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FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMERS' INTENTION TO PURCHASE ORGANIC FOOD IN KHULNA CITY, BANGLADESH

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Abstract

Organic food is widely regarded as clean, healthy, and sustainable consumption, and its demand is increasing globally daily because of the adverse health effects of inorganic food. Quantitative analysis of the factors of individual's decisions to purchase organic food is lacking in the existing literature. By surveying 210 households from one southwestern district of Bangladesh, this study examines the influencing factors of purchasing organic food and explores policy implications. To find the impact of health consciousness, environmental consciousness, social influences, and attitudes on organic food purchase intention, this study employs confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The findings of structural equation modeling reveal that health consciousness, environmental consciousness, and social influences have a significant relationship with purchase intention. However, the mediating factor called attitude has no impact on the purchase decision of organic food. The findings of this study have substantial implications for marketers and policymakers.

Keywords: Organic Food, Health awareness, Environmental consciousness, Consumers' attitude, SEM analysis

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Introduction

Sustainable production and consumption have gained crucial importance in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. Food contamination and adulteration have become significant public health hazards in developing countries like Bangladesh. Bangladesh is an agro-based and densely populated developing country. The country's agricultural food production largely depends on the excessive utilization of chemical fertilizers and insecticides. The resultant inorganic food of the country is now a big challenge for achieving sustainable consumption. Inorganic foods are produced by using synthetics such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. In other terms, inorganic food is defined as food that includes less than 70% organic components (Winter & Davis, 2006). These kinds of foods can be raw foods, processed foods, and ready-to-cook/bake/eat meals. Non-organic foods have adverse impacts on health outcomes: obesity, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. In Bangladesh, almost 30 million people experience foodborne diseases annually (Khairuzzaman et al., 2014). Food adulteration with dangerous bacteria, viruses, parasites, poisons, or chemicals is the primary cause of foodborne diseases (WHO, 2016). In contrast, organic food refers to all naturally occurring food products that are free of manmade chemicals such as fertilizers, premium antibiotics, and genetically modified organisms (Burch et al., 2001). Organic food is produced by organic agricultural methods. Organic foods are produced by farmers who employ renewable resources, preserving soil and water (Sobhanifard, 2018; Rahman and Noor, 2016). It is a production approach that relies entirely on environmental ecosystem management rather than on external artificial agents (Feil et al., 2020). Organic food is healthier and naturally purer than food grown with pesticides or chemical processes (Ditlevsen et al., 2019; Teng & Lu, 2016). Therefore, it is clear how beneficial organic food is for us but some of us still go with the easy and less costly inorganic food. Understanding consumer food purchasing habits can help enhance community food safety and minimize foodborne diseases. Against this backdrop, it is essential to explore the factors that can affect the intention to buy organic food.

Consumers' intentions to purchase organic foods depend on various factors. These factors include health, taste, food safety, fashion, and humanitarian and ecological motives (Rana and Paul, 2017). Consumers' environmental awareness positively affects the buying decision of organic items (Chowdhury & Alamgir, 2021; Heo & Muralidharan, 2019; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011). Empirical evidence supports that health, food safety, as well as environmental concerns are significant determinants in encouraging organic food purchases (Liu & Zheng, 2019; Schleenbecker & Hamm, 2013; Liu et al., 2013). Similarly, consumers' attitudes toward organic products highly affect purchasing intentions for organic products (Chowdhury & Alamgir, 2021; Wang et al., 2020; Yadav & Pathak, 2017; Paul et al., 2016). According to Liu and Niyongira (2017), consumers with higher income levels have greater purchasing power and are more likely to choose high-quality, safe foods. Several studies reported that purchasing organic food is hampered by some significant issues such as high costs, lower level of supply, and information asymmetry (Kushwah et al., 2019; Rana and Paul, 2017; Teng & Lu, 2016; Giannakas, 2002).

