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Management Theory and Studies for Rural Business and Infrastructure Development
eISSN 2345-0355. 2025. Vol. 47. No. 4: 549-557
Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.15544/mts.2025.43

MARKETING INSIGHTS INTO NATIONAL FOOD CONSUMPTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Received 24 07 2025; Accepted 05 09 2025

Abstract
The article deals with the issue of identifying marketing models for the development of rural business in the organic food sector based on the similarities of EU national markets. The reason for this is the adoption of examples of good practice without taking into account national market specifics. The main objective of the article is to identify market similarities in the EU context using cluster analysis and to formulate framework recommendations for marketing practice. Applying this approach, the heterogeneity of the EU market in this area has been confirmed and eight groups of countries have been identified.

Keywords: *Food Waste, Marketing, Organic Farming, Organic Food Consumption, Rural Business Development.*
JEL Codes: *F18, M31, O13, O18.*

Introduction

Although the development of rural business in the organic food sector is indirectly considered as a priority area for the EU with a uniform framework and set objectives in scope of rural development and common agricultural policy, the implementation tools lie with the Member States. This often leads to embarrassed market reactions. Successful models from other Member States are applied at macro and micro level in individual Member State markets, but without achieving a comparable market response. Similarly, original models for individual markets from a product and regional perspective are often unsuccessful because they do not respect their economic and psychographic specifics (Jaseckova et al., 2022). This leads to growing skepticism about the viability of rural businesses based on organic food consumption. The solution to this situation has already been outlined in the scientific literature. The authors examine the specific characteristics of individual markets and do not consider the EU market to be a homogeneous entity (Jakubowska et al., 2025; Lopez-Sintas et al., 2024). However, they examine markets in isolation or in smaller regional groupings based on historical similarities, geopolitical cooperation, etc. (Wojciechowska-Solis et al., 2025; Madureira et al., 2025). Additionally, recent studies underline the need of research in wider socioeconomic perspective (Goralska-Walczak et al., 2025; Dash et al., 2025). A study that would comprehensively assess the EU market in the researched area and divide it into smaller homogeneous groups is currently lacking in the professional literature. This gap is filled by the present study, which uses cluster analysis to process relevant data on individual EU member state markets. The data comes from freely available information from the World Bank and from research conducted by G. Hofstede in the field of psychographic profiling of countries. Based on this approach, the research assumption that there are specific groups of EU countries in the researched area, within which countries are compatible with each other for the

purpose of adopting examples of good practice and cooperation in the area of rural business development in the organic food sector, is confirmed. Thus, the main objective of the article is to identify market similarities in the EU context using cluster analysis and to formulate framework recommendations for marketing practice. The results of the study are applicable in both theory and practice, at both the micro and macro levels of individual markets. While at the macro level in practice they are useful for identifying patterns for the formulation of national policies and functional measures in the development of rural business in the organic food sector, at the micro level they offer the same opportunities to businesses in this field. Similarly, these results can also be used at a theoretical level as a basis for further in-depth examination of the motivators of consumer behavior in the area of organic food consumption, so that in the future, functional groups of countries characterized by an identified degree of similarity can be examined in broader contexts, which will form the basis for the future successful application of models not only for marketing management of support for the development of rural business in the organic food sector, but also for the creation of functional national implementation policies as it is indicated by Percsi et al. (2024).

Literature Review

A regional approach to examining the development of rural business in the organic food sector is currently a commonly applied scientific standard (Thongplew et al., 2023). Muller et al. (2025) examined the determinants of organic food consumption in Switzerland, identifying population groups that are more or less inclined to consume organic food based on demographic parameters. Gonzales et al. (2025) conducted similar research in the specific conditions of the island of Tenerife, and Lafram et al. (2024) in the Kenitra region of Morocco. The regional specificity of research within the national market indicates the need for an analytical approach to examining the issue, given the ineffectiveness of complex market solutions. However, it can be assumed that this ineffectiveness will not be resolved by strict regionalisation, but rather by re-evaluating the patterns applied at the national market level. This is evident from studies of psychographic profiles of countries and their functionality in the context of identifying patterns of consumer behavior (Pelau and Pop, 2018). This is also indicated by Duong (2024), who examines the role of cultural values in consumer decisions in favor of organic food consumption. This approach is particularly appropriate in the context of the European Union, where, given the specific nature of the markets of individual Member States, a universal examination of the development of rural business in the organic food sector leads to the formulation of dysfunctional conclusions (Sica and Franco, 2024).

