



Exploring the Relationship between Health Consciousness and Organic Food Consumption: A Case Study in District,

Faisalabad

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between health consciousness and organic food consumption, focusing on the attitudes and intentions of university students in District Faisalabad, Pakistan. As health concerns and environmental consciousness rise globally, understanding consumer behavior towards organic food has become critical. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a structured questionnaire to gather data from 200 students. The findings indicate that health-conscious individuals exhibit more favorable attitudes toward organic food consumption. Additionally, environmental concerns significantly influence purchasing intentions, while social influences and product availability play a secondary role. The study suggests that health and environmental benefits should be emphasized in marketing organic food to effectively target health-conscious consumers.

Keywords: Health Consciousness, Organic Food, Consumer Behavior, Purchasing Intentions

Introduction

Health Consciousness refers to the awareness and consideration an individual has regarding their own health and well-being, which influences their decisions related to diet, lifestyle, exercise, and health-related behaviors. It reflects an individual's concern for maintaining or improving their health through proactive measures like consuming nutritious foods, engaging in physical activities, avoiding harmful substances, and seeking medical advice when necessary. In the context of organic food consumption, health-conscious individuals are typically more likely to choose organic options, believing that these foods offer superior health benefits compared to conventional products (Hayakawa, 2017).

Organic food often referred to as ecological or biological food, is a fairly universal phrase meaning natural, unadulterated food. Organic food is typically produced in accordance with worldwide organic agricultural production standards and guidelines, and it typically originates from organic agricultural production systems. In domestic and international literature, organic food is sometimes translated as organic product, but this paper does not distinguish between them, so organic product is equivalent to organic food (Zhang and Li, 2018).

More individuals than ever before are worried about their health in recent years. The public's views on food safety have not stopped evolving. One of the most pressing challenges in society today is food safety, which locals are extremely concerned about. In such a setting, many have turned to eating organic food as a way to circumvent food safety issues. According to the World of Organic Agriculture Statistics and Emerging Trends 2022 (WOASET 2022) published by the Swiss Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and IFOAM – Organics International, over 74.9 million hectares of organic agricultural land were recorded in 190 countries in 2020. These studies have also observed that health-conscious consumers are often concerned about the food safety of the products they consume (Wang et al., 2023).

Consumers' dietary choices have shown a paradigm shift in the past two decades and several studies have been conducted in developed and developing countries to study the rising interest in the organic food category (Eynade et al., 2021). Food industry specialists believe that there is vast potential for the organic food market and its consumption has become prevalent worldwide (Asian et al., 2019). The organic food industry shows a growth potential of over 14.1% and by 2025 it is estimated to reach over USD 189.8 Billion (World Health Organization, 2020). Moreover, the pandemic has enhanced the demand for organic food products, as consumers have gained confidence that such products not only boost immunity but also act as ammunition against various chronic diseases (Grinberga-Zalite et al., 2021). Customers are selecting more sustainable, high-nutrient products as a result of increased interest in the health aspect and growing environmental consciousness.

According to a study conducted by a Research firm in the USA, 76% of adults purchased organic food for health reasons, 33% for concerns related to the environment and 22% for availability (Heo and Muralidharan, 2019). Thus, in the long run, health and the environment will prove to be important parameters for consumers to purchase organic food (Eynade et al., 2021).

Because hedonic factors like scent and attractiveness are proven to be significant determinants of purchase intentions, consumers also like organic food for reasons other than health. By concentrating on elements like flavor, scent, and visual appeal, one may increase persuasiveness. Given the increased interest in sustainable food and health-conscious lifestyles, decision-makers are curious to understand the consumption of organic food. To provide customers enough options, organic food firms are developing new product categories and types. Hence, it becomes essential to understand the dimensions, which determine the buying patterns of organic food products in developing economies (Petrescu et al., 2020).

Objectives

1. To examine the level of health consciousness among consumers and its influence on their attitudes towards organic food consumption.
2. To analyze the relationship between health-conscious attitudes and the intention to purchase organic food.

