

# What contributes to locavorism as a consumer ideology?

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – In this study the authors aim to explore the factors that contribute to the formation of locavorism as a form of consumer ideology.

**Design/methodology/approach** – In this study, the authors adopt an inductive approach by preselecting locavore consumers and conducting 43 semi-structured interviews, following the prescriptions of narrative-enquiry research.

**Findings** – The authors reveal that individual-level (i.e. values, beliefs and experiences) and social-level (i.e. groups, local communities and society) influences and exogenous factors can affect the formation of locavorism. Furthermore, the authors' findings corroborate the concept advanced by prior studies that reinforcing loops exist among the three belief dimensions of locavorism.

**Practical implications** – Food producers can use these findings to shape their marketing strategies more effectively to target locavore consumers and/or stimulate the consumption of local food.

**Social implications** – Identifying the influences of social- and individual-level factors on the formation of locavorism can contribute to the understanding of demand shifts towards local food consumption. Additionally, by revealing the modes of thought that formulate the ideologies of locavore consumers, the authors offer guidance in the development of policies that can safeguard local economies and traditions and reduce transport pollution and food waste in favour of sustainable local consumption.

**Originality/value** – In the present article the authors explore the psychological and contextual mechanisms that contribute to the formation of locavorism.

**Keywords** Locavorism, Food industry, Consumer ideologies, Marketing strategies, Localisation, Opposition, Communalisation, Qualitative research, Narrative enquiry

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Today, globalising forces have resulted in a significant increase in distances between the locations of production and consumption, rendering it more difficult for consumers to follow production processes. Consequently, many consumers have reoriented themselves towards local food consumption, preferring either food chains that are characterised by fewer intermediaries or ones where food is directly marketed by producers. Also, many consumers have engaged in anti-scale movements, orienting their preferences towards short-distance food systems and supporting local economies (Feldmann and Hamm, 2015). These shifts towards local consumption have favoured the rise of social movements that are guided by consumers and strive towards purchasing locally sourced foods (Prentice, 2006). According to the rationale of these movements, such endeavours to purchase local food have become a form of food activism (Fitzgerald, 2016). Consistently, scholars have

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adopted the term “locavorism” to indicate this emerging consumer ideology [1] based on local food activism.

In the food consumption literature, consumer ideologies typically assume the form of action-oriented ideas shared among a group of individuals that provide values, meaning and identity (Schmitt *et al.*, 2021). Ideology formation is iterative in nature, as social practices continuously evolve in new forms of ideology. Accordingly, Reich *et al.* (2018) conceptualised locavorism as a “a system of beliefs” [composed by] “three primary dimensions: Lionisation of local foods, Opposition to long-distance food systems, and support for Communalization of food economies” (p. 850). The material social forms in which locavorism is translated include farmers’ markets and community-supported agriculture programmes (Reich *et al.*, 2018). In addition, partnerships between governments and businesses have initiated a set of practices for farmers’ markets, which legitimated locavorism as a shared set of beliefs that was further expanded and reinforced as an ideology through the popular press, books and documentaries (Reich *et al.*, 2018). Despite various researchers focussing on specific attitudes and behavioural outcomes linked to locavore consumers (e.g. Choi *et al.*, 2021; Kim and Huang, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2020), many questions remain pertaining to the psychological drivers behind the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology. In particular, limited attention has been afforded to identifying the psychological and contextual drivers and main actors that can influence locavorism formation and the triggering mechanisms that reinforce this form of consumer ideology. The present study was developed against this backdrop, resulting in the following general research questions:

*RQ1.* What contributes to the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology?

*RQ2.* What reinforces locavorism in the mind of locavore consumers?

We attempt to answer these questions by adopting a narrative enquiry approach (Pentland, 1999), which follows five phases (attending, telling, transcribing, analysing and reading) and is characterised by an iterative nature in the coding procedures (Riessman, 2008; Josselson, 2011). After applying prescreening techniques to identify locavore consumers based on the conceptualisation of locavorism in the extant literature (Reich *et al.*, 2018), we conducted 43 semi-structured interviews with locavore consumers to emphasise life stories and collect rich descriptive information.

This paper offers both theoretical and practical contributions. On the one hand, the study sheds new light on the psychological and contextual drivers and main actors which influence locavorism formation, which will help local producers gain a better understanding of the drivers behind this consumer ideology and shape subsequent marketing strategies. On the other hand, understanding the social- and individual-level influences on the formation of locavorism can support marketing managers when implementing effective strategies and policymakers when developing policies that safeguard local economies and traditions, which often suffer from globalising forces.

## Theoretical background

### *Local food consumption: an increasing trend*

Local food consumption constitutes a relevant part of local cultures and economies. Despite globalising forces, the consumption of local food is highly supported by many local food advocates and policymakers worldwide. Consumer research has highlighted various insights into consumer preferences for local food, which are mainly linked to personal and societal drivers. With respect to the former category, researchers have identified many factors that positively influence preferences for local food. For example, local products are perceived as having superior taste and as being more connected to rural life and healthier, fresher, and safer than non-local food (Birch *et al.*, 2018). With respect to the latter category, societal

drivers are associated with a perception of higher environmental sustainability (i.e. short-distance systems) and social responsibility in terms of supporting local communities (Bianchi and Mortimer, 2015). Accordingly, scholars have noted that the increasing interest in food origins and food chain transparency is due to enhanced sensibility in environmental- and health-related issues (Arsil *et al.*, 2013) and governmental attention to protecting local communities (Coderre *et al.*, 2010). Accordingly, researchers have highlighted that the purchase of local food is also a form of ethical consumption (Young, 2021).

