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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN SHAPING CHINESE CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD

ROLA SOCIAL MEDIÓW W KSZTAŁTOWANIU POSTAW CHIŃSKICH KONSUMENTÓW WOBEC ŻYWNOŚCI EKOLOGICZNEJ

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of social media in shaping the attitudes of Chinese Generation Y and Z consumers toward organic food. Using a mixed-method approach, it combines a review of existing literature with a quantitative empirical survey conducted in 2022 among 1,012 Chinese users of popular social media platforms such as WeChat and Sina Weibo. The research investigates consumer perceptions of information shared via social media, the credibility of this information, and its impact on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of consumer attitudes. Additionally, the study examines the factors motivating or deterring organic food purchases and highlights generational differences in using social media as an information source. The findings emphasize the significant role of social media in promoting sustainable consumption practices in China and underline its potential as a vital tool in aligning consumer behavior with the country's sustainable development goals. Directions for future research on social media's influence on consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions are also proposed.

Key words: organic food, social media, Chinese consumers attitudes

ABSTRAKT

Niniejszy artykuł koncentruje się na rozpoznaniu roli mediów społecznościowych w kształtowaniu postaw chińskich konsumentów pokolenia Y i Z wobec żywnościowych produktów ekologicznych. Podjęte rozważania oparto na procedurze badawczej, obejmującej studia literaturowe oraz analizę wyników badania empirycznego o charakterze ilościowym, które zrealizowano w roku 2022, na populacji 1012 chińskich użytkowników najpopularniejszych w Chinach portali społecznościowych, w szczególności WeChat oraz Sina Weibo. Badano postrzeganie przez konsumentów informacji udostępnianych za pośrednictwem mediów społecznościowych, wiarygodności tych informacji oraz ich wpływu na poznawcze, emocjonalne i behawioralne elementy postaw konsumenckich. Analizowano ponadto czynniki motywujące oraz zniechęcające do zakupu żywności ekologicznej, a także podkreślono różnice pokoleniowe w korzystaniu z mediów społecznościowych jako źródła informacji. Wyniki badania wykazały znaczącą rolę mediów społecznościowych w promowaniu praktyk zrównoważonej konsumpcji w Chinach i podkreśliły ich potencjał jako istotnego narzędzia w dostosowywaniu zachowań konsumentów do celów zrównoważonego rozwoju kraju. Zaproponowano również kierunki przyszłych badań nad wpływem mediów społecznościowych na postawy konsumentów i ich decyzje zakupowe.

Słowa kluczowe: żywność ekologiczna, social media, postawy chińskich konsumentów

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of information technology has affected every area of the daily lives of modern consumers and is shaping consumer behavior, especially their purchasing decisions. The immense popularity of social media has made it a means of satisfying a wide range of needs, from information needs and the need to communicate with others, through shopping and cultural needs to spiritual needs. Instead of using search engines, more and more users are looking for information on social media platforms, which allow them not only to gather the necessary information and knowledge but also to discuss and comment on ongoing events and understand different points of view on a given topic. Head and Eisenberg (2010) have shown that social media platforms are an important source of information for consumers around the world. Asian countries such as South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia are among those with the highest Internet penetration rates, reaching as high as 96.8–97.6% of the population, as reported in 2023. However, the highest Internet penetration rates in the world are mainly recorded in countries such as Ireland, Norway and the United Arab Emirates, where they exceed 99% (Kemp, 2023).

China's modern market is characterized by extremely rapid development and widespread use of social media platforms, which have become an indispensable part of Chinese citizens' daily lives. At the beginning of 2024, China's Internet penetration rate averaged 76.4%, meaning that more than 1.05 billion people were using the Internet (Kemp, 2024; Zheng, 2024; CNNIC, 2024). Platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, and Douyin play a key role in communication processes, entertainment, and in shaping consumer behavior.

WeChat, which is one of China's most popular social media platforms, is seeing a regularly growing number of users. According to 2023 data, the number of active WeChat users has exceeded 1.3 billion. Young people, representatives of Generation Z and Y, account for the largest share of use of this platform. According to the latest data, Generation Y users account for about 30% of all WeChat users in China, while Generation Z represents about 40% of users (Wechatcourse, 2024; Masterson, 2024). It is important to note that WeChat is not just a messaging app, it also offers a wide range of functions, including mobile payments, online shopping and access to public services, making it a versatile platform used by users on a daily basis (GizmoChina, 2024; AsiaPac, 2021; CNNIC, 2023).

Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, is also hugely popular, especially among younger generations. In 2023, the platform boasted some 583 million monthly active users. Weibo is a key tool for brands and influencers, as it enables marketing campaigns and direct interaction with consumers (AsiaPac, 2021; Statista, 2024).

