SYNOPSIS

of Ph.D. Thesis

Consumer preferences for food products (The case of olive oil in Albania)

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

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I.   GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE Ph.D. THESIS

A. Importance of the Studied Problem

This project's importance can be related to the contribution to the academic field and interested businesses and to identify the consumer preference for olive oil better.

- ➢ Explain and clarify the concept of consumer preferences
- ➢ Development of an original theoretical framework
- ➢ Analysis of gaps related to previous studies in this field
- ➢ Development of the methodology to test several hypotheses.
- ➢ Conceptualization of olive oil attribute, types of the attribute.
- ➢ Clarification of concepts used based on previous literature and studies.

B. Research Goal and Research Tasks

B.1 Research Goal

This project aims to inform olive oil stakeholders and the research community at large about consumer preferences on credence attributes such as organic and ISO certification origin, brand for olive oil in a post-communist country in transition with weak institutions, and widespread consumers' distrust on third-party certification.

B.2 Research Tasks

- ➢ To identify the relevant literature review to consumer preferences for food products and consumer preferences for olive oil, especially.
- ➢ To develop the methodological framework to guide the research.
- ➢ To design a useful survey that helps us obtain the necessary data.
- ➢ To analyze the data collected.
- ➢ To evaluate and discuss the results produced by the data analysis.
- ➢ Conclusions and implications of this study
- ➢ Identify the research constraints and indicate future research suggestions.

C. Research Object and Research Subject

The research subjects in the present study are the preferences of the Albanian consumer for food products in general and the primary focus of olive oil.

This study's object includes Albanian consumers at the age of 18+ that take care of buying food and purchasing olive oil.

D. Research Method/s

The methodology has been focused on these stages: the first stage was the review of other literature. The other stage was related to the determination of issues that will be addressed. The hypotheses are divided into two groups hypothesis related to consumer preference and Hypothesis related to the Willingness to pay. To collect all the information needed, this study used a questionnaire with 24-question. After data collection to test the Hypothesis, it was used SPSS 2.0.

One-way ANOVA was used to test the relationships between attributes of qualitative variables (education, income, gender, and credence attributes levels) on Willingness to pay.

The linear regression model is used to test preference related Hypothesis and binary logistic regressions to test the determinants of Willingness to pay.

E. Research Hypotheses

Consumer preferences related Hypothesis

CPH1: Consumers who buy organic certified olive oil have higher preferences for olive oil compared with who buy non-certified olive oil.

CPH2: Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for who buy ISO certified olive oil compared with who buy ISO non-certified olive oil.

CPH3: Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for consumers buying olive oil that have a region of origin Albania than Italy.

CPH4: Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for consumers buying branded OO than non-branded olive oil.

CPH5: Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for consumers better informed about certified organic products than non-informed**.**

CPH6: Customers who prefer to buy ISO certified OO have more knowledge on certification of OO than who prefer to purchase non-certified OO.

CPH7: Consumers with extensive knowledge of the OO brand have higher preferences for olive oil than consumers with limited knowledge of branded olive oil.

Willingness to pay related Hypothesis

WPH1: Gender influences willingness to pay for branded olive oil.

WPH2: Willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil is higher as consumers are getting older.

WPH3: Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher for more educated consumers.

WPH4: Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher for consumers with higher income**.**

WPH5: Gender influences willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil.

WPH6: Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher than for ISO certified olive oil.

WPH7: Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher for branded products than non-branded.

F. Limitations

The limitations of this study are related to the age of the interviewees as all respondents should be 18+, the people who have been interviewed are only those that have bought OO in recent months, while the study focuses only on the **extrinsic** attributes of olive oil. Also, the geographical area was another limitation of this project because only two cities (Tirana and Durres) are taken into the analysis as the biggest cities in Albania with a large number of consumers.

