# Factors Influencing Millennials' Purchase Intention of Organic Food

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#### Abstract

**Purpose:** The present research study aims to evaluate the impact of attitude, environmental concern, sensory appeal, trust in organic food, and willingness to pay price premium on millennials' purchase intention of organic food products. Moreover, it examines the direct and indirect effects of trust in organic food purchase intention.

**Design / Methodology:** The present study is based 227 millennials responses collected via convenience sampling method through an online survey and by use of social media. The structured questionnaire was designed in the form of Google form, and a link for the same was shared online. The Collected data were analyzed by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and structural equation modeling (SEM) with the help of AMOS 21 and SPSS 21.

Findings: Findings suggest that willingness to pay price premium, attitude, and trust in organic food significantly influence purchase intention of organic food. In addition, environmental concern and sensory appeal have a significant positive impact on consumers' attitudes towards organic food products. Willingness to pay the price premium for organic food is positively influenced by trust in organic food. It empirically confirms that the trust in organic food has a more indirect effect than a direct effect on millennials' purchase intention.

**Research Limitations:** The study is based on data collected through the method of convenience sampling, and hence discussed practical implications need to review before implementing in designing marketing strategies.

**Practical Implications:** Marketing managers can make use of findings in developing effective marketing promotional campaigns focusing on developing a positive attitude towards organic food products, and willingness to pay extra can be influenced by instilling trust in organic food.

Originality / Value: This paper explores the insights of millennials' purchase intention in the context of organic food. It is focusing on how environmental concern, sensory appeal, and trust in organic food, and willingness to pay price premium play an influencing role in millennials' consumption of organic food. Moreover, the direct and indirect effect of trust in organic food is examined as a novel contribution in the context of India.

**Keywords:** Millennial, Organic food, Attitude, Purchase intention, Environmental concern, Sensory appeal, Trust in organic food, Willingness to pay price premium

#### Introduction

It is estimated that by 2050 the world's population will reach 9.7 billion. Food production will need to be increased by roughly 70% to feed grown population around the world against the limiting factor of land and water (FAO, 2018). The challenge is also to make sure that produced food and food products to be full of nutrients that support good health. Hence, global efforts have been directed towards focusing on sustainable food production. Sustainable food production is "a method of production using processes and systems that are non-polluting, conserve non-renewable energy and natural resources, are economically efficient, are safe for workers, communities and consumers, and do not compromise the needs of future generations" (Foresight, 2011). Global food production methods must develop in such a manner that minimizes the impact on the environment. As with other manmade activities, food production also contributes to climate change, water scarcity, soil degradation, and the destruction of biodiversity. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN FAO), about 1/3 of the world's soil has already been degraded because of "chemical-heavy" farming techniques, and deforestation, which increases erosion and global warming. Sustainability and environment are burning issues of today. The world is seeing "organic farming" as "sustainable and environment-friendly" solution.

Organic farming through sustainable agriculture meets not only the food requirements of the present generation in an environment-friendly way but also the requirements of future generations and maintains our environment. Organic farming rebuilds soil health and stops harmful chemicals from getting into our water supplies. Organic farmers don't rely on non-renewable oil-based fertilizers and pesticides. It results in greater biodiversity and fewer greenhouse gas emissions. The sooner the organic farming model spreads itself all across the country, the better it will be to ensure a healthier nation.

Moreover, based on insights from previous literature on organic food products, *two research gaps* are found. *First*, the benefit of effective segmentation will be helpful to marketers in designing effective strategies. Earlier studies have used environmental consciousness, health consciousness, lifestyle, and values as bases of segmentations. Nevertheless, insufficient studies have investigated on consumers from belongs to various age-groups. One of such important generation for marketers to target is millennial. The millennial segment is influenced by group values, concern for a sustainable environment, and has more wealth (Ivanova et al., 2019). According to Sheahan (2005), this segment is unlike other segments when it comes to concern for issues pertaining to the environment. This segment has huge potential for marketers of green product in India (Morgan Stanley, 2017). However, despite the importance of this segment, few studies have work on it. Hence, the present study will try to improve insights on millennials organic food buying intentions.

*Second*, available literature confirms that investigation has conducted often in among developed nations. However, some similarities exist in consumers' motives for buying organic food products among various parts of the world (Thøgersen et al., 2015). Consumers' buying behaviour must be investigated across developed, and developing nations can be helpful in developing strategies (Rana and Paul, 2017).

