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1 Theory of Planned behaviour perspective for investigating the role of trust  
2 in consumer purchasing decision related to short food supply chains

3 **Authors:** Elisa Giampietri\*, Fabio Verneau, Teresa Del Giudice, Valentina Carfora, Adele Finco,

4 <sup>a</sup> Department of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences, Università Politecnica delle Marche, Ancona, Italy

5 <sup>b</sup> Department of Political Sciences, University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy

6 <sup>c</sup> Department of Agriculture, University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy

7 <sup>d</sup> Department of Humanities, University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy

8 \*Corresponding Author

9

10 **Abstract**

11 *To better understand the success and the spreading in number of short food supply chains (SFSCs) in Italy, this study*  
12 *investigates consumer motivations and behaviour with regard to such alternative agri-food networks using an extended*  
13 *model of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). In particular, this paper studies the role of consumer trust towards*  
14 *purchasing in SFSCs as well as the role of consumer rural background and fair-trade purchasing preference, in*  
15 *addition to common TPB variables. To this purpose, an online survey has been conducted on a convenience sample of*  
16 *260 consumers in Italy. A Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has confirmed the role of trust as direct antecedent of*  
17 *consumer intention to purchase food at SFSCs, as well as the best-supported attitudes, subjective norms and perceived*  
18 *behavioural control in the standard TPB model. In addition to intention and perceived behavioural control, the*  
19 *behaviour is found to be influenced also by consumer rural residence and fair trade purchasing habit. These evidences*  
20 *are interesting in order to suggest further marketing strategies for farmers, in the direction of more ethical and trust-*  
21 *related forms of consumption.*

22

23 **Keywords:** trust; structural equation modeling; short food supply chains; consumer behaviour; theory of planned  
24 behaviour.

25

26 **Introduction**

27 Nowadays, there is an intense movement in the debate on consumer trust in food choice. Indeed,  
28 due to many food scandals (Forbes et al., 2009) and the progressive industrialization and  
29 globalization of agri-food chains, consumer skepticism about food quality and safety has been  
30 increasing during the last decades (Toler et al., 2009). Although product or process certifications  
31 and labelling sometimes succeed in solving this problem, sometimes they fail instead as customers  
32 often ignore or misinterpret the meaning of specific certifications (Grunert, 2005). In addition, the  
33 perception of some food attributes, by their very nature, cannot be identified through a system of  
34 certification, as in the case of Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) that boast some proper credence  
35 characteristics (Migliore et al., 2015). These alternative circuits of food provision (e.g., farmers  
36 markets, on farm direct selling) increasingly gained ground all over Europe and in Italy as well  
37 (Kneafsey et al., 2013; Marino and Cicatiello, 2012) in recent years, representing a sustainable  
38 alternative to global chains in terms of economic, social and environmental benefits (Giampietri et  
39 al., 2016a; Mundler and Laughrea, 2016). This is in line with the current critical and ethical

40 consumerism that is highly related to both environmental and health impacts of food consumption  
41 (Banterle et al., 2012). Notoriously, SFSCs reconnect farmers and consumers (Kirwan, 2004).  
42 Those direct interactions between the actors are found to provide consumers with a sense of trust  
43 that affect their purchasing decisions in relation to short chains (Holloway and Kneafsey, 2000).  
44 To better understand the success and the spreading in number of such alternative agrifood networks,  
45 based on two previous explorative surveys, this study explores the influence of the main  
46 determinants of consumer intention and behaviour, as required by the Theory of Planned Behaviour  
47 (TPB) (i.e., attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control). In addition, the paper  
48 provides useful information about the role of consumer trust and their residential area and fair trade  
49 consumption habits in order to predict and explain SFSCs-related purchasing decisions.

