

FACTOR INFLUENCING INTENTION TO PURCHASE ORGANIC FOODS AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN SARAWAK

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ABSTRACT

Unfolding growth rate for the demand of organic foods has captivated the deliberation among the academicians and practitioners to further investigating the contributors of such development. Wherein the instigations that has been unveiled by US Institute of Food Technologies including the sprouting consumers' confidence in organic foods consumption, likewise growing concern over the arising of possible health risks as well negative environmental sustainability implication. Correspondingly, the aim of this study is to examine the factors that influence the purchase intention toward organic food among academician in institution of higher learning. Theory of reasoned action (TRA) has been employed in which three independent variables (i.e. attitude toward environment concern, health consciousness and social influence) has availed to examine the intention to purchase organic food. The target respondents of this study are the lecturers, based in one of the university college in Sarawak. The respondents had been selected through purposive sampling techniques, wherein total of 115 questionnaires has been collected which followed by data analysis i.e. descriptive analysis and inferential analysis through Software Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The findings revealed all independent variables are positively linked with the dependent variable. Health consciousness and social influence have a significant impact on customer purchase intention toward organic food. The outcome may possibly accommodates the executing of effective marketing strategies in pursuant to promote green foods whereas it's conspicuous for the top management to be fully grasping on the considerable influences of their potential customers prior to the decision making.

Keywords: Organic Foods, Purchase Intention, Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

INTRODUCTION

As the world population expecting to reach 8.5 billion by year 2030, the demand of the food grasped to be inevitably escalating which in turn leading to the genetic engineering crops (i.e. transgenic plants) that are susceptible to the likelihood of ingesting certain level of toxins and antibiotics (Key, Ma & Drake, 2008). Global sales volume of organic products had reached US\$90 billion in year 2016 and forecasted surging to US\$320.5 billion by year 2025 (Mustapha, 2018). Nevertheless organic food market is growing relatively slow and it still remains in a niche market. Viewing the fact that green conception is still in the infant stage in Malaysia (Chiew et al., 2015), the local organic food industry is considered as trivial accompanying with more than 60% of the organic food is imported from foreign country (Somasundram, Razali, & Santhirasegaram, 2016). In year 2013, it was merely accounted for US\$4.1 million of sales under the health and wellness categories which had pinned on total sales of US\$2924.8 million (Market Access Secretariat: Global Analysis Report, 2014).

In the contemporary age, consumers are meticulous regarding the possible repercussion on their purchasing behaviour towards ecological ecosystem (Vazifehdousa et al., 2013), wherein might motivate them to purchase more organic foods which are produced free from pesticides and chemical fertilizers. As one of the emerging nations, Malaysian government has been progressively inculcating the awareness to change Malaysians' food consumption pattern (Mutlu, 2007; Suhaimie, Ibrahim, & Wahab, 2016) particularly ingestion of healthier and nutritious foods. Coupled with the amassed purchasing power, the demand of organic food is expected to flourish (Teng, Rezai, Mohamed, & Shamsudin, 2011) despite the fact that the prices are generally higher as comparing with other conventional foods (Su, Wang, & Ho, 2012). Prior studies have indicated green consumers are usually less price sensitive due to their preference of having higher quality and safer products (Thing, Evon, Thye & Tien, 2014). To remain healthy has been conspicuously appertaining of customers' selection criterion of organic food against conventional foods (Torjusen, Nyberg & Wandel, 1999) as well as the perceived virtue of organic labelling products has been positively associated with healthiness (Magnusson et al, 2001; Mondelaers et al., 2009). The outcomes of Magnusson et al. (2003) have conjectured the proclamation for the respondents who were possessed stronger intention to purchase organic foods has higher probability to place higher priorities for environmental concern, health consciousness as well animal welfare issues. The postulation of stating that attitude towards a product has been contemplated as one of the precedents of behavioural intention. Therefore, shedding light on the influence of on behavioural intention in pursuant of organic foods would augment the insights for practitioners and academician.

