



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

Factors Influencing Consumer Motivations towards Private Label Organic Food

by

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Católica Porto Business School
September 2021



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Master's Final Assignment in the modality of Dissertation
presented to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to
fulfil the requirements for the degree of
MSc in Management

by

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written under the supervision of
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September 2021

Acknowledgements

I want to extend a heartfelt acknowledgement to my family, particularly my parents, Carlos and Sandra, my sister, Sara, and my boyfriend, Diogo, not only for their support but especially for their encouragement, patience, and support at all times.

I thank Professor Jorge Julião and Professor Marcelo Gaspar for their guidance, understanding, and support throughout this study.

To the professors I met throughout the master's degree for their dedication and competence to the colleagues who accompanied me along this path.

My appreciation is also extended to all those involved in the study for their willingness to participate in it.

Last but not least, to my friends, my teammates who supported me and were always present in one way or another.

Resumo

A natureza problemática da investigação reconhece a forma como os consumidores enfrentam os produtos biológicos de marca de distribuidor, permitindo inferir o que pode motivar ou demover os indivíduos a comprar produtos de marca de distribuidor em detrimento de marca de fabricante.

O reconhecimento do consumo de produtos cultivados biologicamente está a crescer continuamente, e a tendência não passou despercebida pelos principais retalhistas, que têm constantemente desvendado novos alimentos biológicos. O estudo empírico explora como as diversas variáveis em análise influenciam o comportamento dos consumidores em Portugal através de uma análise quantitativa empregando entrevistas como método de recolha de dados. Procurou-se compreender como os indivíduos percecionam a entrada dos retalhistas no mundo dos produtos biológicos, explorar os determinantes que podem motivar estes a passar da marca de fabricante para uma marca de distribuidor bem como os fatores mais incisivos a condicionar a sua compra.

A partir da investigação desenvolvida, é possível notar que os indivíduos encaram os produtos biológicos de marca de distribuidor como sendo de qualidade comparável à dos produtos de marca de fabricante apenas vendidos um preço a um preço inferior.

A presente pesquisa visa apoiar os retalhistas a obter uma compreensão global da mente do consumidor.

Palavras-chave: consumo de alimentos biológicos, marca de distribuidor, comportamento do consumidor, sustentabilidade

Abstract

The problematic nature of the investigation recognizes how consumers face private label organic products, letting one infer what may motivate or demotivate individuals to buy private label products to the detriment of manufacturers' brands.

The acknowledgement of organic food consumption is growing steadily, and the trend has not gone unnoticed by the largest retail companies, which have continuously unveiled new private label bio foods. The empirical study explores how the several variables under analysis influence consumer behaviour in Portugal through a quantitative analysis using interviews as a collection method. It was sought to comprehend how consumers perceive the entrance of the supermarkets in the world of organic products and explore the determinants that may encourage individuals to move from a manufacturer's brand to a private label and the most influential factors affecting their purchase.

From the research conducted, it is possible to notice that individuals face private label organic products as being of comparable quality to store-brand products only sold under a lower price point.

The present investigation aims to support retailers in gaining an overall comprehension of the consumer's mindset.

Keywords: organic food consumption, private label, consumer behaviour, sustainability

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List of Abbreviations

IFOAM – International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements

FiBL – Organic Farming Research Institute

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Definition

Once industrialization practically seized all food industries, organic food has emerged as an increasingly sought-after product. Organic farming and the consciousness of the importance of growing food with minimal chemicals began around the 1960s with a mounting interest in food free of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, making it healthier for human consumption and the agricultural ecosystem. The sector has grown consumer-driven as a result of such awareness.

The importance of the research topic for this dissertation arose given the overwhelming desire for organic food and with price being cited as one of the main barriers in several pieces of literature (Aertsens, Mondelaers, Verbeke, Buysse, & van Huylenbroeck, 2011; Pham, Nguyen, Phan, & Nguyen, 2019; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011). This was an opportunity spotted by private labels who leverage organic values and have conquered consumers by marketing products at competitive rates and, in some cases, even more affordable than conventional ones.

If a well-known manufacturer is the corresponding private label producer and this is perceptible by the consumer, the perceived quality differential may be blurred due to the overall expertise held by manufacturers in generating high-quality goods (Aaker & Keller, 1990). As organic food certification is quite strict in both brands, the private label products present the same stringency and characteristics as the manufacturer's products, leading to profound differences in the individual's attitudes towards store brand organic food. Once the quality difference between brands is narrowed, the price may influence consumers' decision-making (Schnittka, 2015). Therefore, with store brands compromising a significant proportion of consumers' purchases, many authors tried to

comprehend and explore consumer behaviour concerning private label brands, as well as the factors that contribute to their purchasing decisions (Ailawadi & Harlam, 2004; Ailawadi, Pauwels, & Steenkamp, 2008).

Several significant determinants are involved in selecting organic foods aside from influencing the preference for private label products. Previous research focused on purchase intentions towards private organic labels and how their penetration could secure a competitive advantage (Casteran & Ruspil, 2021; Górska-Warsewicz et al., 2018; Konuk, 2018; Reinders & Bartels, 2017). Nonetheless, it seemed appropriate to address the gap in the existing literature on examining which variables are most critical to individuals when searching for a particular organic food and what might drive them to source the private label over national brands in a Portuguese context. Thus, the purpose of the investigation is to review and assess the drivers behind consumers' purchase intention and behaviour and to deliver insights to Portuguese retailers into how consumers perceive their organic food brand to focus on the variables that carry the most weight.

1.2. Methodology

After the prior research, an in-depth exploration of the literature led to considering a combination of meaningful variables to assess the consumer's behaviour concerning the purchase decision of private label organic foods. As a result, the comprehensive analysis framework employed was proposed by Sansone, Musso, Colamatteo, and Pagnanelli (2021), in which the authors sought to understand which factors influence the purchase frequency of private label food products.

The qualitative data collection method enabled understanding the subject's complexities and implications by conducting interviews with several individuals who bought organic food in large Portuguese retail outlets or bought store-brand

organic food at some point. The data obtained were examined to ascertain whether it could fulfil the research questions.

1.3. Outline of the Thesis

Firstly, the paper focuses on the organic consumer with a brief sociodemographic profile of the latter, and a reference is given to the main determinants and barriers to organic food. The second section discusses the methodology with a presentation of the research problem, an outline of the objectives and questions to be answered, a formulation of the research strategy used in this master's thesis, and, finally, how the strategy was conceived. The third section reviews and discusses the data with a brief overview of organic food, bearing in mind the respondents' perspectives while examining the studied variables and how individuals perceive private label organic food. Finally, the study's findings, the limitations, future recommendations, and the bibliographical sources consulted are presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Organic Food

The world has been witnessing a paradigm shift since the consumer community around organic food became larger and demanded organic products (Kushwah, Dhir, Sagar, & Gupta, 2019; Rana & Paul, 2017).

The General Assembly of IFOAM – Organic International from 2008 identifies organic farming as a "production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions rather than inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation, and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and good quality of life for all involved".

According to the FiBL Organic Farming Research Institute in its annual Global Emerging Trends 2021 survey, organic farming is present in 187 countries, of which 3.1 million producers managed about 72.3 million hectares. Global organic food sales reached more than €106 billion in 2019, with per capita consumption reaching €14.0, and the tendency is for organic products to thrive at the pace of consumer demands.

2.2. The Organic Food Consumer

Driving the consumer to decide to buy a particular organic product is commonly referred to as consumer involvement (Kushwah, Dhir, & Sagar, 2019a). Profiling organic food consumers has been getting much attention, with numerous empirical papers focusing on why consumers purchase organic food, the drivers of organic food consumption, and what factors deter consumers from acquiring such products (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2012). While most

literature segments this consumer based on sociodemographic factors, purchase frequency, and purchase intentions (Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz, & Stanton, 2007; Janssen, 2018; Kushwah, Dhir, & Sagar, 2019b; Paul & Rana, 2012) others categorized consumers based on their involvement in the buying process (Hasimu, Marchesini, & Canavari, 2017; McCarthy, Liu, & Chen, 2016).

Nevertheless, outlining the consumer profile of organic foods remains relatively complex due to the many variables involved. According to Padel and Foster (2005), positive attitudes around organic foods do not necessarily lead to actual purchases of organic foods, a noticeable difference between stated behaviour and actual behaviour (Moser, 2016).

