# Comparing Italian and Brazilian consumers' attitudes towards Short Food Supply Chains

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## Abstract

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, this work investigates consumers' attitudes towards the intention to buy local food in Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs), carrying out a survey among university students in Italy and Brazil. Results show that sustainability and food safety mostly influence consumers' behavior in both countries. However, the main differences emerged are related to the fact that Italian consumers recognized the SFSCs as a catalyst for new employment opportunities and local development, whereas the role of short chains on life quality and wellbeing is stressed by Brazilian ones.

## Key words

Short Food Supply Chains, Theory of Planned Behavior, Attitudes, Italy, Brazil.

## Introduction

Compared to the past, nowadays the direct link farming-food and farmers-consumers is going to vanish more and more, because of the changed scenario of intensive agricultural and industrial food production and consumers' new habits. However, recent years have seen a proliferation of a large variety of types of Alternative Agri-Food Networks (AAFNs) such as Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs). These kind of initiatives are continuously arising not only in European Union but throughout the world as an alternative to globalized agri-food model (Galli and Brunori, 2013). In line with this, at EU level SFSCs will benefit from the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2014-2020, as one of the new six priorities and a thematic sub-programme of rural development. Nevertheless, in other countries SFSCs have not already attracted a great interest from policy makers and the financial support to them does not exist yet, although they are developed. In addition, in order to forecast the development of these alternative initiatives, exploring consumers' behavior towards SFSCs becomes primarily interesting among both European consumers and the ones from the other

countries. This paper turns to social psychology and the Theory of Planned Behavior, in order to elucidate which are the most significant attitudes underlying consumers' intention and behavior towards shopping in SFSCs. In this preliminary study we conducted a pilot survey on university students in Brazil and in Italy. Here we demonstrate that Brazilian consumers are in favor of SFSCs (showing positive attitudes, similar to Italians), wishing for a public support to enhance these short circuits. Being an emerging country, we expect that in some years Brazil will also support SFSCs, as in EU (Italy), and that policy makers could take into account our results in order to develop SFSCs marketing policies.

## An overview on Short Food Supply Chains

SFSCs nowadays embody a more endogenous, territorialized, ethical and ecologically embedded approach towards food, representing a direct contact (face-to-face) between farmers and consumers (Marsden et al., 2000; Goodman, 2004). Since they re-socialise and re-spatialise food (Hallett, 2012), SFSCs represent a sustainable alternative to long globalized chains in terms of economical, social and environmental benefits (Ilbery and Maye, 2005), having also impacts on ethics, human health and wellbeing. SFSCs exist all over the world in a wide variety of forms: box schemes, farmers markets, on-farm sales, community supported agriculture, pick-your-own, etc. (Renting et al., 2003). In SFSCs producers and consumers can easily interact and share information, including details about the origin of food and the production method, thus reducing information asymmetry and creating loyalty. Being the most appropriate channels for local and small-scale production family (Kneafsey et al., 2013), SFSCs are expression of cultural capital and rural embeddedness (Hinrichs, 2000; Kirwan, 2004) and an engine for territorial development (Tregear et al., 2007).

## Methodology

Designed to predict and explain human behavior in specific contexts, the Theory of Planned Behavior – TPB (Ajzen, 1991) identifies three global variables (attitude towards the behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control) that together contribute towards picturing the intention, which is a reliable predictor of behavior. In order to highlight the most significant attitudes influencing the Italian and Brazilian consumers' intention to buy in SFSCs, on February 2015 we carried out an empirical research built on a TPB questionnaire (Ajzen, 2006). We investigate a representative pilot sample of university students (Depositario et al., 2009) from both the Università Politecnica delle Marche in Italy and the Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná in Brazil. We distributed 150 on-line questionnaire (via e-mail) in Brazil and 150 in Italy; however, for the analysis we considered only 104 fully completed questionnaires for each country. Based on a previous study (Giampietri et al., 2015), the questionnaire consisted of 14 questions grouped in 4 distinct sections: 3 open-ended questions to elicit readily accessible attitudes that produce the intention to purchase in SFSCs; a seven-points semantic differential (anchor points 1 = strongly agree to 7 =

strongly disagree) with 22 items to measure the attitudes; 2 questions to measure the monthly and annual frequency of purchasing in SFSCs; 8 socio-demographic questions to describe both samples. A content analysis (Weber, 1990; Losito, 2007) has been carried out to collect the different ideas of Italian and Brazilian consumers about the SFSCs; in this way we identified some items' categories through a deductive extraction, based both on the exact words used in the answers and on the international literature on SFSCs. Moreover, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with orthogonal rotation (Varimax) to condense the semantic differential items into a small set of attitudinal principal components, according to correlations among them. Finally, we scrutinized all the variables according to their Cronbach's alpha coefficient[1] in order to test their reliability.