II. Contents and the structure of the Ph.D. thesis

Introduction

CHAPTER ONE: ANALYSIS OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

1.1 The evolution of consumption

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1.3. New trends for food product consumption

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1.3.2. Previous research about food certification

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1.4.1. Brand effect on consumer preference

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1.5.1. Consumer preferences for olive oil in Albania

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CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Theoretical framework and hypotheses' testing

2.2. Methods and procedures

2.2.1. Measurement issues

2.2.2. Data

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CHAPTER THREE: Results and Analyses of the Data

Introduction

III.   INTRODUCTION

Consumer preferences are defined as the subjective tastes of individual **consumers**, **measured** by their **satisfaction** with those items after they have purchased them. This satisfaction is often referred to as **a utility**. According to (P 2004), it is on the basis of the difference of utility between the configurations available in the market that consumers define which product to acquire. The utility can be defined as the psychological satisfaction received by the purchase of the products (MARKETING…, 2008).

Behind every product or service that companies want to trade are consumers, so recognizing their preferences and the elements that affect the sales process of the product or service is an important process for marketing today.

Consumer preferences for food products are constantly changing. In today's business environment where competition is ever stronger, determining the desires, needs, and preferences of the consumer, discovering what, when, where, and how they will buy products is a very important process for marketers and marketing point of view.

Consumer preferences for OO are divided into two groups of product attribute **intrinsic** (taste, appearance, color) and **extrinsic** (packaging, certifications, label, brand, etc.). The focus of this research will be on the extrinsic attributes. Olive geographical origin certification has received ever-increasing attention over the years as a factor that affects the consumer purchasing process; also, other attributes that will be the focus of this research are product food safety, price, place of purchase, type of packaging, organic certification. Knowledge of certification schemes, knowledge on brand, label packaging play an important role in the purchase choices and on the perception of olive oil quality.

Over the previous two decades, the certification of agro-food products has gained importance within the European Union. However, not all consumers have reaped satisfactory benefits from it. In many cases, consumers have revealed an inadequate level of knowledge in their ability to identify and recognize the specific characteristics which might be employed in distinguishing high-quality goods from those of a lower

quality (Vecchio and Annunziata, 2011); (Cicia et al., 2012). This is the reason for which the European Union decided to develop a reputation for high-quality European products, introducing a specific rule system in order to better regulate the origin and the certification of agro-food products (Di Vita, G., D'Amico, M., La Via, G., & Caniglia, E., 2013).

Over the past 70 years, many definitions have been proposed for the expression "origin of a product." One of these is a typical product, regional or traditional, whose quality and characteristics are strongly linked to the geographical name of the area of production (country, region, or locality) and the human and natural resources of that area. Nowadays, PDO or PGI certifications ensure not only the origin of the product but guarantee ties to particular agro-climatic conditions, production practices and "savoir-faire," as well as ties to the "terroir" (Valceschini, E, 1993); (D'Amico, 2011); (Allaire et al., 2011). Geographical Indications constitute an effective differentiation tool in food markets (Deselnicu et al., 2011) and, at the same time, the origin is an important attribute for both consumer and industrial product evaluations (Nagashima A., 1977); (Obermiller, C. S, 1989); (Verlegh, PWJ., & Steenkamp, JBEM, 1999), being perceived as a quality indicator (Malorgio et al., 2008).

Typical products receive more favorable consumer attitudes and stronger country of origin images than atypical ones (Tseng and Balabanis, 2011). However, other characteristics also influence consumer attitudes. According to previous studies on product attributes (Nelson P, 1970) ; (Caswell and Mojduszka), intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics have been observed and investigated for PDO products (Fandos and Flavián, 2006); (Espejel J et al., 2008). A significant "relationship between the extrinsic and intrinsic attributes of a traditional food product and loyalty expressed by consumers" has been detected and is perceived as an indication of the quality of a product. This allows consumers to differentiate the high-quality products from those of a lower quality (Olson, 1985); (Steenkamp, 1987); (Zeithaml, 1988) and shows a positive and significant influence on buying intentions ((Fandos and Flavián, 2006); (Josiassen et al., 2008).

