

An Exploratory Investigation of Consumer Motives and Impeding Barriers to Buying Organic Food Products in Pakistan

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Abstract

Health safety and environmental damage due to agricultural abuses have gained a global significance. Consumers are now concerned about the quality and purity of their intake food, and they are looking for a more environmentally friendly answer to these problems. Organic food is considered as eco-friendly and meets individuals' environment-related desired objectives. The core objective of this study is to explore consumers' buying motive and impeding barrier they face in buying organic food products in Pakistan. For this purpose qualitative interviews and thematic analysis had been incorporated. Twenty-five respondents were interviewed at a famous shopping mall in the city, Lahore Pakistan. The shopping mall was selected due to the availability of organic food products. A coding mechanism had been devised and applied to respondents' answers and further analysed to state their opinions for organic food products under each category. Hence, four categories appeared in the exercise, such as environment and health-related worries, morality and ethicality, self-identity and subjective impeding barriers.

The result showed that almost all respondent declared a health and pollution free environment motive as their prime drive to buying organic food products. Most interestingly some respondents attached their organic food buying with their moral intrinsic motivation and self-identity. In terms of impeding barriers to buying organic food products, trust, product availability and higher prices were proved to be a major matter of concern.

Therefore, organic food marketers are suggested to devise marketing strategies in more holistic manners by attaching consumers' self-concept, moral and ethical dimension with health and environmental protection objectives. Specifically, promoting moral concept harmonized with environment and animal protection shall produce a consumer pull. Consequently, it will support the organic food development in the country. Further, it is suggested that organic food supply may be channeled with a trusted brand name, by doing so the product acceptability shall be increased. Surging demand shall invite more competition in market, which resultantly shall reduce the organic food prices and increase the consumers' product affordability.

This paper contributes to the marketing knowledge in organic food and suggests some motivational factors encouraging the consumers to buy the environmentally friendly food product and same time throws light on impeding factors that restrain individuals to buy organic food products.

Keywords: Exploratory study, Organic Food, Environment, Health, Personal Norms, Self-identity

Introduction

Current environmental degradation and resultant health-related issues have raised the importance and need of organic food products. The consequences of environmental damage are global warming, land erosion, animal species extinction and environmental degradation (Paul, Modi, & Patel, 2016). Organic food represents agricultural produces nurtured by utilising pure, natural and eco-friendly supplements and methods, without using any artificial synthesised fertilisers, poultry feed additives, livestock growth regulators and pesticides (Thogersen, 2015). Further handmade products, using organic products and avoidance of any synthetic input also included in this definition (Nina et al., 2015).

From an environmental viewpoint, it is critical to discover new ways to control and lessen the negative effects of consumption to achieve sustainable development goals as desired by the global community (Steg, Bolderdijk, Keizer, & Perlaviciute, 2014). A more sustainable society can be achieved through changes in consumer consumption patterns since consumers' private household contributes almost up to 40% of environmental damage (Barbaro & Pickett, 2016). Food shares a significant part of household consumption and associated directly with individuals' health and overall environment. Hence, moving towards more sustainable food shall contribute towards solutions related to health and environmental problems.

Pakistan is facing formidable environmental challenges (World Bank, 2010). The significant reason for this problem is current consumption patterns in the society and extensive use of pesticides in agricultural practices (Mehmood, Hussain, Farooq, & Akram, 2016). Due to urbanization and unthoughtful consumption, Pakistanis are producing 20.024 million tons of solid waste annually (PRES, 2018), polluting fresh waters with 2000 million gallons of sewerage water each day (Pak-SCEA, 2006) and consume contaminated food and water cause epidemic diseases affecting thousands of people annually (Daud et al., 2017). The repercussions these trends are evident in the form of increasing in the degree of temperature each year (The Tribune, 2018), loss of human lives in thousands (Daud et al., 2017), infertility of 11.6 million hectares land (Azam, Iqbal, Inayatullah, & Malik, 2001), deforestation (Musa & Bukhtiar, 2015) and monetary loss of \$14 billion each year (World Bank report, 2010).

