

The influence of social media usage and health consciousness on the purchasing intention of organic products: the mediating role of attitude

La influencia del uso de las redes sociales y la conciencia de la salud en la intención de compra de productos orgánicos: el papel mediador de la actitud

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of health consciousness (HC) and social media usage (SM) on the attitude towards organic products (ATT) and the purchasing intention of organic products (PI) in the case of international students in Hungary. The paper has undertaken a quantitative approach using a sample of 204 international students residing and studying in Hungary. After validation of the measurement scales, the hypotheses were tested through partial least squares structural equation modeling. The model tests the relationships between health consciousness, social media usage, the attitude towards organic products and the purchasing intention of organic products. The results showed that health consciousness does not influence the purchasing intention of organic products, compared with the usage of social media, which displayed a significant influence over the purchasing intention. Nevertheless, attitude towards organic products mediated the relationship between HC and PI and between SM and PI. This research provides new insights on how the usage of social media can impact the intention of consumers to purchase organic products. Furthermore, for health consciousness to be effective, the attitude of consumers towards organic products needs to be more favorable.

IROCAMM

VOL. 6, N. 1 - Year 2023

Received: 25/02/2022 | Reviewed: 9/01/2023 | Accepted: 29/12/2022 | Published: 31/01/2023

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2023.v06.i01.06>

Pp.: 88-103

e-ISSN: 2605-0447

Keywords

Attitude, Social media usage, Health consciousness, Consumer behavior, Organic products.

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es analizar la influencia de la conciencia de la salud (HC) y el uso de las redes sociales (SM) en la actitud hacia los productos orgánicos (ATT) y la intención de compra de productos orgánicos (PI) en el caso de estudiantes internacionales en Hungría. El documento ha llevado a cabo un enfoque cuantitativo utilizando una muestra de 204 estudiantes internacionales que residen y estudian en Hungría. Después de la validación de las escalas de medición, las hipótesis fueron probadas a través de modelos de ecuaciones estructurales de mínimos cuadrados parciales. El modelo prueba las relaciones entre la conciencia de la salud, el uso de las redes sociales, la actitud hacia los productos orgánicos y la intención de compra de productos orgánicos. Los resultados mostraron que la conciencia de la salud no influye en la intención de compra de productos orgánicos, en comparación con el uso de las redes sociales, que mostró una influencia significativa sobre la intención de compra. Sin embargo, la actitud hacia los productos orgánicos medió en la relación entre HC y PI y entre SM y PI. Esta investigación proporciona nuevos conocimientos sobre cómo el uso de las redes sociales puede afectar la intención de los consumidores de comprar productos orgánicos. Además, para que la conciencia sobre la salud sea efectiva, la actitud de los consumidores hacia los productos orgánicos debe ser más favorable.

Palabras clave

Actitud, Uso de redes sociales, Conciencia de salud, Comportamiento del consumidor, Productos orgánicos.

1. Introduction

The development of the organic food market is considered a part of ecological consumption, and it reinforces the new paradigm entitled green marketing. Organizations started integrating green marketing operations to their activities, and they enhanced the proliferation of the organic agriculture and organic food (Dangi & Narula, 2021). Attitudes of consumers include their beliefs, values, and their inclination to act in an environmentally friendly manner, or portraying more proper behaviors (Eberle et al., 2022). Nevertheless, there is not enough evidence proving that organic products and non-organic products do not share the same health benefits (Zalecka et al., 2014). Households started paying more attention to having a healthier lifestyle. Consequently, the attitude of consumers towards organic products knew a significant shift, which also led to an increase in the number of studies aiming to study the attitudes of consumers towards organic products (Nagaraj, 2021b). The means by which consumers were informed about organic products changed throughout the years. In the past, consumers were informed about such products through newspapers, magazines, and TV advertisements, and the main motive for buying organic products is the health benefits such products provided (You et al., 2020). Different companies promote their products on multiple social media platforms, enabling them to reach a large number of consumers. Thus, social media is considered as one of the factors that enhances the awareness of sustainable consumption (Nekmahmud et al., 2022). Social media clarifies the production process of organic products, so that consumers can gain more insights on the ways such products are made available, and it gathers users belonging to the same background (You et al., 2020).