In this context, several studies have been carried out on olive oil consumers through the analysis of factors that affect the demand for extra-virgin olive oil (Van der Lans et al.); (Tsakiridou et al., 2006) ; (Menapace et al., 2011). Some authors have analyzed the relationships among consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and buying intention of PDO extra-virgin olive oil, highlighting the importance that consumer tribute to the geographical region of origin and its predisposition to repeat the purchase of a traditional product again (Espejel J et al., 2008). Concerning the method of production, recent research has focused on organic olive oil consumption, often reporting contradictory results.

In Greece, the demand for organic olive oil is positively affected by the socio-economic characteristics of consumers, as well as high income and employment status (Tsakiridou et al., 2006). Spanish consumers, on the other hand, whose social profile is similar to that of Greece, seem to be less interested in organic certification but are highly concerned about the origin of the product (D'Amico et al., 2002).

Other studies have aimed at detecting different consumer segments by the identification of the main qualitative characteristics of the product. Through the implementation of conjoint analysis, research has been carried out with the aim of describing and analyzing the consumer preferences for extrinsic quality attributes of olive oil (Van der Lans et al.); (Fotopoulos et al., 2001); (Krystallis and Ness, 2005); (Elena Caniglia - Mario D'Amico- Iuri Peri, 2006).

Different studies have analyzed the preferences of the Italian consumers and WTP for extra virgin olive oil in Italy (Scarpa and Del Giudice, 2004); (Menapace et al., 2011). Findings suggest that the origin of the product is of importance and that there is a bias in preferences towards local products. Specifically, they revealed that certified olive oil from the south of Italy is more frequently preferred in the south than in the north of Italy (Scarpa and Del Giudice, 2004).

Besides the region of origin, prompts have a direct effect on regional product preferences for some consumer segments, particularly those residents in the product's region of origin (Van der Lans et al.), and preferences for regional products vary widely depending on different geographic contexts (Scarpa and Del Giudice, 2004).

Another important element that affects consumers' preferences is the brand and branding. It is widely acknowledged among the academicians and practicing managers that branding has become a tool of strategic importance and studies on the importance of brand preferences (Narayana, M. K., Sarabhai, M., & Khan, V. K., 2014).

According to Aaker (Aaker DA, 1996), strong brands help the firm to establish an identity in the market place, reduce vulnerability to competitive actions, leading to larger margins, greater intermediary cooperation, and support, and a successful brand image enables consumers to identify the needs that the brand satisfies and to differentiate the brand from its competitors, and it consequently increases the likelihood that consumers will purchase the brand.

(Gensch, 1987), documented that customers form brand preferences to reduce the complexity of the purchase decision process. (Rossiter JR, Percy L, 1987) describe brand awareness is essential for the communications process to occur as it precedes all other steps in the process, and without brand awareness occurring, no other communication effects can occur. For a consumer to buy a brand, they must first be made aware of it. Brand attitude cannot be formed, and intention to buy cannot occur unless brand awareness has occurred. In a situation where the consumer is aware of a number of brands that fit the relevant criteria, the consumer is unlikely to spend much effort in seeking out information on unfamiliar brands. (Kumar et al., 1987), examined the factors influencing the buying decision for various food products.

The brand image seemed to be more important than the origin of the product since the consumers were attracted by the brands. (Nielsen N, Bech-Larsen T, 1998) conducted a study on consumers' purchase motives and perceptions on vegetable oil in three countries and found that consumers in France purchase vegetable oil because of its health benefits (attribute).

Albania is one of the few countries in Europe and the only country in Central-East Europe that has favorable climatic and geographical conditions for olive cultivation. The olive cultivation story in Albania dates back in time. The people of the rural areas are used to the cultivation of olives, and a good tradition has been the heritage from one generation to another.

The olive and olive oil industry is an important segment of Albanian primary production and agro-industry. Primary production of olives accounts for approximately 16% of total fruit output in value, including grapes. The number of planted trees is nearly 5 million and is rapidly increasing as a response to sustained demand, good prices, and government subsidies for expanding the production base.

