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From Theory to School Food Choices: How Environmental Commitment and Consumption Values Are Shaping Parents' Willingness to Pay More for Organic School Meals in the Baltic States

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Article

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Posted Date: November 9th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-10883049/v1

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

From Theory to School Food Choices: How Environmental Commitment and Consumption Values Are Shaping Parents' Willingness to Pay More for Organic School Meals in the Baltic States

Abstract: This research examines parents' willingness to pay more (WTPM) for organic food in school meals across three Baltic countries (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia) using the theory of consumption values. Furthermore, the study examines the mediating role of environmental commitment in the relationship between the Theory of Consumption Values and parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals. A quantitative survey was conducted in the three Baltic countries. Structural equation modeling was used to test the relationships among consumption values, environmental commitment, and parents' WTPM for organic school meals. Cross-country differences in the drivers of WTPM are evident. Functional value related to quality significantly influenced WTPM in Estonia, but not in Lithuania or Latvia. Functional value related to price and social value related to status were not significant in any of the three countries. Conditional value significantly influenced WTPM across the region. Emotional value significantly affected WTPM in Estonia and Latvia, but not in Lithuania. Environmental commitment did not mediate the effects of functional value or conditional value on WTPM. However, it significantly mediated the relationship between emotional value and WTPM in all three countries. Mediation effects were also found for social and epistemic values in Lithuania and Latvia, but not in Estonia. This study extends the theory of consumption values by comparing parents' WTPM for organic school meals across the Baltic region and by clarifying the mediating role of environmental commitment.

Keywords: Willingness to Pay for Organic Food, Theory of Consumption Values, Environmental Commitment, Sustainable Consumption, Baltic States.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the global organic food market has experienced significant growth, driven by increasing consumer awareness of health, food safety, and environmental sustainability (Matthews 2026). Organic food is cultivated and processed without the use of toxic pesticides, soil-damaging fertilizers, antibiotics, steroids, or growth hormones (Boller, Zurwehme et al. 2024). Global organic food markets are expanding rapidly, with a market size of roughly US$279.19 billion in 2024, expected to reach US$317.18 billion by 2025, reflecting a CAGR of 13.6% (Company 2026). Switzerland is number one in the world organic food market with 12.3% market share and per capita consumption of 481 euros. The highest consumer demand is in the USA, Germany, and China (Willer, Schlatter et al. 2026). The retail sector has been extensively studied in the context of demand and consumption for organic food (Jiang, Abdullah et al. 2023, Azizan, Awal et al. 2025, Jakubowska, Grzywińska-Rąpca et al. 2025). However, institutional adaptation, notably in school lunch programs, has so far been insufficiently addressed, although it has the potential to influence children's eating choices and encourage sustainable consumption practices (Franco, Vidal et al. 2025, Moudrý, Eze et al. 2025).

Parents play a significant role in shaping their children's food choices, especially in educational settings(Orta-Aleman, Zuercher et al. 2026). Previous studies have shown that concerns about pesticide residues, antibiotic use, and nutritional value are important motivators for parents when choosing organic foods for their children (O'Rourke, Shwed et al. 2020, Manson, Golley et al. 2026). School meals provide a controlled environment in which parental preferences can directly influence children's diets (Kutman, Parm et al. 2025), making it an ideal setting to study the willingness to pay for organic options (Manson, Golley et al. 2026). However, the existing literature focuses on general consumer behavior or retail purchases, leaving a lack of understanding of how parents make trade-offs between price, health, and environmental benefits in school lunches (Avallone, Nicklaus et al. 2025; Love, Conrad et al. 2026). In addition, Past studies indicated that parents are willing to pay for organic food due to concerns about health, safety, and the environment (Dahmani, Nicklaus et al. 2024, Manson, Golley et al. 2026, Manson, Golley et al. 2026). Various studies have been undertaken worldwide to investigate consumers' purchase/ consumption of organic food products (Bai, Wang et al. 2019, Arora, Rani et al. 2022, Bhutto and Rūtelionė 2024, Castro Campos and Qi 2024, Ahmad, Fahad et al. 2026). However, parents' willingness to pay more (WTPM) for organic food in school meals has not been examined, representing a critical gap with implications for policy development and program implementation.

The Theory of Planned Behavior is among the most widely used frameworks for examining consumer behavior toward organic foods (Yadav and Pathak 2016, Kabir

and Islam 2022, Chaturvedi, Agnihotri et al. 2024). However, recent studies have attempted to investigate organic food consumption through the lens of the theory of consumption, mentioning functional value (quality and price), social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value as significant determinants of organic food behavioral intention (Qasim, Yan et al. 2019, Bhutto, Rūtelionė et al. 2024, Shamsi and Abad 2024). However, the literature has insufficiently explored how consumer values—particularly through a consumption value theory lens—explain purchase behavior more broadly in the parenting context beyond the retail setting (Cao, Zheng et al. 2022, Nguyen 2026). Furthermore, despite its explanatory potential, TCV has rarely been applied to parental decision-making regarding organic food served in schools, indicating a significant theoretical gap in understanding the value-based factors that determine willingness to pay more (WTPM) for organic food in educational settings.

Environmental commitment has emerged as another important, yet under-researched, factor in sustainable consumption(Henn, Kaiser et al. 2025). Previous studies have examined the role of environmental commitment in shaping sustainable consumption behavior (Kim, Oh et al. 2016, Sun, Tian et al. 2022, Luo, Lim et al. 2026). In light of this, a recent study found that environmental commitments positively influence green purchase intention (Ahmed, Abdelghani et al. 2025). In addition, a recent study found that environmental commitment can mediate the relationship between cognitive factors and sustainable behavior (Tang, Ma et al. 2022). However, from the parents' perspective—specifically in the context of the relationship between consumer values and willingness to pay for organic food in school meals—environmental commitment has not yet been investigated, leaving a theoretical gap in our understanding of how sustainability concerns interact with parental values to influence purchasing decisions in institutional settings.

The shift toward organic foods in school meals reflects broader trends regarding children's health and sustainability (Gharge and Wineman 2026); this transition is particularly prominent in Western and Northern Europe, where high income levels (Lucas, Patterson et al. 2017, Dahmani, Nicklaus et al. 2024) and awareness levels are higher, with a clear commitment to improving health and reducing environmental footprints (Avallone, Nicklaus et al. 2025, Benito-Cobeña, Batlle-Bayer et al. 2025). However, in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the adoption of organic foods is still relatively new, especially in school meals. In contrast to Western European countries, organic foods account for a very small share of total food consumption in these Baltic countries, despite the surge in organic consumption across Europe (Harwatt, Benton et al. 2024; Nowak, Aslan et al. 2025). This context provides an opportunity to examine whether existing models of value-based consumer behavior can be applied in regions with low availability of organic products and distinct cultural attitudes towards sustainability.