## Results

The most part of the sample are men living in urban area, admitting to go personally grocery shopping, both in Italy and in Brazil (Tab.1).

*Table 1. Description of Italian and Brazilian Samples*

| Variables | ITALY (N = 104) | | | BRAZIL (N = 104) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency (%) | Mean | Std. Dev. | Frequency (%) | Mean | Std. Dev. |
| Gender: female | 47.1 | 0.47 | 0.502 | 46.2 | 0.46 | 0.501 |
| Nationality: Italian/Brasilian | 97.1 | 0.03 | 0.168 | 99.0 | 0.01 | 0.098 |
| Education: graduated | 42.3 | 0.42 | 0.496 | 79.8 | 0.80 | 0.403 |
| Residence: rural | 33.7 | 0.34 | 0.475 | 15.4 | 0.15 | 0.363 |
| Household net income: <25.000€/<R$75.000 | 49.0 | 1.65 | 0.785 | 52.9 | 1.56 | 0.680 |
| Number of household members: 4 units | 50.0 | 3.73 | 1.184 | 26.9 | 3.36 | 1.365 |
| To go personally grocery shopping: yes | 56.7 | 0.43 | 0.498 | 60.6 | 0.39 | 0.491 |
| Buying organic: never | 19.2 | 2.04 | 0.590 | 26.9 | 2.12 | 0.643 |
| Monthly frequency of SFSCs purchasing | 30.8* | 4.82 | 1.682 | 29.8*** | 5.31 | 1.533 |
| Annual frequency of SFSCs purchasing | 32.7** | 2.71 | 1.629 | 29.8**** | 3.80 | 1.354 |

\* once every 15 days; \*\* every day; \*\*\* never; \*\*\*\* once a month; *Source: own elaboration.*

They both have an average of 4 family members and an annual household net income of less than 25,000 €, corresponding to less than R$75,000. The majority of all the interviewed in Italy are Italians, not graduated. On the other hand, in Brazil the majority of all the interviewed are Brazilians, graduated. In both cases only a minority (15.4%) of the sample always buys organic products while a majority (65.4% in Italy; 57.7% in Brazil) sometimes buys them.

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[1] Cronbach's Alpha ranges in value from 0 to 1: according to Ajzen, we indicated 0.7 to be an acceptable reliability coefficient.

*Table 2. TPB open-ended Questions and Content Analysis*

| Questions | Categories | Attitudes (% Frequency) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **ITALY** | **BRAZIL** |
| Q1. What do you see as the advantages of buying in local Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) during the monthly shopping? | Good quality and food safety | Quality (36%); freshness (25%); traceability (14%); genuineness (12%); food safety (10%); healthiness (6%); nutritious (5%); natural product (4%); food control guarantees (3%) | Quality (33%); freshness (24%); traceability (19%); organic (14%); healthiness (10%); preventing future diseases, food safety and genuineness (3%); natural food (3%) |
| | Sustainability and development | Economic convenience (38%); environmental sustainability (22%); local development (22%); local food valorization (15%); honest income for farmers (6%); tradition (2%); transparency (1%); ethics (1%) | Economic convenience (33%); local development (11%); honest income for farmers (7%); social sustainability (6%); family agriculture support (6%); environmental sustainability (5%); local food valorization (3%); tradition (1%) |
| | Direct relationship between farmer and consumer | Reduced distances (16%); farmer knowledge (13%); product knowledge (11%); direct relationships between farmers and consumers (8%); loyalty (3%); food production process knowledge (1%) | Direct relationships between farmers and consumers (19%); product knowledge (17%); food production process knowledge (10%); trust in food and food processing (8%); producer knowledge (5%); reduced distances (4%); new relationships (1%) |
| | Supply characteristic | Seasonality (8%); Alternative Agri-Food Networks (4%); high food supply (3%) | Accessibility easiness (6%); Alternative Agri-Food Networks (4%); high food supply (3%) |
| Q2. What do you see as the disadvantages of buying in local Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) during the monthly shopping? | Bad quality and food safety | Low food control guarantees (13%); unknown quality (3%); inappropriate food factory (3%); low food safety (1%) | Lack of food certification (12%); unknown quality (9%); low food control and food safety (8%); low traceability (4%); inappropriate food factory (2%) |
| | Short chains' limits | Supply limits (24%); long distances (14%); fragmented purchases (10%); only seasonal food (8%); lack of marketing strategy (2%); only local food (2%); employment reduction (1%); absence in mainstream markets (1%) | Long distances (29%); only seasonal food (18%); supply limits (12%); accessibility difficulty (13%); fragmented purchases (11%); scarce points of sale and their work times (8%); cash only (7%); no farmers' supports (6%); unsustainability (5%); lack of marketing strategy (5%); absence of food standards (3%); presence in mainstream markets (3%); Alternative Agri-Food Networks related problems (3%); only local food (2%); no price negotiation (2%) |
| | Inconvenience | Economic inconvenience (26%); lack of time (9%); low time efficiency (2%) | Inconvenience (19%); lack of time (4%); low time efficiency (3%); price volatility (3%) |
| Q3. What else comes to mind when you think about buying in local Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) during the monthly shopping? | Food quality | Quality (15%); food guarantees (4%); freshness (3%); natural food (1%) | Quality (16%); organic (14%); food safety (11%); healthiness (10%); natural food (7%); life quality and wellbeing (5%); freshness (4%); traceability (3%); inappropriate food factory (1%) |
| | Sustainability and development | Rural development (9%); convenience (6%); farmers valorization (6%); sustainability (6%); new opportunities for young people (1%) | Local and regional development (21%); small farmers and family agriculture support (17%); (no) convenience (12%); farmers valorization (2%); honest income for farmers (2%); sustainability (1%); territorial embeddedness (1%); food and processing innovation (1%) |
| | Typicality | Local food (6%); tradition (6%); seasonality (3%) | |