Literature Review

Akhondan et al. (2015) indicated that there was a significant correlation between students' health consciousness and their organic food consumption. In general, students ate more organic food when they were more worried about their health. Additionally, there was a notable variation in the consumption of organic food between men and women, with women being more likely to buy and eat organic food. Organic food consumption was higher among all respondents in non-food service environments. Family and consumer sciences experts should use the study's findings to rethink their outreach, curriculum, and policy recommendations on the use of organic foods.

Singh & Verma, (2017) studied the factors influencing the actual buying behavior of Indian consumers towards organic food. Sociodemographic factors impacting the actual purchasing behavior of organic foods were among these characteristics, as were consumers' health consciousness, knowledge, subjective norm, perception of price and availability, purchase intention, and actual buying behavior. The behavior and purchase intention of Indian consumers for organic food considering some similar factors considered by Singh & Verma, (2017) and some different ones. The study also examined how customers' perceptions of organic goods, their varieties, and their general satisfaction with regard to flavor, freshness, and appearance in comparison to inorganic ones were influenced by demographic characteristics, health advantages, and the availability of organic items. Furthermore, they show that the majority of their respondents are aware of and eager to purchase organic products, despite their greater cost, suggesting that the nation has a significant

opportunity to promote them. However, their increase in total consumption is being hampered by their comparatively low level of advertising.

Kashif et al. (2023) indicated that all values, i.e., social (0.101), functional (0.314), conditional (0.228), and emotional (0.521) has a significant and positive impact on buying intent of users. Additionally, consumers' intention to acquire organic produce (0.282) is favorably correlated with their purchasing behavior, and their intention to purchase and their intake of organic food are significantly moderated by food neophobia (0.091). Additionally, the study provides useful information to natural food producers, researchers, and marketers.

Su et al. (2022) demonstrated that characteristics of products and concerns of consumers significantly affect young consumer's health and social consciousness. However, it was discovered that the views of young consumers were not significantly impacted by such health and social concerns. Furthermore, research indicates a strong correlation between young customers' attitude and the frequency of their purchases of organic goods. The results further support the idea that attitudes and intentions to buy organic food are moderately influenced by environmental awareness.

Hsu et al. (2016) showed in their research that food safety concern and subjective knowledge have a significantly positive impact on attitudes towards organic food and purchase intentions, and natural content has a significantly positive effect on attitudes towards organic food. It also has shown that attitude towards organic food and being health socially has a significantly positive effect on the purchasing behavior. This paper also showed that consumers' health conscious, food safety concerns and their self-perceived knowledge towards organic foods all play an important role in determining the consumer's propensity to buy organic food. Application: This is beneficial for the organic business since it gives a picture of the customers' demand from the consumers' perspective, which will be of significance for the future production of organic food. Implication: The results of the study would be useful for the government department responsible for agriculture as well as for the promotion introduction of organic foods.

Methodology

A quantitative research design was employed for this study. A detailed questionnaire was developed to collect data from the selected respondents. The questionnaire was designed to gather comprehensive responses related to the research objectives. To ensure accurate and reliable data, an interview schedule was utilized for data collection. This method was chosen to standardize the process, allowing for consistent administration of the questionnaire to all respondents. A total of 200 university students were selected as participants for this study from the universities of district Faisalabad. The respondents were chosen from two specific agricultural institutions: Agriculture University and Arid Agriculture University. These institutions were selected based on their relevance to the research topic and their focus on agricultural education. For sampling, a convenience sampling technique was employed. This technique was chosen to ensure ease of access to participants within the university setting, allowing for efficient data collection. The sample population size was 200 students, from both universities for the study and willing participants were selected based on an availability to answer questionnaires given to them. Therefore, by employing convenience sampling technique, this study was intended to cover vast area in terms of responses collecting within limited time and cost. The students targeted were typical of the educational institutions that they were drawn from hence making the results of this research relevant for the topic under study.