Organic food is becoming increasingly popular in Bangladesh. The usage of pesticides, hormones, and formalin in conventional food has increased city dwellers' need for organic food (Huda et al., 2022). Consumers' attitudes, environmental concerns, and willingness to pay significantly influence the buying decisions of green products (Chowdhury & Alamgir, 2021). Sumi and Kabir (2018) examined that price, product attributes, health awareness, and environmental awareness considerably affect the purchase decision of organic tea among Bangladeshi individuals. According to Prince and Krairit (2017), the intention to buy organic meat is positively affected by consumers' cognitive and affirmative interpretation of health benefits.

Surveying 303 respondents from Bangladesh's top cities, Hasan et al. (2022) found that consumer purchase willingness to organic cotton cloth is positively influenced by environmental concerns and consumer attitudes. It is clear from empirical evidence that the future of organics will be heavily influenced by consumer incentives (Lockie et al. 2002). To ensure safe food and lower the number of foodborne diseases in a community, it is essential to realize consumer attitudes toward organic food. However, not much is known about Bangladeshi consumers' safe food buying habits. The empirical evidence on the influencing determinants of people's decisions to buy organic food is insufficient in the southwest region of Bangladesh. Therefore, this research aims to explore consumer motives and purchase intentions towards organic foods in Khulna city.

Materials and methods

Sample

The primary data on consumers' attitudes to purchase organic food is collected from Khulna city, a southwestern district of Bangladesh. The Khulna city corporation consists of 31 wards. Among them, this study purposively selected seven areas named Boyra, Dakbangla, Dolkhola, Gollamari, New Market, Nirala, and Sonadanga. A total of 210 samples were then obtained by surveying 30 respondents from each area. A well-structured questionnaire, containing demographic information, knowledge, attitudes, and purchase intention towards organic food, is used to collect data through face-to-face interviews. The respondents in this study are only consumers of organic products.

Model specification and hypotheses development

The Structural Equation Model (SEM) has been used to analyze the effect of the selected factors on consumers' buying decisions regarding organic food. This model in this study has been used following the research of Liu et al (2019). According to the Value Belief Norm (VBN) theory, health consciousness, environmental consciousness, and social influences affect customers' purchasing intention of organic food. Attitude works as the mediator factor in this case. Therefore, this study used the SEM model to find the impact of health awareness, environmental consciousness, and consumers' social influences on organic food purchase intention, considering attitude as the mediator factor.

VBN theory suggests that consumers' organic consumption is influenced by their values, attitudes, and personal norms. People who are more concerned about their health and environmental issues are more possibly to purchase organic goods (Katt & Meixner, 2020; Kareklas et al., 2014). Health consciousness also significantly affects consumer views (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008). Due to higher vitamin content and lack of chemicals, consumers think that organic foods are healthier (Dubé et al., 2014). Health-conscious people are highly inclined to buy organic products than non-organic products (Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Irianto, 2015). Similarly, Consumers' attitude is an important mediator of the purchasing behaviour of organic foods. Various studies suggest that purchases of organic food may be influenced by consumer perceptions about organic food (Shamsi et al., 2020; Basha & Lal, 2019; Ngobo, 2011). Consumers' positive attitudes towards green products increase the likelihood of purchasing those products (Liu et al., 2021). It is empirically proven that attitudes towards organic foods have a role in the interaction between organic purchase behavior and environmental and health awareness (Liu et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2019; Pagiaslis & Krontalis, 2014). Based on these, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

- H1.** Health awareness significantly affects consumers' purchase intention of organic food.
H2. Consumers' environmental awareness significantly affects their intention to buy organic food.
H3. Social influences significantly affect the purchase intention of organic food.
H4. Consumers' attitude has a significant impact on the buying intention of organic food.
H5. Consumers' health awareness significantly affects their attitudes towards organic food.
H6. Consumers' attitudes towards organic food are significantly influenced by environmental consciousness.
H7. Social influences significantly affect consumers' attitudes towards organic food.