Official data on olive oil production show an output ranging between 6,400 Mt (Million tons) in bad harvest years and 11,900 Mt in good harvest years. There is a structural production deficit of approximately 1,000 Mt per year, mostly covered by imports of bottled olive oil from Italy and other EU countries. The main production areas of olives for olive oil are in the center and south of the country. In these areas, 90% - 95% of cultivars are for olive oil production (Skreli, E., D. Imami, L. Leonetti, and B. Feraj, 2009).

The processing industry has a specializing and modernizing trend, producing mostly olive oil and table olives (15-20% of total olive production). Official data for 2009 show that there are 108 enterprises processing all edible oils, including olive oil, and 16 enterprises processing table olives. The structural deficit of table olives is covered mainly by imports from Greece and Italy.

Based on the above background, it becomes obvious that credence attributes are quite refreshed in developed countries. Having said that, there is a dearth of information on credence attributes in post-communist countries transitioning toward a market economy.

IV.   CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is based on a literature review with reference to food consumption, product attribute, and certification of food products, the certification of olive oil. Particular importance's also have consumer preferences and Willingness to pay for olive oil. The review starts with the available data, from the oldest to the most recent theories.
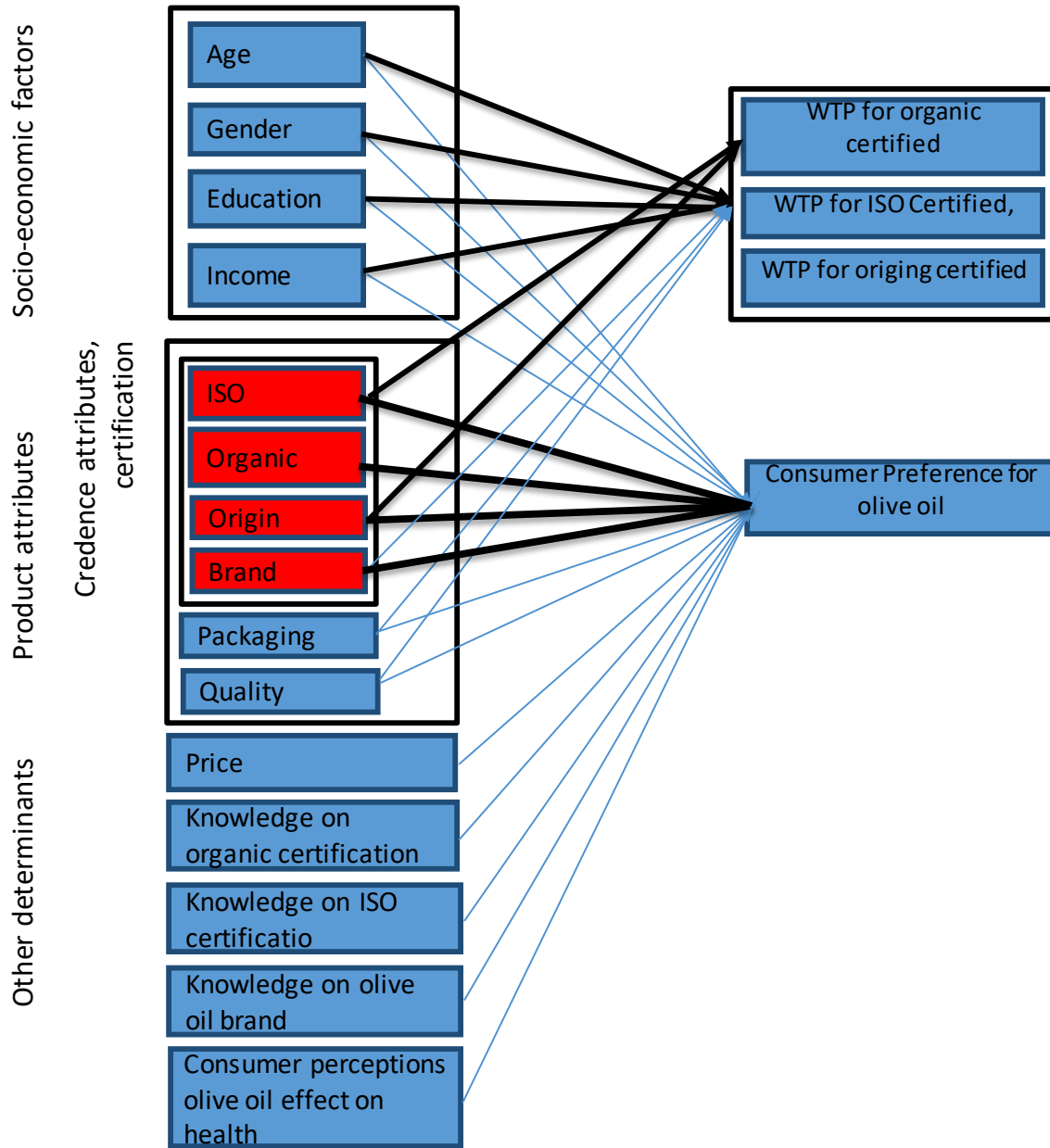
V.   CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