Traditionally, the approach used in the scientific literature is based on examining the economic and demographic profiles of individual markets (Vartiak, 2015). In line with this, Li et al. (2025) identify a positive link between organic food consumption and the middle and older age groups of consumers in a robust sample. However, Gustavsen and Hegnes (2020) suggest the need to examine the psychographic profiles of individual markets using the so-called Big Five personality model of consumers who prefer organic food consumption. They do not discuss national specifics. The need to examine the intrinsic motivational factors of organic food consumption is also discussed by Dash et al. (2025) who discuss the need to examine intrinsic motivational factors of organic food consumption. However, they focus directly on the health benefits of organic food consumption as the main source of motivation. A specific psychographically oriented approach is also applied by Duong et al. (2025), who examine the importance of religion in the context of the inclination to consume organic food.

Rutelione and Bhutto (2024) apply a combined approach and link the regional and individual value dimensions of organic food consumption in the Baltic countries, but all of the above approaches examine consumers at the individual level. A comprehensive examination of national specificities of organic food consumption in broader socio-economic and psychographic contexts is lacking. Zidan et al. (2025) provide a compact comparison of cross-cultural specificities summarized in the available scientific literature. However, they limit themselves to a review of the issue and do not compare the individual specifics themselves, identifying similarities and differences between

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eISSN 2345-0355. 2025. Vol. 47. No. 4: 549-557
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individual regions or countries. Nevertheless, their study can be considered extremely valuable, as it highlights the variability and specificity of markets, thus creating space for further research in this area. They have thus filled a research gap identified by Pant et al. (2024).

The importance of marketing for the development of rural business in the organic food sector is evident from the current state of knowledge in this area. Kumar et al. (2025) use mathematical modeling to examine the balance between consumer preferences for organic food and profitability. Kato et al. (2024) comment on the marketing shortcomings of organic food market product policy. Similarly, Chakraborty et al. (2024) also note the ineffectiveness of marketing support using conventional marketing tactics and practices. Daraboina et al. (2024) attempt to create a universal profile of organic food consumers, which would significantly improve marketing management in this area. However, the individual topics deal with selected phenomena of the (in)effectiveness of marketing support for the development of rural business in the organic food sector in isolation. Moreover, there is no regional link to market specifics and findings in this area. In view of the above, the following research hypothesis is formulated that there are specific groups of EU countries in the researched area, within which countries are compatible with each other for the purpose of adopting examples of good practice and cooperation in the area of rural business development in the organic food sector. Based on this research assumption, the following basic research questions have been formulated:

- RQ 1: Are there clusters of countries within the EU that are characterized by intra-group homogeneity and inter-group heterogeneity relevant to the development of rural business in the organic food sector?
- RQ 2: Which countries are similar and which are different in terms of the development of rural business in the organic food sector?
- RQ 3: What are the characteristics of individual country clusters and what marketing implications does this have for the development of rural business in the organic food sector?

Methodology

In order to achieve the main aim of this paper and answer the research questions, cluster analysis was applied in the Microsoft Engineering for Excel system interface. It was implemented in the form of hierarchical clustering, which had the advantage that the number of clusters did not have to be known in advance, as would be the case with k-means (Garbarova et al., 2017).

This is a non-parametric method commonly used in social sciences research, which allows a set of objects under investigation to be divided into smaller groups, known as clusters, based on their similarity (Cannistra et al., 2022).

The set of objects under investigation consisted of EU member states, which were defined by ten selected variables of a socio-economic and psychographic nature. There were four variables of a socio-economic nature:

1) GDP per capita;
2) final food consumption expenditure of households;
3) food waste; and
4) area under organic farming.

