked to compare a pair of factors belonging to the same level and assign to the pair of factors a relative score using a 1-9 points linear relevance scale (Saaty Scale). After pair-wise comparing the criteria, the sub-criteria influencing the same criterion are pair-wise compared. For example, the criterion "Product Attributes" is compared to another criterion "Trustworthiness". All criteria are pair-wise compared in a similar process. Upon completion, the sub-criterion "Taste" is compared with another sub-criterion of "Product Attributes", for example "Freshness". The third step is completed when all the sub-criteria belonging to a given criteria are pair-wise compared.

<Figure 1> Deconstruction and Organization of the Research Problem in Hierarchical Levels



The answers to the comparisons are collected through questionnaires. For the topic at hand, the selected experts are consumers that have purchased imported organic foodstuffs at least once. Moreover, to simplify the pair-wise comparison, a 5-points scale which excluded the intermediate levels of the Saaty Scale was used (Please see <Table 1>). Different studies demonstrated the interchangeability of these scales. A 1-5 scale provides very similar weighting percentages compared to the 1-9 scale (Hossain et al. 2014; Aupetit & Genest 1993).

The fourth step consists of analyzing and evaluating the consistency of the collected responses. In this study, a total of five consistency tests per collected answer were conducted. One consistency test was run at the criteria level and one consistency test was run for each set of sub-criteria belonging to the same criterion.

<Table 1> 5 Points Scale for Pair-wise Comparison

Intensity of Importance	Definition	Explanation
1	Equal Importance	Two activities contribute equally to the objective.
3	Moderate Importance	Experience and judgment slightly favor one activity over another.
5	Strong Importance	Experience and judgment favor one activity over another.
7	Very Strong Importance	An activity is favored very strongly over another, its dominance demonstrated in practice.
9	Extreme Importance	The evidence favoring one activity over another is of the highest possible order of affirmation.

▪ Saaty(1980, 26)

Consistency is evaluated based on the Consistency Ratio (hereinafter CR), which is evaluated using the following formula.

$$Consistency\ Ratio\ (CR) = \frac{Consistency\ Index\ (CI)}{Random\ Index\ (RI)}$$

where the Random Index (hereinafter RI) is an "estimation of the average CI obtained from a large enough set of randomly generated matrices of size n" (Brunelli 2015, 28). The values of RI for n matrices are reported in <Table 2>.

The Consistency Index (hereinafter CI) is evaluated using the formula

$$Consistency\ Index = \frac{\lambda \max - n}{n-1}$$

where "n" represents the order of pair-wise comparison matrices, i.e. the number of criteria when the consistency test is run at the criteria level (Level 2), or the number of sub-criteria under the same criterion when it is run at the sub-criteria level (Level 3). λ max is the maximum eigenvalue.

<Table 2> Values of the Random Index (RI)

n	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RIn	0.5247	0.8816	1.1086	1.2479	1.3417	1.4057	1.4499	1.4854

▪ Brunelli(2015, 28)

The consistency test is deemed positive when the condition CR≤0.10 is satisfied. "A CR=0.10 means that the answers given during the pair-wise comparisons are 10 percent as inconsistent as if they were given randomly" (Brunelli 2015, 28). CR≤0.10 was defined as the optimally acceptable consistency ratio by Saaty. However, Saaty himself mentions that people find it hard to be consistent and logical due to human nature (Saaty 1983, 140) especially when it comes to the field of social sciences,

where “higher ambiguity of the compared constructs verifies” (ibid, 142-143). Moreover, when the compared criteria and sub-criteria are different in nature, higher levels of CR are expected (Pizzinato & Kim 2020, 143). In such cases, as higher levels of inconsistency are predicted, a higher level of inconsistency up to CR≤0.20 is acceptable (Saaty 1980, 85; Saaty 1983, 149). As such, a higher level of consistency up to 0.20 (CR≤0.20) is accepted in this study.

Ⅳ. Data Analysis

In order to understand the main commonalities and differences between Italian and Korean consumers of imported organic products a survey was conducted in both countries. The questionnaire was prepared in English and translated into Italian and Korean before being distributed to avoid language barriers. The answers were collected over a period of about four months, from May 2021 to August 2021. For Italy, a total of 284 answers were collected online, while 138 answers were collected online and 220 offline for Korea. A total of 80 answers per country passed the consistency test. The questionnaire was structured in five different parts: explanation of the study, respondent demographic information, purchase information, pair-wise comparison of the criteria, and pair-wise comparison of the sub-criteria. In the third section, participants were asked to confirm that they had purchased imported organic food. Only the positive answers were considered for the data analysis. In order to provide a good understanding of the survey and ensure higher consistency, an explanation of the pair-wise rating system was provided.

