



Intention to purchase organic food among young consumers: Evidences from a developing nation



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ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to investigate the consumer's intention to purchase organic food in the context of a developing nation (India) using the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Further, the study has incorporated additional constructs (moral attitude, health consciousness and environmental concern) in the TPB and measured its appropriateness. Responses were collected from 220 young consumers adopting convenience sampling approach. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to evaluate the strength of relationship between the constructs. The findings reported that the TPB partially supported the organic food purchase intention. Among the additional constructs incorporated, moral attitude and health consciousness positively influenced the consumer's intention to purchase organic food. The study has supported the inclusion of new constructs in the TPB as it has improved the predictive power of the proposed framework in determining consumer's intention to purchase organic food.

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1. Introduction

In Millennium Development Goals, 2010, United Nations mentioned sustainable consumption as one of the main pillars of achieving environmental sustainability (Marrakech Process Secretariat: UNDESA and UNEP, 2010). Considering the importance of environment for the welfare of human beings the concept of ethics in consumerism has prospered (Dowd & Burke, 2013) and has become one of the mainstream issues (Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2010). The production and consumption of food is one of the most commonly discussed topics in the ethical behavioral literature as it is associated with various environmental impacts (Tobler, Visschers, & Siegrist, 2011). Now the consumers have started showing greater concern about their health, quality and nutritional value of food (Gil, Tomas-Barberan, Hess-Pierce, Holcroft, & Kader, 2000), which has motivated them to change their dietary preferences. The present decade has seen an increased demand for organic food which is perceived to be healthier and environmental friendly than conventionally grown foods (Williams & Hammitt, 2001). As a result the consumer preferences have

shifted from conventionally grown foods to organically produced foods.

Earlier, the production and consumption of organic food was more popular in developed countries but this concept is also getting acceptance in developing countries. About one-third organically managed land of the world is in developing countries. More specifically, India is among the developing countries having one of the largest areas under organic management (Willer & Kilcher, 2009; as cited in Chakrabarti, 2010). Earlier the organic food produced in the India was exported to the United States and Europe (The Hindu, 2010) but with time organic food products are gaining acceptance in domestic market as well. According to a survey of Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSO-CHAM) an increase in consumption of organic food products has been noticed in India during the last five years (Economics Time Bureau, 2013) but the market penetration is still at the nascent stage in the domestic market (Kapoor & Garyali, 2012). As the consumption of organic food is fairly a new concept in developing countries in comparison to their developed counterparts, so it would be interesting to study the various aspects of organic food purchase intention in developing nations like India. Most of the research on consumer attitudes and behaviors regarding purchase and consumption of organic foods are from the perspective of developed countries. Therefore, the present study attempts to understand the consumer's intention to purchase organic food in the

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context of a developing nation- India; adopting the theoretical framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).

1.1. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and its applicability in organic food choice behavior

The TPB states that three factors, namely; *Attitude toward the behavior, Subjective norm, and Perceived behavioral control*, all together leads to the formation of a behavioral intention (Ajzen, 1985). Attitude toward behavior refers to the 'degree to which a person has a favorable or unfavorable evaluation or appraisal of the behavior in the question' Subjective norm is defined as 'perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior' Perceived behavioral control is 'an individual perceived ease or difficulty or performing the particular behavior'. The people having a higher degree of control over them are more likely to have strong intention to perform a particular behavior. Behavioral intention is defined as individual's readiness to perform a certain behavior and it is assumed as an immediate antecedent of the actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

The TPB has been found very useful in predicting consumer intention and behavior in a wide range of fields (Mathieson, 1991) and has also been applied successfully in food choice and behavior, more specifically in context of organic food (Dowd & Burke, 2013). The TPB framework has been found to be suitable in predicting organic food purchase intention across different cultures. Arvola et al. (2008) studied the applicability of TPB in organic food purchase intention across three different countries (UK, Italy and Finland). The TPB was found suitable in predicting organic food purchase intention across these cultures. However, the relative influence of variables varies across country to country. Similar studies were conducted by Smith and Paladino (2010) in Australia and by Zagata (2012) in the Czech Republic using TPB as the theoretical framework. The result showed the applicability of TPB in determining organic food purchase intention across various cultures. On the basis of this discussion, following hypotheses can be proposed.

