



Comparison of Motives of Students and Professionals for Consuming Organic Food

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ABSTRACT

This survey-based quantitative study examines Turkish consumers' organic food purchase intentions by comparing student and professional samples. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is utilized and extended by incorporating additional factors, including product knowledge, environmental concern, willingness to pay, food safety concern, and health consciousness. An online survey was conducted to identify the driving forces behind the growing shift toward organic food consumption. Several hypotheses were tested and analyzed using SPSS. Key factors related to organic food purchase intentions were identified, and significant differences between students and professionals were observed. Food safety concerns and perceived behavioral control were positively related to organic food purchase intention among professionals but not among students. This difference between student and professional samples calls for targeted marketing strategies and policy recommendations to support organic food consumption. Another important finding of the study is that environmental concern was a significant driver of the decision to purchase organic food for both students and professionals. This may signal a broader societal shift toward more sustainable lifestyles in Turkey. The results contribute to the existing literature by extending TPB and providing recommendations for producers, marketers, and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable consumption behaviors.

KEYWORDS: Organic Food, Green Consumption, Theory of Planned Behavior

1. Introduction

Growing global focus on environmental issues and food safety incidents has heightened consumer awareness of health, fueling increased interest in organic foods. The organic food industry is rapidly expanding and has become a significant area of academic research (Hsu et al., 2016). Data indicate remarkable growth in the sector, which is projected to continue its swift expansion, reaching \$489.75 billion by 2028 with a 15.1% annual growth rate (Research and Market, 2024). Widespread chemical use has damaged ecosystems and produced nutritionally deficient foods through hazardous practices, contributing to lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, highlighting the importance of food safety awareness (Menrad, 2003). Consumers and farmers are increasingly prioritizing sustainable and organic options, boosting the popularity of organic foods in emerging economies such as China and India, as well as in developed regions like Europe and North America (Paul et al., 2016). Recently, there has been a growing focus on sustainable consumption, emphasizing its vital role in ensuring a sustainable future for upcoming generations. The drive for sustainability is closely connected to broader socio-economic changes, global trends, and shifting consumer preferences. Today, consumers are becoming more conscious of how their decisions impact the environment, prompting a reevaluation of personal and societal consumption habits to support sustainability. This growing environmental consciousness and preference for healthy, sustainable foods are reshaping the food industry. Producers are under increased

pressure to implement eco-friendly practices to satisfy eco-conscious consumers. The move toward organic food consumption mirrors broader values of health, sustainability, and environmental concern. This shift is more than just a trend; it signifies a deep change in consumer behavior, driven by growing awareness of the links between diet, health, and the environment. Van Doorn and Verhoef (2015) emphasize the important role of eco-friendly products, such as organic food, in improving environmental quality, noting that consumers are increasingly favoring sustainable, health-focused choices. Similarly, Lockie et al. (2002) contend that eating natural products is crucial for supporting environmentally sustainable lifestyles. Consumers often choose them for their health perks (Mahrinasari, 2021). Organic farming is also valued for its eco-friendly practices that minimize environmental impact. These include using less energy, improving soil quality, conserving water, and supporting biodiversity (Bostan et al., 2019). Such methods help reduce pollution, protect wildlife, and are essential to sustainable agriculture. They aid in combating climate change and lowering agriculture's ecological footprint, supporting global environmental sustainability efforts (Bostan et al., 2019). Research shows that consumers prefer organic foods for their safety, nutritional benefits, and environmental friendliness (Dangi et al., 2020). The overall rise in the popularity of organic foods is mainly driven by growing environmental awareness and health concerns (Tandon et al., 2021). Personal values and cultural backgrounds further influence food consumption behaviors (Zhou et al., 2013).



Therefore, this comparative study of students and professionals in Turkey aims to reveal how these factors specifically affect organic food purchase intentions among these groups.