50

## 69 **Background**

70 In developing our conceptual framework, we draw on a previous work and the Theory of Planned  
71 Behaviour by Ajzen (1991). TPB is rooted in social-psychology and represents one of the most  
72 widely cited alternative approaches to understand and predict human behaviour. According to Ajzen  
73 (2015), this theory does not rely on the utility evaluation of a product or a service, but it focuses on  
74 the specific behaviour of interest, providing a comprehensive framework to explain and understand  
75 its determinants. Many studies (Cook et al., 2002; Verbeke and Vackier, 2005; Louis et al., 2007;  
76 Smith et al., 2008) have already demonstrated the predictive power of TPB in relation to food  
77 purchase and consumption decisions. However, to the best of our knowledge, only little use of TPB  
78 has been applied to investigate consumers' preferences for buying food at SFSCs (Giampietri et al.,  
79 2015; Giampietri et al., 2016b). TPB central premise is that a precise behaviour is a function of the  
80 intention (INT) to perform it and the perceived behavioral control (PBC). The stronger these two  
81 determinants, the more likely the behavioural performance would be. Furthermore, the intention is  
82 determined by the combination of three factors as attitudes (ATT), subjective norms (SN), and PBC  
83 with respect to the behaviour in question, and these are influenced by behavioural, normative and  
84 control beliefs, respectively. The more favorable ATT and SN and the greater PBC, the more likely  
85 a consumer intention to engage in the concerning behaviour. Furthermore, some other factors can be  
86 considered as additional determinants of the intention within the TPB original framework, as past  
87 behaviour and self-identity (Carfora et al., 2016), risk perception (Lobb et al., 2007) or trust  
88 (Mazzocchi et al., 2008).

89 In relation with the open debate on consumer increased distrust, during the last years we assisted to  
90 the decreasing of consumer proximity to farming (Thorsøe and Kjeldsen, 2016) and the consequent  
91 increasing attention in gaining new knowledge about food that we eat, e.g., where and how it is

92 produced and by whom, known as “quality turn” (DuPuis, 2000; Goodman, 2004). Accordingly,  
93 nowadays food safety and quality represent a black box for consumers, especially for those who live  
94 in urban areas that, by their very nature, are quite far from the production process and have lost their  
95 control over food. It is worth noting that the erosion of consumer confidence grows when the risk of  
96 moral hazard along the food chain prevails, in the first place affecting customer loyalty towards the  
97 seller and/or the brand, and creating food safety concerns (Hobbs and Goddard, 2015).

98 Interestingly, trust represents a solution for those situations that are characterized by increasing  
99 complexity and lack of knowledge, as in the case of consumer trust in food and buyer-seller  
100 relationships (Frewer et al., 1996; Lassoued and Hobbs, 2015).

101 Nowadays, the necessity to rebuild and strengthen consumer trust between consumption and  
102 farming represents one of the main challenges in the marketing field. Accordingly, Ding et al.  
103 (2015) state that trust, especially towards farmers (instead of retailers), represents a complex and  
104 hard-to-measure concept that plays an important role in decision-making, especially when the  
105 information is scarce or hard to assess as the food purchasing process. Therefore, customer trust can  
106 have a key role to solve this problem, as it can tackle the loss of both knowledge and control over  
107 the supply chain and drive food choices, especially in the case of SFSCs.

108 Fostering the reconnection between producers and consumers by means of reducing the number of  
109 actors and distances along the supply chain (Marsden et al., 2000; Parker, 2005), SFSCs are found  
110 to significantly contribute to many social, environmental and economic sustainable goals related to  
111 the agri-food sector (Ilbery and Maye, 2005; Forssell and Lankoski, 2014). Many authors (Trobe,  
112 2001; Schneider, 2008; Tregear, 2011; Hartmann et al., 2015) found that the direct interactions  
113 between farmers and consumers as well as their repeated encounters can provide consumers with a  
114 sense of trust built especially on shared know-how and mutual understanding (Meyer et al., 2012).  
115 Indeed, these typical SFSCs’ face-to-face initiatives (Renting et al., 2003) let producers and  
116 consumers interact, share and exchange information related to both food products and production  
117 process and their personal values (O’Kane and Wijaya, 2015), reducing the information asymmetry  
118 and establishing new solid loyalty. In this framework, trust becomes a substitute for full knowledge  
119 (Greibitus et al., 2015) and its role in influencing consumer food choice and purchasing decision  
120 seems to be increasingly important nowadays.

