



Exploring the Impact of Organic Food Marketing on Consumer Purchase Intention: A Thematic Analysis Approach

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ABSTRACT

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The objective of this qualitative research is to explore how marketing of organic food influences the purchase decisions of university students in Pakistan. The study aims to explore the extent to which such marketing strategies affect their intention to buy these products. Qualitative research design was utilized and sources of data collection through in-depth interviews conducted with a sample of 12 university students. Interviews are semi-structured and cover topics related to green/organic food marketing, its consumption behavior and purchase intention. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis through NVivo 14, with themes identified and coded based on the research objectives. The study discovers that green/organic food marketing has a positive impact on consumer purchase intention among university students in Pakistan. Furthermore, the study identifies various factors that influence organic food purchase intention, containing environmental distress, health consciousness, and social effect. The findings of this study deliver insights into the motivations and barriers to organic food consumption. The research implications of this study are for marketers and policymakers in promoting sustainable consumption practice, developing effective marketing strategies to encourage organic food consumption in Pakistan. This study contributes to the existing literature on the impact of green or organic marketing on the consumer purchase intention of university students of Pakistan, by highlighting the importance of organic food consumption and its awareness.

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1. Introduction

Food consumption has arisen as significant hurdle in reaching sustainability as it is precisely intertwined to issues of environment, public safety, and social harmony, economic stability, mishandling and degrading of natural resources. The "Green consumerism" movement has attained support and acknowledgment on a global scale. As a result, consumers are more anxious with their environmentally friendly goals, choices, and deeds. Organic products are usually known for being less harmful to one's health and naturally beneficial. Also, organic products are produced from recyclable and renewable raw materials (Moisander, 2007; Wier et al., 2008). Miller (2019) stated that numerous countries have implemented rules and guidelines to aid in manufacturing organic food. The global market for organic food generated an impressive \$97 billion in sales in 2017, which suggests a considerable desire for nutritious food choices. Europe and North America have the highest concentrations of green food consumers, accounting for approximately 90% of the total consumption. Al-Swidi et al. (2014) proposed that Asia has become the most significant consumer market for green food, experiencing a 40% expansion rate worldwide. The increasing trend of organic food popularity in Asian nations

is consistent with the global trend of increasing customer interest in healthy and environmentally friendly food alternatives, which are not restricted to technologically advanced countries.

The agriculture sector is a chief contributor to Pakistan's economy, accounting for 18.5% of the country's GDP and employing 38.5% of the workforce. Despite various policy measures introduced since the 1960s to improve agriculture productivity, there needs to be more evidence to suggest that organized food purchases have increased in Pakistan. Asif et al. (2018) note that traditional methods have been used to promote healthy food options by reducing the use of pesticides and increasing nutrient content. Due to the agricultural industry's natural and economic difficulties, including the high input costs of pesticides and artificial fertilizers, Pakistan's percentage of organic food could be much higher at barely 0.1 percent. Moreover, Pakistan needs help in meeting the organic food standards set by the World Trade Organization, which makes it difficult for the country to compete in the global market and maintain its share (IFOAM, 2019). The Pakistani government has taken several measures to endorse the production and consumption of green food within the country. Supporting farmers and merchants in producing and selling organic foods has been made possible by the National Agricultural Research Center's (NARC) creation of the Directorate of Green Agriculture in 2008. The directorate provides services, education, and innovation opportunities to the green food industry. Consequently, there are now accessible outlets for organic food in Islamabad, and there has been a surge in its purchases. However, the high cost of organic food remains a significant limiting factor for market expansion. Intriguingly, despite Pakistan placing second internationally for the usage of insecticides in the cultivation industry, as per Yadav et al. (2015), a share of the population chooses to buy green food since toxic fertilizers and pesticides are used less often. However, the general public still needs to understand organic food, which makes it difficult for people to consume it (The Express Tribune, 2011).