The current positive trend towards local food consumption has been recognised by industry experts as an appealing opportunity to generate additional revenue through the development of appropriate marketing management strategies (Carpio and Isengildina-Massa, 2009). When food is perceived as local, firms experience several benefits related to sales performance (Hoskins *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, despite benefits related to the achievement of global brand status, marketing management research has indicated that an increasing number of consumers are avoiding global brands and preferring locally focussed marketing strategies and offerings (Verhaal *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, a stream of research within the marketing management field has started to study how brands can leverage locational clues to attract this emerging segment of consumers. For example, recent studies have noted that within-country brands can reach “Local Icon” status, becoming recognised as a cultural symbol by local communities and experiencing significant market success based on this consumer perception (Halkias *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, the perception of localness is boosted by the use of local resources (Davvetas and Diamantopoulos, 2016). Additionally, brands that intend to build a local image can recur to specific labels emphasising the local traits of their business activities (e.g. “artisanal product”) for reinforcing the association of the brand with farm-to-table and farmers markets in the minds of consumers (Weber *et al.*, 2008).

#### *Locavorism as a consumer ideology: what do we know?*

For a long time, the purchase of local food was considered the standard option. However, agricultural industrialisation made it possible to increase the distance between producers and consumers in the food industry (Conkin, 2008), which brought a number of benefits. For example, in terms of producers, agricultural industrialisation enabled industrial farms to leverage economies of scale and scope, whereas in terms of social factors, it incentivised technological innovation and reduced food waste. For consumers, this industrialisation increased food accessibility and availability. However, agricultural industrialisation has also had detrimental effects on smaller food economies, the environment and overall food quality (Anderson, 2008). In response to such unintended consequences, an increasing number of consumers are positioning themselves towards prolocal and anti-scale orientations, instigating locavore movements (Reich *et al.*, 2018). As suggested by Reich *et al.* (2018), locavore consumers distinguish themselves from other consumers in three primary ways based on their belief system: (1) the lionisation of local food, (2) the opposition to long-distance food systems and (3) support for the communalisation of food economies.

To date, the extant literature has offered various empirical findings on locavorism. For example, Stanton *et al.* (2012) observed that locavore consumers tended to shop more frequently and in a larger number of stores compared to non-locavore consumers. Furthermore, compared to non-locavore consumers, locavore consumers were more sensitive to mass media communication, even if they considered themselves more knowledgeable about food quality and safety. Moreover, they tended to spend more on organic fruits and vegetables and typically had higher incomes than non-locavore consumers. Similarly, Contini *et al.* (2017) noted that locavore consumers were often aged 45 years or under, prioritised self-enhancement, felt as though they were members of their local community and exhibited greater respect for their local gastronomical traditions. In

their scale-development article on locavorism, which aimed at assessing the nomological validity of the scale, Reich *et al.* (2018) found empirical evidence supporting the concept that locavorism is positively correlated with environmental concerns, ethnocentrism, local retailer loyalty, social desirability and community values. Drawing on the new social movement theory, Choi *et al.* (2021) found that pro-environmental attitudes, a strong sense of community attachment, and health consciousness positively contributed to the formation of the locavore ideology. In addition, when products were locally sourced, locavorism significantly enhanced the likelihood of purchasing and the willingness to pay more. Kim and Huang (2021) found that locavore residents perceived restaurants that serve locally sourced food to be more authentic than other restaurants. In addition, they felt better about themselves when visiting restaurants that served locally sourced food. Likewise, Scozzafava *et al.* (2017) observed that when a restaurant was certified as serving locally sourced food, it was more likely to be selected by locavore consumers. Spielmann and Bernelin (2015), drawing on the theory of reasoned action, found that locavore consumers' product traceability and social influences are positively associated with product involvement. Zhang *et al.* (2020) noted that collectivistic-type values and long-term orientation were positively associated with locavorism, which positively influenced attitudes towards buying local food.

Despite these empirical articles on locavorism as a consumer ideology, many questions remain regarding the psychological drivers behind the formation of locavorism. Specifically, no researchers have explored the psychological and contextual drivers and main actors that contribute to the formation of locavorism. As Reich *et al.* (2018) claimed, we still know little about what societal, developmental and system factors can motivate consumers to believe that local foods are superior in quality compared to long-distance food systems and can persuade them to pay greater attention to the welfare of the local food community. To fill this research gap, we complement the extant quantitative research with an in-depth qualitative study.

## Methods

### *The narrative approach*

To investigate the factors that influence locavorism formation, we adopted an inductive research approach based on narrative enquiry approach (Pentland, 1999). Narrative enquiry has some common elements with grounded theory (Josselson, 2011), such as the iterative use of first- and second-order coding (e.g. Annosi *et al.*, 2022; Bloom *et al.*, 2020; Ferraris *et al.*, 2019). However, unlike grounded theory, we move from the whole to the specific (Josselson, 2011). We believe there are several reasons why narrative enquiry is a suitable approach for this research. First, narrative enquiry allows researchers to gather information in ordered sequences and examine connected events to capture key insights. Second, it would allow us to identify the key actors involved and build a coherent framework. Third, the narrative approach is one of the most frequently used approaches to elicit vivid memories and evaluate detailed stories. Moreover, through in-depth interviews, researchers can identify the mechanisms of interest and observe how they unfold in practice. However, narrative enquiry is not only concerned with the mirroring of social phenomena. Rather, it is a "cognitive and cultural ether that permeates and energises everything that goes on" (Pentland, 1999, p. 712). Fourth, as participants reorganise their thoughts by attempting to reinterpret them in a more rational manner, this allows researchers to reconstruct a stream of thoughts and capture information from behind the collected stories (Czarniawska, 1997). We position our research consistently with the narrative identity approach, which postulates that individuals form their identities in the contexts in which they live by framing their life experiences and re-creating an internalised and evolving story of the self with the aim of unifying and making sense of the events they have experienced (Josselson, 2011).