Some authors report that consumers overestimate their organic food consumption to comply with overall perceived expectations being prospectively impacted by acquiescence prejudice when questioned about their organic purchases (Fisher & Katz, 2000; Hjelmar, 2011; Janssen, 2018). Other consumers are unaware of identifying certified organic foods causing them to overestimate their organic food purchases inaccurately (Harper & Makatouni, 2002; Hughner et al., 2007). Hence, it is crucial to determine what motivates organic food purchases and the barriers preventing organic food consumption.

2.3. Consumer Sociodemographic Profile

Both industry and academic research on demographic profiles of organic consumers worldwide are primarily contradictory; nevertheless, there has been more and more robust evidence in this direction (Hughner et al., 2007; Nandi, Bokelmann, Gowdru, & Dias, 2017).

Income frequently comes across as a strong determinant (Smith, Huang, & Lin, 2009). Evidence suggests that households on higher incomes generally end up purchasing organic foods more frequently (De Magistris & Gracia, 2008; Dimitri & Dettmann, 2012; Dumortier, Evans, Grebitus, & Martin, 2017; Fotopoulos &

Krystallis, 2002; Torjusen, Lieblein, Wandel, & Francis, 2001; Wier, O'Doherty Jensen, Andersen, & Millock, 2008). On the other hand, younger households behave more sustainably (Dettmann & Dimitri, 2010; Magnusson, Arvola, Hursti, Åberg, & Sjöden, 2003; Onyango, Hallman, & Bellows, 2007; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011), exhibiting more favourable attitudes concerning organically produced foods by considering them in their purchasing decision (Magnusson, Arvola, Koivisto Hursti, Åberg, & Sjöden, 2001). Nevertheless, Wier et al. (2008) found that purchases of organic foods were reportedly higher amongst older individuals with children (Dettmann & Dimitri, 2010), possibly due to more significant financial resources (Dunlap & Van Liere, 1978; Scott & Willits, 1994). Hence, high-income consumers themselves exhibit more pro-environmental behaviour as well (Ailawadi, Neslin, & Gedenk, 2001). In addition, the literature suggests that small children within the household alone possibly motivates parents to buy more organic foods (Riefer & Hamm, 2011; Wier et al., 2008; Zepeda & Deal, 2009). Hill and Lynchehaun (2002) noted that families commonly enter organic products into their diets upon the arrival of a child and exhibit great interest in these sorts of foods. As the children age and express personal food preferences, by contrast, organic food consumption in the household diminishes (Riefer & Hamm, 2011; Wier et al., 2008), driving a favorable trade-off between price sensitivity and household purchase behavior (Richardson, Jain, & Dick, 1996).

Nandi et al. (2017) recently learned that women are the leading decision-makers for household food purchases and are heavily motivated to acquire organic food products instead of men. In addition, women are more concerned with community-oriented goals than men (Winterich, Mittal, & Ross, 2009), implying that they may be inclined to pay extra for organic products.

Notwithstanding a multitude of studies exploring linkages amongst demographic characteristics and the likelihood of buying organic products, to

date, some researchers have yielded conflicting results regarding age (Botonaki, Polymeros, Tsakiridou, & Mattas, 2006; Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; Torjusen et al., 2001), the number of children, household income (M. L. Loureiro & Barreal, 2015; Onyango et al., 2007), and household size providing mixed results (De Magistris & Gracia, 2008; Grebitus, Yue, Bruhn, & Jensen, 2011; Yue, Grebitus, Bruhn, & Jensen, 2010). However, education single-handedly yields robust results, with nearly every study implying that consumers with more education levels are either more willing or more likely to purchase organic goods. In addition, environmental issues and problems are pretty commonly complex in terms of interactions amongst organisms and the environment (Maloney, Ward, & Braucht, 1975) and are arguably better grasped and understood by higher educated consumers (Dettmann & Dimitri, 2010; Carolyn Dimitri & Dettmann, 2012; Onyango et al., 2007; Wier et al., 2008).

Besides those above, the lesser employed control variables are organic food involvement and social norm, but still play a dominant role (Hansen, Sørensen, & Eriksen, 2018). The former describes the degree to which individuals are personally engaged in various biological eating behaviour-related issues (Hansen & Thomsen, 2017). Also, consumers engaged extensively in organic food questions are prone to devote considerable effort into processing information concerning organic food and may be keener to uphold organic food identity and behaviour (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009). The latter refers to the sizable influence of the societal norm on intended organic food behaviour, suggesting that several preferred foods similarly impact consumers' purchase of organic food in consumers' social environment (Hansen et al., 2018). Individual consumers may use their understandings and perceptions of peer norms as a benchmark against which they may balance their own beliefs and intentions (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2012), and this, in turn, according to Krupka and Weber

(2009), can bias their identity and future decision-making. Overall, there is still no consensus against the impact of the explanatory variables.

2.4. Motivations for organic food consumption

Consumers are willing to pay to go green; the only question is whether going green is a choice or a privilege (Rana & Paul, 2017; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011). A progressive increase in environmental awareness has moved it from marginal to mainstream (Grant, 2012). Several factors led consumers to a greener environment (Paul & Rana, 2012). Hence, it is fundamental that both scholars and practitioners have a comprehensive view of what drives consumers, including which factors influence their preferences and what leads them to embrace an organic diet. An explanation lies in the fact that heightened environmental awareness demonstrated in consumers' knowledge and attitude pushes organic consumption behaviour (Aertsens, Verbeke, Mondelaers, & van Huylenbroeck, 2009; Janssen, 2018; Padel & Foster, 2005; Thøgersen, Jørgensen, & Sandager, 2012). In addition, they are driven by environmental issues emerging as a leading topic of public debate (Dumortier et al., 2017; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011) the conviction that diet choice can be instrumental in mitigating environmental challenges and promoting more ethical consumerism (Kushwah, Dhir, & Sagar, 2019b; Padilla Bravo, Cordts, Schulze, & Spiller, 2013; von Meyer-Höfer, Olea-Jaik, Padilla-Bravo, & Spiller, 2015). A different consideration involves health consciousness and the characteristics found in a given product, including its perceived naturalness and natural content (Chen, 2007; Hasselbach & Roosen, 2015; Sobhanifard, 2018). Among the various studies that attempt the multidimensional approach to consumption value, Sheth, Newman, and Gross (1991) and Morris B. Holbrook et al. (1999) facilitate a more mainstream theoretical setting to categorize the distinct motives behind the consumption of a given product through consumption value theory. From the diverse literature

reviewed, the value that approaches the most common motivators across individuals relates to the perceived benefits stemming from the underlying functional attributes of organic foods. Based on purchase involvement, some of the motives meriting further attention are addressed.

2.5. Health Consciousness and Nutritional Concern

So many factors shape consumer choice through which deterioration of human health yields more weight than others (De Magistris & Gracia, 2008; Paul & Rana, 2012). For instance, the belief that modern agriculture and the food industry employ technologically intensive techniques to grow clean unnatural foods (Orlando, 2018) leads to the demand for products without harmful components. This concept acts as a catalyst and is also seen as a critical motivator for organic food consumption, leading to consumers viewing organic food as an investment (Yiridoe, Bonti-Ankomah, & Martin, 2005; Zepeda & Deal, 2009).

Following Schrank and Running (2018), one of the most vigorous debates surrounding the purchase of any organic food is whether or not doing so is an inherently self-interested act or not. Individualistic motivators such as supposed nutritional benefits and the absence of artificial additives and chemical residues have gained importance in organic consumption (Hasimu et al., 2017; Wojciechowska-Solis & Soroka, 2017).

Health-related rationales gave organic foods a competitive advantage over conventionally produced goods (Torjusen, Sangstad, Jensen O'Doherty, & Kjaernes, 2004) primarily due to their naturalness and perceived enhanced health (Harper & Makatouni, 2002; Padel & Foster, 2005; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002; Zepeda & Deal, 2009). Notwithstanding the ongoing debate about whether organic foods are more nutritious and impacted by lower residue levels than conventional foods, Hasselbach and Roosen (2015) deemed natural content the

most critical reason. Still, there is not enough evidence that organic foods are healthier, as many claim.

