

# Exploring connections between vintage marketing and sustainability in the Italian agri-food sector. An empirical analysis<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

**Purpose of the paper:** This research aims to find out a possible relationship between the “nostalgia effect” (related to Vintage Marketing) and sustainability applications in the Italian Agri-food sector. In particular, focusing on organic food products, the analysis seeks to find a connection between these topics by considering the consumers’ food purchasing behaviours.

**Methodology:** The data collected through the dissemination of an online questionnaire was used to answer the research questions. After a first descriptive analysis of the sample, two exploratory factor analyses were performed to identify those latent factors underlying the variables.

**Findings:** The results show a positive relationship between the Vintage and Sustainability topics, implying that memories of past consumption are capable to influence the consumers’ future food purchase choices.

**Research limits:** The analysis is limited from two fronts: first, it relates only to Italian consumers and, second, the sample under study is restricted. Therefore, future researches should include a larger dataset, collected from different countries, and consider other factors that could influence the consumers’ food purchasing choices.

**Practical implications:** Despite the research limits - strictly connected to its embryonic stage - the results highlight interesting managerial and academic implications. It enriches the debate on consumer behaviour, in a sector where all the potential has not yet been expressed.

**Originality of the paper:** It explores the theme of sustainability from a new angle - that of Vintage - seeking for connections and implications. As literature in this field is not rich, future research should deepen this relationship in order to fill its knowledge gap.

Key words: vintage; sustainability; agri-food; marketing; nostalgia; green

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<sup>1</sup> Authors’ contributions: Annunziata Tarulli wrote the Literature review, and Data and Sample section. Domenico Morrone contributed to the Introduction, the Research objectives, and Questionnaire Development and Instrument sections. Pierluigi Toma is responsible for Results. All the authors wrote the Discussion and conclusion section and the body of the paper, read and approved the final manuscript.

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the socio-economic scenario has shown a growing attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR) issues as a consequence of the awareness of global warming and climate changes' evidence. This wind of change has pushed companies to change the way they do business, especially for those belonging to sectors that particularly affect the environment, such as agriculture. Hence, the need to promote new sustainable business models, which seek practices capable of facing the numerous challenges that this revolution poses. In fact, if, on one hand, this shift towards sustainability can be defined as a "mandatory" choice, on the other hand, it represents an opportunity to be seized as it opens to valuable benefits in terms of consumer awareness, brand reputation and corporate image, besides the economics.

The research literature related to sustainability application is very broad and constantly evolving, thanks to its adaptability to different sectors as well as to the ability to create synergies between different topics. In this sense, this work seeks to find a possible connection between Sustainability and Vintage Marketing topics by exploring the Italian consumers' behaviour during the food purchasing process. In particular, by focusing on agri-food products, this research tries to understand the value consumers assign to value propositions characterized by a nostalgic sentiment related to past experience as well as sustainable features.

Therefore, the rediscovery of such experience from a modern perspective, connected with the paradigm of sustainability, could open a new way in the marketing field, both academic and for managerial implications. It exploits "old" memories as an opportunity to think about sustainability differently.

Although these topics seem to be unrelated, it is possible to create a first theoretical link between the nostalgic sentiment typical of Vintage Marketing strategies and Sustainability in the Italian Agri-food sector. Using the consumers' point of view, a focus on their behaviour at purchasing time as well as their food consumption is studied, detecting those internal and external factors that influence their behaviour.

Therefore, this paper aimed to explore, through an empirical analysis, whether a relationship between the nostalgic sentiment of Vintage Marketing and Sustainability (expressed in its environmental, social, economic aspects) exists, as well as the influence this relationship may have on the Italian's food purchasing decisions. To answer these questions, the data collected through the dissemination of an online questionnaire was analysed to understand whether these two unrelated concepts were actually appreciated and perceived as influential by consumers. Therefore, through the use of Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA), the latent factors among variables were identified and led us to highlight some managerial implications.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 focuses on the analysis of the extant literature and proposes the research questions; Section 3 introduces the methodology while Section 4 brings in the results of the empirical analysis. Finally, the last section includes discussion

and conclusion, suggesting managerial implications as well as future developments.