It is necessary to identify the elements that affect the demand for organic food, including price, awareness, and other related concerns. In Pakistan, the concept of "going green" is gaining popularity among shoppers who are increasingly responsive to the prominence of eco-friendly development. Organic food, in particular, is considered an essential component of green products because it is produced using sustainable agricultural practices without harmful chemicals and fertilizers, making it healthier and more environmentally friendly for consumers. Despite the growing popularity of organic food in Pakistan, over 50% of consumers need more awareness of its benefits. If consumers had full awareness, their purchase intent toward green food might change. The use of artificial chemicals in conventional food products has raised concerns about the environment and the health of individuals. Organic food, on the other hand, is perceived as eco-friendly and healthier due to its minimal or zero use of artificial chemicals. Therefore, increasing awareness among consumers about green food's benefits could significantly change the demand for organic products in Pakistan. Following is the research objective of the study:

To explore the impact of organic food marketing on consumer purchase intention among university students through a qualitative approach

In today's digital age, university students in Pakistan are highly connected to the world and are becoming increasingly concerned about their health. This qualitative study examines the factors influencing consumers' purchase intention towards organic food in Pakistan. This study's findings could benefit food companies seeking to increase their business in Pakistan by adopting green marketing strategies.

Given Pakistan's rising demand for healthy diets, firms and organic food stores must offer high-quality, nutritious food products in physical stores and online platforms. Advertising companies also have a part to play in raising awareness about the benefits of organic food among consumers. By doing so, they can create a favorable environment for developing the green food industry in Pakistan.

Theoretically, this study supports the literature on green or organic food marketing among university students. It will also help companies provide more organic food to create consumer awareness. This study will also help the agriculture sector boost organic food production. It can provide valuable information to farmers on how to improve their organic

farming practices and increase their production. In addition to its implications for businesses, the findings of this study can also bring attention to the role of government in promoting and regulating the organic food industry in Pakistan. The government may enhance the general quality of organic food items and boost customer confidence in these goods by enhancing political functions, boosting supervisory efforts, and enforcing stringent regulations to ensure the quality assurance of green food products.

This study sheds light on an under-researched area in the agriculture sector. It can provide valuable insights into changing consumer behavior related to green or organic food marketing and consumption in Pakistan. By understanding the elements that impact consumers' purchase intent towards organic food, businesses, and policymakers can develop strategies to promote and support the growth of the green food industry in the country.

2. Literature Review

Because organic food is grown without harmful chemicals and contributes to environmental sustainability, it's widely regarded as being of a higher standard than other foods in the market (Lin, Zhou, & Ma, 2010; McCarthy, 2015). Additionally, organizations and regulatory authorities conduct regular checks to ensure that organic food does not contain pesticide residue above an acceptable threshold. To be able to grow organic food, four ecological conditions must be satisfied: (i) the air surrounding the region must be dust-free and pollution-free; (ii) the ground must be free from contaminated solid waste disposal including lead, cadmium, chromium, and mercury; (iii) metalling or the drinking water employed should qualify international human consumption standards; and (iv) there are strict limitations on the use of chemicals which also prohibit the use of certain dangerous sprays and fertilizers (Giovannucci et al., 2005). The organic food market in Pakistan is still relatively nascent but is gaining momentum. A Pakistan Agricultural Research Council report shows that only two percent of consumers source organic food; however, about 69 percent of them would be willing to spend more on organic food (Ashfaq et al., 2019). The understanding of organic food and the availability of organic products in the retail environment is the main reason organic food has a small market share (Akbar et al., 2019).

