

# **Bi-Dimensional Conceptualization of Attitude to Understand the Purchase Intention of Organic Food**

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**Abstract:** In recent years, consumers intend to pay more attention to purchasing organic food because of the urge to consume quality food products and increasing consciousness on the injurious effects of chemicals present in food. This conceptual framework explains what actually influences the consumers to make attention towards organic food and its importance. Apart from that, the main aim of this study is to explain the purchase intention towards organic food by incorporating two-dimensional attitude approach (cognitive and affective attitudes). This conceptualization is also reliable with the attitude construct towards the behaviour stated in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). This type of study is very rare nowadays on organic food research. This study claims that the incorporation of the theory of planned behaviour with two-dimensional attitude approach can provide a more detailed theoretical explanation and clear-cut practical direction regarding behavioral prediction towards purchasing organic food.

**Keywords:** Organic food, Utilitarian attitude, Hedonic attitude, Purchase intention, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB).

## **Introduction:**

Nowadays organic food products are more popular across the world (Hamzaoui Essoussi & Zahaf, 2008) and the organic food market is considered an emerging market (Aertsens et al., 2009). Food consumption is the most chatted topics in the ethical behavioural literature as it is associated with various environmental impacts (Tobler, Visschers, & Siegrist, 2011). The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines organic food as “food produced by farmers who emphasize the practice of using renewable resources and the conservation of water and soil to enrich environmental eminence for forthcoming generations” (USDA, 2007, para. 4). The sustainable depletion is one of the core pillars of attaining environmental sustainability in Millennium Development Goals, 2010 (Marrakech Process Secretariat: UNDESA and UNEP, 2010). The consumers move towards inactive lifestyle and strive for convenient substitutes as food products. This in turn causes infections like obesity and diabetes (Schwarz et al., 2007) which has striving them to change their dietary preferences.

Today's consumers have started showing high concern to their health and nutritional value of food (Gil, Tomas-Barberan, Hess-Pierce, Holcroft, & Kader, 2000) but the consumers are highly affected by the price level of the organic food. Affordability and availability were the major obstacles in buying organic food (Krystallis & Chrysosoidis, 2005). The express growth in the industrial development together with the population explosion is increasing the pressure on the agricultural production methods to improve the yield of the crops. Many studies have raised concerns about increasing levels of usage of chemical enrichers to increase the yield of food production. Since the choice of consumer has moved towards organic products, this lead to demand, which encouraged the organic food manufacturers to assign and employ more land for farming of organic products. In India 455,568 hectares of 1.03 million hectares land are fully converted to organic production(The World of Organic Agriculture, 2008). At the same time, the market for organic food products is also intensifying as novel developing markets in China, India, Singapore and Malaysia. In the past, organic food production and consumption was popular in developed countries but this idea is also accepted in developing countries to some extent. As the organic food consumption is a new notion in developing countries, it stimulates the researchers to study the organic food purchase intention in developing nations like India. Apart from that, the role of cognitive factors have become distinct interest of psychologists. Most of the organic food consumption research focuses on attitude as a one-dimensional variable to predict purchase intention towards organic food (De Magistris, Tiziana & Gracia, 2008). But some studies identified the presence of inconsistency in the relationship between attitudes and behaviours with regard to sustainable consumption (Moraes, Carrigan, & Szmigin, 2012). Therefore, the present study attempts to understand the consumer's intention to purchase organic food based the Theory of planned behaviour (TPB) considering attitude as two dimensions (Lee, Ha, & Widdows, 2011)viz., cognitive (Utilitarian) and affective (Hedonic).