In Pakistan, the present environmental situation calls for attention. Government, scientists and public are vigilant of these concerns. In the realisation of this adverse

circumstances, Government in Pakistan has come up with certain measures like a billion tree project in Khyber Pakhtoon Khwa province, formulation of policies to encourage organic agriculture and encouraging consumers to use organic food products (Technology Times, 2016). Now the assortments of organic food alternatives can also be visible in the market with the other conventional food products. However, in spite of product availability, the market size for natural food products in Pakistan is yet at initial stages (Khan, 2016; Musa & Bukhtiar, 2015). Do the people understand a difference between organic and chemically grown food products? What are their basic motives to buy organic food products? What are the main impediments they face while buying organic food products? Not many researchers have explored these questions. However, there are few studies in green buying behaviour in Pakistani context among which include Alswidi, Huque, Hafeez, and Shariff (2014) and Asif, Xuhui, Nasiri, & Ayyub (2018). Nonetheless, these studies are quantitative, and their focus on organic food is limited to theoretical dimensions followed in these studies. Moreover, a qualitative study by Khan (2016), explored buyers and sellers opinion relevant to prevailing marketing mix strategies of organic food in the Pakistani context. Nevertheless, the focus of this study was geographically and socially concentrated to one city, Karachi Pakistan. Further, the scope was focused on respondents' perception regarding marketing efforts (4Ps). However, the study did not investigate the motivational factors that encourage or discourage consumers and non-user to buy organic food products.

The objective of the present investigation is to study consumer's perceptions about organic food products and explore the motivational factors that encourage individuals to purchase pro-environmental organic food products in Pakistan. After the exploratory analysis, this study offers suggestions for improving the current market situation of organic food products in Pakistan. Moreover, the study proposes a practical solution relating to three broader study areas as naming environment, agriculture and consumer behaviour. Thus, the research shall contribute towards the knowledge, awareness and further development of organic food product market in Pakistan.

Literature review

This study conceptualises organic food as the product that is considered to be environmentally friendly, grown up without synthetic chemical inputs (e.g. urea and pesticides) and life stock growth regulators along with minimum detrimental effect on the biosphere (Lorek et al., 2014). Whereas the word 'consumer' in this study refers to an individual, who protects himself/herself and the planet

through buying and consuming environmentally friendly organic food products (Jo & Shin, 2017). Exploring individuals' perceptions infers sorting out their opinions and views about the features of organic food products and the reasons behind their buying these products.

According to the German Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL& IFOAM, 2018) global survey, 179 countries are involved in organic agricultural practices. Whereas total 50.9 million hectares of land have been utilised under organic cultivation globally (FiBL& IFOAM, 2018). According to Organic Monitor (2017), the organic retail sales of food and drinks have touched \$100 billion worldwide in 2016, with 10% market growth annually. The 90% of organic food products sales are generated by Europe and North America (FiBL& IFOAM, 2018). However, some new rapidly growing regional markets in Latin America, Africa and Asia are emerging that have shared the global organic sales proportionate with North American and European region (Willer, 2017).

According to (FiBL& IFOAM, 2018) statistics, In Pakistan, 89,919 hectares of land is dedicated to organic farming. The land under organic farming had shown a phenomenal growth with three times higher figure since 2008 when it was just 22000 hectares (Willer, 2017). However, lands devoted to organic agriculture account only 0.1% of the total agricultural area (Organic Monitor, 2017). There are 111 organic product producers and 26 processors registered in Pakistan (FiBL& IFOAM, 2018). Moreover, Pakistan is amongst few countries those are in process to formulate organic agriculture and food-related regulations (Willer, 2017).

