

## **Drivers of Light food Purchase Intentions Evidence from Social Network users**

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### **Abstract**

*Having acknowledged that light foods constitute a growing sector of the food industry, this paper looks into drivers of consumers' purchase intentions for light products. By taking advantage of the Social networks' expansion on-line, this paper investigates what may determine light food purchase intentions among social network users in the former fast consumer goods sector. Based on evidence generated from a sample of 210 respondents drawn among users of the most popular social network, namely Facebook, this study suggests that purchase intentions are driven by the perceived value customers attach to various product related characteristics such as sensory appeal, familiarity and time/effort benefits obtained; more, it is the core value light foods offer rather than their content that matters most among respondents. Besides exploring methodologically the potentials of social networks in market research, this study may broaden managerial understanding of Greek customers in a light food context. While customers are attracted by both utilitarian and hedonic values when buying light foods, this study may assist managerial decisions on appropriate marketing policies for firms to be more competitive in the light food markets served.*

### **Keywords:**

Light foods, purchase intention, perceived value, social networks, Facebook, on-line surveys, food industry.

### **Introduction**

The notion of customers' purchase intention has attracted attention in the marketing literature where it has been considered an indicator of future consumer behavior (for more, see section 2.1). The former notion is even more useful nowadays, due to a volatile environment, where consumers tend to become more selective in their choices, trying to ideally maximise their satisfaction and utility from the purchases

they made (Choudhury, 2011). Indeed, changes occurring in the economy nowadays, along with fluctuations in the disposable income and the increasing variety of food products (and services) offered to the modern consumer tend to have an effect on consumer behavior and buying selection criteria (Zakowska-Biemans, 2011). In such an increasingly competitive context, companies strive to remain competitive by producing products/services offering a greater amount of desirable features to their customers (Demiris et al., 2005). Furthermore, companies try to understand and capture their customers' views prior and also after product launching by surveying for instance, their customers in terms of their intentions to and/or satisfaction with a purchase (e.g. see Jones and Sasser, 1995; Reicheld, 1996). Such surveys may have attracted some criticism (e.g. see Reicheld, 1996) yet, they are useful in terms of helping firms understand the particular product/service attributes their customers prefer (Jones and Sasser, 1995) as well as foresee likely sales and market shifts in the various markets served (Kordupleski et al., 1993). The information obtained by such surveys assists managerial decision making (Chien et al., 2003); this is also the case for companies operating in the food industry including the fast growing light foods markets.

With respect to the aforementioned light food sector, note that it constitutes one of the emerging and growing fast moving consumer goods sectors, worldwide. Bearing in mind that a product must have at least 30% less calories of the corresponding full fat to enter the category of light food products, such goods first appeared in the 1970s and consumption has been rapidly growing ever since. Light food products' increasing demand has been studied in various countries such as Lithuania (see Kriaucioniene et al. 2009), Ireland (see Bogue et al, 1999) and Belgium (see Viaene, 1997) while in contrast, the relevant evidence from Greece is limited. Yet, such goods capture a continually growing share of the Greek market too, as the constant increase of product variety offered at the super market shelves suggests. In fact, 2 out of 10 Greeks is claimed to buy light dairy products, while light versions of soft drinks, meats, sweets, ice creams and alcoholic beverages gain more ground (EIEP, 2011). Such consumption growth seems likely to be due to the recent rising obesity levels in the population and/or the desire to lose weight that acts as an incentive. Indeed, it needs to be mentioned here that the numbers of Greek men, women and children that are becoming obese are increasing, a problem encountered even in Thessaly where high rates of child obesity are noted (see Iatrikostypos, 2011) as well as in Crete, the focal region of the so called Mediterranean diet, where alarming findings (see EPIC, 2011) proclaimed it to be the region with the highest obesity rates in Europe.