Therefore, this study utilized VBN theory and SEM to analyze consumers' organic purchasing behavior. The diagrammatic view of the proposed hypothesis of this study is shown in Fig. 1. In SEM, Cronbach's alpha is mostly employed to measure how closely the set of factors is related to each other to find the accuracy of the model. The Cronbach's alpha value is often employed to explain internal consistency. The value of alpha ranges between 0 to 1. The higher value implies a higher level of internal consistency (Mehra & Ratna, 2014; Cartina, 1993). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test is applied to describe the percentage of variance among the variables. It analyzes the suitability of the sampling for the variables of the model. The score of this test also ranges between 0 and 1. If the score is more than 0.79, the model will be considered good as suggested by (Argan, 2008; Cerny and Kaiser, 1977).

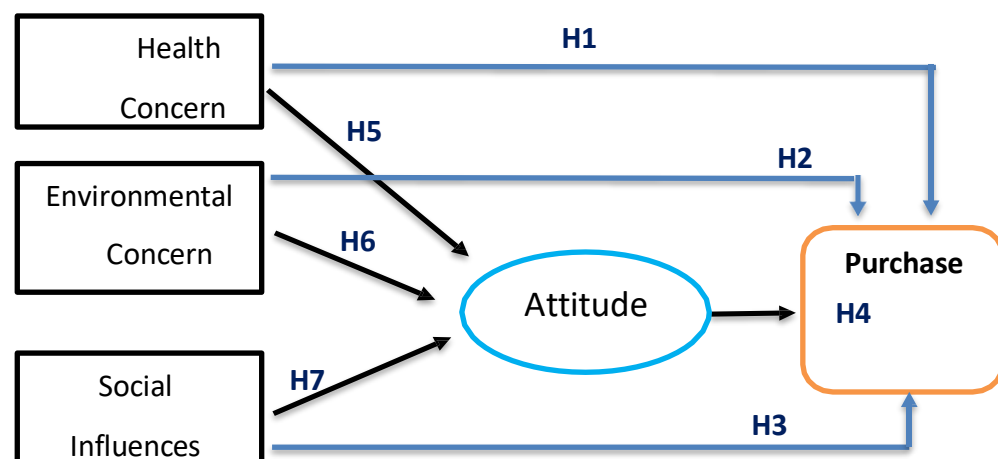


Fig. 1: Research framework

This research conducted factor analysis for measuring the consistency and interrelationships of the variables. The properties of factor analysis are shown in Table 1. Factor analysis can be done with variables that have a high degree of correlation. At the first step, a correlation coefficient has been identified to figure out how the different factors work together. The range of average interterm correlation from 0.15 to 0.50 is best for internal consistency. A common rule of thumb is that a factor loading of 0.70 or greater is efficient for variables. For factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha value and KMO value are checked as a part of the diagnosis test. The alpha value greater than 0.70 is regarded as a reliable factor. According to KMO test, the value greater than 0.70 is considered as a factor.

Table 1: Confirmatory factor analysis properties

Items	Mean	SD	Factor Loading	CR	P(Sig. Level)	CRC	AVE
I. Purchase Intention (Cronbach' Alpha = 0.930)						0.952	0.664
1. When I buy food, I often buy organic food.	3.52	1.072	0.787		***		

2. If organic foods are available, I want to purchase those.	3.52	1.141	0.764	12.097	***
3. I frequently purchase organic food from the supermarket or organic food store.	3.50	1.059	0.811	13.059	***
4. I prefer to purchase organic food from farmers.	3.67	0.999	0.780	12.423	***
5. I have a strong intention to buy organic food if those seems accessible.	3.50	1.103	0.794	12.716	***
6. I plan to increase my organic food consumption over time.	3.55	0.968	0.711	12.234	***
7. I have the intention to purchase organic foods for the family members.	3.69	1.038	0.749	11.795	***
8. I like to purchase organic food products for their long-term benefits on my health.	3.35	1.066	0.750	11.810	***
9. I like to purchase organic food because those are environmentally sound.	3.59	1.056	0.808	13.031	***
10. I like to purchase organic food items due to food safety.	3.61	1.120	0.573	8.571	***