However, presently, the prevailing farming norms in Pakistan are relying chiefly on synthetic biochemical inputs and the varieties that produce high yields (Wood, Rhemtulla, & Coomes, 2007), resultantly; with the passage of time; these applications led farmland to many problems such as declining infertility, loss of topsoil, loss of organic matter and diminishing soil potential for crop production (Khan, 2011). Further, the environmental costs of existing agriculture practices in Pakistan include ground and surface water contamination, discharging of greenhouse gases, pest immunity against pesticides and extinction of biodiversity (Badgley, Moghtader, Quintero, Zakem, Chappell, Avilés-Vázquez, Samulon, & Perfect, 2007). Same is endorsed by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) statistics which says Pakistan is losing 11.6 million hectares of land, which is around 20% of its fertile lands (Daily Times, 2016). Further, scientific research for analysing soil fertility in Pakistan revealed that amongst different soil sample, the carbon content (organic matter) was found less

than 1%, whereas, for fertile land carbon in soil should not be less than 1.29% (Azamet al., 2001).

As far as organic food markets are concerned, organic food suppliers sell their goods at superstores, specialised outlets and farmer markets in urban areas of Pakistan (Khan, 2016). There is some organic food suppliers, growers and sellers operating in various cities of Pakistan like Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, but their main concentration is observed in the second largest city of the country; Lahore (Khan, 2016; Ali, & Ahmed, 2016). The superstores and specialised outlets make various kinds of organic food products available to consumers including wheat, rice, pulses, organic milk, eggs, chicken, meat, honey, fruits and vegetables (Anjum, Zada, & Tareen, 2016).

Regarding organic food, few researchers have attempted to explore the consumers' awareness and motivational factors in Pakistani context (Khan, 2016). However, these studies (e.g. Alswidiet al., 2014; Asif et al., 2018) were mostly quantitative and lacked in-depth analysis of motivational factors behind the organic food purchase decisions. Khan (2016) did a qualitative study in organic food context and discovered the buyer and seller's attitude and belief regarding marketing efforts (4Ps). However, this study did not investigate the motivational factors that encourage consumers and non-consumers to buy organic food products.

Hence, people in Pakistan are now more concerned for their food intake, whether it is safe, natural without any synthetic element and being friendly with animals and overall environment (Anjum et al., 2016). Further, in the case of buying organic food, affordability and availability are considered as major obstacles (Asif et al., 2018). Price of organic products remains nearly two times higher than conventional food (Musa & Bukhtiar, 2015; Khan, 2016).

In the scenario of above-stated review, it can be concluded that Pakistan is facing immense environmental problem due to conventional agricultural practices. The consequences are not only evident in bio-spheric and monetary losses, but the health of millions of people is also affecting. Organic agriculture and produces are the optimum solutions suggested by scientists, and same is realised by the government, industry and general public. However, marketers are not aware of exactly the consumers' perception and beliefs regarding organic food products. A clear knowledge regarding motivational factors behind consumer's organic food buying decision will place marketers in a better position to craft consumer-oriented marketing strategies. This will create a market pull from consumer side which will amicably demand more organic food. Hence, farmers will be encouraged to follow organic agricultural practices. The result will be less

dependency upon harmful synthetic agricultural inputs of farming. Along with this, the present study built on the qualitative methodology to achieve the earlier mentioned objective as discussed in the next section.

The qualitative interviews were conducted in this exploratory study to bring about views, opinions and suggestions of the organic food buyers. Respondents' replies are narrated in their own phrases. Results are then analysed by thematic evaluation and discussed later. The results from this study will provide a thorough comprehension of prevailing consumer perception about organic food products and their motives to buy it. Government, industry and consumer will find this study helps to have a better understanding of the current situation of the organic food market. This study will enable marketers to obtain a more comprehensive idea about the consumers' perception of buying organic food products, enabling them to make well-informed decisions about product assortment and promotion.

