



Consumer Willingness to Pay for Certified Olive Oil: Evidence from the Albanian Market

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Abstract

Analyzing the premium consumers attach to specialized food attributes has gained increasing attention in agricultural economics and marketing. In food markets, product quality is often not directly observable, making signals such as certification labels, brand image, and origin information essential in guiding consumer choices. Against this backdrop, this study examines the variables influencing Albanian consumers' propensity to spend on olive oil, with particular emphasis on product characteristics and socio-demographic factors. The study relies on primary data obtained from a structured survey administered to Albanian consumers responsible for household food purchasing decisions. To analyze how WTP is affected by variables such as age, gender, income, education, branding, and certification, econometric methods, including multinomial logistic regression and ordinary least squares (OLS), were applied. The findings suggest that age, gender, education level, and income do not have a statistically significant effect on the extra amount that consumers are able to pay for organically certified olive oil. Instead, product-specific attributes play a more decisive role. Organic certification, in particular, commands a higher price premium than ISO certification. Additionally, the presence of a well-established and recognizable brand positively impacts consumers' willingness to pay. These findings highlight the priority of differentiation strategies within the Albanian olive oil sector. Focusing on organic certification and brand development can enhance consumer confidence and perceived product value. This research contributes valuable knowledge for producers, traders, and policymakers seeking to promote the growth of premium and certified agricultural products.

Keywords: Consumer, Olive Oil, Albanian Market

1. Introduction

Olive oil is widely regarded as a key agricultural commodity across Mediterranean and Balkan economies. In addition to its economic significance, it plays a central role in the cultural identity and culinary traditions of these regions and forms an essential element of the Mediterranean dietary pattern (IOC, 2022). During the last decades, food markets worldwide have undergone important structural transformations. These developments have been strongly influenced by increasing consumer concern regarding product quality, health-related aspects of food consumption, and environmental sustainability (Grunert, 2005; Verbeke, 2005). As a consequence, consumers are increasingly interested in food products that provide additional guarantees concerning production practices, product safety, and environmental responsibility.

In this context, differentiated food products have become more visible in the market. Shoppers frequently demonstrate a readiness to invest more in merchandise characterized by exceptional craftsmanship and genuine origins. Such signals commonly include certification labels, geographical indications, and well-established brands (Caswell &

Mojduszka, 1996; Darby & Karni, 1973). These mechanisms help reduce information asymmetry between producers and consumers by providing credible information about the origin of the product, production standards, and quality attributes (Akerlof, 1970). For this reason, the concept of willingness to pay (WTP) has become an important analytical tool in agricultural economics and marketing research for understanding consumer preferences and the market potential of differentiated food products (Lusk & Hudson, 2004).

In economic terms, willingness to pay (WTP) represents the highest price that consumers are prepared to pay for a product relative to a conventional substitute, reflecting the perceived value of its attributes (Hanemann, 1991). In the case of olive oil markets, consumers' WTP may be influenced by several factors, including production techniques, certification schemes, origin information, and brand reputation. For example, organic certification is commonly associated with environmentally friendly agricultural practices and lower pesticide use. These characteristics can increase consumer confidence and enhance the perceived quality of the product (Hughner et al., 2007). Similarly, quality assurance standards and branding strategies may serve as reliable signals that influence purchasing behaviour and strengthen perceptions of product authenticity and reliability (Grunert, Hieke, & Wills, 2014).

A substantial body of literature has examined the determinants of consumers' willingness to pay for certified or high-quality food products. Socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and income are frequently examined as possible drivers of consumer behaviour (Govindasamy & Italia, 1999; Loureiro & Hine, 2002). Older consumers are often considered more attentive to issues related to food safety and health. At the same time, higher levels of education may contribute to a better understanding of certification systems and sustainable production methods. Income is also typically viewed as an important determinant of consumers' ability to pay price premiums for higher-quality products (Krystallis & Chryssohoidis, 2005). Nevertheless, empirical studies provide mixed evidence regarding the influence of socio-demographic factors. In many cases, product-related characteristics such as certification labels, product origin, and brand reputation appear to have a stronger impact on consumer preferences than demographic variables (Vecchio & Annunziata, 2011).