Finally, Douyin (the Chinese equivalent of TikTok), is one of the fastest growing social media platforms in China. By 2023, Douyin's user base exceeded 700 million, making it one of the country's most important marketing and communication tools. The platform has gained tremendous popularity for its short videos, which are eagerly created and shared by younger generations (GizmoChina, 2024; Verot, 2024).

All of the aforementioned platforms play an important role in the daily lives of Chinese citizens, both personally and professionally. Young Chinese, especially students, regard them as a key tool to support their purchasing decisions, which shows the importance of social media platforms in consumer behavior in this market. Social media not only facilitates access to information, but also allows interaction with brands and active participation in the creation of product images. It should be noted that social networks in China have further gained prominence due to the role of influencers, known as Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs). These individuals, with their authenticity and large numbers of followers, have a tremendous impact on the buying preferences of Chinese consumers.

In addition, through product recommendations and reviews, they are able to effectively build trust in the brand, which directly translates into the purchasing decisions of their observers (China Marketing Corp, 2024).

Research on social media user behavior in China indicates that the majority of Chinese users log onto social media platforms several times a day, and the dominant majority of them access these platforms via smartphones, further increasing accessibility and intensity of use (Kemp, 2024; Kiely, 2024; China Social Media Statistics, 2024).

The literature often emphasizes that social media has become a platform where interaction takes place not only between consumers and brands, but also between consumers themselves, leading to a specific form of peer pressure. As Kahai and Cooper (2001) point out, the quality of purchasing decisions depends on the knowledge of participants and their ability to recognize real information among the wide stream of data available on social media. Moreover, group behavior theory suggests that social media helps people form like-minded groups, which can influence their attitudes and consumer choices, promoting what is known as "social proof of rightness" (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2011): consumers base their purchasing decisions on the opinions and actions of others, recognizing that if many people take a certain action or recommend a product, then the choice must be right. The scientific literature on the subject emphasizes that social proof of rightness is particularly important under conditions of uncertainty, when consumers seek confirmation from the actions of others to facilitate their purchasing decisions. This is particularly effective in online marketing strategies, where the opinions and recommendations of other users are easily available and influence consumer choices (Sanak-Kosmowska, 2023).

Many Chinese consumers use social media platforms to share their experiences on brands and products. Products with many positive online reviews are then most likely to be trusted by other consumers. The role of social media has been widely described both in the processes of forming relationships between people from different backgrounds, including cultural backgrounds (Sawyer & Chen, 2012), and in personal marketing communications (Nadziakiewicz, 2018; Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Consumers also pay attention to recommendations from influencers that convince them to behave in certain ways, including buying products. At the same time, equipping social media platforms with e-commerce functions allows them to increase their reach in influencing consumers, hence the growing role of these media in marketing strategies in China (Sawyer & Chen, 2012; Nadziakiewicz, 2018).

As the aim of this article is to explore the role of social media in shaping the attitudes of Chinese Generation Y and Z consumers toward organic food products, it is necessary to emphasize the great importance of social media in shaping the attitudes, views and values of users. Therefore, companies must not use only commercial messages, but should offer such values that are expected by customers, which they follow in satisfying their needs. These values include: knowledge, skill acquisition, respect for the environment, or various forms of integration in real and virtual environment. The emergence of relationships between people who share similar values and interests triggers a certain kind of cultural transformation, which involves the emergence of new forms of needs fulfillment. Consequently, this leads to the development of new models of consumption. Organic products are playing an increasingly important role in these models (Mazurek-Łopacińska & Sobocińska, 2017).

Over the past two decades, the world has seen a gradual and significant increase in demand for organic food (Du et al., 2017). In 2019, sales of these products exceeded $105 billion (Willer et al., 2020). Research on organic food consumption has so far focused mainly on developed countries (Kushwah et al., 2019), which are indeed responsible for as much as 90% of the world's consumption of these foods (Asif et al., 2018). However, the growth potential of developing country markets, where most of the world's organic food has been produced, should not be overlooked. China has the largest organic food market in Asia and the fourth largest market in the world. They have more than 3 million hectares of organic farmland, and their sales volume reached $8.59 billion in 2018 (Willer et al., 2020). A growing awareness of the need to protect both one's own health and the environment is driving consumers to seek healthier food options and consume organic products (Lazzarini et al., 2018; Hermaniuk, 2018; Angowski & Domańska, 2016). Chinese consumers' attitudes toward organic food are also strongly linked to beliefs in its health, taste and environmental friendliness. Social media, in turn, has developed as an important source of information on topics related to health and improving quality of life, especially for young people, therefore recognizing its impact on the attitudes of these consumers is very important in studying their reactions to organic food offer in China.