*Methodological procedures*

In this study, we followed the guidelines described by [Riessman \(2008\)](#) for each of the five phases: attending, telling, transcribing, analysing and reading. Thus, we started with an attending phase. Narrative enquiry requires great emphasis on the role of empathy, as the creation of emphatic relationships between interviewers and interviewees can increase the likelihood of collecting detailed and vivid information. To familiarise ourselves with the people and context under study, we read several magazines and online blogs on locavorism, conducted informal conversations with local farmers and producers and examined on-topic books to gain a more complete understanding of the roots of locavorism. We also studied a variety of secondary sources to acquire sufficient background knowledge to foster more empathy by gaining insights into this form of consumer ideology, which often manifests as food activism.

After the attending phase, we progressed to gathering information on the participants and their lives. Since narrative enquiry must be conceived in relation to the context, we were aware that the collected interviews would have been largely influenced by the context in which the participants lived and the people with whom they often interacted. Following [Bloom \*et al.\* \(2020\)](#), we scheduled interviews on days in which the participants did not have to work or had any particular time constraints. In this way, we tried to elicit rich stories and allowed participants to take all the time they needed to reconstruct key passages. To increase methodological rigour, we conducted and transcribed three preliminary semi-structured interviews to refine our research method. The participants were recruited through snowballing techniques, whereby the authors started by seeking participants from personal contacts and then asked them if they knew other people who might be interested in being interviewed on the topic. Prior to conducting each interview, we administered pre-screening questions to identify locavore consumers, and we excluded non-locavore consumers from the interviews. In particular, we paraphrased the three primary belief dimensions outlined by [Reich \*et al.\* \(2018\)](#) and only selected consumers to whom locavorism clearly emerged as a consumer ideology. Our interview protocol covered three main areas of investigation, the first of which concerned the path to locavorism formation. In this section of the research protocol, we focussed on which episodes, events and memories were associated with positive perceptions of local food. The second area was about the types of networks, people, or contextual factors that may have encouraged them towards locavorism formation. The third set of questions was devoted to identifying the triggering mechanisms behind the enhancement of locavorism formation. However, as allowed in the semi-structured interviews for narrative enquiries, we did not rigidly follow all the predefined questions. Rather, we adapted the questions as each interview proceeded, asking participants to provide probes or more details about specific episodes ([Riessman, 2008](#)). All the interviews were recorded with the interviewee's permission and lasted 40–70 min. The interviews lasted until the material exhibited repetitive patterns, suggesting a stage of saturation ([Eisenhardt, 1989](#)).

The next phase consisted of transcribing and analysing. The analysis initially consisted of representing narratives and then interpreting documents to go beyond literal meanings ([Josselson, 2011](#)). Thus, we carefully read each of the transcripts while listening to our audio recordings while simultaneously creating memos and notes in *in vivo* codes. Subsequently, we reconsidered our transcripts and performed open coding. Specifically, we focussed on narrative segments and performed line-by-line coding ([Riessman, 2008](#)). Among other segments, we devoted great attention to the personal episodic tales of what occurred, when and where. For example, we had a variety of open codes such as “I know how the people work here . . .” or “I go to buy meat from [name of local producer] and I know it is good meat . . .” that we combined into the code “I know how “we” work”. In general, we exerted great effort to remain close to the participants' expressions and linguistic choices. We then attempted to analyse the stories holistically to build narrative maps and structures. Each researcher

carried out this procedure independently, and ultimately we compared narrative maps and discussed the main differences. At the end of this process, the coding procedures exhibited good intercoder agreement between the two authors. When the analyses created different results, they were jointly discussed until a consensus was reached. Subsequently, we entered into a second-order coding phase, providing our interpretations of the stories, grouping similar experiences and highlighting any salient passages. After drawing a number of graphical representations to visualise patterns, we arranged a final model to capture the main psychological and contextual mechanisms that contributed to forming locavorism and what aspects reinforced locavorism in the minds of the locavore consumers. Finally, we entered the reading phase, in which we read our findings with some colleagues and discussed the degree of readability and understandability of our main results.

### *Sample*

The final sample of interviewees consisted of 43 Italian locavore consumers, and the interviews took place from September 2020 to January 2021. Of the 43 interviewees, 23 were female and 20 were male, with an average age of 42.65 years (standard deviation = 15.07). The sample characteristics are reported in detail in [Table 1](#).

For practical reasons, the interviews were conducted in Italian and then translated into English. Back translation was then employed to convey the exact meaning of the translations. To guarantee anonymity, we randomly assigned a unique code to each participant (i.e. I1, I2 and I3), which we refer to when providing quotes.

### **Findings**

We grouped any stories that were similar and identified and interpreted the themes that emerged from the groups to outline any that recurred. Our narrative enquiry suggested that the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology emerged as a response to individual-level influences (i.e. personal values, beliefs and experience), social-level influences (i.e. groups, local communities and society) and exogenous factors (i.e. food scandals and the COVID-19 pandemic). In [Tables 2–7](#), we report representative quotes with their respective codes from our interviews. We also noted reinforcing loops among the lionisation of local food, opposition to long-distance food systems and support for the communalisation of food economies (hereafter, lionisation, opposition and communalisation).

#### *Individual-level influences on the formation of locavorism*

We observed that personal values, beliefs and experiences influenced locavorism formation, as presented in [Tables 1–4](#), respectively.

