

THE FOOD AND THE FUTURE: CONSUMERS WILLINGNESS TO PAY FOR MORE MEAT AND ITS DETERMINANTS IN TIRANA, ALBANIA

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Abstract

The developments of the last year in the consumer economy have been a tangible reality throughout Europe. These dynamics, and economic features have increased research interest on the sustainability of food consumption in Albania. Given the context and predictions the research within consumer behavior and willingness to pay (WTP) may be of interest theoretically and practically. The study objective is to provide a multidisciplinary observation through a qualitative–quantitative approach of three groups of variables, such as (a) socio–economic; (b) psychological–social; and (c) motivational and their possible effect to WTP for meat product in the markets of Tirana. Results of the used Ordered Logit model show that variables age, income, consumption, food safety and education levels are factors that impact WTP for more meat. Living labs should consider the effectiveness of multidisciplinary theories within the segment and beyond.

Key words: WTP, income, consumption, Albania

INTRODUCTION

The last few years and especially the year 2022 have been characterized by unprecedented effects of the lockdowns, Covid–19 pandemic and global shocks to energy markets and especially food prices. These developments have also been unpredictable for the food markets in Albania. The broad socio–economic consequences of these dynamics and especially the high inflation during the last year have raised concerns over the consumption economy. Within the segment of consumer choice, willingness to pay (WTP) represents a very important part of consumer behavior. While consumption economy is an underutilized resource of the Albanian economy, consumer behavior from a theoretical point of view represents a subject of continuous research interest. Moreover, studies on consumer behavior and WTP can contribute for the increase of predictability in an unpredictable world, where borders, national factors and

efficiency of resources use have suddenly become very important.

WTP varies between products or attribute differences, socio–economic context and demographics, etc., among consumer groups [3], and over the time it may change [7]. WTP is affected by tastes, preferences, attitudes or subjective norms etc., and new approaches such as post–consumption behavior [21], have been developed with focus the segment and marketing. The determinants of WTP can be understood in a multidisciplinary way within the social dilemma (i.e. within socio–economic picture) including materialism, self–interest or ex–collectivism, facts, opinions, beliefs, etc., and their evaluations, and the degree of self–understanding about the importance of the consumption economy not merely statistically but as an potential for creating economic positives and socially a new and progressives environment where professionals can focus on solving problems for overcoming poverty by creating a

developed–professional society as part of the European standard of living.

WTP may be related to groups of factors such as region/location (eg Mediterranean vs. continental), socio–economic or institutional ones, and/or psychological–social such as religiousness, etc. A core–interdisciplinary work argue the link between religiousness and sustainable behavior [32], while value–belief–norm theory explain the importance of religiousness and its absolutist standard which indicate values, beliefs or decisions [24]. In ‘The theory of price’ [25], as it is presented the impact of theories on consumer choice — including zero–predictability tautological statements, it is clearly emphasized that the society may not rely exclusively on the free preferences of consumers, because institutions may impose restrictions on the consumer choice and the productive system responds to their choices to the extent that they are free to choose goods, underlining the importance of the socio–economic factors and the latter is broadly supported [17], [4].

Considering the challenging dynamics and the implications in the consumption segment the study by covering the justified need for more research on these effects aims to verify the impact of several groups of factors such as (1) socio–economic, (2) psychological–social and (3) motivational ones to WTP for food products in the markets of Tirana. Research on WTP in the light of main and newer theories can be valuable for professionals and responsible institutions by helping to understand even the micro–macroeconomic implications. Given the specific context of developments in energy markets and the consequences on employment, income and consumption, the paper may be useful in several ways: (1) for the consumption economics and potential considerations and predictabilities in consumers activities within the segment; (2) for the market actors, consumer associations, agencies; and (3) for the data enrichment and expanding of instruments that can provide potentially optimal effects to the sustainable consumption or social policy schemes and wider.