Representatives of Generation Y (or Millennials) and Generation Z are more open to new trends, as well as to the impact of the demonstration effect of foreign markets and experts' opinions. This is because young consumers make extensive use of various sources of information, including social media platforms, which have a strong influence on their behavior. It should be noted that Generation Z accounts for about 15% of China's total population, which translates into about 200 million people. Generation Y, on the other hand, accounts for about 22% of the population. This group, being one of the main drivers of consumption in China, consists of more than 300 million people. Both generations have a significant impact on shaping market trends, and so their rising incomes and changing consumer preferences are crucial to the Chinese economy (Zhou et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2023). Therefore, this article attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is social media perceived by Generation Y and Z consumers as a reliable source of information about organic food products?
2. Does the information presented in the media about the characteristics and qualities of organic food stimulate consumer interest in these products?
3. What kind of feelings toward organic food are generated by sharing opinions on social media?
4. Is the content presented on social media effective in encouraging Chinese consumers to buy organic food?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Literature review

Social media plays a key role in the purchasing decisions of both Millennials and Generation Z. Both generations grew up in the digital age, but they differ in their use of social media and how these platforms influence their purchasing behavior. For both generations, social media is an important tool for discovering new products. According to GlobalWebIndex's 2021 report, 47% of Millennials use social media as their main source of shopping inspiration. In the case of Generation Z, the percentage is even higher, with as many as 58% of this group admitting that they discover new products specifically through social media (GlobalWebIndex Report, 2021). This difference may be due to the greater integration of social media into the daily lives of Generation Z, who spend more time on these platforms and are more engaged in interactions with brands.

Both groups appreciate social media recommendations, but Generation Z shows greater susceptibility to influencers. Indeed, as many as 68% of Generation Z consumers admit that they trust influencers more than traditional celebrities, which has a direct impact on their purchasing decisions (Morning Consult Report, 2022). For Millennials, the impact of influencers is also significant, but they are more likely to rely on friends' reviews and opinions as well as user-generated content (Hajli, 2014). This is because Millennials grew up at a time when traditional marketing and the opinions of reference groups, including aspirational groups, had more influence on consumer attitudes and behavior than they do today.

The development of Internet technology makes Millennials increasingly demanding; they expect to see the personalization of content and interaction with brands, which affects their loyalty. This is reflected in the statistics. The results of a study conducted by Epsilon on a group of 1,000 respondents aged 18–64 show that 63% of Millennials indicate that they are more inclined to buy brands that offer personalized offers and content (Epsilon Marketing, 2018). Generation Z, on the other hand, while also valuing customization, is more focused on brand authenticity and transparency. As many as 90% of Generation Z believe that authenticity is a key factor in their purchasing decisions, highlighting the importance of authentic messages and values presented by brands (Morning Consult Report, 2022).

Based on the research findings reported in the available literature, it can be concluded that that social media plays a similar, important role in the formation of brand loyalty in both generations, whereas differences lie in the way this loyalty is built. Indeed, Millennials who engage in brand interactions on social media show greater loyalty to those brands that directly respond to their needs and offer valuable content (Laroche et al., 2013). Generation Z, on the other hand, expects brands to establish a more direct and personal relationship with them, and to actively participate in social issues. Therefore, brands that engage in social issues and demonstrate transparency are more likely to gain the loyalty of this group (Yu et al., 2020).

At this point, it should be noted that user-generated content (UGC) is important for both generations, but Generation Z is more active in creating and sharing such content. Indeed, as many as 76% of Generation Z consumers say they share content related to brands on social media, while this percentage is lower for Millennials, at 60% (Stackla Report, 2019). For Generation Z, user-generated content is not only a source of information, but also a way to express their identity and participate in brand-related online communities.

We can therefore conclude that Generations Y and Z play a key role in shaping the modern consumer market. Their attitudes, behaviors and preferences have a significant impact on companies' marketing strategies, especially in the context of the growing popularity of social media as a communication and promotion channel. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the organic products segment, where environmental awareness and concern for the environment are becoming increasingly important factors and decision-making criteria. Companies offering green products must take into account the dominant role of social media as a source of information about products and services (Bolton et al., 2013). These media are used both to seek recommendations and to judge the quality of products based on the opinions of other users (Sanak, 2012). In the context of organic products, Generations Y and Z show particular interest in information on composition, origin and environmental impact. Research by Hwang et al. (2016) indicates that young consumers are more likely to purchase organic products if they get positive reviews on them from trusted sources on social media. Sanak-Kosmowska, meanwhile, points out that positive reviews and recommendations on social media can significantly increase consumer trust and loyalty not only to specific product groups, but also to the brand as a whole (Sanak-Kosmowska, 2021).