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is famous for understanding how consumers relate to a particular good or service (Ajzen, 1991). Based on TPB focuses on the factors of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that guide people's actions. Attitudes denote the individual's positive or negative belief about a specific action. Subjective norms measure the level of supposed social pressure or social influence to perform a particular action. Perceived behavioral control is the self-reported ability of the individual to perform a specific action. Numerous studies have confirmed that the TPB is a valuable framework for exploring consumers' attitudes toward organic food. In agriculture, as in many other areas, research often reveals that purchase intentions for organic food are highly related to consumers' attitudinal, subjective normative, and perceived control measures. This is also the case for organic food, where research has indicated that attitudes towards certification of organic food, environmental concerns, and perceived product quality are significant determinants of attitudes towards organic food. Hence, marketers could employ TPB to craft effective marketing strategies for organic food by exploring consumers' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavior control toward purchasing organic food (Ahmed, Azhar, & Mohammad; Dler M Ahmed, Z Azhar, & Aram J Mohammad, 2024; Dler Mousa Ahmed, Zubir Azhar, & Aram Jawhar Mohammad, 2024; Mohammad, 2015a, 2015b; Mohammad & Ahmed, 2017).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Sampling and Population

This research has a qualitative and exploratory character that is conspicuous for an interpretive paradigm. This study aims to analyze green or organic food marketing and its influence on the purchasing behavior of university students in Pakistan. The researchers want to understand the participants' experiences and meanings through in-depth construction rather than counting them. Comprehending the interpretive perspective, the research aims to address the complex interplay of social and cultural parameters that influence consumers' purchase intentions toward green or organic food in Pakistan. The sample population includes Persons who are residents of Sahiwal, Pakistan. The target group of the sample is University students who are residents of Sahiwal.

3.2. Data Collection Method

The study relied on a single data collection method: audio-recorded interviews in English administered to twelve university students from varying institutions in Sahiwal. The interviews were conducted to determine how green advertisements influence the purchasing power of consumers through open-ended questions.

3.3. Qualitative Data Analysis

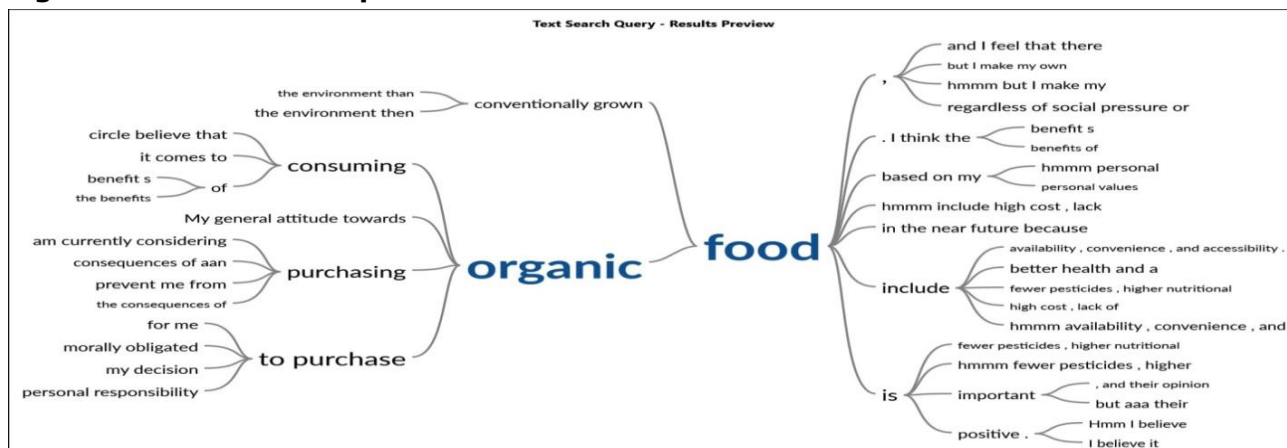
This part describes the transcription processes followed in the study from the audio-taped interviews. The interviews were transcribed immediately after each meeting with participants to minimize the likelihood of distortion or resistance in their responses. To make sure that every participant's responses and comments were accurately recorded during all interviews, a shorthand writer was on hand to help the researcher. In the current inquiry, Umberto's thematic analysis method was chosen to be used on the obtained results. The technique also made it possible to pinpoint several prerequisites that satisfied the aims of the study while still providing adequate information for further analysis. This research adopted the phases Braun and Clarke (2006) set out for thematic analysis. It is important to note that a researcher might oscillate several times between the defined phases while analyzing qualitative data. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) stated that starting the thematic analysis during the data-gathering stage is better because the researcher might get acquainted with the data and even start noticing some patterns. In qualitative studies, the first interview with a participant while data collection may help get the pattern of the study; however, it is comparatively said to enhance only partially. Moreover, the researcher's identifying patterns in the data or the relatedness of the transcribed data strengthens his understanding of the data under study. In this phase, the researcher has to skim through and re-read the categorization. In the present study, research was gathered in fewer phases and was transcribed after the interview and at times within the day. This also allowed him to familiarize himself with the data in a decent manner as it reached a stage where, after the twelfth interview, the researcher declared that no more interviews were needed since the target had been met.