Therefore, this work focuses on filling the three key research gaps. Firstly, this study examines the influence of parents' consumption values on their WTPM for organic school meals. Second, this study examines the mediating role of environmental commitment to gain insight into how environmental commitment enhances parents' value-driven decision-making. Thirdly, this study addresses the unexplored context of the Baltic countries, filling a substantial geographical gap in the literature. By answering the following study questions:

- How do parents' consumption values (e.g., functional, social, emotional, epistemic) influence willingness to pay more (WTPM) for organic food in school meals?
- To what extent does parents' environmental commitment mediate the relationship between consumption values and willingness to pay more (WTPM) for organic food in school meals?
- How do the effects of consumer values and environmental commitment on parents' WTPM for organic in school meals differ amongst the three countries, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia?

In accomplishing these objectives, the study contributes to the theoretical understanding of values-based consumption in institutional contexts. It provides practical recommendations for legislators, school administrators, and food service providers to establish meal programs that meet parents' preferences, promote sustainable dietary habits, and improve children's health outcomes.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Theory of consumption values and WTPM

Sheth et al. (Sheth, Newman et al. 1991) developed the theory of consumption values, a well-established model used to explain consumer decision-making (Ali, Danish et al. 2019; Zailani, Iranmanesh et al. 2019, Tanrikulu 2021). The theory identifies five consumption values—functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional—that directly or indirectly influence consumer behavior (Sheth, Newman et al. 1991). The theory of consumption values has been applied and tested in various niches of sustainable research, including green apparel, organic food, eco-friendly clothing, green tourism (Lee, Levy et al. 2015; Qasim, Yan et al. 2019, Joibi and Annuar 2021, Bhutto, Khan et al. 2022; Rajput, Halan et al. 2025; Sari, febrilia et al. 2025; Wu and Lee 2025; Nguyen 2026).

WTPM is defined as a customer's willingness to purchase a product at a price higher than that of available alternatives (Namkung and Jang 2017, Marini, Khan et al. 2025). WTPM has also been investigated in different domains, including green purchase, sustainable hotel choice, organic food consumer behavior, sustainable

fashion, green tourism, and travel service quality (Dean, Morgan et al. 2002, Boronat-Navarro and Pérez-Aranda 2020, Ganglmair-Wooliscroft and Wooliscroft 2022, Shamsi and Abad 2024, Tawde and RV 2024, Zhou, Wang et al. 2025). People consume a wide variety of products, yet are willing to pay a premium only for products that offer new benefits or additional value (Zhan, Ren et al. 2025). Previous studies have found that consumers are willing to pay a premium if a product provides added value beyond its core benefits, for example, environmental protection, convenience, technological advancement, and health benefits (Izogo, Elom et al. 2020; Alsubhi, Blake et al. 2023; Tee, Cham et al. 2023; Shamsi and Abad 2024). Although organic school meals are generally more expensive than their non-organic alternatives, this factor has been identified as a significant barrier to the consumption of organic food. Therefore, parents' willingness to pay for organic meals in the school setting warrants investigation, as this represents a potentially untapped market. A better understanding of this behavioral gap among parents could yield valuable insights to overcome the price barrier and increase the consumption of organic foods in schools. Therefore, this study applies the theory of consumption values (functional, social, conditional, epistemic, and emotional) to investigate parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals. In addition, this study further examines how these consumption values (functional, social, conditional, epistemic, and emotional) indirectly influence parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals through parents' environmental commitment. The proposed conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

3. Hypothesis Development

Functional value refers to a consumer's evaluation of a product or service based on cost, quality, reliability, and durability (Zaidi, Yifei et al. 2019). Based on these features, functional value can be divided into two dimensions: quality and price (Qasim, Yan et al. 2019). Quality and price considerations are key factors in consumer decision-making regarding organic food (Zheng, Akter et al. 2021; Rūtelionė and Bhutto 2024). Consumers evaluate the price and quality of organic food simultaneously when making purchase decisions (Wang, Pham et al. 2020). Consumers prefer organic food for its

unique characteristics, such as natural ingredients, organic production, and health benefits (Ahmad, Fahad et al. 2026). Moreover, consumers recognize the nutritional benefits of organic products and their potential to yield positive economic outcomes; consequently, they opt for organic foods when weighing the costs of investing in them against the benefits they derive (Napitupulu, Setiawan et al. 2025). A recent study found that functional value quality (Q) has not been a significant determinant of consumer WTPM for organic food, while functional value (P) has a significant influence on consumer WTPM for organic food (Shamsi and Abad 2024). Based on the preceding discussion, we hypothesize that functional value (Q) and functional value price (P) significantly influence parents' willingness to pay a higher price for organic food in school meals; specifically, if parents perceive organic food as being both of high quality and reasonably priced, they are more likely to advocate for its inclusion in school meal programs.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). (a) Functional value (Q) positively influences parents' willingness to pay more for organic food in school meals. (b) Functional value (P) positively influences parents' willingness to pay more for organic food in school meals.

Social pressure or peer evaluations are considered the main factors determining consumers' decision-making behavior (Panda, Singhal et al. 2025). This is related to self-image, especially when a product association is seen as improving consumers' social status (Dunning 2007). The association between social value and organic food products has not been studied extensively. Some recent studies have found that social value significantly influences consumer purchase intention and purchase behavior towards organic food (Bai, Wang et al. 2019; Lopez-Sintas, Lamberti et al. 2024; Napitupulu, Setiawan et al. 2025). However, the relationship between social value and willingness to pay more for organic food has not been examined from a parent's perspective. Based on this, we hypothesize that social value significantly influences parents' willingness to pay a higher price for organic foods in the context of school meals. If parents perceive social value in choosing organic options, they are more likely to be willing to pay a price premium for these products, particularly if they are convinced that doing so positively impacts their social image as responsible and health-conscious parents.

Hypothesis 2: Social value has a positive influence on parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals.

Conditional value refers to the net utility a person is likely to obtain under certain circumstances (Sheth, Newman et al. 1991). Consumers purchase environmentally friendly products when adverse environmental conditions exist, such as global warming, or when there are opportunities for discounts or subsidies (Lu and Gursoy 2017). Past studies have reported that conditional value significantly influences

organic food purchase intention (Akbar, Ali et al. 2019; Rūtelionė and Bhutto 2024, Shamsi and Abad 2024; Chen, Othman et al. 2025). In addition, a recent study found that circumstantial factors can significantly influence consumers' WTPM for products (Koskie and Locander 2023). In our study, we hypothesize that the conditional value of organic school meals significantly affects parents' WTPM for them. If parents see benefits such as improved children's health or access to subsidized, healthy meal plans, they are more likely to pay more for organic food.

Hypothesis 3: Conditional value has a positive influence on parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals.