Research Methodology

The present investigation has attempted to study organic food market in Pakistan, perusing to comprehend the consumers' motivational factors and potential impediments based on which consumers make buying decisions. This research follows an interpretive paradigm for investigation (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), this qualitative study utilised semi-structured interviews to provoke respondents' viewpoints. Whereas semi-structured interviews are a qualitative method of inquiry that combines a pre-determined set of open questions (questions that prompt discussion) with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore particular themes or responses further. A total of 25 consumers or prospective customers (including non-users) were interviewed until saturation. Following Guest, Greg, Bunce, Arwen, Johnson, & Laura, (2006), 20-25 participants' interviews with a homogenous group is all that is needed to reach saturation. Past research in organic food buying behaviour reports that mostly the individuals belonging to middle and upper middle classes show more inclination to be a consumers or prospect of organic food products (Khare, 2015; Khan, 2016), purposive sampling (Chekima et al., 2017) was utilized for selecting consumers (including non-users) from Hyperstar shopping mall in Lahore due to the availability of organic food products in the mall.

Face to face interviews were conducted in the mall. These interviews were recorded by the electric recording device. Many respondents spoke around thirty minutes. Non-users ended up earlier as compared to users of organic food products. Respondents were asked about their motivation behind buying organic foods and the significant reasons that refrain them from opting for such products.

Once transcription was performed, the respondents' replies were encoded into categories that emerged out of this study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). In this study, respondents' similar types of replies are presented together, with most representative response quoted word for word to elucidate categorical concept (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It is important to point out that interpretation of respondents' viewpoint is qualitative so it depends upon researchers' personal views and other investigators may have their understandings and methodology. Next, the study presents findings and discussion.

Primary Research Findings and Discussion

The following section presents the interview findings from consumers. The salient motivational and impeding factors are discussed as mentioned by the respondents. The concept and factors involved are elaborated with actual quotes of the respondents. Also, the responses also contain some suggestions from respondents. The participants' identities are disguised under alphabetical codes, using 'R' "the respondents". Out of twenty-five respondents, twenty were those who had buying experience of organic food products however five interviewees never bought environmentally friendly food product and categories as non-users. Participants were asked a general question stated that "what is their opinion about organic food and the reason behind buying or not buying organic food products." their responses fall into four main categories namely health and environment-related worries, morality and ethicality, self-concept and impediments.

Health and environment-related Worries

Under this, participants were asked to share their opinion on their basic motive of buying organic food products. Almost all respondents asserted insistently that health and environment-related worries are the significant reasons behind their motive to buy organic food. As respondent R1 delineated,

R5: "Food grown without fertilisers and pesticides is very important in today's environment. Due to the use of fertilisers and pesticides foods have injurious chemicals leading to cancer, kidney level diseases and joint problems."

Similarly, R3 vocalised as

R3: "We have to protect nature and natural resources and stop buying/using the products that contain chemicals which are causing detrimental effects on health and global warming."

R15: "Health and environmentally conscious people use organic food products".

Particularly, one respondent went a step ahead and asserted

that the organic food need to be truly green throughout in its value chain process, starting from raw material to end product and the concept of being environmentally friendly should come from the very core of social values. As interviewee R18 elaborated organic food in a very interesting and different way,

R18: Environmental friendly organic food is called green products. But to me it is not only the products which are green, there are rather procedures, mechanisms and social habits in a society too which are GREEN or NOT GREEN. So products, procedures, mechanisms or social habits which are environmental friendly are called GREEN”.

Likewise, R2, R7, R11, R17, R20 and R13 opined environment and health related worries as their chief motivational force to buy organic food.

The above presented findings of the present study is similar to previous studies conducted by using quantitative methodology that deposited a significant positive relationship between health consciousness (Khare, 2015; Moser, 2015, Hansen, Sorensen, & Eriksen, 2018; Han, Hwang, & Lee, 2017; Alsiwidi et al., 2014; Asif et al., 2018), environmental consciousness (Hansen et al., 2018; Shin et al., 2018; Magnusson, 2003; Rana & Paul, 2017) and organic food buying intentions/behaviour (Hansen et al., 2018; Moser, 2015).