2. Materials and Method

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) are core models in social psychology used to predict human actions, especially in areas involving behavioral change like health and consumer choices. TRA suggests that intentions to behave are shaped primarily by attitudes and subjective norms (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Attitudes represent how individuals evaluate a behavior positively or negatively, indicating that a more favorable attitude, such as toward buying organic food, increases the likelihood of engaging in that behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Conversely, subjective norms are the expectations of influential individuals or groups that a specific behavior will be approved and supported. These norms are influenced by people's desire to conform to others' opinions and by their sense of social pressure to adopt specific behaviors (Ajzen, 1991). Building on the TRA, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) introduces Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC), which accounts for factors that facilitate or impede the execution of behavior (Ajzen, 1991). PBC reflects an individual's view of the ease or difficulty of performing a behavior, influenced by previous experiences and expectations, and obstacles. This idea is especially important when individuals lack full control over their actions. Within the TPB framework, the intention to act serves as the most immediate and influential predictor of behavior. It is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (PBC), which can directly affect behavior when choices do not fully determine the outcome. (Ajzen, 1991). Researchers regard the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as a vital framework for understanding consumer behavior regarding organic food products. Previous research has demonstrated the TPB's effectiveness in predicting consumer intentions and behaviors across various industries, especially in food choices and behaviors related to organic products (Arvola et al., 2008). In the context of organic food, the TPB has been successfully employed to forecast purchase intentions and actions, with factors such as environmental concern, health consciousness, and ethical considerations as key influencers (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). The attitude element reflects a person's overall feelings about their actions, shaped by their core beliefs about the expected outcomes or traits of their behavior (Kaur & Kaur, 2023). Earlier research (Zhou et al., 2013) highlights the significant influence of attitudes on green consumption behavior. Thus, we hypothesize:

H1: *Attitude toward organic food is positively related to purchase intention for both students and professionals.*

Subjective norms are defined as the pressure an individual feels to conform to their beliefs about how their actions are perceived by their reference groups, such as family and friends (Ajzen, 1991). It was found that subjective norms significantly influence people's intentions to buy organic food (Sulaiman et al., 2020). Hence, we hypothesize:

H2: *Subjective Norm is positively related to organic food purchase intention for both students and professionals.*

As mentioned earlier, Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) describes how easy or difficult people believe it is to engage in a particular behavior, taking into account various factors that can

either support or impede their actions (Ajzen, 1991). Earlier research has found a direct link between PBC and consumers' intentions to buy organic food (Boobalan & Nachimuthu, 2020). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3: *Perceived Behavioral Control is positively related to organic food purchase intention for both students and professionals.*

Research indicates that social norms and environmental concerns promote moral responsibility and positive perceptions of the environment, which, in turn, promote the purchase of eco-friendly products (Seyfang, 2006). Individuals with greater concern for environmental issues tend to consume more organic food (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). Hence, we hypothesize:

H4: *Environmental Concern is positively related to organic food purchase intention for both students and professionals.*

Food safety concerns drive the growing popularity of organic food, as these products are produced without harmful pesticides and chemicals, thereby reducing the risk of food-related illnesses (Çabuk et al., 2014). Thus, we hypothesize:

H5: *Food Safety Concern is positively related to organic food purchase intention for both students and professionals.*

Organic foods are seen as safer and more beneficial for health management than non-organic options (Huber et al., 2011). Additionally, research suggests that health consciousness influences both food choices and strengthens purchase intentions toward healthier options. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H6: *Health Consciousness is positively related to organic food purchase intention for both students and professionals.*

Philippe and Ngobo (1999) describe product knowledge as the collection of information and rules about product categories stored in consumers' memory. The extent of consumers' subjective understanding of organic food quality influences their attitudes toward and willingness to buy these products. This is supported by research comparing Taiwanese and Indonesian consumers' perceptions (Moslehpour et al., 2014). Thus, we hypothesize:

H7: *Product Knowledge is positively related to organic food purchase intention for both students and professionals.*

The literature consistently shows a positive link between consumers' willingness to pay and their purchase intentions, especially regarding green and organic products (Moser, 2015; Yadav & Pathak, 2017). Hence, we hypothesize:

H8: *Willingness to Pay is positively related to organic food purchase intention for both students and professionals.*

An online English questionnaire was created with Google Forms for data collection. It was shared with participants via emails and messages across various online channels. The study included undergraduate and graduate students, as well as full-time employed professionals. The survey targeted individuals aged 18 or older, with no gender restrictions. Before beginning, participants were asked about their English proficiency to ensure precise and reliable results.

