



Differences in consumer trust toward organic food labels: a comparative study between Slovenia and the United States

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Abstract: Consumer trust toward organic food labels has become increasingly important in contemporary sustainable food markets, where consumers are exposed to a growing number of environmental claims, certification systems, and sustainability-related messages. Since consumers are generally unable to directly verify production processes and environmental standards, eco-labels play a crucial role in reducing uncertainty and influencing purchasing decisions. However, consumer trust toward organic labels may vary significantly between different consumer markets and institutional environments. The purpose of this study is to examine differences in consumer trust toward organic food labels through a comparative analysis between Slovenia and the United States of America.

Keywords: consumer trust; organic food labels; eco-labels; sustainable consumption; green marketing; comparative analysis

JEL classification: M31

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Razlike v zaupanju potrošnikov do oznak ekoloških živil: primerjalna raziskava med Slovenijo in Združenimi državami Amerike

Povzetek: Zaupanje potrošnikov v oznake ekoloških živil postaja vse pomembnejše v sodobnih trajnostno usmerjenih živilskih trgih, kjer so potrošniki izpostavljeni vedno večjemu številu okoljskih trditev, certifikacijskih sistemov in sporočil, povezanih s trajnostjo. Ker potrošniki praviloma ne morejo neposredno preveriti proizvodnih procesov in okoljskih standardov, imajo eko oznake pomembno vlogo pri zmanjševanju negotovosti ter vplivanju na nakupne odločitve. Kljub temu se lahko zaupanje potrošnikov v ekološke oznake pomembno razlikuje med različnimi tržnimi in institucionalnimi okolji. Namen raziskave je preučiti razlike v zaupanju potrošnikov do oznak ekoloških živil s primerjalno analizo med Slovenijo in Združenimi državami Amerike.

Ključne besede: zaupanje potrošnikov; oznake ekoloških živil; eko oznake; trajnostna potrošnja; zeleni marketing; primerjalna analiza

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1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sustainable consumption has become one of the most important global trends influencing consumer markets and business strategies. Growing environmental concerns, climate change, food safety issues, and increasing awareness of the long-term consequences of consumption patterns have significantly transformed consumer expectations and purchasing behavior. Consumers are no longer focused solely on price and product functionality, but increasingly evaluate products through the perspective of sustainability, ethical production, environmental responsibility, and health benefits (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). In this context, organic food products have gained substantial importance as consumers increasingly seek products perceived as safer, healthier, and more environmentally friendly.

The global organic food market has experienced rapid growth over the last decade, driven by increasing consumer awareness regarding environmental protection, animal welfare, food quality, and personal health (Rana & Paul, 2017). Organic food products are commonly associated with reduced use of synthetic chemicals, sustainable agricultural practices, biodiversity preservation, and responsible food production systems (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017). At the same time, the expansion of the organic food market has increased the complexity of communication between producers, retailers, and consumers, particularly regarding product labeling and certification systems.

One of the key mechanisms enabling consumers to identify organic food products is the use of organic labels and certification schemes. Eco-labels and organic certifications serve as informational signals that communicate product quality, production standards, environmental responsibility, and compliance with regulatory requirements (Grunert, Hieke, & Wills, 2014). Since consumers are often unable to directly verify production processes and credence attributes of organic food products, trust in labels becomes a critical factor influencing purchasing decisions (Vukasović et al., 2024; Ricci et al., 2018; Vukasović, 2026). Trust reduces perceived uncertainty and helps consumers make decisions in increasingly complex food markets characterized by information overload and competing sustainability claims.

Despite the growing visibility of eco-labels, consumers frequently experience confusion regarding the meaning, credibility, and reliability of different organic certifications (Aertsens et al., 2011). The increasing number of labels, sustainability claims, and environmental symbols has created challenges in consumer understanding and interpretation of product information. Previous studies indicate that many consumers struggle to distinguish between terms such as “organic,” “natural,” “eco-friendly,” and “sustainable,” which may negatively affect trust and purchasing intentions (Gracia & de Magistris, 2016). Furthermore, skepticism toward green marketing practices and concerns about misleading environmental claims, often referred to as greenwashing, additionally influence consumer trust in organic food labels (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Vukasović et al., 2026).

Consumer trust in organic labels is also shaped by social, economic, and institutional environments. Institutional trust, food traditions, environmental awareness, and market structures significantly influence how consumers perceive organic food products and sustainability-related information (Hughner et al., 2007). In some countries, consumers place stronger emphasis on local origin and personal relationships with producers, while in others greater importance is attached to environmental values, transparency, and digital information sources. These differences suggest that consumer trust toward organic food labels cannot be understood as a universal phenomenon, but rather as a context-dependent process influenced by cultural and market-specific characteristics.

The digital transformation of consumer communication has further changed the way consumers obtain information about organic food products. Digital platforms, social media,

online reviews, and search engines have become important sources of information that shape consumer attitudes, perceptions, and trust (Kapoor et al., 2022; Vukasović et al., 2026). Consumers increasingly rely on digital environments when evaluating product quality and authenticity, while traditional information sources such as television, radio, and print media are gradually losing influence. Consequently, companies involved in the organic food sector must adapt their communication strategies to changing consumer information behavior and strengthen transparency in sustainability communication.

Although numerous studies have examined consumer behavior regarding organic food products, limited research has focused specifically on comparative differences in consumer trust toward organic food labels. Existing studies primarily analyze purchasing motives, health perceptions, environmental concerns, and price sensitivity, while less attention has been devoted to comparative analyses between different cultural and market environments (Rana & Paul, 2020). In particular, comparative studies between European and North American consumers remain relatively limited despite significant differences in food systems, retail structures, sustainability communication, and consumer culture.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine comparative differences in consumer trust toward organic food labels, with a comparative analysis between Slovenia and the United States of America. The study investigates consumers' understanding of organic food products, trust in eco-labels and certifications, purchasing behavior, sources of information, and factors influencing purchasing decisions. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of trust as a key determinant of consumer decision-making in the context of organic food consumption.

