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## EFFECTIVENESS OF ORGANIC FOOD MARKETING

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**ABSTRACT:** The principal aim of this study was to assess the economic results and marketing effectiveness of selected companies dealing with the production and distribution of organic food. The diagnostic survey method was applied in the study. It was conducted on popular social media in 2021 with 686 respondents. The study findings show that the marketing strategy has been ineffective so far. This means that there exists an informationally excluded area, which must be filled in. Therefore, effective product marketing should be developed based on personalised advertisements on social media and online trade. The study findings can contribute to the popularisation and broadening of knowledge regarding the behaviour of organic food buyers. Determining the factors affecting the buying process and motivations will aid stakeholders in building an effective marketing strategy for organic food. This may have a beneficial effect on the development and diversification of the organic food market, whose production may contribute to an improvement of the natural environment condition and the quality of life, as well as the promotion of local food producers.

**KEYWORDS:** organic food, organic food marketing, marketing effectiveness

## Introduction

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The organic food market in Poland is becoming increasingly popular. Eco-food producers use specially created instruments promoting eco-products to compete for customers with conventional food manufacturers. The eco fashion and the increasing awareness of society encourage entrepreneurs to introduce new production and logistics-related solutions. It is difficult to keep prices in the organic food market at a competitive level despite the relatively higher costs of production and distribution. This has been confirmed by studies conducted by IQS, which show that high prices are the most significant barrier to the development of organic food production (according to 68% of the respondents) (Gryn, 2020). The compensation seems obvious. However, the demand for organic food depends on many factors, e.g. on the consumers' wealth, their awareness of how food affects their health, the marketing instruments used by the enterprise, lack of sufficient knowledge about organic products, quality and health safety of organic food, high inflation (Jarossova & Mindasova, 2015; Grzybek, 2016; Najiib et al., 2021; Tandon et al., 2020; Hanus, 2020; Kowalczyk & Kwasek, 2020). Existing barriers in the organic food market can significantly reduce, i.e. strong structures consisting of many units providing official food control and consumer education and promotion of short food chains (Kowalczyk & Kwasek, 2020). A well-constructed marketing strategy and the use of effective promotion instruments directed at a specific segment help to increase sales, which has a beneficial impact on the financial result, especially in the organic food market (Witek, 2014).

The rapid changes in the organic food market in Poland make it difficult for new producers of such food to find a place in it. Bio Planet, Organic Farma Zdrowia and Symbio Polska are among the leading producers and distributors of organic food, supplying the majority of the certified products present on the Polish market. Their goods seem not fully recognised by customers, which is reflected in their economic results. This is a topical issue as promoting healthy nutrition rules and consuming products with a high nutritional value is important and justified now that obesity has become widespread and the threat posed by diet-related and neurodegenerative diseases is growing. However, like any kind of business activity, this one also must be profitable. These considerations raise the question: Is the current marketing strategy effective, and is it reflected in the economic results of Bio Planet, Organic Farma Zdrowia and Symbio Polska – entities producing and distributing organic food?

An attempt was made to assess the effectiveness of marketing activities of companies which produce organic food, which may have affected the

financial condition of the companies. The financial result enables one to measure and assess a company's achievements. The data for the analyses were taken from the financial reports published by the companies under analysis. Notably, due to the small group size, the study material is of no statistical value, and it does not provide grounds for general conclusions. However, it can be a reference point in in-depth studies of the issue. Moreover, the study is partly based on the material obtained from a survey conducted with a questionnaire (which has some flaws, i.e. it is superficial and provides a limited opportunity to present the issue in question).

## An overview of the literature

Organic food is becoming increasingly popular in recent years, although according to Gryn (2020), "bio- and organic food was still a caprice of royals, elites and the rich in the early 21st century". There were probably many reasons for this, e.g. many celebrities promote this market segment with their healthy lifestyle – they claim that King Charles III owes the fact that he went through COVID-19 so mildly to his healthy lifestyle, which involved switching to organic food. The British sovereign has had his organic brand (Duchy Originals) (with over 300 products on offer) since the 1980s, and it has been increasing its income steadily. Due to the media promoting new trends among the young, "zero waste" cuisine and "healthy food" are gaining popularity. This may not be as new as it might seem because housewives used to manage the scant resources in the time of deficit and shortages and tried to use eco-resources, making healthy soup from nettle and goosefoot, acorn pancakes or bread with an admixture of birch bark (Zaprutko-Janicka, 2015). New solutions appear in crisis times, promoting frugality in managing resources, e.g. co-kitchens (NaWidelcu, 2022).

