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Consumer perception of organic products: Motivators and Barriers influencing Buying behavior

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Abstract: *The global market for organic products has witnessed substantial growth over the past two decades, driven by increasing consumer awareness of health, environmental sustainability, and ethical consumption. Despite this growth, organic products continue to occupy a niche segment in comparison to conventional alternatives. This paradox highlights the importance of understanding consumer perception and the underlying factors that motivate or hinder organic purchasing behavior. This research paper aims to examine consumer perceptions of organic products by analyzing the key motivators and barriers influencing buying behavior. Using an extensive review of existing literature and a conceptual analytical framework, the study explores psychological, social, economic, and situational determinants of organic consumption. Findings suggest that health consciousness, environmental concern, perceived quality, and ethical values are primary motivators, while high price, limited availability, lack of trust in certification, and insufficient knowledge remain significant barriers. The paper concludes with implications for marketers, policymakers, and researchers, offering recommendations to enhance consumer adoption of organic products and promote sustainable consumption patterns.*

Keywords: *Organic products, consumer perception, buying behavior, motivators, barriers, sustainable consumption.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, consumer markets across the globe have experienced a significant shift toward sustainability-oriented products. Among these, organic products—particularly organic food—have emerged as a symbol of health-conscious and environmentally responsible consumption. Organic products are generally defined as goods produced using methods that avoid synthetic chemicals, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), artificial fertilizers, pesticides, antibiotics, and growth hormones (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2018). These products are regulated through certification systems designed to ensure compliance with organic standards. The growth of the organic market reflects broader societal concerns related to food safety, environmental degradation, climate change, and ethical production practices. According to Willer et al. (2023), the global organic market surpassed USD 135 billion, with strong growth observed in both developed and emerging economies. However, despite increasing awareness and positive attitudes toward organic products, actual purchasing behavior often remains inconsistent with consumer intentions—a phenomenon commonly referred to as the **attitude behavior gap**. Understanding

consumer perception is crucial because perception directly influences decision-making processes. Consumer perception of organic products encompasses beliefs about health benefits, environmental impact, product quality, authenticity, and value for money. These perceptions are shaped by personal values, socio-demographic characteristics, cultural norms, marketing communication, and past experiences.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although consumer awareness of organic products is relatively high, actual consumption levels remain comparatively low. Numerous studies suggest that while consumers express favorable attitudes toward organic products, these attitudes do not consistently translate into purchasing behavior (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). This discrepancy raises critical questions:

- Why do consumers who value health and sustainability fail to purchase organic products regularly?
- What factors motivate consumers to choose organic products over conventional alternatives?
- What barriers discourage consumers from engaging in organic purchasing behavior?

Addressing these questions is essential for businesses seeking to expand organic markets and for policymakers aiming to promote sustainable consumption.

Research Objective

1. To examine consumer perception toward organic products.
2. To identify key motivators influencing consumers' purchase of organic products.
3. To analyze major barriers that hinder organic product purchasing behavior.
4. To synthesize existing literature into a comprehensive conceptual understanding.
5. To provide recommendations for increasing organic product adoption.

This paper is organised as follows. Section 2 presents an extensive review of the literature. Section 3 outlines the conceptual framework. Section 4 describes the research methodology. Section 5 discusses findings and analysis. Section 6 provides a discussion and implications. Section 7 concludes the study and suggests future research direction.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing academic and managerial interest in organic products is closely linked to global concerns regarding human health, environmental sustainability, and ethical consumption. Organic products are widely perceived as safer and more environmentally friendly than conventional alternatives due to the absence of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, and genetically modified organisms in their production processes (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2018). As a result, consumer perception has become a central theme in understanding organic product adoption, as perceptions strongly influence attitudes, intentions, and ultimately purchasing behavior. Consumer perception of organic products is largely shaped by beliefs related to health, naturalness, quality, and environmental responsibility. Previous research consistently demonstrates that consumers associate organic products with superior health benefits and reduced exposure to chemical residues (Magnusson et al., 2001; Hughner et al., 2007). These health-related beliefs are particularly influential among consumers who are health conscious, parents with young children, and individuals with higher levels of education. Although scientific evidence regarding nutritional superiority remains inconclusive, perceived health benefits continue to play a decisive role in shaping favorable attitudes toward organic consumption (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017). Environmental concern represents another dominant dimension of consumer perception toward organic products. Organic farming practices are widely perceived as environmentally sustainable, promoting biodiversity, soil health, and reduced pollution (Wier et al., 2008). Consumers with strong environmental values often view organic consumption as a means of contributing to ecological preservation and climate change mitigation. According