This study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, it expands current knowledge regarding consumer trust in organic food labels by introducing a comparative perspective. Second, it provides empirical insights into differences between Slovenian and American consumers regarding perceptions of organic food products, sustainability values, and information behavior. Third, the study contributes to the understanding of how digital communication channels and labeling systems influence consumer trust and purchasing decisions in different market environments. The findings may provide useful implications for researchers, policymakers, producers, and retailers involved in the development of sustainable food systems and green marketing strategies.

Based on the theoretical background and identified research gaps, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do consumers in Slovenia and the United States differ in their trust toward organic food labels and certification systems?

RQ2: Which factors most strongly influence consumer purchasing behavior related to organic food products in Slovenia and the United States?

RQ3: How do digital information sources and sustainability communication influence consumer trust and purchasing decisions regarding organic food products?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept and Labeling of Organic Food Products

Organic food products represent an important segment of sustainable consumption and are increasingly associated with environmental responsibility, health consciousness, and ethical food production. Organic agriculture is based on production methods that minimize the use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, genetically modified organisms, and artificial additives, while emphasizing biodiversity preservation, animal welfare, and sustainable resource management (Regulation (EU) 2018/848; Rana & Paul, 2017). Due to increasing consumer

awareness regarding food safety and environmental protection, the demand for organic food products has grown significantly in both developed and emerging markets.

Consumers generally perceive organic food products as healthier, safer, more natural, and environmentally friendly compared to conventionally produced food (Hughner et al., 2007; Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017). Previous studies have shown that consumers often associate organic food products with higher quality, food safety, environmental responsibility, and healthier lifestyles, while trust in certification systems significantly influences purchasing decisions (Rana & Paul, 2017; Vukasović, 2026). In addition to health-related motivations, environmental concerns and ethical values increasingly influence purchasing decisions related to organic food products (Aertsens et al., 2011).

One of the defining characteristics of organic food products is the presence of eco-labels and certification systems that communicate compliance with specific production standards. Eco-labels serve as informational tools enabling consumers to identify products produced according to regulated environmental and agricultural principles (Grunert, Hieke, & Wills, 2014). Since many attributes of organic products cannot be directly evaluated by consumers during the purchasing process, certifications function as indicators of quality, safety, and authenticity.

In the European Union, organic food labeling is regulated by common legislation requiring certified products to display the official EU organic logo and certification code in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2018/848. In addition to the European organic label, national certification marks and private eco-labels may also be used to provide additional quality signals (European Commission, 2023). In the United States, organic food products are regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which introduced the USDA Organic certification system to standardize organic production and labeling practices (USDA, 2023).

Although certification systems are designed to improve transparency and consumer confidence, the growing number of labels and sustainability claims has created increasing complexity for consumers. Modern food markets are characterized by numerous environmental symbols, quality marks, and sustainability-related messages, which may lead to confusion and difficulties in interpreting product information (Delmas & Grant, 2014). Consumers are often exposed to different terms such as “organic,” “natural,” “eco-friendly,” and “sustainable,” without fully understanding the differences between them.

Research suggests that consumers frequently rely on labels as shortcuts in decision-making processes, particularly when evaluating products with credence attributes that cannot easily be verified even after consumption (Ricci et al., 2018; Vukasović, 2026). Credence attributes include production methods, environmental impact, animal welfare, and food safety characteristics. Consequently, trust in eco-labels becomes essential for reducing uncertainty and supporting consumer purchasing decisions.

Despite the increasing importance of eco-labels, several studies report that consumers do not always fully trust certification systems and sustainability claims (Aertsens et al., 2011; Gracia & de Magistris, 2016). Skepticism may arise from insufficient understanding of certification processes, inconsistent labeling practices, information overload, or concerns regarding misleading environmental communication. These challenges have intensified with the expansion of green marketing strategies and the growing use of sustainability-related claims in food promotion (Vukasović & Jagodič, 2025).

Therefore, eco-labels represent not only regulatory and informational instruments, but also important communication mechanisms influencing consumer perceptions, attitudes, and

purchasing behavior. Understanding how consumers perceive and trust organic labels has become increasingly important for producers, retailers, policymakers, and researchers involved in the development of sustainable food systems and green marketing strategies.

2.2 Consumer Trust toward Organic Food Labels

Consumer trust has become one of the central determinants of purchasing behavior in sustainable food markets. In the context of organic food products, consumers are generally unable to directly verify production methods, environmental standards, or compliance with certification requirements. Consequently, trust in organic labels and certification systems plays a crucial role in reducing uncertainty and perceived purchasing risk (Ricci et al., 2018; Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2021).

The increasing importance of trust in organic food markets is strongly connected to the growing complexity of food supply chains, sustainability communication, and environmental claims. From a theoretical perspective, eco-labels may be understood through signaling theory, where certifications function as mechanisms reducing information asymmetry between producers and consumers. Since consumers are generally unable to directly evaluate production processes and sustainability standards, certifications and eco-labels serve as indicators of product credibility, quality, and environmental responsibility. Consumers are exposed to a large amount of information regarding food quality, sustainability, environmental protection, and ethical production, which makes purchasing decisions increasingly complex (Vukasović, 2026). In such situations, eco-labels may simplify decision-making processes and help consumers identify products aligned with their environmental and health-related values.

Recent studies emphasize that trust in eco-labels positively influences consumers' attitudes toward organic food products, purchasing intentions, and willingness to pay premium prices (Testa et al., 2021). Consumers who perceive labels as transparent, credible, and institutionally reliable are more likely to develop positive purchasing behavior toward organic products. Trust therefore represents an important mechanism connecting sustainability communication with actual consumer decisions.