Annunziata Tarulli  
Domenico Morrone  
Pierluigi Toma  
Exploring connections  
between vintage marketing  
and sustainability in the  
italian agri-food sector. An  
empirical analysis

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Towards a new sustainable consumption

The latest profound environmental changes and the uncertainty connected to the quality-of-life issues have raised several questions that involve, in different ways, both businesses and consumers. Since the early 21st century, the entire capitalist and consumeristic system have been questioned, leading to a focus shift from profit (Porter *et al.*, 2007) to principles relating to ethics, environmental protection, and social progress. For this reason, companies have started to consider their stakeholders in a new light, integrating sustainable development issues with their strategies (Grant, 2008). Consumer behaviour has also changed over time, especially in the last decades which registered deep changes in the consumers' consumption preferences and buying behaviour (Cicia *et al.*, 2021). As for consumption, consumers embraced new sustainable attitudes, moving from mainly compulsive and environmentally impactful careless behaviours (e.g., single-use and disposable products, food wastes, etc.), to more reflective and attentive ones, driven by a complex set of interlinked personal, environmental factors as well as social factors (Verbeke, 2008). This demonstrates the centrality of the role of consumption (Grant *et al.*, 2009), the understanding of which is essential to forecast the direction the way in which individuals' consumption moves.

From these considerations arise the need for fostering more sustainable consumption patterns, as it assumes considerable importance as consumers' attention on concepts such as saving, recycling, and reusing products grows. This way of doing is supported also in literature, which highlights that individuals can have a better life only if they undertake to build a better society (Sardar, 2007).

In their transition towards a more sustainable consumption, consumers can count on Marketing applications (i.e., green marketing, vintage marketing, etc.), which promote the adoption of more conscious and sustainable practices (Morrone, 2012) through new managerial strategies.

### 2.2 Nostalgia and Marketing

*Nostalgia* is a sentiment for the past, typically for a period or place characterized by happy personal associations (Boyms, 2008). It has its origins from a Greek compound and it is defined as an emotional state characterized by a sense of sadness related to the distance from loved ones, or places, or for events that occurred in the past. It was the physician Joannes Hofer, in 1688, to first define the term "nostalgia" by studying the adverse psychological and physiological symptoms displayed by Swiss mercenaries (Wildschut *et al.*, 2006). Since then, many scholars have tried to define and study this topic in its various forms, and apply it to different research areas,

from sociology to philosophy and, in recent years, also to marketing. As for philosophical research literature, several contributions were made. For example, Kant (1798) defined nostalgia as a mere representation of reality, created by the individual on the basis of his own sensory perception. In sociology, on the other hand, it is noteworthy the contribution of Davis (1979) who expressed nostalgia both in personal and communal ways. The first one associates nostalgia with the individual's life cycle, whereas the second refers to a sentiment that involves a large number of subjects within society, observed through the lens of significant events (such as revolutions, wars, etc.).

Marketing introduced the so-called “*nostalgic link*” between consumers and products (Schindler *et al.*, 2003) which identifies a personal relationship between consumer and product during a specific stage of life, called “*preference age peak*”. Holbrook and Schindler (2003) defined nostalgia as “the preference for objects (e.g., people, places, or things) that were more common (e.g., popular, fashionable, or widely distributed) when we were younger (e.g., in adulthood, in adolescence, as children or even before we were born)”. While Holbrook and Shindler can be considered the precursors of scientific studies concerning the nostalgia role in purchasing behaviours and decision-making process, also other scholars contributed to this topic discovering a close relationship between consumer, product, and nostalgia (Holak and Havlena, 1992, 1998; Goudling, 2001; Fairey, 2003; Muehling and Sprott, 2004; Reisenwitz, Iyer and Cutler, 2004; and other). Davis (1979) divided nostalgia into three orders: the first one, the “simple” nostalgia, is based on the belief that individuals consider past objects or events as better; the second, i.e., the “reflexive” nostalgia, is based on the belief that past eras are better than the present ones; lastly, the “interpreted” nostalgia, relates to the comparison that people make between the current situation and the emotions that nostalgia provokes, intending to improve the present. In any case, regardless of the definition adopted, a necessary condition for nostalgia is that individuals must use memories of past emotions/events, which have to be both experienced first-hand and acquired externally (Braun, 2002). In fact, only through the availability and reliability of their recollections, they act and make purchasing decisions recalling past experiences.

In marketing, nostalgia is exploited by bringing to the mind of consumers the history of a brand, its evolution, and all the individuals' personal events connected to that specific brand. In other words, through marketing actions, it is possible to convert a negative sentiment (i.e., nostalgia, defined as the suffering caused by memories of the past) (Wildschut *et al.*, 2006) into new opportunities by developing a greater consumer-brand engagement. From these considerations arise the concept of *Retro* and *Vintage Marketing* which seeks to explain the consumers' continuous search for authenticity towards certain brands with the nostalgic dimension. In addition, the revival of old brands allows us to create a connection between today's consumers, the community in which they live, as well as different generations of consumers, which results to be functional from a strategic side. Therefore, the growing attention to products related to the past.

