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DETERMINANTS OF ORGANIC FOOD CHOICE IN GERMANY – THE CASE OF YOUNG ADULTS

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the values that underlie young adults purchase motivation of organic food. Online chat-based laddering interviews were conducted with 30 organic and non-organic consumers. The results revealed several values of young adults that are relevant for organic food purchase. Values that were frequently revealed in relation to organic food purchase were well-being, universalism, hedonism and benevolence. Values that were explored in relation to non-purchase of organic food were security, hedonism and self-direction. The findings show that egoistic values were more relevant for young adults organic food purchase intention than altruistic values. The findings of this study can be used by producers and marketers by increasingly considering the values in their marketing strategies.

Introduction: The market for organic food shows a continuously growing trend. The German government aims to strengthen the organic farming sector in Germany and set the goal to expand the total area of organically farmed land to 20 % (BMEL, 2019). Accordingly, market shares in the organic food sector need to expand. Continued growth in market share requires either a change in the purchasing behaviour of consumers who already consume organic products by demanding more organic products or reaching out for new groups of consumers. One such group is young adults (18 to 30 years). In order to successfully address this group, one must be aware of the general values and specific attitudes towards organic food that drive consumer behaviour (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). Since values and attitudes differ between generations (Fricke, 1996), existing knowledge about values and attitudes of the average consumer is not generally transferable. The aim of the study is to understand the values that underlie young adults purchase motivation of organic food.

This study uses the qualitative laddering technique which is particularly suitable for "clarifying the background and determinants of human action" (Gruber et al 2009: 571). With the help of laddering, values, as the driving forces behind certain behaviours can be uncovered. By encouraging respondents to reflect intensively on their purchasing behaviour, cognitive structures that determine purchasing behaviour are analysed in detail. The laddering method is theoretically based in the Means-End Chain theory, which refers to a three-stage model containing attributes, consequences and values. So-called Hierarchical Value Maps (HVM) are created in order to illustrate the relationships between attributes,

consequences and values (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). The values in this study are based on the Schwartz values (Schwartz, 2012).

Material and methods: In this study, we used laddering interviews for the data collection. The interviews took place online and chat-based on the platform Adobe Connect. The widespread use of the internet within the target group of this study makes online interviews an interesting alternative. Advantages compared to offline are the better accessibility of the participants and possibly the larger willingness to share personal opinions. Furthermore, the extent of social desirability and interviewer bias is likely to be lower in this survey form (Gruber et al., 2009). 30 semi-structured one-to-one interviews were carried out in July 2019 and lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The respondents were recruited by a market research agency, included organic and non-organic consumers who were (co-)responsible for food shopping. In the course of the interview, respondents were asked to name relevant criteria for or against the purchase of organic food. A content analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts by using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA.

Results: Regarding positive organic ladders, we obtained seven attributes, eight functional consequences, seven psychological consequences and five values. Figure 1 shows the HVM with positive ladders for organic food. The thickness of the arrows is proportional to the links between the subjects. The attributes “untreated”, “better animal husbandry” and “local” predominated. Values that were frequently revealed in relation to organic food purchase were “well-being”, “universalism”, “hedonism” and “benevolence”. The highest frequency of links occurred between “untreated”, “health” and “well-being”. The association between the attribute “untreated”, “environmental protection” and “universalism” was also strong as well as the link between “animal welfare”, a “good conscience” and “well-being”. Localness was either linked to “short transportation” and “environmental protection” or “support of local farmers” and finally “benevolence”. With regard to negative organic ladders, a HVM with five attributes, five functional consequences, five psychological consequences and three values was identified. In this case, the results revealed two major chains of associations: the attribute “expensive” resulting in “save less money” and ending up in the values less “security” and less “hedonism” and the link between “not organic”, “lack of trust” and less “security” as well. The third value that was assigned to organic food was less “self-direction”. This was associated with a lack of availability and a shorter shelf life resulting in the consequence of having to go shopping more often.

Discussion: The results of the study show that a variety of values shape young adults purchase motivation of organic food. Both, altruistic as well as egoistic values influence the motivation to buy organic food among young adults in Germany. However, egoistic values such as well-being, hedonism and security were found to impact more often consumers’ organic food purchase intention than the altruistic values naturalism and benevolence. In the case of purchase barriers for organic food, egoistic values (security, hedonism and self-direction) have been exclusively identified. In the literature, there is no agreement on the relative importance of egoistic versus altruistic motives when it comes to organic purchase decisions (e.g. Schleenbecker and Hamm, 2013).