First, as coding or phase one is known, Bron (2002) say that coding is not just a means of analyzing data; it also involves interpreting the investigated event. In this case, a coding structure was created based on the responses to three questions. The codes responding to the first question consisted mainly of how college students viewed purchasing healthy food. The codes dealing with the second question referred to how students appreciated the utility of organic food. Finally, the codes related to the third question explained the context variables in college students' purchase of organic food. The codes avoid confusion according to the research questions to avoid confusing the analysis of the findings. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested how to avoid distortion of the data by a possibly low coding range by maximizing the number of codes drawn from the data. The second thematic analysis stage is Searching for themes or phase two. Braun and Clarke (2013) Maintain that diversity and separation of unrelated codes are two principles of formulating themes or categories. In this study, respondents were asked three different questions, and the answers were analyzed to form codes into themes.

To ensure accuracy, similar or duplicated codes were grouped under appropriate themes. Reading through the codes was important as participants could use different words to express the same idea, and some codes needed to be put into context before they could be understood. Codes that could not be classified were placed in a catch-all theme to ensure that data was not lost and these codes could be carried forward even though they may be reassigned later with a relevant theme following detailed analysis. The software was used to determine the relevance of the critical themes by synthesizing empirical statistics. Thematic analysis is the third phase, in which a reconsideration is made of the themes under development and their refinement to achieve the correct representation of data patterns, as (Braun & Clarke, 2013) point out. In this case, practical validation was applied to ensure that the obtained themes and the participants' experiences and views on the factors determining their purchase intention were consistent. This validation process involved verification with the research participants to ensure that the themes were indeed accurate and true. Such validation increases the reliability of a study's findings and provides additional assurance that the themes developed are exact representations of the data.

Since the codebook frame was not too strict, each researcher could write precisely what they observed or construed about the participants. The codes and themes provided can be

Figure 2: Word Tree Map



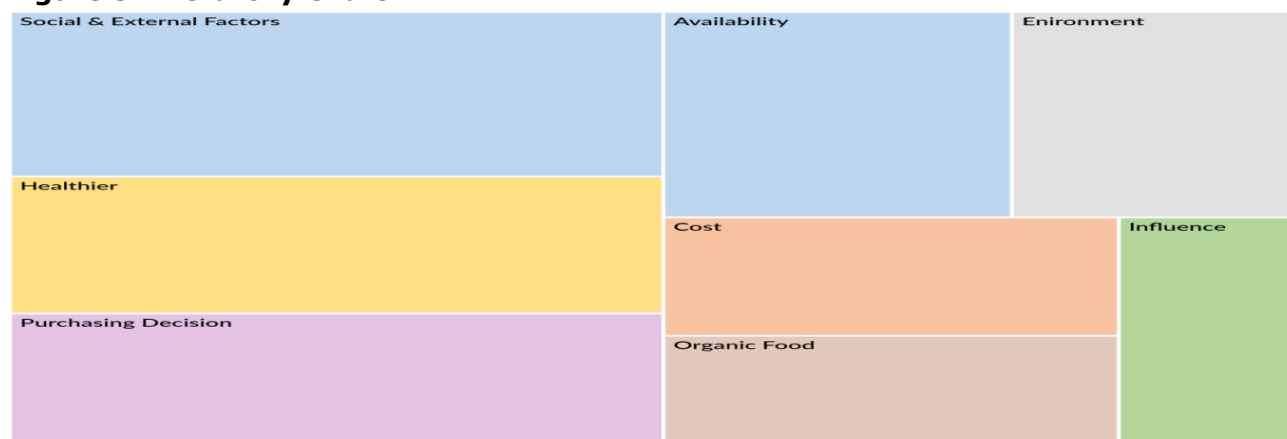
4.4. Data Coding and Identification of Themes