The literature is characterized by diversity and contradictions over the set of factors that

influence or have synergistic effects across products or within the segment, between or beyond regions or countries, etc., regarding the key socio–economic factors or their impact to the willingness to pay more for food products. Among the demographic factors, the age of consumers represents an important variable to willingness to pay more for food animal products [6], and the youngest consumers are willing to pay a higher price for food products [8]. Family size (starting from singles) affects the willingness to pay more for meat products [19], and since it is based on the family model of meat consumption, WTP more is highly related to the family unit [5]. The increase of employees in several sectors across Europe has had a positive effect on the willingness to pay for products [27]. The employment status affects the willingness to pay for food products [20]. The income represents a very important variable to the willingness to pay for the meat product [26], and individuals with higher income levels are willing to pay the largest premiums for meat product [18]. Willingness to pay more may increase as the consumption of food products increases [9]. WTP is highly related to food quality and standards, and food safety affects the willingness to pay more for food products [16]. Moreover, decisions about WTP a higher price are closely related to consumers’ confidence in the food safety of products [29]. Willingness to pay for a food product is heterogeneous within the segment and varies especially with the consumers education level [23]. Consumers with lower education level are willing to pay more a premium for food product compared with those with higher education levels [10]. There is also a positive and statistically significant effect of gender (female) on WTP more for food products [30], [28]. The studies support that Muslim religiousness has a significant impact on willingness to pay more for specific food products [2], and especially at the butcher shops [31]. Notably, based on the philosophical–ethical foundations, affiliations and established behavioural norms on the value traditional cooking of Christianity, Christian religiousness has a significant impact on WTP more for food products [12].

Objectives and hypotheses

The objective of the study is to provide a multidisciplinary observation through theories and new approaches in consumer behavior, verifying the influence of a number of variables such as gender, age, family size, employees, income, consumption and education levels, religiousness and food safety to WTP for more meat—according to consumer’s perception in the markets of Tirana, Albania.

The study hypotheses are:

H₁ — with age willingness to pay more for meat product increases;

H₂ — increase of family size affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₃ — increase of family employees affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₄ — increase of family income affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₅ — increase of consumption affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₆ — increase of food safety affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₇ — increase of primary education affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₈ — increase of secondary education affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₉ — increase of female gender affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₁₀ — increase of Muslim religiousness affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product;

H₁₁ — increase of Christian religiousness affects the increase of WTP more for the meat product.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Measurement procedure

In the measurement procedure variables are adjusted (Table 1) according to group-categories.

The interview was conducted face to face after an improvement of the questionnaire in a focus group.

Table 1. Concepts and variables in the measurement procedure.

Concept	Variables
	Dependent variable
Willingness to pay	<i>WTP</i>
Socio-economic factors	Independent variables
Age	<i>Age</i>
Family size	<i>FamSize</i>
Family employees	<i>FamEmp</i>
Income	<i>Income</i>
Consumption	<i>Consump</i>
Education 1	<i>Edu_1</i>
Education 2	<i>Edu_2</i>
Gender	<i>Gend_0</i>
Motivational factors	
Food safety	<i>FoodSaf</i>
Psychological-social factors	
Religion 1	<i>Relig_1</i>
Religion 2	<i>Relig_2</i>

Source: Data processed by authors.

Empirical data have been obtained through interviewing consumers in 4 administrative units of the municipality of Tirana (Figure 1), considering the composition of the regions and respectively in mini-municipalities no. 3, 5, 8 and 11.

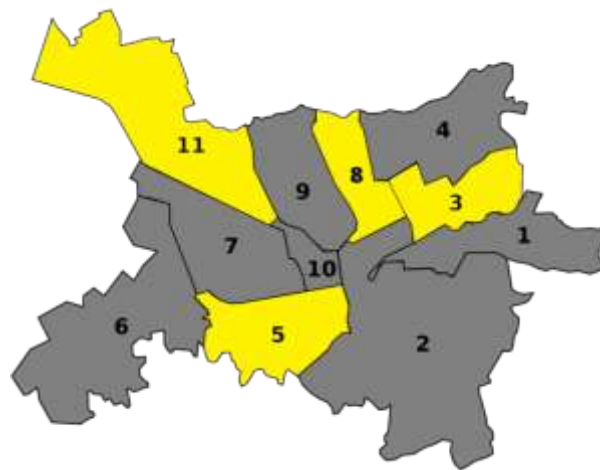


Fig. 1. Mini-municipalities no. 3, 5, 8 and 11 in the municipality of Tirana.

