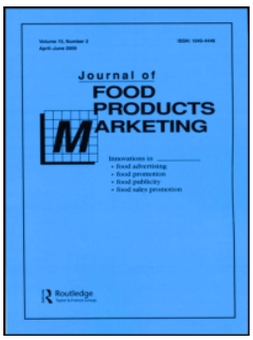

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ABSTRACT

Consumer awareness about organic foods has been growing. However, this trend is not always translated to consumer organic food purchases. It is argued that when it comes to assessing organics, one should expect consumers to use multi-attribute evaluations due to credence attributes and organic standards that organic foods need to adhere to. A thorough review of the existing literature on consumer buying behavior of organic foods identifies healthism, hedonism, and trust among some factors that enhance consumer experiences with organic foods and therefore can affect their purchase intentions. This article is one the few studies that integrated multiple factors in one research framework to empirically evaluate their role in explaining consumer purchase intentions of organic foods. Results from a demographically representative sample completed by an online survey in Australia (N = 1011) provides support for the research hypotheses by revealing positive and statistically significant effects of healthism, hedonism, and trust on consumer purchase intentions. The study concludes with implications and suggestions for future research.

KEYWORDS

Australian consumers; healthism; hedonism; organic food; purchase intentions; trust

Introduction

Demand for organic produce has boomed in recent years as consumers are becoming increasingly aware of and eager to know about their food source (Lang, Stanton, & Qu, 2014). Organic food, once the domain of farm-gate country folk and urban hippies, is moving forward to get serious in the food retail stakes (Kaplan, 2008). As the deputy chair of the Organic Federation of Australia has predicted, organic agriculture will continue to feed the Australian population (Richards, 2013). In Europe, organic foods' market value has increased from €10.8 billion in 2004 to €21.5 billion in 2011, and it is set to grow further (Willer, Lernoud, & Schaack, 2013).

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However, despite retailers' aspirations and increasing offerings of organic products, there are obstacles to consumers' organic product purchase. These obstacles are recognized as reasons for what is called the attitude–behavior gap concerning organic product purchases—that is, consumers' positive attitude toward ethical consumption is not always translated into purchase decisions (Hwang, 2015). Some key obstacles include a lack of research and understanding of consumer purchasing motivations, which can be many. More recently, though, there has been recognition that a hedonistic or "me-centric" element in organic food consumption is increasingly becoming a yardstick against which purchase decisions are made. In addition to hedonistic motivations, consumers are also becoming increasingly health conscious in their food choices, trying to ensure that the food choices they make address their health concerns or health-related aspirations.

Other important obstacles to embracing organic foods are consumer skepticism and, at times, distrust about the superior quality of organic foods and their benefits relative to conventional food products, respectively (Vindigni, Janssen, & Jager, 2002). Trust is a determinant of consumers' choices with regard not only to the type of organic product but also to the type of distribution channel. In complex food markets, such as the market of organic foods, trust is essential and can influence consumer decision-making (Hamzaoui-Essoussi, Sirieix, & Zahaf, 2013). Organic products are credence goods; therefore, maintaining trust in organic food is important for retailers, the food industry, and the agricultural sector.

While organic food is the fastest-growing food sector in Australia, the question of why people buy or do not buy organic food remains underresearched and needs to be better understood (Costa, Zepeda, & Sirieix, 2014). Bulik (2008) and Kareklas, Carlson, and Muehling (2014) noted that the extant research has been more descriptive in nature—for example, asking who organic consumers are (Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz, & Stanton, 2007; Zepeda & Nie, 2012). Organic food research, to date, lacks strong theoretical underpinnings, and many studies on organic food are more exploratory in their attempts to explain the consumer decision-making process (e.g., Essoussi & Zahaf, 2008; Tsakiridou, Boutsouki, Zotos, & Mattas, 2008). Moreover, some previous studies (e.g., Zanoli & Naspetti, 2002) do not explicitly distinguish between healthism and hedonism, which further complicates operationalizing each of these concepts and, subsequently, measuring their role in consumer purchase intentions. Therefore, more research regarding the consumption of organic food is needed to be able to understand the organic foods market more deeply.

