



# The effect of environmental values and attitudes on consumer willingness to pay more for organic menus: A value-attitude-behavior approach



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## ABSTRACT

While organic food consumption has received recent attention, few studies have focused on consumer behaviors of organic menu selection restaurants. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating consumers' decision-making process with respect to organic menu choices based on the value-attitude-behavior model. Applying the tenet of the model, general sustainability values (i.e., altruistic, egoistic, and biosphere value), pro-environmental attitude, and willingness to pay more for an organic menu were introduced. A total of 467 responses were collected via an online survey, then analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. Our results showed that altruistic value significantly affects biosphere values, which in turn influences willingness to pay more for an organic menu via pro-environmental attitude. This study provides the environmental perspectives underlying the impact of sustainability values and attitude on intentions to pay more for an organic menu. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2015, the United States organic market recorded \$43.3 billion in sales, the market's highest to date. Approximately 91% of those sales were from organic food. This reflected organic food's consumer popularity [Organic Trade Association (OTA), 2016]. Organic food has received considerable consumer attention. This attention has notably influenced the restaurant industry's offerings. (Gagić, Mikšić, & Petrović, 2015; Taksali, 2016). For example, in 2015, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) certified Organic Coup as the first organic restaurant (The Organic Coup, 2016), a result of consumers' growing interest in organic foods. According to the Organic Coup, at least 95% of the ingredients used are USDA certified. Even fast-food restaurants across the planet have begun to promote organic menus in order to meet customers' organic preferences (Golman, 2015; Watrous, 2016). For example, the popular American fast food chain Wendy's, began serving organic beverages nationwide in 2015.

While there are a number of empirical studies regarding organic food (e.g., Krystallis & Chryssohoidis, 2005; Lockie, Lyons, Lawrence, & Grice, 2004; Yin, Wu, Du, & Chen, 2010), few studies have focused on the background of consumers' intentions to choose organic menus in the restaurant context. Contemporary consumers spend their money not only on organic food in supermarkets, but also on organic menus in restaurants. Moreover, the emergence of new organic restaurants and an increase in the number of organic menus being offered in established restaurants calls for a comprehensive evaluation of consumers' willingness to pay more for organic menus.

To accommodate this growing desire, this study focuses on the environmental perspective, one of the most important motives when choosing organic foods (Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz, & Stanton, 2007). The hypothesized model of this research was built upon the value-attitude-behavior model (Homer & Kahle, 1988). According to this model, values influence attitude and one's behavior is influenced by their attitudes. In terms of a person's sustainable behavior, Stern and Dietz (1994) noted that attitudes regarding environmental issues come from an individual's general set of values. These values consist of egoistic (self), social-altruistic (other people), and biosphere values (Stern & Dietz, 1994).

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The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship among general sustainability values (i.e., egoistic, social-altruistic and biosphere values) and how these values influence pro-environmental attitudes. In turn, these influences determined how the pro-environmental attitudes influence consumers' willingness to pay more for an organic restaurant menu. This study contributes to existing restaurant research literature by providing a better understanding of the consumers' decision-making process when selecting organic restaurant menus. Moreover, this study's findings offer meaningful information to the restaurant industry.

## 2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

### 2.1. Organic food and organic menu

Organic food is defined as food that is produced without any man-made substances, such as fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and biotechnology (USDA, 2012). According to the regulations of OTA, even artificial materials applied to organic food must be organization-approved. To meet these conditions, organic food producers are required to follow certain steps to validate the organic process of the products. Unlike the conventional food production process, organic food production demands more care and caution from farmers and regulators. Organic food sales in 2015 increased nearly 11% when compared to those of 2014, a small portion of organic food's continuous growth over the last decade (OTA, 2016). This increase in organic food consumption also reflects consumers' attentions to environmental protection and food safety (Chrysosoidis & Krystallis, 2005; Mondelaers, Verbeke, & Van Huylenbroeck, 2009). Past research suggests that consumers purchase organic food due to their desire to be eco-friendly and eco-conscious (McNeil, 2016; Sriram & Forman, 1993). In other words, people who highly value the environment and nature are more likely to buy organic products.

