



Determinants of organic food buying behavior: special reference to organic food purchase intention of Sri Lankan customers

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Abstract

Sri Lankans are experiencing many non-communicable diseases and health problems for decades since they were away from traditional food habits and traditional agriculture prevailed in ancient Sri Lanka which was based on organic constituent. Value of organic food is perceived differently and many customers demonstrate slow buying behaviour and stay back from real purchasing decisions. Among different determinants which affect on purchasing intention of organic food, This paper aims to examine the impact of health consciousness, environment concern, reference group influence and awareness on purchase intention of organic food. Data gathered through a survey questionnaire from 400 individuals from Western Province of Sri Lanka. A Multiple Linear Regression Model was used to assess the degrees of impact from each individual determinant on purchase intention. The research findings demonstrated that awareness and health consciousness were the two key determinants and demonstrated a significant positive impact with purchase intention of organic food. Yet, environment concern and reference group influence have no significant impact on organic food purchase intention of Sri Lankan customers. Extending organic food consumption is a sound and sustainable solution for the environmental and health problems prevails in Sri Lanka at present. Stimulating Purchase intention would employ as one of the strategies to persuade consumption and increase the demand for the organic foods. Policy makers need to draw special attention on improving awareness levels and promote the specific health benefits of organic food in order to stimulate real purchasing decision. Research findings underscore the existing body of knowledge about determinants of purchase intention of organic food.

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1. Introduction

Agriculture laid the base for healthy life styles, food safety, and environmental protection and sustainable food consumption in ancient Sri Lanka. Sri Lankans experiencing non transferable chronic diseases and health problems for decades since they were away from traditional food habits and traditional agriculture which were prevailed in ancient Sri Lanka. World Health organisation (2015) highlighted that 38 million deaths have been reported around the world due to non communicable diseases and unhealthy diet was one of the major reasons. Organic foods are the food grown without chemical fertilizers, pesticides, preservatives and synthetic food enhancers. Organic foods were introduced again to Sri Lankan customers recently, however, value of organic food is perceived differently. Yet, customers demonstrate slow buying behaviour and stay back from real purchasing decision. Dean *et al.*¹ highlighted that human behaviour depends on behavioural intention. Ajzen² highlighted that behaviour is determined through the intention to perform the behaviour. Organic foods have been perceived as no special value in the eyes of consumers^{3 & 4}. The main focus of this study was to review that what determines the purchase intention of organic food by Sri Lankan customers. Among many determining factors of purchase intention of organic food, the objective of this study was to examine the impact of health consciousness, environment concern, reference group influence and awareness on purchasing intention of organic food. Health consciousness was impacted on the purchase intention of the organic food^{4,5,6,7,8,9 & 10}. Reference groups represented in this study were family members, peers and friends. Products and brands that individual's purchases are affected by the reference groups^{11 & 12}. Awareness and environment concern have a positive effect on consumption of organic food^{5 & 9}.

2. Methodology

The research was intended to describe the determinants which lead purchase intention of organic food and it falls under a descriptive research. The research lies under the category of quantitative research. Primary data gathered through a structured survey questionnaire with likert scale of 5 from 400 customers in the Western Province in Sri Lanka. 200 respondents were from Colombo and 100 each from Kaluthara and Gampaha districts. The data collection was based on stratified random sampling method using administrative divisions (Pradesheeya Sabha). The questioner was administered both in Sinhala, the national language of Sri Lanka and English with the support of previously tested questionnaires.

2.1 Hypotheses

- H₁: There is a significant impact of health consciousness on purchase intention of the organic food.
- H₂: There is a significant impact of environment concern on purchase intention of the organic food
- H₃: There is a significant impact of reference group influence on purchase intention of the organic food.
- H₄: There is a significant impact of awareness on purchase intention of the organic food.

2.2 Data Analysis Methods

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse demographics of the sample. Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients were used to measure the reliability of the instrument. Pearson's Correlation Analysis was used to measure the levels of association between each individual determinant with purchase intention. A Multiple Linear Regression Model was developed to assess the degrees of impact from each individual determinant on purchase intention of organic food and Stepwise Regression Model was developed to emphasize the key determinants of purchase intention of organic food.

2.3 Regression Model

$$PI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 HC + \beta_2 EC + \beta_3 RF + \beta_4 AW + \epsilon_i$$

PI = Purchase Intention
 β_0 = Constant Factor

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