Epistemic value measures the perceived net benefit the consumer derives from a product's ability to increase curiosity, provide novelty, and satisfy needs (Sheth, Newman et al. 1991). In addition, epistemic value captures consumers' novelty, curiosity, and desire for information about a product category, including certifications, features, labels, and environmental and health impacts (Castro Campos and Qi 2024). In the context of organic foods, previous studies have indicated that epistemic value exerts a significant influence on purchase intentions—and, in many cases, on actual purchasing behavior as well—often directly or indirectly through attitudes (Qasim, Yan et al. 2019; Mutum, Ghazali et al. 2020; Castro Campos and Qi 2024; Rūtelionė and Bhutto 2024). Additionally, the role of epistemic value in defining WTPM has been recently investigated in the context of organic food, and it was found to have a non-significant impact on WTPM (Shamsi and Abad 2024). However, this relationship has not been investigated in past studies from the parents' perspective. This study hypothesizes that epistemic value plays a key role in parents' WTPM for organic food. When parents view organic food choices as having health, sustainability, and ethical benefits, they are more likely to invest in them, thus acting in a way that is consistent with their values and children's well-being.

Hypothesis 4: Epistemic value has a positive influence on parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals.

Emotional value is defined as the benefit a customer derives from the advantages or comfort-oriented experiences encountered during the use of or interaction with a product or service (Sharma and Kushwah 2025). Regarding organic food, some recent studies have shown that emotional value significantly influences purchase intention for organic food (Akbar, Ali et al. 2019; Watanabe, Alfinito et al. 2020; Rūtelionė and Bhutto 2024). However, across contexts, various studies have shown that emotional value is a significant predictor of attitude (Zamil, Ali et al. 2023) and WTPM (Izogo, Elom et al. 2020). However, such a relationship has not been investigated, and emotional value has not been shown to influence parents' WTPM for school organic meals. Emotional value can significantly influence parents' willingness to pay for organic school meals; the feelings of care, satisfaction, and trust

they derive from providing healthy and safe food for their children can enhance their readiness to pay a higher price.

Hypothesis 5: Emotional value has a positive influence on parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals.

3.2 Environmental Commitment as a mediator

Environmental commitments are significant in shaping pro-environmental behavior (Rafiq and Xiuqing 2024). Numerous studies have highlighted environmental commitment as a significant predictor of sustainable behavior, including green purchasing (Sun, Tian et al. 2022; Ahmed, Abdelghani et al. 2025). While some recent studies investigated the role of environmental commitment as a mediator, Chen and (Zhang 2023) found that environmental commitment significantly mediates the relationship between environmental corporate social responsibility and employees' green innovative work behavior. In addition, in the hospital context, environmental commitment significantly mediated the relationship between green inclusive leadership (GIL) and work ecological behavior (Ullah, Wang et al. 2026). Another study in the hospitality context found that environmental commitment significantly mediated the relationship between reposting destination environmental initiatives and tourists' pro-environmental behavioral intention. Applying this logic to the context of school meals, it is more likely that parents—who perceive organic school meals as high-quality, reasonably priced, socially desirable, contextually beneficial, informative, and emotionally significant—will develop a stronger commitment to environmental issues. This commitment, in turn, can translate these perceived values into a greater willingness to pay for organic food within the framework of school meal programs. Thus, environmental commitment is posited as a central mediating mechanism linking consumer values to parents' willingness to pay.

Hypothesis 6: Environmental commitment mediates the relationships between (a) functional value (Q), (b) functional value (P), (c) social value, (d) conditional value, (e) epistemic value, (f) emotional value, and parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals.

4. Methodology

Data collection for this study was conducted through an online survey administered over four weeks in May 2025. The survey was delivered electronically, allowing participants to respond at their convenience within the specified timeframe. The sample comprised parents or legal guardians of children aged 7–11 years (grades 1–3) attending public schools in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. This age group generally includes more than one child per family; it was difficult to estimate the total number

of parents in the overall population. The poll was designed to collect data from up to 1,000 respondents per country. Convenience sampling is adopted in this study because it is an appropriate strategy when a complete sampling frame is difficult to establish and facilitates efficient data collection. Moreover, this sampling strategy is easy to use and provides results that can be generalized. Previous research has indicated that the minimum sample size should be between 200 and 500 responses (Ilker, Sulaiman Abubakar et al. 2015; Rahi 2017). In total, 400 replies were received from Lithuania, 353 from Estonia, and 388 from Latvia, which was sufficient to evaluate the data. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The exact details of this scale and its source are shown in Table 2.

Table 1 Respondent Details (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia)

Lithuania			**Estonia**			**Latvia**		
Gender	Male	186	Gender	Male	14	Gender	Male	45
	Female	214		Female	325		Female	333
	Other/	0		Other/	14		Other/	10
Age	18-24	1	Age	18-24	0	Age	18-24	0
	25-34	90		25-34	76		25-34	25
	35-44	228		35-44	217		35-44	209
	45-54	70		45-54	56		45-54	140
	55-64	9		55-64	4		55-64	10
	65+	2		65+	0		65+	4
Education	Basic education	3	Education	Basic education	7	Education	Basic education	6
	Secondary education	95		Secondary education	97		Secondary education	55
	Higher education	302		Higher education	249		Higher education	327
Place of Residence	In the city	312	Place of Residence	In the city	183	Place of Residence	In the city	329
	Suburban area	29		Suburban area	105		Suburban area	40
	Rural area	59		Rural area	65		Rural area	19
Occupation	I am studying	312	Occupation	I am studying	6	Occupation	I am studying	4
	I am working	29		I am working	308		I am working	340
	Unemployed	59		Unemployed	8		Unemployed	9
	Stay-at-home	0		Stay-at-home	31		Stay-at-home	35
Household income	Up to €500	30	Household income	Up to €500	2	Household income	Up to €500	6
	€501-1000	29		€501-1000	13		€501-1000	29
	€1001-2000	76		€1001-2000	62		€1001-2000	84
	€2001-3000	63		€2001-3000	90		€2001-3000	77
	€3001-4000	48		€3001-4000	70		€3001-4000	46
	€4001-5000	26		€4001-5000	40		€4001-5000	21
	More than €5000	13		More than €5000	47		More than €5000	33
	I do not want to answer	115		I do not want to answer	29		I do not want to answer	92

This questionnaire is based on previous research. With the assistance of researchers in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, the questionnaire was translated into Lithuanian (for data collection in Lithuania), Estonian (for data collection in Estonia), and Latvian (for data collection in Latvia). Subsequently, the questionnaire was back-translated into English to ensure the semantic equivalence of the concepts (Brislin 1970). Detailed information regarding this scale and its source is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Measurements

Construct Items	Items	Sources
Functional Value (Quality)	3	Qasim, Yan et al. (2019) and Biswas et al. (2017)
Functional Value (Price)	3	Lin and Huang (2012)
Social Value	3	
Conditional Value	3	
Emotional Value	3	
Epistemic Value	3	Mohd Suki et al. (2022)
Environmental Commitment	4	Fauzi et al., (2022)
WTPM for Organic food	4	Shamsi and Abad (2024)

5. Data Analysis

This section explains structural equation modeling using the Partial Least Squares method (PLS-SEM) and employs SmartPLS 4.0 to evaluate the conceptual model. The analysis was managed in two phases. In the first phase, the measurement model was estimated using SmartPLS to assess the data's validity and reliability. In the second phase, the structural model was estimated to examine parameter relationships, in accordance with SmartPLS's two-stage analysis approach.