| Farmer-consumer direct relationship and confidence | New relationships (7%); reciprocal trust (2%); distance between rural and urban areas (1%) | Direct relationships between farmers and consumers (7%); (no) trust (5%); loyalty (3%) |
|---|---|---|
| Short chains' characteristics | Alternative agri-food networks (4%); lack of marketing strategy (2%); uneasiness (1%); improving sale management (1%); no food products (1%) | (no)easiness (8%); alternative agri-food networks (5%); no food products (3%); fragmented purchases (2%); lack of marketing strategy (1%); accessibility difficulty (1%); presence in mainstream markets (1%) |

*Source: own elaboration, 2015*

Testing the attitudes towards shopping in SFSCs, three questions aimed to extrapolate the interviewees' self-revealed perceptions related to SFSCs' advantages (Q1), disadvantages (Q2) and other characteristics (Q3). After extracting the most frequently named attitudes elicited by the interviewees, we condensed them into some principal categories (Tab.2). According to the advantages, Good Quality and Food Safety, Sustainability and Development, the Direct Relationship between Farmer and Consumer, and some Supply Characteristics seem to be the most relevant categories. On the other hand, Bad Quality and Food Safety, Short Chains' Limits, and Purchasing Inconvenience are mentioned as the principal disadvantages. Finally, some other SFSCs aspects have been summarized in the following categories: Product Quality, Sustainability and Development, Typicality (not mentioned by Brazilian consumers), Direct Relationship between Farmer and Consumer and Confidence, and Short Sales' Characteristics. However, the results of this explorative analysis show some differences between the Brazilian and the Italian consumers. Among them, the creation of new employment opportunities has been named only by Italians, underlying the role of SFSCs as a catalyst of local development and rural socio-economic regeneration and dynamism, becoming a way to maintain rural livelihood (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005). On the other hand, only Brazilian consumers mentioned some short chains related aspects as: the prevention of future diseases; the life quality and wellbeing; the certification; the organic production; the lack of supports to small farmers and family agriculture; the scarce points of sales and their work times.

According to PCA (Tab.3), results show that sustainability and food safety is found to be the most significant predictor (Principal Component - PC) of consumers' intention towards shopping in SFSCs instead of mainstream markets, since it explains the majority of total variance (40.8% for Italy, 8 items, α = 0.926; 34.2% for Brazil, 10 items, α = 0.916). This first PC expresses the consumers' sensitivity towards the socio-environmental impacts of SFSCs, their ethical concern and awareness about the role of SFSCs in consumers' food safety and health care. We also observe that the Brazilian consumers seem to be aware of the important role of short circuits in local and regional development so that, actively participating in these short circuits (e.g. on farm direct selling or farmers markets), they get back some personal gratification.