121 In order to examine consumer motivations for purchasing food at SFSCs (instead of conventional  
122 markets), the present study examines the impact of trust on purchasing intention, comparing an  
123 extended TPB model with a classic TPB framework. In addition, the paper also considers the role of  
124 consumers residential area and fair trade purchasing habit in influencing the investigated behaviour.

125

## 126 **Data and Methodology**

127 The methodology used is based on an empirical analysis carried out in Italy during the first semester  
128 of 2016. An extended TPB model was assessed to investigate the determinants of consumer  
129 purchasing habits related to SFSCs as market locations. To this purpose, we implemented an online  
130 survey among a convenience sample of 260 Italian respondents that affirmed to commonly purchase  
131 food at short circuits as farmers' markets (46%) or on farm directly (43%), whereas the remaining  
132 11% prefer other forms of SFSCs as solidarity purchasing groups. The survey was administered as  
133 an online questionnaire that was pre-tested among a small sample (25 participants) in December  
134 2015, and only minor changes were made based on this. The questionnaire included three sections:  
135 the first section asked respondents to state their purchasing habits related to SFSCs in terms of  
136 buying frequency. The second section was designed for the assessment of five TPB variables;  
137 specifically, each variable was measured with three items rated on a 7-point response format.  
138 Finally, the third section incorporated some socio-demographic questions describing the sample.  
139 Section number two, was aimed at assessing trust (TRUST) towards purchasing food at SFSCs and  
140 the original components of TPB as respondents' attitudes (ATT), subjective norms (SN), perceived  
141 behavioural control (PBC), and intention (INT).

142 Three adjective pairs were used to measure attitudes as follows: "Purchasing food at SFSCs is *not*  
143 *gratifying* – *gratifying*; *unpleasant* – *pleasant*; *not satisfying* – *satisfying* to me"; composite  
144 reliability was 0.91.

145 Subjective norms were assessed through the following 7-point *strongly disagree* – *strongly agree*  
146 three items: "Most people who are important to me would approve on my purchasing food at SFSCs  
147 instead of conventional markets"; "Most people who are important to me want that I purchase food  
148 at SFSCs instead of conventional markets"; "Most people who are important to me think that I  
149 should purchase food at SFSCs instead of conventional markets". The composite reliability was  
150 0.91.

151 To measure PBC the following 7-point *totally false* – *totally true* three items were used:  
152 "Purchasing food at SFSCs is easy to me"; "If I wanted to I could easily purchase food at SFSCs";  
153 "Purchasing food at SFSCs depends entirely on me"; composite reliability was 0.73.

154 The intention to purchase food at SFSCs instead of conventional markets was measured using these  
155 7-point *strongly disagree* – *strongly agree* three items: "I intend to purchase food at SFSCs for the  
156 next month"; "I plan to purchase food at SFSCs next month"; "I am willing to buy food at SFSCs  
157 next month"; composite reliability was 0.91.

158 Finally, based on Hartmann et al. (2015), with adjustments, the additional variables of trust was  
159 measured by the following 7-point *totally false* – *totally true* three items: "I perceive purchasing at

160 SFSCs to be reliable”; “Purchasing at SFSCs appears trustable to me”; “I trust in purchasing food at  
161 SFSCs”; composite reliability was 0.92.

162 Finally, we performed descriptive analysis using SPSS version 17, whereas Mplus 7 statistical  
163 software was used to conduct structural equation modeling (SEM). To measure the goodness of fit  
164 for the proposed models, the following indices were considered:  $\chi^2$  (chi-square), Comparative Fit  
165 Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)<sup>1</sup>, and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation  
166 (RMSEA). The purpose has been to test a nested comparisons of a traditional TPB model and an  
167 extended TPB model, as previously described. The extended TPB model has been developed in  
168 order to verify the additional predictive power of trust on predicting consumer purchase at SFSCs.  
169 Therefore, we have integrated TRUST to the original three TPB main antecedents of INT and we  
170 have hypothesized that such variable had an influence on consumer intention that, in turn,  
171 represents an antecedent of consumer behaviour. In addition, our extended TPB model benefits by  
172 the inclusion of two other additional factors in terms of behavioural explanatory variable, namely  
173 consumer residential area (RESID) and fair-trade purchasing habit (FAIRTRADE). The statistical  
174 procedure for testing hierarchical models was used. Given that to accept an extended TPB model it  
175 is necessary to compare it with a traditional TPB model, such comparison has been tested by  
176 considering the first model as a nested model of the second. Hence, in the traditional model the  
177 regression weights of the paths between additional factors and intention and behaviour have been  
178 fixed to 0. To accept the extended TPB model, the hypothesized significant differences in the Chi-  
179 square value have been analysed: if the Chi-square difference ( $\Delta\chi^2$ ) is significant, the extended  
180 model (the larger model with more parameters and less degrees of freedom) can be accepted as a  
181 better model than the traditional model (the smaller one).