Various studies examined the impact of health consciousness on the attitude towards organic products and the purchasing intention of such products (Teng & Lu, 2016, Kapuge, 2016, Asif et al., 2018, Liu et al., 2021, Yadav & Pathak, 2016), in addition to studying the influence of social media on the purchasing intention of consumers (Wang et al., 2012, Pop et al., 2020, Mangold & Faulds, 2009). The current literature examined these variables in a separate manner. Consequently, the main aim of our study is to combine these variables, and assess the influence of health consciousness, social media usage, and

IROCAMM

VOL. 6, N. 1 - Year 2023

Received: 25/02/2022 | Reviewed: 9/01/2023 | Accepted: 29/12/2022 | Published: 31/01/2023

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2023.v06.i01.06>

Pp.: 88-103

e-ISSN: 2605-0447

the attitude towards organic products on the purchasing intention of international students, while also assessing the mediating role of attitude towards organic products. The contribution of this study resides in providing producers and marketing professionals with insights to help them draft their strategies, to strengthen their consumer base while taking into consideration the interactions between the different variables of the study.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Health consciousness

The increasing attentiveness paid to self-care, wellness, and environmental sustainability led to the emergence of consumer groups that pay an increasing attention to their health (Su et al., 2022). Consumers demonstrate their environmental and health consciousness through many ways, including the consumption of organic products. The increasing interest in organic products lead to the proliferation of the industry, therefore, they became capable of expanding into different categories of products and services (Photcharoen et al., 2020). This trend is supported by different factors, including the concern for health, the concern for the environment, nutritional concerns, as well as the improved taste and flavor in organic products. Thus, health concern is considered a main reason why consumers opt for such products (Iqbal et al., 2021). In this study, we will consider health consciousness as a potential factors that influences the choice of consumers.

Health consciousness can be defined as the tendency of individuals to opt for more healthy actions, and their preparedness to support more healthy choices (Shin & Mattila, 2019). It is also considered as the readiness of consumers to identify with and accept health actions (Hansen et al., 2018). In the context of this research, health consciousness will be defined as the concern consumers display about their health, and the process of motivating their health and quality of life with their engagement in healthy behaviors and being self-conscious about their health (Pahrudin et al., 2021). Health-conscious consumers can be identified by their lifestyles, instead of their demographic characteristics, as research has proved that such characteristics are not effective at the definition of health-conscious consumers (Parashar et al., 2022). There is an increasing number of studies that aimed to study the relationship between health consciousness and the purchasing intention of sustainable products. For instance, (Asif et al., 2018) concluded that health consciousness supports the intention to purchase organic products. The same results were supported by (Teng & Lu, 2016), who found that health-conscious consumers demonstrate a strong intention to consume organic food, and they are oriented towards supporting health-related behaviors (Elías-Zambrano et al., 2021). The inclination towards purchasing organic products is encouraged by the health and environmental benefits they bring to consumers. Also, the increasing preference for such products is influenced by different factors, including the gender and size of the family, standard of living, and education (Singhal, 2017).

- H1: Health consciousness has a positive influence over the purchasing intention of organic products
- H2: Health consciousness has a positive influence on the attitude towards organic products

2.2. Attitude towards organic products

Attitude refers to the learned predisposition, favourable or unfavourable, when it comes to a person, object or a problem (Cachero-Martínez, 2020). It also refers to the person's favourable or unfavourable assessment of an object (Ajzen & Madden, 1986), and such evaluation appears due to beliefs, feelings and behavioral inclinations towards a product (Bettiga et al., 2017). Thus, attitude towards green products represents the favourable or unfavourable evaluation of an organic product (Joshi et al., 2021). In fact, consumers tend to exhibit a positive attitude towards organic products (Radulescu et al., 2021). Various studies proved the positive relationship between attitude and purchasing intention (Ahmed et al., 2020; M. F. Chen, 2007; Grankvist & Biel, 2007). Nevertheless, few studies attempted to examine attitude as a variable that mediates the relationship between health consciousness and the purchasing intention of organic products. Thus, we can hypothesize that:

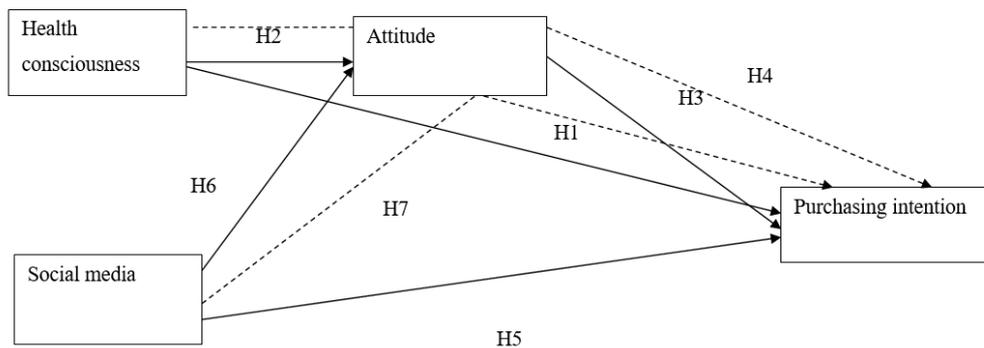
- H3: Attitudes positively influence the purchasing intention of organic food.
- H4: Attitude towards organic products mediates the relationship between health consciousness and the purchasing intention of organic products.

2.3. Social media usage

Social media marketing has emerged as one of the most dominant areas of internet-based marketing, and it still continues in shaping the marketing trends and strategies. It also contributes in the dissemination of values and offers of different companies (Adila et al., 2020). Social media marketing is defined as the set of commercial events and processes that employ social media to positively influence the purchasing behavior of consumers (Jiménez-Marín & Checa, 2021; Chen & Lin, 2019). Social media refers to the set of online applications, and media dedicated to promote interactions, and content sharing, and it comes in different forms, such as Facebook, and Twitter. Social media provides consumers with a platform where they can communicate with individuals who have similar interests (Sun & Wang, 2020). It is also defined as the online applications that helps users to create and exchange content (Lal et al., 2020). Social media interactions were proven to be a direct influencer on purchasing decisions by aiding consumers to be like their peers (Wang et al., 2012). For instance, (Pop et al., 2020a) demonstrated that social media has a positive impact on the attitude towards green cosmetics, health concerns and the intention to purchase green cosmetic. The same results were emphasized, but for the case of online purchasing intention of wine, where (Pucci et al., 2019) found that the usage of social media had a positive influence over the intention to purchase wine online. Furthermore, social media influences attitudes, and purchasing decisions through the different stages of purchasing decisions (Hanaysha, 2022).

- H5: social media has a positive influence on the purchasing intention of organic products
- H6: social media positively influences the attitude towards organic products
- H7: Attitude towards organic products mediates the relationship between social media usage and the purchasing intention of organic products.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



3. Methodology

To analyze our established extended theoretical model, structural equation modeling was employed. SEM is a deep-rooted method that has been employed in different research fields (Berki-Kiss & Menrad, 2022). Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a technique that helps in explaining interrelationships among multiple variables (Sahoo, 2019). SEM includes a variety of multivariate analysis techniques that enable the investigation of organized relationships between a set of multiple predictors and dependent variables (Monecke & Leisch, 2012). The application of this method can be done either through the covariance-based approach (CB-SEM) or the variance-based approach (PLS-SEM) (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2014). PLS-SEM is capable of handling complicated modeling issues that happen routinely, such as unusual data characteristics and highly complex models (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2014). The PLS-SEM was applied in this study, using SmartPLS 3 since the sample size is small (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2014). In order to test the hypothesized relationship, (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) recommended using two-stage analytical procedures, that involve the evaluation of the measurement model and then the assessment of the structural model. To test the significance of the path coefficients, a bootstrapping method was used (Hair, Sarstedt, et al., 2014).

3.1. Participants

The study was based on data collected online via a survey that was distributed from the 1st of November 2021 until the 1st of December 2021. The population of interest included international students in Hungary. The study sample consists of 204 international students living and studying currently in Hungary (n = 204).

3.2. Data collection techniques

The data were collected online through a structured questionnaire, that was developed after a deep review of the available literature. The questionnaire involved the variables highlighted in the study model, including health consciousness, social media usage, attitude, and the purchasing intention of

organic products. Grounded on recommendations made by (Ajzen, 1985), scales including multiple items were developed to measure the variables emphasized by the study. A 7-point Likert scale to showcase the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with an ensemble of statements measuring the variables of our study (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree). Statements from previous studies were used to measure the constructs of the current study. Table 1 shows the survey statements contained in the questionnaire. A pilot study of 50 participants was conducted to check the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the Cronbach alpha demonstrated that reliability is good-to-excellent, ranging from 0.85 to 0.9 (Table 1).