However, when considering the reliability of information obtained from social media, researchers suggest some skepticism, especially when it comes to the credibility and scientific basis of the content presented on social networks (Sanak-Kosmowska & Sliwinska, 2020).

It is worth pointing out the broader context related to the interest that a different consumer groups have in green products, for Generations Y and Z show greater environmental awareness and interest in sustainability compared to older generations. Studies show that younger generations prefer organic products because of their health and environmental benefits (Kamenidou et al., 2020). Studies conducted in European countries, including Poland and the UK, show that the intensity of pro-environmental attitudes is higher among young consumers, which directly affects their purchase decisions regarding organic food (Kowalska et al., 2021).

In China, social media plays an equally important role in shaping environmental awareness and consumer behavior. With the popularity of platforms such as WeChat, Weibo and Douyin, Chinese consumers, especially young people, are using these channels extensively to seek information about products (Zhu et al., 2016; ns in Psychology, 2021). Studies show that Chinese Millennials and Generation Z are more likely to trust recommendations from influencers and opinions posted on social media than traditional advertising (Yang, 2020).

In addition, one of the main reasons Chinese consumers use social media is the need to verify brand credibility. Indeed, Chinese social media is becoming a platform where consumers can inquire about third-party certifications, such as FCC (Federal Communications Commission), CE (Conformité Européenne), FDA (Food and Drug Administration), CCC (China Compulsory Certification), which act as guarantors of product quality and reliability. They can also check the opinions of other users, which significantly influences their purchasing decisions. Brands with such accreditations enjoy greater trust among consumers, which in turn translates into their greater commitment and willingness to make a purchase (China Marketing Corp, 2024).

The challenge for those responsible for managing social media is therefore to skillfully tailor messages to the needs and expectations of customers, rather than simply promoting an offer (Pogorzelski, 2015). In doing so, Sanak-Kosmowska (2018) emphasizes the importance of authenticity and engaging consumers as key elements of effective marketing communications, which is important in the context of building trust in organic products and encouraging their purchase. Carefully planned social media marketing campaigns aligned with consumers' expectations and cultural values help effectively build trust in the brand, which is crucial in the context of successfully encouraging Chinese consumers to purchase organic food (Sanak-Kosmowska, 2020).

In conclusion, it can be said that the attitudes of generations Y and Z toward ecology and green products in China are being shaped by a growing general environmental awareness and changing social norms, as young Chinese consumers are increasingly aware of pollution and health issues (Zhang et al., 2019a). As a result, they are more likely to support brands that promote sustainability and offer green products.

Comparing China with other countries, it can be seen that in Western markets such as the United States, social media also plays an important role in shaping the consumer attitudes of generations Y and Z. However, as the research indicates, cultural differences and preferences for social media platforms affect how these media are used. For example, in China, due to the nature of local social media platforms and strong government control over information, marketing strategies must be tailored to local conditions (MDPI (2020), while Western consumers may be more independent in their search for information, relying less on influencers and more on user reviews and independent product research (Smith et al., 2013). However, in both cultural contexts, social media remains a key source of information about organic products, as confirmed by numerous studies (Forbes, 2016).

In a global context, these attitudes are similar, although there may be differences in motivations and levels of environmental commitment. For example, in Scandinavian countries, where environmental awareness is high, young consumers may be more critical of organic certification and supply chain transparency (Johansson et al., 2020). In China, as in other countries, consumers, especially from Generations Y and Z, also use social media to get information on green products, which influences their purchasing decisions. Understanding the impact mechanism of these media, especially through the prism of the credibility of the information posted, the authenticity of the campaigns and the ability to generate positive emotions is therefore crucial for companies that want to effectively reach younger consumers and promote sustainable products.

2.2. Methodology used

Seeking to answer the research questions, survey was carried out in 2022, in cooperation with a research agency (IMAS International), on a group of 1012 Chinese users of China's most popular social networks, i.e. WeChat and Sina Weibo (the population of young consumers of Generations Y (25–40 years old) and Z (16–24 years old)). The research sample included 68% of Generation Y respondents and 32% of Generation Z respondents. The sample was drawn from the IMAS Agency's online research panel. For the IMAS Agency has an online consumer panel and has experience in marketing research in the Chinese market. The results of the desk research on Chinese consumers' consumption of organic food and their use of social media were also an important context in interpreting the survey results. The structure of the survey sample was carefully balanced in terms of gender, age, education, occupation, economic situation, the number of people comprising the household and the number of children under the age of 18 included in the household (Table 1). This allowed for representative results for different demographic groups. In the sample, women accounted for 47.5% and men accounted for 52.5%. The majority of respondents, 82.5%, had a university degree. In addition, 71.2% of the respondents were employed.