5.1 Measurement Model

In this study, PLS-SEM was used to estimate the measurement and structural models. PLS-SEM is a method particularly well-suited to small sample sizes and to theory development (Riou, Guyon et al. 2016). The measurement model was tested for validity and reliability using various techniques, including factor analysis, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted. Table 3 and Figure 2 (a, b,

c) indicate that convergent validity of all the three countries (Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia) based on the factor loadings (as indicated in table 3 and Figure 2 (a, b, c) which were above the cutoff levels of 0.5 suggested by (Hair, Black et al. 2019), values of Cronbach's alpha, which were above the cutoff levels of 0.7 (Forero 2023), values for composite reliability exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.6 in accordance with (Hair, Hult et al. 2021) and the values of the average explained variance also exceeded the threshold of 0.5 (Cheung, Cooper-Thomas et al. 2024).

Table 3: Factor, Cronbach's alpha, CR, and AVE

		Lithuania				**Estonia**				**Latvia**			
Construct	Items	Factors Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	Factors Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	Factors Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Functional Value (Q)			0.738	0.851	0.647		0.876	0.923	0.802		0.822	0.888	0.726
	FV(Q)1	0.896				0.945				0.864			
	FV(Q)2	0.903				0.813				0.940			
	FV(Q)3	0.568				0.923				0.741			
Functional Value (P)			0.772	0.882	0.655		0.888	0.930	0.817		0.777	0.828	0.626
	FV(P)1	0.663				0.897				0.546			
	FV(P)2	0.906				0.929				0.917			
	FV(P)3	0.840				0.884				0.860			
Social Value			0.893	0.898	0.824		0.908	0.942	0.845		0.932	0.956	0.880
	SV1	0.856				0.894				0.919			
	SV2	0.937				0.938				0.951			
	SV3	0.928				0.925				0.945			
Conditional Value			0.868	0.869	0.791		0.950	0.968	0.910		0.914	0.946	0.854
	CV1	0.886				0.957				0.939			
	CV2	0.897				0.955				0.893			
	CV3	0.886				0.949				0.939			
Emotional Value			0.915	0.917	0.854		0.884	0.928	0.812		0.876	0.924	0.801
	EV1	0.931				0.898				0.907			
	EV2	0.936				0.917				0.892			
	EV3	0.905				0.888				0.886			
Epistemic Value			0.766	0.842	0.671		0.808	0.882	0.714		0.796	0.861	0.677
	EP1	0.809				0.869				0.802			
	EP2	0.770				0.761				0.718			
	EP3	0.876				0.898				0.934			
Environmental Commitment			0.955	0.956	0.881		0.955	0.968	0.882		0.964	0.974	0.902
	EC1	0.939				0.899				0.941			
	EC2	0.945				0.943				0.968			
	EC3	0.935				0.961				0.963			
	EC4	0.936				0.952				0.926			
Willingness to Pay more			0.937	0.938	0.842		0.968	0.977	0.913		0.964	0.973	0.901
	WTPM1	0.901				0.943				0.947			
	WTPM2	0.935				0.965				0.962			
	WTPM3	0.940				0.971				0.947			
	WTPM4	0.894				0.943				0.942			

Table 4 Discriminant Validity (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia)

Lithuanian								
	CV	**EV**	**EC**	**EP**	**FP**	**FQ**	**SV**	**WTPM**
CV	0.890							
EV	0.680	0.924						
EC	0.550	0.696	0.939					
EP	0.520	0.550	0.552	0.819				
FP	0.340	0.189	0.210	0.283	0.810			
FQ	0.370	0.180	0.238	0.293	0.580	0.804		
SV	0.610	0.711	0.599	0.424	0.280	0.158	0.808	
WTPM	0.600	0.602	0.625	0.462	0.180	0.200	0.492	0.818
HTMT								
CV								
EV	0.760							
EC	0.600	0.743						
EP	0.610	0.619	0.606					
FP	0.420	0.220	0.221	0.401				
FQ	0.450	0.211	0.260	0.399	0.560			
SV	0.700	0.787	0.647	0.485	0.350	0.213		
WTPM	0.670	0.649	0.659	0.512	0.180	0.214	0.537	
Estonia								
	CV	**EV**	**EC**	**EP**	**FP**	**FQ**	**SV**	**WTPM**
CV	0.950							
EV	0.720	0.901						
EC	0.670	0.713	0.939					
EP	0.510	0.549	0.486	0.845				
FP	0.430	0.488	0.422	0.807	0.912			
FQ	0.830	0.707	0.716	0.523	0.470	0.895		
SV	0.340	0.569	0.362	0.427	0.420	0.353	0.919	
WTPM	0.600	0.631	0.588	0.388	0.320	0.606	0.387	0.756
HTMT								
CV								
EV	0.780							
EC	0.700	0.774						
EP	0.560	0.618	0.524					
FP	0.460	0.546	0.457	0.758				
FQ	0.690	0.798	0.772	0.602	0.530			
SV	0.370	0.638	0.387	0.477	0.460	0.404		

WTPM	0.620	0.681	0.611	0.403	0.340	0.646	0.412	

Latvia

	CV	**EV**	**EC**	**EP**	**FP**	**FQ**	**SV**	**WTPM**
CV	0.720							
EV	0.610	0.895						
EC	0.470	0.584	0.950					
EP	0.400	0.333	0.358	0.823				
FP	0.460	0.304	0.237	0.299	0.790			
FQ	0.570	0.330	0.271	0.301	0.620	0.852		
SV	0.400	0.621	0.426	0.313	0.170	0.141	0.938	
WTPM	0.540	0.491	0.552	0.326	0.260	0.245	0.280	0.849

HTMT

CV							
EV	0.680						
EC	0.500	0.632					
EP	0.440	0.343	0.341				
FP	0.520	0.338	0.226	0.478			
FQ	0.640	0.366	0.277	0.434	0.680		
SV	0.440	0.690	0.447	0.304	0.220	0.149	
WTPM	0.580	0.533	0.572	0.292	0.240	0.239	0.294

Note FV(Q) = functional value (quality), FV(P) = functional value (price), SV = social value, CV = conditional value, EV = emotional value, EP = epistemic value, EC = environmental commitment, WTPM = willingness to pay more (organic food)

Figure 2 (a): Measurement Model (Lithuania)

Figure 2 (b): Measurement Model (Estonia)

Figure 2 (c): Measurement Model (Latvia)

Discriminant Validity was evaluated through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion. The results from Table 3 indicate that the data for each country—Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia—meet the required standard for discriminant validity: the squared value of each indicator's AVE exceeds the indicator's correlation with other constructs, thereby satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The constructs used in this study are independent of one another, as confirmed by their HTMT values of less than 0.90 (Sarstedt, Ringle et al. 2020). Table 4 shows the HTMT values for each country's data.