From the representative quotes and respective codes presented in [Table 2](#) (relating to how personal values influence locavorism formation), the following emerged as determinants of the formation of locavorism: authenticity, respect for nature, issues linked to environmental sustainability, fair trade, preservation of traditions, a return to previous ways of doing things, solidarity and reciprocity.

For example, locavore consumers bought food that met their search for authenticity, which has two meanings for locavore consumers. On the one hand, they searched for products “connected to a sense of genuineness and transparency” (I11), while on the other hand, they looked for an internal consistency between “what labels claim and what [products] actually have” (I30). Such multiple perspectives on authenticity are consistent with the extant literature ([Lehman et al., 2018](#)). With respect to the former, locavore consumers perceived local products as more authentic and “intrinsically more genuine and fresher” (I21), which contributed to the formation of their beliefs about which local products

No	Gender	Age	Nationality	Region of residence	Education	Married	Sons
1	M	22	Italian	FVG	High school	No	0
2	M	24	Italian	FVG	Bachelor	No	0
3	F	25	Italian	Sicily	Bachelor	No	0
4	M	59	Italian	Veneto	Secondary school	No	0
5	M	26	Italian	Lazio	High school	No	0
6	F	45	Italian	FVG	High school	Yes	2
7	M	55	Italian	Piedmont	MsC/Master	Yes	3
8	F	23	Italian	Tuscany	Bachelor	No	0
9	F	24	Italian	Veneto	MsC/Master	No	0
10	M	52	Italian	Veneto	MsC/Master	Yes	3
11	M	57	Italian	Lombardy	High school	Yes	2
12	F	28	Italian	Lazio	High school	No	0
13	F	57	Italian	Lombardy	High school	Yes	0
14	M	48	Italian	Emilia-Romagna	Secondary school	Yes	2
15	M	53	Italian	FVG	High school	Yes	2
16	M	27	Italian	Marche	Bachelor	No	0
17	F	34	Italian	Veneto	PhD	No	0
18	F	24	Italian	Campania	High school	No	0
19	M	51	Italian	Emilia-Romagna	MsC/Master	Yes	1
20	F	45	Italian	FVG	High school	Yes	1
21	M	55	Italian	Veneto	MsC/Master	Yes	2
22	F	46	Italian	Calabria	High school	Yes	3
23	F	71	Italian	Veneto	Secondary school	Yes	2
24	M	26	Italian	Veneto	Bachelor	No	0
25	F	43	Italian	Piedmont	MsC/Master	Yes	3
26	F	54	Italian	FVG	Secondary school	No	0
27	M	29	Italian	Campania	High school	Yes	0
28	F	52	Italian	Marche	PhD	Yes	1
29	F	47	Italian	Piedmont	High school	Yes	2
30	M	24	Italian	Sicily	High school	No	0
31	F	66	Italian	Sicily	High school	Yes	2
32	F	47	Italian	Veneto	High school	Yes	1
33	M	33	Italian	Liguria	High school	No	0
34	F	24	Italian	FVG	Bachelor	No	0
35	M	64	Italian	Calabria	High school	Yes	1
36	M	23	Italian	Lombardy	Bachelor	No	0
37	M	40	Italian	FVG	MsC/Master	Yes	2
38	F	61	Italian	Veneto	MsC/Master	Yes	1
39	F	59	Italian	Lazio	MsC/Master	Yes	1
40	M	44	Italian	FVG	PhD	Yes	1
41	F	31	Italian	Piedmont	Bachelor	Yes	1
42	F	71	Italian	Campania	MsC/Master	Yes	1
43	F	45	Italian	FVG	High school	Yes	2

**Table 1.**  
Sample characteristics **Note(s):**  $n = 43$

were superior to other products. With respect to the latter, local producers proposed more consistent labels between their promised and proposed offerings, rendering them more capable of meeting the search criteria for authentic experiences demanded by locavore consumers. In sum, the findings indicated that locavore consumers search for authentic food and reward those producers who are able to keep their offerings genuine and coherent. This excerpt from I43 illustrates this pattern: “After a few months of trials, I decided to select only products coherent to their labels [which in most cases are] local ones”. Consistently, we formulated the following proposition:

Authenticity	<p>“When I go to large supermarkets, I find an immense variety of products. I prefer the local ones because I feel they are more transparent [and] authentic. Multinational brands do not report some information that is important to me, such as the processes behind the product. [...] Local products have clearer and more transparent labels [...] [and] this meets my search for authenticity when buying food. [...] it is important to me to purchase goods that are genuine and authentic, as their labels often claim”. (I3)</p>
Back to the origins	<p>“I would like to come back from work and go first to the greengrocer, then to the farm, etc. [...] I would also like to have a pig or a sheep, [...] visit the food companies in the area. Even more than companies, I would like to know the very places where they produce their vegetables and sell them, where there is also exchange, a bit like the barter of the past. For example, you have the chickens and you give me the eggs and I give you the vegetables from the garden. [...] In today’s life, there are no longer those pleasant rituals and stories about food that were possible just a few decades ago”. (I9)</p>
Respecting the natural equilibrium	<p>“I think [the purchase of local food] [...] concerns the justice, the access to resources and their distribution as well as an overall balance of the planet. [...] I do not see the need to use things that they are not necessary to our survival and to exploit more and more the resources on this planet. [...] I think the planet deserves a little of our attention. [...] Buying local is part of a fairer system, which is not based on having and consuming a lot but on having what you need and supporting the people who live on their jobs to keep this style in balance. Linked to this type of product is respect for nature, the environment in which we live and the possibility of receiving products from the land that hosts us, in which we live”. (I28)</p>
Animal welfare	<p>“[I believe that local products] are generally linked to greater awareness and greater respect for animal welfare. [...] From this perspective, I think it is very different to buy products that come far from here than to buy eggs from [name of a local farmer]. Similarly, I do not buy meat at the supermarket but from a woman who has a farm 10 km from [my home]. The main reason is that we know and trust her, and we know how she treats animals. The animal welfare issue touches my heart”. (I3)</p>
Reducing transport pollution	<p>“[Another issue is that local food requires] less fuel consumption to transport the goods because [local goods] travel less distance, and it leads to overall less environmental pollution. Beyond [the travels that are linked to my] work, for which I have to use the car because there are no means, I try to move on foot and to do all my purchases in my territory”. (I4)</p>
Reducing food waste	<p>“I try to be as ecological as possible, in my small way and [for this reason] quite recently I decided to switch my lifestyle towards zero waste as possible, and being able to buy local has helped me a lot because at the local you can ask for some things that you cannot ask the large distribution. Unfortunately, we cannot go to the supermarket with our container anymore, as I do at the farmer’s. [...] There is a lot of waste in our system. The thing that upsets me is the amount of food that is thrown away. One of the reasons why I buy local is the possibility of buying “second choices”, which are excellent products and the same from an organoleptic point of view but are simply less beautiful, less standard and are rejected by large retailers so they basically end up as waste”. (I13)</p>
The importance of the human element	<p>“The ideal purchase is the sincere one, I would say, in which there is the possibility of dialogue with the producer, there is clarity on the production processes and almost on the philosophy behind the production. The ideal purchase is the one in which you do not spend less but spend better, in the sense that you can get an idea of what the producer wants to do, why he does it and how he does it. Then the price comes at a later time [...]. I need to see the people who produce the food, to talk with them and to see their faces’. (I37)</p>

(continued)

**Table 2.**  
Personal values that  
influence locavorism  
formation

Preserving traditions	<p>“[Our system] is too standardised and you risk losing some steps. Everything is proposed in a standard way; you run too much, it is an economic system that is too fast, we are not all ready to run so fast, you really lose sight of your origins. I hope the time will come when traditions acquire salience again. [ . . . ] [Local consumption] can also be a key to revitalising our traditions, our production and the stories connected to our cities”. (I6)</p>
Fair trade	<p>‘[In our daily life] we tend to buy meat from one country, milk from another. Why should we always buy from abroad and not from Italy? In this way, Italian peasants earn little from the sale of milk. [ . . . ] The fairness and respect of those who produce certain products are very important [aspects]. Fair trade also means setting a fair price. The right price, as opposed to the “exploitation” price, makes it possible to maintain high quality and respect human work. We must allow local producers and their families to live in decent conditions”. (I38)</p>
Solidarity and reciprocity	<p>‘I like to go to a place where there is a familiarity, you can enter the shop where there is a person you need, exchange a few words. [ . . . ] The local producers are people of the territory that I know and therefore their economic activity is close to my heart. I know that I can help these people in their business because I know them. I could define it as “the value of solidarity”. Then there is also to say that if I go to the butcher to buy meat, he will come to me to buy bread. It is a mutual exchange; it is a form of solidarity”. (I12)</p>

Table 2.

I know “my” territory	<p>“Let us say that the local product is clearly local, while the products of the multinationals are less clear. [ . . . ] if [then] it says “produced in local factories”, then yes, but it must be specified, if they only say “milk”, I do not trust it. Having lived here for a long time, I know our land and its richness and genuineness”. (I24)</p>
I know how “our” products are treated	<p>“Elsewhere I have no idea how they are produced, while [with] local products, I know how they are processed and I know I can also control the production process”. (I25)</p>
I know how “we” work	<p>“I go to buy meat from [name of local producer] and I know it is good meat. Even fish, I only take fish from our lagoon because I know that in our area, we are careful about certain things, even if there is always plastic in the seas. When I buy local products, I seem to eat healthy, to be happy, because it is something of mine, of my area. I buy chickens from a local producer who raises chickens outdoors: this gives me a sense of wellbeing because I know how we Venetians work”. (I4)</p>
More attention towards quality and freshness	<p>“There is a project of a guy who started growing on the lake of [a local village] and there I buy vegetables, which are always fresh, less processed and taste better than standardised products offered in large supermarkets”. (I3)</p>
In harmony with my body	<p>“[Local products] are in tune with our organism. I mean, if we were born in a certain area rather than in another, I believe that even the body is more suitable, more receptive to using local products”. (I31)</p>

Table 3.  
Personal beliefs that influence locavorism formation

*Proposition 1.* Personal values can influence the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology.

From the representative quotes and respective codes presented in Table 3 (relating to how personal beliefs influence the formation of locavorism), it emerged that locavore consumers believed they had a deep knowledge of the area where they lived, of the production processes and treatments related to local production, and of the way in which local people worked.

Good memories	“Certain aromas, certain flours used, certain meats, certain flavours [. . .] remind me of what I ate as a child. There are some typical products that have marked my life a little, actually even when I was younger, for example, radicchio [. . .]. When I eat the radicchio of our land, I have a feeling of tranquillity, of serenity”. (I37)
Feeling taste differences	“I come from a peasant family and, therefore, I was born with a stable, a chicken coop, a dog and a cat, and the fields cultivated with grapes and wheat or my father’s fodder, so we ate mainly, especially when I was a child, the things of the house. Meat was at home, poultry was at home, vegetables were at home, autumn products were eaten in autumn, summer products were eaten in summer. [. . .] When you are the son of a farmer, you feel the difference between local products and other products’. (I32)
Habits	“Ever since I was little, there was the habit of consuming local food. [. . .] and therefore, I was used to consuming in this way. Now that my life is changing in many ways, I have kept this habit”. (I29)