182

## 183 **Results**

184 Before analyzing the proposed extended TPB model, we report some sample descriptive statistics in  
185 Table 1. In order to elicit the frequency of their purchasing at SFSCs (BEH), respondents had to  
186 answer the following question: “*How often do you usually buy in local Short Food Supply Chains*  
187 *(SFSCs)?*” (see Table 2).

188

189

**Table 1 - Sample descriptive statistics**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>N. Obs.</b>
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<sup>1</sup> To consider the model having an acceptable fit we refer to cut-off values of .90 or more for CFI and TLI (Bentler, 1990; Tucker and Lewis, 1973) whereas the threshold value for RMSEA is of .05 or less (Browne and Cudeck, 1992). In addition, values less than .08 of Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR) are considered acceptable (Hu and Bentler, 1999). In relation to  $\chi^2$ , it is worth considering values having a probability of more than .05; however, we consider some other indices too, since this index tends to be deeply affected by sample size (Barbaranelli, 2007).

Gender	<i>female</i>	143
	<i>male</i>	117
Age (years)	<i>18-30</i>	133
	<i>31-40</i>	65
	<i>41-50</i>	32
	<i>51-65</i>	26
	<i>more than 65</i>	4
Nationality	<i>italian</i>	256
	<i>other</i>	4
Education level	<i>primary school</i>	1
	<i>lower secondary school</i>	13
	<i>upper secondary school</i>	79
	<i>university degree</i>	167
Residential area	<i>urban</i>	186
	<i>rural</i>	74
N. of household members	<i>1</i>	28
	<i>2</i>	48
	<i>3</i>	56
	<i>4</i>	97
	<i>5 or more</i>	31
Average year income (€)	<i>less than 25.000€</i>	100
	<i>25.000-50.000€</i>	120
	<i>50.000-75.000€</i>	27
	<i>more than 75.000€</i>	13
Occupation	<i>student</i>	102
	<i>employee</i>	136
	<i>retired worker</i>	6
	<i>unemployed</i>	16
To go personally grocery shopping	<i>no</i>	101
	<i>yes</i>	159
Buying organic	<i>no</i>	72
	<i>yes</i>	188
Buying fair trade	<i>no</i>	131
	<i>yes</i>	129
Most frequently used forms of SFSCs	<i>on farm direct sale</i>	112
	<i>farmers' market</i>	119
	<i>pick-your-own</i>	7
	<i>box schemes</i>	7
	<i>Solidarity Purchasing Groups</i>	10
	<i>online sale</i>	5

190

191

**Table 2 - Consumers' annual SFSCs purchasing frequency (BEH)**

Question (BEH)	Items	N. Obs.
How often do you usually buy in local Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs)?	(1) once a year	51
	(2) more than once a year	56
	(3) once a month	24
	(4) more than once a month	51
	(5) once a week	51
	(6) more than once a week	27

192

193 As afore mentioned, all the variables of the extended model have been measured by means of three  
194 items each. Table 3 shows variables related descriptive statistics and the Cronbach's  $\alpha^2$  reliability  
195 coefficient, whose high values indicate an high internal consistency of the items.

196

<sup>2</sup> According to Ajzen, we indicated 0.7 to be an acceptable reliability coefficient.