In light of the aforementioned growth of light foods and a lack of relevant empirical studies in this field, this study focuses on undertaking a survey on the determinants of light food purchase intentions among Greek consumers. Moreover, by having taken also into account the growth of social networks and social media marketing (e.g. see also, Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Theodorakis, 2009), this study focuses on social network members in Greece, to generate (on-line) evidence on: (1) determinant factors of customers' intention to purchase light foods; purchase intention is linked to the perceived core value benefit and time/effort value benefits offered as well as such product-related factors as sensory appeal, content and familiarity with a product. (2) The likely effect of social network users' demographics on their light food purchase intentions. Last, (3)

the study also explores the potentials of social networks for market research, in terms of the data quality and the response rate achieved on-line. To do so, a survey was undertaken among members of an extremely popular social network namely Facebook. By doing so, this on-line study sheds light into factors that are likely to drive purchases of light foods. In addition to its methodological contribution for future research, this paper may improve firms' understanding of consumers in a light food context and may also provide assistance to managers in terms of the development of competitive marketing and social network marketing policies reflecting an emphasis on characteristics consumers seem to value most, in this fast moving consumer goods sector served.

## **Literature Review**

### **Intention to Purchase**

The following review of the literature deals with the notion of customers' intentions to purchase light food products (i.e. the dependent variable of this study, shown in Figure 1) and the drivers of light food purchase intentions involving value benefit-related factors light foods may offer (i.e. core value benefits and time/effort benefits) and product-related factors (i.e. product sensory appeal, product content, familiarity with a product).

Purchase intention represents the possibility that consumers will plan or be willing to purchase a certain product or service in the future (Wu et al. 2011). According to Bagozzi, (1983) (as cited in Morwitz et al. 2007), intention constitutes a willful state of choice where one makes a statement as to a future course of action; it is considered as the exactly precedent step from indulging to the actual buying behavior (De Magistris and Gracia, 2008). Consumers' purchase intentions act as accurate indicators of consumers' buying behavior (Grewal et al., 1998). Indeed, Park and Stoel's (2005) review of relevant findings in the literature point out that intention to buy a product usually leads to a positively actual behavior toward that product. By implication, relevant measurements are widely used because they are easily understood and interpreted, while not necessarily expensive to obtain (Armstrong et al., 2000). Managers use the data obtained, to make product sales forecasts (Armstrong et al., 2000; Morwitz et al., 2007). To be more specific, based on the analysis of customers' purchase intentions, managers may decide on the strategy to be implemented for new (and existing) products, including decisions on product development/improvement, promotional initiatives and new product launching (Silk and Urban, 1978; Morwitz et al., 2007). In an operational level, such forecasts can be used, to regulate production schedules, change advertising campaigns, formulate distribution (Warshaw, 1980) and make adjustments to pricing policies (Morwitz et al., 2007). To understand what may determine customers' intentions to purchase a product (or service), it is important for firms to acknowledge first, that customers' buying decisions can be influenced by various needs including physiological (e.g. hunger, thirst) and/or socio-psychological (e.g. prestige, recognition, comfort) and then, identify factors attracting customers' attention and/or forming perceptions of value with a given product or service.

### Perceived value

Consumers often assess the value of a product/service by comparing its features to the acquisition costs (Oliver, 1997). In a broader sense, perceived value can be defined as the consumers' "overall assessment of the utility of a product or service based on their perceptions of what is received versus what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988, p.14). According to Kuo et al. (2009, p.888) customers' "perceived value can be defined from the perspectives of money, quality, benefit and social psychology". To be more specific, note that one's purchase aims to satisfy functional and/or non-functional needs reflecting different shopping values (mainly, utilitarian and hedonic values) associated with a product (Babin et al., 1994). Assuming that customers are rational problem solvers, utilitarian values are considered instrumental and extrinsic and refer to such attributes as economical saving and convenience (Rintamaki et al., 2006). In contrast, hedonic values are more abstract and subjective, relating to emotional and/or self-realization issues (Rintamaki et al, 2006; Babin et al., 1994; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). For example, the utilitarian values of a fast food customer can be linked to such aspects as reasonable pricing and quick service, while hedonic values include an emphasis on food taste and employee kindness (see Park, 2004).

Perceived value was found to positively influence customers' purchase intention in the service sector (Cronin et al., 1997) and customer satisfaction as well (Gallarza and Saura, 2006). Given that perceptions of value play an important role in consumers' decision making and willingness to proceed to a product's purchase (Chi and Kildurff, 2011; Grewal et al., 1998), the ensuing discussion places emphasis on five product-related factors corresponding to both hedonic values (namely, product sensory appeal and product familiarity) and utilitarian values (namely, product content, product core benefit and time/effort benefit) light food products/brands may reflect. More specifically:

- *Product sensory appeals, product content and familiarity with a product.*

Sensory systems are important for consumers in terms of assisting them to encode, remember and recreate information about a given product (Yoon and Park, 2011). *Sensory appeals* refer to such characteristics as smell, look, texture and taste that may trigger purchases (Steptoe et al., 1995). Yoon and Park (2011) found that a product's look holds the most influential part among sensory appeals influencing consumers' attitude towards products. In fact it is the external appearance of a product along with its content that may stimulate one's interest leading eventually to a purchase (Steptoe et al., 1995; Zakowska-Biemans, 2011). *Product content* refers to a product's composition including, natural and artificial ingredients and additives any given branded food may contain. Such information about product content reflects the value of a good and is provided by advertising, the media and more importantly, a brand's label on a product's packing. Indeed, this underscores how important is information (knowledge in general), for consumers and consumer intentions to actually buy a branded product (De Magistris and Gracia, 2008). When consumers are better informed about a product/brand, they feel more familiar with it; in fact, greater familiarity with a given product/brand based on say, previous experience with it may well influence a purchase decision

among different brands (Park and Stoel, 2005; Erdem et al., 1999). *Familiarity with a product* suggests greater confidence towards it (Richardson et al., 1996) while a high level of confidence towards a product, may actually result into buying it (Laroche et al., 1996). This is even more so in the food industry, which is often characterised by the public's food safety concerns and perceptions of quality, in a context where food scandals coupled with genetic food modification issues, ethical considerations and perceptions that processed foods may have health-related implications suggest obstacles to the growth of light foods (Brunso et al., 2002). In light of the above, the fact that product/brand familiarity (Park and Stoel, 2005), product sensory appeal and content seem to be influential in consumers' buying decisions (Steptoe et al. 1995; Zakowska-Biemans, 2011) is also likely to apply to such "sensitive" products as those representing the light food sector, too.

- *Perceived value in terms of core benefit.*

Product value derives from the difference between benefits obtained from product attributes relative to the total costs (Caruana and Ewing, 2010). Perceived core benefits derive from key product attributes/features, consumers acknowledge when processing a purchase decision. Specifically, light foods differ from similar conventional products in terms of possessing special characteristics such as low fat and fewer calories which, according to Bogue et al. (1999), act as an incentive for appearance/health conscious consumers wishing to lose or maintain their weight (see also introduction section 1). Another inducement for consumers to try light products is the health-related benefit to the cardiovascular system one may enjoy as a result of introducing such products into his/her diet; indeed, dietary fats have been linked to heart diseases that could be prevented by consuming light instead of full fat foods (Bogue et al., 1999).

- *Perceived value in terms of time/effort benefits.*

When referring to the perceived value from the benefit perspective, then value reflects the overall sacrifices a customer makes besides money (e.g. purchase time, transaction costs, search costs) in order to receive the benefits of a product (McDougall and Levesque, 2000) while value in terms of the benefits received and sacrifices made is found to be an antecedent to customer loyalty, too (Chen and Tsai, 2008). For example, convenience is considered to be very important for consumers since time is non-renewable and effort could become depleted (Berry et al., 2002). Convenience is considered to be beneficial for consumers in terms of allowing them to save time and effort related to planning, buying and/or using products (Berry et al., 2002). According to Kelley, (1958), convenience costs include the expenditure of time, money and physical energy required to overcome the obstacles of time and space, so as to obtain possession of a good or service. When consumers consider convenience costs as minimal, they may well decide to proceed to a purchase of a given light good, too.

## **Research Model and Hypotheses**

The framework shown in Figure 1, conceptualises the likely effect of a light food product's perceived value in terms of, product sensory appeal, product content, familiarity with a product, perceived core value obtained and perceived value in terms of time effort/benefits

received, on the dependent variable of this study, namely, light foods' purchase intentions. Based on the review of the literature and the discussion made in sections 2.1 and 2.2, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