**Table 4.** How past experiences influence locavorism formation

Exchanging viewpoints	“My approach to food changed when I met a person, currently a dear friend of mine. From that moment on, I started talking to her and she explained to me that local products tend to be much safer than others”. (I16)
Being inspired	“I associate the local product with quality for several reasons, and [one of these] is I remember that my grandparents used to go to buy food by bicycle from local farmers”. (I3)
Word of mouth	‘By word of mouth, I discovered of a company nearby. Relatives introduced it to me and I thought “I’ll try” because they had spoken very well about it.” (I23)
Family habits	“Personally I prefer local products, perhaps because of my history, for family habits. [. . .] So, [I prefer] what is the small shop, as well as favouring local activities: we have always done this way in my family”. (I31)
Changing the family context	“Since I went to live with my husband, I have acquired a series of habits: consumption of local products, non-farmed fish, meats of which we know the origin”. (I13)

**Table 5.** How groups influence locavorism formation

Locavore consumers also believed that local food is fresher and of greater quality than non-local food and that the consumption of local food is in tune with our organisms.

For example, with respect to the ‘I know how “we” work” code, several locavore consumers believed they knew how local producers operated. Interviewee I4 from the Veneto region stated, “I know how we Venetians work”, while I20 from the Friuli Venezia Giulia region stated, “We all know how Friulians work”. This belief had a direct influence on locavorism formation because, as stated by I20, “Even if I do not know the brand, I know I can trust Friulans”, and therefore “most of the times I opt for local food”. Considering these patterns, we formulated the following proposition:

*Proposition 2.* Personal beliefs can influence the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology.

From the representative quotes and respective codes presented in Table 4 (relating to how past experiences influence the formation of locavorism), it emerged that locavore consumers often associate the purchase of local food with good memories, established habits and the perception of relevant differences between local and non-local products in light of past experiences. For example, with respect to this latter aspect, various locavore consumers were in close contact with farmers and appreciated the freshness and quality of local food. Here, I3 stated, “I started hanging out with a friend who had a farm, and this made me better appreciate what it means to eat products from our area”. Accordingly, we formulated the following proposition:

**Table 6.**  
How local communities  
influence locavorism  
formation

Shopkeepers' suggestions	<p>First of all, I always try to buy food that comes from [name of her town]. I go to the place where I have to buy and I am welcomed by the shopkeeper, because in the small and local realities it is not like the supermarket, it is the shopkeeper who comes to you and tells you, "look at this one, it comes from [name of the neighbouring city]". [...] [they give me] good advice and when they do, I do not hesitate to follow it". (I4)</p>
Creating emphatic relationships	<p>"But in the end there is always a relationship of sympathy, pseudo-sympathy or empathy with the person, with what he sells, how he sells it. You are talking to a person who has extensive experience in the industry". (I31)</p>
Self-managed marketing campaigns	<p>"We buy from a woman in [name of a neighbouring town]. [...] She has a broadcast group on WhatsApp and a self-managed Instagram page, so she has her trusted customers [...]. For example, on WhatsApp she describes in detail her weekly offer and sends photos of her harvesting carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, etc". (I41)</p>
Fairs and events	<p>"At a fair, I saw a company in [name of a neighbouring town] that produces meat explaining how animals are slaughtered without making them suffer and the medicines they are given. [...] On that occasion, they made us taste the ham and other products of their production. Since then, we have always bought that kind of product from them". (I6)</p>
Grassroots organisations	<p>"Years ago I came into contact with a Proloco that promoted local products. They promoted a party where only organic and/or local products were offered. That event represented the values that I have always espoused". (I3)</p>
Collective purchases	<p>"I am part of a solidarity buying [and they explained that] to buy products nearby also means to obtain higher quality products. Producers have been selected from these families as far as they accomplish certain quality standards". (I6)</p>
Municipalities' initiatives	<p>'In the municipality where I live, a project called "open fields" has begun. It is organised periodically so that people can get to know the local realities and the farmers to turn to for the purchase of products from our area". (I8)</p>

**Table 7.**  
How society influences  
locavorism formation

Social movements	<p>"A few years ago, there was a protest at national level for the production of milk: the shepherds were no longer there to reimburse the costs of milk production and there I understood all the difficulties of local producers. [...] In short, since then, if I have the possibility to buy a local product, I do it: there is less waste of money for distribution, packaging and all the other expenses and therefore the work is more remunerated for those who produce it, which I think is fair". (I36)</p>
Mass media communication	<p>"Since I saw the [name of a TV programme], I have not bought products by [name of a multinational company] and have preferred local food. That journalistic investigation broadcast on TV made me realise that we know very little about products that come from afar". (I33)</p>
Marketing campaigns	<p>"Some months ago, I was struck by an ad that showed a girl happy because she ate local products. Since then, I've always bought that brand of cereal to make my daughter's breakfast". (I28)</p>
Social media and food bloggers	<p>"One thing that influences me a lot are the food bloggers on the Internet who adopt certain lifestyles, [...] and therefore I can see where I can improve by following them. [...] I am talking mainly about Instagram pages, where there are several people who deal with the topic of environmental sustainability and invite their followers to consume products produced where they live". (I18)</p>
"Objective" quality rankings	<p>"There are many advertisements for pasta but I read in a culinary magazine that our pasta ranks third as the best pasta in Italy. This type of news always grabs my attention and directs me towards buying local products". (I4)</p>

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*Proposition 3.* Previous experiences can influence the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology.

*Social-level influences on the formation of locavorism*

We found that consumers can be influenced by the groups they frequent (e.g. family, friends and colleagues), local communities (e.g. local farmers and shopkeepers) and society in a broader sense (e.g. social movements and mass media). Tables 5–7 cover these three aspects.

