



How the interplay between consumer motivations and values influences organic food identity and behavior

Torben Hansen^{a,*}, Maria Ingerslev Sørensen^b, Marie-Louise Riewerts Eriksen^c

^a Department of Marketing, Copenhagen Business School, Solbjerg Plads 3, 2000 Frederiksberg, Denmark

^b Jr. Category Development Manager, Mondelez International, Sønder Ringvej 55, 2605 Brøndby, Denmark

^c Audience Director, Concept:CPH, Bredgade 33A, 1260 København K, Denmark



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ABSTRACT

This study develops a baseline model specifying expected relationships between consumer motivations (health, environmental, and social consciousness), organic food identity, and organic food behavior. Based on an online survey of 1176 Danish food consumers, we investigate whether these relationships are influenced by different levels of personal values (self-transcendence, openness to change, self-enhancement, and conservation). We find that health consciousness has a higher positive influence on organic food identity with higher levels of *all* four investigated personal values. When openness to change is low, health consciousness has a positive effect on intentional organic food behavior through organic food identity, whereas social consciousness has a negative effect on intentional organic food behavior through organic food identity. Our results provide guidance to those seeking to segment organic food markets based on consumers' motivations and values.

1. Introduction

Several recent studies and reports have suggested a growing consumer trend toward organic food purchases (D'Amico et al., 2016; Lee, 2016; McFadden and Huffman, 2017). Consumer choices for organic foods are of interest to food policymakers for many reasons, including that (a) the production of organic foods involves the use of environmentally sustainable techniques, which may positively impact ecological systems and bio-diversity (D'Amico et al., 2016; Van Loo et al., 2017; Padel et al., 2009) and (b) that links between organic food behavior and value elements such as fairness and human health are often suggested (e.g., Padel et al., 2009; De Marchi et al., 2016). Consumers may have various reasons for purchasing and consuming organic food, including health, taste, animal welfare, and environmental consequences (Aertsens et al., 2009; Hasselbach and Roosen, 2015), personal values and trust (Greibitus et al., 2015), and identities and motivations (De Pelsmacker et al., 2016; Hasselbach and Roosen, 2015), among others. However, the question of why people buy or do not buy organic food is still not fully understood (Hasselbach and Roosen, 2015; Kareklas et al., 2014).

Even though motivations and personal values are important determinants of pro-environmental and organic food behavior (e.g., De Pelsmacker et al., 2016; Kilbourne and Beckmann, 1998), and the literature has suggested researching the links between articulated value

orientations and consumer behavior (Thompson and Troester, 2002; De Maya et al., 2011), the relationships among motivations, values, identity, and consumer organic food behavior remain poorly understood. For example, to what extent do consumers' organic food behavior reflect intuitive and consistent relationships between their own motivations, values, and food identity (De Marchi et al., 2016)?

The aim of this study is twofold. First, we develop and present a baseline model, which specifies expected relationships between consumer motivations (health, environmental, and social consciousness), organic food identity, and organic food behavior. Second, based on a survey sample of 1176 food consumers we investigate whether these relationships are moderated by different levels of personal values. We consider three basic concepts in analyzing consumer choices for organic products. These are personal motivations, personal values, and organic food identity. The results of this study may be highly important for policymakers, food authorities, food managers, and others seeking solutions to environmental problems that require behavioral change.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Baseline model part

Consumer identities are often acknowledged to mediate the link between consumer motivations and behavior (De Pelsmacker et al.,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: th.marktg@cbs.dk (T. Hansen), maria.soerensen@mdlz.com (M.I. Sørensen), marie-louise@concept.dk (M.-L.R. Eriksen).