The survey aimed to evaluate factors such as consumers' attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, environmental concerns, food safety issues, health consciousness, product knowledge, willingness to pay, and purchase intentions for organic food. These were measured using well-established scales from existing research, which had been validated in previous studies. Most scales, except for "Willingness to Pay" and "Purchase Intention," were adapted from Gordon C. Bruner's Marketing



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Scales Handbook, a primary resource for creating the questionnaire. Each construct was measured using at least 3 items on a seven-point scale. The survey also included demographic questions. Table 1 below lists the scale items. The survey was pre-tested with ten respondents aged 18 to 64. Their feedback was incorporated into the final design to improve clarity and understanding.

Table 1: Scale Items

Item	Statement	Reference	Source
ATT1	I like organic foods.	Matthes & Wonneberger, 2014, as cited in Bruner, 2017.	Marketing Handbook
ATT2	I feel positive toward organic foods.		
ATT3	Organic foods are good for the environment.		
ATT4	I feel proud when I buy/use organic foods.		
SN1	People important to me think I should use organic food.	Nysveen et al, 2005, as cited in Bruner, 2009.	Marketing Handbook
SN2	It is expected that people like me use organic food.		
SN3	People I look up to expect me to use organic food.		
PBC1	I feel free to use the kind of organic food I like to.	Nysveen et al, 2005, as cited in Bruner, 2009.	Marketing Handbook
PBC2	Using organic food is entirely within my control.		
PBC3	I have necessary means and resources to use organic food.		
EC1	It is important to me that the products I use do not harm the environment.	Haws et al, 2014, as cited in Bruner, 2019.	Marketing Handbook
EC2	I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions.		
EC3	My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment.		
EC4	I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet.		
EC5	I would describe myself as environmentally responsible.		
EC6	I am willing to be inconvenienced in order to take actions that are more environmentally friendly.		
FSC1	I believe that organic food does not contain any additives.	Kareldas et al, 2014, as cited in Bruner, 2017.	Marketing Handbook
FSC2	I believe that organic food does not contain any artificial ingredients.		
FSC3	I believe that organic food does not contain any chemical and hormone residues.		
HC1	I believe that organic food contains more vitamins and minerals than conventional food.	Kareldas et al, 2014, as cited in Bruner, 2017.	Marketing Handbook
HC2	I believe that organic food is more nutritious than conventional food.		
HC3	I believe that organic food is higher in protein than conventional food.		
PK1	Please rate your knowledge of organic food as compared to the average person's knowledge of organic food.	Roehm et al, 2002, as cited in Bruner, 2009.	Marketing Handbook
PK2	Please circle the number that described your familiarity with organic food.		
PK3	In general, I know a lot about organic food.		
PK4	Please rate your level of knowledge about organic food.		
PK5	I feel very knowledgeable about organic food.		
WTP1	I would pay more for organic food.	Laroche et al, 2001	
WTP2	I would to pay 10% more for organic food than for conventional food.		
WTP3	It is acceptable to pay over %10 for organic food than for conventional food.		
PI1	I am willing to buy organic food in the future.	Han et al, 2010	
PI2	I plan to buy organic food in the future.		
PI3	I will make an effort to buy organic food in the future.		



3. Results

The research sample comprised 207 voluntary participants who received no rewards for their participation. Participants were initially asked to rate their English proficiency; those who identified as "Beginner" were excluded. This led to the removal of 13 participants. After further filtering, an additional 39 respondents were eliminated, leaving a final sample of 155 participants—67 students and 88 professionals. The data was examined for both univariate and multivariate outliers. One univariate outlier was found, and the data was reduced to 154—66 students and 88 professionals. No multivariate outliers were found.

Each construct was evaluated separately, and alpha values were checked for both students and professionals. For students, all constructs except Attitude (ATT) demonstrated reliable alpha coefficients above .70. For professionals, all constructs except Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC) exceeded the .70 threshold. As a result of the reliability analysis in SPSS, items ATT4 (students) and PBC1 (professionals) were removed.

