



# Altruistic or egoistic: Which value promotes organic food consumption among young consumers? A study in the context of a developing nation



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## ABSTRACT

The present research attempts to understand the importance of altruistic and egoistic value in determining the young consumers' intention to buy organic food. Environmental concern was considered as the altruistic value, whereas health concern as egoistic value. Using the convenience sampling method, a total of 304 usable responses was collected from young consumers, with the help of self administered questionnaire survey approach. Data analysis was done using two step structural equation modeling (SEM) approach, i.e. measurement model and structural model. Findings indicated that, both altruistic as well as egoistic value influences the intention to buy organic food among young Indian consumers. However, egoistic value was found to have more impact on the consumers' organic food purchase intention. The present research is one of the initial attempts in the Indian context to understand the importance of values (altruistic and egoistic) organic food consumption among young consumers.

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## 1. Introduction

In the past, studies have reported that consumption pattern of humans is one of the strongest contributors of environmental degradation (Hertwich, 2005; Hertwich and Peter, 2009). But the present decade has seen a growing consciousness in the society for the environmental protection. Considering the environment as an issue of importance for the survival of human being, the ethical consumerism has prospered (Dowd and Burke, 2013). The food related issues (consumption & production) have always been the topic of discussion in ethical behavioral literature, as it is associated with various impacts on the surroundings and environment (Tobler, 2011). A paradigm shift in the consumer's dietary choices has been noticed in the present decade. The consumers have started preferring organic over the traditionally grown foods as the organic food is considered eco-friendly and a healthier choice (Williams and Hammitt, 2001). Earlier, the concept of organic food consumption was more popular in developed nations, but the present decade has seen an organic revolution in developing nations such as India. The organic food industry in India is at its nascent stage still a tremendous positive growth in demand of organic foods has been noticed in the last few years. The Indian organic food market is transforming itself into the fastest growing

organic market in the world due to the radical shift in consumer buying behavior and spending patterns (Market Research.com, 2013).

When the issues related to organic food production and consumption are discussed, it is categorized under the ethical consumption as it shows concern for the environment (organic food is considered to have a less detrimental impact on the environment in comparison to traditionally grown foods) along with the personal benefit to individual (health and taste). Various researchers have emphasized on the significance of studying human values while measuring pro-environmental/ethical behavior (De Groot and Steg, 2009; Fransson and Gärling, 1999; Naess, 1990). Value is defined as 'a desirable trans-situational goal varying in importance, which serves as a guiding principle in the life of a person on other social entity' (Schwartz, 1992). Literature on ethical consumption shows that egoistic values (pro-self) & altruistic values (concern for others) are the two important drivers in the decision making of a human while behaving in the ethical way. The past researches typically suggest that altruistic value (concern for others) and egoistic value (self concern) are negatively correlated with each other (Schwartz, 1992). The concern for self and concern for others, both views are conceptually distinct and incompatible (Kareklas et al., 2014; Suitner and Maass, 2008). However, researches suggested that these distinct views may exist together within an individual & may influence their attitude (Kareklas et al., 2014). Therefore, the present research has used

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these two distinct views together.

The concept of organic food consumption is getting its foothold in developing countries such as India. Earlier, in Indian context the studies related to organic food consumption are few and far between (such as Chakrabarti and Baisya, 2007, 2009; Chakrabarti, 2010; Paul and Rana, 2012; Yadav and Pathak, 2016). Therefore, the present research attempts to understand the importance of values (altruistic and egoistic) in determining the young consumers' intention to buy organic food in the Indian context. The study focuses only on young consumers as they are different in attitude to their previous generation. Today, youth is not only concerned about their present course of action, but also considers its impact on the future, leading them to opt for eco-friendly products (Kanchanapibul et al., 2014) and showing concern for the environment. Further, they have better disposable income and they easily accept innovative ideas, then their earlier counterparts, resulting in one of the most powerful consumer groups. Therefore, they may choose the products which are comparatively costlier than their traditional counterparts. The present research is one of the initial attempts in the Indian context to understand the importance of values (altruistic and egoistic) organic food consumption among young consumers.