At the same time, several studies indicate increasing consumer skepticism toward environmental claims and green marketing communication (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). The rapid growth of sustainability-related marketing messages has intensified concerns regarding greenwashing practices, misleading environmental claims, and insufficient transparency of certification systems. Consumers frequently report confusion when interpreting labels such as "organic," "eco-friendly," "natural," and "sustainable," particularly when multiple certifications appear simultaneously on product packaging (Gorton et al., 2021).

Research also demonstrates that consumer trust toward organic food labels is influenced by institutional trust, previous purchasing experiences, and consumer knowledge regarding certification systems (Molinillo et al., 2020; Vukasović, 2026). Consumers with higher levels of environmental awareness and knowledge about organic production standards generally demonstrate stronger trust in certification systems and sustainability communication. Conversely, limited understanding of certification processes often increases skepticism and uncertainty.

Recent literature further highlights the growing role of digital communication in shaping trust toward organic food products. Consumers increasingly obtain information through digital channels, including social media, online reviews, sustainability influencers, and digital platforms (Kapoor et al., 2022). Transparency, authenticity, and consistency of digital

sustainability communication therefore become essential for strengthening consumer trust and reducing uncertainty regarding product credibility.

Consumer trust toward organic labels may differ significantly across countries and market environments due to variations in institutional systems, consumer perceptions, and sustainability communication practices (Molinillo et al., 2020). In some markets, consumers place greater trust in institutional certification systems, while in others trust is more strongly connected to local production, personal relationships with producers, and community-based food systems. These differences indicate that consumer trust toward organic labels is shaped not only by product characteristics but also by broader cultural, social, and institutional contexts.

Despite the growing number of studies examining sustainable consumption and organic food purchasing behavior, comparative research focusing specifically on consumer trust toward eco-labels remains relatively limited. Existing research often focuses primarily on environmental attitudes, health motivations, or purchasing frequency, while less attention has been devoted to understanding how trust in certification systems differs across countries and market environments. Therefore, further comparative research is needed to better understand the role of trust in shaping organic food purchasing behavior across different markets and consumer cultures.

2.3 Comparative Differences in Sustainable Consumption

Consumer behavior toward organic food products is influenced by social, economic, institutional, and market-related factors, which may differ across countries and consumer environments. Although sustainability and environmental responsibility have become globally important consumption trends, consumers from different countries often demonstrate significant differences in their perceptions of organic food products, trust in eco-labels, purchasing motivations, and information behavior (Thøgersen & Zhou, 2012; Molinillo et al., 2020). These differences suggest that sustainable consumption cannot be understood as a universal phenomenon, but rather as a context-dependent process shaped by market conditions, institutional environments, consumer habits, and sustainability awareness.

Studies indicate that consumers in different countries prioritize different aspects of organic food products. European consumers are often more focused on food quality, local origin, food safety, and institutional certifications, whereas consumers in North America place stronger emphasis on environmental sustainability, ethical consumption, and lifestyle-related values (Molinillo et al., 2020). Such differences are associated with variations in food systems, retail structures, environmental awareness, and trust in institutions regulating food production and labeling.

Institutional and social environments significantly influence consumer attitudes toward sustainability and environmental responsibility. In countries with strong traditions of local food production and shorter food supply chains, consumers may develop trust through direct interaction with producers and local communities. In contrast, consumers in highly industrialized and digitally developed markets often rely more strongly on formal certifications, institutional labels, and digital information sources when evaluating organic food products (Kapoor et al., 2022).

Previous research also demonstrates that perceptions of organic labels vary across countries due to differences in institutional trust and consumer awareness regarding certification systems (Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2021). Consumers who trust governmental institutions and regulatory systems are generally more likely to perceive eco-labels as credible and

reliable indicators of product quality and sustainability. Conversely, lower institutional trust may increase skepticism toward certifications and sustainability claims.

An important difference between countries can also be observed in the role of digital communication and information sources. Contemporary consumers increasingly obtain information about food products through online platforms, social media, digital advertising, and online reviews (Dwivedi et al., 2021). However, the influence of digital communication differs depending on market maturity, digital literacy, and consumer habits. In some countries, consumers continue to rely primarily on personal recommendations and direct purchasing experiences, while in others digital channels have become dominant sources of information influencing purchasing decisions. Digital communication also creates challenges related to information overload, inconsistent sustainability claims, and consumer skepticism toward green marketing practices (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Vukasović et al., 2026).

Research further suggests that environmental concern and sustainability orientation differ across generations and consumer groups (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Previous research on green purchasing behaviour also confirms that environmental concern, consumer attitudes, and information-related factors represent important determinants of environmentally responsible purchase decisions (Jagodič et al., 2016). Younger consumers and highly educated individuals generally demonstrate stronger environmental awareness and more positive attitudes toward organic food products. Nevertheless, economic factors such as price sensitivity and purchasing power continue to influence sustainable purchasing behavior regardless of market environment.

Comparative studies between European and American consumers indicate notable differences in organic food purchasing motivations and trust formation processes. European consumers are often more strongly oriented toward product origin, traditional food systems, and institutional certifications, whereas American consumers tend to emphasize environmental values, lifestyle identity, convenience, and digital accessibility (Molinillo et al., 2020). These differences are particularly relevant for companies developing international green marketing strategies and sustainability communication campaigns.

Despite increasing academic interest in sustainable consumption, relatively limited research has specifically focused on comparative differences in consumer trust toward organic food labels. Existing studies frequently examine purchasing behavior within individual countries, while fewer studies provide comparative insights into how consumers from different environments interpret and evaluate eco-labels and certification systems. Therefore, further comparative research is needed to better understand how institutional environments, communication systems, and consumer perceptions influence trust and purchasing behavior related to organic food products.