Source: Data processed by authors.

Each interview lasted an average of 22 minutes and given the resources, time and location limitations and difficulties encountered in practice, the simple size (220) used with a precision rate of 7% and a confidence level of 95% was considered valid [13], [14].

The questionnaire designed into 4 main parts was used with the aim of providing a large number of data in the city markets by considering the heterogeneity of the sample and the composition of consumers within the aforementioned administrative units. In the first *demographic* section, standard data on the gender, age, religious belief, education, employment status, (monthly) income, etc. of the interviewees were provided. In the second section, *the market, preferences and consumer education* were included questions on the preference of buying in supermarkets, butcheries or farms, the preference of cooking, the origin of product, the method of meat production, knowledge on food safety, knowledge about risk, etc. In the third section, *reliability, protection and consumer behavior*, were included questions on the perception of effects from meat consumption, the perceived trust towards actors within the segment, main institutions and information sources, etc. In the fourth section *the perspective of safety and consumer readiness*, were included questions on the perception of risks from meat consumption (last 5 years), the perceived impact on consumption, the willingness to increase future (5 years) consumption, and the WTP more for a (future) safer product.

The interview was based on the standard procedure in which each sample has equal probability of being selected (random choice), and the above variables are verified according to scaling in the respective sections. So, variable education and religiousness was measured using 3 scales (elementary school; secondary school; university; and Muslim; Christian; other). The size of family, family employees and consumption was measured using 4 scales (1 member; 2–3 members; 4–5 members; > 5 members; and up to 1 kg; 1–2 kg; 2–5 kg; over 5 kg). The age using 5 scales (≤ 24 years; 25–34; 35–49; 50–64; ≥ 65 years), and the variables income and food safety using 6 scales. The variables under review are multinomial, and they are expressed with a nominal or ordinal scale (Likert), therefore the variants for each variable are not numbers but are categories.

Based on data provided the statistical model Ordered Logit was used and the significance of variables is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The significance of variables by Ordered Logit model.

Model 2: Ordered Logit, observations 1–220 (n=219)

Missing or incomplete observations dropped: 1

Dependent variable: *Willingness to pay*

Standard errors based on Hessian

	Coefficient	Std. Error	Z	p-value	
Age	0.370516	0.156721	2.364	0.0181	**
FamSize	-0.192851	0.174089	-1.108	0.2680	
FamEmp	0.204182	0.190836	1.070	0.2846	
Income	0.0058263	0.0021694	2.686	0.0072	**
Consum	0.248304	0.0916400	2.710	0.0067	**
FoodSaf	0.870073	0.187901	4.630	<0.000	**
Edu_1	-0.984865	0.442227	-2.227	0.0259	**
Edu_2	-1.12150	0.350511	-3.200	0.0014	**
Gend_0	0.330996	0.274830	1.204	0.2284	
Relig_1	-0.013736	0.527591	-0.0260	0.9792	
Relig_2	-0.045205	0.550858	-0.0820	0.9346	
cut1	-0.330406	0.953312	-0.3466	0.7289	
cut2	2.45459	0.920384	2.667	0.0077	**
cut3	5.26459	0.982703	5.357	<0.000	**

Mean dependent var	2.940639	S.D. dependent var	0.778814
Log-likelihood	-212.7326	Akaike criterion	453.4651
Schwarz criterion	500.9121	Hannan-Quinn	472.6276

Number of cases 'correctly predicted' = 115 (52.5%)

Likelihood ratio test: Chi-square (11) = 124.837 [0.0000]