Table 1. Questionnaire statements

Construct	Cronbach alpha coefficient	Statements	Source
Health consciousness	0.85	I reflect on my health a lot I am very self-conscious about my health I am alerted to changes in my health I take responsibility for the state of my health I am aware of the state of my health as I go through the day	(Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008) (GOULD, 1988)
Social media	0.878	I use social media to find and spread information I talk with my peers about organic products on social media I seek information from other consumers online I seek information from other consumers online because my peers seek out information electronically My engagement in social media influences my organic product purchase I use social media to search for information about organic products Contents about organic products on social media are trustworthy Contents about organic products on social media are believable	(Chi, 2021)(Pop et al., 2020b)
Attitude	0.815	For me, consuming organic products is healthy I like organic products I feel proud when I buy /consume organic products	(Ajzen, 1991b)(Pop et al., 2020b)
Purchasing intention	0.907	I want to purchase organic products within the next two weeks I intend to purchase organic products within the next two weeks	(Ajzen, 1991b)

3.3. Operationalization of constructs

The initial structural model includes one dependent variable (the purchasing intention of organic products) and three independent variables (attitude, health consciousness, and social media usage), also considered as latent constructs.

4. Results

4.1. Profile of respondents

Table 2 describes the sample used in this study. 63.2% of respondents were female, and 35.3% were male, while 1.5% preferred not to declare their gender. When it comes to the educational level, 50% of respondents are continuing their bachelor's degree, 38.2% are pursuing their master's degree, and 11.8% are currently pursuing their Ph.D. degree.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Sample characteristics	Respondents (n=204)	Frequency (%)
Gender	129	63.2 %
Female	76	35.3 %
Male	3	1.5 %
Prefer not to say		
Educational level	102	50 %
Bachelor	78	38.2 %
Master	24	11.8 %
PhD		

4.2. Assessment of the measurement model

Table 3. Loadings, Reliability, and Validity

	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
ATT1	0.812	0.815	0.890	0.730
ATT2	0.877			
ATT3	0.873			
HC1	0.819	0.850	0.892	0.624
HC2	0.847			
HC3	0.734			
HC4	0.823			
HC5	0.719			
PI1	0.956	0.907	0.956	0.915
PI2	0.957			
SM2	0.784	0.877	0.907	0.618
SM4	0.741			

	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
SM5	0.842			
SM6	0.820			
SM7	0.773			
SM8	0.754			

While evaluating the measurement model, two items were removed (SM1 and SM3) from the analysis because of their low factor loadings (<0.600)(Gefen & Straub, 2005). To test the reliability of constructs, the study used Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). All the CRs were found to be superior than the recommended value of 0.700 (Hair et al., 2014). Cronbach's alpha of each construct surpassed the 0.700 thresholds. Convergent validity was retained because the average variance extracted (AVE) was over 0.500. The results for reliability and validity in addition to the factor loadings for the items are presented in Table 3. Discriminant validity was assessed by the Fornell-Larker criterion. The table shows that the square root of AVE for the construct was greater than the inter-construct correlations (Table 4). Discriminant validity was also evaluated by the Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (Henseler et al., 2015), with values below the threshold of 0.90. Consequently, discriminant validity is accepted (see Table 5).

Table 4. Fornell-Larker Criterion

	ATT	HC	PI	SM
ATT	0.854*			
HC	0.420	0.790*		
PI	0.638	0.346	0.956*	
SM	0.491	0.380	0.495	0.786*

* Square-root of AVE.

Table 5. HTMT ratio

	ATT	HC	PI	SM
ATT				
HC	0.497			
PI	0.741	0.383		
SM	0.563	0.444	0.549	

4.3. Assessment of the structural model

The structural model indicates the paths hypothesized in the research framework. A structural model is assessed based on the R^2 , Q^2 , and significance of paths. 45.3% change in attitude can be attributed to health consciousness and social media usage. 24.1% change in purchasing intention of organic products is attributed to the health consciousness, social media usage, and the attitude towards organic products. Both of the R^2 values are greater than 0.1 (Falk & Miller, 1992). Consequently, the predictive capability is established. Q^2 for attitude towards organic products and the purchasing intention of organic products is higher than 0, which means that the model has predictive relevance. The value of SRMR was 0.068, which is below the required value of 0.20, indicating acceptable model fit (Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, 2017).