II. Attitude (Cronbach' Alpha = 0.797)

1. I believe organic items are less harmful than inorganic food.	2.91	1.176	0.670			0.871	0.575
2. I think organic food is nutritious than inorganic food.	3.36	1.129	0.820	9.352	***		
3. I think organic items are of better quality compare to inorganic food.	3.48	1.036	0.759	8.982	***		

III. Health consciousness (Cronbach' Alpha = 0.830)

1. I always try to take some physical exercise activity regularly.	3.12	1.167	0.707	10.639	***	0.807	0.584
2. I always maintain a healthy, balanced diet.	3.14	1.152	0.750	11.407	***		
3. I am very much aware of my sleeping time.	3.28	1.055	0.823				
4. I always try to drink enough water every day.	3.22	1.041	0.648	9.592	***		

5. I always avoid junk food, processed foods, or street food.	3.31	1.131	0.595	8.674	***
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IV.Environmental consciousness

(Cronbach'Alpha = 0.847)

1. Concerning the level of the environment.	3.60	1.054	0.818			0.880	0.648
2. I believe that environmental elements such as soil, air, water, etc. have an impact on our life.	3.36	0.994	0.804	12.817	***		
3. Organic farming helps to maintain biodiversity balance.	3.59	1.051	0.695	10.663	***		
4. Organic farming method helps to protect the environment because less harmful synthetic and chemical pesticides are used.	3.56	1.100	0.742	11.574	***		

V. Social Influences

(Cronbach' Alpha = 0.751)

1. My friends' choices and opinions strongly influence my intention to purchase organic items.	3.37	1.047	0.676	7.931	***	0.788	0.555
2. My community influenced me to purchase organic food.	3.36	1.081	0.785	8.725	***		
3. Social media posts, social gatherings, events, TV shows impact my preference towards organic food.	3.55	1.071	0.657				

Note: Fit indices: $\chi^2 = 590.610$ ($P = 0.000$), $df: 265$, $\chi^2/df = 2.23$, $RMSEA = 0.077$, $GFI = 0.81$, $AGFI=0.772$, $CFI=0.90$. *** $p < 0.01$.

Results

Validity of measurement model

To test the validity of the model, this study used a confirmatory factor analysis test. The reliability test of the study has been conducted for 25 items, which are measured by a Likert scale. The estimated Cronbach's alpha value is 0.947. The value has reached the acceptable region. While the value is higher than 0.9, it is considered as most reliable. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the acceptable alpha value is above 0.6. Therefore, the variables used in the study have good internal reliability and can be used for further analysis. To calculate the sample adequacy and estimate the variables' homogeneity, this research has conducted KMO test. Cerny and Kaiser (1977) state that a value above 0.5 is acceptable, and a value greater than 0.9 is most appropriate. The estimated KMO value is 0.936, which is the recommended number for factor analysis. Again, the Chi-square value is 3260.754, and the degree of freedom is 300, according to Bartlett's test of sphericity. The value is statistically significant ($P < 0.01$), indicating that factor analysis can be

performed. According to Cerny and Kaiser (1977), both values indicate adequate sampling, and the dataset is ready for factor analysis.

For checking the reliability of the internal consistency, discriminant validity, and the convergent validity of the model, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis on the five constructs of purchase intention, attitude, health consciousness, environmental consciousness, and social influence. Bryman and Bell (2011) recommend that the acceptable value of alpha is 0.6, on the other hand, Hair et al. (2010) mention 0.7. However, in the case of all constructs, the alpha value in our confirmatory analysis is more than 0.7, which indicates that the reliability of internal consistency is acceptable (Table 1). The values of the factor loadings of the individual items in the case of the five constructs are all significant at the 1% level, indicating the initial evidence for the convergent validity of the model. Convergent validity was deemed acceptable because each construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was higher than the 0.5 AVE cutoff values (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Bagozzi & Yi, 1989).

