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Exploring Subjective Knowledge Towards Organic Food Construct: Analyzing Interest of Pakistani Consumers Towards Organic Food

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ABSTRACT

Urban water and air pollutions have made people around the globe more conscious regarding environmental issues. One of the major causes among others is the farm practices of synthetic chemical means to get more crop yields. Organic food is the solution, which is free of synthetic chemicals. People have started to claim organic food at grocery shops due to its health, good taste, and environmental benefits, which consequently boosted the demand of organic food in Pakistan. For this purpose, a descriptive analysis of 250 consumer responses; by using the mall intercept data collection method; was conducted by evaluating the mean values of subjective knowledge items through SPSS. Result outcomes showed that Pakistani consumers possessed subjective knowledge of organic food. This study outcomes would be beneficial for the organic food marketers to know the knowledge base of organic food among consumers and for policy makers who wish set in policy in the country.



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Introduction

Urban water and air pollutions have made people around the globe more conscious regarding environmental issues such as water contamination, surge in greenhouse gases and existence of harmful chemical contents in food (Sandhu, Perumal, & Fauzi 2019). Most of these problems sprout from the unhealthy consumption behavior of the people (Bisoyi & Das 2021). Therefore, changing consumption behavior change can improve the situation (Wasaya et al. 2021). The need of getting more agricultural yields to fill the food needs of population triggered the utilization of synesthetic fertilizers and pesticides

in the name of food security (Olsen & Tuu 2021). Resultantly, required output was secured but the important other side was ignored, the “food safety” (Ali et al. 2019).

Scientifically it is proved vegetables, fruits, meat etc. nurtured through chemic additives contain harmful contents which are unhealthy for human consumption. Specially the leafy vegetables preservers these chemicals (Sandhu et al. 2019). Moreover, farm animal and birds are treated with heavy antibiotics and other chemical-based synthetics getting their growth artificially and to milk cows, buffalos, and goats more (Rashid, Rashid, et al. 2022). The consumption of such food shows negative and harmful effects on human health (Rashid, Shah, et al. 2022). Research shows that consumption of such food caused multiple diseases in human including skin problems, kidney failures, cancer, and liver dysfunction (Wasaya et al. 2021). Scientists claim that organic food is the solution, which is grown free of synthetic chemicals (Dinc-Cavlak & Ozdemir 2022). Moreover, many studies proved that people considered organic food tastier than conventional one (Niemić et al. 2020; Olsen & Tuu 2021; Wasaya et al. 2021). Therefore, organic food is considered as less harmful to the environment and human health (Budhathoki & Pandey 2021).

Globally the market size of organic food is recorded as \$208 Billion in 2022 and it is estimated in 2030 it would touch \$564 Billion showing a growth of 13% in eight years (Organic Food and Beverages Market Report, 2022).

Moreover, people have started to claim organic food at grocery shops due to its health, good taste, and environmental benefits, which consequently boosted the demand of organic food in Pakistan (Sandhu et al. 2019). However, among farmers organic food is considered low in productivity, takes longer harvesting time and more prone to pest attack (Mazhar et al. 2021). Whereas consumer perceive it dearer to its counterparts (Kumar et al. 2022). Nevertheless, a segment among consumer believes it is healthy, tasty, and safe for environment (Hassan Ali et al. 2010). Further, organic farming plays a vital role in biodiversity preservation hence it contributes to environmental quality and at same times it offers people healthy and nutritious food (Ali et al. 2022).

Presently, Pakistan has less research conducted on the consumer perceived knowledge regarding organic food, such as what consumer think about their level of understanding regarding organic food and their apprehension of creating a differentiation between organic and inorganic food (Sandhu et al. 2019). Analyzing consumer perceived knowledge regarding organic food will enable organic food marketers to understand their consumers true apprehension extent related to organic food product, resultantly marketers could target consumers in better way through their focused marketing strategies. Consumers’ subjective knowledge related to organic food concept is related to the people attitude that they possess. Attitude is a person’s negative or positive consistent opinion regarding an object and many past studies in pro-environmental context validate that people with positive attitude regarding environmentally friendly object creates high probability that they would buy that object in near future (Roy & Ballantine 2020).