According to (R Y Cavana, Delahaye, Bl & Sekaran, 2001), literature reviews play an important role in identifying and scoping models, which can then become the basis for a new theoretical framework. The proposed conceptual framework is developed on an extensive review of the relevant body of literature and is designed to address the research questions. The conceptual framework proposed in this project is unique. This chapter aims to formalize the conceptual framework. According to the presented theoretical review, consumer preferences describe the reasons for the selection that people make when they choose products or services. A variety of theories describe the factors which influence the consumers and their behaviors' when making purchasing decisions.

The study of consumer behavior and marketing discipline has focused on analyzing how individuals make decisions to spend their resources in categories related to consumption (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2001). The act of purchase is considered as an activity aimed at solving a problem (Howard & Sheth, 1986).

Recent studies on the Albanian olive oil industry have focused on the analysis of supply (Skreli, E., D. Imami, L. Leonetti, and B. Feraj, 2009) with a paucity of studies on consumer preferences for olive oil.

In the below theoretical framework scheme are presented the factors that affect customer preference such as demographic factors (age, gender, education, and income), credence attributes (ISO, Organic, Origin, Brand, Packaging, Quality). As suggested by (Steenkamp Jean B., 1997), the construct of the theoretical framework includes items related to certification and labeling. Also, other determinants factors as (price, knowledge on organic certification, knowledge on brand, knowledge on ISO certification, and consumer perceptions of olive oil on health).

Figure 1: Theoretical framework: Determinants of Consumers' Preference and Willingness to Pay (Author's scheme)

Socio-economic factors

Credence attributes, certification

Product attributes

Other determinants

Age
Gender
Education
Income

ISO
Organic
Origin
Brand
Packaging
Quality

Price
Knowledge on organic certification
Knowledge on ISO certificatio
Knowledge on olive oil brand
Consumer perceptions olive oil effect on health

WTP for organic certified
WTP for ISO Certified,
WTP for origing certified

Consumer Preference for olive oil

Source: Author's scheme

The extracted results are going to verify the whole theoretical framework, hopefully.

Also, it was designed as a measurement table. Table 1 shows the study concepts and variables and how each will be measured. For each of the variables included in the

theoretical framework, a separate measure was used measured on nominal, ordinal, ratio, or interval scale.