Further assessment of the goodness of fit, hypotheses were tested to establish the significance of the relationship. H1 evaluates whether HC has a significant impact on the PI. The results revealed that HC does not have a significant impact on PI ($\beta = .042$, $t = .712$, $p > .01$). Hence, H1 was rejected. H2 assesses whether HC has a significant influence on ATT. The results showed that HC has a significant impact on ATT ($\beta = .273$, $t = 4.135$, $p < .01$). Consequently, H2 was accepted. H3 studies whether ATT has a significant influence on PI. The results showed that ATT has a significant influence on PI ($\beta = .508$, $t = 7.134$, $p < .01$). Therefore, H3 was accepted. H5 studies whether SM has a significant influence on the PI. The results demonstrated that SM has a positive influence on PI ($\beta = .230$, $t = 3.353$, $p < .01$). Therefore, H5 was accepted. H6 assesses whether SM has a significant impact on ATT. The results demonstrated SM has a positive influence on ATT ($\beta = .387$, $t = 6.444$, $p < .01$). Hence, H6 was accepted.

The 5000 resamples of the study generated 95% confidence intervals as showcased in Table 5. A confidence interval different from zero indicates a significant relationship. Hypothesis testing results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing results

	β	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values	2.5%	97.5%
SM -> ATT	0.387	0.060	6.444	0.000	0.260	0.497
HC -> ATT	0.273	0.066	4.135	0.000	0.157	0.401
HC -> PI	0.042	0.058	0.721	0.471	-0.084	0.147
SM -> PI	0.230	0.069	3.353	0.001	0.082	0.354
ATT -> PI	0.508	0.071	7.134	0.000	0.353	0.627
	R^2	Q^2				
ATT	0.304	0.209				
PI	0.453	0.403				

4.4. Mediation analysis

Mediation analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of attitude towards organic products. The results (see table 7) revealed significant ($p < 0.01$) mediating role of ATT ($\beta = 0,196$, $t = 4.654$, $p = 0.000$) and ($\beta = 0.139$, $t = 3.612$, $p = 0.000$). Hence attitude towards organic products successfully mediated the relationship between social media usage and purchasing intention, and mediated the relationship between health consciousness and the purchasing intention of organic products. Thus, H4 and H7 were confirmed.

Table 7. Mediation results

	Total Effect	T	Sig	Direct effect	Sig		Effect	T statistics	P value
SM->PI	0.427	6.732	0.000	0.230	0.001	SM->ATT->PI	0.196	4.654	0.000
HC->PI	0.181	2.904	0.000	0.042	0.471	HC->ATT->PI	0.139	3.612	0.000

5. Discussion

The present study investigated the relationships between SM, HC, ATT, and PI of organic products. This study also assessed the mediating impact of ATT on the relationship between HC and PI, and SM and PI.

The study found an insignificant relationship between HC and PI. The results of the study contradict those of (Asif et al., 2018; Teng & Lu, 2016). This shows that the health consciousness of international students exhibits no influence over their purchasing intention of organic products. This can be explained by the fact that organic products are priced higher than conventional products, making it difficult to afford them. The study also found that there is a significant influence of HC on ATT. The results of the study are compatible with those of (Nagaraj, 2021a). This demonstrates that health consciousness positively influences the attitude towards organic products. Consequently, the higher the awareness of international students of their health, the more favorable their attitude will be towards organic products. Students who are aware of their health evaluate organic products from the perspective of the benefits their health will gain, making their attitude towards such products more favorable. Also, the recent health crisis the world is living increased individuals' awareness of their health and highlighted the importance of maintaining a healthy diet to protect one's health. Therefore, organic products were seen as a healthy alternative to conventional ones.

Furthermore, the study also assessed the influence of SM on the PI of organic products. The study found that there is a significant impact of social media usage on the purchasing intention of organic products. The results are in line with the studies of (Pop et al., 2020a; Pucci et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2012). Consequently, the usage of social media has a significant impact on the purchasing intention of organic products. In the case of international students, social media usage is a better predictor of their purchasing intention of organic products, since SM presents an effective means of communication that enables businesses to easily reach people in different parts of the world, and who belong to different generations. Also, social media increases the awareness of consumers of organic products, and the effects they have on health, through their expositions to ads and content made by influencers, in addition to the comments made by different consumers online. All these elements increase the exposition of international students to the idea of purchasing organic products, thus shifting their