5.2 Structural Model

The coefficient of determination (R^2) measures how well a model explains the variation in the data (Saunders, Russell et al. 2012, Li, Long et al. 2023). For example, an R^2 value of 0.20 indicates strong predictive power in behavioral research (Cohen 2013, Aberson 2019). In the current study, for the Lithuania data set, the model's overall explanatory power (R^2) indicated that it accounted for 54.9% and 49.8% of the variance in environmental commitment and WTPM, respectively. In the Estonian data set, the model's overall explanatory power (R^2) indicated that it accounted for 60.3% and 47.4% of the variance in environmental commitment and WTPM, respectively. For the Latvia data set, the model's overall explanatory power (R^2) indicated that it accounted for 38.4% and 42.9% of the variance in environmental commitment and WTPM, respectively. (Figure 2 (a,b,c))

Table 5 Hypothesis (Direct Relationship)

Hypothetical Relationships		Lithuania				Estonia				Latvia			
Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	T-Value	P-Value	Staus	Beta	T-Value	P-Value	Staus	Beta	T-Value	P-Value	Status
H1(a)	FV(Q) -> WTPM	-0.029	0.596	0.551	Rejected	0.177	2.343	0.019	Accepted	-0.140	1.804	0.067	Rejected
H1(b)	FV(P) -> WTPM	-0.014	0.235	0.814	Rejected	0.085	1.083	0.279	Rejected	0.047	0.578	0.564	Rejected
H2	H3 SV -> WTPM	-0.026	0.370	0.712	Rejected	0.093	1.458	0.145	Rejected	-0.114	1.950	0.051	Rejected
H3	CV -> WTPM	0.321	4.847	0.000	Accepted	0.141	1.971	0.050	Accepted	0.367	4.866	0.000	Accepted
H4	EV-> WTPM	0.139	1.743	0.081	Rejected	0.250	2.980	0.003	Accepted	0.144	2.061	0.039	Accepted
H5	EP -> WTPM	0.051	0.886	0.375	Rejected	0.031	0.402	0.688	Rejected	0.072	1.430	0.153	Rejected

Note FV(Q) = functional value (quality), FV(P) = functional value (price), SV = social value, CV = conditional value, EV = emotional value, EP = epistemic value, EC = environmental commitment, WTPM = willingness to pay more (organic food)

Table 5 shows direct hypothetical relationships. The analysis of the structural model involves examining the relationships within the proposed model using a bootstrapping method with 5,000 subsamples. Hypothesis testing across Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia yields the following results for WTPM**.** In Lithuania, CV (H3) has a significant relationship with WTPM ($\beta = 0.321$; p-value < 0.05), but FV(Q) H1(a) and FV(P) H1(b) are not significantly related to WTPM ($p > 0.05$). In Estonia, CV (H3) has a significant influence on WTPM ($\beta = 4.847$; p-value < 0.05), and EV (H4) also has a significant influence on WTPM ($\beta = 0.250$; p-value < 0.05). In Latvia, CV (H3) has a significant influence on WTPM ($\beta = 0.367$; p-value < 0.05), and EV (H4) also has a significant influence on WTPM ($\beta = 0.144$; p-value < 0.05). SV (H2), EP (H5) and FV(P) (H1(b)) are not rejected in any country ($p > 0.05$).

Table 6 Hypothesis (Mediation)

Hypothetical Relationships		Lithuania				Estonia				Latvia			
Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	T-Value	P-Value	Status	Beta	T-Value	P-Value	Status	Beta	T-Value	P-Value	Status
H6 (a)	FV (Q) -> EC-> WTPM	0.030	1.396	0.163	Rejected	0.065	2.239	0.025	Accepted	0.006	0.307	0.759	Rejected
H6 (b)	FV (P) -> EC -> WTPM	-0.014	0.904	0.366	Rejected	-0.001	0.106	0.916	Rejected	-0.005	0.231	0.817	Rejected
H6 (C)	SV-> EC -> WTPM	0.069	2.855	0.004	Accepted	-0.008	0.870	0.384	Rejected	0.026	1.289	0.197	Rejected
H6 (d)	CV -> EC-> WTPM	0.004	0.219	0.826	Rejected	0.010	0.655	0.513	Rejected	0.044	1.744	0.081	Rejected
H6 (e)	EV -> EC ->WTPM	0.146	4.208	0.000	Accepted	0.071	2.262	0.024	Accepted	0.141	4.189	0.000	Accepted
H6 (f)	EP-> EC ->WTPM	0.076	3.596	0.000	Accepted	0.012	0.825	0.409	Rejected	0.050	2.384	0.017	Accepted

Note FV(Q) = functional value (quality), FV(P) = functional value (price), SV = social value, CV = conditional value, EV = emotional value, EP = epistemic value, EC = environmental commitment, WTPM = WTPM(organic food)

Table 6 shows mediating relationships. Our study revealed that epistemic value does not mediate the relationship between FV (Q) and WTPM in Lithuania (β = 0.030; p-value > 0.05) and Latvia (β = 0.006; p-value > 0.05), but is significant in Estonia (β = 0.065; p-value < 0.05). H6(a) is rejected for Lithuania and Latvia, but accepted for Estonia. EC does not mediate the relationship between FV (P) and WTPM in all three countries, as the P-values were above 0.05 (Lithuania: p = 0.366; Estonia: p = 0.916; Latvia: p = 0.817). H6(b) is rejected in all three countries. Our study revealed that, in the context of Lithuania, EC mediates the relationship between SV and WTPM (β = 0.069; p < 0.05), whereas this is rejected for Latvia and Estonia (β = 0.069; p > 0.008; β = 0.026; p > 0.05); consequently, H6(c) is accepted for Lithuania but rejected for Estonia and Latvia. EC does not find a significant relationship between CV and WTPM across all three countries, as their P-values are > 0.05. H6 (d) rejected for all three countries. Further, our study revealed that EV has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between EV and WTPM in all three countries, with P-values < 0.05 (Lithuania: p < 0.001; Estonia: p = 0.024; Latvia: p < 0.001). H6(e) is accepted for all three countries. Finally, EC proved to be significant in Lithuania and Latvia regarding the relationship between EP and WTPM (β = 0.076, p < 0.05 and β = 0.050, p < 0.05, respectively), whereas this was not the case in Estonia; thus, H6(e) is accepted for Lithuania and Latvia but rejected for Estonia.