Nearly 60% of respondents rated their economic situation as above average, with 36% rating it as good and 23% as very good. Among the respondents, 46.9% declared that their household consisted of three people, and 28.7% of four people. In addition, 54.9% of respondents said they had one child on their support, while 26.5% of respondents said they had no children.

Table 1. Structure of the study sample.

Gender			
Female		**Male**	
481		531	
Y	**Z**	**Y**	**Z**
330	151	359	172

Age				
Z		**Y**		
16–19 years	**20–24 years**	**25–29 years**	**30–34 years**	**35–40 years**
153	170	204	261	224
323		689		

Education							
Basic		**Basic vocational**		**Medium**		**Higher**	
22		52		103		835	
Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z
10	12	16	36	70	33	593	242

Work situation									
Employed with a job		**Self-employed / freelance**		**Unemployed**		**Learners**		**Others**	
721		59		20		206		6	
Y	**Z**	**Y**	**Z**	**Y**	**Z**	**Y**	**Z**	**Y**	**Z**
625	96	33	26	9	11	18	188	4	2

Economic situation									
Very good		Good		Average		Bad		Very bad	
232		363		355		52		10	
Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z
199	33	288	75	174	181	22	30	6	4
Number of people in the household									
1 person		2 persons		3 persons		4 persons		5 or more people	
24		52		475		290		171	
Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z
18	6	28	24	368	107	176	114	99	72

Number of children under 18 in the household											
No children		1 child		2 children		3 children		4 children		5 and more	
262		542		158		23		3		0	
Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z	Y	Z
93	169	429	113	132	26	15	8	2	1	0	0

3. Analysis of results

The survey made it possible to identify the attitudes that Chinese representatives of Generation Y and Generation Z, have toward organic food.

The layout of the analysis was determined by the research questions presented. The first question concerned the importance of social media as a source of information about organic food products. The survey results presented in Table 2 show that social media is the main source or intermediary of information about organic products. Respondents indicate using information about organic product offer provided through social media by family and friends (33.3%, with 35.6% of Generation Y representatives and 27.9% of Generation Z representatives). They are followed by social media run by manufacturers (28%, including 29.7% of Generation Y representatives and 23.3% of Generation Z representatives), retailers (27.5%, with 29.3% of Generation Y representatives and 23.3% of Generation Z representatives) and influencers (25%, with 24.2% of Generation Y representatives and 26.5% of Generation Z representatives). This shows that people are looking for the most reliable information about organic products, as it can be assumed with high probability that these groups of actors, especially producers and sellers, present the most up-to-date content on the subject, and this generates trust in the information they present. Similarly, those in the immediate environment (family, friends) play an important role in providing their relatives with necessary information.

Table 2. Where do you get your information on organic product offers from?

	Total	Generation Y	Generation Z
From family, friends who share information using social media	33.3%	35.6%	27.9%
From social media run by producers of organic products	27.8%	29.7%	23.3%
From social media run by sellers of organic products	27.5%	29.3%	23.3%
From social media run by influencers or celebrities	24.9%	24.2%	26.5%
From online portals	23.4%	24.2%	21.6%
From family, friends who provide information in face-to-face conversations	20.7%	21.8%	18%
From the websites of specific sellers of organic products	20.3%	21.6%	17.3%
From the websites of specific organic product manufacturers	18.8%	20.1%	15.5%
From television	16.4%	14.7%	20.5%
From forums and newsgroups	14.9%	15.9%	12.4%
From dedicated fairs	14.8%	14%	16.6%
From posters/flyers	7.6%	8.3%	6%
From magazines dedicated to ecology	6.5%	6.2%	7.4%
From the radio	3.6%	3%	4.9%
From the daily press	2.7%	2.1%	4.2%
From other sources	0.1%	0%	0.4%
I am not looking for such information	2.3%	1.2%	4.9%