Although the literature on consumer willingness to pay for organic and certified food products has expanded significantly, empirical evidence from emerging agri-food markets remains relatively limited. Other previous studies have focused on Mediterranean countries with well-developed olive oil sectors, such as Spain, Italy, and Greece (Del Giudice et al., 2015; Vecchio & Annunziata, 2011). Comparatively little research has examined consumer behaviour in transition economies where agri-food markets are still developing, and certification systems are less consolidated. This situation creates an important research gap, particularly in the case of Albania, where the sector of olive oil has expanded considerably in recent years.

Albania benefits from favourable climatic conditions for olive cultivation and has experienced growing investment in olive production and processing. Despite this progress, the domestic olive oil market has received limited attention from the perspective of consumer behaviour and product valuation. In particular, empirical evidence remains scarce regarding how Albanian consumers perceive quality attributes such as organic certification, ISO standards, and product branding when making purchasing decisions. Understanding these preferences is essential for producers and policymakers who aim to promote higher-quality agricultural products and improve the competitiveness of the domestic olive oil industry.

The primary aim of the study is to investigate the factors that shape consumers' willingness to pay for olive oil in Albania. In particular, it explores how socio-demographic factors, alongside product-specific attributes such as organic certification, ISO certification, and brand presence, influence consumer valuation. By presenting empirical findings on these relationships, the research enriches the current understanding of consumer behaviour and willingness to pay for differentiated food products, while also shedding light on the dynamics of agri-food markets in transition economies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Willingness to Pay in Food Markets

Consumer willingness to pay (WTP) is a concept widely used in studies of food economics, marketing, and consumer behaviour. It refers to the highest price that a consumer is prepared to pay for a product based on the value they attach to its characteristics when compared with conventional alternatives (Hanemann, 1991). In food markets, many quality attributes cannot be directly evaluated before the product is purchased. For example, aspects such as production practices, safety standards, or environmental impacts are often not visible to consumers. Because of this limitation, consumers tend to rely on different signals of quality, such as certification labels, brand reputation, or information about geographical origin, to reduce uncertainty and better judge the value of a product (Caswell & Mojduszka, 1996; Grunert,

2005). Previous research indicates that many consumers are willing to pay higher prices for food products that they perceive as healthier, safer, or more environmentally sustainable (Hughner et al., 2007; Katt & Meixner, 2020). Organic food products have received particular attention in the literature because they are commonly associated with environmentally friendly agricultural practices and lower use of chemical pesticides. These characteristics tend to strengthen consumer perceptions of quality and safety, which can lead to the payment of price premiums in the market (Lusk & Hudson, 2004). For this reason, willingness to pay has become an important analytical approach for understanding consumer preferences and assessing the market potential of differentiated agri-food products.

2.2 *Socio-Demographic Determinants of Consumer Behaviour*

Socio-demographic factors are often analysed as potential drivers of consumer preferences for organic and certified food products. Variables such as age, gender, education, and income are commonly used to explain differences in purchasing behaviour and consumers' willingness to pay for higher-quality food products (Govindasamy & Italia, 1999; Loureiro & Hine, 2002).

Age is frequently associated with greater awareness of health and environmental issues. Some studies suggest that older consumers may show stronger interest in products that provide health benefits or environmental advantages. Education is also considered an important factor influencing consumer behaviour in organic food markets. Individuals with higher levels of education may be better able to understand certification labels and the environmental or health implications of different production practices. This greater understanding can increase their trust in certified food products (Katt & Meixner, 2020).

Income is another factor that affects consumers' willingness to pay for organic food. Since certified and organic products are generally priced higher than conventional alternatives, consumers with higher income levels usually have a greater ability to pay these price premiums (Rizzo et al., 2020). However, empirical evidence does not always confirm a strong relationship between income and organic food consumption, as some studies report weak or statistically insignificant effects.