Since the second PC is linked respectively to the theme of desirability in Italy (10.9%, 3 items, α = 0.834) and gratification in Brazil (11.5%, 4 items, α = 0.803), we can notice that among Italian consumers the theme of desirability is not only linked to the SFSCs related

sustainability concern, but it derives also from a sort of personal rewarding granted by the society, so that this aspect can show a proper importance among attitudes.

*Table 3. Principal Component Analysis (PCA) for Italian and Brazilian consumers[2]*

| ITALY | | | | | | BRAZIL | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **KMO 0.868** | PC1 | PC2 | PC3 | PC4 | PC5 | *KMO 0.810* | PC1 | PC2 | PC3 | PC4 | PC5 |
| **SUSTAINABILITY AND FOOD SAFETY** | | | | | | **SUSTAINABILITY AND FOOD SAFETY** | | | | | |
| **green** | 0.870 | 0.218 | 0.109 | 0.015 | 0.097 | green | 0.832 | 0.045 | -0.040 | 0.047 | -0.028 |
| **ethical** | 0.797 | 0.277 | 0.052 | 0.201 | 0.108 | educational | 0.800 | 0.065 | 0.146 | -0.253 | 0.006 |
| **educational** | 0.784 | 0.216 | 0.090 | 0.265 | 0.146 | sustainable | 0.789 | 0.175 | 0.048 | 0.001 | -0.025 |
| **sustainable** | 0.773 | 0.182 | 0.160 | 0.152 | 0.062 | ethical | 0.762 | 0.113 | 0.046 | 0.046 | 0.088 |
| **healthy** | 0.598 | 0.555 | 0.132 | 0.025 | 0.295 | qualitative | 0.760 | 0.177 | -0.062 | 0.225 | 0.075 |
| **qualitative** | 0.553 | 0.636 | 0.136 | -0.072 | 0.223 | healthy | 0.702 | 0.293 | -0.180 | 0.337 | 0.133 |
| **transparent** | 0.492 | 0.381 | 0.386 | -0.029 | 0.312 | transparent | 0.693 | 0.276 | -0.057 | 0.066 | 0.105 |
| **safe** | 0.487 | 0.464 | 0.428 | -0.213 | 0.086 | good | 0.690 | 0.343 | -0.003 | 0.224 | -0.205 |
| | | | | | | useful | 0.607 | 0.282 | 0.296 | -0.195 | 0.054 |
| **DESIRABILITY** | | | | | | gratifying | 0.550 | 0.287 | 0.008 | 0.058 | -0.201 |
| **useful** | 0.293 | 0.788 | 0.073 | 0.218 | -0.054 | **GRATIFICATION** | | | | | |
| **good** | 0.409 | 0.739 | 0.089 | 0.216 | 0.083 | relaxing | 0.194 | 0.840 | -0.069 | 0.036 | 0.056 |
| **pleasant** | 0.149 | 0.600 | 0.247 | 0.412 | 0.246 | funny | 0.363 | 0.701 | 0.232 | -0.088 | -0.073 |
| **CONVENIENCE** | | | | | | safe | 0.383 | 0.611 | -0.041 | 0.148 | 0.443 |
| **fast** | 0.015 | -0.065 | 0.800 | 0.100 | 0.035 | pleasant | 0.530 | 0.609 | 0.013 | -0.011 | -0.354 |
| **cheap** | 0.229 | 0.110 | 0.761 | -0.020 | -0.005 | **CONVENIENCE** | | | | | |
| **easy** | 0.148 | 0.089 | 0.728 | 0.209 | -0.040 | easy | -0.012 | -0.047 | 0.889 | 0.146 | -0.077 |
| **usual** | -0.101 | 0.255 | 0.622 | 0.259 | 0.178 | fast | -0.201 | 0.049 | 0.819 | 0.201 | -0.114 |
| **convenient** | 0.452 | 0.189 | 0.585 | 0.126 | -0.078 | **TYPICALITY** | | | | | |
| **GRATIFICATION** | | | | | | traditional | 0.029 | 0.013 | 0.199 | 0.791 | -0.103 |
| **funny** | 0.246 | 0.143 | 0.093 | 0.776 | 0.182 | typical | 0.118 | 0.021 | 0.118 | 0.760 | -0.067 |
| **relaxing** | 0.021 | 0.101 | 0.455 | 0.725 | 0.084 | **USUAL-NICHE** | | | | | |
| **TYPICALITY** | | | | | | usual | 0.165 | 0.142 | 0.342 | 0.062 | -0.665 |
| **niche** | 0.106 | -0.052 | -0.008 | 0.131 | 0.816 | niche | 0.089 | 0.159 | 0.204 | -0.166 | 0.647 |
| **typical** | 0.467 | 0.023 | 0.090 | 0.229 | 0.647 | | | | | | |
| *Cronbach's α* | 0.926 | 0.834 | 0.801 | | | | 0.916 | 0.803 | | | |
| *P* | | | | 0.643 | 0.514 | | | | 0.769 | 0.452 | -0.096 |

*Source: own elaboration, 2015*

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[2] According to Cronbach's α, two items for each country have been excluded: *Gratifying* and *Traditional* in Italy, *Convenient* and *Cheap* in Brazil.