Results and Discussion

In this section, Frequency and percentage distribution of Demographic Variables, Dependent Variables and Independent Variables are described.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Variables

Sr	Variables	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Age	200	100%
	18-24	94	47%
	25-34	83	41.5%
	35-44	18	9%
	45 to above	5	2.5%
2.	Gender		
	Male	91	45.3%
	Female	109	54.7%
3.	Qualification		
	BS	108	54%
	Ms and Above	92	46%
4.	Household Occupation		
	Government employed	60	20%
	Private employed	95	31.7%
	Self employed	38	12.7%
	Daily wages	7	20.7%
5.	Income of household head		
	Less than 40,000	42	14%
	41,000 to 80,000	89	29.7%
	81,000 to 120,000	93	31%
	121,000 to 160,000	46	15.3%
	161,000 and above	30	10%
6.	Marital status		
	Married	19	39.7%
	Unmarried	181	60.3%
7.	Type of Family		
	Nuclear	96	50.7%
	Joint	62	32%
	Extended	42	17.3%
8.	Number of family members		
	1-2	93	31%
	3- 4	40	30%
	5 – 6	47	25.7%
	7 or above	20	13.3%

Table 1 presents a detailed frequency and percentage distribution of various demographic variables. The age group of 18-24 years forms the largest proportion of the sample, accounting for 47% (94 individuals). The second-largest group is 25-34 years, making up 41.5% (83 individuals). Smaller proportions are observed in the 35-44 and 45 and above age groups, with 9% (18 individuals) and 2.5% (5 individuals) respectively, suggesting that the sample is largely composed of younger individuals. In terms of gender, females represent 54.7% (109 individuals) of the sample, slightly outnumbering males at 45.3% (91 individuals). This indicates a small gender imbalance in the population. Regarding education, 54% (108 individuals) hold a Bachelor's degree, while 46% (92 individuals) have obtained a Master's degree or higher qualifications, highlighting a relatively well-educated sample. When considering household occupation, the majority of individuals come from private-sector families, with 31.7% (95 individuals) having household members employed in private companies. Government employment is also notable, with 20% (60 individuals), while 12.7% (38 individuals) belong to self-employed households, and 20.7% (7 individuals) fall into the daily wage category. This distribution suggests that private sector employment plays a significant role in the sample. The income distribution reveals that most households earn between 41,000 and 120,000, with 29.7% (89 individuals) in the 41,000-80,000 range and 31% (93 individuals) in the 81,000-120,000 range. A smaller number of households earn less than 40,000 (14%) or more than 160,000 (10%). This shows that a majority of the sample comes from middle-income households. In terms of marital status, a significant portion of the sample is unmarried, making up 60.3% (181 individuals), while 39.7% (19 individuals) are married. This suggests that the sample is predominantly unmarried. Family structure shows a preference for nuclear families, with 50.7% (96 individuals) belonging to such households. Joint families account for 32% (62 individuals), while extended families represent the smallest group at 17.3% (42 individuals). Finally, when looking at the number of family members, 31% (93 individuals) belong to families with 1-2 members, while 30% (40 individuals) have 3-4 members. Families with 5-6 members represent 25.7% (47 individuals), and those with 7 or more members account for 13.3% (20 individuals). This indicates that smaller families are more common in the sample.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of dependent and independent Variables

Sr#	Items	S.A	A	N	D.S	S.D
1	I am health-conscious, and this influences my preference for organic food over non-organic food.	72 (36%)	80 (40%)	20 (10%)	17 (8.5%)	11 (5.5%)
2	My awareness of the health benefits of organic food encourages me to purchase it more frequently.	51 (25.5%)	77 (38.5%)	30 (15%)	20 (10%)	22 (11%)
3	I intend to purchase organic food because I believe it is healthier than conventional food.	59 (16.3%)	48 (12.7%)	42 (14%)	28 (29%)	23 (28%)
4	My commitment to maintaining a healthy lifestyle motivates me to buy organic products.	48 (24%)	58 (29%)	69 (34.5%)	12 (6%)	13 (6.5%)
5	My concern for the environment affects my decision to choose organic food over non-organic options.	112 (56%)	46 (23%)	18 (9%)	15 (7.5%)	9 (4.5%)
6	Organic food consumption is a way for me to contribute to environmental sustainability.	28 (14%)	54 (27%)	40 (20%)	32 (16%)	46 (23%)
7	I am willing to pay more for organic food because I believe it is healthier.	61 (30.5%)	77 (38.5%)	33 (16.5%)	3 (1.5%)	5 (2.5%)
8	I am more likely to purchase organic food when it is recommended by my social circle (friends, family, and influencers).	38 (19%)	47 (23.5%)	9 (4.5%)	84 (42%)	28 (14%)
9	The availability of organic food in stores impacts my decision to buy it, even if I am health-conscious.	104 (52%)	49 (24.5%)	5 (2.5%)	15 (7.5%)	27 (13.5%)

