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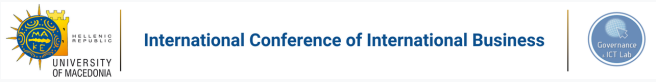

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Green Marketing Applications on Dairy Food Products of the American Farm School of Thessaloniki

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to evaluate the concepts of green marketing, green consumer and green product, which have become increasingly popular at present and to offer practical recommendations to the management of the American Farm School (AFS) of Thessaloniki in regards to green marketing strategies. The strong presence of green marketing in today's business landscape has its roots in the promotion of eco-marketing from the academic community and from the involvement of many citizens in environmental movements which have highlighted environmental issues and entrepreneurship as matters of particular importance. In this study, primary data in regards to the Greek consumers' perceptions on AFS products' eco-friendly characteristics are gathered through a questionnaire survey and an interview with the AFS Farm Manager. Next, the research results are presented in detail. Finally, the study ends with the analysis of the findings and concluding comments.

KEYWORDS: Green Entrepreneurship, Green Marketing, Eco-Marketing, Dairy Food Products

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the years, many innovations have been introduced, which, in turn, have aimed to repair or improve what is currently happening in society. Within the broad context of innovations, environmental concerns have also emerged. As a result, businesses and organizations are adopting alternative actions to preserve themselves and meet the demands of environmentally-conscious consumers. The purpose of this paper is to highlight a new environmental extension of today's organizations, specifically, green marketing, which has gained significant ground in recent years.

It is common knowledge that expanding economic activities and production are causing damage to the natural environment on a global scale, impacting people, wildlife, and crops. In our world, human needs are limitless, but resources are finite. Hence, it is inevitable that marketers must employ limited resources efficiently and effectively to fulfill individual and corporate objectives without wasting a significant amount of resources. Green marketing encourages the use of eco-friendly goods, such as refillable, ozone-friendly, nutritious food, phosphate-free and recyclable items (Nekmahmud & Fekete-Farka, 2020). Moreover, green marketing can be implemented using ecologically responsible methods to meet the needs, desires and expectations of consumers while conserving the environment and society. Certain environmental challenges, such as global warming, the impacts of greenhouse gases, pollution,

and global climate change, are closely linked to the agricultural and industrial sectors in the twenty-first century and have a disastrous influence on human behavior. These emerging environmental challenges can only be addressed if consumers take responsibility for reducing the harmful impacts on the environment by purchasing more green products (Nekmahmud & Fekete-Farka, 2020). Several authors (Papista & Dimitriadis, 2019; Bashir et al, 2020; Liao et al., 2020) have observed that some brands have successfully employed green marketing and that it can offer numerous benefits to companies.

Although many authors (Papadas et al., 2019; Pimonenko et al., 2020; Zhang & Dong. 2020) praise the value of green marketing, it appears that marketing and the environment are not necessarily good companions, as they often have different objectives. According to Glorieux-Boutonnat (2004), marketing primarily focuses on enticing consumers and quickly generating profitable sales and it generally takes the environment into account only when it contributes to this goal. Environmental management, on the other hand, aims to reduce the impact of production on natural resources by decreasing material or energy usage or by utilizing more eco-friendly materials. Conversely, marketers concentrate on persuading and sometimes misleading consumers through various means, such as employing more sophisticated packaging for increased communication or shifting to materials that are more appealing to consumers, regardless of their impact on the environment (Mishra & Sharma, 2010).

This objective of this research is to evaluate the concepts of green marketing, green consumer and green product, which have become increasingly popular in today's business world and to offer practical recommendations to the management of the American Farm School (AFS) of Thessaloniki in regards to green marketing strategies. This study contributes to marketing literature by providing additional support to prior research findings on the growing significance of green marketing in contemporary business practices. The research also sheds light on the importance of green consumers who actively seek eco-friendly products and consider factors like health awareness, trust in organic products, environmental consciousness and natural food features when making purchase decisions. In addition, the study provides practical recommendations for companies and organizations like AFS, such as gender-specific marketing strategies, diversifying media channels, maintaining competitive pricing for green products, prioritizing transparency in marketing and fostering consumer education. Finally, the research findings constitute interesting indications regarding the Greek consumers' perceptions on green marketing and the eco-friendly characteristics of AFS products.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, a brief theoretical background on green marketing, green consumer, green product and environmental concerns is presented. Then, the Methodology and the Analysis and Results sections follow, and the results of our questionnaire survey and the interview responses with the AFS Farm Manager are presented in detail. In the next section, the Discussion and the Managerial Implications are presented. The paper ends with the Limitations of the Research and Recommendations for Future Research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Green Marketing

