



Eating clean and green? Investigating consumer motivations towards the purchase of organic food

Samantha Smith, Angela Paladino *

Department of Management and Marketing, Level 10, 198 Berkeley Street, The University of Melbourne VIC 3010, Australia

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ABSTRACT

Growing consumer concern for health and environment issues has resulted in increased attention towards the purchase and consumption of organic food. This has driven an increase in organic research, especially as marketers seek to understand the motivations behind consumer purchases of organic goods.

This study explored the effects of health consciousness, environmental concern, organic knowledge, availability, quality, price consciousness, subjective norms, risk aversion, perceived control and familiarity on organic attitudes, organic purchase intentions and organic purchase behaviour. These variables formed the antecedents of the causal model which utilised Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) Theory of Reasoned Action as the framework of analysis. Results showed strong support for the relationship between organic knowledge, subjective norms and environmental concern on organic attitudes. While health consciousness, quality, subjective norms and familiarity were found to influence purchase intentions, familiarity was the only variable found to exhibit a significant relationship with organic purchase behaviour. This paper will discuss the implications of these results for marketers. It will also consider the limitations of the study and areas for future research.

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1. Introduction

'Organic' refers to products that are produced without the aid of fertilisers or pesticides (Hutchins and Greenhalgh, 1997). Burch (2001) explained that organic food is "food guaranteed to have been produced, stored and processed without the addition of synthetically produced fertilisers and chemicals" (as quoted in Lockie et al., 2002).

Products classified as organic are produced in agreement with standards right through all aspects of production and are then certified by an industry body (Lyons et al., 2001). This review will specifically focus on produce that is certified organic; this also includes products that come under the label of biodynamic and excludes genetically modified foods.

Research has estimated that the global organic industry is growing at a rate of 10–30% p.a. and is worth 33 billion dollars (Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, 2006). In Australia there is little data on industry size as most agricultural research does not differentiate between conventional and organic produce. However, estimates put Australian industry sales at around 400 million dollars annually (Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, 2006).

The Australian organic industry is small in comparison to the global market, representing less than 1% (Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, 2006). It is also underdeveloped in terms of the Australian agricultural production with estimates that it is only 1–1.5% of the total value (Organic Federation of Australia, 2001). The growth of the Australian organic industry, in terms of production, is largely influenced by overseas markets, especially Europe as they take around 70% of Australia's organic exports (Baker, 2007). Annual growth estimates show that organic production is expanding at a rate of 16% per annum (Department of Primary Industries, n.d.).

Organics is an emerging area of research (Huang, 1996). There have been several European studies that have looked at the consumer in regards to organic purchases (Chinnici et al., 2002; Davies et al., 1995; Grunert and Juhl, 1995; Hill and Lynchehaun, 2002; Hutchins and Greenhalgh, 1997; Magnusson et al., 2001; Makatouni, 2002; McEachern and McClean, 2002; Padel and Foster, 2005; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005; Tregear et al., 1994). This research has focused on consumer attitudes towards organic products (Davies et al., 1995; Magnusson et al., 2001; Tregear et al., 1994) and consumer motivations for purchasing organic food (Chinnici et al., 2002; Grunert and Juhl, 1995; Hutchins and Greenhalgh, 1997; Makatouni, 2002; Padel and Foster, 2005; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005). However, there has been little of this research conducted within the Australian market and even less examining the youth market (Lea and Worsley, 2005; Lockie

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +61 3 8344 1916; fax: +61 3 8349 4293.

E-mail address: a.paladino@unimelb.edu.au (A. Paladino).

et al., 2004, 2002; Squires et al., 2001). Moreover, these studies have focused on consumer attitudes and demographics (Lea and Worsley, 2005; Squires et al., 2001), with little research examining Australian consumers motivations for purchasing organic food products (Lockie et al., 2002). Consumer motivations with respect to organic produce are the emerging interest for researchers. As Lockie et al. (2002) advocate it is 'clear that the future of organics will be very much dependent on the motivations of end consumers'. Therefore this study will examine consumer motivations and their purchase intentions towards organic produce, within an Australian context. As Grunert and Juhl (1995) suggest, research should look at different samples within countries to see if theories hold for all groups.

This paper will focus specifically on the organic vegetable market. Organic vegetables are produced all year round in Australia and account for over half of all organic sales (Willer and Yussefi, 2006), making it an appropriate sector to examine. In addition, the purpose of this study is to discover the youth consumers' motivation behind organic purchases and thus extend current knowledge in the area to a specific and unexplored cohort of consumers. This has in fact not been achieved in any past studies and represents a significant contribution to knowledge in the area. It also presents information valued by marketing practitioners.