2.6. Quality and Safety

Kushwah, Dhir, Sagar, et al. (2019) suggest that the role played by sensory and quality aspects hold essential items relating significantly to consumers' personal attitudes in the buying involvement process (Hughner et al., 2007; Thøgersen, de Barcellos, Perin, & Zhou, 2015). Sensory appeal, which manages smell, taste, and appearance, holds the second most prevailing factor while examining driving food preferences (Chekima, Oswald, Wafa, & Chekima, 2017; Curvelo, Watanabe, & Alfinito, 2019; Hasselbach & Roosen, 2015). As consumers continuously strive for natural flavours and fresher goods, taste plays a prominent role when purchasing organic food (Lyons, Lockie, & Lawrence, 2001; S. Smith & Paladino, 2010). Numerous studies point that consumers perceive organic foods as tasting better, having more natural content, and more flavour than the conventional alternative (Aertsens et al., 2011; Nandi et al., 2017). Lockie et al. (2002) stated that the higher the natural content deemed by individuals, the greater the quality perceived by them, leading consumers going back to the roots of sustainable farming methods used in the past, succumbing to how food used to be or tasted back in the day (Chinnici, D'Amico, & Pecorino, 2002). Furthermore, Hill and Lynchehaun (2002) suggest that due to the high prices, consumers perceive organic foods as higher quality than conventionally grown foods, inducing inferences as to their taste perceptions.

Moreover, food safety concerns remain a trigger motivation behind the purchase of organically produced foods, primarily driven by the widespread public unease over some food scares witnessed by consumers (Harper & Makatouni, 2002; Hwang, 2016; Torjusen et al., 2004). Such concerns around safety regularly relate to farming methods, where some evidence suggests

consumers see organic farming methods as more reliable than conventional intensive farming, imparting more authentic flavours (Padel & Foster, 2005). Indeed, Anderson, Wachenheim, and Lesch (2006) note that consumers commonly see organic foods as entirely safe.

2.7. Environmental Friendliness and Ethical Consumerism

Ethical concerns regarding the environment evolved to the point that there is significant interest in the literature on pro-environmental behaviour (Pham, Nguyen, Phan, & Nguyen, 2019). For instance, organic consumers view conventional food products as bearing harmful ingredients, whereas organically produced foods come across as environmentally friendly, driving food itself to become a primary vehicle for fostering pro-environmental and sustainable practices (Shin, Im, Jung, & Severt, 2019). This vision fosters green and ecologically sustainable products paving the way for organic food in mature markets (Rana & Paul, 2017). In addition, Seyfang (2006) uncovered that environmental protection is a common trigger for ethical consumerism. Such consumerism falls within consumer activism, which entails buying ethical products with low social and environmental costs or enacting a moral boycott of non-ethical products (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014). According to (Cho & Krasser, 2011), practising ethical consumerism motivates consumers to choose environmentally friendly products to comply with their ethical responsibility. The literature on organic food supports the social value role in purchasing organic food (Biswas & Roy, 2015; Costa, Dekker, & Jongen, 2004; Gonçalves, Lourenço, & Silva, 2016; Shin et al., 2019). Social value is a powerful predictor of pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour, relating to the product's perceived ability to potentially provide an expected status to the consumer, consistent with their reference circles (Shin et al., 2019). Notwithstanding, (Kushwah, Dhir, &

Sagar, 2019a) refute the idea that consumers who favour organic foods for ethical reasons do not focus on social identity formation or seek social approval. In other words, consumers who purchase organic food for societal approvals may not play an active part in ethical consumption.

The expectations towards improved animal welfare within organic production systems also drive organic buyers, albeit lesser than health and environmental issues (Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002). Animal welfare is a multi-level construct containing nutritional and social components used to measure food quality, food safety, and humane livestock treatment livestock (Harper & Makatouni, 2002; Hasselbach & Roosen, 2015). Concern with the environment and animal welfare hold altruistic motivations; nevertheless, egoistic motives are stabler predictors of organic food purchase (Magnusson et al., 2003).

2.8. Barriers Preventing Organic Food Consumption

The emerging body of research illustrates an inconsistency between organic food and actual purchase behaviour, despite favourable attitudes among consumers (Hughner et al., 2007). Under the same rationale used to explore motives, (Ram & Sheth, 1989) propounded the innovation resistance theory to account for several reasons for individual resistance against a new product relying on the consumer's involvement in the purchase process. The literature review indicates several factors that hinder the consumption of organic foods that deserve further study to understand the barriers for consumers (Aertsens et al., 2011; Buder, Feldmann, & Hamm, 2014; Kushwah, Dhir, & Sagar, 2019b; Lockie et al., 2002; Pham et al., 2019; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015). Nevertheless, individuals continue to value organic foods instead of non-organic alternatives in select settings, despite whatever barriers they experience. The first barrier looks at availability - under the usage barrier heading - which emerges when a consumer does not make a purchasing decision due to insufficient or limited

availability of the organic food product (Aertsens et al., 2011; Botonaki et al., 2006; Nandi et al., 2017; von Meyer-Höfer et al., 2015). Next, lack of knowledge signals a traditional barrier, emerging when a consumer lack organic product knowledge and awareness (Aertsens et al., 2011; von Meyer-Höfer et al., 2015; Yiridoe et al., 2005). Aside from these, the higher premium price is the single most widely referenced barrier in the miscellaneous literature and occurs when consumers compare the quality-to-price ratio of the organic product to conventional alternatives (Aertsens et al., 2011; Nandi et al., 2017; Pham et al., 2019; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015). Ultimately, scepticism about certification and labelling pertains to the extent of risk and uncertainty stemming from distrusting the labelling and certification schemes available in a given cultural context (Aarset et al., 2004; Pham et al., 2019; Torres-Ruiz, Vega-Zamora, & Parras-Rosa, 2018; Yiridoe et al., 2005). Hence, synthesizing the triggers that hinder consumers from buying organic food becomes essential to address in a global context.

2.9. High Premium Prices

A large body of literature cites the high price perceived by individuals as one of the main barriers to not purchasing organically grown products (Aertsens et al., 2009; Harper & Makatouni, 2002; Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002; Hughner et al., 2007; Padel & Foster, 2005; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002; Zepeda & Deal, 2009). As a result, both academics and practitioners need to understand precisely how much consumers are ready to pay and what factors shape this willingness. Extensive research findings suggest that consumers are willing to pay an organic price premium (Govindasamy, Arumugam, Vellangany, & Ozkan, 2018; Nandi et al., 2017; Yiridoe et al., 2005), amounting to the maximum difference in perceived value between organic and non-organic foods, yet many are reluctant to pay current market price premiums (Wier et al., 2008). Regarding food decisions, price-conscious consumers favour conventional alternatives due to the high costs

of organic products (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015). Nevertheless, consumers who are open to novelty and willing to try new foods more often tend to buy organically produced products (Zakowska-Biemans, 2011). Consistent with (Katt & Meixner, 2020), attitudes, predominantly regarding the environment and one's health, play a sizable role in influencing willingness to pay for organic foods, which concurs with a recent review of organic purchase intention determinants (Paul & Rana, 2012; Rana & Paul, 2017).

Similarly, items such as location, quality, and labelling of food products commonly enhance willingness to pay as these features frequently exhibit a considerable signalling effect (Janssen & Hamm, 2012). One illustration of this falls on organic labels, which ultimately may cause a positive impact on the taste perception of individuals (Apaolaza, Hartmann, Echebarria, & Barrutia, 2017). The shopping environment - which covers the sort of outlets where individuals purchase their organic products - also weighs in for willingness to pay, albeit purchasing venue drivers is the less-studied module (Katt & Meixner, 2020). In general, high premium prices placed on organically produced foods generate ambiguous consumer cues (Hughner et al., 2007). While consumers cite the high cost of organic food as being a deterrent in their purchasing behaviours, at the same time, users use price to form judgments on the quality and tastiness of organic food (Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002).

2.10. Product Availability

Over time, both traditional commerce and large retail outlets notice the burgeoning popularization of organic products, making them attainable to more consumers (Carolyn Dimitri & Dettmann, 2012; Paul & Rana, 2012). Nevertheless, there is still unavailability or inconvenience associated with buying organic foods from a consumer standpoint, posing an additional deterrent to purchase (Aertsens et al., 2011; Buder et al., 2014). Furthermore, Nandi et al. (2017)

proposed that the limited variety and product assortment paired with the lack of visibility and accessibility across retail outlets also constitute additional barriers to consumers. If consumers struggle to locate a given organic product in the initial instance, it is unlikely that these will feature in the individuals' choice bundles unless users explicitly search for a particular product. Indeed, Henryks, Cooksey, and Wright (2014) found that viewing a particular organic food item at the retail outlet can trigger its purchase.