### 2.3 *The role of nostalgia and sustainability in the consumers' purchasing process*

Annunziata Tarulli  
Domenico Morrone  
Pierluigi Toma  
Exploring connections  
between vintage marketing  
and sustainability in the  
Italian agri-food sector. An  
empirical analysis

When it comes to the consumers' purchasing process, the study of consumer behaviour results to be of great importance as it tries to forecast the possible actions and reactions of individuals or groups to the internal and external stimuli they meet at purchasing time. The analysis and understanding of these stimuli is fundamental as it is able to trigger a series of brain mechanisms that lead consumers to buy a product rather than another (Gallucci, 2019). In fact, the consumers' purchasing choices are influenced by various and complex emotions. Consequently, the ability of businesses to unleash emotions (positive or negative) in consumers' minds is closely related to the stimulation of some specific areas of the brain.

In marketing, particularly in Vintage Marketing, emotions are capable of making the purchasing time more or less attractive in relation to variables that have nothing to do with the characteristics of the product (for example, influenced by past experiences, or related to a particular emotional phenomenon called *somatic marker*). Focusing on the Agri-food sector, the study and understanding of neurological phenomena and the conscious and unconscious motivations that push consumers towards a particular purchase play such a decisive role as to substantially modify the current perception of food. Indeed, studies have shown how modern consumers pay more attention to the value of a product's consumption experience than to the product itself (Meo, 2019). As a result, communication and marketing strategies are no longer directed towards enhancing products but towards individuals, considering their habits, lifestyles, emotions, and perceptions they have during the consumption of food products. Therefore, as individuals are irrational, in the elaboration of purchasing decision-making processes, emotions and memory result to have a leading role.

Emotionality in purchasing choices is widely affirmed in literature (Gallucci, 2019; Lindstorm, 2013), especially in the food products one. Several factors influence the consumers' perception of food products, such as design, packaging, brand image, positioning on shelves, sensory involvement, and memories. As regards memories, they are strictly connected to the vintage concept. In particular, "vintage foods" means all those products that intentionally evoke a habit of a bygone era, more or less distant from the current one, in which they were consumed. In recent years, the vintage concept applied to the Agri-food sector has received considerable interest both from the scientific community and from consumers. As regards consumers, they look to the past to recover the awareness of a more authentic and genuine food style, characterized by greater attention to quality and healthiness attributes of food products, which is totally in contrast to contemporary consumption styles characterised by ready-to-use and highly-processed foods. Therefore, nostalgia in the food sector seeks for authenticity, traditional, and genuine flavours that recall the memory of a rural world and its values.

As for sustainability, the Agri-food sector is no stranger to the change brought by this topic. In fact, empirical evidence shows that the way in

which food products are consumed has a decisive impact both on the individuals' environment, economic and social sphere (Seuneke *et al.*, 2013; Morgan *et al.*, 2009; Goodman and Watts, 2007; Sage, 2014). Therefore, the way in which food products are produced and consumed plays a decisive role in the fight against wastes and towards a more conscious use of natural resources (Carolan, 2018). These considerations push companies to seek new strategies for food production, distribution, and consumption aimed at creating an innovative model of integrated economic development, whose origin lies in the individual local territories.

Regarding consumers' behaviour in the Agri-food sector, several researches (Cristini *et al.*, 2015; Davies *et al.*, 1995; Zanoli *et al.*, 2002) have highlighted the growing interest in consuming organic food and local products. As for organic and local food, consumers associate those aspects related to food safety, naturalness, freshness, healthiness, environmental protection, animal well-being, as well as the maintenance and well-being of rural communities (Lombardi *et al.*, 2015; Bagdonis *et al.*, 2009; DeLind, 2002). Moreover, the interest shown by consumers in local food is linked to a different way of perceiving the quality of food (Migliore *et al.*, 2015), as well as with attributes such as taste and safety.

In this context, information represents a fundamental tool for consumers when they have to purchase, especially in the food sector. Therefore, the need for a complete information as regards the attributes of quality *experience* (i.e., taste, freshness, etc.), *convenience* (i.e., simplicity and convenience of consumption) and *credence* (i.e., organic products, environmental and social sustainability, the origin of the product and ethics), which play a leading role since they represent the basic characteristics of food products (Ophuis *et al.*, 1995; Andersen and Philipsen, 1998; Deshmukh and Mohan, 2015).