Conceptual framework

Securing loyal consumers who are willing to continuously purchase food products is essential for food manufacturers and retailers to survive in today's

highly competitive markets (Hartmann, Klink, & Simons, 2015). According to Huddleston, Whipple, and Van Auken (2004), loyal consumers are linked to tangible company benefits, such as higher sales, lower operating costs, and an expansion of the customer base due to word-of-mouth reputation (Huddleston et al., 2004). As customer loyalty may improve the overall competitive position of the business, it is a desirable factor to investigate (Maignan, Ferrell, & Hult, 1999) in the context of organic foods.

Organic food consumption is complex. The very definition of organic foods implies multiple factors that should come together for organic food to be produced and to appear on shelves. According to Chen (2009, p. 166), "Organic farming refers to a farming system which uses organic manure and avoids or largely refrains from using synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and chemicals. Moreover, organic foods generally contain less harmful additives and more primary and secondary nutrients than conventional foods, and they carry no additional risk of food poisoning." In the literature, a distinction is usually made between a nutritionist or health-oriented perspective and more social and pleasure-oriented dimensions of food consumption (Kristensen, Askegaard, & Jeppesen, 2013). Indeed, concerns regarding health are often regarded as more important for the choice of organic food than, for instance, environmental concerns (Hughner et al., 2007).

Theories that previous researchers tended to use to study organic food consumption were attitude-behavior models such as the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and the theory of planned behavior (TPB; e.g., Chen, 2007; Zagata, 2012). One of the central assumptions of TRA and TPB is that humans are rational in their decision-making processes and actions, so that cognitive approaches can be used to predict behaviors (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In line with the above theory, this article studies the impact of functional elements of organic food, such as perceived healthism, on consumers' purchase intentions. The addition of affective variables has been recommended as an important theory extension and one of the key aspects that can help in explaining consumer behavior in a more comprehensive way (Conner & Armitage, 1998). Therefore, this article also places importance on the role of motivational and psychographic variables, such as trust and hedonistic motivation, in predicting organic food consumption (Hughner et al., 2007; Schifferstein & Ophuis, 1998).

The role of hedonistic motivations in consumer purchasing behavior

There has been recognition that a hedonistic, or "me-centric" element in organic food consumption is increasingly becoming a yardstick against which purchase decisions are made. Hedonistic consumption refers to those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of one's experience with products (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).

Aertsens, Verbeke, Mondelaers, and Van Huylenbroeck (2009) viewed hedonism in terms of pleasure and sensuous gratification of oneself. Grunert and Juhl (1995, p. 43) regarded hedonism as an individualistic domain "closely related to stimulation," and "representing pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself."

The fact that consumers are beginning to place more value on the hedonistic benefits of foods is evidenced by some online trends. A special "breed" of hedonistic consumers starting up new blogs and online communities in Australia (e.g., the Green Hedonist, Ethical Hedonist with a Sustainable Heart, and Modern Hedonist) keep attracting more followers. As a result, marketing practitioners and manufacturers remain in search of particular attributes that engage all consumer senses, thus inspiring their deeper connection with the product (Topping, 2007). For example, it has been shown that hedonism is an important determinant or predictor of attitudes toward foods (Audebert, Deiss, & Rousset, 2006). Pohjanheimo et al.'s (2010) study demonstrated that hedonism was significantly and positively associated with food choice motives "mood" and "price." Their study also found that consumer values are connected to organic food choice motives and, to some extent liking, and thus consumer values can be used in both product development and brand communication. Chryssohoidis and Krystallis (2005) found a significant relationship between the importance consumers attached to "fun and enjoyment" and the consumption of organic fresh fruits and vegetables. Homer and Kahle's study (1988) demonstrated that hedonistic and stimulation values have an effect on consumer attitudes toward nutrition. However, the role of the hedonistic component of attitude and emotions in relation to organic food consumption and purchases remains underresearched (Aertsens et al., 2009). In the context of organic foods, this means brands facilitate a perceived hedonism that can vary from an outstanding flavor to a feeling that one made a smart choice (Anisimova, 2007). In addition, taste or a flavor, related to the value hedonism, can play an important role in determining organic food purchases (Aertsens et al., 2009). Therefore, a first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