2.11. Lack of Knowledge and Awareness

Several investigators advocate that lack of knowledge and awareness contributes to the slowdown in organic food issues (Aarset et al., 2004; Aertsens et al., 2009; Demerit, 2002). Hence, an extensive body of literature stresses how important such actors are to a more mature organic food market (Aertsens et al., 2011). However, a different angle lies simply in whether the consumer is pleased with the conventional product available or lacks the expertise to move from conventional to organic (Botonaki et al., 2006; Janssen & Hamm, 2012). While Hutchins and Greenhalgh (1995) uncovered that consumers could effortlessly understand the organic farming term, Hill and Lynchehaun (2002) posit that most individuals comprehend its core attributes; yet, many misunderstand the practices behind organic farming and its incurred costs. Bearing this in mind, Yiridoe et al. (2005) distinguish consumers who remain not informed and individuals with general but insufficient background knowledge to differentiate unique attributes of organic foods compared to conventional ones, not holding them as a purchase option. Still, Demerit (2002) points out that inadequate knowledge and lack of awareness are the leading barriers for consumers not to purchase organic food.

2.12. Scepticism regarding Certification and Labelling

Another setback in the purchase of organic food is the level of consumer scepticism surrounding organic food labels. Some European studies have found that consumers tend to distrust certification bodies, leading them to question the genuineness of organic products (Aarset et al., 2004; Torres-Ruiz et al., 2018). Loureiro and McCluskey (2000) reported that labelling is essential for consumers to recognize which organic products have gone through a comprehensive control system. In order to reduce consumer distrust, an essential step in the supply chain involves authenticating and validating the products through the government's certification to signal to consumers that organic processes were employed in the production process (Dumortier et al., 2017).

Some scepticism about the valid traits of organic and organic labels stems from reported mislabeling and product misrepresentation, notably because of nonuniform organic standards and certification procedures, which may hold some consumers back from purchasing organic and genuinely believe in the organic label (Yiridoe et al., 2005). Moreover, labelling and certification act as a trust builder between end-users and producers (Padel & Foster, 2005). Thus, although knowledgeable consumers may want to purchase organic products, dubiousness around the valid organic attributes may hold them behind from doing so.

A lack of trust in giant agribusiness involved in the production of organic produce was one of the most commonly cited reasons (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2012; Zepeda & Deal, 2009). Consumers with these concerns seemed to privilege short-chain methods of food purchasing, with an emphasis on buying locally or directly from the farmer (Scalvedi & Saba, 2018). Therefore, "local" could complement "organic" for safety issues and prevent the possible concern about industrialized organic agriculture (Adams & Salois, 2010; Schjøll, 2017).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Problem

As outlined in the literature review section, the desire for organic food is proliferating, transitioning from a neglected niche market to a global food market (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015). Nevertheless, the discrepancy between consumers' sustainable intentions and opinions versus their actual purchasing behaviour persists. Organic food consumption is growing considerably, and the tendency is not going unknown among the leading retail chains, which have continuously released new private label organic products. Given the massive commitment of most supermarkets to offer their organic portfolio, these products are ceasing to be a niche segment and now occupy more shelf space at affordable prices.

Private labels continually expanding into new and diverse categories follows some general trends and with that expansion comes increased acceptance by consumers. Moreover, research suggests that products made by a third-party manufacturer and sold under a retailer's brand have attained an increasing significance in consumer preferences over the years, especially within the food sector (Ailawadi, 2001; Dolekoglu, Albayrak, Kara, & Keskin, 2008).

There was a clear gap in the level of quality amid private label and brand-name products in the past. However, that hole has narrowed; private label quality levels are considerably higher and more consistent than ever before. Moreover, the more quality private label products on the market, the more eagerly consumers will favour a private label over a higher-priced name brand. Gone are the days when there was a stigma associated with purchasing private labels.

By looking into the factors underlying the consumption of private label organic foods, considering the drivers of consumers' preferences for this product

category is a crucial point worth pursuing. Based on this premise, it is intended to ascertain consumers' perceptions about the characteristics of private label organic foods and the primary motivators for acquiring such organic foods and comprehend the probable motives behind why individuals may opt for private label foods.

3.2. Research Objectives and Questions

The investigation acknowledges the problematic nature of the study as to how consumers perceive private label organic products, letting one draw inferences as to what may motivate individuals to purchase distributor brand products over manufacturer's brands.

Given the assumptions discussed concerning the determinants of organic food consumption as well as the perception between private label organic products and manufacturers of organic brand-name products, the research question that summons this research lies the following:

- What determinants might encourage consumers to switch from a manufacturer's brand to a private label organic food?
- What are the most influential factors influencing the purchase of private label organic food products?

The following objectives were formulated for this investigation:

- To understand the behaviour, purchase preferences, and the factors influencing consumers' choices for private label organic foods;
- To assess what may motivate consumers to favour private label over manufacturer's brand organic foods;
- To assess whether the stigma still prevails that store-brand products are inferior to national brand products and whether this carries over to organic foods.

3.3. Research Strategy

Sansone, Musso, Colamatteo, and Pagnanelli (2021) propose insights into the motivations and drivers that influence consumers' choices in private label products' purchasing behaviour. The comprehensive analysis framework upon the factors impacting consumers' choice of private label food products encompasses several variables, which will offer valuable insights to be used in this master's thesis. The primary intent is to understand how consumers perceive private label organic products to draw inferences about what may motivate them to purchase distributor brand products to the detriment of the manufacturer's brands.

According to the analysis framework, the authors suggest a combination of variables that significantly contributes to consumers' purchase decisions, including some factors related to the way consumers see a given product. Pursuing the same reasoning as the authors, the variables were clustered depending on their importance. The selected variables for the present investigation will be examined according to product-related, store-related, and price-related variables that will assist in drawing inferences about the possible repurchase decision.

I. Product-related Variables

Quality is seemingly related to customer satisfaction determinants that either dictate the decision to buy or not, ranging beyond the inherent or technical attributes of the products (Sansone et al., 2021). Consumers traditionally sense private label products to be of poorer **quality** than their brand-name counterparts (Nenycz-Thiel, 2011). Nevertheless, retailers strive to enhance their notoriety by endeavouring high-quality products and expect private label organic food products to grant them the image of a premium retailer (Jonas & Roosen, 2005). If consumers perceive a private label to be produced by a well-known

manufacturer, the perceived quality difference may be narrowed given the manufacturers' overall expertise in producing high-quality products (Aaker & Keller, 1990).

Since the flavour of food products is perceptible by consumers, one factor influencing purchase and repurchase decisions is **taste** (Sansone et al., 2021). Glynn and Widjaja (2015) revealed that the quality score of private label compared to national brands improves once consumers sample the private label item. As individuals realize that private and national brands are made in the same facility using the same ingredients, consumers sense that both generate similar sensory experiences in terms of taste perceptions (Rossi, Borges, & Bakpayev, 2015).

II. Store related Variables

Private label behaviour comes down to positive store image and monetary attitude to consumer retention and distrust (Liu & Wang, 2008). Jayakrishnan, Chikhalkar, and Chaudhuri (2016) uncovered that store brands as extensions of store image add store differentiation inside the minds of consumers.

Factors such as **store loyalty** and satisfaction can be channelled to augment preference for store-branded food products (Chen, Gilbert, & Xia, 2011; Jayakrishnan et al., 2016) since store loyalty correlates perfectly with private label brand consumption (Ailawadi et al., 2001). Indeed, the more loyal the individual is towards the store, the greater the value perception of the store's own-brand products.

Martenson (2007) posits that store image and **assortment** can impact store loyalty and satisfaction. For instance, the main concerns pertain to how assortments can affect shoppers' preferences and purchase decisions and how customers perceive variety within an assortment (Sansone et al., 2021). Ailawadi, Neslin, and Gedenk (2001) postulate that consumers seeking variety positively

correlate with the use of private labels, employing them as a means of changing pace, stepping out of routine. A further explanation stems from Fader and Lodish's (1990) rationale that variety-seeking behaviour is paired with a desire for reasonably low prices, thereby mitigating the risk and cost involved in switching brands.

III. Price related Variables

Consumers trust their judgment when drawing comparisons on quality and occasionally tie price in as an indicator of it. As a result, the perception that a private label is cost-effective becomes paramount for private labels to draw customers. Furthermore, cost-effectiveness is an underlying attribute that defines the scheme of private labels in consumer minds (Nenycz-Thiel & Romaniuk, 2009), making **value for money** imperative to ease private label brands' retrieval of consumer memory.