The findings of this study can be used by producers and marketers by considering the values increasingly with regard to marketing strategies (see also Zanolini and Naspetti, 2002). When it comes to attracting young adults as new group of consumers, particularly the reasons for not buying organic food should be looked at more closely. It should be analysed how the negative chains can be dissolved and how more attention can be paid on the value related to the “lack of trust”.

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Image:

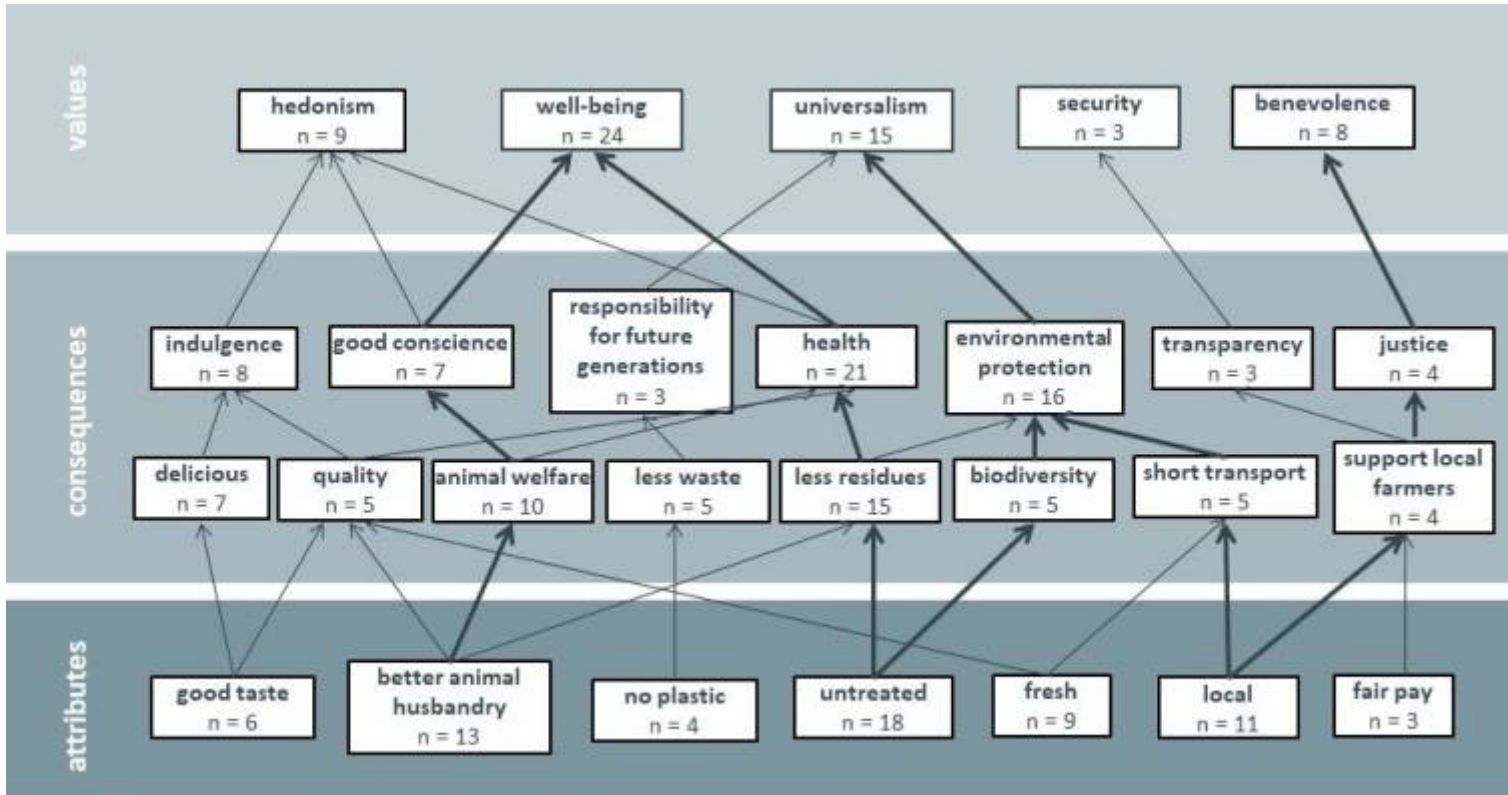


Figure 1: Hierarchical Value Map of motivations for purchase of organic food

Image 2:

