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Assess the impact of subjective norms of consumers' behaviour in the Greek olive oil market

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the research was to highlight the role that socio-economic and spatial attributes of consumers – households exert on their choices regarding not only the supply modes but also the price they are willing to pay for different categories of olive oil. Regarding WTP for different olive oil labels, consumers are willing to pay premiums only for olive oils being processed by either private companies or cooperatives, with the latter to gain 34% of them in case they would decide to change the olive oil they usually purchase. The most important consumer profile is the young educated consumer one.

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1. Introduction

Olive oil, as an integral part of Greek and Mediterranean diet, has strong and long life relations with Greek consumers, as it is continuously used not only to cover nutritional needs, but also for cultural and religious purposes. For the period 2000–2008, Greece is the first olive oil per capita consumption country worldwide, followed by Spain, Italy and others (FAO, 2012). Olive oil sector is one of the most important components of the Greek primary production activities: olive groves are being cultivated in 50 out of 54 prefectures of the country while Greece, with an average production about 360,000 tonnes per year (IOOC, 2009), is the third olive oil producing country, after Spain and Italy. In total, 1.1 million hectares are being covered with 140 million olive trees, with the vast majority of them producing olives for olive oil (more than 85%), while the rest of them represent edible olive varieties. Only 22% of olive groves are being irrigated, with the island of Crete to have the majority of irrigated olive groves.

Another important characteristic of this sector is the relatively large number of olive oil labels of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)²: Greece, to date, has 26 olive oils granted as PDO and PGI, while the main competitors,

Italy and Spain, have respectively 39 and 25. Considering this evolution, different studies have recently attempt to evaluate the level of awareness regarding quality labelling for several foodstuffs and olive oil in particular and to measure the Willingness to pay for purchasing such products (Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2001; Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2003; Philippidis et al., 2002; Menapace et al., 2011). Nevertheless most of the studies related to consumers' behaviour for olive oil focus on organic olive oil market only. Sandalidou and Baourakis (2002) maintain that organic olive oil is a quite promising product, but there is considerable lack of information and uncertainty about the organic origin of the product. Regarding pricing policy there is a straight forward tendency from consumers to pay higher prices for organic olive oil and there are a lot to be done on the consumers' satisfaction issue. Fotopoulos and Krystallis (2002) reach to the same conclusion, regarding pricing, for the whole organic food market in Greece, mentioning that there is a lot to be done on the promotion and food safety fields in order organic food consumption to be increased. Krystallis et al. (2006), Tsakiridou et al. (2006) and Krystallis and Chrysohoidis (2005) show off that high pricing of organic foods in addition with low awareness of the term *Organic* create a quite adverse trading environment for further expansion and evolution of the organic market in Greece.

If we accept that PDO and PGI labels are *de facto* a guaranty of quality and can be perceived as such by consumers, we also assume that other characteristics of the product, especially environmental aspects, have an important role on the achievement of the final quality

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² According to the EU agricultural product quality policy, PDO covers agricultural products and foodstuffs which are produced, processed and prepared in a given geographical area, using recognised know-how. PGI covers agricultural products and foodstuffs closely linked to the geographical area. At least one of

(footnote continued)

the stages of production, processing or preparation in the area (European Commission, 2012).

of olive oil. Among them, we can mention the type of olive mills and the technology adopted especially in terms of proper sewage treatment of residuals. For this reason, through a country wide sample, the present study attempts to evaluate the Greek consumers' preferences and behaviour for different olive oil brands and various specific olive oil's attributes. This research is focused on consumer behaviour attributes taking under consideration, amongst others, the recognised quality certification protocols and the environmental components of the production process.

2. Theoretical background

Consumers' preferences and willingness to pay more for specific foods' attributes is a complex decision-making process that has been largely conceptualised via the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). This theory suggests that attitudes toward behaviour and subjective norms predict an individual's intention which, in turn, predicts the behaviour itself. Even if this theory has been used to predict a wide range of human behaviours, it was criticised for neglecting the role of social factors and the environment surrounding the individual behaviour (Werner, 2004). Consequently, Ajzen (1991), with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) proposed an extension of the model incorporating the idea of Perceived Behavioural Control as both a predictor of intention and a direct predictor of behaviour.

