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Exploring consumer behaviour, attitudes, and willingness to pay for agroecological products in tunisian urban areas

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Abstract

Agroecology is increasingly recognised as a transformative approach to sustainable food systems. In Tunisia, however, despite growing institutional support, agroecological products exhibit weak market penetration due to limited consumer awareness, perceived price premiums, and insufficient differentiation from organic and conventional foods. This study investigates the determinants of urban consumers' attitudes toward agroecological food, purchase intentions, and willingness to pay a premium price, with particular emphasis on psychological, perceptual, and socio-demographic factors. Survey data collected from 400 consumers in Greater Tunis were analysed using descriptive statistics and partial least squares structural equation modelling. Descriptive results indicate that consumers generally acknowledge the environmental and health benefits of agroecological food, perceive its quality positively, and display high price sensitivity. Willingness to pay a premium price remains limited, with approximately 53% of respondents expressing such willingness in the olive oil case study. Most respondents belong to the urban middle class, are well educated, perceive themselves as physically fit, and show a preference for fresh foods sourced directly from producers and cooperatives. Empirical results reveal that green psychological benefits are the strongest predictor of willingness to pay a premium price, with a standardised coefficient of 0.455, followed by purchase intention and attitude toward agroecological food. Attitudes are significantly shaped by perceived value, green psychological benefits, price sensitivity, and general perceived quality, while purchase intention is influenced by green psychological benefits, perceived value, general perceived quality, health consciousness, and attitude toward agroecological food. In contrast, environmental concern and environmental values do not significantly affect attitudes or purchase intentions, highlighting a gap between environmental awareness and actual consumer behaviour. Mediation analysis further demonstrates that psychological and perceptual factors, particularly green psychological benefits, perceived value, health consciousness, and perceived quality, indirectly influence willingness to pay a premium price through their effects on attitudes and purchase intentions. These findings underscore that in weakly institutionalized markets, consumer behaviour is driven less by environmental values and more by perceived

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personal benefits, relational trust, and identity-based psychological rewards. The results offer practical insights for policymakers and market actors seeking to enhance consumer engagement with agroecological products and support sustainable food system transitions.

Keywords: Agroecological food, consumer behaviour, structural equation modelling, Tunisia, willingness to pay