Gender has also been examined in the literature as a possible determinant of consumer behaviour. Previous studies indicate that women may demonstrate higher levels of concern about food safety, nutrition, and environmental sustainability, which may influence their purchasing choices. Nevertheless, the influence of socio-demographic variables often varies depending on the country context and the type of product being analysed.

2.3 *Certification Labels and Consumer Trust*

Certification labels are widely considered an important mechanism for reducing information asymmetry between producers and consumers in food markets. Through certification schemes, producers are able to communicate verified information about production practices, product quality, and environmental standards, which helps strengthen consumer confidence in food products (Akerlof, 1970; Grunert et al., 2014). Among the different certification systems, organic certification is often viewed by consumers as a stronger signal of product quality and environmental sustainability compared with other standards such as ISO certification. Consumers frequently associate organic labels with environmentally responsible farming methods, stricter production controls, and products that may offer higher perceived nutritional value. Consequently, the presence of organic certification can increase consumers' willingness to pay a premium for food products.

Empirical research on olive oil markets also highlights the significant role of certification labels in shaping consumer preferences. Studies conducted in several Mediterranean countries indicate that organic certification and geographical indication labels often generate price premiums because consumers tend to associate these signals with authenticity and superior quality (Del Giudice et al., 2015; Vecchio & Annunziata, 2011). Furthermore, certification labels help consumers differentiate between products in markets where quality characteristics are not easily observable before purchase.

2.4 *Branding and Product Differentiation*

Branding represents an important strategy through which firms communicate product quality and distinguish their products in competitive food markets. Well-known brands help reduce uncertainty for consumers by signalling reliability, consistency, and product credibility (Grunert, 2005). In agri-food markets, branding strategies are often used together

with certification schemes to strengthen product differentiation and enhance perceived product value. The combined presence of branding and certification labels can increase consumers' willingness to pay because these elements reinforce perceptions of authenticity and quality. For example, a recognised brand associated with organic certification may provide a stronger signal of product quality than either attribute individually. Empirical research in the field of food economics has frequently applied econometric approaches such as discrete choice experiments, contingent valuation methods, and logistic regression models to estimate consumers' willingness to pay for organic olive oil and other certified food products (Krystallis & Chrysosoidis, 2005; Scarpa & Thiene, 2011; Del Giudice et al., 2018). Research consistently demonstrates that a product's geographical origins, official certifications, and marketing tactics are the primary drivers behind buyer choices and the ability to command higher prices in the food sector.

3. Research Hypotheses

Building on the existing literature and the theoretical framework of consumer behaviour in food markets, this study formulates a set of hypotheses related to the determinants of consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for organic olive oil. Previous research indicates that both socio-demographic characteristics and product-related attributes may influence consumer preferences for differentiated food products (Govindasamy & Italia, 1999; Loureiro & Hine, 2002; Krystallis & Chrysosoidis, 2005). In the context of olive oil markets, specific product attributes such as organic certification, branding, and quality labels are often associated with higher perceived product value and may therefore influence consumers' willingness to pay price premiums (Del Giudice et al., 2015; Vecchio & Annunziata, 2011). These attributes function as quality signals that help consumers evaluate products in markets where information about product characteristics is not always directly observable (Akerlof, 1970; Grunert et al., 2014). Based on these theoretical considerations and previous empirical findings, the following hypotheses are tested in this study:

H1: Willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil increases with consumer age.

H2: Higher levels of education positively influence consumers' willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil.

H3: Consumers with higher incomes are more willing to pay a premium for organically certified olive oil.

H4: Female consumers exhibit a higher willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil compared with male consumers.

H5: Consumers are willing to pay a higher price premium for organically certified olive oil compared with ISO-certified olive oil.

H6: Branding has a positive effect on consumers' willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil.