197

**Table 3 - TPB variables' scales and descriptive statistics**

Variables (scales)	No. items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Attitudes (ATT)	3	0.91
Subjective Norms (SN)	3	0.91
Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC)	3	0.73
Trust (TRUST)	3	0.92
Intention (INT)	3	0.91

198

199 Table 4 reports the correlations among the investigated variables and also their mean and standard  
 200 deviation. According to correlations, INT shows the strongest positive correlation with PBC and  
 201 trust, while intention and PBC are the strongest correlates of BEH. In addition, all mean values are  
 202 clearly above the scale mean (on a 1-7 point scale), showing that the interviewees boast highly  
 203 positive attitude (5.28), subjective norms (4.67), trust (5.37), and intention (4.78) towards  
 204 purchasing in such investigated alternative markets. However, the mean value for PBC is lower  
 205 (4.48), compared to other variables, showing a lower respondents' self-confidence to engage in  
 206 SFSCs-related purchase, despite their high and positive attitude and trust (Al-Swidi et al., 2014).

207

208

**Table 4 - Correlations and descriptive findings between variables**

	1.	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. INT	4.78 (1.50)							
2. ATT	0.323**	5.28 (1.56)						
3. SN	0.410**	0.168**	4.67 (1.55)					
4. PBC	0.482**	0.142*	0.272**	4.48 (1.35)				
5. TRUST	0.476**	0.342**	0.401**	0.385**	5.37 (1.11)			
6. BEH	0.578**	0.294**	0.229**	0.379**	0.255**	3.29 (1.69)		
7. RESID	-0.003	0.262**	-0.028	0.028	0.073	0.088	0.28 (0.45)	
8. FAIRTRADE	0.242**	0.102	0.210**	0.091	0.261**	0.248**	0.005	0.50 (0.50)

209

*Note: Mean (Standard Deviation) for each variable on the diagonal*

210

211 To test the construct validity, the measurement factor analysis model included seven latent factors  
 212 indicating ATT, PBC, SN, INT, TRUST, RESID and FAIRTRADE. Goodness-of-fit statistics for  
 213 this measurement model are acceptable ( $\chi^2 = 170.94$ ,  $df = 110$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $RMSEA = 0.05$ ;  $CFI =$   
 214  $0.98$ ;  $TLI = 0.97$ ;  $SRMR = 0.04$ ). As showed in Table 5, the standardized parameter estimates are  
 215 all significant and present higher values (from 0.62 to 0.94).

216

217

**Table 5 - Study measurements**

Measures	Standardized factor loading
<b>INT</b>	
I intend to purchase food at SFSCs for the next month.	0.89
I plan to purchase food at SFSCs next month.	0.83
I am willing to buy food at SFSCs next month.	0.93



**ATT**

Purchasing food at SFSCs is not gratifying – gratifying.	0.88
Purchasing food at SFSCs is unpleasant – pleasant to me.	0.93
Purchasing food at SFSCs is not satisfying – satisfying to me.	0.84

**SN**

Most people who are important to me would approve on my purchasing food at SFSCs instead of conventional markets.	0.77
Most people who are important to me want that I purchase food at SFSCs instead of conventional markets.	0.94
Most people who are important to me think that I should purchase food at SFSCs instead of conventional markets.	0.84

**PBC**

Purchasing food at SFSCs is easy to me.	0.62
If I wanted to I could easily purchase food at SFSCs.	0.71
Purchasing food at SFSCs depends entirely on me.	0.72

**TRUST**

I perceive purchasing at SFSCs to be reliable.	0.83
Purchasing at SFSCs appears trustable to me.	0.91
I trust in purchasing food at SFSCs.	0.93

**RESID**

Which is your residential area? (urban/rural)	Fixed to 0
---	------------

**FAIR-TRADE**

Do you usually buy fair-trade products? (yes/no)	Fixed to 0
--	------------

**BEH**

How often do you usually buy at local Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs)?	Fixed to 0
---	------------

218

219 The traditional TPB model (i.e., the one that does not consider trust as antecedent of the intention  
 220 and RESID and FAIRTRADE as predictors of behaviour) shows the following good fit to the data:  
 221  $\chi^2 = 35.46$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; RMSEA = 0.12; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.82; SRMR = 0.05. Findings  
 222 indicate significant effects ( $p < 0.001$ ) of ATT ( $\beta = 0.23$ ), SN ( $\beta = 0.27$ ) and PBC ( $\beta = 0.38$ ) on  
 223 consumer intention to buy at SFSCs; in addition, both the intention ( $\beta = .51$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and PBC ( $\beta =$   
 224  $.13$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), show a considerable predictive power on the behaviour. Overall, 36.5% and 34.7%  
 225 of INT and BEH variance is explained by this model, respectively.