The objective of the current study is to bridge the research gap by studying factors stimulating the millennials' buying of organic food in India. It is grounded on the key drivers identified from the extensive

review of the literature of research papers published in reputed journals. In past studies, the variable such as organic knowledge, health consciousness, environmental consciousness, lifestyle, product attributes, product availability product quality found as significant variables in predicting purchase intention of consumers. Few past studies in developed country-specific to millennial consumers have concluded that *sensory appeal, trust in organic food, environmental concern, and, willingness to pay price premium* have a significant impact on millennials' buying intention of organic food. In our knowledge, very few studies have made an attempt to reveal this in the setting of a developing country such as India. Therefore, the results of the study aids in knowing factors affecting millennials' buying intentions of organic food.

# 1. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

#### 1.1 Organic Food Consumption and Millennials

An effective segmentation strategy is to take consumers' from varied generation as bases of segmentation instead of age. Therefore, much of the attention has gained in recent times of academicians and marketers by the millennial generation. "Generation Y is often interchangeably used in literature with millennial for consumers born between 1982 and 2000" (Brosdahl and Carpenter, 2011). They are considered as techsavvy, high level of literacy, heavy user of the internet, social values, (Ivanova et al., 2019); concern for the safety of food, ecological development (Deloitte, 2018); and ready to pay the extra price (Organic Trade Association, 2016). Millennials get affected by environmental factors, health benefit, and value in consuming organic food than knowledge (Madan, 2017; Hassan, Yee, and Ray, 2015). Millennials won't mind spending more money when it counts the most and so, if marketers able to build trust in organic food may be encouraged to pay more for its consumption. Therefore, it becomes vital to examines the relationship between environmental concern, sensory appeal, attitude, trust, willingness to pay price premium, and purchase intention in the context of organic food.

#### 1.2 Purchase intention

It is the measure of the commitment of an individual's towards performing a particular behaviour or buying of specific good or service. "Purchase intention is a kind of decision-making that studies the reason to buy a particular brand by consumer" (Shah et al., 2012). According to Aizen (1991) consumers' behaviour in future can be judged by analyzing its intent to buy. Literature supports that consumers' intention is a precursor to real actions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1991). Several studies have investigated buying intention in case of organic food products (Ashraf et al., 2019; Al-swidi et al., 2014; Cabuk et al., 2014; Chekima et al., 2017).

## 1.3 Attitude towards organic food and purchase intention

It can be referred to as "a person's favourable or unfavourable evaluation of an object, beliefs represent the information he/she has about the object" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). According to (Blackwell et al., 2001) attitude is expressed as liking and disliking of an individual. It can be defined as "the degree of favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour under study" (Ajzen, 1991). In another way, "attitude is the psychological emotion routed through consumers' evaluations and, if positive, behavioural intentions tend to be more positive" (Chen and Tung, 2014). Context of such studies was to evaluate the

role of attitude in influencing consumer behaviour. Furthermore, previous studies have empirically confirmed that attitude has a significantly influences on purchase intent (Ham et al., 2018; Maichum et al., 2016; Hsu et al., 2016) Thus, it formulates following hypothesis:

 $H_1$ : Consumers' attitude towards organic food significantly influences their intentions to purchase organic food.

#### 1.4 Environmental concern and attitude towards organic food

It refers to "people's awareness of the environmental issues and their willingness and support to resolve them" (Hu et al., 2010). Environmental concern shows emotions related to environmental issues (Lee, 2008), in other words, the environmental concern mentions of an emotional attribute, expressing anxiety, passion and attention to the environmental consequences (Yeung, 2004). Results of Bamberg test model (2003) shows concern for the environment as a form of the general attitude to the environment and indirectly affect purchase intention through intermediary role of attitude towards green purchase behaviour. In this case, environmental concern influences purchase intention through its effect on attitude (Chen and Tung, 2014). Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

*H*<sub>2</sub>: *Environmental concern significantly influences the consumer's attitude towards organic food.* 

1.5 Sensory appeal and attitude towards organic food

At first glances, the perception about the quality of food products often framed in the mind of consumers by their physical appearance. It is something that appeals to any with one or altogether five senses such as sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Attributes pertaining to organic food products are physically more appealing. Consumer satisfaction often reflects an individual based on the physical appearance of organic food products (Espejel et al., 2007). Organic food product purchase intention gets influenced often by the sensory appeal of it (Massey et al., 2018). Past studies have concluded that consumers' attitude is strongly influenced by taste, smell, and texture of organic foods (Chen, 2007; Lee and Yun, 2015).

 $H_3$ : Sensory appeal significantly influences the consumers' attitude towards organic food.