The main goal of the qualitative part of this study was to find out how selling green or organic food affects consumers' plans to buy among Pakistani college students. After reading line-by-line transcribed textual data, themes were coded into parent nodes and classified as social and external factors, healthier, and purchasing decisions. Table 1 states that sources and references against each theme evolved through the coding of textual interviews. Sources depicted the number of participants who discussed a particular theme, while references reflected the total number of people who coded a theme.

Table 1: Data Coding and Identification of Themes

Codes	Sources	References
Availability	9	16
Cost	11	12
Environment	11	13
Healthier	12	20
Influence	8	9
Organic food	9	11
Purchasing decision	12	19
Social & External Factors	11	24

Figure 3: Hierarchy Chart



Social and environmental considerations can have a significant impact on customer purchase intentions when it comes to marketing green or organic foods. For example, cultural values may impact how customers feel about organic food because different cultures may place different importance on the sustainability of the environment and good health. Social norms may also affect consumer behavior since people may be more inclined to purchase organic food if they believe it to be a socially acceptable action. I need to conform to the expectations of others when it comes to consuming organic food, but I make my own decisions based on my own beliefs and values. (R1)". Different research studies have reported that consumers view organic foods as better than other foods. Based on the study by (Hughner et al., 2007), it was revealed that consumers had a perception that organic meals were healthier and had a higher

nutrient density than everyday meals. Equally, a 2019 study by Xu et al. observed that Chinese consumers likely purchase organic foods because they view them. These outcomes point out that consumers generally perceive that organic foods provide better health benefits. Much as this is the case, it is worth emphasizing that the issue of nutritional value between organic and its counterpart types of foods is still under investigation and controversy. Organic or green food advertisements promote healthy eating since they can focus more on the benefits of eating organic foods. Marketing campaigns that stress the health-enhancing qualities of organic food or the absence of harmful substances, for example, may engage customers in these products. Haws, Reczek and Sample (2017) found that marketing messages on the health benefits of organic food were more effective in changing the consumer's purchase intentions than those on environmental protection.

'My opinion on consuming organic food is that it is characterized by lesser levels of pesticide use, enriched nutritional content, and flavor,'(R8)"

Research conducted by Greaney et al. (2009) states that a more significant proportion of students who find fruits and vegetables to be healthy foods consume them more. Weight concerns and issues related to health are problem statements that enable people to rethink their meals. It is a significant concern when organic or green foods are under marketing. Organic food or green food marketing can take advantage of this phenomenon by marketing the nutritional benefits of organic food. The tendency of consumers to seek better foods is increasing. A survey by Kacen and Lee in 2002 noted that several elements, such as the quality of the product purchased, the price, and the brand name, affect women's buying behavior. These parameters may be negotiated optimally by the green or organic food marketing controlled the message of better quality organic foods that promote good health.

"I believe that the effects which can be gained from purchasing organic food would be healthy living and a healthier planet." (R4)

In their study, Shafie and Rennie (2012) found that market factors such as product features, benefits, cost, and availability determine consumers' desire to buy organic foods. Such marketing strategies that point out the advantages of organic foods or highlight the accessibility of organic foods are more likely to change the purchasing behavior of consumers.