This research examines on the antecedents that contribute to the intention purchasing organic food among lecturers in one of the higher learning institution in Sibu, Sarawak. The findings of this research intend to provide several insights and cognizance regarding the purchase intention on green food among academic staff. It is imperative for business entities such as restaurant operators, retailer, wholesalers as well as other allied players such as farmers to appertain the findings as one of its sources of information while formulating its promotional programs and operations in order to increase consumers' intention on organic food purchasing. The following sections would be comprised of literature overviews on relevant theories and the how those

independent variables (attitude towards environmental concern, health consciousness and social influence) influence the purchase intention of organic foods, data and methodology, data analysis, discussion and conclusion.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

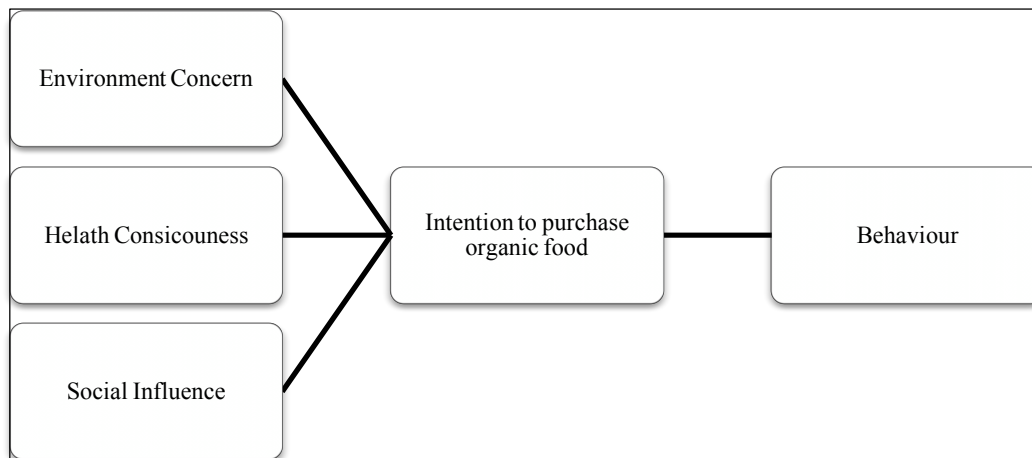
The production of organic foods throughout natural ecological cycle practices, or known as organic agriculture wherein it precludes the usage of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, subsequently circumventing the environmental issues such as soil degradation, contamination of ground water, as well as air pollution (Hassan, Loi & Kok, 2015; Sharma & Singhvi, 2018). The perception of organic products could be varied among customer segmentation according to their cultural background likewise domestic market environment (Dardak, Abidin, & Ali, 2009). According to definition stated in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in Malaysia, all products that been known as organic must comply with the Malaysian Standard, MS1529:2001 which comprising of scrutiny on production processes, labelling and marketing organically produced food (A New Beginning for Organic Food Industry, 2012).

ENVIRONMENT CONCERN

Environment attitudes demonstrate in what manner an individual’s response towards the adjustment of his/her adjacent environmental situations (Chan, 2013). Environmental concerns have been identified as attitudes of consumers towards ecological ecosystem which leading to conserve the natural resources (Leong & Ng, 2014) as well as proved to be significantly affecting consumers’ purchase intention of green foods (Hassan, Loi, & Kok, 2015). The linkage of organic agricultural practices with preserving the ecological sustainability has aroused the interest as well as the inclination of environmental conscious customers to increase their spending on organic foods purchases even in the state of affairs of poor economic performance for the motivation of perceiving it as one of the essential goods (Leong & Ng, 2014). The findings of succeeding studies have proved that environmental concern has significant effect towards consumer’s’ purchase intention of organic food (Hassan, Loi, & Kok, 2015; Ueasangkomsatea & Santiteerakulb, 2016; Chan, 2013; Chin, 2013; Tan & Paim, 2015). However, there are likewise several researchers which discovered that there is no significant influence of environment concern towards consumers’ purchase intention (Kapuge, 2016). Thus, it is a need to investigate whether the lecturers will be more concerned on environmental change and change their purchase intention towards organic food.

H1. There is a significant positive relationship between attitude towards environmental concerns and the consumer intention to purchase organic food.