1.6 Trust in organic food, willingness to pay price premium, and purchase intention

Consumers can't evaluate the attributes and benefits of organic food products so easily due to credence attributes in it. Consumers do not have confidence in the promise of the trustworthiness of organic food products (Voon, Ngui, and Agrawal, 2011). In the context of organic food products consumers' trust play an important influencing role in buying decisions (Krystallis & Chryssohoidis, 2005). Past studies have found that purchase intention influenced by trust in organic food (Liang, 2016; Teng & Wang, 2015; Tung et al., 2012). Increased trust in organic food may lead to intensifies the readiness to pay extra for the its benefits over conventional food products. Literature supports that if consumer perceived it is worth to spend more money with organic food products, increase the purchase intention. Based on the above discussion helps in framing the following hypotheses:

 $H_4$ : Trust in organic food is significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions.

H<sub>5</sub>: Trust in organic food is significantly influence consumers' willingness to pay price premium.

## 1.7 Willingness to pay Price Premium

It can be stated as an individual's keenness to pay the extra price for acquiring or buying a specific product or service. It is one of such antecedents influencing in organic food consumption.

Organic products are perceived healthier than conventional food products resulted in people seeking healthier-lifestyle willing to pay extra for organic food (Dauncey, 2002). Often young consumers have limited resource of money, and this can act as a barrier in consumption of it (Nasir and Karakaya, 2014). Consumers with great environmental concern were ready to adopt green hotel practices but not willing to pay a premium price for it (Manaktola and Jauhari, 2007). Against that finding of Yadav and Pathak (2017) reveals that consumers have shown readiness for paying the extra price in case of eco-friendly products. The reported contradictory finding of this variable in Indian context necessitates assessing its role in the study context.

*H*<sub>6</sub>: Willingness to pay price premium for organic food significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions.

Based on the above discussion following research model proposed:

 $H_2(+)$ Environmental Concern Attitude  $H_1(+)$ Sensory Purchase  $H_3(+)$ Appeal Intention  $H_4(+)$  $H_6(+)$ Willingness to Trust in Organic Pay Price Research Objectives  $H_5(+)$ Premium

Figure 1: Proposed Research Model

Following are research objectives formulated in order to address the research gap identified in previous section.

- To study the effect of environmental concern and sensory appeal on millennials' attitude towards organic food.
- To evaluate the role of attitude on millennials' purchase intention.
- To examine the effect of trust in organic food on millennials' purchase intention.
- To assess the influencing role of willingness to pay price premium on millennials' purchase intention.

#### 3. Methods

3.1 Data collection, procedure and sample

Online data for the study were collected during the period of December, 2019 – January, 2020. Millennials can be easily accessed on the platform of the internet, especially on social media. Therefore, the link of the survey was posted on social media. In total, 227 Indian millennial consumers responded to the survey. Descriptive Sample analysis of the sample of the study reveals that 45% of respondents were male (n=102), and 55% were female (n=125). In terms of age groups, 85% of respondents were aged between 18 to 24 years (n=192), 13% of respondents were aged between 25 to 31 years (n=30). As per the annual family income, 38% of respondents having annual income between Rs. 2,50,001 - Rs. 5,00, 000 (n=87), 37% of them having Up to Rs. 2,50,000/- (n=83).

#### 3.2 Measures

Attitude toward organic food product was assessed with four-items adopted Taylor & Todd (1995). Environmental concern was adopted from the four-item scale from Kilbourne and Pickett (2008). Three-items adopted from Chen (2007) were used to measure sensory appeal. Trust in organic food was measured by the three-item scale from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). Willingness to pay price premium was assessed by the four-item scale taken from Leong and Ng (2014). Finally, purchase intention was taken from three-items scales of Michalidou & Hassan (2008), and Lin (2007) (refer Table 1). Five-point Likert scale used to collect data on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 5 indicating strongly agree.

#### 3.3 Data Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used to check how well measured variables represent the constructs used in the study. It is a tool that confirms or rejects measurement theory. A multivariate analytical technique known as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used to evaluate structural relationships between constructs in the proposed research model. It is most widely used with the help of the observed variable to examine the relationship between latent variables. The present study uses the SEM to test hypotheses based on the research model being proposed.