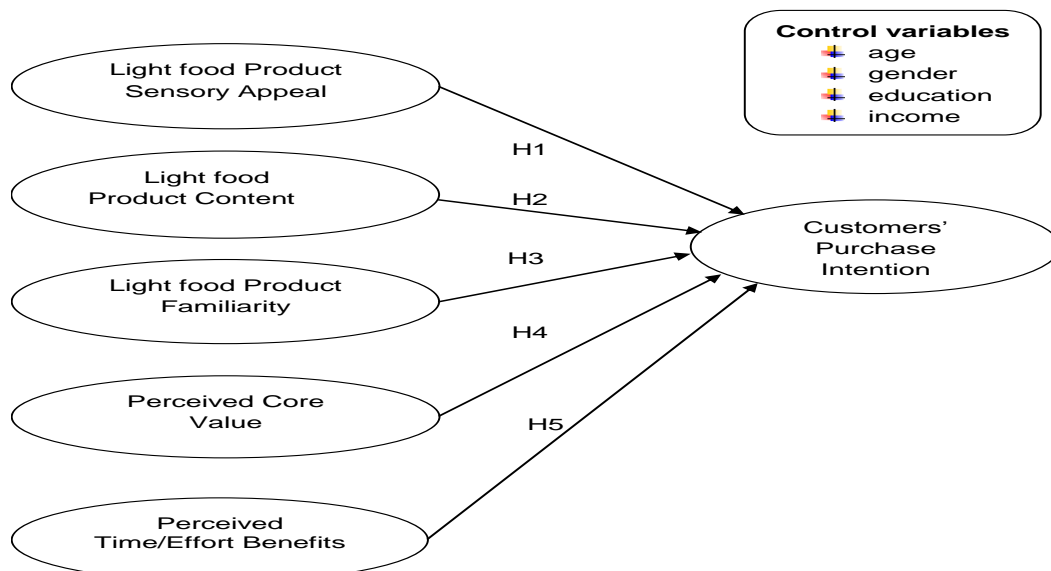
*H1: There is a positive relationship between a light food product's sensory appeals and customers' intentions to purchase it.*

*H2: There is a positive relationship between customers' knowledge of a light food's content and customers' intentions to purchase it.*

*H3: There is a positive relationship between customers' familiarity with a light food product and customers' intentions to purchase it.*

*H4: There is a positive relationship between a light food's perceived core value and the customers' intentions to purchase it.*

*H5: There is a positive relationship between a light food's perceived value in terms of time/effort benefits and the customers' intentions to purchase it.*



**Figure 1: Determinants of light food products' purchase intentions.**

This above conceptualisation also acknowledges that demographic variables (used as control variables in Figure 1) can affect one's choices (Wedel et al., 1999); for example, customers' education can influence buying preferences (Keillor et al., 2001) which is also the case for gender and age (Cleveland et al., 2011). Hence, in addition to the former hypothesised relationships, this paper explores the role of such demographics as age, gender, income and education, in the relationship between customers' intentions to purchase light foods and the antecedent factors shown in Figure 1.

## Methodology

The on-line methodology including sampling along with the contact method issues, the questionnaire design and the variables' operationalisation are presented in sections 4.1 and 4.2.

### Sampling and contact method

To test the research hypotheses, a survey has been conducted, on-line. The advantage of undertaking on-line surveys is according to Hamilton (2009), the fact that feedback is immediate; in fact, 50% of the sample responds within 17 hours of the initiation of the survey, while the majority of responses (i.e. 87%) are received by the end of the first week. Furthermore, a survey that is conducted on-line is costless (Kaplowitz et al., 2004). In this case, data were generated on-line from a sample of 210 respondents drawn among social network users. An advantage of carrying out a survey via social networks (e.g. My Space, Linked, Facebook) is that one can reach individuals that could not be easily reached via other channels; targeting unusually large groups of people whose digital meetings include discussions on special interest topics, becomes easier among social network members sharing pronominal interests and attitudes (Wright, 2005). In this survey, the on-line data collection took place with the help of Facebook which, since its introduction in 2004, has been growing into the most popular website of social networking worldwide (see also Theodorakis, 2009; Boyd and Ellison, 2007). The motivation behind exploring the specific means of data collection is that large numbers of consumers can be targeted to provide costless and timely responses assisting a given marketing survey's aims. A convenience sampling method was employed where the selection of the subjects was based largely on the convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher. Specifically, the author's profile in Facebook was used to target a long list of Facebook friends/guests with an invitation aiming to elicit participation to the survey. The initial invitation provided respondents with a link to the web-based questionnaire and was followed up by a reminder posted on the third day of the survey. To boost response, the academic purpose of the survey and the confidentiality pertaining to the data collected were highlighted. Approximately 1,200 users were invited to fill in the questionnaire on-line, out of which 210 completed responses were gathered altogether, resulting into a response rate of 17.5% within five days. The characteristics of the sample employed among social network (Facebook) users are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: The profile of the sample**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency (n=210)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	60	28.7%
Female	149	71.3%
<b>Age</b>		
17-29	163	76.6%
30-39	29	13.8%
40-49	15	7.1%
50<	3	1.4%
<b>Family situation</b>		
Single	169	80.9%
Married	37	17.7%
Divorced	3	1.4%
<b>Number of children</b>		
None	180	86.5%
Until 3	27	13%
More than 3	1	0.5%
<b>Education</b>		
High school	21	10.1%