There are numerous and diverse definitions of marketing, but they all tend to place the customer at the center. Peattie and Charter (2003, p.728) define Marketing as "*the entire business seen from the end result, which is from* the *customer's point of view*". However, the concept of marketing has evolved over the years, and traditional definitions generally pay little attention to environmental, social, and ethical perspectives. Traditional definitions focus on concepts of mass consumption, mass sales, mass marketing, and standardized products. In contrast, modern marketing embraces concepts such as consumer satisfaction, targeted marketing segments and customized products or services, with no evidence of green thinking in these definitions. Only in the description of green marketing some green perspectives can be noticed (Peattie & Charter, 2003). Green marketing can be defined as "*actions carried out by organisations that are apprehensive about the ecology or green problems by providing the environmentally friendly goods or services to bring satisfaction among customers and the community*"

(Mukonza et al., 2021, p. 4). Therefore, we can say that green marketing is a careful integration of social and environmental requirements with the economic desires of the company. Green marketing is also known as environmental, sustainable and ecological marketing (Mishra & Sharma, 2010).

With the world's population growing at an unprecedented rate and increasing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, alongside the depletion of the ozone layer due to chlorofluorocarbons, the need to integrate sustainable practices into all aspects of production, consumption, and daily life has become more urgent. Sustainability became a public concern with the "Our Common Future" section of the Brundtland Report in 1987 and it gained further attention when global leaders made it a priority after the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Product modification, environmentally responsible packaging and advertising are just a few examples of activities aimed at encouraging and supporting trade that seeks to satisfy these human needs or wants while considering environmental concerns. Environmental considerations must now be integrated into marketing efforts at all levels, making green marketing a pivotal concept. Jay Polonsky (2008) emphasizes the importance of green marketing by relating it to the basic economic concept of how individuals allocate their limited resources to meet unlimited wants. The rise of environmental awareness in the 1970s, leading to the concept of ecological marketing, can be traced as the precursor to green marketing. Peattie and Charter (2003) identified a link between this awareness and industries with the most significant environmental impact and the development of new technologies to address environmental challenges.

2.2 Green Consumer

The driving force behind green marketing and strategy is the green consumer, a significant new force. Green consumers actively seek out or purchase goods that are both environmentally friendly and meet their needs, their production involves using renewable energy, and, typically, they consistently avoid items that can harm living beings and/or engages in unethical testing on animals or people. Similarly, green consumerism and green consumption, or sustainable and environmentally responsible consumption, are interconnected concepts. Consumers in industrialized nations are modifying their behavior and starting to practice green consumption to reduce the harmful effects of consumption habits on the environment. Consequently, green consumerism could contribute to increased environmental sustainability (Amoako et al., 2022).

Previous studies have found a connection between consumers' consumption of green foods and attitudes toward behaviors such as health awareness, trust in the demand for organic foods, environmental consciousness, and the appeal of natural food features. According to Ajzen (1991, p. 180), the founder of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), "….*a person who has a positive attitude towards a particular behavior is more likely to engage in that behavior*". Making green purchase choices may involve paying more for green products, advocating sustainable consumption practices, and purchasing green products. Two key aspects influence green consumers' purchase decisions. One is intrinsic to the consumer and includes self-interest, knowledge of and willingness to practice resource conservation, and reducing the consumer's negative environmental impact. Additional external influences encompass consumer perceptions in society and product characteristics, including cost, performance, safety, and marketing (Amoako et al., 2022). Various variables, such as attitude, purchasing intention, issues, responsibility, human-oriented, emotional, cognitive reactions, and collectivism, affect the intention to buy green, all intended to promote this behavior. Perceived degradation is a reliable predictor of consumer green purchasing decisions in developing countries, as asserted by Amoako et al. (2022).

According to the concept of consumption value, green products hold significant social value that can influence consumer behavior in favor of green products. The price of purchasing green products is currently a barrier to green purchases. Previous research (Suciu et al., 2019; Kowalska et al., 2021; Eyinade et al., 2021) also indicated that organic food is seen as pure, nutritious, healthy, and environmentally friendly. A favorable attitude toward organic food is another indicator of positive purchasing intentions and behavior.

2.3 Green Product

A green product is manufactured in an environmentally friendly manner. Numerous marketing researchers (Lago et al., 2020; Sun & Wang, 2020; Chan eta al., 2022) have provided definitions of green products. Green and environmental products are those that are safe for the environment, made from non-toxic materials, recycled, or have minimal or eco-friendly packaging. A product is considered "green" when its environmental and societal performance during manufacturing, usage, and disposal significantly exceeds that of traditional or competing product offerings (Nekmahmud & Fekete-Farka, 2020). Green products are often perceived as safer and healthier than conventional ones, and they positively impact the product's life cycle and the use of natural resources (Amoako et al., 2022). Green products are evolving through methods such as reuse, recycling, repair, reconditioning, and reduction. In general, green foods are preferred over other food items because they are better for the environment and human health (Amoako et al., 2022).

