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CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND PURCHASING DETERMINANTS FOR OLIVE OIL IN ALBANIA: EVIDENCE FROM TIRANA

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyze market developments and consumer preferences for olive oil in Tirana with a particular focus on how sociodemographic factors influence consumer behavior in the choice of olive oil. The growth of the Albanian economy and increased health concerns after Covid-19, have led to a rise in demand for higher quality products such as olive oil. Therefore, this study is relevant as it analyzes the importance of product's origin and investigates whether consumer uses olive oil for aesthetic and health care purposes. The study is based on data collected from 150 respondents in Tirana through a structured questionnaire distributed via Google Forms and analyzed using descriptive statistical method and chi-square tests in Microsoft Excel. The findings indicate that while educational status and gender do not significantly influence the importance consumers attribute to olive oil origin, age and, occupation have a significant effect. The findings reveal that 70% of consumers use olive oil for both aesthetic and health purposes, primarily applying it to the skin for cosmetic care and using it to address digestive issues for health treatment. The paper provides valuable insights that may be used to develop more effective marketing strategies and also policy recommendations.*

Keyword: *Olive oil, Consumer preferences, Tirana, Health concerns, Sociodemographic factors*

1. Introduction

Olive oil is one of the most traditional and valuable products in Mediterranean diets and global agri-food markets. Its cultural and economic significance has increased research interest in understanding the factors that influence consumer choices and their willingness to pay for it. Among the most significant product related factors influencing consumer preference towards olive oil are origin, method of production, labelling, and certification (Sgroi et al., 2023).

Organic and quality indicators of olive oil are highly valued. According to Casini et al. (2014), organic certification is one of the most important factors when consumers choose olive oil. The demand for high-quality products, especially organic ones, is consistently increasing, along with a larger willingness among consumers to pay for these attributes (Chinnici, Bracco, & La Via, 2016). As buying motivations, it is indicated in the literature that organic products are purchased by consumers because they are considered safe and healthy (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2012). Sandalidou et al. (2002) emphasized that the health benefits are a primary competitive advantage of organic olive oil. In countries that cultivate olive, consumers have more knowledge of its values and show a more positive attitude toward organic olive oil (Pardo et al., 2018).

Consumers are willing to spend more on olive oil, that display specific certification which show quality and origin. Aprile et al. (2012) found that the organic production method and Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) certification positively influence consumer preference. Products with a PDO label are seen as premium products, and consumers are willing to pay more for these products (de-Magistris & Gracia, 2016). This suggests that certification and production methods are one of primary factors driving consumer preferences for olive oil.

Panico et al. (2014) found that consumers have a stronger preference for domestic olive oil. Furthermore, recent studies by Pérez y Pérez and Gracia (2023) and Chan-Halbrendt et al. (2010), indicate that price and origin are important factors influencing consumer choices. According to Dekhili et al. (2011), the importance of the organic label varies across consumer groups, with some placing significantly greater value on it than others.

Olive cultivation and olive oil production are one of the major agricultural activities in Albania. Olives are cultivated in nine out of the twelve prefectures of the country (INSTAT, 2025). Consequently, Albania provides a relevant context for studying consumer preferences for olive oil, given its long history of cultivating olives. Despite the increase of domestic production, which largely satisfies national demand, consumer demand continues to evolve. Recent evidence shows that younger, more educated, and higher-income consumers assign greater emphasis on health and environmental attributes, whereas older and lower-income individuals priorities price and traditional options (Ahmadi Kaliji et al., 2025). Furthermore, findings from Muça et al. (2016), indicate that Albanian consumers demonstrate a preference for domestically produced olive oil, because they are familiar with its taste and trust its quality, and often relying on personal connection with vendors when assessing product attributes. This study aims to evaluate the key factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions regarding olive oil, with a particular focus on the relationship between product origin and sociodemographic factors. The main research question is: Which sociodemographic factors significantly influence the importance consumers in Tirana attribute to olive oil origin?

Understanding these factors is important for agribusiness and farmers in the olive oil sector in Albania to successfully market their product to meet the demands of the European market. Although many studies have examined consumer behavior toward olive oil in Mediterranean and EU countries, empirical evidence from Albania remains limited. This limited information is particularly essential in view of the increase in olive production and motivation of farmers for adoption into organic farming. The findings will help to strengthen marketing strategies, support local producers' competitiveness, and inform future agricultural policies promoting value-added and origin-based products in Albania.