Note: S.A (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), N (Neutral), D.S (Disagree), S.D (Strongly Disagree)

From table 2, it was also found that 36% of the respondents have strongly agreed (S.A.) on the statement that their health consciousness affects their organic food preference while 40% agreed on the same. Based on the results, 10% of respondents are neutral (N), 8.5% and 5.5% of respondents disagree (D.S) or strongly disagree (S.D) respectively, implying the fact that health consciousness leads to a high tendency of purchasing organic food. Since 25.5% strongly agree and 38.5% agree on the statement that the health benefits of organic foods lead to increased purchase. The percent of neutral responses to the statement is 15% while 10% did not respond in the disagree category and 11% in strongly disagree. This indicates that awareness of health benefits is a major but not a very strong factor and motivator to buy organic food products. Some 16.3% of the respondents strongly agree while 12.7% agree that they patronise organic foods because they are healthier than their conventional counterparts. A massive 29% of the people are uncertain and 28% either disagree or strongly disagree to the statement, generally there is a poor perception towards the opinion that organic food is healthier. In the fourth item, 24% go to the extent of strongly agreeing and 29% agree that due to their commitment to a healthy lifestyle, they tend to purchase organic products. However, 34.5% of the respondents remain neutral while only 6% and 6.5% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree respectively, meaning that a motivation towards a healthy lifestyle is not significantly weak but rather moderate among the respondents. The following responses show what kind of commitment the consumers have toward the consideration of making environmentally friendly decision by choosing organic foods: Strongly agree 56%, Con 23%. Even 9% of the students have a neutral attitude toward them, while 12% of the students oppose or strongly oppose them. This shows that a people's concern of the environment is a major factor influencing their choice to consume organic food.

Likewise, 14% of the respondents strongly agree and 27% agree that they use organic food to be part of the solution towards the

degradation of the environment; however, 20% are neutral to this statement. Overall, 33% of respondents say that they agree with the statement that consuming organic food is beneficial to the environment while 16% of them will say they somewhat disagree with the statement while a further 23% strongly disagree. As for the reason 30.5% strongly agree and 38.5% agree with the statement of willingness to pay a premium price for organic food because they are convinced that the food is healthier. There is less than 1% who nearly disagree with this statement, 16.5% were nearly neutral, 1.5% disagreed and 2.5% strongly disagreed mean most of the participants believe in the health benefits of the organic food and are willing to pay for it. Nevertheless, 42 percent of the participants marked 'Neutral/Neutral not at all' option, while 14 percent selected 'Disagree/Strongly disagree'. Consequently, this shows that as much as social influence may affect its users, it is not a decisive attribute for many. 52% strongly agreed, while 24.5% agreed with the statement I only buy organic foods in stores if they are health conscious, because of the availability of such foodstuffs. A mere 2.5% are indifferent while 7.5% disagreed and 13.5% strongly disagreed in a revelation that the availability of organic foods in stores influences its purchase a significant way. Thus, the level of health consciousness, the level of environmental concern and the likelihood of finding organic food products are some of the factors that define consumer behavior at a high level of identification with the willingness to pay a higher price for organic food products. Two components which may affect green hotel are social influences and environmental sustainability aspect which is relatively less significant for the most of the respondents.