Organic products belong to *credence* attributes. They differ from traditional food for the way in which they are produced (i.e., no chemical pesticides, cultivation that follows the course of the season, etc.). As for the way in which consumers approach to organic products, many scholars studied this phenomenon and concluded that consumers associate the term "organic" with elements such as naturalness, health and well-being, human respect, the environment and nature, quality, and the concept of "unprocessed" (Cristini and Bellini, 2015; Davies *et al.*, 1995). An interesting result was that of Haghner *et al.* (2007), which highlighted the existence of a relationship between consumers of organic food products and "nostalgia", as the attributes of these products are able to recall memories of the past and old traditions.

However, despite the high interest of consumers towards organic products, high prices and low disposable incomes represent the primary factors limiting their purchases. Demographic variables (i.e., age, education, income, etc...) were also found to be influential (in a positive or negative way) in the purchase of organic products. Therefore, from these considerations, arises the need to understand whether a relationship between vintage and sustainable aspects exists, its influence as well as the impact the latent factors have on Italian Agri-food purchases. In detail, the following two research questions were empirically tested:

RQ1: *Is there a relationship between the nostalgic feeling deriving from Vintage Marketing and the awareness of purchasing a sustainable food product?*

RQ2: *If such a relationship exists, what is its effect and intensity in influencing the purchase of Agri-food products?*

Annunziata Tarulli  
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Exploring connections  
between vintage marketing  
and sustainability in the  
Italian agri-food sector. An  
empirical analysis

### 3. Methodology and data

#### 3.1 Research objectives

Therefore, the current research has two aims. First, it seeks to find a possible relationship between *Sustainability* (declined in its environmental, social and economic aspects) and *Vintage Marketing* (i.e., the “nostalgia effect”) topics in the Italian Agri-food sector. The second, closely connected to the first, aims to find out whether this connection can influence the Italians’ Agri-food product purchases.

Based on the previous background, a questionnaire was built in order to identify those attributes that influence consumers at purchasing time. In particular, it investigated on the following attributes: the food characteristics consumers value the most, their level of knowledge and behaviour towards sustainability aspects, the influence that products recalling past experience have on their purchasing behaviour, as well as their propensity towards organic products. From the analysis of these attributes, it will be possible to understand the nature of consumers’ behaviour at food-purchasing time but also whether certain characteristics may influence their final choices.

#### 3.2 Questionnaire development and variables description

To perform the analysis, the data was collected through the dissemination of an online questionnaire. In particular, the investigation was addressed to a well-stratified sample of Italian consumers and lasted approximately a month (from September to October 2019). The Google Form platform was used to disseminate and collect data.

The survey included 28 questions divided into the following five sections: variables related to Sustainability topic, variables that influence food purchase process, variables related to the Vintage Marketing topic, variables related to organic Agri-food products, and demographic variables. Some questions provided a five-point Likert scale evaluation (where ‘1’ and ‘5’ identified a poor or high match) while others included open or multiple-choice answers. The Likert scale is a psychometric response scale used to measure the level of agreement, attitude, or opinion of the respondents to a statement or question. It measures the extent to which the respondents agree or disagree on a particular topic (Preedy, 2010). The most common scales use five- or seven-points. In this work, a five-point one was used as it is easier to understand and provides a better distribution of data (Matell and Jacoby, 1972). The multiple-choice answers, on the other hand, are useful in understanding the factors that most influence consumer behaviour in the proposed scenarios.

The first section investigated the attention and level of knowledge consumers have on sustainability, their sustainable daily practices, and the importance they give to sustainability aspects at purchasing time. The second section was related to understanding the features consumers value the most when it comes to purchasing food products. In particular, it was asked to evaluate characteristics such as quality, organoleptic properties, availability, price, to name a few. The Vintage Marketing section analysed consumer buying behaviour to understand whether Schindler's "nostalgic link" influence the Agri-food purchasing process. In particular, the nostalgia effect, its importance at purchasing time, and its link with organic and authenticity were explored. Lastly, the demographic section explored essential demographic items such as gender, age, income, education, qualification, and job.

Table 1 summarizes the description of the variables and their measure.