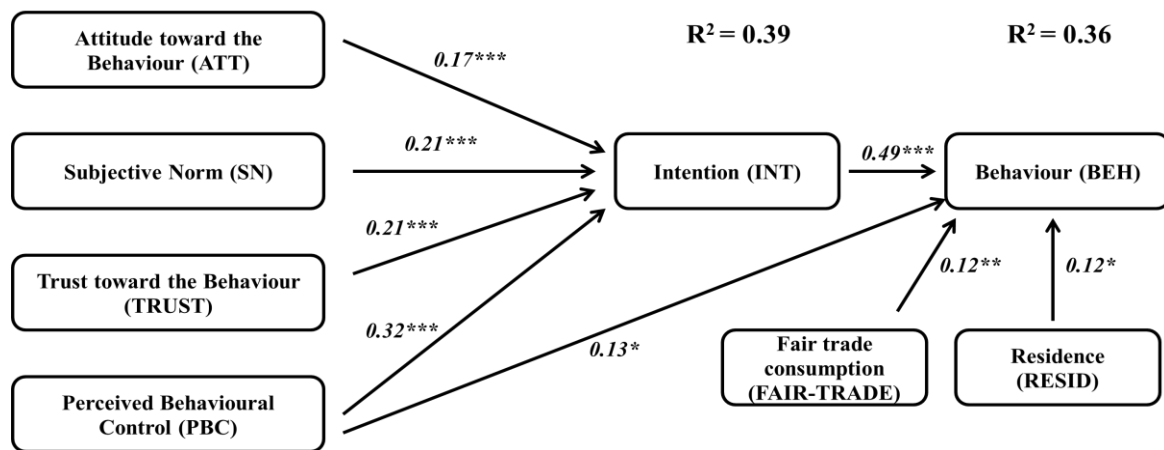
226 However, all the Goodness-of-fit statistics highlight that the extended TPB model fits the data better  
 227 than the traditional one. Accordingly,  $\chi^2 = 14.19$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; RMSEA = 0.08;. CFI = 0.96; TLI  
 228 = 0.90; SRMR = 0.03. Overall, 39.5% and 36.4% of INT and BEH variance is explained by our  
 229 expanded TPB model, respectively. Standardized results show that ATT, SN, PBC and TRUST are  
 230 all significant positive antecedents of intention; in particular, PBC represents the main predictor of  
 231 INT ( $\beta = 0.32$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by TRUST ( $\beta = 0.21$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), SN ( $\beta = 0.21$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and

232 ATT ( $\beta = 0.17$ ;  $p < .001$ ), as shown in Figure 1. Furthermore, the behaviour is significantly  
 233 determined by the intention ( $\beta = 0.49$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by PBC ( $\beta = 0.13$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), fair-trade  
 234 consumption habit ( $\beta = 0.12$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and the residential area ( $\beta = 0.12$ ;  $p < 0.10$ ). Results show  
 235 that the Chi-square difference value between the traditional TPB model and the extended TPB model is  
 236 significant ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 21.27$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), thus the extended model is found to be significantly better than  
 237 the traditional one.

238

239

**Fig. 1 – Path model with standardized regression coefficients**



240

241

242

243

### Conclusion and Discussion

244 In order to contribute to explain the reasons why short food supply chains have largely gained  
 245 ground in Italy in recent years, this paper aims at testing an extended framework of the Theory of  
 246 Planned Behaviour in order to explain food purchases at SFSCs (e.g. farmers' market). In particular,  
 247 this study scrutinizes the role of consumer trust. To this purpose, an online questionnaire  
 248 administered to a convenience sample of Italian consumers assessed standard TPB variables (e.g.  
 249 attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, intention) and the additional trust with  
 250 respect to buying food at SFSCs. Results show that TPB framework can be considered as a useful  
 251 framework to understand the investigated behaviour, and especially to explain the intention that  
 252 drives it.