Figure 1: Research Framework



HEALTH CONSCIOUSNESS

In the concern of the possible health risk that might arising through consumption of conventional food, the contemporary consumer has emerged as more vigilant towards the dietary particularly on the origin of edibles in which the preferential goes to those absence of harmful substances, for instance, excessive amount of pesticides, fertilisers, antibiotics, as well as synthetic food additives for the processed foods (Chiew, et al., 2014). In connection with health consciousness, prior researches has avowed that health issues is one of the leading consideration for consumer when comes to selection of food (Azzurra & Paola, 2009). Majority of consumers perceive that they will be getting more healthier by consuming organic foods (Hill & Lynchehaun, 2006) as empirical studies has substantiated that organic dietary products are generally content lesser fat yet higher level of carbohydrate and Vitamin C which is beneficial for our body immune system as well as reducing the progression rate of malignant cells (Chin, 2013). There are several researches to show that there is significant relationship between health consciousness and consumers’ purchase intention towards organic food (Kapuge, 2016; Azzurra & Paola, 2009; Hassan, Loi, & Kok, 2015; Ueasangkomsatea & Santiteerakulb, 2016; Chin, 2013). However, there are some of the researches which mention that health consciousness is not a significant towards consumer purchase intention too (Freytag-Leyer, 2015).

H2. There is a significant positive influence between health consciousness and the consumers’ intention to purchase organic food.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Subjective norms associate with the social pressure that influences a person to perform in a certain manner (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norm is defined as the perception of others' expectations for certain behaviours that one will or will not perform (Flytkjær & Jørgensen, 2012). One of the influential forces is the social class whereas it reflects the consumers' position in the society whereby depending on the consumers' income level, family background as well as personal profession. Hence, individuals have the inclination to bond altogether with the group that having similar characteristics on their lifestyles, jobs and tastes (Mutlu, 2007). The typical categories of social influence towards the perception of organic food consumption could be listed as social dilemma, trend, sustainable lifestyle, compliance to laws and regulation, and influence of social media or entertainment (Eide, 2013). There are several researches which demonstrating a positive influence of social class towards consumers' purchase intention (Tan & Paim, 2015; Chen, 2013). On the other hands, there are findings of several studies which are not supported social influence will affect consumer purchase intention towards organic food (Chan, 2013). Thus, it is a need to investigate the effect of social influence towards lecturers whom are not easily persuaded or influenced by others.

H3. There is a significant positive relationship between influence from society and the consumer intention to purchase organic food.

THEORY OF REASONED ACTION (TRA)

This study applied theory of reasoned action (TRA) as the analytical framework for investigating antecedents that influence lecturers' purchase intention towards organic product (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). TRA model has been predominantly used to predict the motivational factor towards behaviour. There are several researchers which ratified TRA as an appropriate theoretical model appertaining to studies about organic food (Flytkjær & Jørgensen, 2012; Effendi, Ginting, Lubis, & Fachruddin, 2015). TRA proposed two key elements which are attitude and subjective norm in predicting customers' intention to engage customers' behaviour which are attitudes means an individual's self-expectation towards the behavior whereas subjective norms indicates an expectation of others (e.g. family, friends, society and etc.) (Flytkjær & Jørgensen, 2012). However, there are also have some limitations of the TRA which might affect the accuracy of the result which are blunder of obstacles in performing the desired behaviour, overlooking some important factors that will influence consumer behaviour such as threat, anxiety, or past experience (Leong & Ng, 2014), and poses the possibility of confusion confounding between attitudes and norms. The extension of TRA, theory of planned behaviour (TPB) has been extensively adopted in investigating the customer's food choices (Ajzen, 1991) wherein the theory brings in additional explanatory variables, perceived behavioral control which expounds consideration whereby an individual is possible lacking of ability in performing a specific behaviour such as price premium of organic products (Magnusson et al., 2001; Mondelaers et al, 2009; Voon, Ngui & Agrawal, 2011) and lacking of availability of organic foods (Tan & Paim, 2015). Nonetheless, perceived controllability might appear as less significant in this study as Shepherd et al. (1996) unearths that higher price of organic foods emerges as focal barrier for transforming intention into real purchases mainly for low-income group. On the other hand, the growing number of specialized outlets that are selling organic products due to sprouting demand for organic food products among consumers has eliminate the barrier of gaining access to organic products. Thence, the researchers presume the weightage of perceived behavioral controls in influencing purchasing intention of organic foods could be relatively insignificant in this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE FOR THE STUDY AND THE MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS

Education level and income level have been identified as the significant demographic determinants which will influence green purchase intention (Teng, Rezai, Mohamed, & Shamsudin, 2011), Hence, the researchers argue that lecturers would be more appropriate segment who have known to earn higher income (PayScale, 2016) and thus better purchasing power to buy organic food. The respondents of this study, lecturers is appertained to medium income households (M40) group which is defined as those with the mean income threshold ranging between RM5,662 and RM6,502 in year 2016 (Department of Statistics of Malaysia, 2017). This study postulates that the lecturers are highly educated and more likely to have more knowledge about organic products, thence rendering the marketer to be more effective in rousing the interest to purchase of organic food (Voon, Ngui & Agrawal, 2011). Non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling has been adopted throughout the collection of self-administered questionnaire from the targeted respondents, lecturers whereas the benefits comprising of more cost effective as well as less time consuming on data gathering. Additionally, this research concentrated on one specific subsample in which the sample members are similar in term of their occupation (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2012).