1. Demographic Information and Purchase Habits

Prior studies found that gender, occupation, level of education, and family size are relevant demographic information for regular consumers of organic products (Chinnici et al. 2002; Fotopoulos & Krystallis 2002, 738-740). Such information was included in the survey along with questions on the presence of a newborn, and dietary choice, as a positive link was found between these patterns and organic choice (Cicia et al. 2002; Hughner et al. 2007, 96). <Table 3> summarizes the demographic information collected in Italy and Korea.

In both the Italian and Korean groups, the majority of the consumers are female, with a high level of education and living in a family of three or more people. This reflects the typical organic consumer found in previous studies. The main differences between the two consumer groups are found in the composition of age group, family size, presence of newborns and dietary habits.

<Table 3> Demographic Information

	ITALY					KOREA				
Gender	Female: 80%			Male: 20%		Female: 87.2%			Male: 12.8%	
Level of Education	BA: 26.3%	MA: 32.5%	PhD: 2.5%	College: 37.5%	Secondary School: 1.2%	BA: 43.2%	MA: 32.4%	PhD: 2.7%	College: 21.6%	Secondary School: 0%
Work Status	Employed: 70%		Student / Job Seeker / Retired: 21.3%		Homemaker: 8.8%	Employed: 50%		Student / Job Seeker / Retired: 39.1%		Homemaker: 8.1%
Age Group	21-30: 38.8%	31-40: 18.8%	41-50: 15.0%	51-60: 12.5%	61 or more: 15.0%	21-30: 29.9%	31-40: 35.9%	41-50: 20.9%	51-60: 12.3%	61 or more: 1.0%
Family Size	1: 16.3%	2: 28.8%	3: 25.5%	4: 25.0%	5 or more: 7.5%	1: 43.6%	2: 2.6%	3: 28.2%	4: 23.1%	5 or more: 2.6%
Newborn	Yes: 5%			No: 95%		Yes: 27%			No: 73%	
Dietary Choice	Vegetarian: 5%		Pescatarian: 6.2%		Vegan: 3.8%	Vegetarian: 2.7%		Pescatarian: 2.7%		Vegan: 0%

The major consumer group in Korea is aged between 31 and 40 followed by those aged between 21 and 30, confirming the results of Lee and Cho (2011). In Italy the major age group is the one between 21 and 30 followed by the age group 31-40. This can be explained by the fact that Italian millennials (born 1981-1996) and generation Zs (1997-2012) are the most likely age groups to purchase organic food and drinks[1] and they perceive organic food prices as fair. On the other hand, organic food prices in Korea are rather expensive (Florkowski et al. 2010; Bo et al. 2012). Koreans aged between 31 and 40 are the main grocery shoppers and have greater purchasing power as their careers are likely to be solid. They can afford more expensive products such as the organic ones. Regarding the family size, it is important to underline a strong presence of consumers living alone in the Korean group. However, the number of Korean consumers in the selected group who are raising a newborn is significantly higher. In fact, Korean mothers make up a major consumer group of organic foods due to a strong concern for their baby's health.[2] Finally, the amount of consumers following vegan, vegetarian and pescatarian diets are comparatively higher in Italy.

The purchase habits of the considered Italian and Korean consumer sample are schematized in <Table 4>. It emerges that most consumers in both countries purchase both organic and conventional goods, spending less than 50 Euros per month. However, the Italian group tends to purchase imported organic products more frequently. Interestingly, the

1) Mintel Press Team (2019), "Eating with a Conscience: Almost a Fifth of All Food and Drink Launches in Europe are Organic", https://www.mintel.com/press-centre/food-and-drink/eating-with-a-conscience-almost-a-fifth-of-all-food-and-drink-launches-in-europe-are-organic. (accessed on September 22, 2021)

2) Agricultural Trade Office (2015), "Organic Products Market Brief Update" (GAIN Report No. KS1515), https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/report/downloadreportbyfilename?filename=Organic%20Products%20Market%20Brief%20Update_Seoul%20ATO_Korea%20-%20Republic%20of_4-15-2015.pdf. (accessed on September 22, 2021)

majority of the Korean consumers have been purchasing organic products for a comparatively longer period, from 4 to 10 years.