The third PC is related to convenience in both samples (7.7% for Italy, 5 items, α = 0.801; 7.8% in Brazil, 2 items, P = 0.769). As opposite to the Italians, Brazilians do not care so much about economic convenience, considering only the perceived ease of purchasing in SFSCs that is linked to time saving. The last two PCs count on 2 items in both samples: in Italy, PC4 consists of gratification (5.9%; P = 0.643) and PC5 is represented by typicality (4.9%; P = 0.514). In Brazil, PC4 consists of typicality (6.1%; P = 0.452) and PC5 is represented by a component with a inverse relationship between its two items that are usual and niche (5.6%; P = -0.096). According to both Brazilian and Italian consumers, the aspect of gratification derives also from the direct relation between farmers and consumers. Here, the reciprocal interaction is engine of values sharing and creation of trust and ethical relations, promoting the consumers' education about the product and its production process, preventing the information asymmetry on food safety and building long lasting loyalty. Finally, also the typical and traditional aspects of SFSCs seem to be strictly considered by consumers.

## Conclusions

Some relevant differences exist between the two investigated countries, not only regarding to consumers but also in the agricultural sector. In Italy this sector is represented mostly by small farmers[3] (86%), as opposite to Brazil where large producers count for 52% of farms' total number. According to this, comparing these two different cases can be interesting in order to investigate both consumers' behavior and the policy implications. The present study investigated the most significant TPB attitudinal variables underlying both Italian and Brazilian consumers' intention and behavior towards shopping in SFSCs. Based on our results, we can notice that in both cases sustainability and food safety are found to be the most significant predictors of consumers' intention towards shopping in SFSCs, instead of mainstream markets. Sustainability is strictly related to the renewed importance of direct interaction between farmers and producers (Giampietri et al., forthcoming 2016). In this context, SFSCs can be perceived as an engine for both local and regional development and local food valorization (Morris and Buller, 2003; O'Neill, 2014) in which modern consumers feel embedded (Sage et al., 2003), getting back some personal gratification. These aspects underline the modern reflexive consumerism (Cicia et al., 2012) that is linked to socio-environmental and ethical concerns and to food safety and health care. In addition, direct contact engenders the reciprocal dialogue exchange and values sharing (trust and ethics), so that consumers can be informed about the product and the production process, preventing the information asymmetry related to food quality. However, there are some differences between Italian and Brazilian consumers. In Italy SFSCs are recognized as a catalyst for new employment opportunities, local development and socio-economic regeneration in rural areas, whereas Brazilian consumers light up the role of short chains especially on diseases

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[3] We considered small farmers those having less than 10 hectares of Utilized Agricultural Area in Italy (Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2010) and in Brazil (Brazilian Census of Agriculture, 2006).

prevention and on life quality and wellbeing. However, some other drivers of consumers' intention and behavior emerged from our statistical analysis, linked to personal gratification, economic and time convenience, desirability and some typical and traditional aspects of local food and SFSCs. In contrast with the Italians, Brazilian respondents highlighted the lack of a public support to both small farmers and family agriculture that is necessary to foster further development of SFSCs. As a matter of fact, a specific support for short chains does not exist in Brazil yet. Here, a National Program for Strengthening Family Agriculture (PRONAF) exists, supporting investments, costs and commercialization for familiar agro-industry (but not specifically for short chains). On the contrary, the new CAP supports the SFSCs in Italy, encouraging economic development by means of buy local campaigns and promoting local and regional entrepreneurship. However, in both countries policy makers should tailor their strategies and marketing communication on specific consumers preferences and values linked to SFSCs, as showed in this analysis. This is necessary to avoid the risk of policy misinterpretation and, consequently, its scarce efficiency and bad performances related to the original aims of supporting SFSCs. Nevertheless, we require some deep further studies of consumers behavior as well as a more heterogeneous sample to investigate.

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