The Goodness of Fit index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness of Fit (AGFI), degrees of freedom (df), value of χ^2/df , CFI, RMSEA, and chi-square (χ^2) value were used to assess the fit of the model. The fitness of the model is good with $RMSEA \leq 0.08$, $CFI \geq 0.90$ (Hu & Bentler, 1999), GFI and $AGFI \geq 0.80$ (Chau & Hu, 2001), and $\chi^2/df < 3.0$. The obtained fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 590.610$; $df = 265$; $\chi^2/df = 2.23$; $AGFI = 0.772$; $GFI = 0.81$; $CFI = 0.90$; $RMSEA = 0.077$) most of the value for model fitness fulfill the lowest acceptable threshold except the RMSEA value which is .003 less than the acceptable range. The discriminant validity has been presented in Table 2. The model indicates that for each construct, the square root AVE value should be greater than the estimated intercorrelations, supporting the discriminant validity. All of the values satisfy the discriminant validity rule of thumb. The results show a positive and statistically significant ($P < 0.01$) correlation between the purchase intention and attitude parameters.

Table 2: Results of discriminant validity

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Purchase Intention	0.815				
2. Attitude	0.709***	0.758			
3. Health Consciousness	0.743***	0.750***	0.764		
4. Environmental Consciousness	0.816***	0.796***	0.879***	0.805	
5. Social Influences	0.763***	0.783***	0.805***	0.809***	0.745

Hypothesis Testing

The SEM model has been used to test the association between the selected variables in the model (Table 3). The result fit indices are $X^2 = 590.610$ ($P = 0.000$), $df: 265$, $X^2/df = 2.23$, $RMSEA = 0.077$, $GFI = 0.81$, $AGFI = 0.772$, $CFI = 0.90$. These indices indicate a good-fitting model. The hypotheses testing table shows that environmental consciousness, health consciousness, and social influences have a strong relationship with purchase intention. Though environmental consciousness has a relationship with the attitude, but health consciousness and social influences have no impact on attitude.

Table 3: Results of the SEM model

	Path Direction		Estimate
Purchase Intention		Environmental Consciousness	0.415*** (0.117)
Purchase Intention		Social Influences	0.336*** (0.125)
Purchase Intention		Attitude	0.140 (0.094)
Purchase Intention		Health Consciousness	0.307* (0.089)
Attitude		Environmental Consciousness	0.540*** (0.127)
Attitude		Social Influences	0.044 (0.147)
Attitude		Health Consciousness	0.126 (0.109)

Note: Fit indices: $\chi^2 = 590.610$ ($P = 0.000$), $df: 265$, $\chi^2/df = 2.23$, $RMSEA = 0.077$, $GFI = 0.81$, $AGFI = 0.772$, $CFI = 0.90$. Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

The result from SEM estimation exhibits that health consciousness, environmental consciousness, and social influence positively and significantly affect the purchase intention of organic food directly. It means if it is possible to raise public consciousness towards health and the environment, then their attitudes and thoughts regarding purchasing organic food will change positively. Side by side, the more they are socially engaged, the higher the chance of purchasing organic food. Here, attitude is the mediator variable in the model, but the result is insignificant. This means that consumers' attitudes about organic food don't affect their intention to purchase it. Fig. 2 shows the diagrammatic view of the estimated results of the SEM model. Based on the SEM Modelling, it has been estimated that among the seven hypotheses, a total of 4 hypotheses named by H1, H2, H3, and H6 are statistically significant. H2, H3, and H6 are statistically significant at 1 percent level of significance, and H1 is statistically significant at the 5 percent significance level. The hypothesis H1 shows that there is a nexus between health awareness and purchase intention with a 5 percent significance level. More clearly, the buying intention of organic food is significantly impacted by health awareness. H2 indicates a significant relationship between environmental consciousness and purchase intention at a 1 percent significance level. H3 shows a significant relationship between social influences and purchase intention with a 1 percent significance level. So, the inclination to purchase organic food is greatly determined by social factors. Furthermore, hypothesis H6 indicates that there is an association between environmental consciousness and attitude with a 1 percent significance level. Three hypotheses, such as H4, H5, and H7, are statistically insignificant. The results imply that attitude has no impact on the purchase intention of organic food. Additionally, health consciousness and social influences have no significant impact on the mediating factor, attitude.