> Hypothesis 1: Hedonistic consumer benefits will have a positive impact on consumer purchase intentions of organic foods.

Healthism and organic foods consumers

Organic farming refers to a farming system, which is more sustainable and easy on the environment and also more gentle and nourishing to a human body. As a result, consumers often perceive organic foods as healthier (Zagata, 2012) and less processed than conventional foods (Lyons, Lockie, & Lawrence, 2001). A growing demand for organic foods is often driven by

growing consumer concern about chemicals in food and the environment, health consciousness, and specific dietary and allergy conditions—in other words, consumer perceptions of organic tasting better and the desire to get "back to basics" (Kaplan, 2008). In addition, escalating rates of obesity and dietary-related illnesses in recent years have triggered government-led health campaigns globally and in Australia. The new form of health consciousness has emerged, rejuvenating what was referred to by Crawford (1980) as *healthism* over 30 years ago, which stands for a preoccupation with personal health as the primary focus for the achievement of happiness and well-being. For healthism-oriented consumers, health becomes the ultimate and a must-be value in organic foods (Crawford, 1980). Verschuren (2002) referred to healthism in foods as functional foods and conceptualized them as having two primary effects on health: the enhancement of physiological function and the reduction of disease risk.

According to Barsky (1988), a psychological factor that may influence the acceptance of foods is consumers' worries of the impact that aspects of modern life can have on their health. Devcich et al.'s (2007) study found that modern health worries are an important psychological factor to consider with regard to attitudes toward functional foods. Despite an increasing array of health benefits in organic foods, at present, the link between healthism in organic foods and consumer purchase intentions remains underresearched. Some exceptions (see Urala & Lähteenmäki, 2004) attempted to explore perceived reward from using healthy foods and consumer willingness to use such foods. Another study by Verbeke (2005) has shown that belief in the health benefits of functional foods is an important determinant of the acceptance of these foods. A second hypothesis is therefore formulated as follows:

> Hypothesis 2: Perceived healthism in organic foods will have a positive impact on consumer purchase intentions of organic foods.

The role of trust in organic food consumption

Communication with consumers is increasingly oversaturated with facts, claims, and advice about foods' health properties from different and, at times, competing stakeholders who may have differing investments in the healthy eating agenda (Eden, Bear, & Walker, 2008; Randolph & Viswanath, 2004). It has been reported that, for instance, healthy eating messages have been ineffective partly due to public mistrust of health information itself (Ward & Coates, 2006). In complex food markets, such as the market of organic foods, trust is essential and can influence consumer decision-making (Hamzaoui-Essoussi et al., 2013). Studying consumer trust in organic food is therefore important not only because organic food is comparatively new but

also because it is difficult for consumers to verify whether foods they purchase are truly organic. Trust is a determinant of consumers' choices, not only of the type of organic product but also of the type of distribution channel. Often a farm grows the product or ingredient for a product, processed by another firm, packaged by a third firm, and shipped to its final destination by yet another firm (Oberholtzer, Dimitri, & Greene, 2005). As organic sales have moved into mainstream retail markets, the conventional food industry is becoming more involved with the organic movement. This opens up a possibility for a credibility gap because consumers generally cannot check if the retailer or manufacturer accurately enforces organic standards (Perrini, Castaldo, Misani, & Tencati, 2010). Therefore, maintaining the integrity of organic products is a pertinent issue as organics move further into the mainstream market.

