



Discussion paper

The theory of planned behavior and the norm activation model approach to consumer behavior regarding organic menus

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ABSTRACT

This study's purpose is to explore consumers' intention to choose organic menu items at restaurants and their intention to visit restaurants featuring organic menu items. The study model was developed using the theory of planned behavior and the norm activation model. With a total of 461 responses, the results from structural equation modeling indicated that attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and personal norm are determinants of intention to choose organic menu items, which eventually lead to consumers' intention to visit restaurants featuring organic menu items. Theoretical and managerial implications of the research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Environmental and social considerations have become an important component in consumer decision-making in regards to purchasing eco-friendly products such as organic food. This development has been displayed in the significant organic products purchasing increase in recent times (Barber et al., 2010; Jang et al., 2011). Organic food is considered more environment-friendly when compared to conventional food. Organic farming includes a wide range of practices that are expected to be “socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable” (Bourn & Prescott, 2002, p.1). For example, according to the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) guidelines (2013), organic farmers are not allowed to use prohibited fertilizers or plant genetically modified seeds. By utilizing this practice, organic farming and processing procedures contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and maintenance, as well as the improvement of the environmental quality (USDA, 2015). Research shows that organic farming practices produce food that provides health benefits such as higher levels of nutrient content (Crinnion, 2010) and less pesticide residues for consumers, as well as increasing biodiversity (e.g., Bengtsson et al., 2005; Crowder et al., 2010).

The organic food category represents approximately 90% of the total sales in the organic product market. This category also accounts for almost 5% of the total food sales in the United States (Organic Trade Association, 2016a). According to the National Restaurant Association's (2016) survey, 64% of the professional chefs who participated in the survey picked organic produce as one of the hot trends in the restaurant industry. The remarkable increase in consumer demand for organic

food has opened up new opportunities for the restaurant industry (Filimonau and Grant, 2017). For example, restaurants could develop new customer segments, since organic food consumption is closely linked to alternative lifestyles. These lifestyles often emphasize environment, health, and/or alternative medicine (Cicia et al., 2002). However, restaurants featuring organic menu items must face persistent challenges, including the lack of availability and variety of organic ingredients (Poulston and Yiu, 2011). One method to overcome these challenges is for restaurants to change menus based on available ingredients in the given season (Chait, 2016). These challenges may then become a source of differentiation and competitive advantages for the restaurants in the market (Chait, 2016).

Previous research (e.g., Harland et al., 1999; Park and Ha, 2014) suggests that there are two main domains to predict a person's pro-environmental behavior. These include self-interest motives and pro-social motives (Han, Lee, & Hwang, 2016). The former approach is the more traditional view. This approach suggests that consumers are willing to perform a pro-environmental behavior for personal interest. For example, if a person has a favorable attitude toward an eco-friendly product, the person is more likely to buy the product. In this aspect, attitudinal theories, such as the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB), have been widely applied to predict people's pro-environmental behavior (Han et al., 2016). The latter pro-social motives are explained by the norm activation model (NAM, Schwartz, 1977). The NAM framework has been used in previous studies to examine the role of pro-social motives in consumer's environmentally responsible decision making (Han, 2014). For instance, a consumer's sustainable consumption is predominantly affected by their

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moral consideration. Performing certain types of pro-environmental behaviors often increases one's personal costs (Harland et al., 2007). In other words, consumers may be required to spend more money if they opt for an eco-friendly item. Moreover, they may need to sacrifice convenience and put more time and effort to find the options available near them.

There have been multiple consumer studies about organic food (Arvola et al., 2008; Zanolini and Naspetti, 2002). However, studies focusing on consumers' intention to choose an organic menu item when they are eating out and intention to visit restaurants featuring organic menu items are sparse. Understanding the mechanism behind consumer's preference for organic menu items may be critical in creating effective marketing strategies for the restaurant industry. This will help the industry respond to the continuously growing consumer demand toward organic food (Hanks and Mattila, 2016). This study's purpose is to explore consumers' intention to choose organic menu items at restaurants and their intention to visit restaurants featuring organic menu items. The study model was developed using the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) and NAM (Schwartz, 1977) theories. The TPB was chosen because the theory has successfully been applied to numerous consumer research studies regarding food choice behavior (e.g., Arvola et al., 2008; O'Fallon et al., 2007; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005). Furthermore, considering moral norms are essential in understanding consumers' behavior in consuming environment-friendly products in the field of hospitality and tourism (Han et al., 2016). Although a number of researchers have claimed that personal norm should be added to the TPB model (Conner and Armitage, 1998), an integration of TPB and NAM has not occurred in predicting consumers' pro-environmental behavior related to hospitality and tourism beyond general pro-environmental behavior such as recycling and reusing (Han et al., 2016). Therefore, this study offers empirical evidence by incorporating the TPB and NAM into the study model to explain consumer's decision-making process of organic menu choice when eating out.