The questionnaire is divided into two sections in which Section A lists seven likert scale measurement questions to examine the significance of the variables. Meanwhile, section B comprises of respondent's profile such as gender, age, marital status, income level and the frequency of purchasing organic food. The research instrument used in constructing the measurement in Section A is adopted prior researches of Yang, Al-Shaabani and Nguyen (2014); Shaharudin et al. (2010); and Hung, Lin and Chen (2012). The construct of research instruments is as follows:

Table 1: Construction of research instrument

Constructs/Variable	Question
Attitude towards Environment Concern	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I pay a lot of attention to the environment. 2. I am worried about the worsening of the quality of environment. 3. I am emotionally involved in environmental protection issues. 4. Environment concern is my major concern in purchasing product. 5. Organic food is an environmentally friendly product.
Health Consciousness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am alert to my health condition. 2. I consider myself as health conscious. 3. I think it is important to know well how to eat healthy. 4. I take responsibility for the state of my health. 5. I try to consume organic food for my long-term health benefits.
Social Influence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. My family encourages me to purchase organic food. 2. My friends encourage me to purchase organic food. 3. People who are important encourages me to purchase organic food. 4. News and magazine influence me to purchase organic food. 5. Social media influence me to purchase organic food.
Purchase Intention towards Organic Food	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In recent month, I have willingness to buy organic food. 2. I will increase the purchase frequency of buying organic food. 3. I am willing to buy organic food on regular basis. 4. I will recommend others to buy organic food.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONDENT

With total of 115 respondents, there are 66 males and 49 females which exemplifies 57.4% and 42.6% of the overall sample. The age group that carries the highest percentage range from 31 to 35 years old, which is 31.3%. There are 42 respondents (36.5 percent) are single and 73 respondents (63.5 percent) are married meanwhile majority of them don't have children (55.7%). Most of the respondents are earning range of income between RM3001 to RM5000. Whereas greatest number of the respondents purchases organic food occasionally (44.3%), following by 33% and 22% of respondents are rarely and often purchase organic food.

Table 2: Descriptive analysis

Section B items	Scale	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	66	57.4
	Female	49	42.6
Age	18-25 Years	1	0.9
	26-30 Years	33	28.7
	31-35 Years	36	31.3
	36-40 Years	10	8.7
	> 40 Years	35	30.4
Marital Status	Single	42	36.5
	Married	73	63.5
Number of children	0	64	55.7
	1	13	11.3
	2	16	13.9
	3	9	7.8
	4 and above	13	11.3
Income level	RM1001-RM3000	6	5.2
	RM3001-RM5000	49	42.6
	RM5001-RM7000	25	21.7
	RM7001 and above	35	30.4
Frequency of purchase organic food	Never	7	6.1
	Rarely	33	28.7
	Occasionally	51	44.3
	Often	22	19.1
	Very Frequency	2	1.7

Table 3: Pearson correlation

		Environment	Health	Social	Purchase Intention
Environment	Pearson Correlation	1	.756**	.573**	.592**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	115	115	115	115
Health	Pearson Correlation	.756**	1	.485**	.564**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	115	115	115	115
Social	Pearson Correlation	.573**	.485**	1	.779**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	115	115	115	115
Purchase Intention	Pearson Correlation	.592**	.564**	.779**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	115	115	115	115

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson Correlation Analysis had been used to measure the strength of the relationship between independent variables (environment concern, health consciousness and social influence) and dependent variable (intention to purchase organic food). The coefficient of social influence ($r=0.779$) was regarded as highly positive and significantly correlated to purchase intention on organic food. Environment concern ($r=0.564$) and health consciousness ($r=0.592$) were considered as positive and moderately strong in correlated with purchase intention of organic food.