6. Discussion and contribution

Our study found that Functional Value (Q) significantly influences parents' WTPM for organic in-school meals in Estonia, but it has no significant effect in Lithuania and

Latvia; the findings support recent findings (Shamsi and Abad 2024) but contradict earlier studies in the context of sustainable purchasing behavior (Cao and Zhang 2024; Aly and Al-Salfiti 2025). Our results indicate that Estonian parents see organic foods (high quality) as having a direct positive influence on children's health and daily school lives; in this context, organic school food is a safer, more nutritious option that better fits their expectations for their children's development, not just a "label." This, in effect, incentivizes them to pay more for organic options within the school food program, as it helps them fulfill their basic parental duties: protecting their children and ensuring the best possible care – even during school hours. In contrast, Latvia and Lithuania may place less emphasis on the functional value of organic food due to reduced awareness of it (particularly in school lunches). Previous research has shown that parents have different food health priorities, especially regarding their children's nutrition (Dědina, Sanova et al. 2014).

Our study revealed that functional value (P) has no significant effect on parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Kumar, Bhattacharya et al. 2025; Sadler, Bharath et al. 2025). Our data reveal that in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, parents see organic food as healthful. However, economic factors, such as concerns about cost and family budget constraints, do not influence their decision-making or prevent them from paying extra for organic food for school lunches. This is consistent with previous research, indicating that parents appreciate the health benefits of organic foods and thoughtfully weigh their willingness to pay in school meal decisions (Kutman, Parm et al. 2025).

Our study showed that social value does not have a significant effect on parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; the results support previous studies (Li and Kallas 2021, Oesman 2021, Shamsi and Abad 2024). The results reveal that parents in the Baltic nations, including Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, pay more attention to the price and the nutritional quality of organic food than to its social status. Moreover, in the Baltic countries, school lunch programs are frequently considered collective services, with an emphasis on health and children's well-being rather than status (Janhonen 2026).

Conditional value strongly influences parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia, as in previous studies (Prince, Wahid et al. 2024; Rūtelionė and Bhutto 2024). Our results suggest that contextual incentives, such as government subsidies for school meals and support from schools and local communities, incentivize parents to spend more on organic food. In the Baltic countries, these characteristics make organic food attractive and affordable, reflecting parents' growing interest in their children's health and environmental conservation.

The results of our study suggest that emotional value has a substantial impact on parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals in Estonia and Latvia; the result is in line with earlier studies (Ayaviri-Nina, Jaramillo-Quinzo et al. 2022; Jakubowska, Grzywińska-Rąpca et al. 2025), although it is not substantial in the Lithuanian context. The finding contrasts with recent consumer-oriented findings (Rūtelionė and Bhutto 2024). Our findings indicate discrepancies among the Baltic states (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia) concerning perceptions of organic food and its emotional significance. In Estonia and Latvia, sustainability and health are increasingly prioritized, with parents more willing to invest in organic school lunches. In Lithuania, the preference for organic school meals is mostly influenced by financial considerations and the belief that conventional food offers comparable quality, rendering emotional value less significant.

Our study found that epistemic value has no significant effect on parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia; the finding aligns with recent studies (Ray, Das et al. 2023; Shamsi and Abad 2024). Our results suggest that parents in the Baltic countries do not emphasize innovation and novelty in organic food, such as production methods and environmental impact. Previous research has suggested that knowledge strongly influences consumer choice (Castro Campos and Qi 2024), but in the Baltic countries, parents prioritize practical aspects, such as health benefits and cost, rather than the cognitive value of organic food.

Finally, we tested whether environmental commitment mediates the relationship between consumption values and parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first study to investigate the impact of environmental commitment on consumption values and parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals. Our study found that parents' environmental commitment significantly mediated the relationship between functional value (Q) and parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals in Estonia, but this effect was not significant in Lithuania and Latvia. Our findings suggest a significant mediating role for environmental commitment in Estonia, where sustainability concepts are strongly integrated into school curricula (Rääk & Eisenschmidt, 2025; Shlykova, 2025), ultimately encouraging Estonian parents to choose the organic option for their children. In Lithuania and Latvia, integrating sustainability into the concept of integration is at a nascent stage; parents focus more on affordability and immediate nutritional benefits when making food choices for their children.

Our study found that parents' environmental commitment did not significantly mediate the relationship between functional value (P) and parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. The reason could be that parents in the Baltic States still place greater weight on cost, convenience, and immediate nutritional benefits than on environmental matters. These results are consistent with

previous studies highlighting that consumers, particularly in the Baltic regions, often place greater emphasis on affordability and convenience when choosing food, especially for their children (Pomerleau, McKee et al. 2002; Petrauskienė, Žaltauskė et al. 2015). Furthermore, our study revealed that environmental commitment exerted no significant influence on the relationship between social values and parents' willingness to pay for organic food in school meals; however, in Estonia and Latvia, this relationship was statistically non-significant, whereas in Lithuania it was not. The results suggest that these divergent findings are attributable to differences in social norms and cultural factors across these Baltic states. In Lithuania, individuals feel more socially motivated to prioritize environmental protection, which reinforces their inclination—driven by social pressure and peer influence—to opt for organic choices; past studies also suggest that the perception of social pressure is particularly strong in Lithuania, as individuals feel a greater social obligation to prioritize environmental protection (Čapienė, Rūtelionė et al. 2021, Čapienė, Rūtelionė et al. 2024). Parents in Latvia and Estonia, conversely, may not view the selection of organic options for school meals through the lens of social symbolism, thereby weakening the link between their social values and their willingness to pay. Previous studies have indicated that, in Latvia, the high cost of organic options and the lack of public awareness campaigns limit consumers' adherence to environmental values (Aleksejeva and Pelse 2019). Our study found that parents' environmental commitment did not significantly mediate the relationship between conditional value and parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals in Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. The reason could be the conditional benefits provided by the Baltic governments, such as promotions and government subsidies for school meals. These benefits reduce the cost of organic food, making it more affordable for parents. They are considered stronger motivators than environmental concerns. Baltic parents place greater weight on financial incentives and support when choosing organic meals for their children at school. Past studies also indicate that subsidies, tax benefits, and discounts are among the factors driving the choice of a sustainable option over environmental factors (Cascavilla, D'Adamo et al. 2026). Our study showed that parental environmental commitment significantly mediates the relationship between emotional value and parental willingness to pay for organic food in school meals in Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. The results suggest that, in the Baltic states, parental environmental commitment strengthens the link between emotional value and willingness to pay a higher price for organic food in school meals: parents who prioritize their children's nutrition and health tend to feel a stronger emotional connection to organic food; they perceive meals prepared with organic ingredients as healthier and more environmentally sustainable, which motivates them to pay a higher price for organic food in school meals. Previous studies have also pointed to this fact: parents who place paramount importance on their children's health and nutrition form stronger emotional bonds with organic products, given their perception that these products

are inherently healthier and more environmentally responsible(Kutman, Parm et al. 2025). Lastly, our study showed that parental environmental commitment significantly mediates the relationship between epistemic value and parental willingness to pay for organic food in school meals in Lithuania and Latvia, but it is insignificant in Estonia. The reason could be that parents in Lithuania and Latvia might be more curious about organic food options for school meals and their benefits, which could encourage them to pay more for organic food options, especially when paired with their environmental commitment. However, the absence of mediation in Estonia can be a consequence of the contextual variations. It is possible that the parents value the practical attributes (nutrition, taste, variety and affordability) over the ecological or environmental elements (Ravikumar, Spyreli et al. 2022; Kutman, Parm et al. 2025).