The organic food market is very interesting, and it may be a promising niche in the food economy. Its output and turnover have been growing rapidly in recent years. In the European Union countries in the years 2012-2018, the area of ecological farmland increased by 33.7 p.p. (from 10 047 896 ha in 2012 to 13 438 168 ha in 2018), and a significant increase in sales of organic food was recorded in this period (from 20.8 billion in 2012 to 37.4 billion in 2018) (European Parliament, 2018). Also, in the USA and in Europe, it grew steadily, which manifests itself in a nearly 10% share of organic food in the food market in the USA and Germany and a 20% share in Denmark (Mulder & Liu, 2017; Gryn, 2020; Czudec et al., 2022). Organic food is also becoming increasingly popular in France, the UK and Switzerland (Ruiz de Maya et al., 2011; Ham, 2019) (Figure 1).

## billion EURO

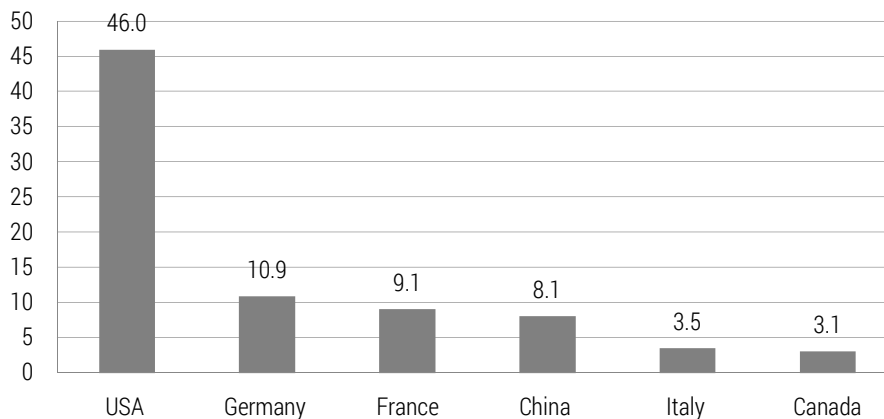


Figure 1. The volume of consumption of organic foods in 2018

Source: authors' work based on European Parliament (2018).

The value of the organic food market in Poland was estimated at 1.1 billion PLN in 2018-2020, and it is still growing. Compared to the entire food market in Poland, however, this is a small amount; according to the data of the Polish Chamber of Organic Food (PIŹE, 2019), the average consumer spending in Poland in 2017 on organic food was at the level of EUR 6 per capita per year, which was 1/10 of the EU average. The Swiss, Danes and Swedes spent the most on organic food in the year (EUR 288-237 per capita per year). Many scientific researchers emphasise that the amount of spending on organic food is influenced by the economic development of the country reflected in the level of GDP per capita (Smoluk-Sikorska, 2010; Kułyk & Michałowska, 2016; Hermaniuk, 2018).

The European Commission published the *European Strategy for Biodiversity 2030* and the *“From the Field to the Table” Strategy* in 2020 (Komisja Europejska, 2020), which specify the measures spanning the whole food production process. These will also include international cooperation concerning sustainable food systems. The measures mentioned above include the development of organic farming, whose principles cover pro-consumer activities aimed, for example, at shortening supply chains. Stimulation of the sale of goods produced and sold locally will improve the safety of food supply to customers. This is expected to improve organic food availability on the market, which may promote organic food production. This may provide many diverse benefits, and consumers will enjoy healthy products of high quality and sensory value. An increase in organic food production will help to increase the farmers' income and use the existing labour resources on farms more effectively and protect the natural environment (Czudec et al., 2022).