<Table 4> Purchase Habits

	ITALY					KOREA				
Type of Food Purchased	Only Organic: 1.0%			Conventional and Organic: 99.0%		Only Organic: 2.2%			Conventional and Organic: 97.8%	
Purchase Frequency	Rarely: 7.5%	Sometimes: 41.3%		Often: 26.3%	Daily: 25.1%	Rarely: 50.0%	Sometimes: 28.9%		Often: 5.3%	Daily: 15.8%
Monthly Expense in Euro	Below 50: 35.8%	50-99: 37.5%		100-199: 17.5%	200 or more: 6.3%	Below 50: 48.6%	50-99: 35.9%		100-199: 12.2%	200 or more: 3.3%
Period of Consumption of Organic Foodstuffs	1 year or less: 6.3%	1-3 years: 38.8%	4-10 years: 37.5%	11-20 years: 11.3%	More than 20: 6.3%	1 year or less: 12.8%	1-3 years: 33.3%	4-10 years: 41.0%	11-20 years: 10.3%	More than 20: 2.6%

2. AHP Data

In the fourth section of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to consider the purchase of imported organic food as the objective and to pair-wise compare and rate the relative importance of the indicated criteria and sub-criteria. On the basis of the collected data, the local weights for criteria and each set of sub-criteria and the global weights and rankings were derived. Global weight is obtained by multiplying a criterion's local weight for the relative sub-criterion local weight. Global weights and ranking provide a general picture of the consumers' preferences, on the basis of which the main differences and commonalities between the selected consumer groups can be drawn. The results at the local and global levels for criteria and sub-criteria are simplified in <Table 5> and <Table 6>.

Observing the criteria's local weights, it emerges that both Italian and Korean consumers consider "Trustworthiness" as the most important

factor, followed by “Product Attributes”, “Country of Origin” and “Ethical Concern”. For both groups there was a big priority gap between “Trustworthiness” and “Ethical Concern”.

<Table 5> Local and Global Weights plus Rankings for the Italian Consumers

Criterion	Priority Vector	Sub-criteria	Local Weight	Global Weight	Global Rank
Ethical Concern	0.1667	Fair Trade and Workers Rights	0.3008	0.0501	9
		Environmental Concern	0.3197	0.0533	7
		Animal Welfare	0.3795	0.0633	6
Product Attributes	0.2945	Taste	0.1426	0.0420	10
		Freshness	0.2393	0.0705	5
		Availability of Organic Local Substitute Product	0.2795	0.0823	4
		Naturalness	0.3386	0.0997	2
Country of Origin	0.1675	Geographic Distance to Country of Origin	0.2461	0.0412	11
		COO Development Level	0.2439	0.0409	12
		Knowledge and Cultural Similarity of COO	0.2042	0.0342	13
		COO’s Green Image	0.3058	0.0512	8
Trust-worthiness	0.3713	Brand Image, Reputation	0.2582	0.0959	3
		Organic Label	0.7418	0.2754	1

At the global level, both Italian and Korean consumers ranked “Organic Label” first, meaning that when they purchase imported organic food, the type of certification and its perceived trustworthiness are considered as the most relevant factors. This result is in line with prior studies that concluded that to increase the purchase of organic products building trustworthiness in the label is imperative (Thøgersen et al. 2019). Italian and Korean consumers also give a similar relevance to “Freshness” and

“Fair Trade and Workers Rights” when purchasing imported organic foods.

<Table 6> Local and Global Weights plus Rankings for the Korean Consumers

Criterion	Priority Vector	Sub-criteria	Local Weight	Global Weight	Global Rank
Ethical Concern	0.1469	Fair Trade and Workers Rights	0.3050	0.0448	9
		Environmental Concern	0.4034	0.0593	6
		Animal Welfare	0.2916	0.0428	10
Product Attributes	0.2341	Taste	0.1600	0.0375	12
		Freshness	0.2945	0.0689	5
		Availability of Organic Local Substitute Product	0.2140	0.0501	7
		Naturalness	0.3315	0.0776	3
Country of Origin	0.1963	Geographic Distance to Country of Origin	0.1844	0.0362	13
		COO Development Level	0.1981	0.0389	11
		Knowledge and Cultural Similarity of COO	0.2548	0.0500	8
		COO’s Green Image	0.3627	0.0712	4
Trust-worthiness	0.4227	Brand Image, Reputation	0.3968	0.1677	2
		Organic Label	0.6032	0.2550	1