TEI	21	10.1%
University	108	51.9%
Postgraduate	53	25.5%
PhD	5	2.4%
<b>Monthly income</b>		
500-1000€	123	63.1%
1001-1300€	45	23.1%
1301-1600€	11	5.6%
1601-2000€	7	3.6%
More than 2000€	9	4.6%

To sum up, note that the majority of this study's on-line respondents consist of young female consumers up to 29 years of age, single, holding a postgraduate and/or a university degree and earning between 500 to 1300€ per month (see also limitations in section 7). In addition to the 210 responses gathered altogether, there were 100 incomplete questionnaires that had to be discarded. This could be due to the subject of the survey and/or operational difficulties (on-line); it could not be due to the well-designed, self-administered instrument as explained below (see section 4.2). Despite that the response was slightly lower than other on-line surveys whose response may reach up to 25% (Hamilton, 2009), the proposed method lends itself for quick data collection as more than 100 responses were received within the first 24 hours, only.

#### **Questionnaire Design and Variable Operationalisation**

The structured questionnaire developed on-line to serve the needs of the survey, was hosted by [www.surveygizmo.com](http://www.surveygizmo.com). The research instrument's cognitive relevance to (and relative easiness to complete by) the respondents, was evaluated through pilot testing prior to administering it in a larger scale. Thanks to the former host, the data collected were retrieved on-line in an excel spreadsheet format, eliminating thus, typing errors in data entering and facilitating coding to speed up the data analysis. The instrument was developed by adapting existing multi-dimensional scales to operationalise the constructs studied (see Figure 1). The operationalisation of the relevant variables has a solid academic foundation that derives from the existing literature (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Basic references for all multi-item measures used**

<b>Measures</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Basic References</b>
<b>Independent Variables</b>		
<b>Perceived Value</b>		
Product sensory appeal	4	Chen, (2007)
Product content	4	Chen, (2007)
Product familiarity	3	Chen, (2007)
Perceived core benefit	4	Chen, (2007)
Perceived time/effort benefits	3	Chen, (2007)
<b>Dependent Variable</b>		
<b>Customers' Purchase Intention</b>	6	Bao et al, (2011); Chen, (2007)

Given the fact that data collection has been conducted on-line among Facebook users/consumers, this study's research design is less conventional in comparison to other marketing surveys. To provide some evidence on the quality of the on-line instrument developed for this



study, the respondents were asked to use a 7-point scale (ranging from 1=very easy to 7=very difficult) in order to assess the relative difficulty in terms of the time needed, effort made and knowledge required to address the questions asked. The respondents' replies suggest that the self-administered questionnaire presented on average, little difficulty to them (mean<3). In addition, both the amount and the quality of responses achieved on-line, within five days-time, attest for a well-designed instrument as well as confirm the potentials of social networks such as Facebook, in market research (see also, contribution in section 6).

## Data Analysis

### Descriptive analysis and measure reliability assessment

Bivariate statistical analysis and multivariate analysis have been performed to statistically describe the variables included in Figure 1 (see more in section 5.1) as well as test the hypothesised relationships (see more in section 5.2).