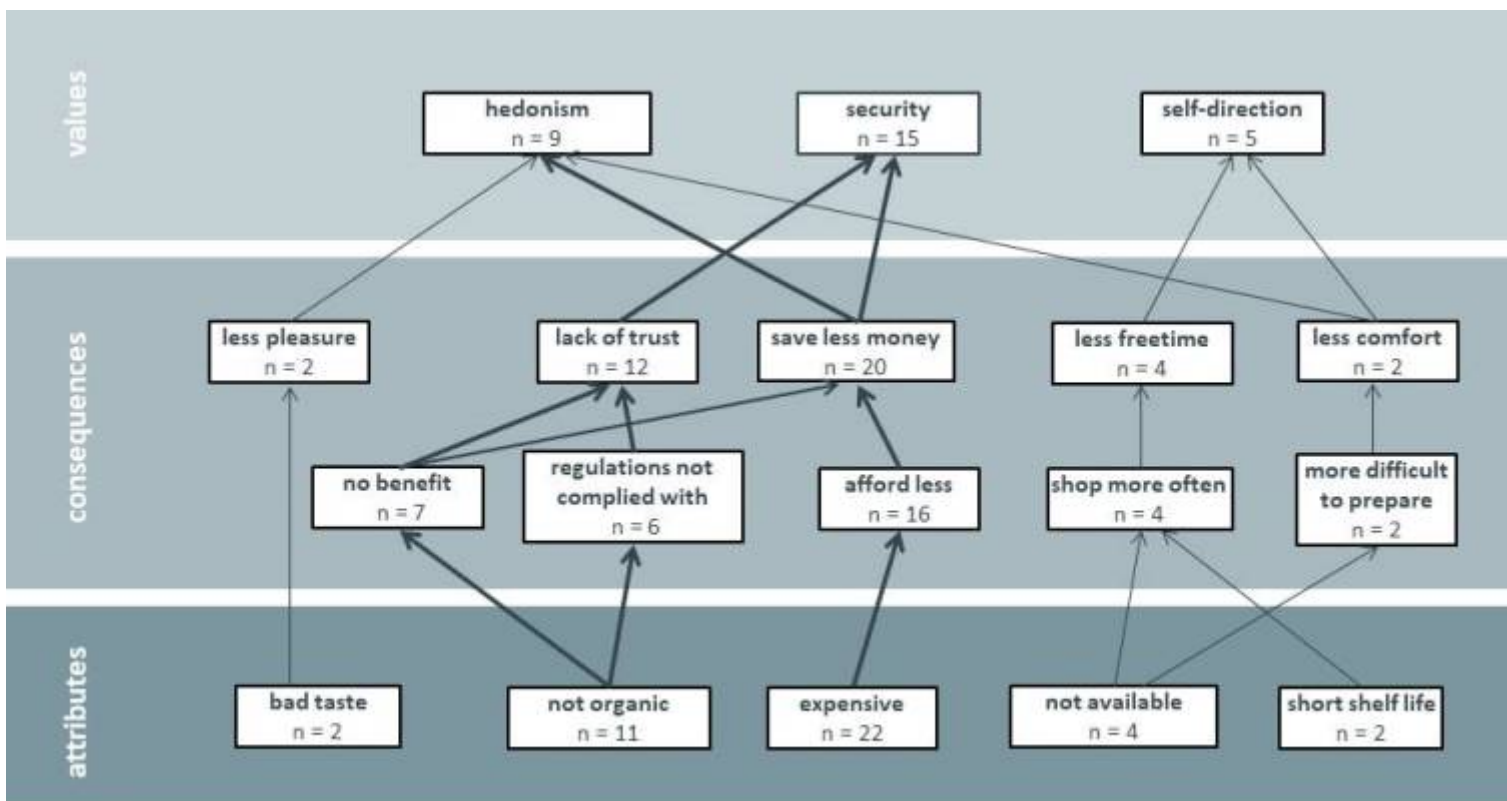


Figure 2: Hierarchical Value Map of motivations for non-purchase of organic food

Disclosure of Interest: None Declared

Keywords: laddering, means-end chain, organic food , purchase behaviour, values, young adults