*Tab. 1: Variables description table*

Name	Description	Measure
Variables related to Sustainability		
InfoSust	Expresses the degree of information perceived by the respondent about environmental, social and economic sustainability.	closed, Likert scale
SustPract	Indicates the respondent's implementation of sustainable consumption practices.	closed, Likert scale
PurcSUSTinfl	Aims to understand whether, at purchasing time, the consumer pays attention to sustainability aspects.	closed, Likert scale
PurcENVprot	Indicates how much a consumer pays attention to environmental protection in purchases decisions making.	closed, Likert scale
Variables that influence food purchase process		
Pdt_COST	Refers to the price of food products.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_AVAI	Refers to the availability of the product.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_QUAL	Concerns the quality of food.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_PACK	Refers to the packaging.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_INGR	Refers to the ingredients.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_TAST	Refers to the taste.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_SAV	Refers to saving.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_ADV	Refers to advertising.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_PROMO	Refers to the presence of promotions in stores.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_STORE	Refers to the store.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_ENVprot	Refers to the attention, at purchasing time, on products designed and produced with respect for the environment.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_WORKprot	Refers to the attention, at purchasing time, on products designed and produced with respect for workers protection.	closed, Likert scale
Pdt_OTH	Refers to the presence of additional attributes (different from the previous ones) that influence consumers at purchasing time.	closed, Likert scale
Variables related to Vintage Marketing		
PurcVINT	Indicates whether the consumer is attracted to food products that remind of the past.	closed, Likert scale
VintEFACT	Aims to quantify the incidence of past memories in food purchasing choices.	closed, Likert scale
VintAUT	Refers to consumers' association between the concept of "food of the past" and the authenticity of the product itself.	closed, Likert scale
VintSUST	Indicates and quantifies the existence of a relationship between the concept of sustainability and vintage food products.	closed, Likert scale
Variables related to organic Agri-food products		
PdtBIO	Refers to organic food products and, in particular, to the idea that consumers have of these.	closed, single choice
No_BIO	Refers to the reasons why consumers do not buy and consume organic food products.	closed, single choice
Demographic variables		
GENDER	Refers to sexual gender.	closed, binary choice
EDUC	Refers to educational qualification.	open, numerical
OCCUP	Refers to the occupation.	closed, single choice
AGE	Refers to age.	closed, single choice
INCOME	Refers to income	closed, single choice

Source: our elaboration



### 3.3 Data and Sample

The online survey reached 450 respondents. Only responses with no missing data were included in the final sample. Participants were 65% female and 35% male, with an average age of 44 years old. As for education, most of the sample had a high school education (59%), followed by college or university (34%) and postgraduate (7%). As regards the profession, the 45% of the sample was a worker, while the remaining part was students (18%), self-employers (13%), and so on. The average monthly income was below Euro 1999,00. Considering this data, it is possible to state that the sample is well-stratified and balanced. Table 2 summarizes the sample composition.

Tab. 2: Sample composition (in percentage, %)

Gender	Age (years)	Education	Profession	Monthly income (€)
Female, 65	18-25, 21	High school or below, 59	Student, 18	< 999, 41
Male, 35	26-40, 25	College or university, 34	Employed, 45	1.000-1.999, 38
	41-55, 34	Postgraduate, 7	Entrepreneur, 6	2.000-2.999, 14
	56-65, 16		Self-employed, 13	> 3.000, 7
	> 65, 4		Unemployed, 8	
			Retired, 10	

Source: our elaboration

## 4. Results

To answer the research questions, the data collected was studied as follows. At first, a descriptive analysis was carried out focusing on the purchasing attributes related to sustainability, food characteristics, nostalgia effect, and organic products. Subsequently, two Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) were performed to identify those latent factors underlying the phenomena under study. In particular, the attributes that influence the purchase intentions, as well as the connection between sustainability aspects and nostalgia effect, were examined.

### 4.1 Focus on the sample's purchasing attributes

The first step was, therefore, to analyse the attributes that the respondents value during their food purchasing process. As for the sustainability aspects, Table 3 shows that most of the sample has a medium level of knowledge of sustainability (45%) and adopt sustainable practices in daily life (e.g., attention to wastes, recycling, use of the bike instead of the car, etc...) (35%). Furthermore, the possible relationship between food purchases and sustainability was studied both in general terms as well as focusing on environmental protection. As for the generic relationship, 42% of the sample declares to be quite influenced by sustainability aspects during purchasing, whereas the remainder is fairly (24%) or highly (13%)

influenced. This demonstrates the sample's growing interest in purchasing food products geared toward sustainable consumption (only 6,4% of the sample are not affected at all). This trend is also confirmed by the attention to environmental sustainability (i.e., the purchase of organic products or from particular areas), which obtains higher percentage scores as attention increases (Tab. 3).

