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RELIGIOSITY AND ORGANIC FOOD CONSUMPTION. TOWARDS A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

The study analyzes the effect of three constructs as antecedents of organic food consumption: extrinsic religiosity, intrinsic religiosity, and individual attachment to a religious community.

Marketing and consumer research are aware of the potential impacts of religion on consumption choices since a long time. However, few are the studies approaching the matter of organic food consumption considering the effects of religiosity. The effect of three potential antecedents are there considered. Intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity are included in the analysis. A third antecedent regards individual attachment to a religious community. The impact of such perceived individual belonging is here considered for a more comprehensive analysis, and given the negligible attention the concept has received so far in the -scarce- available literature on the topic. Structural Equation Modeling has been performed on a sample of Italian individuals attending Buddhist pilgrimages. Preliminary estimations of the model show a good model fit; all the proposed hypotheses resulted significant.

BACKGROUND

Organic food consumption has experienced, especially in industrialized markets, a considerable growth (e.g., Richter, 2008; Paul and Rana, 2012). Among those studies devoted to investigating the antecedents of organic food consumption, few considered the potential implications of religious values. Religiosity is defined as «a belief in God accompanied by a commitment to follow principles believed to be set by God» (Vitell et al, 2005). It is well-known that religiosity influences everyday human behaviour (Weaver and Agle, 2002). Religion influences also consumption patterns of people (Essoo and Dibb, 2004; Doran and Natale, 2010). Religion is a clear determinant of consumer behaviour, given the pervasive nature of this cultural

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component, influencing several traits of societies and individual lives. The relevance of religiosity for marketers is straightforward: as noted by Kim et al (2004) religion is an enduring cultural factor, whose influences extend in the long term. In this sense, religion is very likely to influence marketing strategies and initiatives. Such importance of religion in consumer behaviour and in marketing science has been long recognized by scholars (e.g., Allport and Ross, 1967; Hirschman, 1983). In consumer behaviour literature, several measurements of the religiosity construct have been proposed (e.g., Allport and Ross, 1967; Hirschman, 1983; Genia, 1993; Worthington et al, 2003; Kim et al, 2004). Following most of research on religiosity in consumer behaviour (e.g., Allport and Ross, 1967; Donahue, 1985; Vitell et al, 2005), the study includes intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity as potential antecedents of consumer behaviour related to organic food consumption. As a third antecedent, the study considers consumer perceived attachment to a religious community. The relatively scarce literature on the impact of religion on consumer behaviour has not devoted relevant attention, as far as it is known, to the impact of perceived belongingness to religious communities in determining individual consumer behaviour. (e.g., Lindridge, 2005).

METHODOLOGY AND EARLY RESULTS

Data collection was based on the administration of a questionnaire to individuals attending a Buddhist pilgrimage in Northern Italy. Known and validated scales were used for intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. Due to the substantial lack of studies on the role of religious communities in consumption contexts, a modified version of Sierra et al's (2016) measure of community attachment was adapted to the context of the Buddhist religious community, as a proxy of the individual sense of belonging with respect to religious communities. 310 usable responses resulted after data collection. SEM was performed on the collected data; early estimations of the model shows an acceptable fit (RMSEA= .046; AGFI= 907; GFI= .941). All the hypothesized relationships were found significant, confirming results of extant literature on the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity on food consumption (e.g., Mukhtar and Mohsin Butt, 2011), providing also evidence for the influencing role of perceived community belonging. Originality of results should be considered in terms of research context, which differs from the majority of existing research on the role of religiosity in food consumption, mostly related to Islamic contexts. These preliminary results also suggest to further explore individual importance of religious communities in consumption, adopting, for example, the lenses of literature on brand/consumer communities.

Keywords: religiosity; religious communities; organic food; Buddhism.

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