On the other hand, Koreans ranked “Brand Image and Reputation” second and “Naturalness” third, while the result is opposite for the Italians. Compared to the Italian consumer group, the Korean group tends to give more importance to both “Green Image of the Country of Origin” and “Brand Image and Reputation”. They prefer organic food products which originated from a country with a strong green image, brand image and reputation. Italians consider “Geographic Distance” and “Animal Wellness” as relatively more important in the purchase decision making

process compared to their Korean counterparts. This is in line with the previous literature according to which reduced geographic distance with the country of origin is translated into higher perceived levels of freshness and reduced transport emissions among European consumers. Another important difference at the global level lays in the value given to "Availability of Local Organic Alternative". It is more important for Italian consumers than for their Korean counterparts.

Ⅴ. Discussion

As shown in <Table 5> and <Table 6>, "Trustworthiness" and "Country of Origin" exhibit a comparatively higher weight on the decision-making towards imported organic food for the Korean consumer group, while "Ethical Concern" and "Product Attributes" are relatively more important to Italians. The fact that "Ethical Concern" was more relevant to Italian consumers, is consistent with the findings that emerged from the literature review.

Considering the Global Rankings and Global Weights, the Italian consumer group valued the "Availability of Organic Local Substitute Product" as being more important than the Korean group. This is in contrast to the findings in prior studies which suggest collectivist cultures, like Korea, are expected to prefer domestic products over the imported ones due to the higher ethnocentrism (Thøgersen et al. 2016; Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran 2000) This result may be due to the fact that Korea has limited availability of local organic food products and it relies highly on imported foodstuffs. On the other hand, the organic local alternative is easily found in Italy. Hypothesis 1 is not supported.

"Freshness" was ranked fifth by both groups. Prior studies demonstrated that "Freshness" is perceived as particularly important when purchasing

fruits and vegetables. Using the attribute “Fresh” or other attributes related to “Freshness” to promote imported organic products containing fruits and / or vegetable can be a successful strategy for exporters to both Italy and Korea. “Geographical Distance to the Country of Origin” plays a more important role for the Italian consumers.

“Naturalness” was ranked as the most important sub-criterion of “Product Attributes” at the local level in both countries. In the global ranking, it ranked third for Korean consumers and second for Italian consumers. In the questionnaire distributed to consumers online and in person “Naturalness” was defined as the absence of GMO ingredients, colorants, and preservatives in organic food products. The usage of this attribute for marketing purposes is allowed for organic products exported to Italy. However, the usage of “Natural” or “Pure” on food labels is strongly restricted in Korea as it can be misleading to consumers (EU 2019, 42). For exporters to Korea, emphasis should be placed on characteristics that consumers associate with “Naturalness” instead. “Taste” did not play a particularly important role in the decision-making process for Italian and Korean consumers alike.

“Organic Label” was valued as being the most important factor influencing the imported organic choice in both countries at the local and global levels. Hypothesis 2 “‘Organic Label’ is more important compared to ‘Brand Image and Reputation’ for organic consumers in both Italy and Korea” is confirmed.

When purchasing organic food, for both Italian and Korean consumers the type of certification and the perceived trustworthiness of the certification authority are the most important factors. This is consistent with previous studies confirming that to increase the demand for organic products building trustworthiness in the organic label is fundamental (Thøgersen et al. 2019). The preference for a given organic label over another is personal and differs from country to country. Consumer

knowledge about organic standards, certification, and control as well as the promotion campaigns at the national level play a central role in the perception of the system, especially certification agencies, labels and logos. Italian consumers see the EU organic logo as trustworthy, and its regulations as safe (Zander et al. 2015; Janssen & Hamm 2011). It is better to use the EU organic label when entering the Italian market. Companies exporting from EU member countries or countries with which the EU signed an organic equivalency agreement, such as Korea, are allowed to use the EU organic logo. This grants them an advantage when entering the Italian market. As Korean consumers are very concerned about food scandals and safety, and they tend to trust domestic products more than the imported ones (EU 2019, 42), using the Korean national organic label to target the Korean consumers is suggested.