2. Olive Oil Production and Market Context in Albania

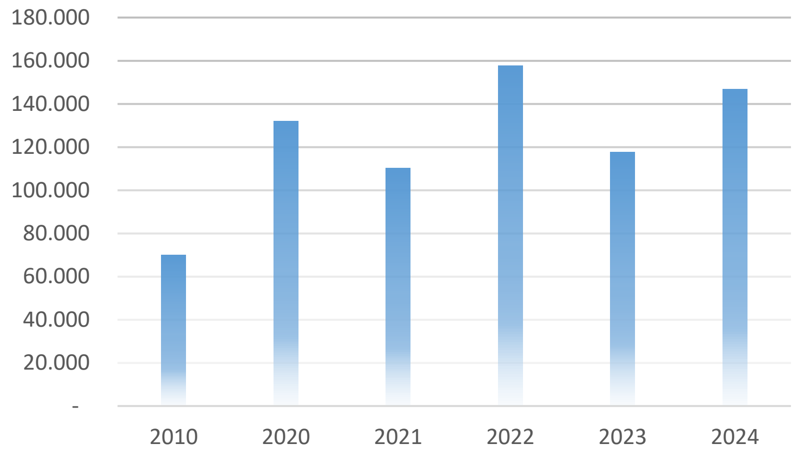
Agriculture remained one of the significant sectors of Albania economy representing about one-fifth of the country's GDP in 2022 and employs roughly one third of the workforce, the highest percentage among Western Balkan countries (INSTAT, 2023b). Agriculture in Albania is primarily small-scale and self-sufficient, characterized by fragmented land, limited modern technology usage, restricted financial resources, and occasionally high input costs (Kullaj, 2007). The result is low productivity and low value added per worker (World Bank, 2021).

Albania is still a country that primarily imports rather than exports of products, although in recent years Albania have seen improvements in the agricultural trade deficit. Appropriate government policies and a more proactive perspective among Albanian youth generation could lead to even greater development for the sector and for the Albanian economy as a whole. In the past few years, olive production in Albania has been increased considerably. As it shown in Figure 1, from 70,010 tons in 2010, the production was reached 146,726 tons in 2024 (INSTAT, 2025). Despite this considerable growth in olive production, the sector remains far from having its production potential fully exploited.

In recent years, organic farming has developed in Albania, with a mainly focus on medicinal and aromatic plants. Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in the area of certified agricultural land for olive cultivation. As it presented in Figure 2, the data illustrated the trend of organic land certified or in certification over the last 5 years (2020-2024). In 2020, only 46 hectares of land were under certification, reaching 109.6 hectares in 2024. This steady growth indicates a rising interest and commitment among farmers toward organic production. This trend is also reflected in organic olive production, which shows an increase of approximately 346% from 2020 to 2024, rising from 142.7 tons in 2020 to 637.4 tons in 2024.

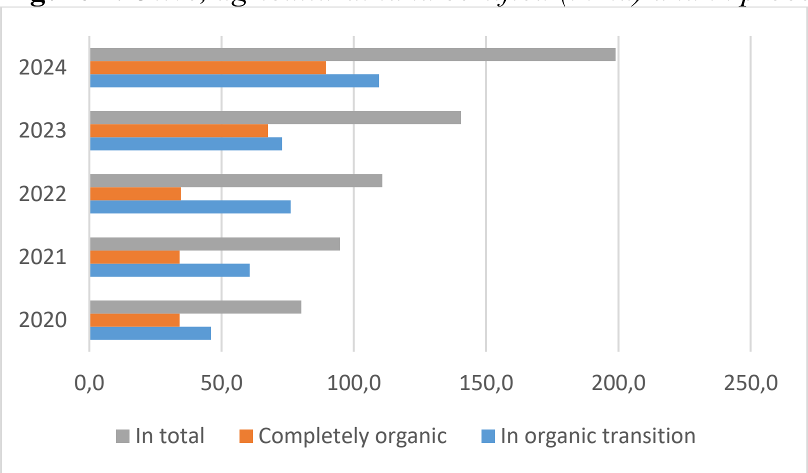
In both cases, the rising trend is highly marked, reflecting increase interest on organic olive farming but also an indicator of enhanced regulatory compliance and market demand.

Figure 1. *Olive production (in ton) in Albania,2010-2024*



Source: INSTAT,2025

Figure 2. *Olive, agricultural land certified (in ha) and in process in Albania, 2020-2024*



Source: INSTAT,2025

The southern parts of the Albania are the primary producers of olives. In 2024, Fier prefecture is the leading olive-growing area in Albania, with a supply of 30% of the total production at country level. Together with Berat prefecture, these two regions provide 50%, half of the country's olive production and are thus the major contributors to this sector in Albania.

Regarding the Balkan region, Greece dominates in terms of production volume of olive by exceeding 3 million tons of production, demonstrating dominant role on the Europe olive market. Albania experienced a notable high in 2022 with 157,710 tons of olive production, suggesting an upward trend in growth. North Macedonia maintains a rather stable level of annual production of around 11,800 tons. Such differences between Western Balkan countries are linked with the market condition and, probably, other investment efforts, along with climatic conditions influencing olive cultivation in these countries.