From consumers' standpoint, **price** is a paramount factor impacting purchase preferences and in-store decisions (Dolekoglu, Albayrak, Kara, & Keskin, 2008; Miranda & Joshi, 2003). Bearing this in mind, Dhar and Hoch (1997) reported that the price differential between private label and brand-name products in any category significantly affects private label performance. Hence, price consciousness plays a pivotal part in decision-making on private label purchasing (Batra & Sinha, 2000).

Historically sold as the lowest-priced alternative, private label translates into frequent purchases and better product recognition, particularly for lower-income households who seek out **promotions** in times of affordability (Dolekoglu et al., 2008). Moreover, promotions tie intimately to price - several studies report that price promotion enhances private label sales more than product promotion since the former are the ones that entail a functional nature through direct monetary benefit (Chandon, Wansink, & Laurent, 2000; Hardesty & Bearden, 2003). Hence,

consumers perceive similar advantages associated with private labels (Baltas, 1997; Burton, Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, & Garretson, 1998).

3.4. Research Design

The study uses qualitative data collection techniques - interview and documental research - to understand the subject's complexities and implications. The qualitative research approach involves reviewing the information directed to understanding and interpreting the problem in question. For instance, the assessment of the determinants of organic food consumption came from the initial intention of comprehending what motivates and discourages consumers from opting for such food and, in turn, understanding if it somehow relates to their preference for private label products exact nature.

The interviews devised for this research were held with individuals who consumed organic food in large retail outlets and who bought store-brand organic food at some point. The purpose is to interpret the participants' opinions in the study process descriptively, thus enabling the interpretation of the intentions registered by the consumers. In order to maintain anonymity, the participants are assigned the letters A to M. Whenever supermarkets are mentioned, they will be assigned the letter W to Z. The current study includes 13 interviews made in Portuguese, with people from several areas and different ages ranges. The interviews were conducted during July, with an average length of an interview being around 30 minutes. Given the nature and purpose of this research, semi-structured interviews were preferred, and an interview script was devised.

A series of objectives and pertinent issues to be tackled concerning the framing and drafting of the interview scripts were laid out. Subsequently, the questions for each variable were developed. This yielded the interview objectives that formed the grounds for preparing the interview guide (Annex I). Nevertheless,

being a semi-structured interview, the interview guide was not strictly enforced throughout the entire meeting. Some questions followed their natural order, occasionally being placed in a different order than the one included in the script. Certain aspects of the questions posed to each interviewee underwent modifications to suit the script to the circumstances of each individual. The interviews were taped to refrain from writing notes during the interview, which could distract the participants. It was sent an email to the academic community of Católica Porto Business School stating the general objectives and the importance of their collaboration in the study. The interviews were audio-recorded and, later, their content was transcribed. Following the transcription, the interviews were thoroughly analyzed. The purpose of this analysis is to pinpoint information stemming from the questions posed in the interviews.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section analyzes and debates the findings from the field research. For methodological convenience, this section is framed, considering the categorization that formed the grounds for analyzing the variables conducted in the interviews.

Constant comparison was employed as data analysis whereby each interpretation and finding was contrasted with previous results by Sansone et al. (2021) upon the factors driving consumers' preference for private label food products. Initially, it is provided with a brief overview of the area studied in terms of the respondents' perspectives - to acknowledge in which form they perceived the organically produced foods and the main constraints they encountered. Afterwards, it is sought to explore how the various variables might fit into the context of organic food, given that the framework developed applies generically to private label food. Ultimately, the idea is to see how consumers evaluate private label instead of the manufacturer's brand organic foods.

4.1. Appraisal of Organic Consumption Determinants

The first question involved the assessment of the determinants for the preference for organically produced products. Several reasons are given as to why organic products are preferred over conventional ones, especially among “the younger ones” who “are already more concerned with this kind of issue, not only for health reasons, for having a better diet, but also for sustainability issues” as far as **Interviewee D**'s statement goes.

The respondents exhibited positive attitudes towards organic products as they are perceived as healthier, fostering a superior quality of living since, according to **Interviewee C (IC)**, “conventional foods are filled with pesticides”. Further

concerns were expressed by **Interviewee G (IG)** and **Interviewee I (II)** about the potentially harmful effects of pesticide residues in food in particular in “the additives in the ingredient list” (**II**), resulting in people seeking organic products containing “fewer chemicals” (**IG**). **Interviewee D (ID)** reflected on the fact that that it probably brings more benefits, from the health point of view, since the production (...) does not contain other sorts of pesticides that can be found in other cultivation methods”.

A greater preference for products that do not use pesticides or synthetic chemical fertilizers was not the only concern reported with significant importance following the idea of **Interviewee M (IM)** that organic products “are overall more healthy and good for the environment”. The preference for organic products is among the most widespread actions to mitigate environmental impact and embrace a more sustainable consumption behaviour. **Interviewee F (IF)** stated that “there are two aspects: the matter of our health as well as the matter of sustainability,” ending up concluding that “first it benefits us directly and then it benefits all of us because you are buying a product that has a little environmental impact.”

“it was climate change and all the consequences that we have been noticing. (...) we have been educated for a sustainable environment to enjoy the assets without compromising the future generations. We should be thinking a little bit more about the world.” (**IG**)

Health awareness was also a defining element considered “the main factor that motivates to embrace an organic diet” (**IC**). Several studies have uncovered that health consciousness is a driver for organic food purchase (Hsu, Chang, & Lin, 2016; Kriwy & Mecking, 2012) and a predictive of attitudes, intention, and organic food purchase (Magnusson et al., 2003, 2001), perhaps explained by

consumers' sense of organic food alternatives to yield more substantial health benefits (Wier et al., 2008). **Interviewee L (IL)** reinforces the belief that adopting organic food implies having “a healthier lifestyle” and a focus on “environmental reason”. Thus, organic buyers are consciously informed that their food intake affects their health, are fond of wholesome and natural products, and are willing to alter their foods to enhance their health (Aertsens et al., 2009; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002). The findings corroborate this present study that the intake of such products becomes a commitment to the respondents' health.

“It is a matter of caring about my diet, eating the most minimally processed food possible, and eating food with the lowest amount of pesticides. (...) it is terrible for your health to eat these altered and chemical products. (...) In the end, it is a question of health.” **(IA)**

Purchasing organic food may be an individualistic choice rather than an altruistic one since having a “healthy, more organic, and natural diet will be beneficial in the long run” **(IA)**. In addition, the embrace of organic food based on following healthy eating habits is generally a better predictor of consumer behaviour than environmental decisions (Magnusson et al., 2003). Likewise, **interviewee B (IB)** considers the inclusion of biologically grown foods to be an investment in improving “health, (...) quality of life”, enabling “fewer problems throughout the lifespan.”

“I also feel better about consuming them. (...) I feel better buying these products instead of the conventional ones.” **(IJ)**

One exciting note brought up by **Interviewee E (IE)** is the fact that “organic products last longer when not eaten, do not rot as quickly and taste-wise (...) are significantly better”. As a result, the “flavour of these products is very different from the flavour of conventional ones” becomes somewhat appealing to individuals, confirming the findings of Paul and Rana (2012) that the flavour of organic food has a close relationship with overall consumer satisfaction and purchase intention. As “the taste is entirely different” (**ID**), this attribute becomes a pivotal contributor to the consumption of organic products, as consumers perceive that organically produced food tastes better than conventional food (Bryła, 2016; Lea & Worsley, 2005; Lockie et al., 2002).

The support of local farmers and suppliers appears to bear some form of weight on a particular individual being perceived as a close alliance between the local food and organic food movements. This idea converges with the reasoning of some authors in which they note that consumers of locally produced food preference organic production methods (Conner, Montri, Montri, & Hamm, 2009) and consumers of organic food value local food production (Gracia, Barreiro-Hurlé, & López-Galán, 2014; Hempel & Hamm, 2016).

“I guess what I have is the desire to favour local producers, seasonal products, and as a result, I end up using these organic products quite frequently.” (**ID**)

4.2. Appraisal of Organic Consumption Deterrents

The general idea amongst those interviewed is that price is considered the most significant constraint when purchasing organic products.