Testing these hypotheses allows the study to identify whether demographic characteristics or product attributes play a more important role in determining willingness to pay in the Albanian olive oil market.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Collection and Survey Design

The empirical analysis of this study is based on primary data collected through a structured survey administered to Albanian consumers who participate in household food purchasing decisions. The study was based on data collected from a sample consisting of 400 participants, ensuring a sufficiently large dataset for statistical and econometric analysis. The target population consisted of individuals who had purchased olive oil within the previous month, in order to guarantee that participants were familiar with the product and actively involved in grocery purchasing activities. The questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding consumers' purchasing behaviour, perceptions of olive oil quality, and relevant socio-demographic characteristics. In particular, respondents were asked to indicate whether they would be willing to pay a price premium for olive oil possessing specific product attributes, including organic certification, ISO certification, and brand recognition. These attributes were selected because existing literature suggests that certification schemes and branding strategies can significantly affect consumers' perceptions of food quality and influence purchasing decisions (Grunert, 2005; Hughner et al., 2007). Additionally, the survey collected demographic information such as age, gender, level of education, and household income, which are commonly used variables in consumer behaviour studies. The questionnaire primarily consisted of closed-ended and categorical questions, allowing the responses to be easily quantified and incorporated into econometric models. Following the data collection process, the survey responses were systematically coded and organised into a structured dataset suitable for subsequent statistical and econometric analysis.

4.2 Variables and Measurement

The main dependent variable used in the empirical analysis is consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for certified olive oil. In this study, WTP refers to the additional price that consumers are prepared to pay for olive oil possessing specific quality attributes compared with conventional products (Hanemann, 1991). To analyse the determinants of willingness to pay, the econometric model incorporates several explanatory variables that capture both socio-demographic characteristics and product-related attributes. Socio-demographic variables include respondents' age, gender, education level, and household income, which are commonly used in consumer behaviour studies to explain differences in purchasing decisions (Govindasamy & Italia, 1999; Loureiro & Hine, 2002). In addition, the analysis includes product-related variables that may influence consumer valuation of olive oil quality. These variables refer to the presence of organic certification, ISO certification, and product branding, which function as signals of product quality and reliability in food markets (Grunert, 2005). A summary of all variables included in the empirical model is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables used in the empirical analysis

Variable	Description	Measurement
WTP	Consumers' Willingness to pay a price premium	Continuous (ALL)
Organic	Presence of Organic certification	Dummy (1 = organic, 0 = otherwise)
ISO	ISO certification	Dummy
Brand	Branded olive oil	Dummy
Age	Age of respondent	Years
Gender	Gender of respondent	Binary
Education	Education level	Ordinal
Income	Household income category	Ordinal

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

4.3 Econometric Model Specification

To investigate the determinants of consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for olive oil, this study applies econometric modelling techniques that examine the relationship between consumers' stated willingness to pay and a set of explanatory variables describing both socio-demographic characteristics and product attributes. Econometric analysis makes it possible to evaluate the relative contribution of these factors in shaping consumer preferences and decisions regarding price premiums. Since willingness to pay may be expressed through different price categories, the primary empirical specification of this study is based on a multinomial logistic regression model. This approach is commonly used in consumer behaviour and marketing research when the dependent variable represents discrete or categorical outcomes (Hosmer, Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, 2013). The multinomial logit model estimates the probability that a consumer selects a particular alternative relative to a base category as a function of explanatory variables. The general form of the multinomial logit model can be expressed as:

$$P(Y_i = j) = \frac{e^{\beta_j X_i}}{\sum_{k=0}^J e^{\beta_k X_i}}$$

where:

- $P(Y_i=j)$ represents the probability that consumer i chooses outcome j ,
- X_i represents the vector of explanatory variables,
- β_j represents the estimated parameters associated with each explanatory variable.