From the representative quotes and respective codes presented in Table 5 (relating to how groups influence the formation of locavorism), it emerged that people are exposed to locavorism through various constructs. These included exchanging opinions with close contacts, being inspired by people close to them, word of mouth, family habits and changes in family contexts (e.g. going to live with a partner). Therefore, locavorism can be influenced by word of mouth, especially among people who trust each other. As noted by I2, “when [her] mom talks with [her] friends, she takes note of many interesting places to buy fresh local food”, although, more generally, their town is characterised by “word of mouth and mutual trust”. Accordingly, we formulated the following proposition:

*Proposition 4.* Social groups can exert an influence on the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology.

As shown by the representative quotes and respective codes presented in Table 6 (relating to how local communities influence the formation of locavorism), people are exposed to locavorism through various methods. These included shopkeepers’ suggestions, the creation of emphatic relationships by local consumers, self-managed marketing campaigns, fairs, events, grassroots organisations, collective purchase groups and municipalities’ initiatives. Several interviewees stated that they appreciated self-managed marketing campaigns by small local farmers. As stated by I11, “The presence on social networks by small local activities allows me to always be informed about what is the product of the season”, which, in turn, “creates a relationship [based on] trust”. Based on our interviews, we formulated the following proposition:

*Proposition 5.* Local communities can exert an influence on the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology.

Based on the representative quotes and respective codes presented in Table 7 (relating to how local communities influence the formation of locavorism), it emerged that people are exposed to locavorism through social movements, mass media communication, marketing campaigns, social media, food bloggers and “objective” quality rankings. For example, mass media communication shaped the way consumers think, which was particularly evidenced by I1, who stated, “Watching TV increased my awareness of climate change. On my own, I was never informed much about it, but then, following the news, I realised that there are many ways to support our planet, [and one of them is to buy] local food to pollute less”. Based on these findings, we formulated the following proposition:

*Proposition 6.* Society can exert an influence on the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology.

*The impact of exogenous factors on locavorism formation*

From our interviews, it emerged that exogenous factors could also affect locavorism formation, with our interviewees explaining how the Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), the “blue mozzarella” scandal, and the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the formation of locavorism. For example, I25 stated,

In the 90s, there was the talk of mad cow disease that perhaps influenced a bit all the consumption of those who eat meat. I started buying local from that time. [...] Or do you remember the 'blue mozzarella'? There have been these scandals that have somewhat directed consumption to local products; even those episodes have left their mark on our culture, at least on mine. So, even if I buy at the supermarket, I make sure that the product is local.

With respect to the COVID-19 pandemic, I31 noted, "Consider, for example, the period passed with the lockdown [for the Covid-19 pandemic]: it somehow taught us to appreciate our territories and to consume local products". Therefore, we formulated the following proposition:

*Proposition 7.* Exogenous factors can exert an influence on the formation of locavorism as a consumer ideology.

#### *Reinforcing loops among the three belief dimensions of locavorism*

Consistent with Reich *et al.* (2018), we found empirical evidence that corroborated the presence of reinforcing loops among the three belief dimensions of locavorism. For example, I27 stated,

When I walk in the local markets, I smell the food of our land, and I realise how lucky we are to be able to benefit from these flavours and great quality. [...] Sometimes, I wonder why certain foods have to come from Germany or France when ours have a very high quality.

This demonstrates how lionisation and opposition are intertwined. In a similar vein, I28 stated, "The local economy should be supported, and not only for a matter of solidarity for our small economic reality, but also because it means greater naturalness, authenticity and seasonality of the products". Overall, our interviews confirmed the presence of co-influences among the three belief dimensions of locavorism. Lionisation enhanced trust in local systems as opposed to long-distance ones (opposition), which resulted in support for the local system (communalisation). Accordingly, and consistent with Reich *et al.* (2018), we formulated the following proposition:

*Proposition 8.* In the minds of locavore consumers, there are reinforcing loops among the three belief dimensions of locavorism as a consumer ideology.

## **Discussion**

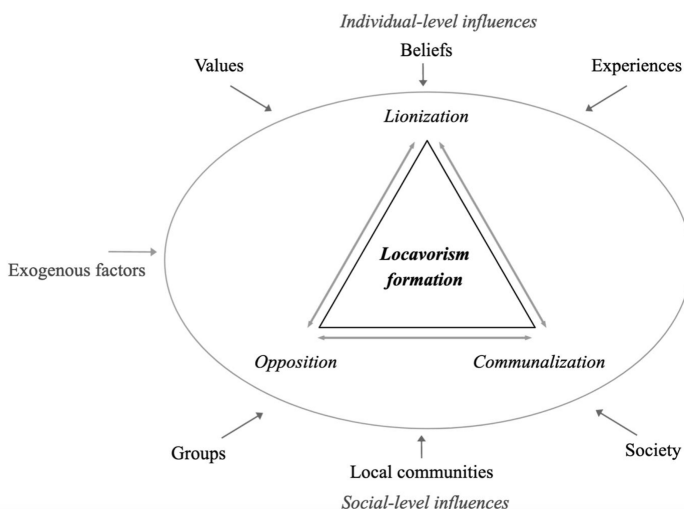
Despite local food is often not economically convenient (Megicks *et al.*, 2012), local food consumption is becoming an increasing trend among consumers (Vabø and Hansen, 2016). Consistently, researchers have noted that local food preferences are driven by inner motives, typically linked to moral responsibility and/or a willingness to preserve local traditions (Spielmann and Bernelin, 2015). From a marketing management perspective, preferences for local food may be an appealing opportunity to generate additional revenue through the development of appropriate marketing management strategies (Carpio and Isengildina-Massa, 2009). This shift in consumer preferences has also favoured the rise of anti-scale and prolocal movements by food activists, who believe that local food is superior in quality, oppose long-distance food systems and support the communalisation of food economies (Fitzgerald, 2016). Recently, scholars have conceptualised this type of food activism as a proper form of consumer ideology (Reich *et al.*, 2018). The present study extended this research stream by exploring the psychological and contextual mechanisms contributing to the formation of locavorism and by empirically corroborating the existence of reinforcing loops among the three subdimensions of locavorism, as conceptualised by Reich *et al.* (2018).

