



Application of the Theory of Planned Behaviour to predict Iranian students' intention to purchase organic food



Masoud Yazdanpanah^{a, b, *}, Masoumeh Forouzani^{a, 1}

^a Department of Agricultural Extension and Education, Khuzestan Ramin Agriculture and Natural Resources University, Mollasani, Ahwaz, Iran

^b IIASA- International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, Schlossplatz 1, Laxenburg, Austria

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 July 2014

Received in revised form

30 January 2015

Accepted 11 February 2015

Available online 6 March 2015

Keywords:

Purchase organic food

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Moral norm

Self-identity

Iran

ABSTRACT

Many studies have attempted to measure the relative importance of environmental concerns by comparing organic farming with conventional agriculture. However, there have been concerns that the factors which motivate consumers to purchase organic foods are not properly known. This study investigated students' behavioural intentions with regard to purchasing organic food in Iran. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) was used for the investigation, as it is one of the most widely used theories for investigating the relationship between attitude and action. Results indicated that the students' attitude was the main predictor of their intention to purchase organic foods. Interestingly, this research showed that both perceived behavioural control and subjective norms were not significant predictors of intention. Furthermore, adding moral norm and self-identity as the additional constructs to the TPB significantly increased the explanatory power of the standard model. From the practical point of view, the present study provides a justification for using attitude, self-identity and moral norm dimensions in policy and decision making that intend to encourage students to purchase organic foods.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

It is generally expected that changing from conventional to organic farming would protect and improve human and environment. Organic farming provides long-term benefits to both people and the environment, such as: increasing soil fertility; controlling pests and diseases without harming the environment; ensuring the safe quality of water resources; spending less money to buy external farm inputs; and, of course, producing nutritious food from high quality crops to sell at a good price (HDRA, 1998; Muller, 2009; Guzman and Alonso, 2008; Scialabba and Müller-Lindenlauf, 2010; Niggli et al., 2008; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002; Wheeler, 2008). However, the transition to organic agriculture is complex and problematic and requires integration with all segments of society such as farm, policy making and market level. This article will focus on

the last part, that is, market level, which is directly related to the consumers' behaviour in purchasing organic foods.

In attaining this transition, adoption of organic farming by growers is pivotal (Best, 2008; Flaten et al., 2006; Katsvairo et al., 2007), and governmental regulations and incentives can help accomplish this shift (Morris and Potter, 1995). Given such regulations, the farming transition ultimately comes down to choices made at the market (Heinberg and Bomford, 2009). Consumption is the reason why anything is produced. Indeed, consumers play a pivotal role in future investments in organic farming. Growth in consumer demand for friendly, "green" or chemical-free food products has led to the expansion of organic farms (Rigby and Cáceres, 2001) which have developed as a part of wider organic movement incorporating producers, manufacturers and consumers (Alrøe and Kristensen, 2000). Organic agriculture has developed rapidly in Europe and North America. According to statistics, in the USA, the value of retail sales of organic foods in 1999 was approximately \$6 billion, while the number of organic farmers was increasing at a rate of about 12% per year (USDA, 2000; for more details see Hughner et al., 2007; Reynolds, 2004). It is clear that the proportion of land under organic farming is a response to the signals from market and consumer demands (Hughner et al., 2007). For example, in Europe and North

* Corresponding author. Department of Agricultural Extension and Education, Khuzestan Ramin Agriculture and Natural Resources University, Mollasani, Ahwaz, Iran. Tel./fax: +98 6136524348.

E-mail addresses: masoudyazdan@gmail.com, yazdanm@ramin.ac.ir (M. Yazdanpanah), m.forouzani@yahoo.com, M.forouzani@ramin.ac.ir (M. Forouzani).

¹ Tel./fax: +98 6136524348.

America, an expansion of organic farming is directly related to the growth in consumer demand for organic food (van Mansvelt et al., 1998). Hence, consumer preference is a very important tool for success of any overall environmental plan and may lead to further reductions in pesticide use in farming systems (Hanson and Benedict, 2002). The future of organic agriculture, to a large extent, will depend on consumer demand and on consumer motivation to pay higher prices for organically grown foods (Aryal et al., 2009; Hughner et al., 2007). In the future, therefore, organic foods with their specific health benefits could offer a new way of thinking about the relationships between food, health and nature in everyday life. Thus, marketing strategies are determined by consumer beliefs, attitudes, and responses to organically grown products, as well as by the willingness to pay a premium price (Aryal et al., 2009). Therefore, actions performed by individuals are just as important to the success of the transition as anything that can be done by farmers and governments (Heinberg and Bomford, 2009). Consequently, consumer choices are as important as producer choices throughout the whole chain of organic food production. Put another way, it is imperative to understand consumer decision-making with respect to organically produced foods and to seek strategies about how consumption of these can be promoted. An in-depth understanding of the mechanisms that lead people to use such products is thus critically important. Meanwhile, some questions inevitably arise, such as: What encourages consumers to accept or reject organic foods as a part of their daily diet? What factor(s) determine(s) consumers' intention to purchase organic foods? The answers have important policy implications for the implementation of environmentally friendly programs. Actually, by using this knowledge, policymakers can facilitate changes in intention regarding the use of organic foods which, in turn, can influence the size of the organic cultivation area. However, in contrast with Europe and North America (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2008; Arvola et al., 2008; Dean et al., 2008 and for more details see Hughner et al., 2007) and other parts of the world (Kumar, 2012; Chen, 2007; Aryal et al., 2009), very few (if any) studies of this kind have been undertaken in Iran (Yazdanpanah et al., 2015a). The core premise of this study was thus to provide much-needed empirical data on the intentions of Iranian consumers regarding the use of organic foods. More specifically, this research aimed to reveal which internal factor can significantly affect the intention towards organic foods.