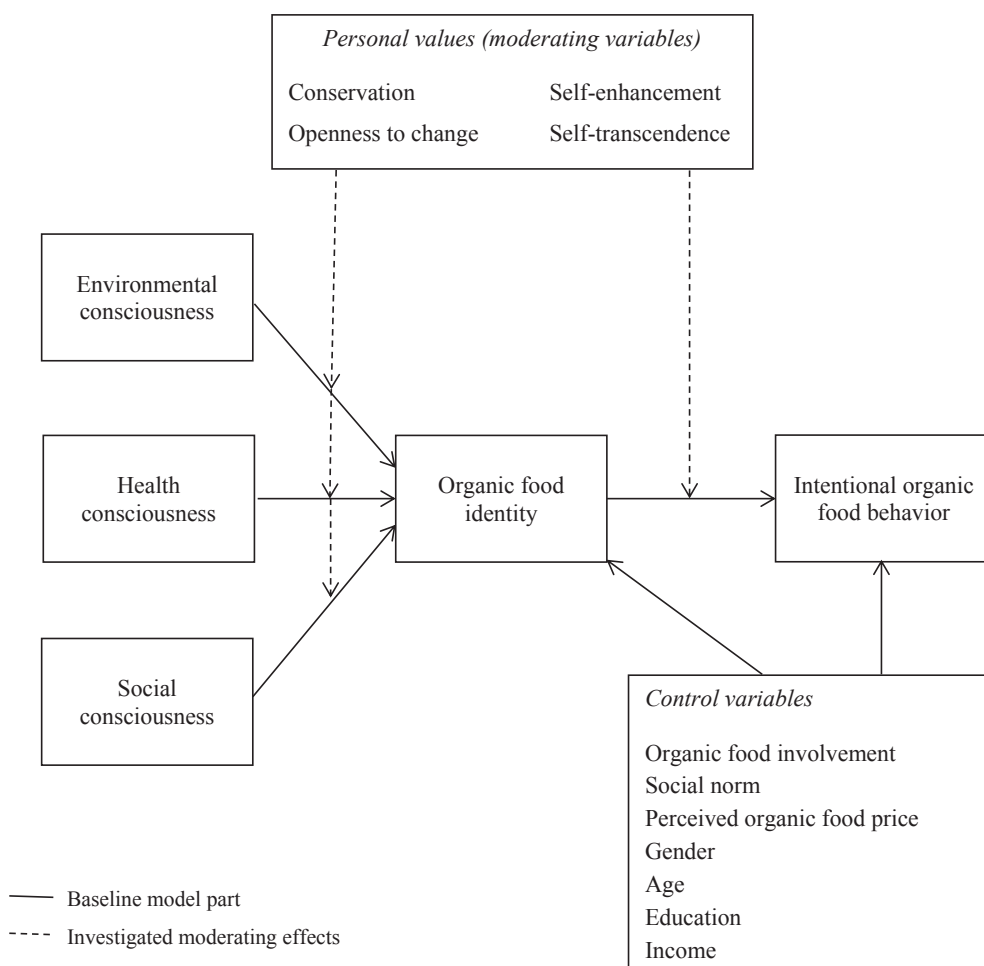


Fig. 1. Organic food identity model.

2016), which also can be expressed as a hierarchical motivational-identity-behavior perspective (Jayawardhena, 2004). This view is also consistent with established consumer behavior paradigms (e.g., Warshaw, 1980; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1973), suggesting that identity can be seen as an intervening variable between consumer psychographics and behavior (Arnocky et al., 2007) and with research suggesting that consumers generally prefer consumption that is congruent with their perceived identity (Belk, 1988). We build upon this perspective in the proposed organic food identity model (Fig. 1).

Our model starts from the expectation that organic food identity is a 'primary' direct drive of organic food behavior (Rise et al., 2010). In broad terms, *self-identity* relates to how individuals perceive their role in the social structure (Stets and Burke, 2003), which in turn may influence how individuals adopt expectations to accompany the role, and tend to act to represent these expectations (De Pelsmacker et al., 2016). Organic food identity is an individual's overall perceived identification with the role of being an organic food consumer.

A literature review suggests that three consumer motivations, in particular, may be related to consumer organic behavior: Environmental, health, and social consciousness, respectively.

These can be viewed as representing consumer motivations because they are criteria, which may be used by consumers to select and justify their food behavior (Grunert and Juhl, 1995). While some previous studies have suggested direct links between consumer motivations and behavior (Kriwy and Mecking, 2012; Ureña et al., 2008) we suggest in our baseline model that this link is mediated by organic food identity. Our suggestion is consistent with a substantial amount of empirical research, which indicates that the relationships between consumer motives and (organic) food behavior are mediated by constructs such as

attitude and identity (e.g., Lee, 2016; Michaelidou and Hassan, 2008; Sparks and Shepherd, 1992).

Consumers that adhere to *environmental consciousness* are motivated by products that are considered environmentally friendly and not harmful to the environment (Michaelidou and Hassan, 2008). Environmental consciousness has been identified as one of the most important drivers of consumer organic food behavior (D'Amico et al., 2016).

Health consciousness refers to consumers' readiness to identify with and to undertake health actions (Becker et al., 1977). Even though there is an ongoing debate concerning whether organic food is more nutritious than conventional food (Hasselbach and Roosen, 2015), several studies point to the high importance of health as a motivator for organic food consumers (e.g., Kriwy and Mecking, 2012; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2009).

While environmental consciousness captures concern for the environment, *social consciousness* captures concern for society and/or for the consumer's social surroundings (Webster, 1975; Iyer et al., 2016; Atkinson, 2012). For socially conscious consumers, organic marketplace behaviors offer a viable and meaningful way to connect their private concerns (e.g., concern for one's own health) with concerns for their social surroundings (e.g., concerns for the health of one's family) (Atkinson, 2012; Magnusson et al., 2003; De Maya et al., 2011).

Health, environmental, and social consciousness differ in the sense that health consciousness can be regarded as a more egoistic motive (benefits the individual), social consciousness as a mixture of egoistic/altruistic motives (benefits her/his family) while consideration for the environment is more altruistic (benefits the environment rather than the individual) (Magnusson et al., 2003).

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