There were six psychographic variables, labeled HD 1–HD 6 (abbreviation of Hofstede dimensions):

1) power distance (HD1);
2) individualism (HD 2);
3) motivation towards achievement and success (HD 3);
4) uncertainty avoidance (HD 4);
5) long-term orientation (HD 5) and
6) indulgence (HD 6).

The individual values were taken from World Bank data for 2024 (variables 1-4) and from Hofstede's model of psychographic profiles of countries (variables 5-10 titled HD 1-HD 6) (https://ec.europa.eu/; https://www.theculturefactor.com/). The values HD 1-HD 6 for Cyprus, which is not separately identified by the Hofstede's model, were calculated as the average value of the Greek and Turkish psychographic profiles, which values are known.

The data matrix containing variables (selected socio-economic and psychographic

characteristics) in *m* columns and objects in *n* rows (EU countries) on which these characteristics are measured is shown in Table 1.

Each object, i.e., row of the source matrix, or the i-th vector x_i^t = ($x_{i,1}$, ...$x_{i,j}$,... $x_{i,m}$) is then characterized by its features (Jankalova & Vartiak, 2017).

Table 1. Source data

Variables / Observations	GDP per capita [€]	Final food consumption expenditure of households [%]	Food waste [kg per capita]	Area under organic farming [%]	HD 1 [score]	HD 2 [score]	HD 3 [score]	HD 4 [score]	HD 5 [score]	HD 6 [score]
Belgium	48260	12,2	151	7,6	65	81	54	94	61	57
Bulgaria	13310	20,8	95	2,2	70	50	40	85	51	16
Czechia	26670	15,8	101	15,97	57	70	57	74	51	29
Denmark	64430	11,8	254	11,43	18	89	16	23	59	70
Germany	47180	11,5	129	9,83	35	79	66	65	57	40
Estonia	27360	19,1	134	23,42	40	62	30	60	71	16
Ireland	100140	8,6	144	2,2	28	58	68	35	51	65
Greece	19650	16,2	196	17,22	60	59	57	100	51	50
Spain	28750	13	65	10,83	57	67	42	86	47	44
France	38920	13,3	139	9,87	68	74	43	86	60	48
Croatia	17260	18,1	72	8,94	73	42	40	80	40	33
Italy	33860	14,4	139	18,14	50	53	70	75	39	30
Cyprus	31270	13	294	6,31	63	53	51	93	43	50
Latvia	19140	19,7	124	15,88	44	70	9	63	69	13
Lithuania	23820	19,2	140	9,32	42	55	19	65	49	16
Luxembourg	117100	9,6	122	6,23	40	60	50	70	64	56
Hungary	17600	16,7	84	6,31	46	71	88	82	45	31
Malta	34350	13,3	162	0,62	56	59	47	96	47	66
Netherlands	56140	11,7	129	4,44	38	100	14	53	67	68
Austria	49490	10	131	25,69	11	77	79	70	47	63
Poland	17520	18,5	123	3,91	68	47	64	93	49	29
Portugal	23300	17,3	184	19,31	63	59	31	99	42	33
Romania	14790	25	181	5,08	90	46	42	90	32	20
Slovenia	26980	14	71	11,1	71	81	19	88	50	48
Slovakia	20170	18,3	106	13,69	100	57	100	51	53	28
Finland	47890	12,2	109	14,98	33	75	26	59	63	57
Sweden	51980	12,8	117	19,94	31	87	5	29	52	78

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of our own research, it was possible to answer all the research questions in full.

RQ 1: Are there clusters of countries within the EU that are characterized by intra-group homogeneity and inter-group heterogeneity relevant to the development of rural business in the organic food sector?

Yes, there are 8 clusters of countries within the EU that are characterized by intra-group homogeneity and inter-group heterogeneity relevant to the development of rural business in the organic food sector.

RQ 2: Which countries are similar and which are different in terms of the development of rural business in the organic food sector?