“I think the biggest obstacle is the price point. Organic food is much more expensive than conventional food, so I think that will be the most influential factor.” **Interviewee K**

This reasoning is backed by recent investigation concerning the extension of organic food consumption and purchase barriers in the organic market, which unveiled that price is the most compelling reason for buying conventional alternatives (Aertsens et al., 2009; Padel & Foster, 2005). Therefore, consumers' willingness to pay for environmentally friendly products such as organic produce is rather crucial as high pricing acts as a hurdle in these cases (Gleim, Smith, Andrews, & Cronin, 2013). One can notice that “although it has been gradually solved, is the issue of not being affordable to adopt a diet with this type of product” (IG) and seen as one of the reasons as to why “people opt to buy non-organic products” (IL). This is evidenced by Buder et al. (2014) that also reported that given the high cost associated with organic food products, consumers of these foods were not regularly purchasing organic.

The bottom line is that ultimately price awareness of organic food is pinpointed as the leading purchase barrier amongst organic food consumers (Bryła, 2016; Padel & Foster, 2005), contrasting with the respondents' feedback that “basically, the only thing is merely the price” (IB).

Despite being perceptible that “there are fewer and fewer obstacles” (IA), according to **interviewee A**, one can infer that for some, it is somehow related to a “financial obstacle, no doubt about it”.

Notwithstanding, a different motif is the “fact that there may not always be a broad offering of products”, causing a “higher price bar” (IF). In addition, the lack of availability of organic food continues to be a constraint to augment organic food consumption. Such findings follow Dimitri and Richman (2000) and Gil, Gracia, and Sánchez (2000), remarking that higher product prices and unavailability are the most significant obstacles to purchasing organic food products.

“There is not that much choice. It is not easy to find this kind of product. There are already some, but not that much. (...) Then organic food is much more expensive than conventional products, and the price factor weighs a little.” (IE)

A rather intriguing remark came from **Interviewee M**'s concern that “organic food products use the same amount of plastic and degrading environmental plastic as the conventional products”, being somewhat of a hassle.

4.3. Product-related Variables

Bearing in mind the product-related variables, it is appropriate to tackle the aspects related to the perception of quality and taste. In a first instance, it seemed appropriate to question the interviewees to grasp which characteristics are most valuable to them when looking for a portion of organic food and then assess their perception of private labels instead of the manufacturer's brands. As a result, it is possible to infer which dimensions retailers should better exploit and convey a sense of quality.

As for the assessment of the most pertinent traits when searching for this sort of products, **interviewee F** shares that “in organic products, it is the appearance that dictates. It has to be in proper condition, it has to be a fresh product, presentable, with few imperfections”. Nevertheless, it also points out that “an organic product contradicts a little bit of this since the products are not perfect, it has some imperfections, and even though it bears the quality stamp, it has to look good. It cannot be too ripe or too green, and it has to be in perfect condition for consumption.” Appealing appearance is broadly debated with hedonistic consumer consumption when buying organically produced food (Li & Jaharuddin, 2021). This idea pursues the same guiding line as Massey, O’Cass, and Otahal (2018), which states that when searching for organic food, consumers place stress on appearance leading to “sometimes it may even be a more

expensive product, but the appearance may lead me to choose” (IF). This clear realization that organic food equals a high-quality pattern should be combined with several other factors or a set of factors deemed appropriate:

“A good relationship between quality and pricing and some honesty. It has to be all well-accomplished product either from its image, what it is saying, the price they are targeting, the quality, how it is sourced and where it is made it is all vital for me.” (IM)

In terms of how the interviewees see private label organic products, the idea cited by **Interviewee A** is that “in terms of the actual quality of the products, I would not have any problem whatsoever in getting those store brand products, I believe they would have the same quality”. Hence, individuals experience a minor difference in quality between the store and national brands.

Interviewee L acknowledges that private label organic products “probably come from the same source, the packaging is different, but it is precisely the same product”, In other words, the large retailers often contact the producer who sells a given organic product and requests to place his brand name on it. As a result, the end product offers the same characteristics and quality as the brand-name products. In this manner, “as long it has certified labels, it does not matter to me” (IM). It is of particular relevance to highlight that despite this statement, **Interviewee K** diverges, claiming that “as a general rule, brand-name products are always of higher quality and are also made differently with much more care and knowledge than the private label”.

As previously emphasized, various drivers and deterrents play an integral part in the purchase decision of organic products, transposing this to the assessment of store-brand products. **Interviewee H** mentions that seek “the list of ingredients and search for ones as short as possible when it comes to additives,

preservatives, (...) I am also careful with the calorie information". **Interviewee J** continues by commenting that "the most prominent attributes for these products to be considered of quality, are the elements displayed in the nutritional table, the product's origin". Upon attaining such properties, quality standards are met, prompting both "do not see much difference between brand-name and private label products".

Conversely, to what has been written, some individuals portray opposing stances against private label products, like **Interviewee B**, who "usually have little confidence in private labels". Notably, interviewee A refers that "when they charge low prices, and I immediately begin to doubt the quality. (...) I associate the price a little bit with the quality".

Wang, Zhang, Mu, Fu, and Zhang (2009) substantiate this reasoning that consumers are suspicious of private labels as they are deemed bogus or received in return for financial incentives instead of a guarantee of quality or food safety. Hughner et al. (2007) brought up the price paradox rather interestingly by pointing out that when organic foods are priced lower, customers tend to infer them as lower quality and less beneficial. This implies that since quality equals "health", lower pricing reduces the distinguishing characteristic of organic food, the perceived health.

When questioned about flavour, the respondents, in a broad stance, all seem to concur that "taste is fundamental, and it's one of the factors that are also sought after in organic foods" (**IK**), whereas "much progress is being made for betting on the organic flavour" prompting "people are also adopting much more the preference for organic products instead of conventional products". For instance, "a product on the outside may not be very appealing, but it is worth it in terms of flavour and nutrients" (**IG**). Lockie et al. (2002) mention that taste lures people into embracing an organic diet because the flavour is superior to non-organic

products. The **interviewee D** has a relatively solid position on the investment of private labels:

“I think they will also make products that will please the palate and the lifestyle of these more demanding customers. The organic products that I have bought so far from the private label I have no complaints about, I always have generally good products, I mean, I do not notice much difference in the final taste.”

4.4. Store-related Variables

Understanding whether a given individual considers himself loyal to a particular brand seemed appropriate to measure to discern precisely what sort of brand immediately emerges in the consumer's mind. Private label brand has the position of building consumer loyalty to the store and, according to (Wu, Yeh, & Hsiao, 2011) differentiating the store from its competitors. Furthermore, it was also worth noting what triggers consumers to visit a specific outlet rather than the competitor to see if a stronger perceived image would prompt them to opt for the store's brand. In contrast, private label products extend the store's image (Beneke, Flynn, Greig, & Mukaiwa, 2013), and the latter is considered a significant predictor of consumer attitude toward store brand products.

When questioned about their preferable establishments to purchase their organic food, one Interviewee focused on “some characteristics such as more diversity and variety of products, with more space and that is tidier and neater” (**IB**). Notwithstanding, **interviewee D** admits that “it is really a matter of convenience if I go to a local one, it is because it is the biggest supermarket I have closest to home if I buy online honestly it is simply because I find the site more convenient and the shopping process more efficient”, in other words, it comes down to what is most comfortable. Hence, “it is usually the one I find the most

convenient at the time” (IE). This view is reinforced by **Interviewee I** who points out that “usually, the decision is based on the proximity to the store”.

Interviewees F and **L** seem to be in agreement that, in a sense, what influences the consumer is “the store's appearance, the arrangement, the layout of the products, the presentation.” (IF), that is, the perceived image of the establishment and the service it holds a considerable significance for both individuals.

“It is also about the service. I think it is crucial. The service and the product. Of course, if I really like a product, and the service is not good, I will go to a specific store just for the product. However, if there is somewhere else I can buy it, I'll prefer to go to the store where I am better assisted, even if it is further away from home, for example.” (IL)

It is worth remarking that when **subjects J, H, and K** indeed referred to why they chose a particular facility, it was “both for their assortment and the quality” (IJ). Thus, the pursuit of variability seems to be a mutual focus.

“Maybe **X**, in terms of organic products, is the retailer that offers more variety, at least that is what I feel, which helps the consumer choose. When I know I want to buy organic products, **X** is usually the best option from my experience.” (IK)

Interviewee D believes that “if you occasionally buy things at **W**, they are pretty interesting too”, nevertheless, does not resort to such establishment as often “because I do not find it convenient to go there, it's really just a matter of convenience.”, bringing up once again the matter of convenience. Both **interviewees C** and **M** have a genuine interest in the same store either because “in my personal opinion, the veggies are much fresher.” (IC) or either because “**Y** offers very straightforward products. The store brand is the one that I like the

most among all the store brands from all the supermarkets because even from the packaging and the quality. It demonstrates that they know what they are doing like it is very simple, it is straightforward, they do not have more than two variations from the same product, and this allowed me just to get, it's easy-going, I do not have to be indecisive".