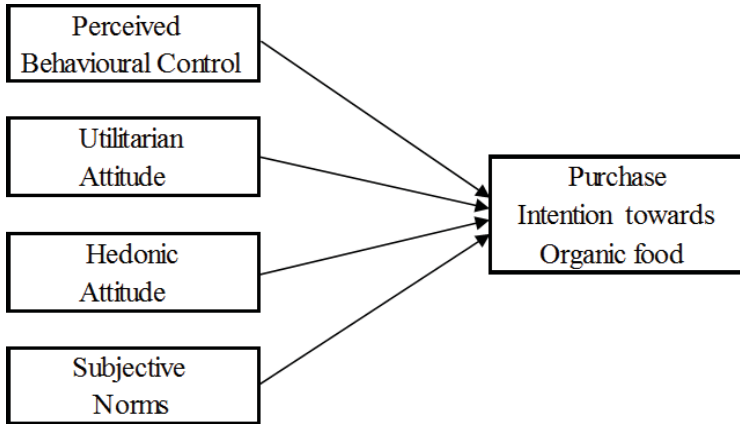
### **Theoretical background:**

The Theory of Planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991)is the extended model of the Theory of Reasoned action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TRA proposed that the behaviour of a person is influenced by behavioural intentions, which are initially affected by attitude towards certain act and also by subjective norms. By extending TRA, the TPB evolved with three factors such as attitude, perceived behavioural control (PBC) and subjective norms. This theory states that intention to perform a certain behaviour of an individual is affected by individuals' attitude

(attitude towards buying), perceived behavioural control (measure of extent to which the consumer can control their behaviour towards certain activities) and subjective norms (the effect of social pressure on the performance towards an action). The TPB has also been effectively used often to measure behavioural intentions in organic consumerism (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008; Robinson & Smith, 2002). Even though the TRA and TPB are widely used to explain the organic food consumption, some of the studies suggest the various enhancements on those theories to improve the model prediction (Nejad, Wertheim, & Greenwood, 2004). Ajzen (1991) suggested that TPB is open for modification and it can be broadened by incorporating new constructs or shifting the pathway of the prevailing variables. Studies recommended that the predictive power of the TPB can be enhanced by adding new predictor variables (Arvola et al., 2008). The assumptions of TPB affirm that it is an individual decision making process and always rational based. Hence, it is suitable to incorporate cognitive approaches in TPB to determine the purchase intention of an individual (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). After some decades few research conclusion stated that the TPB theory can also be extended by incorporating affective dimensions as attitudes (Conner & Armitage, 1998). Also some researchers identified the non-existence of consistency relating to considering attitude as an unidimensional aspect and its influence on behavioural intention, that is referred to as attitude behaviour gap (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000).

So this study mainly focuses on the two internal state of an individuals' as attitudes as Cognitive and Affective. The novelty of this conceptualization is also justified by the gap in the existing literature, where there is not enough proof to predict the organic food purchase intention with attitude as two dimensions in Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Yet to date, all the studies have concentrated only on unidimensional attitude approach in TPB to predict the purchase intention of organic food (e.g., Johe & Bhullar, 2016; Liang, 2016a; Yadav & Pathak, 2016). But this study enrolls with a distinct approach to predict purchase intention of organic food. These dimensions of attitudes are often used as cognitive (Utilitarian) and affective (Hedonic) in many studies (Fiore & Kim, 2007; Lee et al., 2011). This conceptual framework is also reliable with the Attitude construct in TRA and TPB models to predict the purchase intention (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Assessment related to beneficial buying about a particular product is revealed by the utilitarian attitude and the assessment related to pleasant or agreeable buying is revealed by the Hedonic attitude. Here, the conceptual model is framed based on the theoretical underpinnings and existing literatures.

## Conceptual model:



**Figure: 1** Schematic diagram of conceptual model

### **Perceived behavioral control:**

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) deals with one's own judgement about their abilities to initiate a particular behavior(Ajzen, 1991). Hence, it is the perceived ease of doing a particular behavior. TPB also revealed that PBC is one of the powerful predictor that influence the behavioral intention. The perceived barriers (e.g., organic food is viewed as costly) and chances to overcome barring factors derives perceived behavioral control. Perceived barriers such as cost and handiness are important obstacles that delays organic food consumption (Krystallis & Chryssohoidis, 2005; McEachern & Willock, 2004; Padel & Foster, 2005; Rodríguez, Lacaze, & Lupín, 2008).The financial status and income level of an individual are considered as crucial determinants of purchase intention of organic food (Gracia & De Magistris, 2007; Riefer & Hamm, 2008; Zepeda & Li, 2007).Hence purchase intention towards organic food is based on the degree of perceived behavioral control(Chen, 2007).Therefore it is concluded that intention to buy organic food is high when consumers perceive more control over buying it.