In an effort to answer the question of whether social media platforms are perceived by Generation Y and Z consumers as a reliable source of information about organic food products, the survey asked about the forms of activity manifested by the respondents aimed at deepening their knowledge of organic food offers. The results are shown in Table 3. Attention is drawn to the relatively high activity in seeking more detailed information reported by young consumers. Participation in social media discussions on organic products was declared by almost half of all surveyed representatives of Generations Z and Y. However, while most of them (48%) reported that they only ask questions about organic products via social media, a slightly smaller percentage (44%) stated that they express themselves and share their experiences in this area, while 43% stated that they made use of recommendations from others, especially experts (Table 3). However, differences are revealed in this regard between representatives of Generations Z and Y. For respondents from Generation Y show a greater inclination to ask questions on social networks (51.4%) as compared to Generation Z (39.9%). Millennials are also much more likely to speak out on online forums and share their experiences (51.1%) than Generation Z representatives (28.2%), and in their purchasing decisions they rely more heavily on recommendations from others (47.3%) than the latter (33.1%). This may be due to the greater maturity of Generation Y, as well as their wider range of accumulated experience and higher level of education, in the field of ecology included (nearly 58% of the Millennials surveyed reported that they try to stay up-to-date on the topic of organic food products available on the market. Meanwhile, more than half of the Generation Z respondents (53.1%) admitted that they do not participate in discussions about organic products on social networks because they lack the knowledge to speak out on the subject).

Table 3. Do you participate in discussions about organic products on social media?

	Total	Generation Y	Generation Z
Yes, I ask questions to obtain information of interest to me	47.7%	51.4%	39.9%
Yes, I am happy to speak out on online forums to share my experiences	43.8%	51.1%	28.2%
Yes, I use recommendations from other people, especially experts	42.8%	47.3%	33.1%
I only read texts posted on social media (articles, blogs, podcasts, etc.).	24.6%	25.1%	23.5%
I watch ads for organic productss	34.0%	36.7%	28.2%
I do not get involved in discussions on this topic	9.4%	6.7%	15.2%
I do not read materials on the subject	2.5%	1.3%	5.0%

As regards the **first research question** on the cognitive layer of consumer attitudes, the survey results indicate that information on organic products available in social media is considered reliable by the respondents. In their opinion, it significantly expands knowledge about ecology and organic products (58.5%, with 57.6% of Generation Y respondents and 60.1% of Generation Z respondents) and is presented in an attractive, accessible form (41.5%, with 41.9% of Generation Y respondents and 40.2% of Generation Z respondents), more credible than content available in other media (34.6%, with 37.4% of Generation Y respondents and 28.5% of Generation Z respondents). One in three Chinese respondents of Generation Y (31.8%) and Generation Z (28.5%) even stated that they trust information presented in social media more than that presented in other media, and nearly half (49.9% of Generation Y representatives and 42.4% of Generation Z representatives) said that although the reliability of information presented in social media is similar to that available in other sources, they prefer to use social media (Table 4).

Table 4. How would you rate the information about organic products presented on social media?

	Total	Generation Y	Generation Z
The information is presented in an attractive, accessible form	41.4%	41.9%	40.2%
This information significantly expands the knowledge of ecology and organic products	58.4%	57.6%	60.1%
I consider it more reliable than that presented in other sources	34.6%	37.4%	28.5%
I have more confidence in social media information	30.7%	31.8%	28.5%
The reliability of information on social media is similar to others, but I prefer to use social media	47.5%	49.9%	42.4%
I have no opinion	5.7%	4.6%	8.0%

As for the **second research question**, the survey responses indicate that information presented in social media about the features and characteristics of organic food stimulates consumer interest in these products (Table 5). Indeed, more than half of respondents (i.e., 51%, with 49.8% of Generation Y respondents and 52.3% of Generation Z respondents) admitted that information on organic food presented in social media greatly expands their knowledge about these products, 41% of respondents (43.3% of Generation Y and 37.2% of Generation Z) said that they influence intentions to purchase organic products, and another 40% of respondents (41.1% of Generation Y and 35.6% of Generation Z) admitted that information obtained from social media stimulates the purchase of these products.

The **third research question** related to the emotional layer of consumer attitudes. The survey responses indicate that sharing opinions on social media generates positive emotions towards organic food, but only 20% of respondents (22.6% of generation Y and 14.6% of generation Z) admitted that they are related to health care, while in the opinion of 29% of respondents (28.9% of generation Y and 30.3% of generation Z) this content only increases their sensitivity to ecological problems. This is a very notable result, portending a certain predominance of altruistic values related to concern for the environment over selfish motivations focusing on the needs of individual consumers.

Table 5. How do you react to information about organic food presented on social media?

	Total	Generation Y	Generation Z
It greatly expands my knowledge of organic food	50.6%	49.8%	52.3%
It influences purchase intentions for organic products	41.3%	43.3%	37.2%
It stimulates me to buy organic products	39.3%	41.1%	35.6%
I like the form of these messages because it is attractive	33.0%	34.8%	29.1%
It increases my sensitivity to ecological issues	29.3%	28.9%	30.3%
It stimulates my interest to a greater extent than those from other sources	26.5%	28.4%	22.3%
It stimulates good feelings about health care	20.1%	22.6%	14.6%
It does not elicit much of a reaction from me	4.2%	3.2%	6.2%

The results show the predominance of cognitive responses over emotional and behavioral ones. In addition, the majority of respondents, 65% overall (67.5% of Generation Y and 60.1% of Generation Z), would like to see the scope of information activities regarding organic product offers increased (Table 6).