Interviewee A has a relatively firm conviction about resorting to supermarkets: "I always prefer to buy as close as possible to the producer", not due to their perceived quality or even lack of confidence in certification, but because he believes that "the further up the chain you go, the less profit the producers make and, as a matter of principle, I do not like to resort to supermarkets". Nevertheless, "if I must choose a supermarket, I prefer to go to **Z**, because I think that, (...) it values quality and this is reflected in the prices" (**IA**).

As far as brand loyalty goes, the main idea is that "if a particular brand seems trustworthy, I tend to be loyal, but I also like to try other brands that also appear to be reliable" (**IB**). In addition, individuals seem to appraise several essential aspects to them, as, for instance, **Interviewee D** notes, when he searches for "a particular product, maybe I consider the price, compare the available ones and perhaps buy private label organic or not". As for **Interviewee G**, he only seems to see certification as something that instils confidence, meaning, "as soon as it has that certification, I'm not too picky".

The consensus is universal - when it comes to deciding on a particular brand of organic products:

"The freshness and the appearance that dictates the purchase decision and not the need to go to the supermarket or the grocery store to buy that particular product." (**IF**)

Interviewee M, in turn, states that it is simply “a matter of what is available”, as “right now organic food products rotate a lot. So, not every time you encounter the same products in the same supermarket. (...) So that is why I have not been loyal yet”. Even **Interviewee D** herself concedes that “If we are talking specifically about organic products, I do not really have that preference.” In this sense, individuals do not see themselves as “dependent on a specific brand” (**IH**) or even “attached to a particular brand when it comes to choosing these products” (**IK**). Nonetheless, when further queried if he would perhaps choose to acquire a particular brand from a particular retailer, **Interviewee B** confesses that “at some point try it out and assess its quality.”

Ultimately, **Interviewee L** recognizes that it ends up “varying brands because I go to several supermarkets”, but since “the origin is not always explicit there, even though it says organic”, this one suggests that “it would be more reliable if there were even more producers with doors open to the public to purchase. It would be more reliable, and the prices there would be more attractive to that buyer.” In the same thread of reasoning, “one of the reasons why I prefer this supermarket rather than any other is because it has an area dedicated to organic products (...) while, maybe, in other supermarkets, there are only a few shelves with organic food. In **Z**, there is even a separate area, you can see a greater concern, and that, as a consumer, catches my attention” (**IA**).

It is notorious for a “growing demand in both store and national's brands” (**IB**). As for **Interviewee C**, he considers that “there is plenty of diversity, and (...) I get that sense that establishments have been investing in their private label organic products,” prompting the sense that “nowadays there is already a lot of availability, especially in the supermarket chains, because some large retailers are already betting on organic products” (**ID**). Generally speaking, this thought is supported by all interviewees who state that “organic products have increased

quite a bit in the last few years”, especially ascertained a “more variety in the private labels” (IE). This concept does not go unnoticed by **Interviewee D**, who observes that large retailers:

“are notably more concerned about this; I guess the big retailers also realize that they have to go after this consumer and, for this reason, they make these bets. (...) obviously, a large store will do this if it has an economic benefit. It seems to me that this is why there is more of this offering.”

It is relevant to highlight that this is not a new subject, being notably a trend: “People want to eat properly” (IF), leading to a “growing concern of brands to increase the range of products” and “why retailers have to adjust to this new reality” (IL). Similar to what was described by **Interviewee D**, “if that is the way they (retailers) are going to gain customers, of course, you will notice a greater investment” (IF).

“More and more brands have realized that people are adopting this kind of diet based on organic products and have increased the variety of products to meet the demand. **W**, for example, has recently created a new line of organic products with plenty of products” (IH). Something also felt by **Interviewee J**, who adds that although “**W** branded (organic) products are growing”

Individuals do perceive a great “bet on diversifying (...) product range” (IG) from establishments, and this “big difference” (IK) is due to the “consumer has been opting a lot for organic foods, more vegan options” with “growth in availability from both brands” (IK).

It is interesting to observe that more and more establishments are increasingly adding “more organic food products,” encouraging the interviewee “to go more and stay loyal to **Y**. So, there is not an overwhelming amount of products but every now, and then I see something new.” (IM)

Notwithstanding the mainstream view that outlets have diverse in this area, some, as reported by **Interviewee E**, “still do not have a large diversity of organic products - they are starting to, but it is still minimal”. **Interviewee J** emphasizes that:

“One of the biggest obstacles is the variety of products supermarkets have to offer. To maintain a diet based on organic products, the "displays" of this type of product would have to be much larger and have a more comprehensive offer with solutions for most of the so-called conventional products.” (IJ)

4.5. Price-related Variables

The price-related variables' valuation helped assess how the respondents perceived the pricing of both manufacturer and private label organic foods. As store brands are commonly found in a low price tier, and as this low price is frequently associated with poor quality, it became valuable to determine how private label organic food is perceived. It is also equally interesting not only to note the role that promotions perform in consumers' lives. The perceived price of organic food appears to be quite ingrained. According to **Interviewee L**, “as a general rule, organic products are more expensive”, a fact extensively substantiated by several different studies pointing to high price as one of the most significant barriers to purchasing these products. Nevertheless, while organically-grown products are “on the other hand, private label products are generally more affordable”(IC).

Interviewee E suggests that “there is a significant difference in the price” between store-branded and brand name organic products, whereas **Interviewee G** credits this difference as “being the same proportion when we refer to conventional products, only applied to organic products”. This divergence occurs since “store brands try to position themselves at a price a bit below the

manufacturer's brands" (**IB**). Finally, among the numerous suggestions, **Interviewee D** reports a fascinating idea:

"I think that private labels are more affordable, yes. (...) store brands have equivalents to that already with a much lower price. So we begin to have more offers, and then, if there is a similar offer in a private label, in fact at a more affordable price, I will probably buy it." (**ID**)

When asked about which brand of organic products provided a more accessible price, **Interviewee K** noted that "I do not buy a private label product because it is cheaper", noting that, "of course, in an initial phase, to try something completely different from our diet, we end up investing in a more affordable product, but then it is a matter of preference" (**IK**). **Interviewee F** appears to concur with this affirmation since, in his perspective, it is not "the price that dictates the difference. It is more the quality, the presentation of the product" being ultimately a matter of personal taste and preference for a particular brand.

"Definitely, sometimes it is better to choose the store brand products because it is about the same quality just for a lower price. Of course, this lower price is more on the supply chain than on the product's quality. This is my perception from what I've read." (**IM**)

Even though the respondents have a positive approach, **Interviewees L** and **H** both seem to hold a strong stance on the topic. Besides not posing any issue at all "if it is a private label or a specific national brand (...) as long as it has quality" (**IL**), the respondent still prefers "to buy what comes directly from the farmer". Furthermore, **Interviewee H** elaborates that "there are many things that the private labels do not have yet, so we have to go for the national brand solutions".

Upon being asked what would prompt the respondent to switch to private label organics, the former posited that at some point "if it appeared, after

experiencing it, to have more quality and the more flavour” (**IB**) then, eventually, one might decide to opt for it over the similar manufacturer-branded organic product.

Since Cotterill and Samson (2002) reported that price-conscious consumers switch to private label products because their prices are lower than those of national brands, it seemed relevant to measure whether promotions would have some sort of impact. In other words, if, eventually, promoting a particular manufacturer's brand would influence the preference for private labels. For **Interviewee C**, promotion acts as a means of acquainting oneself with new products and new brands, that is, “being a product that I have not tried yet, that is the way I can form an opinion about it”. Similarly, **Interviewee E** states that if promotion enables the product to be “more affordable, of course, I jump at the offer even if it is a brand I have never tried”. Broadly speaking, if the end price pays off, **Interviewee F** feels that “even though it may not be a product that I usually consume, the price may even convince me to be a consumer of that product, and eventually I may change my mind and start buying that one. But yes, I do try it according to the promotions”. A similar observation was echoed by **respondents H** and **K**, with the latter stating that:

“it's very much in the optic of if a brand is known, so-called "good", is more reasonably priced (...) We are significantly influenced by promotions, no doubt. It's a way of letting the consumer know about the products. It's a way of attracting us” (**IK**)

Interviewee G's consumerist side, on the other hand, causes one to admit to having a preference “to try everything and (...) if I thought it was within my budget and it was something out of the ordinary, maybe the price would not make me buy it, but with the promotion, I might try it”.