2.4 Digital Information Sources and Green Marketing

The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly transformed consumer behavior and the way consumers obtain information about products and services. In the context of organic food products, digital communication channels have become increasingly important sources of information influencing consumer perceptions, attitudes, trust, and purchasing decisions (Kapoor et al., 2022). Consumers today actively search for information through online platforms, social media, digital communities, search engines, and online reviews before making purchasing decisions, particularly when evaluating products associated with health, sustainability, and environmental responsibility. Previous research has also shown that media communication can influence consumer buying behaviour and environmental behavioural orientation (Jagodič & Vukasović, 2019).

Social media platforms have become particularly influential in shaping consumer attitudes toward organic food products and sustainable consumption. Sustainability influencers, online communities, bloggers, and digital campaigns significantly affect consumer awareness and purchasing behavior by promoting environmentally responsible lifestyles and healthy consumption habits (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Through social media, consumers are not only exposed to promotional content but also participate in discussions, share experiences, and evaluate product credibility based on recommendations from other consumers.

Previous studies indicate that digital communication positively influences consumer engagement with sustainability-related topics and may increase trust toward organic products when communication is perceived as transparent and authentic (Molinillo et al., 2020). Consumers are more likely to trust companies that provide detailed information regarding product origin, production methods, environmental impact, and certification processes. Visual communication, storytelling, sustainability reporting, and interactive digital content therefore represent important tools for building consumer trust and strengthening brand credibility.

Digital communication also creates challenges related to information overload, inconsistent sustainability claims, and consumer skepticism toward green marketing practices (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Vukasović et al., 2026). Consumers are frequently exposed to misleading environmental messages and greenwashing practices that may reduce trust in sustainability communication.

Green marketing represents an important strategic approach used by companies to promote environmentally responsible products, production methods, and sustainable consumption practices. Contemporary green marketing extends beyond traditional product promotion and increasingly focuses on communicating environmental values, corporate social responsibility, ethical production, and long-term sustainability goals (Polonsky, 1994). In the organic food sector, green marketing communication often emphasizes natural production processes, reduced environmental impact, animal welfare, health benefits, and sustainable lifestyles.

Research demonstrates that consumers respond positively to green marketing when sustainability claims are perceived as credible, relevant, and supported by trustworthy certifications (Gorton et al., 2021). However, consumer responses to green marketing differ depending on market conditions, environmental awareness, previous experiences, and trust in institutions and companies. In some markets, consumers may be more skeptical toward corporate sustainability communication, while in others sustainability-oriented branding may strongly influence purchasing intentions.

Digital communication channels also enable personalized and targeted green marketing strategies based on consumer interests, values, and purchasing behavior. Companies increasingly use data-driven approaches, personalized advertisements, and interactive communication to engage consumers interested in sustainability and organic food products (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Such approaches may strengthen consumer involvement and improve the effectiveness of sustainability communication.

Despite the growing importance of digital communication and green marketing, consumer trust remains a critical determinant of communication effectiveness. Consumers are more likely to respond positively to sustainability messages perceived as transparent, credible, and evidence-based (Vukasović, 2026).

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Methodology and sample

The study is based on a quantitative research approach aimed at examining consumer trust toward organic food labels and identifying the key factors influencing purchasing behavior related to organic food products. Particular emphasis was placed on comparative differences between consumers in Slovenia and the United States of America regarding perceptions of eco-labels, sustainability values, purchasing motivations, and information behavior.

A structured online questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale statements designed to measure consumer attitudes, trust in organic labels, purchasing behavior, perceptions of sustainability, and sources of information related to organic food products. The questionnaire items were developed based on previous studies examining consumer behavior, sustainable consumption, eco-labeling, and trust in organic food markets (Rana & Paul, 2017; Molinillo et al., 2020; Vukasović, 2026).

The research included consumers from different age groups, educational backgrounds, and income levels. The survey was conducted separately in Slovenia and the United States in order to enable comparative analysis between the two markets and consumer environments. Data collection was carried out using online distribution channels, including e-mail communication and social media platforms. A non-probability convenience sampling approach combined with snowball sampling was applied in both countries due to the exploratory nature of the research and the accessibility of respondents.

The Slovenian part of the study was conducted between July and September 2025. The final sample included 156 respondents, of whom 33% (52) were male and 67% (104) were female. The largest age group consisted of respondents between 36 and 45 years of age, representing 47% (72) of the sample. Respondents aged 26 to 35 represented 22% (34), while respondents between 46 and 55 years represented 16% (25). Smaller proportions were observed among respondents aged 56 to 65 years (7%), respondents aged 18 to 25 years (5%), and respondents older than 65 years (3%). Regarding education structure, 34% (53) of Slovenian respondents held a master's degree, 37% (58) held an undergraduate degree, 26% (41) completed secondary education, 2% (3) held a doctoral degree, and 1% (1) completed elementary school or less.

The United States part of the research was conducted between May and July 2025. The final sample consisted of 200 respondents, including 42% (84) male and 58% (116) female participants. The largest age group consisted of respondents between 36 and 45 years of age, representing 38% (76) of the sample. Respondents aged 46 to 55 represented 25% (50), while respondents between 26 and 35 years accounted for 19% (38). Participants aged 56 to 65 represented 10% (20), respondents aged 18 to 25 years accounted for 5% (10), and respondents older than 65 years represented 3% (6). In the United States sample, 33% of respondents held an undergraduate degree, 31% held a master's degree, 24% completed secondary education, and 12% held a doctoral degree.

The questionnaire included several groups of variables related to:

- understanding of organic food products,
- trust toward eco-labels and certification systems,
- purchasing frequency,
- purchasing locations,
- information sources,
- sustainability perceptions,

- and factors influencing purchasing decisions.