2.4 Green Marketing & Environmental Concerns

Environmental concern is a strong attitude toward environmental conservation, as described by Crosby et al. (1981). Traditionally, environmental concern has been seen as a unidimensional construct, ranging from indifference to high levels of concern for the environment (Cherian & Jacob, 2012). According to Seguin et al. (1998), environmental concerns can significantly influence people's motivation to change their behavior in an effort to address environmental issues. Various studies (Lazaroiu et al., 2019; Chen & Antonelli, 2020) have identified environmental concerns as a crucial factor influencing individuals' decisions to purchase organic and sustainable foods. Kim and Choi (2005) found that concern for the environment directly affects green consumer behavior. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2021) have highlighted the connection between environmental attitudes and behaviors. Mostafa (2009) discovered that consumer intentions to purchase green items are significantly and positively influenced by both environmental concerns and attitude. Additionally, it can be argued that in order to foster environmentally conscious consumers, there must be an adequate availability of eco-friendly products and socially responsible businesses (Szabo & Webster, 2020).

However, it is crucial to emphasize that genuine and clear environmental claims should be made to encourage people to make environmentally friendly purchases. Research by Ismail et al. (2006) and Ismail and Panni (2008) has shown that consumers need access to green products to engage in pro-social/environmental behavior. Once consumers have access to information about healthy/organic food, it often becomes common knowledge. Given that several studies (Zhang & Dong, 2020; Wu et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021) have revealed that consumer confidence in product safety is a key factor motivating the public to make environmentally friendly purchases, a comprehensive advertising campaign for these products is necessary to inform customers about their safety and health-friendly qualities.

3 METHODOLOGY

Our approach involved a mixed methodology: in terms of quantitative research we constructed and distributed a questionnaire to access consumer perceptions regarding AFS products and their eco-friendly characteristics. Previous research suggests that web surveys, compared to mail surveys, are faster, less expensive, provide easy access to widely dispersed respondents, and offer data in real-time numerical form (Dillman et al., 2014); we followed this route also, and distributed the questionnaire via social media and email. It consisted of two sections; in the first one, participants were asked to provide demographical related information, and the second part included questions related to Green Marketing and AFS products awareness issues, with all questions being closed-ended allowing participants to express their opinions only through specific answers. On more practical issues, the questionnaire was created using Google Forms, the collected raw data was processed using SPSS Version 28, and the data collection period was month. A total of 121 usable questionnaires were collected. In regards to the qualitative research, we

conducted an interview with the AFS Farm Manager to gauge his view and plans on the adoption of Green Marketing techniques.

4 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Interview Findings

In this subsection we underline the key points unveiled from the interview process with the AFS Farm Manager.

- **Question:** How do you define green marketing?

Answer: *Promotion of products on "good" terms and that the products as well as their packaging are friendly to the environment.*

- **Question:** What types of platforms does your company engage in to promote your products?

Answer: *Word of mouth, interviews on radio stations or TV, YouTube, but in the future, we would like to further develop our strategies.*

- **Question:** To what extent are the products that your company offers based on the five following factors: recycled materials, sustainable distribution networks, green energy, reparability and long-lasting quality?

Answer: *We are mainly based on sustainable distribution networks and long-lasting quality.*

- **Question:** If your products become more eco-friendly will you increase the retail price or decrease it?

Answer: *Because the price is already expensive and the customers will not spend more money to buy the products, we will keep the same price. For example, milk used to be in glass packaging but now it is in plastic packaging for safety reasons. We would like to make packaging for our products with sustainable materials while keeping the same price.*

- **Question:** How does the company's vision incorporate sustainability?

Answer: *It is a vital part of our educational strategy and it is put into action through the production. For example, the AFS employees do soil reconstitution, give lessons to the students and then there is training and practice on the farm.*

- **Question:** What specific values do you communicate to your current or potential customers to increase the likelihood of purchasing your products or services?

Answer: *The history of AFS and that the products they buy are made from materials that are cultivated – produced in AFS and prepared by the students of AFS.*

- **Question:** Do you think that consumers will purchase more AFS related products if the packaging is improved?

Answer: *Obviously. It just needs to be promoted with the right marketing.*

4.2 Statistical Analysis

In regards to the first five questions on demographical data: overall, most respondents were women, in the 18-39 age bracket, working in both the private and public sector. In particular, women correspondent to 62% of our sample and men to 38%, 35.5% were between the ages of 18 and 25, 33.1% between 26 and 39, 24% between 40 and 59, while only 7,4% were aged 60 and over. Concerning the level of education, 40.5% had received a professional education at a vocational institution or at a University, 26.4% were postgraduate, 15.7% undergraduate, 12.4% had secondary level education, while only 5% had a PhD. Regarding the working status, 39.7% of the participants were private employees, 24.8% were students, 18.2% were state employees, 3.3% were retired, 2.5% were unemployed, while 11.6% were something else. Finally, 29.8% of the participants lived in a household size of four people, 19% in a household of two, 19% in a household of three, 16.5% in a household of one person, while 15.7% in a household of 5 people or more.