"Honestly, I do not encounter problems in terms of meeting the supply of organic food at fair price ranges."

Rerderso Spaol (R4) The buying decision of users of organic food was determined by product characteristics, cultural norms, and personal beliefs, according to the findings by Thgersen et al., 2015. These findings imply that other marketing strategies that conform to the consumer's and society's values may influence consumers' consumption decisions.

4. Discussion

The green marketing strategies of the companies while improving organic food into the target, including university students who are more likely to have the intention to buy organic food. Companies can more effectively target university students and encourage more eco-friendly food consumption through aspirational marketing of organic foods by educating them on their health and green attributes. The strategy of expanding the consumption of organic food will contribute to the formation of a healthy population and the transition to a sustainable food system. Organic food is appealing to clients for its high nutrition content, high natural content, and high overall product value. Because of this, most clients who find these product qualities appealing are likely to buy organic food. According to some studies, perception of the product and publicity also shaped consumer behavior and intentions towards organic foods. Thus, effective green marketing strategies that emphasize organic foods' nutritional value and superior quality can grow sales and build the profile of companies engaged in producing and commercializing organic foods. A further step in such direction will be more satisfying for firms and more sustainable for the food industry as an appeal will be made to consumers who advocate for health and environmentally sound merchandise.

4.1. Limitations of study

Although this study's findings are helpful, there are some limitations. The Council is worried that its findings will not apply beyond those noted in the universities in developing countries. So, its expansion to other contexts should be approached with caution. Secondly, the sample size of the analyzed study is relatively small, which does not allow the elucidating evidence of organic food adoption experiences and perspectives on this population to be fully represented. Thirdly, some respondents may have been subject to social desirability and recall bias, which may have affected the interpretation of the data collected. Lastly, while the qualitative approach provided an in-depth analysis, it likely needed to provide strong enough proof. These limitations can be addressed by collecting data from a more prominent and representative sample and employing more quantitative techniques while controlling for biases.

4.2. Future Research Recommendations

It can be proposed further to target resources to increase awareness and knowledge of organic food appreciation, especially for the rural population where organic farming is widespread. Public awareness campaigns, workshops, and seminars can foster such sentiments in the populace. In other words, measures can also be taken to make organic food more available and affordable in local markets and supermarkets. In addition, partnerships between organic producers and government agencies can contribute to developing organic product supply and marketing. Lastly, all stakeholders in organic food products need to tackle food labeling and certification issues that are critical to consumer trust and willingness to buy organic food products that are accurately labeled and certified.

5. Conclusion

In the case of Pakistan, the study investigated whether green or organic food marketing affects the buying intentions of university students. The findings themselves demonstrated that organic or green food marketing affects consumers' purchases, hence pointing out the measures to promote organic food consumption. Such approaches are good news for them: they need to boost the integration of green or organic food marketing strategies to achieve fishery sustainability. A qualitative approach was applied in the research, using 12 university students as samples to identify the factors leading to the consumer desire to purchase organic food. The study's findings conform to prevailing literature but also include some particulars regarding Pakistan. Several variables can influence and shape a customer's intentions and consumption pattern towards organic food, for instance, their health awareness, knowledge, and the importance they attach to organic food, price of organic goods, distrust, poor access to information, and supply of organic food, and low understanding of organic food. Such elements may form obstacles against the purchase of organic food and can also contribute to changing their attitudes towards organic food. In conclusion, this study shows how some green or organic food marketing strategies may be effective in encouraging the use of organic food in Pakistan. These results serve as a basis to develop new policies and activities to promote green food consumption in the country. However, other studies should be conducted to determine the effects of green or organic marketing of foods on other groups and in different contexts, which will add to the scope of the problem in question.

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