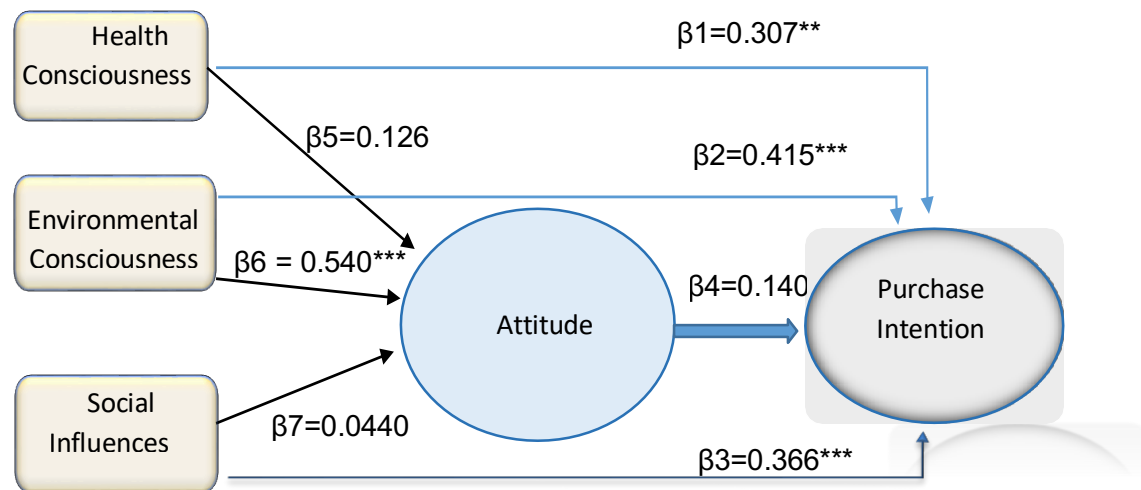


Fig. 2: The results of SEM

Discussion

Organic food, for its health benefits, is regarded as the most demanded consumer good globally, especially in developed countries. Our research displayed that health awareness plays a pivotal role in this case. The people with more concerned about health issues are very much inclined to purchase organic food. The cause behind this is the negative effect that people face from consuming the inorganic food that poses severe challenges to their health, and people are aware of this. This result is consistent with the findings of Asif et al. (2017), Liu et al. (2021), Rana and Paul (2017), and Singh and Verma (2017). Like health consciousness, social influences positively affect consumers' buying intention of organic food. Being motivated by friends, neighbors, community people, and by celebrities, people are concerned and feel for the motivation toward the buy organic food. The more people are engaged with those consumers who are very health conscious and avoid taking inorganic food and are habituated to organic food, the greater is the probability of getting signals of threat caused by the inorganic food, and people will be inclined to take organic food. This result is supported by Liu et al. (2021). Environmental consciousness positively affects people's purchase intention of organic food. The people who are very concerned about environmental issues are very likely to eat organic food. This result is supported by the research of Liu et al. (2021), Asif et al. (2017), and Weekez and Sibanda (2019). Environmental consciousness not only influences people's purchase intention of organic food, but also affects people's attitude towards organic food.

Conclusion

The understanding of consumers' organic food purchasing behaviour is essential for promoting sustainable consumption and production. This research examined the influencing determinants of consumers' attitudes and purchase intention towards organic food following value-belief-norm (VBN) theory. The results indicate that consumers' attitudes about organic food are strongly influenced by their environmental awareness. The estimated findings of the SEM model confirm that consumers' health and environmental consciousness positively affect their purchasing decision of organic food. In addition, consumers' social engagement significantly affects their organic food purchases. The findings of this paper offer important insights for the organic food

industry's long-term growth in Bangladesh. Consumers have an environment-conscious positive attitude and purchase intention towards organic foods. And, consumers' health awareness can increase the demand for organic food consumption. Therefore, the government should promote health and environmental awareness about organic food through education and publicity. Additionally, the government should adopt necessary steps to encourage the advancement of organic agriculture. The organic food industry should also disseminate the benefits of organic food by advertising through information channels and domestic events for promoting consumers' health and environmental awareness.

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