Consumers purchase organic food not only from markets, but also order organic menus in restaurants. Organic restaurant menus are comprised of a variety of organic ingredients to qualify as organic food. Once customers select one of the menu items, they are served with dishes made from organic ingredients. Organic menus include the least human-modified ingredients, including as chemical/synthetic seasoning, artificial flavors, and colors (Baker, Benbrook, Groth, & Benbrook, 2002; Chen, 2007; OTA). In the restaurant industry, approximately 45% of adult consumers consider the availability of organic or environmentally friendly menus when selecting a restaurant [National Restaurant Association (NRA), 2016a]. Also, American Culinary Federation chefs stated environmental sustainability as one of the critical trends in the restaurant industry (NRA, 2016b). Organic menu development has become another challenge for restaurant practitioners/chefs in meeting consumer demand for such items. Industry practitioners predict consumer demand for organic menus will continue to grow (Golman, 2015; OTA, 2016; Watrous, 2016).

Scholars have emphasized that this organic trend in the restaurant industry is not only rooted in personal advantages (e.g., taste, health, etc.), but also communal interest (e.g., environment, fair trade, etc.) (de-Magistris & Gracia, 2016; Kang, Jun, & Arendt, 2015; Poulston & Yiu, 2011; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Moreover, Schifferstein and Ophuis (1998) highlighted that consumption of organic products is linked with "a particular value system that affects personality measures, attitudes, and consumption behavior" (p. 119).

A person's environmental value is one of the cornerstones of his/her consumption habits (Biswas & Roy, 2015). Empirical results from various studies have confirmed environmental concern is one of the primary factors that drive consumers' consumption of

organic food (Hughner et al., 2007; Schifferstein & Ophuis, 1998; Squires, Juric, & Bettina Cornwell, 2001). Along with the trend, consumers have consciously changed their lifestyles. Their values may be the reason behind such phenomenon. Businesses have also been concentrating on developing environment-friendly items to satisfy this shift. To this end, further research in the context of organic menu selection is necessary and timely. This study focuses on the role of consumers' values and their effect on forming pro-environmental attitudes and their willingness to pay more for organic menus.

### 2.2. Value-attitude-behavior model

The value-attitude-behavior model was proposed and tested by Homer and Kahle (1988). The model shows values are fundamental in the formation of attitudes, which lead to a specific behavior. According to social adaptation theory, values, as an amalgam of social cognitions, enable individuals to adapt to an environment, guiding them to how to act in a certain situation (Homer & Kahle, 1988; Kahle, 1983; Kahle, Kulka, & Klingel, 1980). In addition, norm-activation theory postulates that a person behaves in a certain way to help others in order to be consistent with his/her internalized values (Schwartz, 1977). Therefore, when a person's internal values are activated, he/she builds responses toward an object/notion and then expresses them by taking actions.

A value is defined as a stable belief that facilitates an individual to conduct a particular action or end-state that he/she prefers (Rokeach, 1973). A person's values are used to evaluate events and select behaviors, as well as order those events and behaviors, based on their perceived importance level (Homer & Kahle, 1988). Scholars have addressed values to be the most abstract constructs that build attitudes and behaviors (Chrysosoidis & Krystallis, 2005; Homer & Kahle, 1988; Kamakura & Mazzon, 1991; Wedel, Ter Hofstede, & Steenkamp, 1998). The hierarchical flow among value, attitude, and behavior is proposed as the following order: 'value → attitude → behavior' (Homer & Kahle, 1988). Accordingly, values are the underlying basis that can account for people's attitudes and behaviors. Attitudes are conceptualized as outcomes resulting from diverse factors including personal values. Attitudes are often seen as less stable than values (Homer & Kahle, 1988). While attitudes are more specific and directly associated with some objects, persons, or notions (Kahle, 2013), such as the environment in this study, values are more general sets of ideas. As a consequential outcome from values and attitudes, a person shows an actual behavior. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), behavioral intention is the best precursor and direct determinant of actual behavior. This notion has widely been accepted in academia and a number of previous studies (e.g. Li & Cai, 2012; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999) have successfully used behavioral intention as a proxy measure of actual behavior within the value-attitude-behavior framework. Therefore, behavioral intention (willingness to pay more) was also used as a proxy measure of actual behavior in this study.

Furthermore, following the previous research, the value-attitude-behavior model has been supported in the organic context (Homer & Kahle, 1988; Kang et al., 2015; Thøgersen, Zhou, & Huang, 2016; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). This study applies the model to the organic menu consumption in restaurants and assumes that an individual's general values of sustainability may influence his/her attitude toward environment, which creates behavioral intention, such as willingness to pay more for organic menus in restaurants.

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