As shown in Table 1, approximately half of the participants (50.4%) spent less than €10 monthly on AFS products, 21.5% spent between €10 and €30, 10 .7% between €30 and €50, 7.4% between €50

and €70, and 7.4% spent between €70 and €100, while only 2.5% were willing to spend more than €100. Therefore, the consumption related to specific AFS products can be considered as moderate at best.

Table 1. Amount (in euros) spent on AFS products on a monthly basis

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under 10€	61	50.4	50.4
10-30€	26	21.5	71.9
30-50€	13	10.7	82.6
50-70€	9	7.4	90.1
70-100€	9	7.4	97.5
100 or above	3	2.5	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

In Table 2 we include our results regarding the impact of eco-friendly packaging on buying decisions. Among the participants, 38% had a neutral stance, 26.4% agreed, 18.2% strongly agreed, while 9.1% disagreed, and only 8.3% strongly disagreed. This is an interesting result, because typically consumers of "green" products are also heavily interested in an overall eco-friendly approach, and, by extension, one expects that eco-friendly packaging would perhaps have an even more significant effect; however, the percentage of neutral does point to a potentially significant untapped market segment.

Table 2. Importance of eco-friendly packaging for buying decisions

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	10	8.3	8.3
Disagree	11	9.1	17.4
Neutral	46	38.0	55.4
Agree	32	26.4	81.8
Strongly Agree	22	18.2	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

Table 3, shows that 19.0% of the participants responded that they are fully aware of green or eco-friendly products, 33.9% that they know them in general, 33.1% had a neutral attitude, while 9.1% and 5% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. This is a significant finding in the sense that more than half (52.9%) of the consumers are aware of eco-friendly products.

Table 3. Awareness degree of "green" or eco-friendly products

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	5.0	5.0
Disagree	11	9.1	14.0
Neutral	40	33.1	47.1
Agree	41	33.9	81.0
Strongly Agree	23	19.0	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

In Table 4 we specialize the question from Table 3 by further examining awareness of "green" products or eco-friendly products in terms of specific media outlets. Among the participants, 23.1% mentioned TV, 19.8% answered class lectures, 10.7% newspapers, 5% reported magazines, and thus the main bulk of our sample points to the strong role of both social media and/ word of mouth that seem to be the primary source of obtaining information.

Table 4. Awareness of "green" or eco-friendly products regarding specific media

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
TV	28	23.1	23.1
Magazines	6	5.0	28.1
Class lectures	24	19.8	47.9
Newspapers	13	10.7	58.7
Other	50	41.3	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

Concerning the respondents' willingness to pay more for "green" features products, from the subsequent Table 5 we see that 9.1% strongly agreed, 21.5% agreed, 42.1% had a neutral attitude, 17.4% disagreed, and only 9.9% strongly disagreed. This is a useful insight, because only little more than one in four (27.3%) seem to be unwilling to pay more for such products, which coupled with the 42.1% of neutral responses shows that there is significant opportunity of further extending the consumer base.

Table 5. Are you willing to pay more for "green" features products?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	9.9	9.9
Disagree	21	17.4	27.3
Neutral	51	42.1	69.4
Agree	26	21.5	90.9
Strongly Agree	11	9.1	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

As shown in Table 6, the respondents views on which marketing elements strongly influence buying behavior concerning "green products" are the following: 24.8% mentioned the product, 14.9% the package, 8.3% promotion, 4.1% the place, and 47.9% pointed to all the aforementioned. Practically, this point to the fact that consumers seem to focus on the actual products details involved, rather than more typical marketing channels.

Table 6. Marketing elements that strongly influence the buying behavior of "green" products

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Product	30	24.8	24.8
Package	18	14.9	39.7
Place	5	4.1	43.8
Promotion	10	8.3	52.1
All of the above	58	47.9	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

Table 7 depicts the main reasons inhibiting the respondents to pay more for "green products" were the product cost being too high / unaffordable to them (34.7%), the fact that while producer claim such products are more costly to produce, actually they are not (20.7%). Also, 14.9% reported that they are ready to pay for extra-ecofriendly products, 8.3% that the producer should pay for the additional costs, and 7.4% that the government should pay for these. Interestingly, 6.6% reported that environmental issues are a gimmick for promotion purposes, and another 6.6% that they cannot see the benefit of those features, while only 0.8% reported that the environmental issues are gimmick for commercial purposes only. The key finding in this case is that a very small percentage sees lack of utility in such purchases, with the main barrier and /or point of concern being that of price, for which a little more than one out of

five (20.7%) believe that related products are overpriced not due to actual nature of the production process, but rather because of the producers claims.