In addition to the multinomial logit specification, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model is also estimated to analyze the relationship between willingness to pay and selected explanatory variables. The OLS specification treats WTP as a continuous dependent variable and enables the estimation of the marginal effects of both socio-demographic and product-related factors (Greene, 2018). The empirical regression model is specified as follows:

$$WTP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Age_i + \beta_2 Gender_i + \beta_3 Education_i + \beta_4 Income_i + \beta_5 Organic_i + \beta_6 Brand_i + \epsilon_i$$

where:

- WTP represents the willingness to pay of the consumer;
- Age denotes the age of the respondent.
- Gender represents the gender of the respondent.
- Education captures the level of education.
- Income represents the income level of the respondent.
- Organic is a dummy variable indicating preference for organic certification.
- Brand represents the influence of product branding.
- ϵ_i is the error term capturing unobserved factors affecting willingness to pay.

This econometric framework enables the study to assess how individual characteristics and product attributes jointly influence consumers' valuation of olive oil quality attributes in the Albanian market.

4.4 Model Evaluation

The adequacy and explanatory power of the econometric models were assessed using several statistical indicators commonly applied in regression analysis. *First*, goodness-of-fit measures such as the Pearson and Deviance statistics were examined to determine whether the estimated models appropriately represent the observed data. *Second*, likelihood ratio tests were employed to evaluate whether the inclusion of explanatory variables improves the predictive performance of the model compared with a specification that contains only the intercept term. These tests help determine the joint statistical significance of the explanatory variables in explaining variations in the dependent variable (Hosmer, Lemeshow, & Sturdivant, 2013). *Finally*, the explanatory capacity of the models was assessed using pseudo R-square measures, including the Cox and Snell, Nagelkerke, and McFadden indices. Although pseudo R-square values are typically lower than the coefficients of determination observed in linear regression models, they still provide useful insights into the proportion of variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the estimated model (Greene, 2018).

5. Econometric Results

This section reports the main empirical findings obtained from the econometric analysis carried out to analyze the elements of consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for olive oil in Albania. The estimated models aim to evaluate how both socio-demographic characteristics and product attributes influence consumer valuation of olive oil quality. Similar empirical methodologies have been widely applied in studies examining consumer preferences for certified food products (Hughner et al., 2007; Dettmann & Dimitri, 2010). Different econometric techniques were applied depending on the structure of the dependent variable and the hypotheses tested in the study. Specifically, multinomial logistic regression was employed to analyse consumers' choices across alternative certification schemes, while ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to examine the association between gender and willingness to pay measured as a continuous variable. The empirical findings are presented according to the hypotheses defined in the theoretical framework, enabling the identification of the main determinants influencing consumer preferences in the Albanian olive oil market.

5.1 Socio-demographic Determinants of Willingness to Pay

The first set of hypotheses evaluates whether socio-demographic characteristics influence consumers' willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil.

5.1.1 Age

The results obtained from the multinomial logistic regression analysis suggest that age does not have a statistically significant effect on consumers' willingness to pay for organic olive oil. The likelihood ratio test indicates that the coefficient associated with the age variable does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance ($p = 0.054$). Although this value is relatively close to the commonly accepted significance threshold, it does not provide sufficient statistical evidence to confirm a significant relationship. This result indicates that consumers' valuation of organic olive oil does not differ substantially across age groups. One possible explanation is that olive oil represents a traditional and frequently consumed product in Albania and constitutes an important element of everyday dietary practices. As a consequence, preferences regarding olive oil quality may be relatively similar across generations.