Table 1: Study concepts and variables

Concept	Variable
Consumers' preference for olive oil	Ratio, scale 1=lowest preferences…10=highest preference
Willingness to pay for organically (ISO, origin) certified and brand	Ratio: the amount of price premium to be paid, in ALL
Organically certified	Dummy variable: 1=certified, 0=not certified
ISO Certified	Dummy variable: 1=certified, 0=not certified
Branded	Dummy variable: 1=branded, 0=not branded
Origin	Nominal: regions included
Age	Ratio: number of years
Gender	Binary: 1=male, 0=female
Education	Ordinal: 1=Basic (4 years), 2=elementary school (8/9 years), high school (12 years), university (15 years +)
Income	Ratio: income categories, ALL 1-5
Packaging	Nominal: types of packaging by size and material
T6Quality	Ordinal: 1: table oil, 2=virgin, 3=extra virgin
Price	Scale: ALL/liter
Knowledge on organically (ISO, origin) certified, and branding	Likert scale 1=very limited knowledge…5=very extensive knowledge.
Consumer perception of olive oil health effects	Likert scale 1=not effect at all on health…5=very positive effect on health

Source: Author's scheme

VI.   CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS AND ANALYSES OF THE DATA

This chapter focuses on the specification of models and related hypothesis tests with regard to the research questions. The data collected from the questionnaire, and the results obtained will be analyzed. Initially, the data collected from the questionnaires were coded and pasted into SPSS, including the process of data clearing in order to delete junk information; the relationship among variables will be tested through statistical tests. Below are listed all the hypotheses listed at the beginning of the study, but as we will see, not all of them can be tested due to study limitations.

VII.   CONCLUSIONS

In the recent year, due to the economic changes' consumer behavior and preferences for olive oil has changed. It is noted that consumer preferences are heterogeneous; they derive from different factors or needs. It's important to understand consumer preferences not only for stakeholders and government but also for marketing policymakers in order to adapt their products as well as producing the products preferred by their consumers. These preferences can be determined through the attributes and/or characteristics of olive oil products, and consumer types can be inferred from the choices they make among those attributes.

The results show that consumers prefer mostly extra virgin olive oil and less virgin or normal olive oil. Another element that was noticed is that the Albanian consumers are not obsessed with purchasing branded olive oil; they prefer to purchase more olive oil produced in Albania, and they also know in person the farmer and are confident in their way of production.

As to the country of origin of the olive oil that consumers purchased, as shown in the above data, they prefer the olive oil produced in Albania, as there are some large companies operating in the country. The other favorite olive oil is the one originating in Italy, Greece, Spain, and elsewhere. As we know, those countries are the greatest importers of olive oil in the Albanian market.

Regarding the packaging, most of the interviewers prefer glass bottles.

Regarding organic certification, most of them state that the oil they buy and use is not certified organic, so it does not contain any labels from any entity or institution that certifies organic products. A limited number of them respond that the oil they buy is certified organic, but there is some ambiguity as they think it is organic and the OO they purchased from the farmer they know in the village because of no usage of chemicals or pesticides.

Another type of certification that consumers are asked about is the ISO one, where data shows that most of the consumers prefer to purchase olive oil that has an ISO certificate, a few of them answer that the oil they bought does not have this type of certification.

The analysis shows that consumers attach a price with quality according to them from the following relation: price-quality, price-quantity, price-origin of product, price-brand, price-packaging; what is most important to them is quality in these attributes and consumers say they would be willing to pay more if they notice that there is a relation between price and quality of OO.

Around half of the consumers interviewed respond that they have a basic knowledge of ISO and Organic certification in olive oil. The number of interviewers who answered that they have extensive knowledge is insignificant compared to the total. What is noticeable is the connection between the level of education of the interviewees and the knowledge they have about OO certifications.

The Albanian consumers do not express interest in the olive oil brands that they purchase, as mentioned earlier; this is related to various factors where one of them may be the lack of knowledge of the brands. According to graph nr 15, the % of the interviewers that declare to have limited knowledge about OO brands is considerable. We can associate this element with a low interest in the OO brand. Also, it is noted a

relationship between the level of education of the interviewers and their knowledge of the OO brand.