#### 3.3.1 Reliability and Validity Measurement

For assessment of reliability, Cronbach coefficient alpha is a widely accepted choice and most reported statistics (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1992). In most literature  $\alpha = 0.7$  or more ensures having reliability (Hair et al., 1998). In addition to this, the Composite Reliability (CR) score was calculated to confirm that constructs used in the present study were reliable. Table 1 clearly shows that all construct's value of Cronbach alpha is greater than 0.7, and the CR score is higher than 0.60 confirms that constructs in the present study were reliable (refer Table 1). To establish composite reliability, CR score for all the constructs should exceed 0.60 (Hair et al., 1998). Furthermore, to establish validity for the study, convergent and discriminant validity were measured. The average variance extracted (AVE) value exceeds 0.50 is widely accepted measures for convergent validity presence in the study (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The square roots of the AVE scores if higher than inter-correlation (IC) confirms the presence of discriminant validity. Table 2 indicates that AVE scores above the threshold and the square roots of the AVE is higher than IC score confirms the presence of both convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 1 – Measurement Item and Reliability

Construct and Source	Items	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Attitude (Taylor & Todd, 1995)	"I like to purchase organic food."  "Purchasing organic food is a good idea."	0.062	0.816	0.690
	"Purchasing organic food is a wise idea."	0.863		
	"Purchasing organic food would be pleasant for me."  "I am very concerned about the environment."			
Environmental Concern (Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008)	"I would be willing to reduce my consumption to help protect the environment."		0.865	0.681
	"Major social changes are necessary to protect the natural environment."	0.892		
	"Anti-pollution laws should be enforced more strongly."			
Sensory Appeal (Chen, 2007)	"Organic foods smell nice."	0.011	0.789	0.652
	"Organic foods have a pleasant texture."  "Organic foods taste good."	0.811		
Trust in Organic	"I trust this organic food."			0.688
Food (Chaudhuri and	"This organic food is reliable."	0.868	0.869	
Holbrook, 2001)	"This organic food is safe."			
Willingness to pay Price Premium (Leong and Ng, 2014)	"I will continue to consume organic products without affect by the price changes."			0.585
	"I am willing to pay a higher price for organic products."	0.849	0.849	
	"I am willing to buy organic food because the benefits outweigh the cost."	0.047	0.047	
	"Buying organic food is the right thing to do even if they cost more."			
Purchase Intention (Michalidou and Hassan, 2008; Lin,	"If organic food was available, I would buy it."			
	"It is likely that I will purchase organic food."	0.844	0.832	0.713
2007)	"I plan to buy organic food."			

Note: CR - Composite reliability, AVE - Average variance explained

The overall measurement model was good to fit as all the indices for measurement model are within the threshold limit  $\chi^2$ =139.603, df=89; P<0.05;  $\chi^2$ /df=1.569; GFI=0.928; TLI=0.969; CFI=0.977; NFI=0.939; RMSEA=0.05; PNFI=0.697; PGFI=0.607 adopted from Hair et al. (2006, 1998) and Hu and Bentler (1995).

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Table 2: Reliability and Validity Measurement

	ATT	EC	SA	T	WPP	PI
ATT	0.831					
EC	0.806*	0.825				
SA	0.621*	0.623*	0.807			
T	0.716*	0.771*	0.694*	0.829		
WPP	0.623*	0.633*	0.570*	0.743*	0.765	
PI	0.663*	0.725*	0.631*	0.737*	0.764*	0.844

Note: ATT- Attitude, EC- Environmental concern, SA- Sensory appeal, T- Trust in organic food, WPP-Willingness to pay price premium, PI- Purchase intention, \*p<0.001

### 3.3.2 Structural Model

The structural model has been validated and adopted as the final stage of the study. Figure 2 represents the path. The result shows that the research model is good to fit. Enlisted indicators of goodness-of-fit statistics measures were above all acceptable criteria  $\chi 2= 242.976$ ;  $\chi 2/df = 1.736$ ; p = 0.000; GFI = 0.901; RMSEA=0.057; CFI =0.962; NFI=0.916; TLI=0.954; PNFI=0.750, and PGFI=0.664 adopted from Hair et al. (2006, 1998) and Hu and Bentler (1995).

Environmental 0.59 Concern  $R^2 = 0.71$ Attitude 0.32 Sensory Purchase 0.27 Appeal Intention 0.20 0.44 Willingness Trust in Organic to Pay Price Food Premium 0.77

Figure 2 : Structural Model

**Table 3: Result of Hypotheses Testing** 

Hypothesis	Relationship	Standardise Estimates (β)	S.E.	t-value	Indirect Effect	Total Effect	p- value	Result
H1	ATT→PI	0.32	0.106	3.717			***	Supported
H2	EC → ATT	0.59	0.094	5.261			***	Supported
Н3	SA → ATT	0.27	0.104	2.550			0.011	Supported
H4	T → PI	0.20	0.123	1.643	0.34	0.54	0.004	Supported
Н5	$T \rightarrow WPP$	0.77	0.069	9.202			***	Supported
Н6	WPP → PI	0.44	0.132	4.159			***	Supported