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It has been found out that the distribution of EU countries among individual clusters based on applied criteria is the following:

- cluster 1: Belgium, Germany, Austria, Finland;
- cluster 2: Ireland;
- cluster 3: Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia;
- cluster 4: Czechia, Estonia, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia;
- cluster 5: Denmark;
- cluster 6: France, Italy, Cyprus, Malta;
- cluster 7: Luxembourg;
- cluster 8: Netherlands, Sweden.

The dendrogram in Figure 1 shows that clusters 1 and 8 (Belgium, Germany, Austria, Finland, Netherlands and Sweden), 2 and 7 (Ireland and Luxembourg), and 4 and 6 (Czechia, Estonia, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, France, Italy, Cyprus and Malta) are characterized by mutual similarity. At the same time, clusters 2 and 7 differ most from the other clusters, which makes them relatively isolated structures of the development of rural business in the organic food sector that are not suitable for transferring examples of good practice to the application sphere in the markets of other EU Member States.

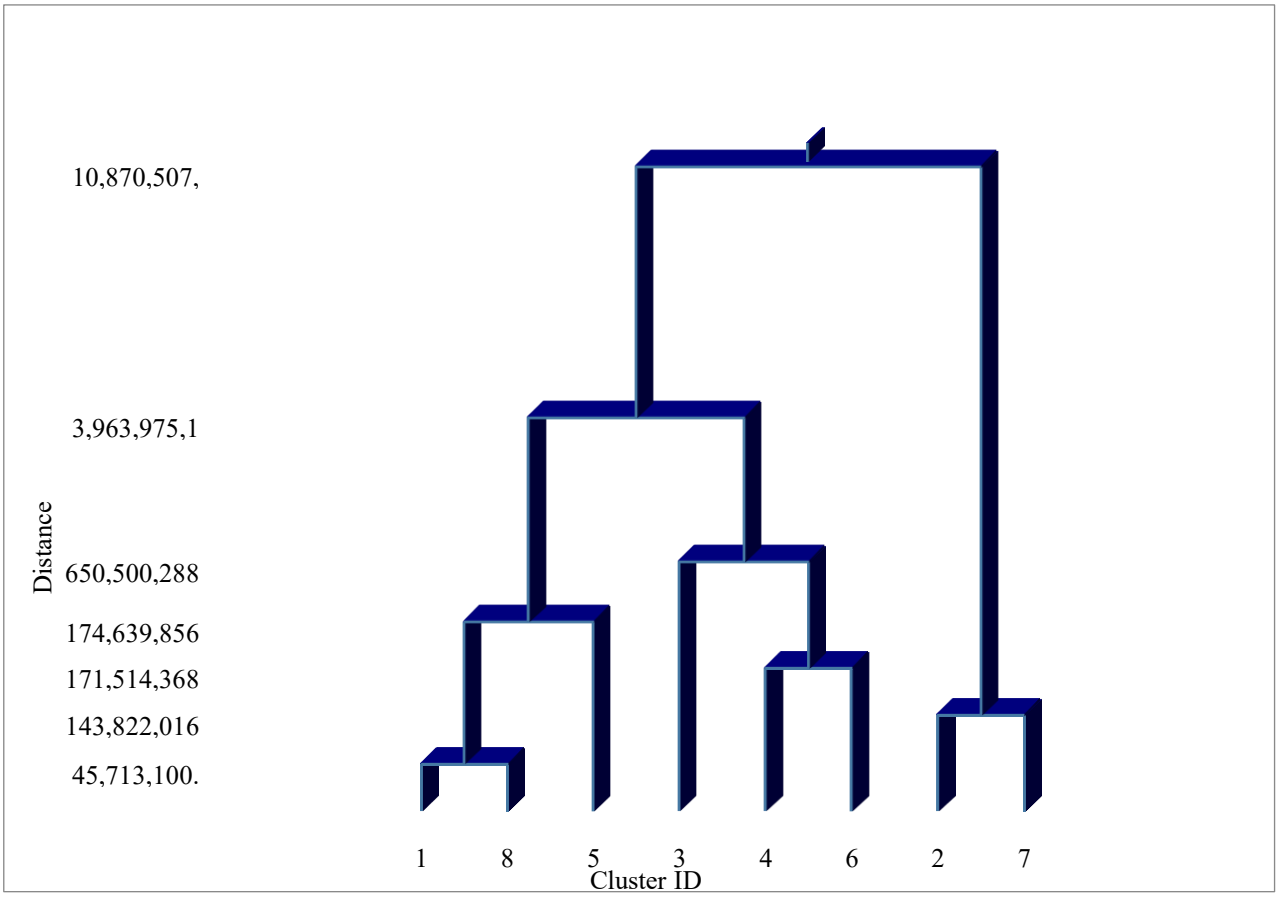

Figure 1. Dendogram

RQ 3: What are the characteristics of individual country clusters and what marketing implications does this have for the development of rural business in the organic food sector?

Table 2 summarizes the average values of variables achieved within individual clusters. These values are representative for the creation of the profile of individual clusters. Based on these profiles, marketing recommendations for the development of rural business in the organic food sector can be formulated.

Table 2. Means of each segmentation variable for each cluster

	Cluster								
Segmentation variable	overall	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
GDP per capita [€]	37700	48200	100000	17400	26100	64400	34600	117000	54100
Final food consumption expenditure of households [%]	15	11,5	8,6	19,2	16,4	11,8	13,5	9,6	12,2
Food waste [kg per capita]	137	130	144	123	116	254	183	122	123
Area under organic farming [%]	11,1	14,5	2,2	9,15	15	11,4	8,73	6,23	12,2
Power distance [score]	52,5	36	28	68,9	55	18	59,2	40	34,5
Individualism [score]	66	78	58	55,2	65,7	89	59,7	60	93,5