Table 7. Main reasons for not paying more for "green" products

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Cannot see the benefit of those features	8	6.6	6.6
Product cost is too high, cannot afford them	42	34.7	41.3
Producers only claim it is more costly to produce while actually it is not	25	20.7	62.0
Government should pay for the additional costs	9	7.4	69.4
Producers should pay for the additional costs	10	8.3	77.7
Environmental issues are a gimmick for promotion only	8	6.6	84.3
I am ready to pay for extra-ecofriendly products	18	14.9	99.2
Environmental issues are gimmick for commercial purposes only	1	0.8	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

Table 8 depicts the reasons green marketing is in the headlines nowadays: 37.2% of the participants reported that consumers are becoming more aware of such products, 26.4% that companies increasingly use these products as competitive edge, 19.8% that companies attempt to address society's new concerns, while 16.5% reported that consumers are aware of green products. It's worth noting that many respondents feel that the shift of companies towards producing green products has to do (to a strong degree) with the current trend (see second row). This can be important in the sense that consumers of "green" products pay may more attention to the core values of the company compared to other products.

Table 8. Reasons why "green marketing" is in the headlines nowadays

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Consumers are becoming more aware of green products	45	37.2	37.2
Companies increasingly use this as competitive edge	32	26.4	63.6
Company's attempt to address societies new concern	24	19.8	83.5
Consumers are being aware of green products	20	16.5	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

Table 9 includes our results regarding the respondents' familiarity with American Farm School; 27.3% had a neutral attitude, 25.6% agreed, 21.5% strongly agreed, 19% disagreed, while only 6.6% completely disagreed with it. These results show that more effort it needed on behalf of the specific organization since more than half of the respondents were unaware of its particular products.

Table 9. Familiarity with American Farm School products

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	8	6.6	6.6
Disagree	23	19.0	25.6
Neutral	33	27.3	52.9
Agree	31	25.6	78.5
Strongly Agree	26	21.5	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

As shown in Table 10 regarding the media that introduced the respondents to AFS products, 30.6% mentioned word of mouth communication, 17.4% mentioned advertising in supermarkets, 6.6% TV, 6 .6% mentioned the radio, 3.3% the newspapers, and finally 34.7% mentioned other media, while only 0.8% did not provide any answers. This finding overall extends and enhances the results from the analysis in Table 9: more effort is needed on behalf of AFS to better promote its products, and the institution should utilize other channels apart from the ones which traditionally has a strong presence, e.g., AFS already has a variety of products place at supermarkets.

Table 10. Through which media did you become aware of AFS products

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No answer	1	0.8	0.8
TV	8	6.6	7.4
Radio	8	6.6	14.0
Word of Mouth communication	37	30.6	44.6
Advertising in supermarkets	21	17.4	62.0
Newspapers	4	3.3	65.3
Other	42	34.7	100.0
Total	121	100.0	

Next the results of cross-tabulations on a selection of the questions using gender as one factor are presented. According to Table 11 regarding the importance of eco-friendly packaging, among men 45.7% were neutral, 28.3% agreed, 13% strongly agreed, while 10.9% strongly disagreed and finally 2.2% disagreed. Among women, 33.3% were neutral, 25.3% agreed, 21.3% strongly agreed, 13.3% disagreed, and 6.7% strongly disagreed. These results enhance our previous findings included in Table 2, because the overall neutral stance regarding the environmental aspects of packaging does not change in a significant manner among gender.

Table 11. Gender and eco-friendly packaging cross tabulation

			Importance of eco-friendly packaging for buying decisions					Total
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Male	Count	5	1	21	13	6	46
		% within Gender	10.9%	2.2%	45.7%	28.3%	13.0%	100.0%
	Female	Count	5	10	25	19	16	75
		% within Gender	6.7%	13.3%	33.3%	25.3%	21.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	10	11	46	32	22	121
		% within Gender	8.3%	9.1%	38.0%	26.4%	18.2%	100.0%

From Table 12, we derive that the awareness degree of "green" or eco-friendly products does not seem to deviate significantly between the genders. In particular, among men 39.1% were neutral, 32.6% agreed, 13% strongly agreed, 10, 9% strongly disagreed and finally 4.3% disagreed. Among women, 34.7% agreed, 29.3% were neutral, 22.7% strongly agreed, 12% disagreed and 1.3% strongly disagreed.

Table 12. Gender and "green" product awareness degree cross tabulation

			Awareness degree of "green" or eco-friendly products					Total
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Male	Count	5	2	18	15	6	46
		% within Gender	10.9%	4.3%	39.1%	32.6%	13.0%	100.0%
	Female	Count	1	9	22	26	17	75
		% within Gender	1.3%	12.0%	29.3%	34.7%	22.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	6	11	40	41	23	121
		% within Gender	5.0%	9.1%	33.1%	33.9%	19.0%	100.0%

Table 13 depicts the willingness to pay more for "green" featured products in terms of gender. Among men, 50% were neutral, 19.6% agreed, 13% strongly disagreed, 8.7% disagreed and 8.7% strongly agreed. Among women, 37.3% were neutral, 22.7% agreed and another 22.7% disagreed, while 9.3% strongly agreed and 8% strongly disagreed. Therefore, it seems that both men and women are unwilling and/or uninterested to pay more with a 71,7% and 69,6 cumulative percent of the answers respectively placed in the negative "spectrum up to" a neutral stance.