Previous studies found that consumer skepticism and lack of trust prevented them from purchasing more organic food (Aertsens et al., 2009; Lea & Worsley, 2005). In addition, confusion and uncertainty have been reported on foods marketed as "healthy eating" (Hill, Knox, Hamilton, Parr, & Stringer, 2002), with consumers considering claims about fat content and health benefits as potential "gimmicks" and "cons" (Chan, Patch, & Williams, 2005). Consumer trust, on the other hand, was reported to lead to feelings of warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). According to Morgan and Hunt (1994), brand trust leads to brand loyalty. Castaldo, Perrini, Misani, and Tencati (2009) showed that trust in a retailer's private-label fair trade product has a positive impact on consumers' brand loyalty. This implies that trust creates exchange relationships that can be highly valued. However, organic consumer trust has received insufficient attention in consumer behavior research and warrants further research. To investigate the impact of trust on consumer purchase intentions, a third hypothesis is formulated as follows:

> Hypothesis 3: Consumer trust in organic foods will have a positive impact on consumer purchase intentions of organic foods.

Methodology

This article reports the findings from an Australian study that investigated the impact of multiple factors on consumer purchase intentions of organic foods. A structured questionnaire was used for the data collection. A pretest with 12 respondents was conducted to assess the questionnaire's suitability, readability, and time taken for completion. The questionnaire was standardized and undisguised for all the respondents. A pilot study was conducted by a research agency with a sample of 37 subjects. Following the pilot test, a few minor adjustments were made. These included decreasing its length to

reduce response fatigue (Burchell & Marsh, 1992) as well as changing the wording in several questions for greater clarity.

The online survey method was considered the most appropriate method of data collection due to its advantages, including access to unique populations and ability to accommodate large sample sizes at relatively low costs in a short amount of time (Wright, 2005). A total of 1,011 completes were achieved that provided a demographically representative sample (in terms of age, gender, and geographic location) of the Australian adult population. Respondents were recruited from a national research only panel. The pre-condition for qualifying for this project was that qualified respondents had to have purchased organic products sometime in the past.

The first part of the survey consisted of a brief introduction to the topic and a screening question to ensure that respondents qualified for the survey (i.e., bought organic food in the past).

Data analysis procedures

The regression analysis was used to evaluate the relationships between an independent variable (consumer purchase intentions) and dependent variables (consumer trust, consumer hedonistic motivations, and consumer perceived healthism). The regression equations with the individual dimensions were followed by a multiple regression test with the aggregated model. An estimation of proportion of variation in the dependent variable was assessed using the square of the multiple correlation coefficients (R^2). The relative importance and significance of each of the dimensions is evaluated in terms of beta-values and t values. The assumptions of independence, normality, homoscedasticity, and linearity were tested for and were in accordance with the suggestions by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) and Coakes and Steed (2001). Checks for the residual scatterplots for all the standardized residuals and standardized predicated values indicated that scatterplots for all the regression equations were randomly distributed, suggesting that there were no evident relationship between residual and predicted values. No outliers were identified. In addition, independence of error was tested by means of the Durbin-Watson statistic. All the values were close to or below 2, a value that Norusis (1993) indicated as acceptable.

Measurement of variables

The study constructs were measured with a series of 7-point Likert-type scales. Consumer-perceived healthiness of organic foods, consumer hedonistic motivations, and consumer trust were measured using a 7-point Likert type scale anchored on 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Consumer purchase intentions were also measured using a 7-point Likert type scale

anchored on 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. A 7-point Likert scale was also selected for the purposes of increasing reliability as it has been shown to be superior in this aspect over a 5-point scale (Churchill, 1999). To minimize the problem of reducing validity, the neutral response alternative was included (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2002). The questionnaire was standardized and undisguised for all the respondents. In the process of developing new constructs, a number of procedures recommended by Churchill (1979) and Jacoby (1978) were employed to ensure the appropriate scale development. These procedures included the employment of multiple item measures, which enabled a more comprehensive portrayal of the concepts under the measurement, ranging from five to 15 measures. The tests for reliability were undertaken in accordance with recommendations by Nunnally (1978) and are presented in Table 1. The results indicate that all Cronbach's alpha coefficients were higher than 0.70 for each of the constructs. A high Dillon-Goldstein further suggests unidimensionality and reliability of the constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Ho, 2006).