6.1 Theoretical Contribution

This research provides four main contributions. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to apply the theory of consumption values to examine parents' WTPM for organic food in school meals. This method transcends traditional consumer behavior models and offers a broader perspective on decision-making in school lunch programs. This research environment, unlike earlier studies, provides a new analytical perspective that improves both the theoretical foundation and empirical validation of the theory of consumption values (Sheth, Newman et al. 1991) concerning parents' willingness to buy organic school meals, thereby highlighting the scope of application and transferability of this theoretical framework. Further, this study extends the idea of consumer values to investigate WTPM from parents' perspectives. WTPM is an important factor that most researchers in the field of organic food consumption neglect, especially outside the scope of strictly consumer-centric studies. Secondly, this study examined the influence of environmental commitment on the relationship between the theory of consumer values and parents' willingness to pay more for organic options in school meals. Prior research indicates that environmental commitment affects sustainable behavior (Ahmed, Abdelghani et al. 2025; Bangwal, Chaudhary et al. 2025). This research specifically examined how parents' environmental commitment acts as a link between the theory of consumer values and parents' willingness to pay more for organic food. Thirdly, the study broadens the geographical reach of research on organic food consumption by covering the Baltic States – Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia - which have been rarely studied in this context. This study contributes to the understanding of organic food consumption in a new regional context by applying the 'theory of consumption values' in these countries and points to specific challenges and opportunities that parents in these countries face concerning sustainable nutrition practices at schools.

6.2 Implications for policy and practice

First of all, governments have taken measures to relieve the financial burden of organic school meals. Indeed, price is one of the major variables that impact parents' willingness to pay a premium for organic food. This can be easily achieved by offering tax incentives, subsidies, and public procurement laws that give preference to organic products in school food programs. Governments can also help make organic meals more affordable – for example, in the Baltic countries, where food prices are a major problem – by giving financial incentives and cutting costs. Secondly, schools could play a role in educating parents about the benefits of organic foods. This could be achieved through nutrition education, school gardening activities, and classroom discussions on healthy and sustainable diets, she said. These measures can enhance the perceived value of organic foods for parents and children—beyond purely economic considerations—and foster long-term support for sustainable school nutrition initiatives. Third, the government and schools should work together rather than separately. The government can provide financial resources and policy guidance, and schools can implement actions such as awareness campaigns, nutrition programs, and community events. This type of cooperation is especially important in the Baltic countries, where parents value affordability, health, and speedy results more than social prestige. Fourthly, the promotion of organic school meals should be underpinned by an environmental commitment. Research suggests that the relationship between consumer values and parents' willingness to spend more may be enhanced by environmental commitment, particularly when sustainability ideas gain greater popularity in educational and family decision-making. Therefore, governments and schools should promote environmental stewardship through sustainability campaigns, curriculum, and participatory projects that connect children's health with environmental conservation.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This research has several limitations. To begin, the scope of this research is limited to three Baltic countries: Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. As a result, its conclusions cannot be extrapolated to other parts of Europe, such as the Nordic countries, because these regions have different cultural traditions and food policy frameworks regarding organic food. Secondly, although this study sought to determine whether parents are willing to pay for organic food, it is important to note that this desire does not fully reflect parents' actual purchasing behavior in the context of school meals. Third, this study focused on consumer values, environmental commitment, and parents' willingness to pay. However, parents' attitudes toward organic products may also be influenced by other potential factors, such as household income, rural-urban disparities, and school-level policies. As a result, future research should aim to incorporate these factors into the existing research framework. Fourth, the scope of this framework should be expanded in future research so that it encompasses a wider

variety of countries. Longitudinal studies or mixed-method approaches should be utilized to monitor changes over time, and additional stakeholders, including schools, policymakers, and the children themselves, should be incorporated into subsequent research analyses. For the fifth point, it is of the utmost importance to validate actual payment behaviors and to evaluate the impact of specific interventions, such as financial subsidies, educational campaigns, and school sustainability programs, to acquire a more in-depth comprehension of the factors that truly determine the willingness of parents to pay for organic food within the context of school meals.

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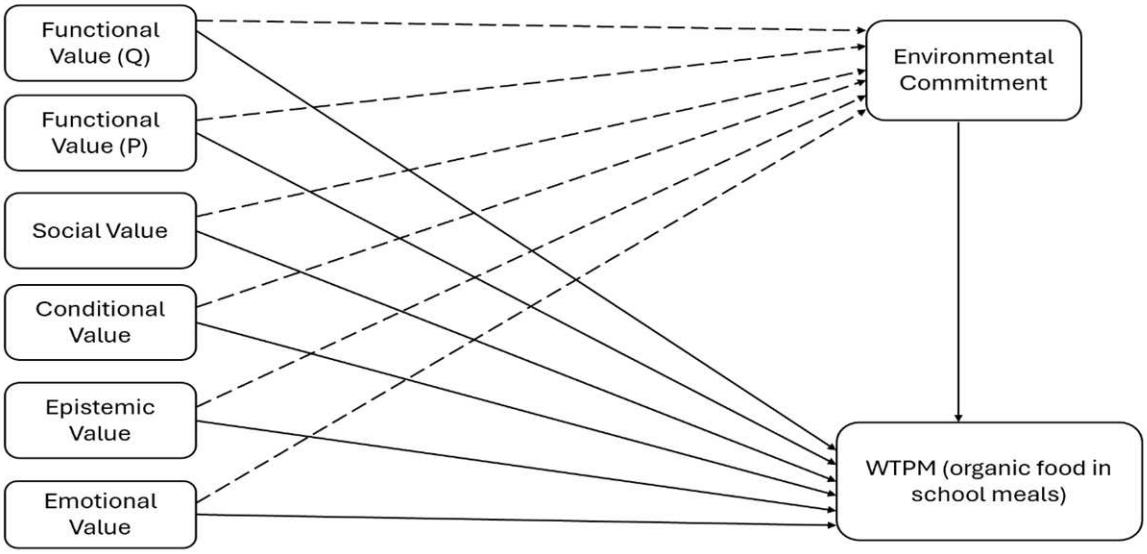