At the theoretical level, this study is the first to explore the psychological and contextual mechanisms contributing to the formation of locavorism as a proper form of consumer

ideology. In light of the prominent role of consumer ideologies in shaping consumer attitudes, behaviours and practices (Schmitt *et al.*, 2021), our study identified three main sources of influence. In particular, locavorism formation is shaped through individual and social influences and exogenous factors. Figure 1 presents a graphical representation to visualise the patterns derived from the qualitative analysis. This model indicates that personal values, beliefs and experiences at the individual, group, local community and societal levels and exogenous factors can influence locavorism formation. Our interviews also corroborated the co-influence among the three belief dimensions of locavorism (lionisation, opposition and communalisation). From this perspective, our study provides a holistic view of what contributes to locavorism formation and how this consumer ideology emerges and is reinforced through reinforcing loops.

Our study also demonstrated that personal values, beliefs, past experiences, social ties, characteristics of the local community, societal trends and exogenous (or systemic) factors constitute the primary sources of influence in locavorism formation. This view extends social identity perspectives to the study of consumer ideologies. This concurs with social identity perspectives, where self- and social-level influences can shape consumer attitudes and behaviours (Terry *et al.*, 1999). From our analysis, exogenous factors also emerged in locavorism formation. These findings emphasise the plurality of drivers in developing consumer attitudes, suggesting that some of these drivers (i.e. local communities and societal influences) can be strategically leveraged by marketing managers to achieve market success. Based on the present research, future studies can complement our qualitative analysis with quantitative studies for investigating the magnitude of each of the relationships summarised in Figure 1. Also, future studies can inspect the main differences between the mechanisms that contribute to the formation of locavorism and other food-related ideologies.

Understanding the modes in which consumers think is essential for formulating effective marketing strategies (Stangherlin and de Barcellos, 2018). Thus, from a managerial perspective, our study can support food producers by providing a better understanding of what influences locavorism formation and helping them adapt their marketing strategies to cope with the escalating uncertainty provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been reported that this pandemic posed several challenges for managers in the food industry (Penco *et al.*, 2021). Accordingly, locavore consumers can be perceived as an opportunity for



**Figure 1.**  
What impacts  
locavorism formation:  
insights from  
qualitative analysis

small local producers. Moreover, lionisation, opposition and communalisation beliefs have resulted in locavore consumers favouring small local food producers as opposed to large food corporations. However, to capture locavore consumers, local producers should be aware of the modes of thought and motives that determine locavorism formation. While experience involves the past, personal values and beliefs can still be influenced by local producers in both direct and indirect ways, ranging from marketing campaigns and participation in local fairs to word of mouth. Furthermore, the persuasion of new people can activate a virtuous circle, which can result in these people sharing their locavore beliefs with their acquaintances, who could consequently become locavore consumers in the near future.

From the perspective of policymakers, identifying social- and individual-level influences on locavorism formation can partly explain demand shifts towards local food consumption and support them when developing policies to safeguard local economies and traditions. Furthermore, the present study can support policymakers in identifying and implementing specific policies for enhancing the competitiveness of local systems and developing infrastructures that can help local producers meet the needs of locavore consumers.

While the present study has provided new insights into the academic debate on locavorism as a consumer ideology, it presents a number of limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, as the concept of localness can vary between geographical areas, we believe that a cross-country analysis would increase the generalisability of our findings (Rasool *et al.*, 2021). Thus, future studies could expand our investigation into different geographical areas. In addition, although the present study explored the psychological and contextual mechanisms contributing to the formation of locavorism and reinforcing loops, we did not account for shifts in mental processes and contextual transformations of consumer ideology in the minds of consumers. Moreover, we did not determine how the narratives might have changed over time at the moment we carried out the interviews. Thus, future research could build on this study to analyse the constant changes in consumers' tastes and needs that characterise the food industry (Bresciani, 2017). Similarly, we believe that future studies should concentrate on a novel unit of analysis. More precisely, we focussed on individual locavore consumers as the unit of analysis. Although we acknowledge the difficulty of exploring modes of thought rather than behavioural patterns, the model we developed summarises the main forces that can contribute to the formation of locavorism. Therefore, future research could examine the evolution of locavore ideology over time rather than focussing on single consumers. Finally, we see opportunities to explore how this consumer ideology can be leveraged for the achievement of desirable social outcomes, such as reduced food waste or ensuring food security and safety (Amicarelli and Bux, 2021).

## Conclusion

While there is still much to learn, we hope that this research offers a starting point from which to investigate each of the influences outlined herein more deeply. The ways in which consumers think offer several insights about their attitudes and behaviours. These insights can considerably support managers in shaping their strategies. In this study we offered inferences about how individuals shape their modes of thought and what contributes to the formation of their beliefs. We hope our study may enhance the academic debate on the locavore consumer ideology, providing marketing management and research the attention they deserve.

## Note

1. Consumer ideologies are defined as the sets of normative beliefs shared among groups of individuals (Durkheim, 1938).

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