Table 13. Gender and "green" products willingness to pay more cross tabulation

			Willingness to pay more for "green" features products					Total
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Gender	Male	Count	6	4	23	9	4	46
		% within Gender	13.0%	8.7%	50.0%	19.6%	8.7%	100.0%
	Female	Count	6	17	28	17	7	75
		% within Gender	8.0%	22.7%	37.3%	22.7%	9.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	12	21	51	26	11	121
		% within Gender	9.9%	17.4%	42.1%	21.5%	9.1%	100.0%

In Table 14 we explore the marketing elements that strongly influence the buying behavior of "green products". Among men, 41.3% mentioned all the marketing elements, 30.4% referred only to the product, 15.2 % mentioned the package, 8.7% the place and finally 4.3% the promotion. Among women, 52% mentioned all marketing elements, 21.3% the product, 14.7% the package, 10.7% the promotion and only 1.3% mentioned the place. Again, as with previous cross-tabulation results we see that overall there are no significant variations between genders, though in this case the place and promotion seem to affect men and women in a slightly different manner.

Table 14. Gender and "green" products marketing elements cross tabulation

			Marketing elements that strongly influence the buying behavior of "green" products"					Total
			Product	Package	Place	Promotion	All of the above	
Gender	Male	Count	14	7	4	2	19	46
		% within Gender	30.4%	15.2%	8.7%	4.3%	41.3%	100.0%
	Female	Count	16	11	1	8	39	75
		% within Gender	21.3%	14.7%	1.3%	10.7%	52.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	30	18	5	10	58	121
		% within Gender	24.8%	14.9%	4.1%	8.3%	47.9%	100.0%

Table 15 shows the reasons green marketing is in the headlines nowadays, among men 30.4% reported the company's attempt to address society's new concerns, followed by a 28.3% which responded that companies increasingly use this as competitive edge, 26.1% reported that consumers are becoming more aware of green products and finally 15.2% reported that consumers are being aware of green products. Among women 44% stated that consumers are becoming more aware of green products, 25.3% that companies increasingly use this as competitive edge, 17.3% that consumers are being more aware of green products and a 13.3% reported the company's attempt to address societies new concern. In this case there seems to be a more prominent (though not strong) gender based variation, because in both consumer

awareness (first column), and, the company's attempt (third column), there is a different perception on how these aspects promote visibility.

Table 15. Gender and "green" marketing headlines reasons cross tabulation

			Reasons why green marketing is in the headlines nowadays				Total
			Consumers are becoming more aware of green products	Companies increasingly use this as competitive edge	Companies attempt to address societies new concern	Consumers are aware of green products	
Gender	Male	Count	12	13	14	7	46
		% within Gender	26.1%	28.3%	30.4%	15.2%	100.0%
	Female	Count	33	19	10	13	75
		% within Gender	44.0%	25.3%	13.3%	17.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	45	32	24	20	121
		% within Gender	37.2%	26.4%	19.8%	16.5%	100.0%

Finally, we present the results of the Spearman's rank-order correlation test with an alpha level of 0.05. As depicted in Table 16, for the relationship between age and "green" products awareness degree there is a weak positive correlation (0.108) between these two variables, which is not statistically significant ($p=0.240 > 0.05$). Practically, age does not seem to affect whether if one seeks information about "green" products or not, and this is illustrated in Figure 1 with the grouped bar chart especially in the cases of "positively" oriented answers.

Table 16. Age and "green" products awareness degree – Spearman correlation

			Age	Awareness degree of "green" or eco-friendly products
Spearman's rho	Age	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.108
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.240
		N	121	121
	Awareness degree of "green" or eco-friendly products	Correlation Coefficient	0.108	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.240	.
		N	121	121