Consumers evaluated individual statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). This approach enabled the measurement of attitudes, trust perceptions, and the relative importance of individual purchasing factors. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical analysis was used to examine frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations. In addition, inferential statistical methods were applied to examine differences and relationships between variables. Comparative analysis between Slovenian and American consumers included the use of t-tests, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis in order to identify statistically significant differences in consumer perceptions, purchasing behavior, and trust toward organic food labels.

To ensure the reliability of the measurement instrument, internal consistency analysis was conducted using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The obtained reliability coefficient exceeded the acceptable threshold value of 0.70, confirming satisfactory reliability of the questionnaire instrument (Hair et al., 2022). In addition, validity testing was performed to assess the appropriateness of the research instrument for measuring consumer attitudes and trust-related constructs.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Slovenia (%)	USA (%)
Gender		
Female	67	58
Male	33	42
Age		
18-25 years	5	5
26-35 years	22	19
36-45 years	47	38
46-55 years	16	25
56-65 years	7	10
Above 65 years	3	3
Education Level		
Elementary school or less	1	-
Secondary education	26	24
Undergraduate degree	37	33
Master’s degree	34	31
Doctoral degree	2	12

Source: Own research, 2025.

Several limitations of the study should also be acknowledged. Since non-probability sampling methods were used, the findings cannot be fully generalized to the entire populations of Slovenia and the United States. Furthermore, the study is based on self-reported consumer perceptions and attitudes, which may involve subjective bias. Cultural differences, market structures, and differences in digital maturity between the two countries may additionally influence consumer responses and interpretations of sustainability-related concepts. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable comparative insights into consumer trust toward organic food labels and contributes to a better understanding of sustainable consumption behavior across different cultural and market environments.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Understanding of Organic Food and Eco-Labels

The first part of the empirical analysis focused on consumers' understanding of organic food products and their perceptions of eco-labels and certification systems. The results indicate that consumers in both Slovenia and the United States are generally familiar with the concept of organic food; however, important differences were identified regarding the interpretation of organic production, sustainability, and labeling practices.

Slovenian consumers most frequently associate organic food products with local production, domestic origin, traditional farming practices, and environmentally friendly agricultural methods. The majority of Slovenian respondents (95%) described organic food as food produced in accordance with ecological farming standards, without excessive use of chemical substances and fertilizers, and produced within a local or domestic environment. These findings suggest that Slovenian consumers strongly connect organic food with local trust, regional identity, and proximity to producers.

In contrast, American consumers demonstrated a broader and more sustainability-oriented understanding of organic food products. Most respondents associated organic food primarily with environmental protection, absence of harmful chemicals, sustainable production practices, and healthier lifestyles. Environmental responsibility and ethical production were identified as particularly important aspects influencing product perception. Compared to Slovenian consumers, respondents in the United States placed less emphasis on local origin and stronger emphasis on sustainability-related values and environmental impact.

The comparative analysis therefore indicates that consumer understanding of organic food products differs significantly across cultural and market environments. Slovenian consumers appear to evaluate organic food primarily through local and interpersonal trust mechanisms, whereas American consumers are more strongly influenced by sustainability orientation, environmental values, and institutional certification systems. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that consumer perceptions of organic food products are strongly influenced by food traditions, consumer expectations, and market structures (Molinillo et al., 2020).

The study also examined consumer understanding and interpretation of eco-labels and certification systems. The results reveal that consumers in both countries experience certain difficulties in distinguishing between terms such as "organic," "eco-friendly," "natural," and "sustainable." This confusion was more pronounced among American consumers, where approximately 22% of respondents reported uncertainty regarding the interpretation of sustainability labels and environmental claims.

At the same time, Slovenian consumers demonstrated somewhat higher reliance on direct product labeling and personal trust in producers, while American consumers more frequently combined label information with digital sources, including websites, online reviews, and social media platforms. These differences suggest that trust formation processes differ between the two countries and are influenced by broader institutional and digital environments.

Despite the identified differences, eco-labels remain important informational signals influencing purchasing behavior in both countries. More than half of respondents stated that they regularly pay attention to organic labels and certifications when purchasing food products. Consumers who reported better understanding of certification systems also

demonstrated higher levels of trust toward eco-labels and greater willingness to purchase organic food products.

The findings indicate that understanding of organic food products and eco-labels is not based solely on product characteristics, but also on broader cultural, informational, and institutional factors. Consequently, companies operating in international organic food markets should adapt sustainability communication strategies and eco-labeling practices to different consumer expectations and cultural perceptions.

Table 2: Understanding of Organic Food Products and Eco-Labels

Understanding Dimension	Slovenia (%)	USA (%)
Association with local production	95	54
Association with environmental sustainability	68	88
Association with healthier lifestyle	72	81
Association with ethical production	44	70
Awareness of certification systems	61	74
Confusion regarding sustainability labels	18	22
Regular attention to eco-labels during purchase	52	63

Source: Own research, 2025.

The results presented in Table 2 further confirm significant differences in the perception of organic food products and eco-labels. Slovenian consumers demonstrate stronger orientation toward local production and interpersonal trust, while American consumers place greater emphasis on sustainability, environmental values, and certification awareness. The findings additionally suggest that consumers in both countries increasingly rely on eco-labels as mechanisms for reducing uncertainty in food purchasing decisions, although varying levels of confusion regarding sustainability terminology remain present.

4.2 Consumer Trust toward Organic Food Labels

The second part of the analysis focused on consumer trust toward organic food labels and certification systems. Trust represents one of the key factors influencing purchasing behavior in organic food markets, particularly because consumers are generally unable to directly verify production processes, environmental standards, or compliance with organic regulations. Consequently, consumers rely heavily on eco-labels and certifications when evaluating product quality, safety, and authenticity.