Iran is one of those countries in which the agriculture sector is highly dependent on the consumption of chemical inputs (Forouzani and Karami, 2011; Monfared et al., 2015); therefore, the need to produce healthy crops for internal consumption as well as exports is of great importance. Recently, the Health Ministry stated that Iran heads the world's stomach cancer rankings. According to statistics, 70,000 people are diagnosed with this type of cancer annually. One-third of this can be attributed to the use of agricultural crops with pesticide residue. In connection with this, one member of Iran's Parliament believes that pesticide residues have caused negative impact on agricultural exports in Iran and are responsible for the high costs of health care (Monfared et al., 2015).

In Iran, the growth of organic agriculture follows a steady pattern. Not surprisingly, Iranian farmers often get the blame for not adopting this alternative agriculture. While consumer acceptance of organic products is as important as anything that can be done by farmers, the main barrier to increasing organically cultivated areas in Iran may originate from the lack of willingness among consumers to buy organic food products (Yazdanpanah et al., 2015a). Furthermore, the case of Iran is also relevant for other countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which largely share the same religion, culture and history (Yazdanpanah et al., 2013a, b).

The study population for this research included university students. This specific group was selected because, compared to the general population in Iran, its members are more likely to experience and be familiar with organic foods and also more likely to be aware of the chemical residues in conventional agricultural foods as well as their harmful effects on health. They are also likely to be more knowledgeable about this issue through their education, surfing the internet, and learning from educators and peers. Moreover, contrary to an older assumption that most neurological development is completed before a child enters school, new research has found that the higher-order cognitive skills could be developed by interactions with the environment in early adulthood (Baker et al., 2011). While, in general, not many adults will become environmental activists, research suggests that younger people are likely to be more accepting of radical changes (Lenzen et al., 2001). Furthermore, based on Vermeir and Verbeke (2008), young adults are the consumers of the future and thus capable of making a difference in the next decades. They are in the end stage of forming their own identity and developing a personal system of beliefs and values. They will very likely take their habits with them as they grow older, which would provide policymakers with ample possibilities for creating organic food consumption habits within the Iranian population. In addition to being the next generation of adults with consumer power, these young adults currently also have considerable spending power and can influence food choices in their own households. Finally, a study by Synodinos (cited in Kumar, 2012) revealed that responses from students were similar to those obtained from general consumers. Encouraged by the findings of the Synodinos study, the current study has also utilized a student population. We deliberately chose students, as they already have some knowledge of the concept of organic farming and are also now responsible for shopping for and preparing their own food.

Zanoli and Naspetti (2002) argued that in marketing the analysis of consumer behaviour deals primarily with preferences and how these preferences are formed in the mind of the consumer. In the case of organic foods, consumer purchase decisions are based on subjective experiences and perceptions of those foods (Hughner et al., 2007). This is close to the first approach which is categorized by Jackson (2005), namely, to understand human environmental behaviours by adopting approaches which model behaviour as a function of processes and characteristics that are conceived as being internal to the individual—attitudes, values, habits, and personal norms (Aertsens et al., 2009).

For at least the past three decades, social psychologists have developed models to understand and predict human behaviour. They have labelled them as the Expectancy value models, which are the most popular paradigms designed for the prediction and understanding of human behaviour (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993 cited in: Arvola et al., 2008). From the many current psychology theories to explain health and pro-environmental behaviour such as norm activation model (Schwartz, 1977), motivation protection theory (Rogers, 1983), the health belief model (Rosenstock, 1974), social cognitive model (Bandura, 1986) or the theory of reasoned action (TRA) of Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), and its successor, this study was undertaken based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). TPB is the most commonly applied examples of these models which is parsimonious and successful in predicting behaviour in general (Watson et al., 2014) and also investigating the relationship between attitudes and action, (Beedell and Rehmann, 2000; Webb and Sheeran, 2006).

Zanoli and Naspetti (2002) argued that rational choice theories like TPB are one of the three dominant disciplinary approaches to the study of food in consumer research. Rational choice theories consider behaviour, for example, pro-environmental behaviours, to

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1744425>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1744425>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)