**Table 3: Descriptive statistics and internal consistency-reliability analysis for multi-item measures**

Measures	Items	Min	Max	Mean	S.D	Cronbach's alpha
<b>Independent Variables</b>						
<b>Perceived Value</b>						
Product sensory appeal	4	1	7	4.47	1.16	0.837
Product content	4	1	7	3.69	1.40	0.878
Product familiarity	3	1	7	3.43	1.30	0.625
Perceived core benefit	4	1	7	3.87	1,37	0.841
Perceived time/effort benefit	3	1	7	4.80	1,17	0.580
<b>Dependent Variable</b>						
<b>Customers' Purchase Intention</b>	6	1	7	5.95	1.59	0.802

Table 3 includes the descriptive statistics of the variables studied where it seems that on average, the sample of respondents places greater emphasis on the time and/or effort savings light food products may offer as well as on sensory appeals made (for more, see multivariate statistical analysis' findings in section 5.2). Additionally, inter-item analysis has been performed to assess internal consistency/reliability for all multi-item measures so as to make sure that the reliability criteria are met prior to using them for hypotheses testing in the multiple regression analysis performed. Table 3 shows the reliability calculations for the multi-item scales used, resulting into Cronbach's a statistics (see Flynn et al., 1990) that are close to or well over the minimum acceptable reliability level of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

### Multivariate statistical analysis

Multiple regression analysis was undertaken to examine the combined impact of the five predictor variables depicted in Figure 1, on customers' intentions to purchase light foods. Note that there are no serious multi-collinearity problems between independent variables as the VIF is below the 3 points limit suggested. The data were also examined for outliers, skewness, kurtosis and multivariate normality

using procedures and plots available by SPSS. With respect to the proportion of change in customers' purchase intention captured, the regression analysis' results (see Table 4) show that 37.8% is the variance explained, while the probability that these results have occurred by chance is rather unlikely as the high level of significance suggests.

**Table 4: Regression results on the drivers of customers' intentions to purchase light foods**

Independent variables	Dependent variable Customers' Purchase Intention Stand. beta
<i>Product Sensory Appeal</i>	0.224***
<i>Product Content</i>	-0.082
<i>Product Familiarity</i>	0.254***
<i>Perceived Core value benefit</i>	0.297***
<i>Perceived Time/Effort value benefits</i>	0.193***
<b>Control variables</b>	
Gender	0.053
Age	0.049
Education	0.001
Income	0.061
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.378***</b>

\*\* Significant at the 0.05, \*\*\* significant at the 0.01, (Valid N=210)

Specifically, unlike product content, the rest four determinant factors are found to have an impact on intentions to purchase light food products (see table 4). More specifically, the core value benefit light foods offer, exhibits a highly significant and positive relationship with customers' intentions to purchase light foods ( $b=0.297$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Also, familiarity with a product is found to have a significant, positive relationship ( $b=0.254$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) to purchase intentions, which is followed by the perceived value in terms of time/effort benefits consumers may obtain from light foods ( $b=0.193$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Interestingly, none of the control variables (i.e. gender, age, education and income) is found to have a significant influence on customers' light food purchase intentions in the context of this on-line study (see also limitations in section 7).

## Discussion and Conclusion

Against the above findings, the notion of perceived value seems an important determinant of customers' intentions to purchase light food products. In fact, four (out of five) hypotheses namely, H1, H3, H4 and H5 have been supported. To be more specific, H1 has found support, suggesting that light products' sensory appeal seems to determine customers' intention to purchase light foods although it has not been clarified what are the particular appeals respondents refer to (e.g. look, texture, smell and/or taste). While physical product characteristics tend to arouse buyers' interest and increase their intention to buy, consumers' knowledge about product content is not necessarily a motive driving purchase intentions. In fact H2 has been rejected which suggests that when consumers make purchase decisions they place more value on other characteristics than a light good's ingredients; for example, product familiarity. Indeed, in line with the literature (e.g. Laroche et al., 1996; Park and Stoel, 2005), this study provides support to H3 meaning that the more a customer feels familiar with a light food product, the greater becomes the customer's

intention to purchase such product. The implications for the marketing of such products are obvious, here. Furthermore, the data analysis provides support to H4 highlighting the fact that customers' purchase intentions are primarily driven by the perceived core value benefit, light foods offer. Despite that the perceived core benefits (e.g. prevent heart disease, lose weight, control weight, control calories intake, remain slim) have not been specified in the context of this study, the former finding is in line with Bogue et al.'s (1999) study in a similar context, arguing that a customer's intention to buy diet products increases when the core benefits from such products are greater.