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

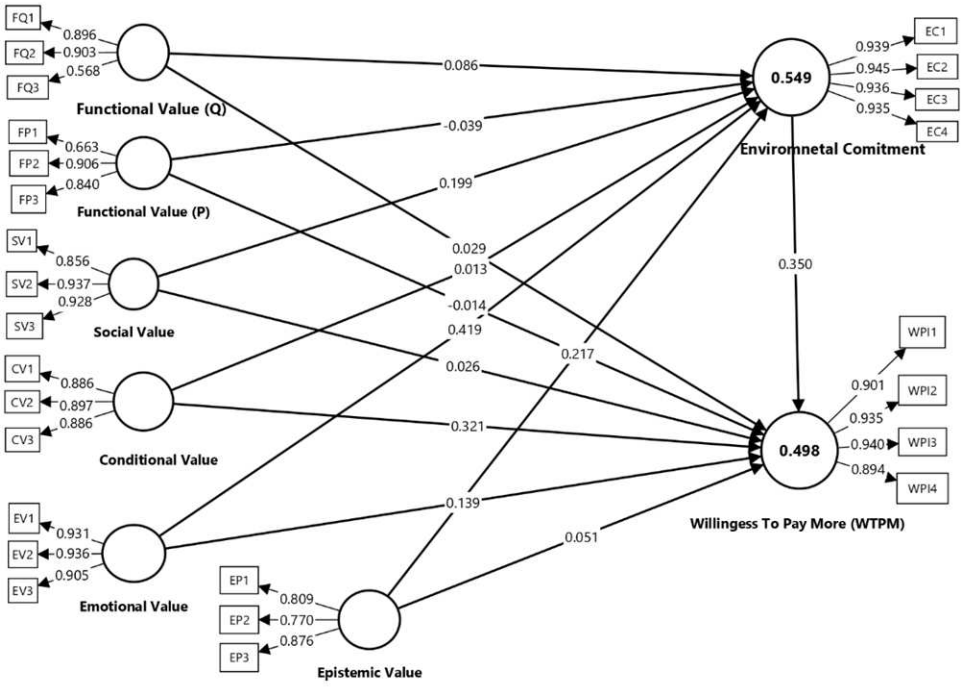


Figure 2 (a): Measurement Model (Lithuania)

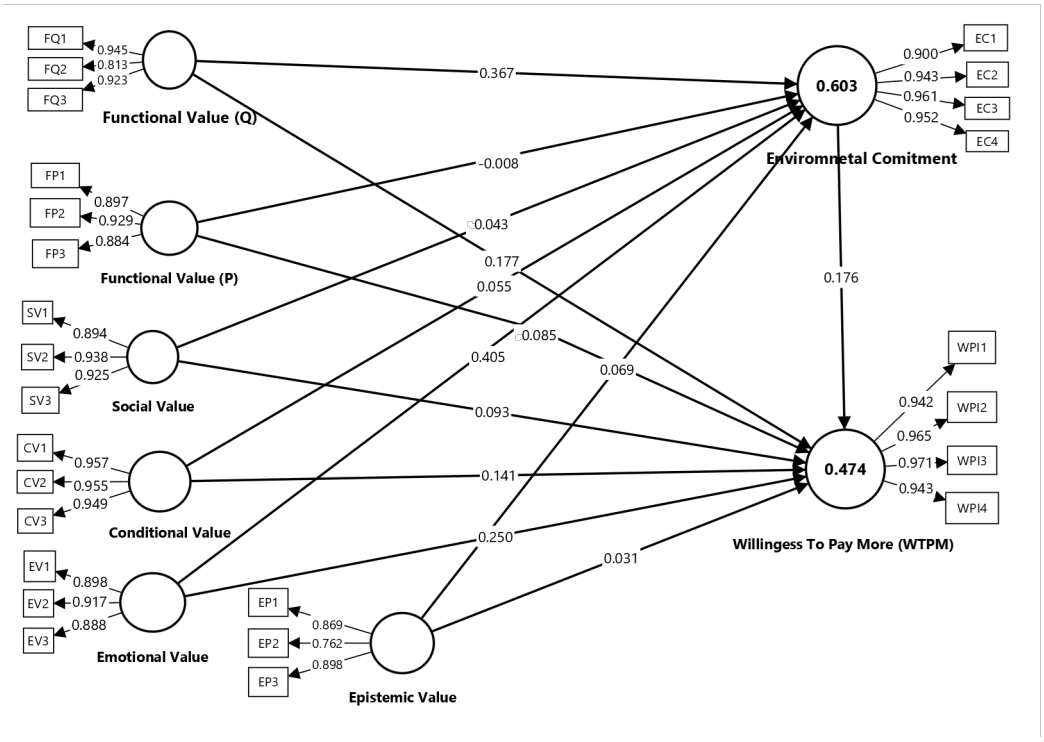


Figure 2 (b): Measurement Model (Estonia)

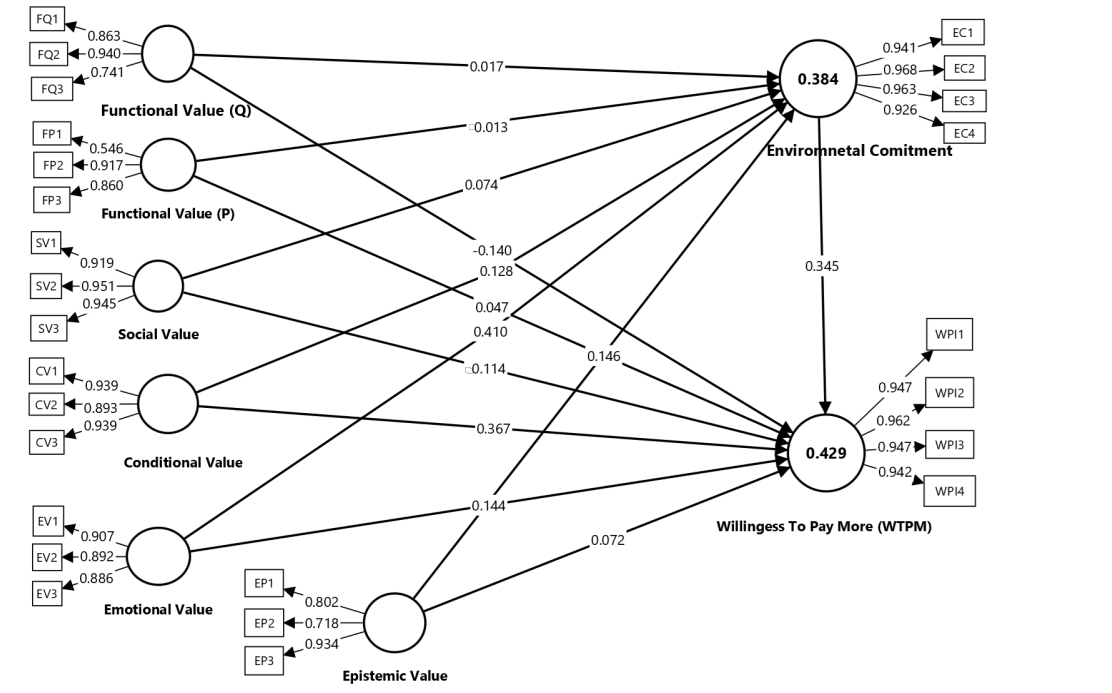


Figure 2 (c): Measurement Model (Latvia)

Supplementary Files

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- AppendixMeasurementItems.docx