Note: \*\*\* p < 0.001

# 4. Discussion and theoretical implications

Table 3 shows the results of testing of hypotheses where attitude significantly affects purchase intention  $(\beta=0.32, p=0.000)$ . It can be inferred that if consumers' develop a more positive attitude towards organic food products result in higher the chances of buying. This result is consistent with past studies (Ham et al., 2018; Onel, 2017). Environmental concern ( $\beta$ =0.59, p<0.000) and sensory appeal ( $\beta$ =0.27, p=0.01) affects positively to consumers attitude. It implies that higher the concerned individual has towards environmental issues and high perceived sensory attributes of the organic product may lead to building consumers' attitude positive towards organic food. Said results are consistent with past studies (Basha and Lal, 2019; Kim Nam et al., 2016; Cabuk, 2014) and (Chekima et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2014) respectively. Trust in organic food has a positive impact on purchase intention (β=0.20, p=0.01) and willingness to pay price premium ( $\beta$ =0.77, p<0.000), respectively. This concludes that higher the trust of consumers' on organic food has increased the purchase intention and also higher the willingness to pay the extra price for organic food products. Past literatures have supported this finding (Ashraf et al., 2019; Anisimova, 2016; Konuk, 2017). Also, consumers' willingness to pay price premium has a significant positive impact on organic food purchase intention (β=0.44, p<0.000). This implies that if consumers' have a high willingness to pay the extra price for organic food products leading to high buying intention. The R<sup>2</sup> value in the dimension of purchase intention of organic food in the model is 0.71, consider as having good explanatory power.

Moreover, while assessing the direct and indirect effect of trust and purchase intention, bootstrapping procedures in SEM were used. Total of 500 bootstrap samples was processed with bias-corrected 95% of the confidence interval. It was found that trust has more of an indirect effect on purchase intention ( $\beta$ =0.34, p=0.000) than the direct effect ( $\beta$ =0.20, p=0.01). The total effect of trust on buying intention is statistically significant ( $\beta$ =0.54, p=0.004). This implies that consumers high trust in organic food significantly mediated by a willingness to pay price premium. It can be interpreted that consumers' willingness to pay increases if consumers' have built high trust in organic food in-turn results in the increased likelihood of buying organic food.

# 5. Practical implications

The present study has a few managerial implications. First, to increase purchase intention consumers' attitude needs to be built positively. Marketing communications or promotional campaigns can play an important role in developing a positive attitude towards organic food products. The campaign can build in the attainment of the high level of awareness towards organic food, how these products contribute to good health (e.g. natural content, food safety, nutrition), benefits to consumers and community at large, may help in the fulfilment of this objective. Marketing communication should be focusing on the label as important in perceiving 'organic' in its true sense. Second, millennials are very high in conscious of the environment and sensory attributes of organic food products. Developing short films or advertising targeting how consumption of this organic product can help to protect our eco-systems or environment may lead to positive developments help in framing a positive attitude. Promotions emphasizing direct comparison of physical attributes of organic with conventional food products aid them perceiving benefits of the same. Third, purchase intention also influenced by consumers' willingness to pay price premium, which in turn affected by consumers' trust in organic food. Millennials are a consumers segment face limitations of resources, and hence, it is important to perceive the value in a trade-off of buying organic food. So, consumers' trust in organic can be instilled by educating consumers through advertising about 'organic certification' is the true indicator of genuineness of organic. This increased awareness will make them confident in believing the benefits of organic food over conventional food products may increase the willingness to pay more for it. Hence, effective segmentation strategies can be formulated and targeted to the right segment where millennial as more environment-conscious segments, price-conscious segments, and appealing sensorial segments may help in reshaping its marketing tactics and strategies.

## 6. Limitations and future directions

The present study has certain limitations that may be addressed in future studies. First, the sampling procedure used in this study may limit in generalizing the findings. Future studies may adopt random sampling may improve the generalizing of findings of the study. Second, a study conducted on millennials was carried out for a specific time, so its analysis has limited application in the context of generational analysis. Future studies may be carried out as longitudinal in nature may overcome this problem and also provide better insights on changes over a period of time in characteristics of millennials. Third, the present study is in more general as a class of organic food products which itself very broad. Hence, future studies may cover in the specific category of product such as beverages, fruits and vegetables, species, etc... may help marketers to get insights on the implication of strategies for their businesses. Moreover, findings can be enriched by assessing the role of mediating and moderating variables such as gender, lifestyle, and income of consumers.

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