to Stern's (2000) Value-Belief-Norm theory, such environmentally responsible behavior is driven by moral norms rooted in altruistic and biospheric values. Consequently, organic products are frequently purchased not only for personal benefit but also as an expression of environmental responsibility and ethical commitment. Perceived product quality and sensory attributes further influence organic buying behavior. Numerous studies indicate that consumers believe organic products to be fresher, tastier, and of higher overall quality compared to conventional alternatives (Sahota, 2009). These perceptions enhance consumer satisfaction and strengthen repeat purchase intentions. Quality perception is particularly important in food categories such as fruits, vegetables, dairy, and baby food, where consumers are more sensitive to safety and nutritional concerns. This perceived quality advantage often compensates for higher prices among committed organic consumers. Beyond individual benefits, ethical and social considerations also shape consumer attitudes toward organic products. Ethical motives include concerns about animal welfare, fair labor practices, and support for local farmers (Padel & Foster, 2005). Organic consumption is often linked to lifestyle choices and self-identity, where consumers perceive organic purchasing as a reflection of their moral values and social responsibility. In this context, organic products function not merely as commodities but as symbolic goods representing sustainability, health, and ethical consciousness. Beyond individual benefits, ethical and social considerations also shape consumer attitudes toward organic products. Ethical motives include concerns about animal welfare, fair labor practices, and support for local farmers (Padel & Foster, 2005). Organic consumption is often linked to lifestyle choices and self-identity, where consumers perceive organic purchasing as a reflection of their moral values and social responsibility. In this context, organic products function not merely as commodities but as symbolic goods representing sustainability, health, and ethical consciousness.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The present study employs a **descriptive and analytical research design grounded in a systematic literature review** methodology. This design is appropriate for synthesizing existing empirical evidence to examine consumer perception of organic products comprehensively and to identify the key motivators and barriers influencing buying behavior. The descriptive component facilitates an in-depth understanding of prevailing themes and patterns within the literature, while the analytical component enables critical evaluation and integration of findings across diverse studies. By adopting this approach, the study aims to develop a consolidated and theory-driven understanding of organic consumption behavior without collecting primary data.

3.2 Data source

The study is based exclusively on **secondary data** obtained from reputable and peer-reviewed sources to ensure the credibility and reliability of findings. Academic literature was collected from leading scholarly databases, including **Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar**. In addition, authoritative reports and statistical publications from internationally recognized organizations such as the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** and the **Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL)** were reviewed to provide contextual and industry-level insights.

A systematic search strategy was employed using relevant keywords and Boolean operators, such as "*organic products*," "*consumer perception*," "*organic buying behavior*," "*motivators*," "*barriers*," and "*sustainable consumption*." Only articles published in English between **2000 and 2024** were considered to capture contemporary developments in organic consumption research.

3.3 Data Analysis Technique

A **systematic literature review (SLR)** approach was adopted, followed by **thematic analysis** to synthesize findings across selected studies. The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, selected articles were carefully reviewed to extract key constructs, variables, and findings related to consumer perception, motivators, and barriers. Second, recurring patterns and

concepts were coded and grouped into thematic categories, such as health consciousness, environmental concern, perceived quality, price sensitivity, availability, and trust issues. Finally, these themes were analytically integrated to identify relationships, contradictions, and research gaps within the existing literature.

Thematic analysis was chosen due to its suitability for identifying consistent trends and conceptual linkages across a diverse body of research, thereby enhancing the interpretative depth of the study.