The data for both groups failed to meet the assumptions for parametric testing after conducting Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. Therefore, a non-parametric approach was used for further analysis. Spearman's rank correlation was used to test the relationships between constructs.

Attitude toward organic food (ATT) had a significant positive correlation with purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .401, p < .001$), confirming that a favorable attitude is linked to higher purchase intentions among students. Additionally, attitude (ATT) showed a strong positive correlation with purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .669, p < .001$), suggesting that as professionals' positive perceptions of organic food grow, so does their likelihood to purchase. These results strongly support Hypothesis 1.

Subjective norm (SN) showed a positive correlation with purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .478, p < .001$), supporting the hypothesis that perceived social pressure influences organic food buying intent for students. Similarly, among professionals, SN was significantly associated with PI ($\rho = .523, p < .001$), indicating that social influences and perceptions similarly affect their intentions to buy organic food. These results validate Hypothesis 2.

Perceived behavioral control (PBC) was not significantly associated with purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .238, p = .054$), suggesting that the sense of control over buying organic food may not significantly influence students' purchase intentions. Conversely, a significant positive correlation was found among professionals ($\rho = .229, p = .032$), suggesting that their perception of control is associated with their purchase intentions, though this relationship remains weak. Overall, these results indicate that Hypothesis 3 is not supported, as perceived behavioral control correlates positively with organic food purchase intention only among professionals, not students.

Environmental concern (EC) showed a significant positive relationship with purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .419, p < .001$), suggesting that more environmentally aware individuals have a higher intention to buy organic food for students. For professionals, environmental concern (EC) was moderately positively correlated with PI ($\rho = .386, p < .001$), suggesting that those with greater environmental concern also have stronger intentions to buy organic food. These results support Hypothesis 4.

Food safety concern (FSC) showed no significant link to purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .052, p = .680$) among students, indicating that their food safety worries may not influence their decision to buy organic food. Conversely, among professionals, a moderate positive correlation was observed ($\rho = .359, p < .001$), suggesting that safety concerns are associated with a greater likelihood of purchasing organic food. Overall, the results indicate that Hypothesis 5 is not supported, as food safety concern is positively related to organic food purchase intention only among professionals, not students.

Health consciousness (HC) showed a positive and significant correlation with purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .337, p = .006$), indicating that students who are more health-conscious tend to have higher purchase intentions for organic food. Similarly, among professionals, HC also had a strong positive relationship with PI ($\rho = .452, p < .001$), suggesting that more health-conscious professionals are more likely to intend to buy organic food. These results support Hypothesis 6.

Organic food knowledge (PK) showed a strong positive association with purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .488, p < .001$), indicating that students with greater knowledge of organic food are more likely to purchase organic food. For professionals, the correlation is even stronger ($\rho = .605, p < .001$), indicating that greater organic food knowledge is associated with higher purchase intent. These results support Hypothesis 7.

Willingness to pay (WTP) showed a strong correlation with purchase intention (PI) ($\rho = .657, p < .001$), making it the most significant relationship and confirming that a higher willingness to spend is closely tied to the intention to buy organic food for students. For professionals, this correlation was even stronger ($\rho = .709, p < .001$), suggesting that their readiness to pay more for organic products is highly linked to their purchase intentions. Consequently, these results support Hypothesis 8.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk normality tests indicated that data for both students and professionals were non-normal. Thus, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to compare the two independent samples. The Mann-Whitney U test results for the constructs of Attitude (ATT) toward organic food, Subjective Norm, Product Knowledge, Perceived Behavioral Control, Willingness to Pay, Health-consciousness, and Purchase Intention showed no statistically significant difference between students and professionals.

However, a significant statistical difference was observed between students and professionals regarding Environmental Concern and Food Safety Concern. Professionals (mean rank of 84.94) showed greater environmental concern than students (mean rank of 67.58). Similarly, professionals show greater concern for food safety, with mean ranks of 85.23 versus 67.20 for students.