Table 6. In your opinion, should the scope of information activities related to organic food offer be increased, decreased, or remain at the current level?

	Total	Generation Y	Generation Z
should be increased	65.1%	67.5%	60.1%
there should be no change in scope	26.5%	24.7%	30.3%
should be limited in scope	8.4%	7.8%	9.6%

As regards to the fourth research question on the behavioral aspect of attitude, it should be noted that for 41% of respondents, information on organic food presented in social media influences their intentions to purchase organic products, while 39% of respondents declared that it stimulates them to purchase these products. However, considering the criteria for choosing organic food (Table 7), respondents indicated that when making purchasing decisions they are primarily guided by the quality of the product (75%, with 72.1% of Generation Y representatives and 80.6% of Generation Z representatives) and its composition (55%, with 54.2% of Generation Y representatives and 56.5% of Generation Z representatives). Certificates confirming the ecological quality of the product (38.7%) and the product's origin (37.8%) also play a large role in these decisions. Among these criteria, product recommendations by favorite social networks, opinions of experts and even opinions of relatives and friends play a relatively smaller role.

Table 7. What guides you when choosing organic food?

	Total	Generation Y	Generation Z
product quality	74.6%	72.1%	80.6%
product composition	54.9%	54.2%	56.5%
certificate confirming the product's ecological quality	38.7%	40.8%	33.6%
the origin of the product	37.8%	38.6%	36%
product brand	26.1%	28.2%	21.2%
promotion of the products	11.1%	12.2%	8.5%
opinions of relatives and friends	10.6%	11.1%	9.5%
price	8.2%	6%	13.4%
ecological packaging	7.6%	6.8%	9.5%
place of purchase	6.1%	6%	6.4%
expert opinions	5.1%	5.6%	3.9%
recommendation of products through favorite social networks	4.2%	5%	2.5%
current trends	0.3%	0.5%	0%

The relatively greater maturity of Generation Y leads them to make more informed choices and is reflected in their behavioral responses. Representatives of Generation Y are relatively more likely to buy organic food, one in four every day, and more than half at least once a week, whereas among the surveyed representatives of Generation Z, only 15% buy organic products daily, and less than 25% do so at least once a week.

When analyzing the factors limiting the purchase of organic food, price plays a decisive role. However, it is of greater importance to Millennials (65.2%) than to representatives of Generation Z (45%). The Zetas, on the other hand, are more critical when it comes to the assortment structure of the offer, and they express a lower level of trust in organic food, not believing in its health benefits (Table 8).

Among the organic food choices, one can also see a more comprehensive approach among Millennials, who buy products from more diverse assortment groups than representatives of Generation Z.

Table 8. Why do you not buy organic food?

	Total	Generation Y	Generation Z
It is too expensive	52.4%	65.2%	45%
There is a lack of organic substitutes on the market for all the products I eat	27%	17.4%	32.5%
I do not believe in the health benefits of organic food	19%	13%	22.5%
There is an insufficient range of organic products in the stores I use	19%	4.3%	27.5%
I do not pay much attention to environmental issues	15.9%	8.7%	20%
I do not like the taste	7.9%	4.3%	10%

In conclusion, however, it should be noted that more than 60% of respondents from both generations strive to buy primarily organic food, preferring it over conventional food. When analyzing consumers' motivations shaping their consumer choices, it is necessary to emphasize the indication of concern for their own health (77% of Generation Z respondents and 70% of Generation Y respondents) and that of their loved ones (63% of Generation Z and Y respondents). These are therefore the main motives that drive them to purchase organic food products. When conducting communication campaigns, it is therefore necessary to develop motivations related to the pursuit of environmental protection, which requires increasing awareness and sensitivity to threats to the environment.

Achieving positive results, however, will hinge on reducing the scale of restrictions, i.e. forming more affordable prices, expanding the range of organic food offered on the market, and being more effective in convincing people of the value of the market offer of organic products, thereby increasing the level of trust in these products.

4. Discussion

The results of the present study confirm that young consumers make extensive use of social media platforms, which have a strong influence on their behavior. This influence manifests itself in the use of other consumers' opinions, their recommendations, and participation in discussion panels (Duffett, 2017; Hajli, 2015). Research on the behavior of social media users in China shows that most of them log onto these platforms multiple times a day, and the vast majority access them via smartphones. This makes the availability and intensity of social media use in China extremely high (Kemp, 2024; Kiely, 2024; China Social Media Statistics, 2024).