3.4 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that although consumer perception of organic products is largely positive, actual consumption remains constrained by several practical and structural factors. Consistent with prior research, health consciousness and environmental concern emerge as dominant drivers shaping favorable attitudes toward organic products (Magnusson et al., 2001; Hughner et al., 2007). Consumers widely associate organic products with superior health benefits, reduced chemical exposure, and environmentally sustainable production practices. However, the results reveal that these positive perceptions alone are insufficient to translate into regular purchasing behavior, highlighting a persistent **attitude–behavior gap** in organic consumption. One of the most significant constraints identified is affordability. Despite strong health and environmental motivations, high price premiums continue to deter consumers from purchasing organic products on a consistent basis. This finding aligns with earlier studies which emphasize that price sensitivity moderates the relationship between positive attitudes and actual buying behavior (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008; Thøgersen, 2017). Organic products are often perceived as value-laden but economically inaccessible, particularly for middle- and low-income consumers. As a result, organic consumption tends to be occasional or selective rather than habitual, limiting market expansion. Trust-related concerns also play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior. While consumers generally perceive organic products as beneficial, skepticism regarding certification authenticity and labeling credibility undermines purchase confidence. In line with previous research, the findings suggest that insufficient knowledge about certification processes and inconsistent regulatory standards weaken consumer trust (Padel & Foster, 2005). This lack of trust reduces perceived value and increases perceived risk, thereby discouraging purchase even among environmentally and health-conscious consumers. Furthermore, accessibility and availability constraints significantly influence purchasing decisions. Limited distribution networks and restricted availability in mainstream retail outlets reduce convenience, particularly in semi-urban and rural contexts. Under the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), such constraints reduce perceived behavioral control, which directly impacts actual behavior. Thus, even consumers with strong purchase intentions may fail to act when organic products are difficult to access. The findings also reinforce the importance of integrating psychological motivations with structural enablers. While intrinsic motivations such as health consciousness and environmental concern initiate interest, extrinsic factors such as pricing strategies, trust-building mechanisms, and distribution infrastructure ultimately determine purchase behavior. This interaction supports the Value-Belief-Norm framework (Stern, 2000), which suggests that moral values must be supported by enabling conditions for pro-environmental behavior to occur.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to existing literature by reaffirming that consumer perception acts as a necessary but insufficient condition for organic product adoption. The results extend prior studies by emphasizing the moderating role of practical constraints in shaping the perception–behavior relationship. This insight underscores the need for more integrative models that simultaneously consider motivational drivers and market-level barriers. Overall, the discussion highlights that promoting organic consumption requires a shift from solely awareness-based strategies toward holistic interventions that address economic and institutional challenges. Without improvements in affordability, accessibility, and trust, positive consumer perceptions are unlikely to result in sustained organic purchasing behavior.

IV. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

The findings suggest that managers in the organic product sector must move beyond awareness-driven marketing and focus on reducing practical constraints faced by consumers. Transparent and informative labeling is essential to enhance consumer trust, clearly communicating certification standards, sourcing practices, and health benefits. Managers should adopt competitive and value-based pricing strategies, such as smaller package sizes, private-label organic brands, and promotional pricing, to reduce perceived price barriers. Additionally, targeted consumer education campaigns—delivered through digital platforms, in-store communication, and influencer partnerships—can improve knowledge, correct misconceptions, and strengthen the perceived value of organic products, thereby encouraging repeat purchase behavior.

V. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

From a policy perspective, government intervention plays a critical role in facilitating organic consumption. Providing financial subsidies and technical support to organic farmers can reduce production costs and, consequently, retail prices for consumers. Establishing standardized and transparent certification systems at national and international levels is necessary to enhance consumer trust and reduce skepticism regarding organic claims. Furthermore, public awareness programs implemented through educational institutions, mass media, and public health initiatives can improve consumer understanding of organic products and their long-term benefits. Such policy measures can collectively strengthen the organic ecosystem and promote sustainable consumption.

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