4. Discussion

Analysis of the hypotheses revealed that all factors related to organic food purchase intention were significantly correlated among both students and professionals, except perceived behavioral control and food safety concerns. Thus, we can conclude that following TPB principles confirms the theory's relevance for Turkish consumers' organic food choices. The results also showed that perceived behavioral control and food safety concerns are positively associated with organic food purchase intention among professionals, but not among students. Additionally, the results



show that both students and professionals are affected by the perceived expectations and approval of important people in their social networks. This emphasizes how interpersonal relationships and societal norms shape their consumption choices, aligning with the social aspect of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Although this is quite common, professionals showed a greater concern for the environment, possibly because of more life experience or greater exposure to environmental information through their work lives. Students, while also concerned about the environment, may be influenced more by current educational experiences and social movements. In both samples, environmental concerns seem to strongly influence the choice to buy organic food, potentially indicating a broader societal shift towards sustainability in Turkey. A positive correlation between food safety concerns and purchase intention suggests that professionals are motivated by the perceived health and safety benefits of organic food. This alignment could be linked to their life stage, when health and safety become more prominent due to family duties or personal health consciousness. Conversely, the absence of a strong relationship among students suggests that safety concerns might be less urgent, or that other factors, such as price sensitivity or environmental awareness, might take precedence. The link between health consciousness and the intention to buy organic food among students and professionals emphasizes how health influences consumer decisions. Both groups favor organic food because it aligns with a health-conscious lifestyle and is perceived as a healthier choice. This suggests that health consciousness is a common motivator across diverse consumer segments and underscores the importance of marketing the health benefits of organic foods to both students and professionals. The results show that product knowledge is positively associated with purchase intentions among both students and professionals. Well-informed consumers tend to buy organic food more often, underscoring the role of consumer education in encouraging organic consumption. This shows that both groups value information and that acquiring knowledge aids them in making decisions aligned with their personal beliefs and preferences about organic products. Willingness to pay was strongly related to purchase intentions for organic food in both groups, suggesting that perceived value and quality outweigh cost considerations. This suggests that Turkish consumers, whether students or professionals, are willing to spend more on food choices that reflect their values of health, safety, and environmental sustainability. The stronger correlation among professionals might be due to their greater financial capacity, which reduces the influence of the higher price of organic food.

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5. Conclusions

This study's findings have important implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, it confirms the relevance of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in the realm of organic food consumption, broadening its scope by including factors such as environmental concern, food safety, health-consciousness, product knowledge, and willingness to pay. It indicates that these additional factors are essential for understanding consumer intentions, offering a more detailed framework for predicting organic food purchase intentions across demographic segments.

For managers and marketers, the study underscores the importance of customizing marketing strategies to meet the unique concerns and preferences of different consumer groups. Professionals tend to be more concerned about environmental issues and food safety, so marketing messages should highlight the environmental and health advantages of organic foods to attract this audience. For students, strategies could prioritize affordability and accessibility while also promoting health and environmental benefits. The strong link between product knowledge and purchase intent suggests that educational marketing can be highly effective for both groups. Managers in the organic food industry should consider consumer education initiatives to improve understanding and appreciation of organic food benefits, which could lead to increased interest and sales consumption.

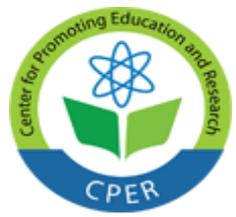
Future research could investigate additional variables such as cultural influences, ethical considerations, gender issues, and the impact of digital media on shaping consumer perceptions and intentions. Previous literature also emphasizes that stages in the family life cycle significantly affect shopping attitudes, which could benefit from a marketing perspective analysis. Moreover, ongoing studies are needed to track evolving trends and marketing strategies in the organic food market. There is also potential to examine how the current economic conditions affect consumers' willingness to pay extra for organic products. Finally, conducting comparative research in other emerging economies could help determine whether the results are specific to Turkey or applicable to similar markets. This would enhance our broader understanding of global consumer attitudes toward organic food and guide international marketing strategies.

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