Table 4: Model summary

<i>f</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Adjusted R Square</i>	<i>Std. Error of the Estimate</i>
1	.809 ^a	.654	.645	.824

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social, Health, Environment

b. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

Multiple regression analysis had been used to test the relationship between independent variables (environment concern, health consciousness and social influence) and dependent variable (purchase intention toward organic food). According to the analysis report, the value of adjusted R square is 0.645 (refer to Table 2) which shoes that there is 64.5 percent of purchase intention had been affected by environment concern, health consciousness and social influence. The regression for environment concern (E) is 0.095, health consciousness (H) is 0.203 and the social influence (S) is the highest which have 0.700 (refer to Table 3). The constant was 0.014. Thus, the estimated regression model will be: *Consumers' purchase intention = 0.014 + 0.095E + 0.203H + 0.700S*.

From environmental perspective, the results of positive yet insignificant is in line with Leong and Ng (2015) whereby indicated that the respondents did not grasp the benefits of organic food consumption could ameliorate the ecological problems such as greenhouse effects and global warming issues. The prior studies demonstrate that majority of the consumers rarely take environment issues into consideration when they are shopping (Tan & Paim, 2015). On the other hand, the significant findings for health consciousness is consistent with previous researches (Yang and Nguyen, 2014; Tan & Paim, 2015) which points out that consumers who are mindful of their healthiness incline to react more positively towards behavioural intention to purchase organic foods. Conjointly, the significant outcome for social influence is conforming to the precedent studies (Tan & Paim, 2015; Chen, 2013) in which Teng and Wang (2014) further substantiates that the motivation to purchase is greatly influenced by viewpoint of persons who are important to them.

Table 5: Coefficients

<i>Model</i>	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>		
(Constant)	.014	.249		.055	.956
1 Environment	.095	.109	.079	.869	.387
Health	.203	.090	.193	2.252	.026
Social	.700	.075	.640	9.350	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase intention

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results demonstrating that social influence has been identified as most influential factors for the purchase intention towards organic foods whereas the leading channel is via social media, followed by newspapers and magazines, withal lowermost

influence is deriving out of their social circle such as friends, family members and etc. On top of this, marketer could attract lecturers to purchase organic food by posting advertisement via social media such as Facebook, newspaper, and magazine as well as engaging healthcare professional expertise in contemplation to prompt their motivation to consume green food.

Correspondingly, health consciousness likewise demonstrating positive and significant towards purchase intention for organic food considering nutritionist or doctor could take the part of providing expert advices to foster the health value of organic foods. In conjunction with the uplifting traits, Voon, Ngui & Agrawal (2011) proclaims that Malaysians have more trust on the products that are accredited by recognised quality assurance agencies and less prone to switch their existing products once they are convinced as well committed on the distinction of organic foods.

Nonetheless, the lacking element in motivating lecturers to buy and consume organic foods is their environment concern in which the results uncovered the positive yet insignificant relationship may possibly due to the presence of other barriers occurring along the way for instance time constraints, as well personal belief arising from community and peer pressure. Furthermore, Magnusson et al. (2003) elucidates that a person might be more desirable to perform initiatives that are auspicious for environmental protection merely when comes to the situation he/she is able to enjoy private side benefits with negligible costs and involving short-term time period.

This study, in its limited generalization use as it has fixated on lecturers whereas academic staff might not be appropriate to represent divergent groups where earning medium to high income such as professional skilful employees and self-employed. Moreover, there are few identifiable predictors that ought to be taken into consideration for future research for instance, product quality, food safety, price attributes, knowledge dimension as well as perceived value with respect to obtain greater insights on the intention to buy organic foods. Moreover, Yen (2018) asserts the need for the contemporary studies to incorporate psychological variables such as self-congruity in investigating their significance in shaping customers' self-images in which in congruent with their intention to purchase as well consume the organic foods.

In conclusion, organic food sector has been embraced with abundant of potential demand in the forthcoming generation particularly within the market segmentation which is characterized as possessing high education as well good-paying occupation. With the advent of organic lifestyle, organic products have shedding the lights of the consumers who are conscious towards their health condition as well as the sustainability of their living environment, whilst relishing on obtaining information through circulation of information via social media and other reputable experts advisory. Therefore, it's essential for dealers of organic foods to formulate an effectual promotional strategies in order to captivate the attentions of potential buyers by sharing relevant information of health benefits through participating via their virtual communities and social networking services.

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