With respect to the perceived value in terms of the time/effort benefits light foods may offer, the evidence is in favour of H5 that has found support, too. More specifically, such benefits are found to influence intentions to purchase light foods. If one perceives time/effort benefits from a convenience point of view (e.g. see Steptoe et al., 1995; Luqmani et al., 1994), then this study's findings are consistent with Berry et al., (2002) linking consumers' buying habits with savings in time and effort made for buying (and/or using) products. Last, profile characteristics as gender, age, monthly income and education (see control variables in Table 4) do not seem to have an effect on light food purchase intentions in the context of this study. This is neither in line with Cleveland et al.'s, (2011) and Krystallis and Chryssohoidis' (2005) studies linking customer profile to buying preferences, nor agrees with Daneshvary and Schwer's (2000) study where variations in monthly income have been linked to different purchase decisions (see also limitations in section 7).

In light of the above findings, it seems that purchase intentions are driven by both utilitarian values (i.e. product core value and time/effort savings) and hedonic values light food brands may foster (i.e. product sensory appeal, familiarity); yet, customers' purchase intentions do not seem to be driven by information on product content. The above findings are evident across customers in the context of this study, irrespective of differences among the customers' profile (see also limitations in section 7).

Light foods constitute one of the emerging and growing sectors in the food industry worldwide and have been studied in various countries as discussed earlier (see section 1). Although light food products have become popular lately due to customers' increasing demand for them, there has *not* been, to the best of the authors' knowledge, a similar academic research study on light food products in the Greek context. This study is *original* in terms of investigating the empirical link between purchase intentions and perceived value of light food products and providing evidence from Greek consumers, on-line. The contribution of this paper from a *methodological* point of view, involves the exploration of a new means of data collection (i.e. social network based surveys) in consumer research by utilising the most popular social network nowadays namely, Facebook, to do so. Despite that the suggested method can be used to study populations with internet access (Kaplowitz et al., 2004), the quality and the amount of the responses achieved in a short period of time (see sections 4.1 and 4.2), highlight the usefulness of the proposed means of on-line data collection for customer satisfaction surveys of widely dispersed (yet, predominantly younger) populations. From a *managerial* point of view, this paper sheds light on consumers' perceptions about light goods and the antecedents of customers' intentions to purchase such goods. To be

more specific, this paper shares the view that the better the customers' perceptions about light products' sensory appeal, familiarity, core value offered and time/effort benefits obtained from purchasing them, then the greater the consumers' intentions to purchase such light goods become. These findings can be useful for managers in terms of helping them understand and endorse their customers' perspective in order to formulate marketing strategies and goals (Zakowska - Biemans, 2011); in fact light food marketing strategies should aim to improve such important drivers of purchase intention as customers' familiarity with a light product/brand, the sensory appeal and/or the time/effort savings light goods may offer. By implication, this paper may help firms become more competitive in the light food markets served by guiding managerial decision making into placing greater emphasis on those utilitarian and hedonic values customers seem to focus on (Rintamaki et al, 2006).

### **Limitations and Directions for Further Research**

While this paper provides evidence on Greek consumers' attitudes towards light foods, remember that a primary objective for this study has been the exploration of a new means of on-line data collection in market research (see section 1). To do so, bear in mind that this study placed greater emphasis on testing a new customer survey method rather than developing the most comprehensive conceptualisation of customer satisfaction with light foods and/or enhance the findings' external validity across the Greek context. Having acknowledged the above, two limitations have to be noted, here. First, the number of hypotheses developed and tested is limited to four; this is due to the fact that this study looked into a limited number of drivers, only. Further research should improve the proposed model by linking satisfaction to more likely antecedents reflecting utilitarian and hedonic values (Babin et al., 1994; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982); for example, value for money, product quality and/or brand awareness. Also, this study has neither looked for relationships among antecedents of customer satisfaction nor examined specific light food categories. Thus, future research should focus on the combined effect of a greater number of antecedents to increase the percentage of the variance explained in customer satisfaction within specific light food categories. Second, despite the originality of this study's methodology involving on-line data collection via social networks, the non-probability sampling method employed among Facebook users, resulted into a sample where younger, single, female light food consumers are over-represented, making thus, findings prone to bias. Future social network based research should employ relevant social network analysis methodologies to address the issue of smaller groups with similar characteristics drawn on-line (see Henttonen, 2010). Further research on light foods should also consider increasing the sample size by including a broader spectrum of consumers as well as those that do not have internet access and/or a Facebook profile. This would help in terms of improving the sample's representativeness and capturing a wider range of consumers' views about light foods. Failing to do so, is likely to introduce bias to findings and prohibit any kind of generalisations (Saunders et al., 2009).

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