253 Compared to the original TPB framework (that does not consider trust as an antecedent of  
 254 intention), the extended model shows better goodness-of-fit statistics. All the investigated variables,  
 255 as attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and trust, reveal a positive effect on  
 256 intention, explaining 48% of its variance. In particular, perceived behavioural control has the largest  
 257 effect on intention, followed by trust. It follows that the easier for consumers to shop at SFSCs and  
 258 the higher their trust, the higher their intention; similarly, the more consumers' attitudes are

259 positive towards SFSCs and people who are important to them (i.e. social referents as family,  
260 friends) approve that they purchase in such alternative agri-food networks, the more consumers'  
261 intention to perform it will increase. Furthermore, intention has a good predictive effect on  
262 consumer behaviour, in line with what assessed by Kim et al. (2003) on dairy product consumption,  
263 whereas it is minor than what found by Verbeke and Vackier (2005) in fish consumption. Also  
264 perceived behavioural control is found to have a direct effect on behaviour. Furthermore, consumer  
265 trust has no direct effect on consumer actual purchase, thus intention mediates its effect on  
266 behaviour. In addition to intention and PBC, purchasing fair-trade products and living in a rural area  
267 positively influence consumers' purchase at SFSCs, explaining 36% of the behavioural variance.  
268 Although the explained variance related to behaviour proves to be minor than for intention, this is  
269 also in line with the previously cited literature related to TPB application to food consumption  
270 (Ajzen, 2015). In relation to fair-trade consumption, our findings confirm the strong connection  
271 between consumers involvement and active participation in different forms of SFSCs and the  
272 sustainable dimensions of their ethical consumerism (Grunert et al., 2014).

273 Based on our evidences, consumer trust is relevant when deciding where to buy food and we can  
274 suppose that it might lead to positive behavioural effects when it exists. According to Holloway and  
275 Kneafsey (2000), following these findings it is possible to assume that, by reinforcing consumer  
276 trust towards SFSCs, people intention to purchase in such alternative networks will also increase,  
277 encouraging their development in line with current sustainable trajectories of European Union for  
278 the agrifood sector. As stated by many authors (Marsden et al., 2000; Trobe, 2001; Hunt, 2007;  
279 Schneider, 2008; Meyer et al., 2012), trust can be established and reinforced through SFSCs' direct  
280 encounters between producers and consumers, that facilitate the information exchange. Central to  
281 these alternative networks are face-to-face interactions that, indeed, let consumers being more  
282 informed and consequently more trusting (e.g., about food and production process), increasing  
283 transparency along the food chain and reducing asymmetric information. Since trust tends to offset  
284 negative perceptions associated with food purchasing decision (Ding et al. 2015), it might drive  
285 loyalty and new solid relationships between producers and consumers (Hartmann et al., 2015),  
286 overcoming consumer confusion and fostering SFSCs purchasing frequency and development.

287 Interestingly, in line with the literature on SFSCs, it is plausible to assume that such alternative  
288 chains can successfully overtake modern consumer loss of confidence in food provision systems;  
289 however, we have found trust reliability being very high and this seems to be a controversial aspect,  
290 especially in case of high risks (e.g. food quality scares and scandals).

291 Although findings cannot be generalized, since the study has been conducted on Italian consumers  
292 and on a consumers' sample that was not representative of the entire population, they provide some

293 novel contributions to the actual scientific debate on the role of trust in food choice and consumer  
294 behaviour, in particular focusing on short food supply chains related preference. Further research  
295 may be conducted to better scrutinize the role of trust by investigating, on a more representative  
296 sample, the link between trust and behaviour, in order to suggest a way to overcome the existing  
297 gap between intention and behaviour, as suggested by Armitage and Conner (2001).

298

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