Social media has become relatively the most reliable source of obtaining information on products, including organic products, shaping their attitudes and consumption decisions (Tariq et al., 2018). This is also confirmed by the results of the present study.

The phenomenon, pointed out by previous researchers, of Chinese Millennials and Generation Z representatives' relatively greater reliance on influencer recommendations and opinions posted on social media than on traditional advertising (Yang, 2020a), has only partially been confirmed by the present findings. For according to 47.5% of the respondents surveyed herein, the reliability of information on social media is similar to that available through other sources, but they prefer to use social media. This is related to the peculiar phenomenon of social media shaping the attitudes, mentality and behavior of users. This is particularly important with regard to organic products, the consumption of which affects the transformation of consumption patterns of modern generations.

The basis for trust in information obtained from social media is the role of these media in shaping life values, including those related to environmentalism. Researchers point to the importance of social networks in highlighting the value of organic food, as well as increasing its consumption and consumer loyalty (Chen et al., 2017).

The results of a survey conducted on Guangdong Province university students show that nine out of ten participants identified social media as their primary source of information, and reviews as well as opinions posted on these platforms had a significant impact on their purchasing decisions. Another interesting aspect is the impact of negative information on purchasing decisions. For studies have shown that the presence of negative reviews on social media can both discourage purchases and, paradoxically, increase confidence in the available information. This phenomenon indicates the complexity of the decision-making process and the importance of a balanced perception of information in social media (Qi, 2020).

However, given the growing environmental awareness, especially related to pollution and health issues, which translates into social norms, young Chinese consumers are more likely to support brands that promote sustainability and offer green products (Zhang et al., 2019b). The present research indicates that, according to 65% of Generation Y and Z respondents, the scope of social media outreach activities conducted by manufacturers and sellers of green products should be increased.

5. Limitations and Future Study Opportunities

Limitations of the present study include its focusing only on selected social networks, as well as the survey being conducted in relation to the entire group of organic food, yet the aspects of attitudes and behaviors studied are certainly differentiated across individual organic products. Moreover, only differences between representatives of Generation Z and Generation Y in terms of organic food baskets purchased are reported. Further areas of research may include identifying the specific criteria that guide buyers of particular organic food products, as well as pointing out the motives behind their purchasing decisions.

Directions for future research may include identifying the role of individual household members in the consumer decision-making process regarding the purchase of organic products, especially organic food (roles: initiator, advisor, offer information seeker, purchaser and consumer). After all, it is extremely important for companies offering organic products to know who in the household is most likely to provide information about product offers, as well as which members of the household initiate or advise them, as this allows the communication messages to be targeted accordingly. It is also important to know the interests and motives of buyers and consumers who make market choices, as well as those who participate in those choices.

Moreover, research should be continued on the strength of factors both stimulating and limiting the purchase of organic food, and monitoring changes in this area resulting from market trends.

The impact of shared social media that has been reported by researchers – content, ratings, recommendations and reviews of various products on the development of social commerce so-called "social shopping" (Hsu, 2017; Huang & Benyoucef, 2013) – should stimulate the identification of the extent to which information and opinions, as well as recommendations of products and services posted on social media affect the use of social commerce by users of these media platforms.

6. Conclusions

The use of social media as a source of information on market offerings, especially in the context of organic products, is a common phenomenon among Generations Y and Z in both Chinese and Western markets. Cultural differences and preferences for social media platforms influence the way young consumers seek and process information. In China, the role of influencers and the specifics of local social media platforms play a key role in shaping consumer attitudes, while in Western markets there is more emphasis on user reviews and independent research. Regardless of these differences, however, growing environmental awareness and interest in organic products are a common denominator for young consumers around the world.

The role of social media in shaping Chinese consumers' attitudes toward organic food is invaluable in the context of the extensive sustainability strategies being implemented in China. These media not only facilitate access to information on organic products, but also stimulate the development of altruistic motivations, which are increasingly evident in consumer behavior. Chinese consumers, especially those of generations Y and Z, are showing increasing sensitivity to environmental issues, which is reflected in their purchasing preferences.

In the context of China's sustainable development strategies, which include such ambitious goals as reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality, the growing interest in organic food is an important step toward sustainable consumption. At the same time, growing awareness of the health risks of consuming conventionally grown products, enriched by discussions on social media platforms, is leading to increased demand for organic food.

Amid the widespread use of social media and growing health and environmental awareness among Chinese people, social media is becoming a powerful tool in promoting sustainable consumption practices in China. These shifts in consumer behavior are in line with global trends, where social and environmental responsibility is gaining prominence, driving a transformation toward a more sustainable economy.

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