*Tab. 3: Purchasing attributes of food and sustainability (in percentage, %)*

Likert's scale	Knowledge-level of sustainability	Sustainable practices	Sustainable influence in purchasing food products	Attention to environmental sustainability
1	4	2	6	8
2	19	11	15	14
3	45	32	42	28
4	25	35	24	31
5	7	20	13	19

Source: our elaboration

As for food product characteristics, the respondents value features like quality, ingredients, and taste of medium-high importance. On the other hand, attributes such as advertising, packaging, point of sale, worker protection, availability, environmental protection, and price had a medium-low relevance. Regarding savings and promotions, these attributes deserve different considerations. The results show that there is a share of consumers who consider these attributes of little relevance - therefore they pay more attention to other characteristics (e.g., quality) - and there is a share of consumers for whom it assumes clearly higher importance.

Next, the study focused on Vintage and its possible implications in the Agri-food sector. Table 4 confirms the existence of an attraction to food products that evoke the past in the minds of consumers (e.g., foods consumed during childhood/adolescence). More specifically, more than half of the sample is considered to be substantially influenced by vintage elements at purchasing time, while the rest of the sample records no influence, or little and medium influence. As for Agri-food products, 33% of the sample shows a high incidence of nostalgia in their Agri-food purchases, while the rest of the sample reports a medium (30%), low (26%) or absent (11%) incidence (Tab. 4). In addition, the association between nostalgia and authenticity (i.e., a greater naturalness of food products that evoke past experiences) was also investigated. The results show that 54% of the respondents associate a greater genuineness to nostalgic food products, while the rest of the sample identifies an intermediate (23%), low (13%), or absent (10%) association. Lastly, the link between nostalgic food products and sustainability was found as 70% of the respondents expressed a medium-high connection between these two topics (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4: *Vintage (in percentage, %)*

Likert's scale	Food products and nostalgia effect	Incidence of nostalgia effect at purchasing time	Vintage food and genuineness	Vintage food and sustainability
1	8	11	10	9
2	16	26	13	21
3	25	30	23	41
4	31	21	24	21
5	20	12	30	8

Source: our elaboration

As for organic products, the analysis revealed that the respondents consider organic food products healthier (20%) and less chemically treated and less processed (72%), than non-organic food products. Furthermore, 6% of the sample considers these products a return to “the good food of the past”, while only 1% believes that they are tastier. Lastly, the respondents identified the following reasons why organic food products are not purchased: excessive cost (66%), lack of confidence in these products (24%), or lack of interest in this food category (9%).

This descriptive analysis allows us to make some initial reflections. There seems to be a growing attention from consumers towards responsible food consumption, which is positively associated with the “nostalgia effect” as they connect the attribute of authenticity to “vintage food product”. Consequently, it generates a first meeting point between sustainability and vintage topics. In addition, also other attributes - such as quality, ingredients, and taste - seem to influence these purchases. Finally, as regards organic food products, the majority of consumers understand and appreciate these products but still consider them too expensive.

#### 4.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis: Consumers' purchase intention

Once the variables were defined, the analysis focuses on detecting the latent factors influencing the purchasing intention of consumers. Therefore, the first Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed using the twelve variables influencing food purchasing process. However, before proceeding with the analysis, the correlation matrix was first carried out. Table 5 shows good and medium-high positive correlations among all the variables, thus confirming the importance of these attributes when it comes to purchase food products.

Tab. 5: Correlation Matrix

	COST	AVAI	QUAL	PACK	INGR	TAST	SAV	ADV	PROMO	STORE	ENVprot	WORKprot
Pdt_COST	1											
Pdt_AVAI	0,55	1										
Pdt_QUAL	0,49	0,49	1									
Pdt_PACK	0,27	0,36	0,44	1								
Pdt_INGR	0,31	0,43	0,71	0,48	1							
Pdt_TAST	0,5	0,52	0,74	0,42	0,61	1						
Pdt_SAV	0,78	0,53	0,5	0,31	0,34	0,5	1					
Pdt_ADV	0,34	0,41	0,37	0,39	0,32	0,34	0,4	1				
Pdt_PROMO	0,57	0,41	0,41	0,29	0,28	0,46	0,6	0,48	1			
Pdt_STORE	0,25	0,48	0,32	0,41	0,32	0,37	0,33	0,43	0,4	1		
Pdt_ENVprot	0,3	0,44	0,6	0,49	0,64	0,5	0,35	0,3	0,24	0,36	1	
Pdt_WORKprot	0,25	0,4	0,55	0,4	0,58	0,49	0,29	0,28	0,18	0,35	0,8	1

Source: our elaboration with IBM SPSS Statistics

In order to perform a robust analysis, two tests were performed to understand whether the sample was adequate for the development of the model: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measurement (KMO Test) and the Test of Sphericity by Bartlett. Both measures were found to be significant (Tab. 6) as KMO values higher than 0,7 are to be considered satisfactory. Therefore, we proceeded with the analysis.