Model:

$$\text{WTP} = + 0.371 * \text{Age} - 0.193 * \text{FamSize} + 0.204 * \text{FamEmp} + 0.00583 * \text{Income} + 0.248 * \text{Consump.}$$

(0.157) (0.174) (0.191) (0.00217) (0.0916)

$$+ 0.870 * \text{FoodSaf} - 0.985 * \text{Edu}_1 - 1.12 * \text{Edu}_2 + 0.331 * \text{Gend}_0 - 0.0137 * \text{Relig}_1$$

(0.188) (0.442) (0.351) (0.275)

(0.528)

$$- 0.0452 * \text{Relig}_2 - 0.330 * \text{cut1} + 2.45 * \text{cut2} + 5.26 * \text{cut3}$$

(0.551) (0.953) (0.920) (0.983)

Source: Data processed by authors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the data provided, a socio-economic picture of the main characteristics of the individuals included in the study can be created. Among other family members, women are the main buyers (Figure 2) of meat, and this evidence supported by other previous studies of food consumption in the city of Tirana. This can be explained by their caring and managerial role in terms of cooking and preparing food in the family, or their employment status, culture, the traditional family, etc.

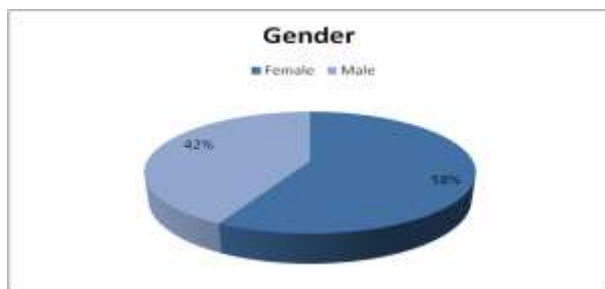


Fig. 2. The gender of the interviewees.
 Source: Data processed by authors.

Most of the respondents (Figure 2) belong to the age group 35–49 years (35%), the age groups 25–34 years and 50–64 years are the same (respectively from 25%), followed by the age group ≥ 65 years (8%) and ≤ 24 years (7%). The adult's group–category is majority and this is important for market policies and consumption. However, this may be a justifiable evidence during the post-pandemic period, either due to the influence of the family model on the consumption of food and especially meat, or perhaps due to the importance of the age group of the most employed for consumption, etc. (Figure 3).

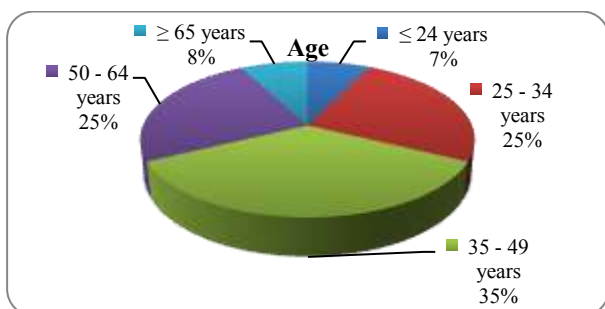


Fig. 3. The age of the interviewees.
 Source: Data processed by authors.

As expected most of the interviewees belong to the Muslim religiousness (Figure 4), and 31% of them belong to the Christian religiousness. Remaining part (14%) represent other beliefs.

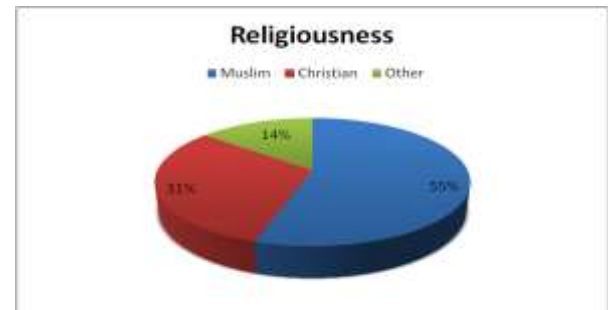


Fig. 4. Religiousness of the interviewees
 Source: Data processed by authors.