5.1.2 Education

The empirical results also indicate that the level of education does not significantly affect consumers' willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil. The likelihood ratio test associated with the education variable does not show statistical significance ($p = 0.521$). Although previous studies often suggest that higher educational attainment may increase awareness of sustainability issues and certification standards, this relationship does not appear to be particularly strong in the Albanian olive oil market. A potential explanation is that consumers' perceptions of olive oil quality may be shaped more strongly by long-standing consumption habits and cultural familiarity with the product rather than by formal knowledge of certification systems

5.1.3 Income

The empirical results indicate that household income does not have a statistically significant effect on consumers' willingness to pay for organic olive oil. The likelihood ratio test associated with the income variable shows that the coefficient is not statistically significant ($p = 0.227$). This result suggests that consumers belonging to different income categories demonstrate relatively similar valuation patterns for certified olive oil. One possible interpretation of this finding is that olive oil is not perceived primarily as a premium or luxury product in the Albanian context. Instead, it represents a traditional and commonly consumed food product that forms part of everyday dietary habits. As a consequence, consumers' willingness to pay for organic olive oil may not vary substantially across income groups.

5.1.4 Gender

The relationship between gender and willingness to pay was analysed using an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model. The empirical results indicate that gender does not significantly explain variations in consumers' willingness to pay. The estimated coefficient is extremely small and statistically insignificant ($p = 0.913$), while the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.000$) confirms that gender does not contribute to explaining differences in consumer valuation.

These findings suggest that male and female consumers display very similar preferences regarding organic olive oil in the Albanian market

5.2 Product Attributes and Willingness to Pay

While socio-demographic variables show limited explanatory power in econometric models, the empirical findings indicate that product-related characteristics play a more important role in determining consumers' willingness to pay for olive oil.

5.2.1 Certification Schemes

The comparison between organic certification and ISO certification reveals a statistically significant difference in consumer valuation. The findings from the multinomial logistic regression show that organic certification exerts a positive and statistically significant effect on consumers' willingness to pay. This suggests that consumers tend to value organically certified olive oil more highly and are therefore more inclined to pay a premium price for it compared to products that are certified only under ISO standards. This result suggests that organic certification functions as a stronger quality signal for consumers. Organic labels are often associated with environmentally friendly production methods, improved health perceptions, and stricter quality standards. Consequently, organic certification may communicate attributes that are more directly valued by consumers compared with ISO certification.

5.2.2 Branding

The econometric results also show that branding plays an important role in influencing consumers' willingness to pay. The likelihood ratio test indicates that branding is highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), suggesting that consumers are more willing to pay higher prices for olive oil products associated with recognizable brands. The pseudo R-square values reported for this model indicate that approximately one-third of the variation in willingness to pay can be explained by the estimated specification. This finding highlights the role of branding as an important mechanism for reducing information asymmetry in food markets. When consumers cannot directly observe product quality, brands serve as signals of

reliability, authenticity, and consistent product standards. The interaction between branding and organic certification may therefore strengthen the perceived value of olive oil products.

To provide a clearer overview of the empirical findings, Table 2 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing derived from the econometric models estimated in this study. The table presents the variables associated with each hypothesis, the statistical results, and whether each hypothesis is supported or rejected. This summary facilitates the interpretation of the main determinants affecting consumers' willingness to pay in the Albanian olive oil market.

Table 2. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Variable	Result	Supported
H1	Age	Not significant	Rejected
H2	Education	Not significant	Rejected
H3	Income	Not significant	Rejected
H4	Gender	Not significant	Rejected
H5	Organic vs ISO	Significant	Supported
H6	Branding	Significant	Supported

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on econometric results.

Overall, the empirical results indicate that socio-demographic characteristics do not play a significant role in explaining consumers' willingness to pay for certified olive oil in Albania. In contrast, product-related attributes, particularly organic certification and branding, emerge as the most important determinants influencing consumer valuation. These findings underline the importance of product differentiation strategies in food markets, where quality signals such as certification labels and brand reputation help reduce information asymmetry and shape consumer preferences.