The results indicate that trust toward organic food labels differs significantly between Slovenian and American consumers. Slovenian respondents demonstrated stronger trust in local producers and direct purchasing channels, while American consumers expressed greater reliance on institutional certification systems and formally regulated labels. These findings suggest that trust formation mechanisms are influenced by broader cultural, institutional, and market-specific factors.

In Slovenia, consumers frequently associated trust with local food systems, farmers' markets, and direct interaction with producers. Respondents emphasized that personal contact with producers and perceived product transparency positively influence confidence in organic food products. In contrast, American consumers more frequently relied on official certification systems, standardized labeling practices, and institutional credibility when evaluating organic food products.

Despite relatively positive attitudes toward organic labels, the results also reveal the presence of consumer skepticism in both countries. Some respondents expressed concerns regarding misleading sustainability claims, unclear labeling practices, and insufficient

transparency of certification systems. Such skepticism appears to be associated with increasing exposure to sustainability-related marketing communication and the growing number of environmental claims appearing on food packaging.

The findings further indicate that consumers with higher levels of knowledge regarding certification systems and organic production standards demonstrate significantly higher trust toward eco-labels. Similarly, respondents who regularly check product declarations and certification information during purchasing decisions reported stronger confidence in the reliability of organic labels.

An important difference between the two countries was also observed regarding institutional trust. American consumers demonstrated somewhat stronger trust in formal certification systems and government-regulated labels, while Slovenian consumers relied more heavily on interpersonal trust and locally embedded food networks. These differences may reflect variations in retail structures, food culture, market maturity, and consumer experiences with organic food systems.

The analysis additionally confirmed that trust significantly influences purchasing intentions and willingness to purchase organic food products. Respondents who reported higher levels of trust toward eco-labels also demonstrated more frequent purchasing behavior and stronger sustainability orientation. Conversely, consumers expressing skepticism toward certifications were less likely to purchase organic food products regularly. The results therefore confirm that trust represents a central mechanism connecting sustainability communication, certification systems, and consumer purchasing behavior. Eco-labels function not only as informational tools, but also as important trust-building instruments reducing perceived uncertainty in increasingly complex food markets.

Table 3: Consumer Trust toward Organic Food Labels

Trust Factor	Slovenia (M)	USA (M)	p-value
Trust in organic certifications	4.1	4.3	0.031
Trust in eco-label credibility	4.0	4.2	0.044
Trust in government regulation	3.6	4.1	0.018
Trust in local producers	4.5	3.7	0.002
Reliance on labels during purchase	4.2	4.0	0.067
Skepticism toward green marketing claims	3.4	3.8	0.025
Perceived transparency of certifications	3.7	4.0	0.041

Source: Own research, 2025.

The results presented in Table 3 demonstrate statistically significant differences between Slovenian and American consumers regarding trust formation mechanisms related to organic food labels. Slovenian consumers exhibit significantly higher trust toward local producers and interpersonal food networks, whereas American consumers demonstrate stronger trust in institutional certification systems and formal regulatory mechanisms. American respondents also expressed slightly higher skepticism toward green marketing claims, suggesting greater sensitivity toward potential greenwashing practices and misleading sustainability communication.

The findings additionally indicate that consumer trust toward eco-labels represents a multidimensional construct influenced by institutional credibility, transparency, sustainability communication, and market-specific conditions. Consequently, companies operating in international organic food markets should adapt trust-building and communication strategies to different consumer expectations and market environments.

4.3 Purchasing Behavior and Organic Food Consumption

The next part of the analysis examined consumers' purchasing behavior related to organic food products, including purchasing frequency, preferred purchasing locations, product categories, and the main factors influencing purchasing decisions. The results indicate that consumers in both Slovenia and the United States demonstrate relatively positive attitudes toward organic food consumption; however, significant differences were identified regarding purchasing patterns and consumption habits.

Among Slovenian consumers, organic food products are most frequently purchased on a weekly basis. Approximately 41% of respondents reported purchasing organic food at least once a week, while 15% stated that they purchase organic food products daily. The results suggest that organic food consumption has become relatively integrated into everyday purchasing habits among Slovenian consumers, particularly regarding basic food categories such as fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and honey.

In the United States, purchasing behavior appears somewhat more polarized. Approximately 40% of respondents reported frequent or regular purchases of organic food products, whereas around one quarter of respondents stated that they purchase such products rarely or never. Compared to Slovenia, American consumers demonstrated greater variability in purchasing frequency, which may reflect differences in income distribution, lifestyle patterns, retail accessibility, and price sensitivity.

The analysis further revealed important differences regarding preferred purchasing locations. Slovenian consumers most frequently purchase organic food products at farmers' markets, local stalls, specialized organic stores, and directly from producers. Such purchasing behavior indicates strong orientation toward interpersonal trust, local food systems, and direct product evaluation. In contrast, American consumers predominantly purchase organic food products in supermarkets, large retail chains, and online stores. Online purchasing was significantly more common among American respondents, reflecting higher levels of retail digitalization and stronger integration of e-commerce into food purchasing behavior.

The findings additionally show that product categories purchased most frequently differ slightly between the two countries. Slovenian consumers most frequently purchase organic fruit, vegetables, honey, and dairy products, whereas American consumers demonstrated more diversified purchasing behavior including processed organic foods, packaged products, and ready-to-consume organic alternatives. These differences may reflect variations in food culture, dietary habits, retail structure, and market availability.

Price remains one of the most important barriers influencing organic food purchasing behavior in both countries. Respondents frequently identified high prices as a significant limiting factor reducing purchasing frequency and accessibility of organic products. Although consumers generally associate organic food products with higher quality and environmental benefits, many respondents reported that affordability continues to strongly influence final purchasing decisions.