Olive oil in Albania is not only part of the diet, but it is considered a product that has a positive impact on health. More than 70% of the interviewers answered that the impacts that olive oil has on health are positive and very positive.

In order to meet the purpose of the study as envisaged in the earlier sections, have been tested several hypotheses to show the relationship among variables. Here is a list of the conclusion of each Hypothesis.

CPH1: "*Consumers who buy organic certified olive oil have higher preferences for olive oil compared with those who buy non-certified olive oil.*" It is noted that consumer preferences for olive are not higher for consumers buying certified organic products. So those with high preferences are not the ones who purchased organic olive oil as claimed.

CPH2: "*Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for who buy ISO certified olive oil compared with who buy ISO non-certified olive oil,*" that there are no significant differences between the two distributions (certified and non-certified ISO olive oil).

CPH3: "*Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for consumers buying olive oil that has a region of origin Albania than Italy.*"Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for consumers purchasing olive oil that have Albania as a region of origin. If we compare Albanian as a country of origin and Italy, we note that the consumers interviewed prefer to buy Albanian olive oil more than Italian.

CPH4: "*Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for consumers buying branded OO than non-branded olive oil.*" The analysis shows that there is not a statistically significant relationship between the variables because the consumers' preferences for olive oil are not higher for consumers purchasing branded products.

CPH5: "*CPH5: Consumer preferences for olive oil are higher for consumers better informed about certified organic products than non-informed* ".We see that the

connection is not strong between people who buy olive oil certified as organic and their preferences; in other words, there is no strong link between high preferences and extensive knowledge on organic certifications. Most of the respondents have the basic knowledge.

CPH6: "Customers *who prefer to buy ISO certified OO have more knowledge on certification of OO than who prefer to buy non-certified OO.*" The data suggests that the variables ISO OO certification and consumer knowledge on certification of food product and olive oil are associated with each other.

CPH7: "*Consumers that have extensive knowledge on OO brand have higher preferences for olive oil than consumers with limited knowledge on branded olive oil*" according to our data, we can accept the relationship among variables, but we confirm that this relationship is low and compromised the test.

.**WPH1:** "*Gender has an influence on willingness to pay for branded olive oil.*" The H_0 is accepted gender has not any influence on Willingness to pay for branded olive oil.

WPH2*: "Willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil is higher as consumers are getting older.*" According to the data gathered, we conclude that there is not a connection between age and Willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil. The oldest interviewers are not willing to pay more for OO certified as organic.

WPH3: "*Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher for more educated consumers.*" According to our results, we conclude that education doesn't affect WTP. We reject the Hypothesis that: Willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil is higher for more educated consumers. As we saw from the analysis, people with elementary school- level of education are more willing to pay for organically certified olive oil.

WPH4: "*Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher for consumers with the higher income.*" According to our data, we conclude that there is not a relationship between higher income and Willingness to pay for certified organic OO. We reject the Hypothesis that: Willingness to pay for organically certified olive oil is higher for a higher

level of income. As we saw from the analysis, people with their level of income between 50001-100 000 ALL are more willing to pay for organically certified olive oil.

WPH5: **"***Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher for female consumers.*" We conclude that **H₀** is accepted gender doesn't affect the Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil. Although the number of female interviewers is higher than male, this Hypothesis indicates that there is no relationship between the Willingness to pay for organic olive oil and the female gender. As we saw from the analysis, males are more willing to pay for organically certified olive oil.

WPH6:*" Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher than for ISO certified olive oil.*" According to our results, **Ho** will be rejected. We conclude that Willingness to pay for certified olive oil is higher compared with ISO certified olive oil. The Hypothesis is confirmed because, based on the results, the WTP for certified organic OO is higher than for ISO.

WPH7: "*Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher for branded products."* There is a positive relationship between the variables. We conclude that Willingness to pay for organic certified olive oil is higher for branded products compared with non-branded.

VIII. RECOMMENDATION

This study aims to inform stakeholders on the preferences and willingness to pay for Olive Oil of Albanian consumers. The following recommendations are addressed mainly to companies involved in the process of production of olive oil. They have as a target group the national consumer, but also, these data can be used by researchers, companies dealing with the certification process, or other interested individuals.