The mentioned idea of Sethuraman and Gielens (2014) that promotion sensitivity commonly leads to a negative effect on private label seems to be in line with the statement made by **Interviewee II**, in which “if brand-name products are being promoted, I try to go for them”.

Respondents M and **B** seem to agree that promotions do not significantly impact their everyday life, with the former stating that it is not “a promotion person. I just get what I need, especially because I am living alone, and I do not spend that much” (**IM**) while the latter states that “it's not the promotion of the private label brand that will make me opt for it by default. However, in case I had the need to economize, I would eventually have to turn to private label organic foods.” (**IB**). **Interviewee D** summarizes the core premise here by commenting that,

“It is a factor to consider as well, i.e., if I have two similar products in front of me and there is a promotion on one of them with similar features enough for me to risk that promotion, I will. Now I'm not going to buy something completely different or that I already know I'm not enjoying because of the promotion. So it's a factor, but it's not a deal-breaker all the way.” (**ID**)

Questioning the respondents on whether or not they thought that purchasing store-brand organic foods offered real value for money in terms of product quality, the response was overwhelmingly unanimous:

“Private label products turn out to be more affordable and offer decent quality” (**IE**).

Likewise, for **Interviewee G**, this one ends up favouring “private label organic products. Many store brands are already at a reasonable level within the organic

ones, but they always end up being more expensive, and an organic product imposes the necessary quality to make me buy it.”. Further adding that “the price-quality ratio of the store brand products is much higher. The private label product achieves the reserve quality, the minimum quality that makes me buy a specific product” (**IG**). Something shared with **Respondent J**, who mentions feeling “better consuming these types of products and even with how I am treating my body. In addition, I think that private label products have better quality to price ratio offers”.

Interviewee I believes that “organic products are totally different. The private label products usually have a lower price, but I never felt a big difference in quality”. Even as “a beginner in this field and in these foods”, **respondent K** feels “pretty satisfied with the more accessible private label products”. It is worth pointing out that **Interviewee L** shares the feeling that private label organic products offer the same healthy consciousness as brand-name products because, “in theory, they are the same products, so I do not think there is any differentiation between those two”.

Notwithstanding, respondent B kept his posture regarding store brand foods - “I rarely buy private label products, the so-called private label brands”, so one “do not have the perception whether the price/quality ratio is worth it.” (**IB**)

5. Conclusions

5.1. Findings

This section concludes the study, bridging the gap between the starting research questions, the results obtained, and other research. The study, which had a qualitative approach, was employed based on documentary research techniques and semi-structured interviews with several intervenients, framing the data within the analytical framework developed by Sansone, Musso, Colamatteo, and Pagnanelli (2021) to broaden the possibilities of knowledge production.

The focus was to tackle the fundamental question that steered the entire research, to determine and comprehend the main drivers of private label food choice aiming at organic food. This main thrust stemmed from an intention to understand the behaviour, purchase preferences, and factors that influenced consumer choices, evaluate what motivates consumers to favour private label, and comprehend what triggered consumers to purchase organic foods.

The consumer profile of organic food is driven by their concern for their well-being, a healthy lifestyle, a balanced and healthy diet, and their commitment to the environment. Given the heightened awareness that food is the basis for a healthier lifestyle, the search for so-called wholesome foods in various products has grown exponentially. This thinking has led large retailers to embark on creating their brands of organic foods. Individuals perceive that such products offer high quality at more reasonable prices than national brands and that the value for money in respect to brand-name products is much more favourable, both in terms of nutritional quality and taste.

It is important to note that although the reduced price in some cases is advantageous, there is still some hesitation at this level either because nothing

cheap can be as good or because this reduction in price means a reduction in quality.

This thesis aimed to close a gap about motivating and discouraging organic food consumers and how individuals perceive the private labels available in the Portuguese organic market. As most retail chains are committed to their organic assortment, these products are gradually gaining more presence at more reasonable prices.

The findings mentioned earlier can be helpful for retailers to gain an understanding of the consumer's mindset, assess the reasons for purchasing their own-brand organic foods, and minimize obstacles to its consumption.

5.2. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Like many quantitative research methodologies reliant on the use of interviews as a data collection method, one of the biggest challenges involves reflexivity, meaning that respondents may give the interviewer exactly what he or she wishes to hear, resulting in biased responses and even inaccuracies due to poor recollection about the topic. Thus, the considerable time spent on processing the interviews could have been devoted to other tasks on the research. An additional limitation inherent to the method used is that the results are generalizable, incomplete, and difficult to compare.

More than settling with certainties, this dissertation opened some new questionings insofar as an attempt was made to exploit a somewhat dispersed and scarcely explored field of knowledge concerning the world of private label organic products. Therefore, it is essential to deepen this theme and potentially add additional necessary variables, hoping that future studies will lead to a broader understanding of this area of research.

For future investigation, the use of a larger sample population to gather deeper consumer insights with the help of a possible quantitative analysis to understand which variables hold more weight and how those interrelate. Generally, it is expected that this theme is of global appeal as it is an exponentially growing trend, with impact for retailers and an indication of a significant change in consumers' perception about private label products leading to the development of strategic objectives with a focus on supporting motives and reducing significant barriers.

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Annexes

Annex I – Interview Guide

	Specific Objectives	Question Guidance
I Interview Background	Legitimize the interview. Brief the interviewee about the investigation.	In broad terms, brief the interviewee regarding the research study (objectives and procedures). Soliciting the interviewee's collaboration (the interview as a fundamental instrument of data collection). Guarantee the confidentiality of data collected (fictitious names and places). Request authorization to audio record the interview and cite, in whole or excerpts, the information retrieved in the research.
II Interviewee Breakdown	Data gathering on the interviewee and the determinants of organic food purchase.	Q.1. What were the factors that contributed to you begin purchasing organic food? Q.2. What do you consider to be the main obstacles for you to adopt a primarily organic diet?
III Examination of variables on consumers' perceptions of private label organic products	Product-related variables To understand the quality perceived by consumers. To comprehend which attributes are most important to consumers. To see whether private label organic food have the same, higher, or worse quality than brand-name organic products;	Q.3. Since quality carries significant weight when choosing a product, which features/attributes carry the heaviest weight? Do you feel that private label organic food has the same quality as national brand ones?

	<p>To determine whether the taste is an essential feature.</p>	
	<p>Store-related variables To figure out what motivates the consumer to go to one store as opposed to another. To understand if the customer purchases more private label organic products from the preferred outlet. To see if the consumer observes variety or absence of diversity in organic foods. To notice if there is a more significant assortment within the private labels or the manufacturer's brands. To understand how consumers feel that supermarkets allocate some space for such organic products;</p>	<p>Q.4. Would you consider a loyal consumer of organic food from a particular brand? Is there a private label or national brand that comes to your mind? Q.5. Is there a compelling reason that makes you choose to go to that particular store rather than the competitor? For example, do you eventually prefer buying the brand from that particular store? Q.6. Do you notice variety among the private label organic foods in comparison to national brand ones? Do you believe that the establishments have invested strongly in diversifying their product range?</p>
	<p>Price-related variables To assess which brand offers a better value for money for consumers. To understand whether individuals detect price differences across brands. To understand whether promotions have some influence on consumers;</p>	<p>Q.7. Do you feel there is a difference in prices between national brand organic foods and private label organic foods? Are you willing to pay more for private label? Q.8. When you buy organic food, do you assure that you are getting your money's worth? Do you believe that private label products offer real value for money in terms of product quality? Q.9. Bearing in mind special offers within organic foods, if any</p>

		private label products are being promoted, do you tend to buy them in preference to national brand products?
Final Questions	<p>To investigate whether it is ultimately valuable to purchase organic products, in particular, private label products</p> <p>To understand what consumers are missing in order to embrace a predominantly organic diet, in particular, in private label products</p>	<p>Q.10. Do you believe it is ultimately worth it to buy private label organic food? Do you remain doubtful or even distrust the quality of private label organic foods available on the market?</p> <p>Q.11. Is there something missing that holds you back from looking at private label foods the way you look at national brand organic foods? What do you foresee as the main obstacles to overcome to embrace a diet with solely organic foods?</p>