Results and discussion

Table 2 presents ordinary least squares (OLS) regression results for drivers of organic food purchase. Four models are presented: Models 1 to 5 contain estimation results when regressing the dependent variable, consumers' purchase intentions of organic foods, on individual drivers of purchase intentions. Model 4 presents estimation results for the aggregate multiple regression model, which includes all regressors simultaneously. All models were subjected to specification tests regarding the assumptions underlying linear regression models, including (1) linearity and additivity, (2) statistical independence of the errors, (3) homoscedasticity of the errors, (4) normality of the error distribution, and (5) no-perfect collinearity of regressors (Coakes & Steed, 2001; Hair et al., 1998). Results regarding item 2 are included in Table 2 in the form of the respective Durbin-Watson test statistic, which suggests no violation of that assumption.[1]

Model 1 analyzes the hypothesized positive impact of Healthval, which measures consumers' perceived health benefits of organic foods on consumers' purchase intentions. The positive and statistically highly significant coefficient for Healthval provides empirical support for this conjecture: The higher the consumers' perceived health benefits of organic foods, the higher, on average, their willingness of purchasing such foods. The magnitude of this effect is substantial, as evidenced by a comparatively high coefficient value for Healthval and *R*-squared value for Model 1: The latter suggests that 43% of

[1]Durbin-Watson test statistics were all close to 2, which is interpreted as confirming the assumption of error independence (Norusis, 1993). Results from other specification tests, which all indicated no violation of the above assumptions, are available from the authors upon request.

Table 1. Summary of constructs, items, Cronbach's alpha, and Dillon-Goldstein's rho figures.

Construct	Items	Cronbach's alpha	DG rho (PCA)
Consumer perceived healthism	• Organic food has health-promoting effects • Organic food helps me to live a healthy lifestyle • Organic food enhances my health • consider myself very health-conscious • I try to keep a healthy work life balance	.859	.902
Hedonistic consumer motivations	• Purchasing organic food makes me feel good about myself • It is trendy to buy organic food products • enjoy spending money on organic food products • eat organic food not because I have to but because I want to • enjoy being immersed in exciting new experiences of trying organic foods • can treat myself by eating organic foods • get pleasure from eating organic foods • The best time for me to enjoy organic foods is during meals with family or friends	.879	.907
Trust in organic foods	• trust Australian institutions certifying organic foods • trust Australian organic food sellers • trust Australian organic food manufacturers • trust claims on organic food labels • trust organic food products I purchase • can rely on organic food products sold in Australia • trust store personnel who sell organic foods • I trust a product that carries an organic label/an organic certificate	.966	.971
Consumer purchase intentions of organic foods	• will continue purchasing organic foods • would gladly buy more organic food if I could find it • check to see if food products are organic before I purchase them • If organic and conventional food items were the same price, I would choose organic • If the "organic version" of the same product is more expensive than the "conventional version," I would choose organic • may purchase organic food in the future • would recommend purchasing organic food to a friend/relative • If I had to buy food today, I would buy certified organic food	.919	0.935

the variation in the dependent variable is accounted for by variation in Healthval. This results in alignment with some previous studies that showed a positive link between the use of perceived healthiness in foods and consumer willingness to continue using such foods (e.g., Urala & Lähteenmäki, 2004).

Table 2. OLS regression results for drivers of organic food purchase.