Table 3: Consumers with higher levels of health consciousness will have more favorable attitudes towards purchased organic food consumption compared to those with lower levels of health consciousness.

health consciousness	Attributes	Respondents attitudes towards purchased organic food consumption					Total
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
health consciousness	Strongly Agree	12 (6%)	12 (6%)	14 (7%)	2 (1%)	4 (2%)	40 (22%)
	Agree	15 (7.5%)	8 (4%)	11 (5.5%)	4 (2%)	3 (1.5%)	41 (20.5%)
	Neutral	17 (8.5%)	15 (7.5%)	8 (4%)	5 (2.5%)	10 (5%)	55 (27.5%)
	Disagree	11 (5.5%)	10 (5%)	5 (2.5%)	1 (0.5%)	2 (1%)	29 (14.5%)
	Strongly Disagree	15 (7.5%)	11 (5.5%)	9 (4.5%)	6 (3%)	1 (0.5%)	31 (15.5%)
	Total	67 (43%)	54 (35%)	46 (29%)	13 (10.5%)	20 (12%)	200 (100%)
	Statistics	Chi square ≤ 0.000 (163.446) Gamma ≤ 0.000 (0.366)					

Table 3 examined the relationship between health consciousness and attitudes toward the purchase of organic food. A total of forty participants (22% of the total participants) who responded in the strongly agree category were identified among the respondents when answering to the question concerning their level of health consciousness. Specifically, in relation to the purchase of organic food, 12 out of the participants in this group were strongly in agreement, 12 showed they agreed while 14 of them did not have any strong opinion on the matter. Firmly, 2 respondents only (1%) disagreed while 4 respondents only (2%) strongly disagreed with the statement of purchasing organic food. The percentage distribution of the respondents in the group that agreed to be health conscious was 20.5%; 41 in number. Among them, 15 strong agreed with the statement of buying organic food, 8 agreed, and 11 were neutral on the same statement. Meanwhile, 4 (2%) disagreed and 3 (1.5%) strongly disagreed. About the neutral health consciousness group, the respondents include 55 people, which is 27.5%. Among the sexually active of them, 17 (8.5%) strongly agreed, 15 (7.5%) agreed and 8 (4%) of the respondents had a neutral attitude towards organic food consumption. Furthermore, 5 (2.5%) disagreed and 10 (5%) strongly disagreed. Disagreeing with the notion of the company having accountability for professionals' contributions, there were 29 participants, or 14.5%. Regarding the level of agreement to purchase the organic food, 11 (5.5%) strongly agreed, 10 (5%) agreed, 5 (2.5%) were neutral, 1 (0.5%) disagreed and 2 (1%) strongly disagreed. Lastly, 31 respondent or 15.5% strongly disagree with the statement being health conscious. The respondents from this group included 15 people (6%) who responded strongly in the affirmative, 11 (4.5%) responded in the affirmative while 9 (4%) had neutral attitude

towards the statement. Additionally, 6 (0.5%) disagreed and 1 (0.5%) strongly disagreed. As the table shows the Chi-square result of 163.446 and p-value ≤ 0.000 indicate that there is a significant relationship between health consciousness and organic food consumption attitude. Moreover, There was moderate positivity to the variable of Gamma = 0.366 ($p \leq 0.000$), showing that people who are health-conscious have good attitude about the use of Organic food products.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study reinforces the idea that health-conscious individuals are more likely to prefer organic food, as evidenced by the strong association between health consciousness and positive attitudes toward organic food consumption. Additionally, environmental concerns are a significant motivator, further enhancing the link between sustainable choices and health-conscious behaviors. While social influences and store availability also play a role, they do not have as strong an impact as health awareness and environmental concern. The findings of this study are a wake-up call to the present marketers and policymakers in countries as well as in the global level, to make consumer centric and health focused promotions with reference to the organic foods and the environmental effects of the food industry. Slightly stronger and positive correlation between health consciousness attitude and purchasing intentions signifies that the behavior can be modified to some extent through health awareness and information campaigns specifically among young educated population.

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