Tab. 6: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,881
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3.060,707
	df	66
	Sig.	,000

Source: our elaboration with IBM SPSS Statistics

The next step was to study Communalities, which indicates how much the variance of each considered variable is explained by common factors. The analysis showed significant values so the Total Variance Explained was then carried out. Its results identified the three factors to be extracted, as they were the ones capable of explaining more than half of the total variance of the phenomenon under study (69,9%). Finally, the Rotated Component Matrix detected the three latent factors among the variables, summarised in Table 7.

The first factor includes the variables *Pdt\_ENVprot*, *Pdt\_WORKprot*, *Pdt\_INGR*, *Pdt\_QUAL*, and *Pdt\_TAST*, which identifies the component that combines sustainability with product quality (Sustainability and Quality). The second includes the variables *Pdt\_COST*, *Pdt\_SAV*, *Pdt\_PROMO*, and *Pdt\_AVAI* and is defined as the economic component that considers the relevance of the price, savings, and promotions, which is associated with the importance of availability (Price and Availability). The last factor refers to the variables *Pdt\_STORE*, *Pdt\_ADV*, and *Pdt\_PACK*, which relates to marketing aspects as they consider the influence of the store type, advertising, and packaging (Marketing).

Tab. 7: Rotated Component Matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
Pdt_ENVprot	,843		
Pdt_WORKprot	,829		
Pdt_INGR	,808		
Pdt_QUAL	,727		
Pdt_TAST	,623		
Pdt_COST		,884	
Pdt_SAV		,846	
Pdt_PROMO		,704	
Pdt_AVAI		,516	
Pdt_STORE			,798
Pdt_ADV			,721
Pdt_PACK			,544

Annunziata Tarulli  
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Exploring connections  
between vintage marketing  
and sustainability in the  
italian agri-food sector. An  
empirical analysis

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Varimax

Source: our elaboration with IBM SPSS Statistics

#### 4.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis: Sustainability and “nostalgia effect” in Agri-food sector

Subsequently, it was performed the second Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), which examined the possible relationships between the concept of sustainability and the “nostalgia effect” in the Agri-food purchases. The *Correlation Matrix* (Tab. 8) shows, this time, different results as negative correlations are found in the VintAUT and PurcVINT variables. However, even if negative, these correlations have values really close to zero. The remaining variables, on the other hand, detect positive correlations ranging from low to medium-high values.

Tab. 8: Correlation Matrix

	InfoSust	SustPract	PurcSUSTinfl	PurcENVprot	PurcVINT	VintEFCT	VintAUT	VintSUST	AGE
InfoSust	1								
SustPract	0,351	1							
PurcSUSTinfl	0,359	0,46	1						
PurcENVprot	0,293	0,346	0,608	1					
PurcVINT	0,06	0,018	0,11	0,105	1				
VintEFCT	0,061	0,057	0,177	0,158	0,748	1			
VintAUT	-0,015	-0,005	0,049	0,099	0,272	0,319	1		
VintSUST	0,051	0,108	0,239	0,203	0,396	0,468	0,408	1	
AGE	0,073	0,165	0,196	0,158	-0,086	0,006	0,204	0,075	1

Source: our elaboration with IBM SPSS Statistics

Therefore, we proceeded with the KMO and the Bartlett’s Test, which verified the adequacy of the sample (Tab. 9).

Tab. 9: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,698
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1.067,617
	df	36
	Sig.	,000

Source: our elaboration with IBM SPSS Statistics

Following, the analysis of Communalities was carried out and confirmed the ability of the common factors in explaining a relevant part of the total variance of the extracted variables. Then, the analysis of the Total Variance Explained defined in three the factors capable of explaining more than half of the total variance (i.e., 64,30%), which were finally detected with the Rotated Component Matrix (Tab. 10).