H1. Consumer's attitude towards the organic food positively influences their intention to purchase organic food.

H2. Subjective norm significantly influences the consumer's intention to purchase organic food.

H3. Greater behavioral control significantly increases consumer intentions to purchase organic food.

1.2. Incorporating new constructs in the TPB

The TPB is open for modification as Ajzen (1991) suggested that it can be deepened and broadened by adding new variables or altering the path of the existing variables. Although TPB is based on the assumption that behavioral intention is determined by attitude, subjective norm and PBC, previous researches show that there are some domain specific factors which are not included in this model (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Donald, Cooper, & Conchie, 2014). Therefore, increasing evidences has been noticed in the recent psychological literature for including predictor variables in the TPB. Inclusion of additional predictor variables has resulted in improving the predictive utility of the TPB across various domains (Arvola et al., 2008; Donald et al., 2014). The present study has also attempted to include new constructs (moral attitude, health consciousness and environmental concern) in the TPB taking support from the extant literature.

1.3. Moral attitude

The TPB has been criticized mainly, as it has no consideration for moral influences that affect the behavior (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Arvola et al., 2008; Dowd & Burke, 2013) and moral attitude plays an important role in influencing the domain where there is conflict of individual and social gains (Manstead, 2000). 'Moral attitude aims to measure the favourable self-evaluations which arise from anticipated compliance with one's own moral principles' (Schwartz, 1977). Moral obligation can be useful in the context of organic foods as purchasing organic food shows the individuals concern for themselves, society and the environment, so there is a possibility that conflicts may arise between personal and social gain. Addition of moral norms in the TPB has proved its applicability in behavioral studies (Arvola et al., 2008; Dowd & Burke, 2013). Dowd and Burke (2013) found that addition of moral attitude has a profound effect on the TPB, as it added 8% to the explanatory power of the TPB model whereas Arvola et al. (2008) shows that inclusion of moral attitude in the TPB model fitted the data slightly better than the original TPB model. The discussion leads to the formulation of hypothesis H4.

H4. Moral attitude positively influences the consumer intention to purchase organic foods.

1.4. Health consciousness

Health consciousness can be defined as 'the degree to which health concerns are integrated into person's daily activities' (Jayanti & Burns, 1998). Consumers consider health as an important parameter while purchasing the food products (Wandel & Bugge, 1997) and show interest in issues related to food and health (Rozin, Fischler, Imada, Sarubin, & Wrzesniewski, 1999). The consumers who were more concerned about their health related issues had more favorable attitudes toward purchasing organic products (Paul & Rana, 2010). Organic foods are generally perceived as a healthier option as compared to the conventionally grown foods (Lea & Worsley, 2005) and health concern is considered as one of the major factors that motivates the consumer attitude and intention towards the purchase of organic foods (Chakrabarti, 2010; Davies, Titterington, & Cochrane, 1995; Magnusson, Arvola, Hursti, Åberg, & Sjöden, 2003; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002). The following hypotheses were proposed based on the above discussion:

H5. Health consciousness among consumers positively influences their attitude toward organic food.

H6. Health consciousness positively influences the consumer's intention to purchase organic food.

1.5. Environmental concern

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 & Jones, 2002: 482). An individual's concern for the environment is fundamental to environmental research and has a direct relationship with the environmentally friendly behavior (Hines, Hungerford, & Tomera, 1987). Pagiaslis and Krontalis (2014) have also mentioned in their study that environmental concern has a direct and a positive impact on consumer's intention to buy eco-friendly products. Environmental concern plays a significant role in determining the purchase intention of organic food (Smith & Paladino, 2010) as buying organic food is considered as pro-environmental behavior. Tregear, Dent, and McGregor (1994)

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