### **Hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of attitude:**

Examining the hedonic and utilitarian components of attitude has been recommended in diverse disciplines as economics, psychology, and sociology. These modules have multidisciplinary recognition in consumption based studies in marketing, stated by Hirschman and Holbrook in their series of articles (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982).In such recent studies the product/brand attitude was treated as one dimension(e.g.,Rahnama, 2016; Silvana & Peršurić, 2016; Ueasangkomsate

& Santiteerakul, 2016). Researchers also recognized that the presence of inconsistency in linking unidimensional attitude and behavioural intention is denoted as attitude behaviour gap (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000). Batra and Ahtola make an attempt to measure the multiple dimensions of attitudes (Ahtola & Batra, 1999). They also states that, based on the two reasons consumer performs consumption of goods and services, they are: (1) Instrumental utilitarian and (2) consummatory affective (hedonic) fulfilment reasons. Studies recommend that, greater amount of variance can be explained in a model relating consumer behaviour by incorporating attitudinal dimensions in it (Bagozzi & Burnkrant, 1979; Olney, Holbrook, & Batra, 1991). The Hedonic dimension of attitude is caused by experience about usage of products/services and Utilitarian dimension of attitude is caused by utilities gained from the products/services. The predictability of TPB can be enriched by adding predictor variables (Arvola et al., 2008). These above motives directed to incorporate Bi-dimensional conceptualization in attitudes of consumer to predict the purchase intention of organic food based on TPB.

### **Subjective norms:**

The perceived social pressure for a person to engage in or evade a behaviour is defined as subjective norm (Ajzen, 1991, Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). It discloses the view of individuals' about how they would be perceived by their social groups if they perform a particular behaviour. Ajzen (2002) states that subjective norm is determined by the entire set of available normative beliefs about hope of the significant referents for the individual concerned (e.g. family, friends, and others). Subjective norm has also been concluded as a significant determinant of social stimulus on performing a certain behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Ha, 1998). Social trends have moved towards healthier consumption of food and individual responsibility has also increased. These drifts have strongly influence on the consumer choices to buy organic food (Hill and Lynchehaun, 2002). Finally the consumer choice regarding purchase intention of organic food is based on the attitudes and opinions of peoples who are important to them.

### **Discussion:**

Selecting food is a multidimensional concept and complex decision making behaviour (Costell, Tárrega, & Bayarri, 2010) and this is especially for organic food. This study raised query about the lack of conceptualization in organic food studies that determines consumer behaviour associated with buying organic food, and make an attempt in explaining the purchase intention towards organic food by incorporation of bi-dimensional conceptualization in attitude in Theory of planned behaviour (TPB). This type of conceptualization is not only for studying food related behavioural intention, it can be incorporated in any behavioural intention

studies. Dealing with attitudinal dimensions provide building blocks for researchers, who are struggling to develop models that explain a greater percentage of the variance in consumer behaviour (Bagozzi & Burnkrant, 1979; Olney et al., 1991). So this present study enhances the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), and predominantly discusses about the two dimensions of attitude (Cognitive and Affective). It strongly argues that the explanatory power towards purchase intention of organic food can be increased by deploying these dimensions of attitude in TPB. This framework can definitely diagnose the problem of attitude-behaviour gap which was identified in earlier studies (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000) and measurement of these dimensions of attitude can also offer investigators and managers with distinct approaches to modelling marketing issues, and these measures can expose product differences/positions that may not be apparent when one dimension attitude is used (Dillon, Madden, Kirmani, & Mukherjee, 2001; Machleit, Allen, Madden, & Machleit, 1993). This model helps to quantify the consumers of organic food based on their emotional and rational thinking. This conceptualization also helps organic industry to understand the consumer behaviour and as a basis for upcoming growth of organic food consumption.

### **Conclusion:**

This study claims that Utilitarian and Hedonic attitudes are separate constructs and are significant dimensions of attitude to predict purchase intentions. The policy makers and marketers should recognize consumers' inner preferences for organic food over unhealthy foodstuff in food market. As of now we found very limited work concerning how internal states of consumers' are identified by their perception of organic food and how they react towards purchase intention of organic food. Hence, the bi-dimensional conceptualization of attitude based on Theory of planned behaviour supports for well understanding of consumers' perceptions and expectations with regard to organic food purchase intention. This study has few limitations. It does not discuss about the specific categories of organic food products, because the preferences of consumers may differ on categories of food product. This study gives the general idea of consumer preferences towards purchase intention of organic food. It also suggests that there may be a chance for including more variables that can explain the purchase intention towards organic food, which is not yet accounted. So the future studies should concentrate on those unaccounted significant variables. Empirical explanations based on this conceptualization would give better results to explain the predictive power of purchase intention towards organic food.

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