The popularity of organic food is also increasing in Poland because increasingly aware consumers are seeking healthy, GMO-free food (Witek & Szalonka, 2017), without pesticides and allergising or harmful additives, preferably in biodegradable packaging (Witkowska-Dąbrowska et al., 2020). Moreover, the better quality of such products is seen as resulting from a higher content of bioactive compounds, e.g. antioxidants (Żakowska-Biemans, 2009; Kułyk & Michałowska, 2018). Apart from that, according to Prof. Rembiałkowska, eating organic food regularly can contribute to “decreasing a risk of diet-related and neurodegenerative diseases (i.e. Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease) and cancers (e.g. breast cancer or lymphoma)...” (Gryn, 2020). Some consumers in Poland are aware that organic and conventional foods are produced differently. The latter does not contain artificial additives, and it is often produced by local manufacturers, who take measures aimed at improvement of soil quality, reducing water and air pollution and increasing biodiversity (Hole et al., 2005; Mulder & Liu, 2017). Others, who want to remain fashionable, try to catch up with their influencers who promote eco-trends and environmental protection. Therefore, it is worthwhile to use the current interest in healthy organic food and attempt to build effective product marketing based on the widespread use of e-resources, i.e. digital marketing channels based on online trade and personalised advertising (Novytska et al., 2021; Abrar et al., 2016).

## Research methods

The main purpose of the study was to assess the economic results and marketing effectiveness of products of selected companies dealing with the production and distribution of organic food. The diagnostic survey method was applied in the study, and a questionnaire was used as the research technique. The sample was carefully selected, and the questionnaire was addressed to consumers who bought organic food, which helped to assess the recognisability of organic food. The questionnaire was constructed by the study authors based on the literature on the subject (Ünal et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019; Dangi et al., 2020; Loera et al., 2022). The research employed the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method and was conducted through an online panel in popular social media in late 2021 with 686 participants. The data were verified with respect to the formal aspects and their completeness, and the study material was subsequently analysed.

This paper presents only a part of the pilot study. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions in its first part. They revealed the motivation and preferences of organic food consumers in the buying process. The sec-

ond part of the questionnaire contained a metric with questions concerning the age, sex, education, professional situation, place of residence and marital status of the respondents. The population under study was dominated by a group of young respondents (aged 18-25 years accounted for 93% of the population). This may be explained by the fact that the questionnaire was uploaded to a popular online social media platform, with young people having relatively easier access. The group under study included individuals with secondary (65%) and higher (26%) education, and the others had primary or vocational education. More than half of the respondents (54%) declared living in an informal relationship, a considerable portion (37%) were not in any official relationship, and only a small group (7%) were married. More than half of the respondents (55%) chose the response "I'm studying", with members of this group declaring having temporary work under a contract of mandate. Moreover, every third (36%) of respondents worked professionally, and only 4% were unemployed.

This study employed the analysis: of literature, monographic, comparative and financial data based on financial reports of companies dealing with the production and distribution of organic products. This study examined the financial results of BioPlanet, Organic Farma Zdrowia and Symbio Polska in 2015-2020. It involved document examination – this paper presents part of its results.

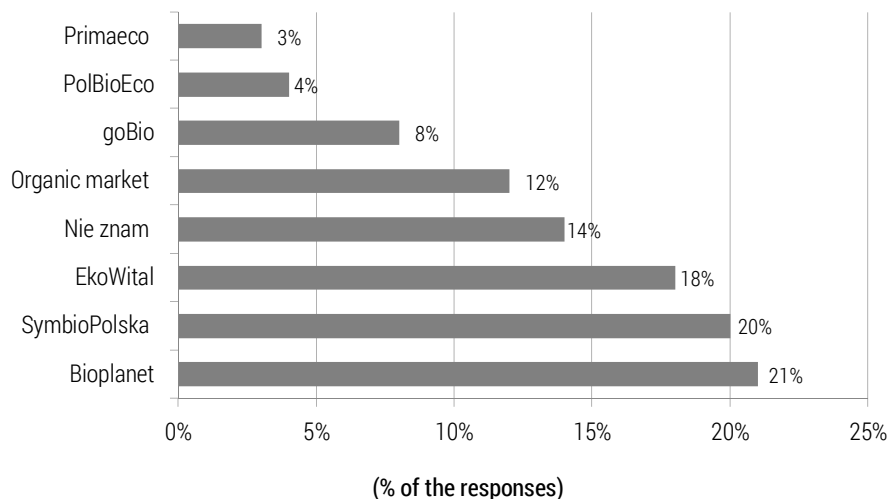
The obtained research results can fill the cognitive gap and contribute to deepening knowledge about the behaviour of organic food buyers. This may have a beneficial effect on the development and diversification of the market for organic food, whose production may contribute to the improvement of the natural environment, promotion of local producers of organic food and quality of life.