## 2. Review of literature

Before discussing the past literature on egoistic and altruistic value towards attitude towards organic foods and its consumption, the researcher would like to describe what the word egoistic and altruistic mean? The word 'altruistic' describes the situation under which the individuals' act on other behalf without expecting any kind of personal benefits (Schwartz, 1968, 1977). In contrary the term 'egoistic' means acting on the behalf of oneself or removing the suffering and harm of oneself, i.e. personal benefits (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). The research has considered both values as organic food consumption by the individuals show their concern towards themselves (organic food is considered as a healthier option than traditional food) as well as toward the environmental protection (organic food considered to have a less detrimental impact on the environment). So, there is a possibility that conflict may arise between individuals' altruistic and egoistic motives while buying organic food products (Yadav and Pathak, 2016).

The ethical behavioral literature relating to altruistic and egoistic motives has given mixed results regarding its influence on consumer's organic food purchase intention and behavior. Some researchers stated that altruistic motives (such as concern for the environment, animal welfare, etc.) play the most significant role in determining the consumer attitude and behavior intention towards organic food consumption (Chen, 2007; Durham and Andrade, 2005). Additionally, in contrast, some researchers stated in their findings that egoistic motives (health concern) might better predict the consumer's intention to purchase organic food than the altruistic motives (Magnusson et al., 2003). Therefore, the present research attempts to identify the motive (egoistic/ altruistic) which determines the organic food consumption in Indian context.

### 2.1. Health concern (Egoistic values)

The health concern among individual shows the pro-self (concern for self or to their family) concept, so it can be understood as egoistic in nature (Magnusson et al., 2003). In comparison to the conventional food, the organic food is perceived to be healthier and having a higher nutritional value (Grankvist and Biel, 2001; Lea and Worsley, 2005), as its production does not involve the use of any harmful chemical fertilizers (Ott, 1990; Pino et al.,

2012). Health related issues & safety concerns are considered among the main motivating factors while purchasing the organic food (Goetzke and Spiller, 2014; Haas, 2010; Hwang, 2016; Wandel and Bugge, 1997). More specifically, the desire for good health and well-being is the driver of food markets. A growing body of organic food consumption literature suggests that health concern and issues related to it are among important drivers for developing a positive attitude (Chryssohoidis and Krystallis, 2005; Padel and Foster, 2005; Smith and Paladino, 2010) and intention towards organic food consumption (Kareklas et al., 2014; Soler et al., 2002).

### 2.2. Environmental concern (Altruistic values)

On the other side, environmental concern can be understood as altruistic in nature, as the individual performs these behaviors of protecting the natural environment with little thoughts of benefits for themselves (Ebreo et al., 2003). Environmental concern among individuals is linked with the altruistic value of consumers or with their altruistic purchase considerations, as consumers often opt for organic food products because it is a pro-environmental behavior. Choosing organic food products over traditional food, show their concern for others and the common good (Kareklas et al., 2014; Thøgersen, 2011). Environmental concern indicates 'the degree to which people are aware of problems regarding the environment and support efforts to solve them or indicate the willingness to contribute personally to their solution' (Dunlap and Jones, 2002: 482). Smith and Paladino (2010) stated that concern for environment plays a very crucial role in influencing organic food consumption intention as buying organic food is considered as pro-environmental behavior. Smith and Paladino (2010) reported a significant impact of environmental concern on consumers' attitude towards buying organic food, which further influences their purchase intention. Environmental concern among individuals' increases the likelihood that they will purchase organic food (Loureiro et al., 2001). Huang (1996) also reported that increased environmental concern in society is responsible for increased consumption of organic food. The individuals who are willing to engage themselves in eco-friendly activities are more likely to purchase organic food products in the near future (Tregear et al., 1994) which shows that environmental concern is one the important motives and values for consumers while deciding to opt for organic food.

On the basis of the discussed literature, the following hypotheses were developed.

- H1.** Health concern (Egoistic value) positively influences the individual's attitude towards organic food.
- H2.** Health concern (Egoistic value) positively influences the individual's intention to consume organic food.
- H3.** Environmental concern (Altruistic value) among individual's positively influence their attitude towards organic food.
- H4.** Environmental concern (Altruistic value) among individual's positively influence their intention to consume organic food.
- H5.** Attitude towards organic food positively influences the intention to consume organic food.

On the basis of discussed literature and hypotheses developed, a conceptual framework was developed (Please Refer to Fig. 1).

## 3. Research methods

### 3.1. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed using the references from the

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