The structure of the Albanian family, despite the economic and social developments, continues to be dominated by the multi-member-family (Figure 5), where 48% consist of families of 4–5 members and 29% of families with more than 6 members. This can be an influential factor for important variables within the consumption segment as they are WTP, food preferences, consumption patterns, etc. Institutions considering demographic predictability can design more efficient instruments.

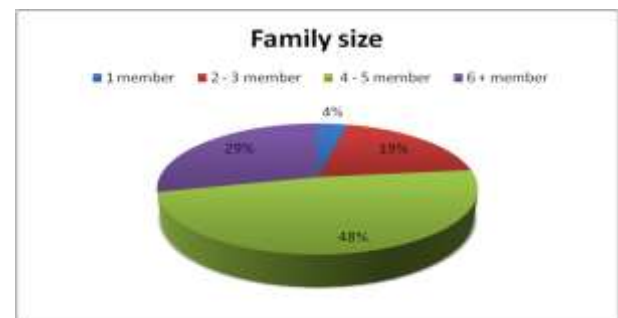


Fig. 5. Family structure of the interviewees
 Source: Data processed by authors.

The quantity of consumption (Figure 6) shows that the 2 main groups consume 1–2 kg and 2–5 kg of meat/week (35% each). Fewer consume up to 1 kg of meat (20%) and the rest consume more than 5 kg per week (10%). Based on the dominant family structure, and the employment status and income level beyond a moderate approach are very important within the segment, and we emphasize that the meat among other products

meat represent one of the main products of the food diet for families.

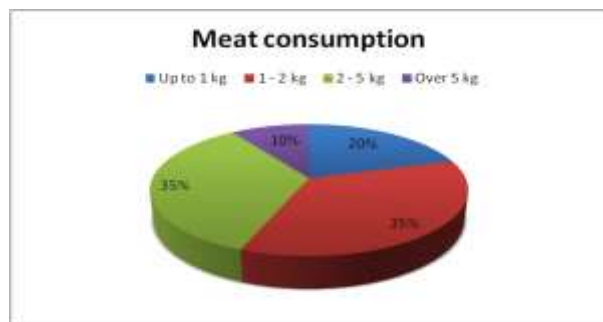


Fig. 6. Meat consumption quantity (weekly).
 Source: Data processed by authors.

Among the meat types consumed (Figure 7), the main part is chicken meat (40%), followed by beef/cow meat and lamb (20% each), and then pork meat (16%). A small part of the respondents (4%) consume other types of meat or have replaced it for other food products (eg fish).

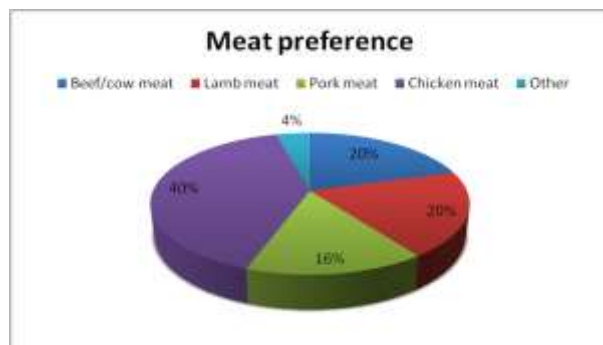


Fig. 7. Preference for meat types
 Source: Data processed by authors.

The WTP for the price of meat (Figure 8) is headed from the category that pays 601–900 ALL (or about 5.2–7.77 Euro).

Thus, about 21% of the interviewees are willing to pay a price of 900–1600 ALL, about 19% a price of 301–600 ALL, and 20% of them up to 300 ALL.

Despite the limitations (eg materials), the interviewees express their concern for the food safety of meat. Regarding the question of how much they are willing to pay more in the future for a safer meat (Figure 9), about 46% answer that they are willing to pay more than 20% of the price, 35% answer that they are ready to pay 10%–20% more, and 19% answer up to 10% more. Meanwhile, consider that the average price of meat this year (2022) increased from 900 ALL/kg to 1,200 ALL/kg.