The potential of the TPB to explain WTP for different goods (both public and private) has provided mixed results (Ajzen and Driver, 1992; Luzar and Cosse, 1998; Pouta and Rekola (2001); Werner et al., 2002). Both Pouta and Rekola (2001) and Werner et al. (2002) found perceived behavioural control to be an important predictor of WTP while others have found it to be insignificant. The above mentioned studies suggest that psychosocial variables, such as perceived behavioural control, have shown to be better predictors than attitudinal variables alone (Sparks and Shepard, 1992). However, subjective norms only capture what an individual believes important others want him/her to do. They do not capture what important others do themselves. More recent theoretical frameworks have included both of these ideas in the form of injunctive and descriptive norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). A series of studies have already been printed, implementing the TPB. Blanchard and Kupperman et al. (2009) measured behavioural, normative, and control beliefs and examined how they predicted fruit and vegetable intake. All beliefs were found to be significant predictors of it. Kittinger et al. (2008) assessed the direct relationship between attitude, fruit and vegetable intake and found that this relationship is significant. Blanchard et al. (2009) found affective, but not instrumental, attitudes to be significant factor of intention. Collins and Mullan (2011) found that subjective norms factor is a significant predictor of intention. Godin et al. (2010) measured the relationship between anticipated regret and intention of fruit and vegetables intake, with this to be significant. All these findings demonstrate the utility of the TPB in the food sector. However, the olive oil, as a food product, has not been studied before, by implementing this methodology. Therefore, this is the contribution of this specific research.

3. Methodological approach

The empirical study is based on a consumer's behaviour survey focused on two main aspects: (i) the purchasing choice for olive oil (formal – informal distribution networks³) in order to evaluate the consumers' preferences as well as the relative market shares of

branded and unbranded olive oil and (ii) the awareness of olive oil consumers as regards main attributes of the product. More exactly, three alternative characteristics of olive oil are examined: the label, the quality certification protocol and finally the respect of environmental criteria in the production process. The awareness is measuring through the willingness to pay more or less in order to ensure each one of the examined attribute.

Consequently the reference population of the study concerns households living in conventional dwellings and not individual consumers. The field research was conducted on a national level by administering individual questionnaire to 2000 households in 23 municipalities of the country. Previous studies estimated that the formal market share is relatively limited so that more than 45% of households are providing olive oil through relative – self consumption or purchasing unbranded olive oil directly from small producers (ICAP, 2005). Nevertheless we considered more appropriate to calculate the sample size on the basis of a response distribution of 50% which gives a largest sample size. With a reference population about 3,550,000 households, the selected sample size of 2000 units correspond to a margin error about 3% (exactly 2.88%) and a confidence level of 99% or alternatively 2.6% margin error and 98% C.I.

The households have been selected through a stratified random sampling where strata have been defined through the following two key criteria: urban/rural areas and traditional production/nonproduction zones of olive oil. This double spatial distinction is being implemented because previous studies have demonstrated that there is significant differences among them on the preferred ways of purchasing olive oil for their households while urban lifestyle affects the nature of the foods consumed as well as the dietary patterns. In this context, three urban centre categories have been defined: (a) Athens and Thessalonika, (b) large regional cities and (c) small medium cities. As regards the second criteria, a distinction is made between municipalities near production areas and those outside such areas. The structure of the research and sample is given in Tables 1 and 2.

We have to mention that 18 questionnaires (less than 1%) were excluded from the analysis due to their large number and quite systematical missing responses (8 in nonproductive areas and 10 in productive ones).

The on field study took place from December 2009 to January 2010, through direct interviews exclusively with household's head or his/her spouse in order to ensure reliable responses. Finally, the interviews have been carried out at the entrance of supermarkets after agreement reached with their manager while the consumers were chosen by the interviewers randomly in every definite household's head ageing group following the principles of stratified random sampling.

The methodological approach is based on a two-step study, each one corresponding to a specific objective:

Table 1
Technical information.

Technical information issues	
Type of survey	Field research
Population	3,462,000
Sample unit	Household
Fieldwork date	December 2009–January 2010
Sample size	2000
Sampling error	2.66%
Confidence level	98%
Sampling method	Stratified random sampling
Software used	SPSS

³ By informal distribution networks we mean the distribution of olive oil among relatives or friends without the involvement of merchants or retailers.

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