Tab. 10: Rotated Component Matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
VintEFCT	,884		
PurcVINT	,875		
VintSUST	,672		
PurcSUSTinfl		,816	
PurcENVprot		,734	
SustPract		,725	
InfoSust		,665	
AGE			,816
VintAUT			,634

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax

Source: our elaboration with IBM SPSS Statistics

Specifically, the first component includes the variables related to the attraction to food products that remind of the past, the incidence of past memories in food purchasing choices, and the relationship between the concept of sustainability and vintage food products (i.e., *VintEFCT*, *PurcVINT*, and *VintSUST*). Therefore, this first component demonstrates the latent existence of a relationship between the vintage features and sustainability in the food purchases (Vintage and Sustainability). The second factor combines the *PurcSUSTinfl*, *PurcENVprot*, *SustPract*, and *InfoSust* variables, which relate to the growing influence that sustainability has in Agri-food products purchasing and, in particular, to the increasingly role of sustainable knowledge and practices (Knowledge and Influence of Sustainability). Lastly, the third component refers to the *AGE* and *VintAUT* variables. It confirms the first latent factor but it highlights a totally different aspect. In this sense, the positive relationship between past purchasing experiences, the perception of authenticity of vintage Agri-food products, and sustainability are demonstrated. It is interesting to emphasize that

past purchases, with a strong nostalgic component, not only influence future purchases but manage to significantly evoke the feeling of a healthy, genuine and sustainable product (Past experience).

Annunziata Tarulli  
Domenico Morrone  
Pierluigi Toma  
Exploring connections  
between vintage marketing  
and sustainability in the  
italian agri-food sector. An  
empirical analysis

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The results confirmed the consumers' growing attention towards a more responsible consumption of food products, as well as a positive relationship between sustainability aspects and the nostalgic sentiment. In particular, an initial connection between these topics is discovered in the first latent factor, which proves the existence of a relationship between the greater value that consumers give to vintage food products - as well as its importance in influencing food purchases - and sustainable applications. In this context, indeed, knowledge of sustainability and its potential is fundamental in the application and implementation of best practices for businesses. In fact, by exploiting the greater value customers place on vintage food products, companies can maximize their revenues by changing their offer toward a more authentic and sustainable one. Furthermore, the great power assigned to nostalgic sentiment should also be noted. In fact, past purchases characterised by strong nostalgic components are able not only to influence future purchases but also manage to significantly evoke the feeling of a healthy, genuine, and sustainable product. Therefore, companies should consider these aspects in their business practices, the implementation of which could strategically lead to greater benefits in terms of consumer awareness, brand reputation and corporate image, besides economics.

Moreover, also the other attributes that influence the Agri-food purchasing process need to be exploited, as their analysis could open to further managerial considerations. As for economic attributes (i.e., price, savings, and promotions), for example, the need to set up new advertising strategies emerged, focused on the enhancement of the product (e.g., packaging) and the enhancement of better purchasing experience for consumers (e.g., more attractive stores).

A final consideration must be made regarding organic food products. The analysis highlighted that even if most of the sample positively links attributes like quality, authenticity, and healthiness to these products, however, the connection between organic and vintage topics appeared to be almost non-existent. Nonetheless, companies should still promote this connection as nostalgia is gaining interest among consumers. Therefore, besides the healthiness and authenticity attributes, future marketing campaigns should emphasise the return to the good products of the past as this is the ultimate goal of the organic products.

In conclusion, the obtained results allow us to positively answer the research questions underlying this study. In fact, exploratory factor analyses have shown that the relationship between nostalgic sentiment and sustainable food products exists, is positive, and consumers are aware of it. Therefore, even in this first exploratory stage of the study, a meeting point between sustainability and vintage was discovered.

Undoubtedly, this study is not without limitations. First, the sample under study is quite small (e.g., it reached only 450 respondents) and, moreover, it relates only to Italian consumers. However, as this represents a first step in the exploration of these themes, we expect to overcome this limitation by deeply analysing these topics in future researches. Therefore, future analyses should include a bigger dataset, collected from a wider and diversified sample, from different countries. The second limitation, on the other hand, is strictly related to the novelty of the topic under study. In fact, this work provides a preliminary understanding of the connections between the Vintage Marketing and Sustainability topics. With our results, we seek to lay the foundations for a new research perspective in the management arena, the understanding of which will be key to directing companies towards more consumer-oriented strategies. This way of doing will benefit both companies and consumers: companies because they will reach the desired sales level and increase their reputation, consumers because they will find and purchase products in line with their desires.

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