intention towards purchasing such products. The study also attempted to ascertain the influence of SM on ATT. The results show that SM has a positive influence on the attitude of international students towards organic products. The results of the study are in line with the works of (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Pucci et al., 2019). The various information about organic products published on different social media platforms enhance users' health concerns, in addition to their health awareness. As a consequence, consumers will feel more responsible for their health, and their attitude towards organic products will be more favorable. The results of the study show that social media has the power to influence the purchasing intention of consumers, that is why businesses need to employ the different social media platforms to highlight the advantage of their organic products on the health of consumers, in addition to highlighting other aspects of the products, such as their production process and the labels they obtained, to increase the trust of consumers and encourage them to pay the price premium for such products. The findings of our study provide a strong theoretical contribution to the literature because there is limited research on the relationship between SM, HC, ATT, and PI of organic products.

The study also assessed the impact of ATT on the PI. The study found that there is a positive influence of ATT on PI. The results of the study are in line with those of (Basha et al., 2015; Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005). According to the Theory of Reasoned Action by (Ajzen, 1991a), attitude exhibits a positive influence over the purchasing intention of consumers.

Additionally, including ATT as a mediator in the analysis has further helped in explaining under which conditions SM and HC have a significant impact on the purchasing intention of organic products. In the present study, ATT fully mediated the relationship between HC and PI, whereas ATT partially mediated the relationship between SM and PI. The results of the study show that the attitude towards organic products is critical when it comes to encouraging international students' purchasing intention of organic products.

6. Conclusion

This paper attempted to extend and test a TRA model that links HC, SM with ATT, and PI. This research adds to the TRA literature by demonstrating that the usage of social media has a significant impact on the purchasing intention of organic products, and the enhancement of the relationship between health consciousness and the purchasing intention of organic products is done by using the attitude towards organic products as a mediating variable. The data have been analyzed using PLS-SEM. The SEM findings of the research demonstrate that social media is needed to influence both the attitude and the purchasing intention of organic products, and health consciousness has a significant influence over the purchasing intention of organic products. Attitude towards the research mediated the relationships between SM and PI, HC and PI, by making the relationships more significant.

7. Implications

The research has significant implications. From the theoretical perspective, the study was capable of empirically proving the role of HC, SM, and ATT in encouraging international students to purchase organic products. The study also contributed to the stream of literature on consumer behavior, highlighting the positive influence of the usage of social media on the purchasing intention of organic products, and the attitude towards organic products, in addition to the role of attitude as a mediator in the relationships

between social media and the purchasing intention of organic products, and health consciousness and the purchasing intention of organic products. The results of this study can help companies tailor their marketing strategy towards a new segment of international students, belonging to different cultures and countries but sharing a global mindset. Businesses, in this case, can use the social media platforms as the main driver of their strategy, by polishing their social media content and highlighting the benefits of their organic products on health, in addition to their difference from conventional products.

8. Limitations and future research directions

The study used a sample of international students residing in Hungary. Future studies could use a wider sample of respondents collected in other countries. Future studies could also attempt to use other behavioral theories to study the influence of social media on the purchasing intention and purchasing behavior of organic products.

9. Specific contribution of each participant

- Conception and design of the work: E.M.
- Documentary search: E.M.
- Data collection: E.M.
- Analysis and critical interpretation of data: E.M.
- Review and approval of versions: E.M.

10. Acknowledgements

Not applicable

11. Financing

No financing was attributed

12. Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest

13. References

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IROCAMM

VOL. 6, N. 1 - Year 2023

Received: 25/02/2022 | Reviewed: 9/01/2023 | Accepted: 29/12/2022 | Published: 31/01/2023

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2023.v06.i01.06>

Pp.: 88-103

e-ISSN: 2605-0447

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Citación: Echchad, M. (2023). The influence of social media usage and health consciousness on the purchasing intention of organic products: the mediating role of attitude. *IROCAMM - International Review Of Communication And Marketing Mix*, 6(1), 88–103. <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2023.v06.i01.06>



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IROCAMM- International Review Of Communication And Marketing Mix | e-ISSN: 2605-0447

IROCAMM

VOL. 6, N. 1 - Year 2023

Received: 25/02/2022 | Reviewed: 9/01/2023 | Accepted: 29/12/2022 | Published: 31/01/2023

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/IROCAMM.2023.v06.i01.06>

Pp.: 88-103

e-ISSN: 2605-0447