The type of packaging plays an important role in consumer preferences. In this Ph.D. thesis, after analyzing the data collected, it was concluded that Albanian consumers prefer the packaging of olive oil in glass bottles. We recommend that companies use more glass bottles as a packing much more than other types since consumer preference related to this type of packing is higher.

It was found that consumers' knowledge of certifications and types of olive oil brands are very basic. We recommend those companies that certify and certainly have a cost of this process would be better to inform their consumers of the certification advantages they use. Undertaking consumer awareness campaigns with the symbols and logos of certification bodies add value to their preference. The presence of these companies on social networks may add an information channel.

Consumers' reliability of olive oil marketed in the supermarket is lower than the olive oil they bought in a factory in the local area. To avoid this gap, we recommend using labels that qualify the content and information necessary for the product as traceability is an essential element.

It was noticed that olive oil is one of the most used in the food diet. Moreover, consumers prefer local olive oil to Albanian companies should be encouraged by this fact and invest in both olive plantations and the processing industry. To improve OO's production standards and bring them as closely as possible to European countries and in the future Albanian companies to be able to export outside the domestic territory.

Although the branding process is costly, local producers have to brand olive oil as the brand creates a quality level for the product and creates the opportunity to develop a loyal clientele.

The market for organic products in Albania is still small. Still, consumer preference for organic food products presents a potential for market development in general and olive oil, which may develop in the future with increasing revenue and awareness about organic foods (olive oil). Therefore, companies should pay attention to the organic certification process.

A worrying element in this sector is the low lack of food control. Therefore, the government/policymakers should regulate the olive oil trade, especially concerning quality and counterfeiting of origin or trademarks. Law enforcement measures would boost domestic production of high-quality olive oil and make them more necessary and affordable new investments in the sector (not to mention the benefits that the consumer will have by having the highest quality olive oil on the retail shelves).

The brand name provides the product's opportunity to have its history and personality on the market and justify a certain price level.

The olive sector is considered a priority industry for the Albanian government - the sector is included in public financial support schemes, so businesses in this sector are advised to participate in grants or financial benefit schemes to invest in improving the quality of production or other elements such as certification of the country of origin, improving the type of packaging, expansion of the sales network, etc.

IX. CONTRIBUTIONS

o Critical analysis and systematization of previous studies devoted on food certification and consumer preferences in the context of olive oil.

o Adaptation of methodological framework for studding consumer preferences towards olive oil in the specific circumstances in Albania.

o Probation of the methodology of studying Albanian preferences towards olive oil. Analysis of Albanian consumer preferences for olive oil products. Analysis and description of factors that affect the Willingness to pay and consumer preferences for olive oil. Formulation of managerial and practical recommendations.

X. Scientific Publications of the Ph.D. candidate (related to the topic of the dissertation)

➢ Boja,M., Morina, F. (2017). "Certification of food products and the impact on the market"- 13th International Conference of ASECU', 19-20 Maj ,2017, Albania
http://www.asecu.gr/files/13th_conf_files/13th-conf-asecu-proceedings.pdf

➢ Boja, M., "Analysis of Consumer Preference for Olive Oil Attribute in Albania", 15th ASECU International Conference University of National and World Economy, September 26–27, 2019 Sofia, BULGARIA
http://www.asecu.gr/gr_Activities%20.html

➢ Boja, M.. "Consumer preferences versus product certification (The case of olive oil in Albania"). ИЗСЛЕДОВАТЕЛСКИ ЕТЮДИ, ТОМ 10/2019, Университет занационално и световно стопанство, ISBN: 978-619-239-318-2, page 182-202.

➢ Boja, M., The Importance of Food Certification for Olive Oil Market in Albania, Бизнес посоки, Бургаски Свободен Университет, бр. 2, 2020 (under print)).