"Brand Image and Reputation" is valued more by Korean consumers. They are strongly brand loyal and brand oriented (EU 2019, 29) and tend to prefer domestic brands with a strong image and a positive reputation. In this sense, foreign brands face some obstacles in entering the Korean market, but consumers would prefer those foreign brands that they are more familiar with. They are more likely to prefer foreign brands that entered the local market early and stayed there for a certain period of time. As both countries highly value "Brand Image and Reputation", it is imperative that exporting companies build a trustworthy image in the respective markets.

Italians consider "Animal Welfare" as more relevant when deciding to purchase imported organic food compared to Korean consumers. This is in line with the previous literature and confirms Hypothesis 3. On the other hand, Korean consumers are more sensitive to "Environmental Concern". This is consistent with Korea's increasing interest and efforts to promote and achieve green growth and cut carbon emissions. Environmental education has been provided for a longer period of time in

Korea, where it was introduced in secondary schools back in 1981.

"Fair Trade and Workers Rights" was ranked ninth in both countries. The sub-criteria of "Ethical Concern" are not main drivers of the imported organic food choice but still influence the decision-making in both customer groups. Customers of imported organic foodstuffs include a good number of ethical consumers who wish to consider how their purchases affect other members of society and the environment. Therefore, it is suggested for the exporting companies to promote and be involved in social programs aimed at promoting sustainability especially in the country of exportation of the product (Maggi 2022). This would be positively perceived by consumers in both nations. A stronger brand image and reputation is highly valued by both consumer groups and could lead, in the long run, to brand loyalty.

"Geographical Distance to the Country of Origin" is more important to Italians in their decision to purchase imported organic foodstuffs. Previous studies showed that Italian consumers highly value the EU Organic Logo and tend to prefer local or European foodstuffs (Janssen & Hamm 2011; Zander et al. 2015). European countries are geographically located near each other which translates into lower emissions and higher animal welfare during transportation. Ingredients from geographically nearer countries are also associated with fresher final products and lower transport emissions. On the other hand, the countries which are located close to Korea, have a negative green image. They are perceived negatively by Korean consumers (Lee & Cho 2011). Moreover, historical events, bilateral relationships, and tensions with foreign countries, shape the preference for certain countries of origin among Korean consumers. Negative historical experiences and current conflicts between Korea and her neighboring countries negatively affect the image of such countries. As shown by both local and global rankings and weights, "Geographic Distance to the Country of Origin" is considered less important compared

to the “Green Image of the Country of Origin” by Korean consumers.

Korean consumers tend to place more importance to both “Green Image of the Country of Origin” and “Brand Image and Reputation” compared to the Italians. This is consistent with previous studies about Korean consumers which indicate that branded products from countries with a strong green image are likely to be perceived as more trustworthy, safer, and of higher quality. Moreover, Koreans ranked “Knowledge of and Cultural Proximity to the Country of Origin” as comparatively more important than their Italian counterparts.

A limitation for this study is that due to the difficulty in finding consumers of imported organic foods the number of valid responses collected is smaller relative to the estimated number of consumers of organic food products in Italy and Korea. Another limitation consists in a possible sample bias. The questionnaire was distributed online through SNS, university groups, organic products consumer groups and email for both Korea and Italy. In Korea questionnaires were collected in person in shopping malls and in organic supermarkets of Seoul as well. But none were collected in-person in Italy due to the strict travel restrictions in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Users of SNS and university group members are mainly young people. Moreover, when collecting answers in person, it is likely that the respondents are female.

Ⅵ. Conclusion

This study wishes to contribute to a better understanding about purchase of imported organic foodstuffs. Korea and Italy were selected as the subjects of this study due to the different stages of development and share of the organic food market and to the expected organic market growth. This study aimed at analyzing the various factors affecting the

purchase decision for imported organic foodstuffs and their relative relevance in the two countries. The uniqueness of this study consists in the use of the AHP methodology to the purchase decision towards imported organic foodstuffs in Italy and Korea. Moreover, no prior study compared Italian and Korean consumers of imported organic food products.

On the basis of an extensive literature search, “Product Attributes”, “Trustworthiness”, “Ethical Concern”, and “Country of Origin” were selected as the main criteria that affect the consumer purchase decision for imported organic foodstuffs. Different sub-criteria which influence each one of the criteria in the decision-making towards imported organic foodstuffs were selected in the same way. Following the AHP model, consumers of imported organic foodstuffs in Italy and Korea were asked to fill-in a questionnaire, where they pair-wise compared firstly the criteria and then the sub-criteria.

