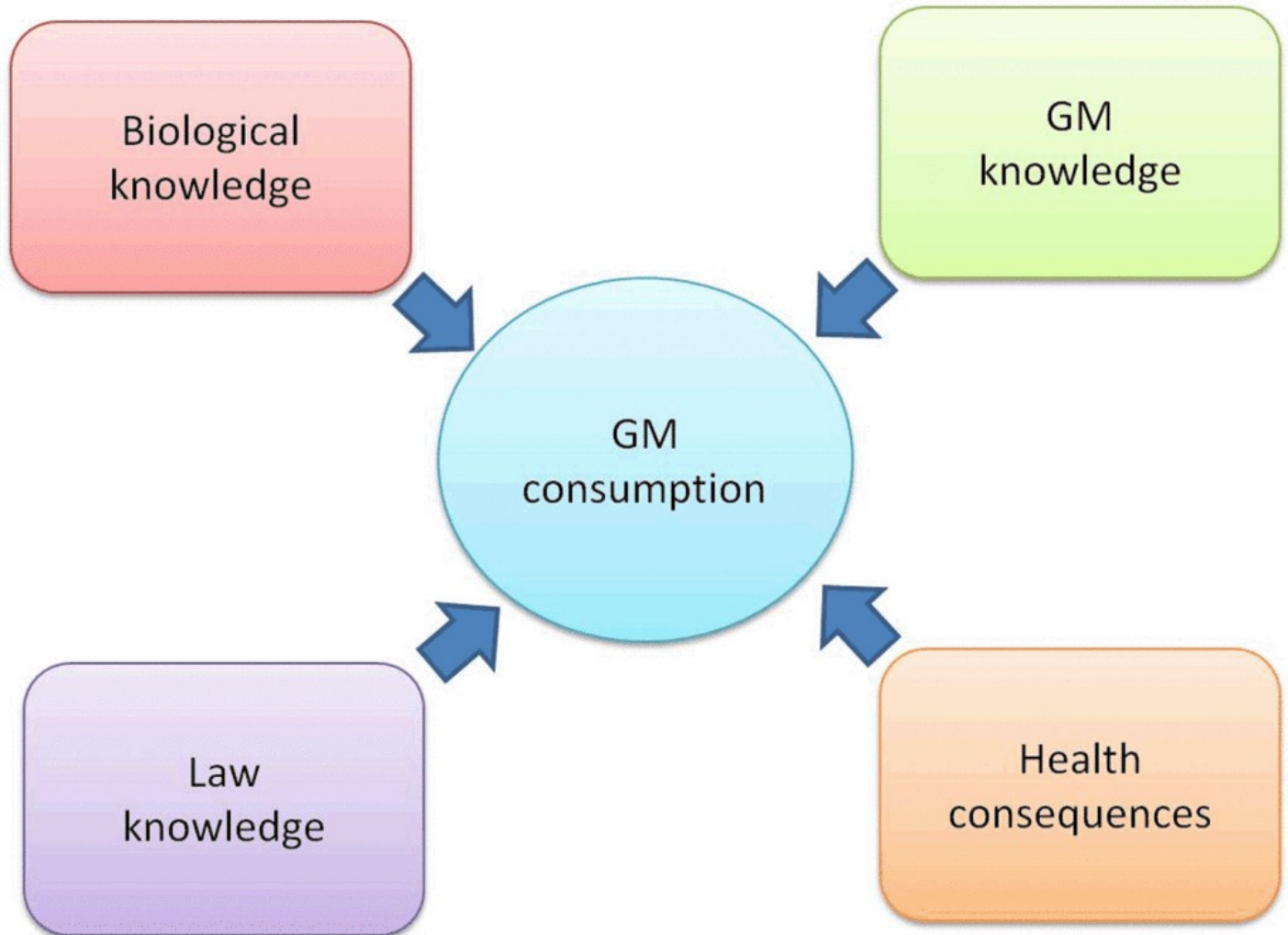


Consumer and genetically modified food

Nowadays quality and safety influence consumers' behaviour of food products more and more: so, food labeling has really an important role in the food system and marketing policy. Also the use of new biotechnologies into agri-food system has generated many contrasting reactions in all involved actors, in several matters: risk evaluation, patent issue, traceability system, coexistence of different cultivations, labelling, threshold limit, consumers' protection. In this scenario, whereas the acceptance depends on the consumer's perception of risks and benefits, consumer's knowledge about genetically modified (GM) food is a key element: moreover, it is also a new tool for the international competition.

For this reason, many doubts hit Europe and therefore Italy (where consumers tend to privilege typicality, healthiness and, in general, food products' naturalness): therefore, our research has studies GM consumption into a particular segment of population (young generation) and one of the main purposes was to implement a quantitative model to understand behaviour about this particular kind of consumption and identify the factors that determine their purchase. So, it were identified four variables able to explain the GM food consumption: biological knowledge, GM knowledge, law knowledge and health consequences (Figure). The study is based on our previous research and is its natural continuation and deepening.



Variables for GM food consumption

In general, increasing knowledge may affect consumer perceptions of risks and benefits of GM food. Moreover, it is very important the great sensibility towards human health and the environment problems. In Italy, as consumers tend to prefer food products' healthiness, typicality and, in general, naturalness (as shown by the strong raise in organic productions), it is possible to affirm that the diffusion of GM products surely goes on the contrary path. As a matter of fact, GM foods represent a dominant competition tool around the world market; moreover, they marginalize territorial genetic resources. Therefore, there is the need for agri-biotechnological research to develop freely, since there is the stable need, even on behalf of public institutions, to have satisfactory scientific parameters to run rational choices to preserve agricultural actors and consumers' interests. In fact, it could see that in the Italian context the main concern is to defend GM food-free supply chains on which all the main typical regional productions are based on.

These considerations originate from economic evaluations and refer to consumers' orientation. The productive surplus problem, preoccupations about the environmental decay and the production risks caused by super intensive agriculture, push Europe towards the encouragement of an eco-sustainable development model and the valorization of high-quality agricultural local productions. This path is in total opposition with all that GM foods represent: it brought to an more than enough and composite normative picture comprising incentive and regulation of eco-compatible productions and the rule of quality brands based on designation of origin. Also considering the Italian general lifestyle, the research's results reveal key information about GM food consumption: above all it depends on the level of GM organisms Knowledge and their impact on health and environment. In any way, many people is not educated correctly about Health Consequences and, therefore, is not going to buy them, because modern technological alteration of food suggests a negative answer among consumers, in particular without a correct information about risk estimation and cost/benefit assessments. Moreover, thanks to a precise international system able to estimate human health and environmental consequences in case of GM food consumption, it could be possible to have a good and practical tool in order to train people about GM food effects. In this way people would be more aware regards to GM food choice.

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