Morality and ethicality

Under this, the question for the motivation of buying organic food products, participants were asked to share their opinion, some respondents expressed organic food buying as their intrinsic responsibility based on their self-concept and personal held values. They are willing to opt for organic food because they consider it the right thing to do, for that respondents agree to bear some personal costs (e.g. higher prices and inconvenience to find organic food). R1, R3, R4, R6, R9, R10, R12, R15, R18, R19 and R20 acclaimed buying organic food as their intrinsic motivation to save the environment and biosphere, R3 and R8 verbalised in this way,

R3: “As an educated and aware member of the society, I bear the full responsibility than other in the protection of the environment through the purchase of organic food products.”

R9: “Some follow the use of green products as they are well aware of their social responsibilities and the perks of the eco-friendly or green environment.”

R19: “We are living in a polluted environment which is causing proliferation of many infectious diseases not in human beings but other creatures also. Organic food enables can be a drastic shift to the protection of the

environment and natural climate from the wholesome effect of pollution.”

To compare the present findings and previous studies, it can be seen that most of the organic food literature is full of evidence that commonly consumers validate their environmentally friendly food buying with health and taste motives, and same has been verified in Pakistan (Alsiwidi et al., 2014; Asif et al., 2018) however, the studies focusing on ethical and moral motivation to buy organic food products are still scarce. Stern et al., (1999) argues that without incorporating ethical and moral dimension in studying the drive behind a particular motive, would be insufficient to produce a true picture of such behaviour. Moreover, the market strategy prevailing in Pakistani market to promote organic food products are heavily based on hedonic motives (e.g. health and taste) (Khan, 2016). In this study, although the respondents persist the same argument for their organic food buying however they also have shown a deeply held ethical and moral sense attached with organic food buying, this side of their perception is based on their intrinsically held values for the environmental preservation to come up in line with their self-concept. Therefore the marketers should incorporate the ethical and moral messages along with hedonic motive in their promotional campaigns to promote organic food.

Theoretically, the intrinsic motivation that encourages the individuals to act in a pro-social way even at the cost of personal loss is explained as “Personal Norms” (Stern et al., 1999). Norm Activation theory commonly named as Norm Action Model (NAM) explains this phenomenon of selfless behaviour in favour of social and common interests (Schwartz, 1977). There are number of studies the literature that endorse the formation of pro-social and altruistic behaviour based on personal norms (Han et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2018; Steg et al., 2011; Han et al., 2016; Joireman, 2001; Stern et al., 1999).

Self-Identity

Even some respondents supported this idea that they use organic food because it is associated with their self-concept. For the question of motivational factors, two respondents R7 and R19 opined buying organic food as the part of their self and consistent with the belief that what they ought to do rightly. As respondent R19 conferred:

R19: “Well personally I feel myself all out to purchase the organic food products.”

R7: “We must consume and support organic food products, definitely it is environmentally friendly and important for our future generations.”

Self-acclaimed organic consumers are frequent buyers of organic products (Gatersleben et al., 2014). The idea to

portray a positive self-identity in an organic friendly way is the significant predictor of organic food purchase intention and behaviour (Hansen et al., 2018; Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997; Lee, 2008; Dittmer, 2009). According to van der Wreffe and Keizer (2013), self-identity is the direct determinant of intentions to purchase organic food even in the absence of attitude as a mediator.

Earlier discussed findings of the present study are alike previous studies conducted by using a quantitative methodology that deposited a significant positive relationship between self-identity and organic food buying behaviour (Khare, 2015; Moser, 2015; Enzler, 2015; Hansen et al., 2018).