As further illustrated in Table 1, Greece also leads in olive oil production, contributing over 313,000 tons and reinforcing its regional dominance. Albania has maintained a consistent production cycle with an average of 12,500 tons over the past five years. Production in North Macedonia and Montenegro is inexistent in comparison with Greece and Albania.

Table 1. *Production of olive oil (in a thousand tons) in Wester Balkan countries 2018-2022*

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Albania	12.5	11.5	13.0	16.5	15.50
Greece	327.7	290.5	276.0	255.0	313
North Macedonia	1.325	1.3	1.904	1.887	1.89
Montenegro	0.018	0.02	0.020	0.028	0.02

Source: FAOSTAT,2025

Albania primarily imports olive oil from neighboring countries such as Italy and Greece. Import values fluctuate across years, with Italy consistently representing the largest import country with over USD 6 million in 2024 while Greece and Spain which is the largest country for production of olive oil contribute in smaller amounts (UN Comtrade, 2025). These dynamics indicate that while Greece and Italy remain stable major suppliers of olive oil, the amounts differ yearly, suggesting changes in the market and probably, consumer preference shifts within Albania consumers.

Overall, the olive oil sector in Albania is characterized by steady production growth, increasing interest in organic certification, and continued reliance on imports from neighboring countries. These dynamics highlight the need to better understand consumer behavior in the domestic market, particularly in urban centers such as Tirana, where purchasing trends and preferences play a crucial role in shaping future market development.

3. Methodology

This study is based on a structured online survey conducted with a convenience sample of 150 respondents during June 2022. The survey targeted residents in the region of Tirana, the capital city of Albania and with the most density of population. Tirana was selected as the study area because it represents the country's largest urban market including a heterogeneous population with varied income levels and purchasing habits, thus providing a suitable setting for examining consumer preferences toward olive oil. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to capture both product-related attributes and sociodemographic characteristics, including age, gender, education, family size, income level, and occupation. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and distributed through online platforms. It included multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale items as well as open-ended questions. A total of 150 valid responses were obtained, and descriptive statistical method along with chi-square test were applied using Microsoft Excel. These methods were chosen to summarize consumer trends and to identify significant associations between sociodemographic variables and purchasing behavior. This analytical approach enables a deeper understanding of how consumer profiles influence preferences for olive oil, providing valuable insights for producers, marketers, and policymakers aiming to align supply strategies with market demand.

4. Results

The sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 2. The respondents were mostly females with 75% of the respondents. The sample is dominated by young and middle-aged adults (76% aged 18–45) with relatively high education (71% with at least a bachelor's degree). 76% of the responded were employed, living in a family with 3-5 members with medium income level.

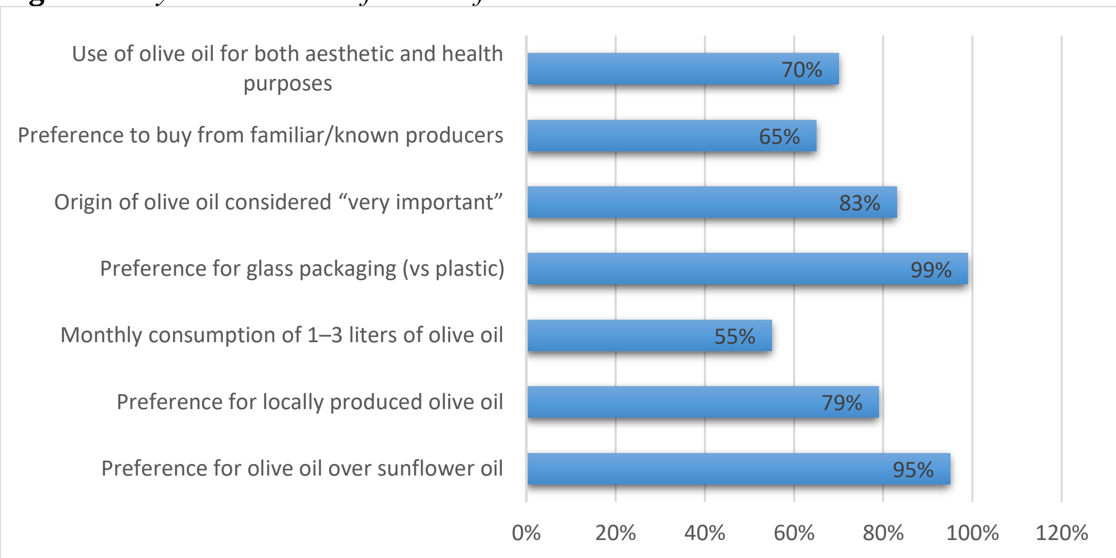
Table 2 *Sociodemographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