2. Literature review

2.1. Organic food consumption when eating out

In 2015, the U.S. organic industry hit a new sales benchmark: \$43 billion (Organic Trade Association, 2016a). Organic labeling is considered the most positive and reputable form of labeling among those of eco-friendly products (Allen and Kovach, 2000). Organic products are available in more than 75% of supermarket product categories (Organic Trade Association, 2016b). The continued growth in the U.S. organic industry is triggered by the development and implementation of the USDA's regulatory program (Dimitri and Greene, 2002). The USDA certifies organic food that has been "grown and processed according to federal guidelines addressing, such factors as, soil quality, animal raising practices, pest and weed control and use of additives" (USDA, 2012).

The restaurant industry has responded to the growing popularity of organic products (Hanks and Mattila, 2016). For example, the Organic Coup, the first USDA certified fast food restaurant in the U.S., opened their first location as recently as 2015 and has expanded to nine locations as of 2017. The restaurant aims to serve major markets in California and uses 100% organic ingredients for their menu offerings (The Organic Coup, n.d.). Chain restaurants such as Chipotle Mexican Grill as well as some independent restaurants are trying to replace existing ingredients with organic options (Chipotle, n.d.; Poulston and Yiu, 2011). Restaurants featuring organic ingredients in their menu offerings are expected to achieve better sales performance since consumers are willing to pay a premium for organic menu items and are more likely to patronize restaurants incorporating green practices (Hu et al., 2010; Jang et al., 2011; Poulston and Yiu, 2011). Consumers' interest in restaurants serving organic food items is expected to grow (USDA, 2017) and thus consumer behavior research is needed in this context.

Additional research will aid restaurant operators in developing market-based strategies and to perform better by fulfilling consumers' menu choice preferences

Consumers are willing to purchase organic food items due to the benefit it gives to themselves and others (Hwang, 2016). Primary motivations for purchasing organic food include health consideration, better quality, and environmental concern (Bonn et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2014). Organic food production foregoes the usage of chemicals that may be harmful to one's long-term health (Hughner et al., 2007). Consumers expect better quality and taste when purchasing organic produce. This expectation is due to organic producer's safer production methods when compared to conventional food and the premium price they must pay (Hill and Lynchehaun, 2002; Hwang, 2016).

According to Nielsen's (2010) study, environmental and social considerations prompt general North American consumers to choose organic produce. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents in the study were willing to buy organic produce to promote environment-friendly organic farms while 38% believed it was the right thing to do. Honkanen et al. (2006) also found that ecological motives that concern environmental and animal welfare had a strong impact on attitude toward consuming organic food. While previous studies demonstrated mixed results in comparing organic food with conventionally grown food in terms of its nutritional value and environmental impact, there is a general perception that organic food is a healthier and more environmentally friendly option (Bourn and Prescott, 2002). People's food choices are also closely related to the self-image they wish to portray in social settings (Petrescu and Petrescu-Mag, 2015). Due to the influence of media, people tend to consider purchasing organic food as trendy and fashionable in some regions (Petrescu and Petrescu-Mag, 2015). Hwang (2016) also found that older consumers are motivated to purchase organic food for the positive self-image it gives in addition to food safety concern. That is, they want to build or manage self-image in social settings by utilizing shared meaning of organic food consumption among members in the society.

Conversely, consumers face several barriers if they wish to consume organic food. For example, the higher price for organic food items is one of the major obstacles for consuming organic food. This high price hinders consumers from repeat purchases (Marian et al., 2014). Lack of availability of organic food items, mainly due to geographical locations (e.g., rural communities) or insufficient variety of organic food ingredients available in stores, is another primary barrier (Hamzaoui Essoussi and Zahaf, 2008; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005). Yet another barrier is a lack of education on the benefits of organic food. If a consumer does not have enough knowledge about organic food, that consumer is less likely to eat organic food (Aertsens et al., 2011). Skepticism about organic producers, labeling, and the certification process may also hinder organic food consumptions (Aertsens et al., 2009; Hamzaoui Essoussi and Zahaf, 2008).

2.2. Norm activation model

The norm activation model (NAM; Schwartz, 1977) has been widely used to predict people's altruistic and pro-social behavior (De Groot and Steg, 2009). Pro-social behavior refers to a person's action that is intended to help other people and consists of a broad range of helping, sharing, and cooperating behaviors (De Groot and Steg, 2009; Zhang et al., 2013). It is closely associated with a person's morality. Thus, the intensity of a person's morality determines the degree of their pro-social behavior (Schwartz, 1977). Pro-environmental behavior is often considered as one type of pro-social behavior given that pro-environmental behavior involves positive consequences to others (Steg and De Groot, 2010). Pro-environmental behavior includes any types of behaviors that mitigate the harmful impact of one's actions on the environment (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). In the hospitality and tourism research, pro-environmental behaviors include patronizing green restaurant/hotel (Hu et al., 2010; Han et al., 2010), eating locally sourced food at

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