Motivation towards achievement and success [score]	45,4	56,2	68	55	33	16	52,7	50	9,5
Uncretainty avoidance [score]	72,7	72	35	80,5	78,7	23	87,5	70	41
Long term orientation [score]	52,2	57	51	48,7	51,7	59	47,2	64	59,5
Indulgence [score]	42,7	54,2	65	27,5	31	70	48,5	56	73

Cluster 1 is characterized by medium GDP, a relatively high share of organic farming, and environmentally conscious consumers who are typically highly individualistic. From a marketing perspective, the following is appropriate in these conditions: 1) emphasize personal choice and responsibility; 2) build a communication strategy on the long-term benefits of organic food consumption, and 3) refer to certificates obtained and build brand value based on trustworthiness.

Cluster 2 is characterized by high GDP, a lower share of organic farming, and low food expenditure. Consumers are typically more motivated towards achievement and success. From a marketing perspective, it is appropriate in these conditions to: 1) position organic food as premium; 2) refer to efficiency, performance, and prestige; and 3) collaborate with luxury brands and e-commerce platforms.

Cluster 3 is characterized by low GDP and a focus on tradition with a high share of food consumption. Consumers are typically characterized by a high degree of uncertainty avoidance. From a marketing perspective, the following is appropriate in these conditions: 1) emphasize affordability and the tradition of rural business; 2) create local markets and support community sales; and 3) communicate organic food as a return to nature and naturalness.

Cluster 4 is characterized by a lower level of GDP and a higher need for uncertainty avoidance. From a marketing perspective, the following is appropriate in these conditions: 1) base the communication strategy on the safety, certification, and quality of organic food; 2) use simple and understandable messages; and 3) communicate in cooperation with trusted local entities.

Cluster 5 is characterized by high GDP, low trust in organic food, and high levels of food waste. Consumers are typically highly individualistic. From a marketing perspective, the following is appropriate in these conditions: 1) appeal to efficiency and lifestyle optimization; 2) presenting organic food as part of an intelligent and conscious lifestyle; and 3) focusing on reducing food waste.