	Category	N	%
Age	18-29	57	38
	30-45	57	38
	46-60	29	19
	>60	7	5

Gender	Female	113	75
	Male	37	25
Education	Elementary	2	1
	High School	42	28
	Bachelor	57	38
	Master/PhD	49	33
Nr of family members	2	5	3
	3	117	78
	>5	28	19
Income Level	Low	2	1
	Medium	137	91
	High	8	5
	Very High	3	3
Occupation	Employed	113	76
	Unemployed	5	3
	Student	27	18
	Pension	5	3

As illustrated in Figure 3, the survey results reveal a strong preference for olive oil, with 95% of respondents selecting it over sunflower oil. A total of 79% of the respondents favored local production of olive oil over imported one. Quality is the most significant attribute for the consumer to buy olive oil. The data on whether consumers use olive oil for aesthetic care and health treatment showed that 70% use it for both purposes. In the field of aesthetics, major uses of olive oil by the respondents applied to the skin, and for health treatment, it was mainly used to address digestive problems.

Figure 3 *Key Consumer Preferences for Olive Oil in Tirana.*



The consumption pattern showed a majority of 55% consuming 1-3 liters of olive oil per month. Results further revealed that 45% were already using plastic packaging for olive oil, although that 99% of the preference was on glass bottles of packaging. 83% of the respondents believed that the origin of the olive oil is very important, and 65% of consumer would rather buy among family members involved in olive cultivation.

Table 3 *Chi-square Results for Sociodemographic Factors Influencing Olive Oil Origin Preference*

Sociodemographic factors	value	P-value	Significance
Gender	0.238	>0.05	Not significant
Education	0.102	> 0.05	Not significant
Age	0.01	< 0.05	Significant
Occupation	0.04	< 0.05	Significant

Then was tested and examined the importance of origin of olive oil regarding the sociodemographic factor such as age, gender, occupation and, education. It was used chi square analysis and the result presented in table 3, showed that gender (X^2 =0.238; $p > 0.05$) and education (X^2 =0,102; $p >0.05$) are irrelevant in the importance of origin of buying olive oil unlike age (X^2 =0,01; $p < 0.05$) and occupation (X^2 =0,04; $p < 0.05$) which are relevant in explaining the importance of origin of buying olive oil.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzes market developments and consumer preferences for olive oil in Tirana with a particular focus on how sociodemographic factors influence consumer behavior in the choice of olive oil. The results indicate that, although gender and educational do not significantly influence the importance consumers attribute to olive oil origin, age, and occupation have a significant effect. Tirana's consumers show a high level of awareness regarding quality characteristics, demonstrating a clear preference for domestically produced olive oil presented in glass containers, alongside an increasing recognition of its health and aesthetic advantages. The growing demand for high quality products, origin verified, and health-conscious olive oil, reflects a shift in patterns of Albanian consumer following COVID-19 pandemic. These results align with the worldwide shift of consumers towards authenticity, sustainability, and product traceability of olive oil. The findings indicate that olive oil goes beyond its status as a basic food item, emerging as a lifestyle product, appreciated for its contributions to nutrition, well-being, and self-care routines.

Producers and government agencies should reinforce the "Made in Albania" brand from a marketing and policy-oriented perspective. Producers should focus more on emphasizing the place of origin in packaging and product certification, while government agencies should prioritize strategies that highlight the cultural value and quality attributes of Albanian olive oil. Targeted marketing efforts on social media, influencer partnerships, and gastronomic events, could increase emotional connections between consumers and local production. At the same time, policy interventions should prioritize the expansion of certification capabilities and strengthening of market transparency. Furthermore, improved cooperation among producers, local governmental, and research institutions will be crucial for improving competitiveness, and reaching new export prospects for Albanian olive oil within regional and European markets.

The study has certain limitations. The use of a convenience sample of 150 respondents only from Tirana constrains the generalizability of the results, and the analysis relies only on descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. This analysis provides only basic insight on consumer behavior choosing olive oil. Future research should incorporate a larger and more diverse sample representing various Albanian regions and utilize more sophisticated statistical techniques as logistic regression, factor analysis, or structural equation modelling to identify the factors influencing consumer decision-making.

Furthermore, exploring producer perspectives, supply chain dynamics, and the influences of certification schemes (PDO, PGI, organic) would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the potential development of the olive oil sector in Albania. In conclusion, this study gives some basic strategic recommendations on marketing strategies and policy initiatives, which can facilitate the sustainable expansion of Albania's olive oil sector and its integration into wider agri-food value chains.

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