Barriers

Under this, participants were asked to share their opinion on difficulties they are facing when buying organic food products, along with this participant R1, R4, R5, R6, R11, R12, R20, R21 and non-users R8, R23, R25 responded that the barriers that abstain them buying organic food includes organic food knowledge, availability and trust. The foremost obstacle that the majority had spoken about was the higher prices. Hence, willingness to pay higher prices for organic food remained as a significant catalyst to make their opinion of buying or not buying the product.

R25: "I like to purchase the organic food products, but availability, affordability and accessibility are major issues. Therefore I am not willing to pay prices for organic food."

R5: "Organic food products are available in Pakistan, but the awareness of a common man is at the ebb. If awareness is there even, the price becomes the main hindrance in buying."

R11: "In Pakistan the marketers claim but you cannot trust marketers, as they are selling is most of the time different from what are claiming in their advertisement."

R1: "Organic food is good, but availability, affordability and accessibility are major issues. I have never seen a separate counter for organic food."

R23: "Awareness and general knowledge of a common man for the conservation of the environment are lacking. Lack of knowledge leaves significant population unaware of what is organic food; this ignorance effects on the environment."

The above presented findings of the present study is similar to previous studies conducted by using quantitative methodology that deposited about the core impediment that refrain potential organic food buyer from purchasing environmentally friendly food products, including lack of

awareness (Gliem, 2013; Hidalgo-Baz et al., 2017; Asif et al., 2018), higher prices (Konuk, 2018; Temperini et al., 2017; Moser, 2015), unavailability of organic food (Gliem, 2013) and lack of trust (Temperini, 2017; Chen & Chang, 2013; Testa et al., 2016).

Regarding exploring individuals' core motivational factors behind organic food buying in Pakistan, this study finds that no doubt health and environmental drives are the chief determinants of organic food purchase intention and behaviour but Pakistani individuals also endorse moral and self-identity motives in buying organic food products. This findings proposes an additional point of view along with as it was suggested by Asif et al. (2018) and Alswidi et al. (2014) which reported a significant positive relationship of rational factors of decision making (e.g. attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control) with organic food purchase intention and behaviour of Pakistani individuals. Hence, this study highlights the importance of moral and ethical values in the study of consumers' behaviour buying organic food in the Pakistani context. Whereas, lack of knowledge, availability and trust were found as barriers to buying organic food products.

Conclusion

This research investigate the consumer's response towards buying motives and the obstacle they face in purchasing organic food products in Pakistan by interviewing the buyers and non-buyers. It was observed that most individuals were aware of the benefits of chemical-free food. However, not all bought it. For some the significant reason for buying the organic food was the health benefits; others purchased as it is environmentally friendly. Certain consumers were aware of adverse consequences that conventional non-organic food brought to the environment and biosphere, hence, they consider it as their intrinsic moral motivation to buy eco-friendly food. However, as far as obstacles are concerned, respondents showed that higher prices, limited availability and lack of trust in supplier had made organic foods buying more hazardous for them and it left no other option but to buy unhealthy conventional food products. It is thus suggested to organic food marketers to devise marketing strategies in more holistic manners by attaching consumers' self-concept, moral and ethical dimension with health and environmental protection. Specifically, promoting moral concept attached to environment and animal protection shall produce a consumer pull. Consequently, it will support the organic food development in the country. Further, it is suggested to increase the organic food supply with a trusted brand name, by doing so the product availability shall increase, the prices shall decrease, and consumers will have more trust in organic food products supplies. Further, it is expected that

this research will provide stakeholders with a more well-rounded view of consumers' perception of organic foods products in Pakistan that will help them make more informed decisions about their food choices and marketing strategies.

Limitations and areas for further research

Present study consists of twenty-five interviews with buyers and non-buyers of organic food product that were conducted in Lahore, Pakistan. Other cities and social groups belonging to different areas with a wider sample might have a variant and enriched findings. Further, the study is limited to qualitative analysis of the problem. However, the validation of the results requires a quantitative investigation to which future researchers can wish to explore.

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