Cluster 6 is characterized by a medium level of GDP and a higher share of food in total consumption. Consumers are typically characterized by a high degree of uncertainty avoidance. From a marketing perspective, the following is appropriate in these conditions: 1) appeal to the credibility and quality of organic

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eISSN 2345-0355. 2025. Vol. 47. No. 4: 549-557
Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.15544/mts.2025.43

production; 2) use storytelling by local producers; and 3) provide tastings as part of sales promotion.

Cluster 7 is characterized by a high level of GDP, low food consumption expenditure, and balanced values of the Hofstede model dimensions. From a marketing perspective, the following is appropriate in these conditions: 1) appeal to the balance between quality and reasonable choice; 2) build a modern brand with traditional values, and 3) position organic food as a high-quality and responsible pleasure.

Cluster 8 is characterized by medium GDP, a high degree of individualism, and an extremely low level of motivation towards achievement and success. From a marketing perspective, the following is appropriate in these conditions: 1) activate experiential marketing models in connection with organic food consumption; 2) communicate organic food as a lifestyle and a means of self-expression; and 3) make full use of influencer marketing and social networks.

Based on the answers to the research questions, it can be concluded that the research assumption was fulfilled. Isolated examination of countries and subsequent identification of examples of good practice together with models of the development of rural business in the organic food sector as implemented in the EU context on the example of Poland by Goralska-Walczak (2025), using the example of Greece by Madureira (2025), and using the example of Hungary by Percsi et al. (2024) has not been proved as efficient. However, it is useful for develop models and theories of the development of rural business in the organic food sector for the clusters of countries, where these countries are grouped. However, especially in case of Poland, Greece and Hungary it is cluster 3 what can be confusing for theory and practice of countries which are grouped in other clusters as there is an illusion of universal applicability of created patterns among various countries.

The research results supplement the current state of knowledge in the field under investigation and complete the research carried out by Zidan et al. (2025). At the same time, they refuted the original assumption that traditional market regions as a whole (the EU or V4) needed to be examined, as was done in the case studies of Europe, the US, and Brazil by Sica and Franco (2024); in the case study of the Baltic countries by Rutelione and Bhutto (2024) and in the case study of the V4 countries by Wojciechowska-Solis et al. (2025). In all cases, it was demonstrated that these markets are heterogeneous and that the countries belonging to them are classified into different clusters.

Conclusion

The paper was focused on identifying marketing models for the development of rural business in the organic food sector based on the similarities of EU national markets. To confirm the research assumptions and answer the three research questions, a cluster analysis based on hierarchical clustering was applied. It was found out that there are 8 clusters of countries within the EU that are characterized by intra-group homogeneity and inter-group heterogeneity relevant to the development of rural business in the organic food sector. Relevant similarities were identified among following countries: 1) Belgium, Germany, Austria, Finland, Netherlands and Sweden; 2) Ireland and Luxembourg; 3) Czechia, Estonia, Spain, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, France, Italy, Cyprus and Malta and 4) Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia. Denmark forms an autonomous cluster with no relevant similarities to other countries. From a marketing perspective, the following is recommended for individual country groups: 1) build organic food brands as part of a lifestyle based on personal choice and responsibility, engage influencers, and activate experiential marketing (countries under point 1) above); 2) build a modern brand with traditional values and position organic food as premium and luxurious (countries under point 2) above); 3) base the communication strategy on the quality of organic food, use storytelling and make marketing locally, provide tastings as part of sales promotion (countries under point 3) above); 4) emphasize affordability and the tradition of rural business, create local markets and support community sales, communicate organic food as a return to nature and naturalness (countries under point 4) above) and 5) appeal to efficiency and lifestyle

optimization, present organic food as part of an intelligent and conscious lifestyle and focus on reducing food waste (Denmark). In addition to these micro-level recommendations, the research results can also be used to identify good practices for the creation of functional national implementation policies.

Acknowledgement

The author(s) declare financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. This paper was supported within The Internal Grant Agency of AMBIS University KMCR-2025-01.

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Management Theory and Studies for Rural Business and Infrastructure Development
eISSN 2345-0355. 2025. Vol. 47. No. 4: 549-557
Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.15544/mts.2025.43

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