6. Discussion

The empirical analysis conducted in this study provides important evidence regarding the elements that influence consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) for olive oil in the Albanian market. The econometric results indicate that product-related characteristics play a more influential role than socio-demographic variables in explaining consumer valuation of olive oil quality. This finding underlines the growing relevance of product differentiation strategies in agri-food markets, particularly in emerging economies where consumers frequently rely on quality signals when evaluating food products. The results of the econometric analysis show that socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education level, household income, and gender do not have a statistically significant effect on consumers' willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil. These findings suggest that preferences for olive oil quality among Albanian consumers tend to be relatively homogeneous across demographic groups. One possible explanation is that olive oil represents a traditional and widely consumed product in Albania, forming an important part of everyday dietary habits. Consequently, consumption patterns and product valuation may be relatively similar across households and generations.

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that socio-demographic factors do not always represent the primary determinants of consumers' willingness to pay for organic food products (Katt & Meixner, 2020; Rizzo et al., 2020). While earlier research has often suggested that higher levels of education and income may increase demand for organic products, empirical evidence across different markets remains mixed. Similarly, although some studies suggest that women may show stronger preferences for organic food due to greater concerns regarding food safety and environmental sustainability (Hughner et al., 2007), the results of this study indicate that male and female consumers demonstrate comparable valuation patterns in the Albanian olive oil market. In contrast, the econometric results highlight the stronger influence of product-related attributes on consumers' willingness to pay. In particular, the analysis reveals that consumers are more likely to pay higher price premiums for organically certified olive oil compared with products carrying ISO certification. This suggests that organic certification serves as a stronger signal of product quality and environmental sustainability, as consumers often associate organic labels with healthier production methods and environmentally responsible practices. Similar conclusions have been reported in studies examining olive oil markets in Mediterranean countries (Vecchio & Annunziata, 2011; Del Giudice et al., 2015). Branding also emerges as a significant determinant of consumer willingness to pay. Recognizable brands appear to enhance consumer confidence by signalling consistent product quality and reliability. In markets characterized by information asymmetry, the combination of strong branding and certification labels may further strengthen perceived product value.

Overall, the findings indicate that consumer behaviour in the Albanian olive oil market is primarily driven by product differentiation rather than demographic segmentation. Certification schemes and branding strategies appear to be more effective in shaping consumer preferences than marketing approaches based solely on socio-demographic characteristics. Future research could expand this analysis by considering additional factors such as product origin, sensory characteristics, and consumer trust in certification systems.

7. Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides useful insights into consumers' willingness to pay for olive oil in the Albanian market, several limitations should be acknowledged. *First*, the analysis relies on a specific sample of Albanian consumers, which may not fully capture potential regional differences in consumption behaviour across the country. *Second*, the econometric models focus primarily on socio-demographic characteristics and selected product attributes. Other factors that may influence consumer preferences, such as attitudes toward sustainability, trust in certification systems, taste perceptions, and product origin, were not incorporated into the analysis. Future research could address these limitations by including behavioural and attitudinal variables, increasing the sample size, and conducting comparative studies across Mediterranean olive oil markets. Such extensions would provide a broader understanding of consumer behaviour and help identify additional determinants of willingness to pay for certified food products.

8. Policy Implications

The findings of this study generate several important implications for producers, marketers, and policymakers involved in the development of the Albanian olive oil sector. *First*, the results indicate that investments in organic certification may represent an effective strategy for increasing the market value of olive oil products, as consumers show a clear willingness to pay price premiums for organically certified olive oil. Policies that facilitate access to certification systems and support producers in adopting organic production practices could therefore enhance the competitiveness of the sector. *Second*, the analysis highlights the strategic role of branding in food markets characterized by information asymmetry. Recognizable brands can serve as important signals of product quality, authenticity, and reliability. Consequently, producers should focus on developing strong branding strategies that emphasize certification attributes and product differentiation. *Finally*, increasing consumer awareness regarding certification standards and quality indicators may further strengthen trust in certified products. Public information campaigns and educational initiatives could help consumers better understand the differences between certification systems such as organic labels and ISO standards. At the same time, strengthening institutional frameworks that ensure transparency and credibility in certification schemes may improve consumer confidence and contribute to the long-term development of a competitive and sustainable olive oil sector in Albania

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