Predictors	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Healthval	0.658***			0.334***
	(27.762)			(12,551)
Hedonval		0.674***		0.365***
		(28.975)		(13.526)
Trust			0.545***	0.212***
			(20.673)	(8.801)
R^2	0.433	0.454	0.298	0.762
Adj. R^2	0.433	0.454	0.297	0.581
F-ratio	770.736***	839.522***	427.362***	466,219***
Durbin-Watson	2.045	1.959	1.964	1.953
N	1011	1011	1011	1011

Note. The dependent variable is consumers' future purchase intentions of organic foods. *t* values in parentheses. ***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$.

In Model 2, the hypothesized positive relationship between Hedonval, which measures consumers' hedonistic motivations in relation to organic food and its consumption, and consumers' purchase intentions are tested. The coefficient for Hedonval, too, is positive and statistically highly significant, which provides empirical evidence of this notion: The stronger consumer hedonism with regard to organic food products, the higher, on average, consumers' willingness of purchasing such products. The magnitude of this effect is comparable to that found in Model 1, as suggested by a similarly high coefficient and R^2 value, respectively. This finding is in line with Chryssohoidis and Krystallis (2005), who found a significant relationship between the importance consumers in their study attached to "fun and enjoyment" and the consumption of organic fresh foods.

Model 3 examines the research hypothesis that consumer trust in organic foods is positively associated with consumers' willingness to buy. The positive and statistically highly significant coefficient for the Trust variable provides confirming evidence in that regard: The more consumers trust organic food products, and the higher the perceived trustworthiness of sellers and manufacturers of such products, the more, on average, consumers are willing to purchase organic foods. The fairly high coefficient value for Trust and R^2 value indicate that this relationship, too, is substantial, albeit somewhat smaller in magnitude when compared with the respective effects in Models 1 and 2. This finding is consistent with the previous studies, which found positive impact of consumer trust on consumer loyalty (Castaldo et al., 2009; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Finally, Model 4 subsumes all previously discussed drivers of consumers' intentions of purchasing organic foods into one multiple regression model. Table 2 shows that the broad picture remains unchanged: the coefficients of virtually all individual regressors remain positive and statistically highly significant when included simultaneously in the regression model.

Conclusion and implications

This study contributes to existing research on the gap between consumer awareness of organic foods and their lower purchase intentions. The thorough literature review identified several important aspects such as healthism, hedonism, and trust as playing important roles in explaining consumer purchase intention of organic foods. This study is one of the first attempts to integrate those factors into one research framework. The postulated research hypotheses were supported. Positive and significant effects were found for all the explanatory variables for consumer purchase intentions.

Our findings provide valuable implications for organic food producers, manufacturers, restaurateurs, and retailers. First, they suggest an important role of functionality in organic foods in relation to consumer health. Retailers and manufactures are providing increasing choices to consumers for addressing their health concerns, and consumers, in turn, are becoming increasingly discerning about such choices.

Second, the current study makes a contribution to theories of conspicuous consumption. The results suggest that discerning consumers are looking to be inspired and surprised as they try to build an emotional bond with the foods they consume, seeking beyond customary nutritional food with enjoyable taste. Consumers are looking for deeper sensory pleasures from foods, and this is greatly affecting both how purchase decisions are made and whether or not brand loyalty is formed. Organic producers therefore need to provide consumers with innovative options and new twists on organic food brands in order to succeed in this sensory-driven culture (Datamonitor, 2008).

Third, as organic food is increasingly going mainstream, maintaining trust is becoming even more critical. The findings have implications for advertisers and brand managers with regard to building and maintaining consumer trust in organic foods by continuously maintaining high nutritional standards in organic foods.

Limitations and future research

The cross-sectional nature of the primary method of data collection also limits the data in regard to the phenomenon under investigation to the information at a single point in time.

It seems to be worthwhile for future researchers to gather data on other aspects of consumer-based loyalty such as cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal loyalty to find out the effects of these factors on various dimensions of loyalty.

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