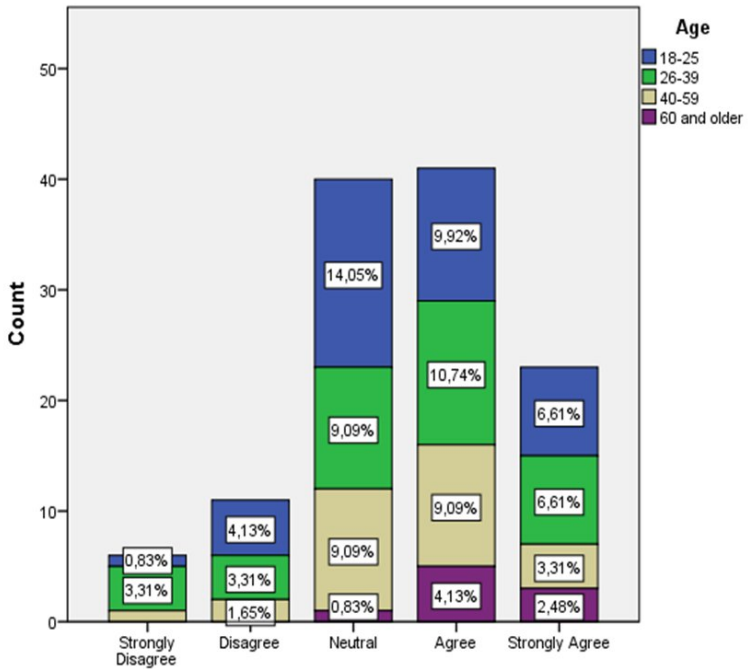

Figure 1. Age and "green" products awareness degree grouped bar chart

A Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to determine the relationship between age and willingness to pay more for "green" products. From Table 17, we derive that that there is a weak, positive correlation (0.140) between these two variables, which is not statistically significant at all ($p=0.126 > 0.05$) and this is further illustrated in Figure 2 with an almost "even distribution" among each stack.

Table 17. Age and willingness to pay more for "green" products – Spearman correlation

			Age	**Willing to pay more for "green" featured products**
Spearman's rho	**Age**	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.140
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	0.126
		N	121	121
	Willing to pay more for "green" featured products	Correlation Coefficient	0.140	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.126	.
		N	121	121

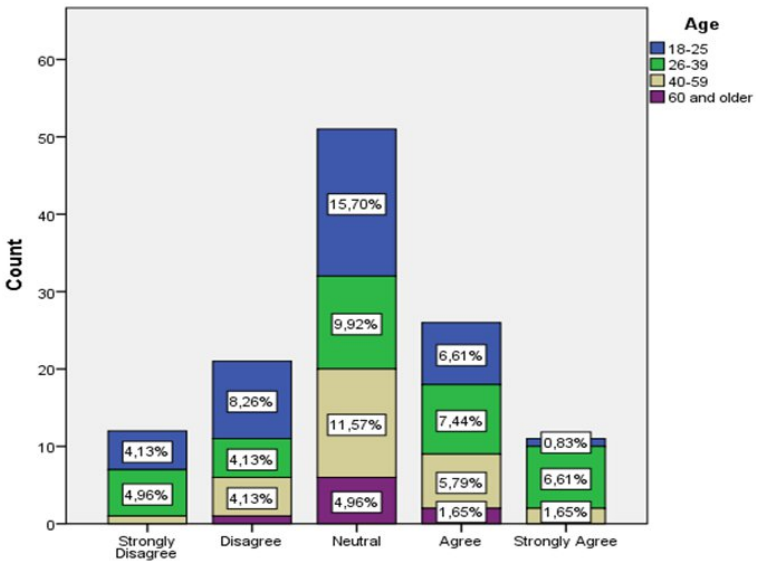

Figure 2. Age and willingness to pay more for "green" products grouped bar chart

5 DISCUSSION

The analysis of quantitative results reveals that the study consisted of a larger proportion of women than men. In terms of age distribution, participants were mainly concentrated in the age groups of 18-25, 26-39, and 40-59, with a smaller percentage representing individuals aged 60 and over. Regarding education, the majority had professional education at a Vocational Institution (IEK) or a University, followed by postgraduates, undergraduates and individuals with secondary level education. Employment-wise, private employees constituted the largest group, followed by students, state employees and retirees. The participants had varying household sizes, with a significant portion having households of four people, followed by households of two and three people. Lastly, a substantial percentage of participants had spent less than €10 per month on AFS products, with gradually decreasing proportions for higher expenditure brackets.

Men displayed a higher percentage of neutrality towards the importance of eco-friendly packaging for buying decisions compared to women, who had a greater percentage of agreement and strong agreement. Men exhibited a higher percentage of neutrality regarding the awareness degree of "green products" or eco-friendly products compared to women, who had a greater percentage of agreement and strong agreement. Men tended to mention other media sources more frequently for awareness of "green products" or eco-friendly products, while women mentioned other media sources equally and emphasized TV and class lectures as additional significant sources of awareness. Men showed a higher degree of neutrality towards willingness to pay more for "green" feature products, while women demonstrated a more balanced distribution of agreement and disagreement. In terms of the marketing elements that strongly influence the buying behavior of "green products," men emphasized all marketing elements and the product itself, whereas women placed greater emphasis on all marketing elements, specifically mentioning the product and the package. Men expressed concerns about producers only making claims without actual increased production costs, high product costs that they cannot afford and a readiness to pay for extra-ecofriendly products, while women reported challenges related to high product costs, the perception of producers making false claims and a willingness to pay for eco-friendly products. In terms of reasons why green marketing is in the headlines, men highlighted the company's attempt to address new societal concerns and the use of green marketing as a competitive edge, whereas women emphasized the growing consumer awareness of green products and the competitive strategies adopted by companies.