2. Background and hypotheses

2.1. Theoretical framework

In order to appreciate the reasons why consumers purchase organic produce, an understanding of purchase behaviours is required. The Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1991) have been used throughout attitudinal research to understand and predict consumer purchase behaviours. These theories have been applied in a variety of contexts, from exercise behaviour (Smith and Biddle, 1999), condom use (Wilson et al., 1992) and speeding behaviour (Stead et al., 2005). The Theory of Planned Behaviour has also been utilised within organic research (Magnusson et al., 2001; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005). Therefore, consistent with these past studies, this study incorporates TPB as its theoretical framework.

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) predicts behaviour by evaluating the intention to carry out the specified behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Intentions are identified as the effort an individual is willing to exert to perform the behaviour, which includes motivations (Ajzen, 1991). Intentions are considered as a precursor to behaviour and are therefore seen as the best predictor of behaviour (Ajzen, 2002).

Perceived behavioural control was 'added to' the TRA to create the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). This element was added to deal with situations where people do not exert full control of the behaviour in question, for example, when availability limits them from purchasing a product (Ajzen, 2002). Perceived behavioural control is the perception an individual holds of the ease with which the behaviour can be performed (Ajzen, 1991). With regards to organic products, price and availability are perceived behavioural control factors, as they have the potential to limit consumer purchases.

2.2. Attitudes

Attitudes are the favourable or unfavourable evaluation an individual forms of a specified behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Attitudes influence the intentions held and the more favourable the attitude, the greater the intention to perform the behaviour will be (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005). Attitudes are also a function of behavioural

beliefs; if an individual believes the performance of a specific behaviour will lead to a positive outcome then he/she will develop a favourable attitude towards that behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Additionally, attitudes are predictors of purchase intentions and consequently purchase behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In other words, attitudes influence the intentions held and the more favourable the attitude, the greater the intention to perform the behaviour will be (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005). Moreover, attitudes are important as consumers require an understanding of their attitudes and motivations in order to overcome the perceived purchase barriers they face (Hill and Lynchehaun, 2002).

Research has supported the attitude-intention relationship, showing that environmental attitudes do have an impact on consumers green purchase intentions (Alwitt and Pitts, 1996). Squires et al. (2001) also reinforce this, finding that consumers who hold self confessed green attitudes purchase more organic products than those without green attitudes. Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2005) found that a positive relationship exists between consumers' attitudes towards buying and their intentions to buy organic products. In contrast, Magnusson et al. (2001) found that positive attitudes were not ultimately reflected in purchase intentions. The majority of respondents in their study had positive attitudes towards organic products but were not willing or able to purchase in accordance with their attitudes, due to barriers of income and low perceived value for money.

Despite this, the majority of research demonstrates that many consumers depict positive attitudes towards organic food products (Lea and Worsley, 2005; Magnusson et al., 2001; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005). The greater the positive attitudes, the greater the intention to buy will be and therefore, the greater the likelihood that consumer will purchase organic products over conventional alternatives (Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005).

A mediator has been defined as "the generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable" (Baron and Kenny, 1986, p. 1173). The TRA indicates that mediation effects will influence the relationships formed (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Therefore this report will examine the effect of mediators. First the effect of purchase intentions on the relationship between the antecedents and purchase behaviour will be examined. Next, the mediation effects of organic attitudes on the relationship between antecedents and purchase intentions will be explored. Individual hypotheses will be discussed in each antecedent section.

H1a: An increase in positive attitudes towards organic produce will increase consumer's intention to purchase organic produce.

H1b: An increase in positive attitudes towards organic produce will increase consumer's purchase behaviour of organic produce.

H1c: The effect of organic attitudes on organic purchase behaviour will be mediated by green purchasing intentions.

2.3. Organic knowledge

Knowledge is important as it is regarded as having an influence on the consumer decision making process (Laroche et al., 2001). This is supported by Hill and Lynchehaun (2002) who found that knowledge is a key influencer in the purchase of organic products. Moorman et al. (2004) found that subjective knowledge influences the choice a consumer makes, as they are inspired to act in accordance to the knowledge they hold.

Research has shown that consumers have a basic understanding of the term 'organic' (Hutchins and Greenhalgh, 1997). They view 'organic' as free from chemicals (Hutchins and Greenhalgh, 1997). Lyons et al. (2001) showed that consumers describe organic produce as natural, raw and being less processed than conven-

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