## Results of the research

The study included an analysis of the available economic information, such as reports of the company (Bio Planet, Organic Farma Zdrowia, Symbio Polska) and its activities published online (Table 1). Part of the analysis is presented in this paper. All of the companies earned income from the sale of products in 2015-2021 (except Symbio Polska – no data available for 2020-21). According to these data, the position of BioPlanet was better compared to the other entities (dynamics of income from sales in 2015-2021 ranged from 101% to 136%). The income from sales of Organic Farma Zdrowia in 2015-2020 was relatively stable (the dynamics index ranged from 102% to 113%), but a decrease in revenue was noted in 2021 compared to the previous year. The economic results of Symbio Polska were not satisfactory. This

was reflected in the financial result: the net profit reported by BioPlanet ranged from 2.002 kPLN in 2015 to 83 kPLN in 2018, but it increased later (it amounted to 3.610 kPLN in 2021). The other entities reported a loss in 2015-2021 (except Organic Farma Zdrowia, which reported a profit of 1.050 kPLN in 2015). The economic results of the companies under examination did not bring the desired profit to the investors in Organic Farma Food or Symbio Polska (a decrease in share value was reported in 2015-2021 – Table 1). The net profit per share of BioPlanet in the period under study ranged from PLN 0.03 PLN in 2018 to PLN 1.78 in 2020.

It seems that increasing awareness and knowledge of the beneficial properties and the fashion for consuming organic food among consumers should result in an increase in their interest, which should be reflected in an increase in the income from sales. However, this was not the case for all the selected companies – it may have been caused by numerous factors, such as the lack of/decrease in the available financial resources caused by people losing their jobs during the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, many customers switched to traditional cooking at home in order to save money or out of necessity. A question was asked at the time, whether this was caused only by these factors. A hypothesis was put forward that the economic result achieved by Organic Farma Zdrowia and Symbio Polska depended on the recognisability of both companies' product brands. The further examination involved a pilot study in the form of a diagnostic survey concerning the knowledge of the selected companies.



**Figure 2.** Recognisability of entities dealing with the production and distribution of organic food [%]

**Table 1.** Economic results in selected companies dealing with the production and distribution of organic food

Item	Profit for selling (kPLN)		Dynamics index (previous year = 100%)		Net profit (kPLN)		Net profit per share (PLN/share)	
	Bioplanet	Organic Farma Zdrowia	Bioplanet	Organic Farma Zdrowia	Bioplanet	Organic Farma Zdrowia	Bioplanet	Organic Farma Zdrowia
2015	86071	80814	-	-	2002	1 050	0.71	0.234
2016	113469	91126	132%	113%	792	-3 031	0.28	-0.676
2017	123293	93279	109%	102%	1016	-5 059	0.36	-1.129
2018	128441	98223	104%	105%	83	-4 048	0.03	-0.903
2019	153060	100011	119%	102%	1812	-5 672	0.65	-1.266
2020	203929	102696	133%	103%	4991	-5 331	1.78	-1,092
2021	205476	100279	101%	98%	3610	-13653	1.29	-2.481

Source: authors' work based on Bankier.pl (2021; 2022; 2023).



The respondents were asked whether they knew the names of companies which dealt in the production and distribution of organic food (Figure 2). The results show the highest recognisability among potential customers for Bio Planet (21% of responses), Symbio Polska (20% of responses) and EkoWital (18% of responses). The respondents less frequently mentioned the companies of goBio (8% of responses), PolBioEco (4% of responses) and Primaeco (3% of responses).

The respondents were also asked about their knowledge of organic food in various groups of products manufactured by the selected companies, i.e. Symbio Polska, BioPlanet and Organic Farma. Photos of packaging were provided in the questionnaire to make it easier to recognise the products. More than half of the respondents (64%) did not know the dairy products shown in the illustrations (Figure 3). Only 15% of them recognised tofu of the Symbio Polska brand, 14% of them recognised vanilla cheese made by BioPlanet, and the smallest percentage recognised yoghurt made by Organic Farma (7%). The respondents were also asked about another product category – snacks (Figure 3).