Fig. 8. WTP for the price of meat product.
 [1 Albanian Lekë (ALL) = 0.0086 Euro]
 Considering the fluctuations in exchange rates, 300 ALL = 2.6 Euro.
 Approximately 600 ALL = 5.2 Euro, 900 ALL = 7.77 Euro, and 1,600 ALL = 13.8 Euro.
 Source: Data processed by authors.



Fig. 9. (Future) WTP more than the price for a safer meat (in %).
 Source: Data processed by authors.

From the measurement of the variables under consideration through the Ordered Logit Model (Table 2), unlike to how it was hypothesized, family size, family employees, gender, and religion (Muslim, Christian) have no influence to WTP for more meat product. Variables age, income, consumption, food safety and education (1, 2) have influence on the probabilities for WTP for more meat. The research is characterized by limitations during the measurement procedure, and especially related to the self-perception of the interviewees. Further complementary studies can avoid possible subjectivism regarding the self-assessment of knowledge about the issue of food safety or consumer behavior, etc.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper in accordance with the objective provides a measurement of above variables and the outcome of the regression Ordered Logit Model (table 2) show the levels of

significance; which mean that with increasing age, income, consumption, and food safety has a very high probability to pay more for meat product underlining the importance of key socio-economic and motivational factors. Education levels (1, 2) have a very significant impact and are negatively related to WTP. This finding deserves further specific research. As we pointed out education levels vary widely and that there are contradictions on the impact of education. The literature also supports the link between the higher education factor and the willingness to pay more for food products which may be explained by the higher level of consciousness on food nutrients and energy level or motivational factors (healthy foods, food safety, etc). There is a positive association of respondents with education level (Bachelor's degree) or higher to WTP for food products [11]. Findings are consistent with other studies focusing on WTP in Albania and specifics of post-pandemic within food consumption [22], [15], highlighting the impact of motivational and socio-economic variables and extrinsic differences. Especially to the main determinants (income, consumption) should be paid attention because they may affect at all times and in many ways both the consumer behavior and the post-consumption behavior. It is supported that emotions mediate to the cognitive appraisals, and the ego, or anger and shame effects to post-consumption behavior [21]. Perhaps under the pressure of rising risks from poverty or deprivations, the above variables may have multiple effects on post-consumption behavior and the impact of emotions on satisfaction and the relationship to behavior is well-documented.

Given the size of the interview (small number), or subjectivism level among the interviewees (eg perceptions between WTP, purchase, eating, consumption, etc.) and especially specific context (eg post-pandemic, psychological effects, inflation, price increases, etc.) or casual links, but also referred to the trust to retailers versus certifications in Albania a measurement between buyers of a category (eg butcher shops) could have been more efficient. The study highlights the specifications within

WTP for products but nevertheless some limitations may affect the level of generalizations. However, through a broad observation, it is evident that there is a theoretical gap and the research in consumer behavior can be viewed in the light of basic theories, such as the theory of planned behavior [1], and value-belief-norm theory [24], and lastly post-consumption behavior [21] where emphasized that cognitive appraisals as antecedents of emotions determines behavior; by explaining 'why-s' of beliefs within segments and beyond in marketing (eg polls, their predictability, etc), perceptions, truths or experiences or positive and negative emotions and their impact for improving or deteriorating of the interviewees' skills. Deprivations and socio-economic consequences in post-consumption appraisals or beliefs can be both causes and consequences for the functioning of a system that is self-feeding within the zero-minimum interval, promoting opportunistic or ego-defensive behaviors and characteristics such as hypocrisy, ambiguity, misunderstanding or distrust. The recommendation for the research extension within the new theories and approaches is valid. We pointed out that WTP varies according to factors, or between products, and over time — but over time researcher's competencies on the same subject can be enriched. Economics is a way of seeing, and a good theoretical focus can enrich the corpus of competencies by making interventions simpler, and this could be a second valuable outcome.

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