In addition to price, respondents also identified limited product availability, insufficient understanding of certifications, and distrust toward sustainability claims as important barriers to purchasing organic food products. American consumers reported slightly higher skepticism toward environmental marketing claims, while Slovenian consumers more frequently emphasized limited product accessibility and preference for local food systems.

The analysis further confirms that trust toward eco-labels significantly influences purchasing behavior. Consumers who demonstrated higher levels of trust in certifications and sustainability communication also reported more frequent purchases of organic food products and stronger willingness to pay premium prices. These findings support previous research emphasizing the relationship between consumer trust, sustainability perceptions, and organic purchasing intentions (Testa et al., 2021; Vukasović, 2026).

The comparative results demonstrate notable differences in purchasing behavior and consumption patterns related to organic food products. Slovenian consumers demonstrate stronger orientation toward local markets, direct purchasing channels, and product quality, whereas American consumers exhibit greater reliance on supermarkets, online purchasing, and sustainability-oriented consumption values. Despite these differences, trust, product quality, and price remain among the most important factors influencing purchasing decisions in both markets.

4.4 Sources of Information and Digital Influence

The analysis further examined the sources of information consumers use when obtaining information about organic food products and sustainability-related issues. The results indicate that important differences exist between Slovenian and American consumers regarding information behavior, trust formation, and the role of digital communication in purchasing decisions.

Among Slovenian consumers, the most important sources of information were product declarations, labels, previous purchasing experiences, and recommendations from family members or acquaintances. Consumers frequently emphasized the importance of direct contact with products and personal trust when evaluating organic food products. Product labels therefore continue to represent one of the most influential informational tools affecting purchasing decisions in the Slovenian market.

American consumers, on the other hand, demonstrated significantly stronger reliance on digital communication channels and online information sources. Social media platforms, online reviews, websites, digital advertisements, and search engines were identified as important factors influencing consumer perceptions of organic food products and sustainability-related values. These findings reflect the stronger integration of digital technologies into everyday consumer decision-making processes in the United States.

The comparative analysis suggests that Slovenian consumers continue to rely more strongly on interpersonal trust and direct product evaluation, whereas American consumers demonstrate greater dependence on institutional information and digitally mediated communication. Such differences may be associated with variations in retail structures, market digitalization, consumer culture, and trust formation mechanisms.

The results also indicate that digital communication significantly influences consumer awareness regarding sustainability and organic food consumption. Consumers who actively use digital channels for obtaining sustainability-related information generally reported higher awareness of environmental issues, stronger familiarity with certification systems, and greater interest in organic food products. These findings support previous research emphasizing the growing role of digital communication in shaping sustainable consumption behavior (Kapoor et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

At the same time, respondents from both countries identified certain negative aspects of digital communication related to sustainability marketing. Consumers frequently reported information overload, inconsistent sustainability claims, and difficulties in evaluating the

credibility of online information sources. Several respondents expressed skepticism toward promotional sustainability messages appearing on social media and digital advertising platforms, particularly when environmental claims were perceived as insufficiently transparent or overly commercialized.

The findings additionally suggest that transparency and authenticity represent key determinants of successful digital sustainability communication. Consumers demonstrated higher levels of trust toward companies and brands providing clear information regarding product origin, production methods, environmental impact, and certification procedures. Sustainability communication perceived as honest, informative, and evidence-based positively influenced consumer trust and purchasing intentions.

The results indicate that digital communication channels play an increasingly important role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing behavior related to organic food products. However, the effectiveness of green marketing communication strongly depends on credibility, transparency, and consumer trust. Companies operating in organic food markets should therefore develop communication strategies that combine digital accessibility with trustworthy and transparent sustainability information in order to strengthen long-term consumer confidence.

4.5 Comparative Analysis between Slovenia and the United States

The comparative analysis revealed several important similarities and differences between Slovenian and American consumers regarding trust toward organic food labels, sustainability perceptions, purchasing behavior, and information sources. Although consumers in both countries generally demonstrate positive attitudes toward organic food products, the findings indicate that purchasing motivations and trust formation mechanisms differ across cultural and market environments.

Slovenian consumers predominantly associate organic food with local production, domestic origin, and interpersonal trust, whereas American consumers place greater emphasis on sustainability values, environmental responsibility, and health-related benefits. Similarly, Slovenian respondents demonstrated stronger trust toward local producers and direct purchasing channels, while American consumers relied more heavily on institutional certification systems and formally regulated eco-labels.

Differences were also identified regarding purchasing behavior and information sources. Slovenian consumers more frequently purchase organic food products through farmers' markets, specialized stores, and direct sales channels, reflecting stronger orientation toward local food systems and personal interaction. In contrast, American consumers demonstrate greater reliance on supermarkets, online purchasing channels, and digital information environments. Social media, websites, online reviews, and digital platforms therefore play a more significant role in shaping purchasing decisions in the United States.

Despite these differences, several similarities were observed between the two markets. Consumers in both countries perceive product quality, food safety, certifications, and trust as key factors of purchasing decisions. Price remains one of the main barriers limiting wider consumption of organic food products, despite generally positive attitudes toward sustainability and environmentally responsible consumption.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that consumer trust toward organic food labels is strongly influenced by institutional environments, communication practices, and consumer perceptions of credibility and transparency. These results suggest that companies operating

in international organic food markets should adapt sustainability communication and eco-labeling strategies to different consumer expectations and market characteristics.

5 DISCUSSION

The results show that consumer trust toward organic food labels represents an important determinant of sustainable purchasing behavior and that significant differences exist between Slovenian and American consumers. Differences were identified regarding trust formation mechanisms, sustainability perceptions, purchasing motivations, and information behavior across the two markets.

One of the most important findings of the study is the different interpretation of organic food products between the two countries. Slovenian consumers strongly associate organic food with local origin, direct relationships with producers, and traditional food systems, while American consumers demonstrate a broader sustainability-oriented perspective emphasizing environmental responsibility, ethical production, and healthy lifestyles. These findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that sustainable consumption behavior is strongly shaped by cultural and institutional contexts (Molinillo et al., 2020).