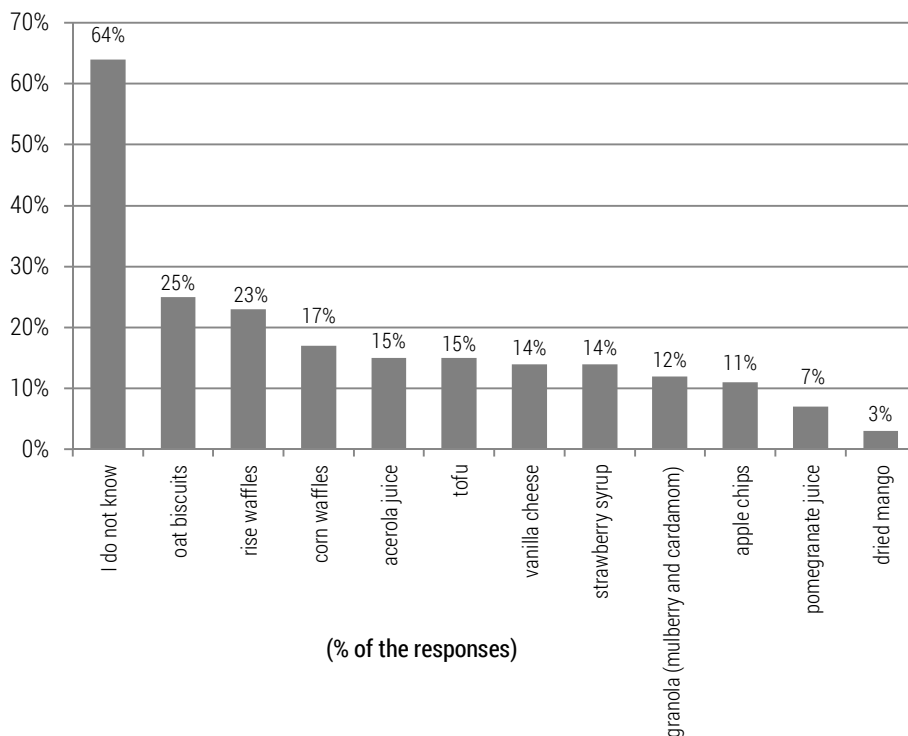
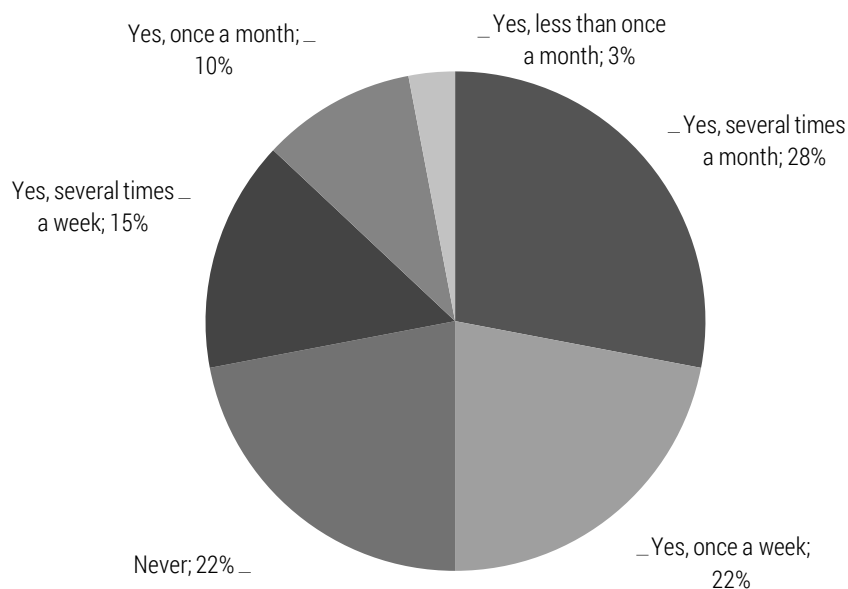


Figure 3. Recognisability of organic food products

In this category, they mentioned oat biscuits made by Symbio Polska (25%) the most frequently and rice waffles made by BioPlanet (17% of the responses). Only 3% of them were aware of mango produced by Organic Farma. The respondents were asked about their knowledge of individual juices. Acerola juice made by BioPlanet was the most recognisable product in this category (15%). It was usually available in health food shops due to its beneficial effect on the body. Strawberry syrup made by Symbio was mentioned by 14% of the population under study, and the pomegranate juice produced by Organic was mentioned by only 7%.

There are different reasons for consumers choosing to buy organic food, e.g. their anxiety associated with the impact of the method of nutrition on the incidence of diet-related diseases may increase consumers' interest in such food. Therefore, the respondents were asked to say how often they bought organic products (Figure 4). The data show that a considerable part of the surveyed entities (28%) declared that they bought such food several times a month, and a slightly smaller part (22%) bought it once a week. A relatively small group among the respondents (10%) bought organic food once a month, whereas 3% of them claimed to buy such products only once a month.