Men displayed a higher percentage of neutrality in terms of familiarity with AFS products, whereas women showed a more balanced distribution of agreement, strong agreement and disagreement. When considering the awareness media of AFS products, both men and women mentioned various mediums, with word-of-mouth communication and another medium being prominent for both genders, while TV, advertising in supermarkets, radio and newspapers were mentioned to varying extents.

The analysis revealed various correlations between age and different metrics. Age showed a weak, positive correlation with eco-friendly packaging, suggesting that as age increases, there is a slight tendency towards valuing eco-friendly packaging more. However, age did not significantly correlate with the awareness degree of green products, awareness media of green products, payments for green products, marketing elements of green products, non-payment reasons for green products, familiarity with AFS products and awareness media of AFS products. Interestingly, age displayed a weak, negative correlation with the reasons why green marketing is in the headlines, indicating that younger individuals are more likely to perceive companies' attempts to address new societal concerns as a reason for the prominence of green marketing. Overall, while there were some associations between age and certain metrics, they were generally weak and not statistically significant.

6 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study offer some significant recommendations for AFS management and leadership of companies that produce dairy food products. First, AFS should consider applying gender-specific marketing strategies as gender appears to play a significant role in participants' perceptions and behaviors related to green marketing and eco-friendly products. Women tend to place a higher value on eco-friendly packaging; they are more willing to pay extra for green products and placed a higher emphasis on marketing elements, especially product and packaging. Thus, putting emphasis on these aspects in future marketing campaigns can prove really appealing to female consumers. Moreover, the study shows that participants were generally aware of the concept of "green products" or eco-friendly products and they identified various media sources and word-of-mouth communication as key channels for gaining awareness. However, there was a notable gender difference, with women placing a higher emphasis on TV and class lectures as sources of awareness. The AFS should consider diversifying their media channels and investing in advertising strategies across multiple platforms to reach a wider audience.

Furthermore, affordability is a concern for consumers, particularly men, who expressed concerns about high product costs, while women were more balanced in their responses. The AFS should strive to keep green and eco-friendly products competitively priced to make them accessible to a broader range of consumers. Addressing concerns about high product costs and providing genuine value for eco-friendly features can encourage more consumers to make green purchases. Strategies like cost-effective packaging solutions can help maintain reasonable prices. In addition, there is a need to educate consumers about the value of green and eco-friendly products. Food processors in general, should focus on marketing campaigns that not only promote their products, but also raise awareness about environmental issues and the benefits of choosing eco-friendly options. Finally, consumers expressed concerns about false claims by producers regarding the eco-friendliness and the authenticity of green products. Companies should prioritize transparency and provide clear information about their products' environmental attributes, certifications and sourcing practices in order to build trust towards their consumers.

7 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides valuable insights, but it also has some limitations. First, this research exclusively focuses on measuring consumers’ perceptions. The elements influencing consumer behavior are far-reaching, extending beyond what can be captured through a questionnaire alone. The sample of 121 respondents may not be fully representative of the entire Greek population, as it had a higher

proportion of women and participants from specific age and education groups. This limitation could affect the generalizability of the findings. To enhance the applicability of findings, future studies should involve a larger and more diverse sample size (Comrey & Lee, 2013). Moreover, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases or inaccuracies. Participants may provide socially desirable responses or have different perceptions than their reported behavior (Rosenman et al., 2011). Finally, data was collected using predetermined online questions. This approach was chosen for its cost-effectiveness and of dissemination among the intended audience (Sklavounos et al., 2023). However, it should be noted that online surveys may yield inaccurate responses due to potential misunderstandings of the questions (Bryman, 2016).

Consequently, there is a possibility that valuable insights may have been missed, suggesting that future research should incorporate a combination of online and in-person surveys. Moreover, to advance the understanding of green marketing and eco-friendly products, future research could conduct longitudinal studies to track changes in consumer attitudes and behaviors towards green marketing and eco-friendly products over time. This would help identify trends and evolving consumer preferences. In addition, the weak and non-significant correlations between age and various metrics in this study suggest that age may not be a significant factor in green marketing perceptions. Further research with a more diverse age range may yield different results. Also, future studies should compare consumer perceptions and behaviors across different cultures and regions in order to provide valuable insights into the global adoption of green marketing and eco-friendly products. Finally, in-depth case studies of companies and organizations, such as the AFS, that have implemented green marketing strategies could offer practical insights to other businesses looking to adopt similar approaches.

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