The main similarity between the Italian and Korean consumers is that they ranked the main criteria in the exact same order. Both groups consider “Trustworthiness” as being the most important criterion when they decide to purchase imported organic foodstuffs. It is followed by “Product Attributes”, “Country of Origin”, and “Environmental Concern”. Considering the different sub-criteria, both Korean and Italian consumers value “Organic Label” as being the most important when purchasing imported organic foodstuffs. Moreover, both “Freshness” and “Fair Trade & Workers Rights” were valued similarly by the two groups. For both consumer groups “Taste” is not a particularly relevant factor, but it is comparatively more important to the Italians.

The main differences between the two groups regard the importance of “Brand Image and Reputation”, “Naturalness”, “Animal Welfare”, “Country of Origin’s Green Image”, “Geographic Distance to the Country of Origin”, and “Knowledge and “Cultural Similarity of the Country of

Origin". It emerged that Korean consumers are comparatively more brand oriented. In Italy "Naturalness" was ranked second followed by "Brand Image and Reputation". Regarding "Country of Origin's Green Image", Korean consumers consider this sub-criterion relatively more important. Moreover, "Knowledge and Cultural Similarity of the Country of Origin" are comparatively more important than "Geographic Distance to the Country of Origin" for Korean customers. Similarly to the Koreans, Italians value "Green Image" more than "Geographical Distance" and "Knowledge & Cultural Similarity". However, for imported organic food products, Italian consumers valued "Geographic Distance" higher than "Knowledge & Cultural Similarity". This preference is probably motivated by the positive green image of the EU. Overall, "Ethical Concern" was valued higher by Italian consumers compared to their Korean counterparts. A stronger difference was found for "Animal Welfare".

The study also collected purchase habits and demographic information about the respondents. It emerged that Italian and Korean consumers of imported organic foodstuffs are mainly women with a family of three or more. Comparatively, more Korean consumers are raising a child, and this is in line with the statistics about Korean consumers of organic food. However, consumers of imported organic foodstuffs living alone build up a relevant part in both consumer groups. The Italian consumers are comparatively younger than the Korean ones. Regarding the purchase habits, almost the entirety of both consumer groups are switchers, meaning that they buy both organic and conventional foodstuffs. The frequency of purchase is slightly higher among Italian consumers.

This study could serve as the basis for further research about imported organic foodstuffs. It is suggested that a wider sample be used and to consider the role of price and willingness to pay to better understand the purchase intention towards organic foodstuffs in future research.

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| 국문초록 |

이태리와 한국 소비자들의 수입 유기농 식품 구매행동에 대한 분석

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글로벌 유기농 농산물 시장의 급성장에도 불구하고 소비자들의 수입 유기농 제품 구매 행동에 대한 연구는 제한적이다. 본고는 수입 유기농 식품의 구매 결정 과정에서 이탈리아와 한국 소비자 사이의 차이점과 공통점을 강조함으로써 해당 분야 연구에 이바지하고자 하였다. 양국은 유기농법을 장려하고 친환경 제품의 생산 및 소비에 대한 교육을 강화하고 있다. 또한, 이탈리아와 한국은 한-유럽연합 유기가공식품 상호 동등성 인정 협정을 맺은 바 있다. 이는 양국의 유기농 제품 무역에 긍정적인 영향을 미칠 것으로 전망된다. 소비자들의 수입 유기농 식품 구매 의사결정에 영향을 미치는 요인들로는 신뢰성, 제품 속성, 원산지 효과 및 윤리적 고려가 있다. 두 나라 소비자들의 수입 유기농 식품 구매 의사결정 요인 분석과 비교 연구에는 AHP 기법이 활용되었다. 양국 소비자들의 수입 유기농 식품 구매에 영향을 미치는 주요 요인은 유사하였으나, 세부적인 차이도 드러났다. 한국 소비자는 보다 브랜드 지향적이며 녹색 이미지를 중요시하는 반면, 이탈리아 소비자는 원산지와의 거리 및 동물복지를 상대적으로 중요시하는 것으로 나타났다. 이러한 결과들은 한국이나 이탈리아 시장에 진출하고자 하는 기업에게 큰 도움이 될 것으로 보이며, 도출된 결론은 해당 분야에 대한 후속연구의 초석이 될 것으로 기대된다.

▪ 주제어: 수입 유기농 식품, 구매행동, 이태리, 한국, AHP