The findings further confirm the central role of trust in the organic food purchasing process. Consumers who demonstrated higher trust toward certification systems and sustainability communication also reported more frequent purchasing behavior and stronger willingness to purchase organic food products. These findings support previous studies emphasizing the relationship between trust, certification credibility, and purchasing intentions in sustainable food markets (Testa et al., 2021; Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2021).

An important contribution of this study lies in identifying different trust formation mechanisms across the two markets. Slovenian consumers rely more strongly on interpersonal trust, local food systems, and direct product evaluation, whereas American consumers place greater trust in formal certification systems, institutional regulation, and digital information sources. These differences suggest that trust in organic food markets is not formed exclusively through labels themselves, but also through broader social and institutional structures influencing consumer perceptions of credibility and authenticity.

The study also highlights the growing importance of digital communication in shaping sustainable consumption behavior. American consumers demonstrated significantly stronger reliance on social media, online reviews, digital platforms, and search engines when evaluating organic food products and sustainability claims. Although Slovenian consumers continue to rely more strongly on product labels and personal recommendations, digital communication channels are becoming increasingly important in both markets. These findings confirm the growing influence of digital environments on consumer awareness and sustainability-related purchasing decisions (Kapoor et al., 2022; Dwivedi et al., 2021). The findings additionally indicate growing consumer skepticism toward sustainability claims and green marketing practices (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Vukasović et al., 2026).

The findings further confirm that price remains one of the most important barriers limiting wider adoption of organic food products. Although consumers generally associate organic food products with higher quality, environmental responsibility, and health benefits, economic considerations continue to strongly influence purchasing decisions. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that positive sustainability attitudes do not always translate into actual purchasing behavior due to affordability constraints (Rana & Paul, 2020).

From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that companies operating in organic food markets should develop differentiated communication strategies adapted to specific cultural and market environments. In Slovenia, stronger emphasis on local origin, producer transparency, and interpersonal trust may positively influence consumer confidence, whereas in the United States companies should focus more strongly on institutional credibility, digital communication, and sustainability-oriented branding strategies. Although developed in a B2B context, previous research indicates that ICT-supported marketing strategies can strengthen market orientation and business performance, which is relevant for companies seeking to develop more effective and trust-based green marketing communication (Jagodič & Milfelner, 2022).

The study also provides important implications for policymakers and certification organizations. Simplifying sustainability communication, increasing transparency of certification systems, and improving consumer education regarding eco-labels may contribute to strengthening consumer trust and reducing confusion related to sustainability terminology. More transparent certification practices may additionally reduce skepticism toward green marketing claims and improve the effectiveness of sustainability communication.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The research is based on non-probability sampling methods and self-reported consumer perceptions, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, differences in market maturity, retail structures, and digital development between Slovenia and the United States may influence consumer responses and interpretations of sustainability-related concepts. Future research could therefore include larger and more representative international samples and examine additional cultural and institutional factors influencing trust toward organic food labels.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of trust as a central mechanism influencing consumer responses toward organic food labels and sustainability communication across different cultural environments.

6 CONCLUSION

The study examined comparative differences in consumer trust toward organic food labels with a comparative focus on consumers in Slovenia and the United States of America. The results show that trust represents one of the key determinants influencing consumer perceptions, purchasing behavior, and sustainable consumption patterns related to organic food products.

The results indicate that Slovenian consumers are more strongly oriented toward local production, interpersonal trust, and direct relationships with producers, while American consumers place greater emphasis on environmental sustainability, institutional certification systems, and digital information sources. These findings demonstrate that consumer trust toward eco-labels is shaped not only by product characteristics and certifications, but also by broader cultural, institutional, and market-specific factors.

The study further confirms that eco-labels and certifications function as important informational signals reducing uncertainty in food purchasing decisions. Consumers who demonstrated stronger trust toward organic labels and sustainability communication also reported more frequent purchasing behavior and higher willingness to purchase organic food products. At the same time, skepticism toward sustainability claims, information overload, and confusion regarding environmental terminology remain important challenges affecting consumer confidence in organic food markets.

An additional important finding relates to the growing influence of digital communication channels on sustainable consumption behavior. Digital platforms, social media, online reviews, and search engines increasingly shape consumer awareness, trust formation, and purchasing decisions, particularly among American consumers. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of sustainability communication strongly depends on transparency, authenticity, and perceived credibility of environmental claims.

The study contributes to the existing literature by expanding current understanding of consumer trust toward organic food labels through a comparative perspective. In contrast to many previous studies focusing primarily on purchasing motives or environmental attitudes within single-country contexts, this research highlights the importance of cultural and institutional differences in shaping consumer trust and sustainable purchasing behavior.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that companies operating in organic food markets should adapt sustainability communication strategies to the characteristics of different consumer environments. In markets where interpersonal trust and local food systems are more important, communication emphasizing producer transparency and local origin may strengthen consumer confidence. In more digitally developed markets, companies should focus more strongly on institutional credibility, transparent sustainability communication, and digital engagement strategies.

The study also highlights important implications for policymakers and certification organizations. Increasing transparency of certification systems and improving consumer education regarding eco-labels may contribute to reducing consumer confusion and strengthening trust toward organic food products.

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The research was based on non-probability sampling methods and self-reported consumer perceptions, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could therefore include larger international samples, longitudinal analysis, and additional variables related to institutional trust, sustainability literacy, and digital consumer behavior.

Overall, the findings confirm that consumer trust toward organic food labels represents a multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon that plays a central role in contemporary sustainable food markets. The study therefore highlights the importance of trust and transparent sustainability communication for the future development of organic food markets.

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