**Figure 4.** Respondents' declarations on the frequency of Organic Farma Zdrowia S.A., BioPlanet and Symbio Polska product purchase

## Discussion/Limitation and future research

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The experience of French eco-food distributors shows that success is possible in this field. Its sources can be seen in: personalisation and emphasising the pro-health activity of organic food, especially among young consumers with a high awareness level (Grzybowska-Brzezińska, 2012), branding, „...centralisation and standardisation in the intra-organisational network structure...” (Bryła, 2016) and in developing stable relations with suppliers and customers (creating a so-called “partnership brand”). The study conducted by Witek and Kuźniar (2021) shows that a greater interest in healthy nutrition and in buying organic food was demonstrated by younger female consumers, which was also confirmed by this study. Reaching this group of consumers can be facilitated by promoting eco-food by cooking bloggers (Bryła, 2015). The “...effect of synergy and complementarity between the online shop and a traditional one...” plays an important role in the process (Bryła, 2016). Development of the organic food market is affected by some limitations, e.g. relatively high prices (Kułyk & Dubicki, 2019), which results from high organic food production costs, limited availability and lack of knowledge of how eco-products are labelled (Hermaniuk, 2018). This was also confirmed in the current study.

Unfortunately, the recent reports from Germany and Austria on the regression of organic farming caused by increased production costs are worrying. The pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, and other factors have contributed to this state of affairs. In Austria, 1450 agricultural producers have already given up organic farming, and Austria has so far been an example of a country focused on organic farming. A significant problem is the halving of milk production and yields compared to conventional agriculture. However, thanks to eco-premiums and higher subsidies, the statistical incomes of organic farmers were higher than on conventional farms. The crisis is exacerbated by high inflation, which causes a loss of consumer purchasing power (Głuszek, 2023).

## Conclusions

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The advantages of good quality organic food for human health and life are obvious. Education and stimulation of good eating habits and a healthy lifestyle can contribute to developing the organic food market in the future. The price is still a determinant of purchasing in the case of food; in particular, it is important in the organic food market in countries with low GDP per capita. In addition, rising inflation may significantly reduce the demand for organic

food. Numerous barriers in the production and distribution of eco-products in the above-mentioned scientific studies do not exhaust the list of restrictions in this area. However, the solutions proposed by the European Commission may at least partially offset the progressive regression of organic farming.

A comparative analysis of the economic results achieved by the companies dealing with the production and distribution of organic food shows that in a dynamically changing environment and under the adverse conditions of the pandemic, the best economic effects were achieved by BioPlanet. Both Organic Farma Zdrowia S.A. and Symbio Polska reported a loss. The economic results of BioPlanet and Symbio Polska indicate that the adopted marketing strategy covering the sale of the above-mentioned organic food products was not effective.

The source of failures of the last two companies can be seen in unfavourable circumstances and difficulties in eco-product distribution at the time of isolation. However, one should note that young people in the population under study (93% of the total population were people aged 18-25) did not know the other products. Such an age structure of respondents, on the one hand, may constitute a certain limitation in the case of generalisation of conclusions. However, as research indicates, „... an opportunity for further development of the domestic eco food market may be the generation of people born after 1995 (generation Z), who most often buy organic food (39% of them at least once a week...)” (Dlhandlu.pl, 2022). Therefore, despite the small financial possibilities, there is a group of young and conscious consumers who care about the quality of life and can encourage others to consume organic food by their example.

It is worth noting that sweet snacks enjoyed the best recognition among respondents. Therefore, there is still an area excluded from the point of view of information, which needs to be supplemented in order to be able to fully exploit the existing potential of the remaining organic food offer. Effective marketing of organic food products could be based on the specificity of the interests of the most open, young group of customers. Therefore, maybe targeted branding on the Internet (e.g. on Instagram, Tik Tok), the use of personalised advertising in social media, enabling identification with idols and digital commerce, which functioned successfully even during the Covid-19 pandemic, would make it possible for the companies to succeed.

### The contribution of the authors

Concept, K.Ch. and A.L.; methodology, K.Ch.; literature review, K.Ch.; conclusions, K.Ch.; conducting a survey, A.L.; development of study results, A.L.

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