Perceived subjective knowledge of a product helps an individual to memorize positive or negative experience and exposure regarding an object and create convenience in decision making in favor or otherwise (Pacho, 2020; Hameed et al., 2022). Past studies in organic food context incorporated consumers’ perceived knowledge as a construct to investigate consumers buying intentions and behaviour successfully (Arora et al. 2022; Fatha & Ayoubi 2021; Peštek, Agić, & Cinjarevic 2018). Further, many studies investigated perceived subjective knowledge from developed a few of them from developing countries. Pakistan is a developing country facing great challenges of environmental degradation due to heavy usage of synthetic chemicals in farming (Sandhu et al. 2019). This has not only contaminated ground and river water, but it is also responsible for the spread of pandemic diseases and heavy death toll due to the human consumption of chemical fed farm produces (Mazhar et al., 2021).

There are few studies investigated the determinants of organic food purchase intentions and behavior in Pakistani context. A recent empirical study conducted by Sandhu et al. (2019) examined the influence of environmental beliefs on the purchasing behavior of organic food among consumers in Pakistan. The study revealed a significant relationship between personal norms and the intention to buy organic food. However, there is hardly a study evaluating the level of perceived knowledge among Pakistani consumers regarding organic food products. In order to achieve this objective, the current study provides a descriptive

analysis of the statements related to perceived subjective knowledge. This research offers valuable insights into consumers' perspectives on subjective knowledge, which can be utilized by practitioners to develop and communicate more impactful promotional messages to their target audience.

Literature Review

Consumers' Subjective Knowledge Towards Organic Food

Subjective knowledge reflects an individual's assessment of what and how much he or she knows about the specific product such as organic food (Arora et al. 2021, 2022). It can also influence the level of trust towards a new product. Lack of knowledge results in a low level of consumers' trust in the product information they receive (Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen 2017). Also, knowledge is a characteristic that can affect all the phases of the decision-making process (Roh, Seok, & Kim 2022). Sufficient knowledge can have a favourable impact on food choice by the consumers (Thi Nguyen & Dang 2022). Organic food is a comparatively new concept; therefore, consumers need more information about the products to improve their knowledge (De Canio and Martinelli 2021). The higher the knowledge of organic foods among the consumers, the more likely that they prefer to buy organic food products (Sandhu et al. 2019).

Data, Variables and Methodology

In this study, a descriptive analysis is conducted on the item means that measure the personal norms construct. To gather data, a questionnaire in the English language was administered to Pakistani consumers aged 18 and above who were visiting Centaurus Tower shopping mall in the capital city of Islamabad, Pakistan. A total of 300 questionnaires were randomly distributed, out of which 220 participants responded. After eliminating 20 questionnaires with missing values, a total of 200 responses were recorded in the SPSS worksheet. Subsequently, the mean values for each item of the personal norms construct were calculated using the descriptive function in SPSS.

Research Instrument

The study measures the consumers' perceived knowledge through five item scale adapted from Flynn and Goldsmith (1999). Subjective knowledge reflects an individual's assessment of what and how much he or she knows about the concept (Peštek et al., 2018). Hence, for this study, it is an individual's perception of his or her knowledge of organic food (Hidalgo-Baz, Martos-Partal, & González-Benito, 2017). The items that represent the construct were assessed using a 5-point scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree' (coded as 1) to 'strongly agree' (coded as 5). The six items pertaining to personal norms were coded as CSK1 to CSK5, respectively.

Data Analysis and Results

To analyse descriptive of consumers' perceived subjective knowledge items explaining level of knowledge about organic food perceived by Pakistani consumer against each item. The mean of each item for 250 responses was calculated through SPSS.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for construct items of Consumers' Perceived Subjective Knowledge towards Organic Food

No.	Consumers' Subjective Knowledge Towards Organic Food	N	Means
1	"I do feel very knowledgeable about organic food"	250	4.25
2	"Among my circle of friends, I'm one of the experts on organic food subject"	250	3.90

3	“I know a lot about organic food”	250	3.70
4	“I have the information of organic food that is around”	250	4.40
5	“When it comes to organic food, I know sufficiently”	250	4.08

Results

The aim of this study is to analyze the descriptive information derived from the responses of Pakistani consumers regarding their perceived subjective knowledge related to the purchase of organic food. This descriptive analysis is exploring trends among Pakistani consumers prioritising factors showing their perceived knowledge level about the subject. For this purpose, consumers' perceived subjective knowledge items mean was calculated through SPSS shown in table 1. According to table 1, CSK4, CSK1, CSK5 and CSK2 showed higher mean values as 4.40, 4.25, 4.01 and 3.70 respectively. Whereas CSK3 3.70 showed lesser mean values as compared to other items in table 1.

Upon conducting this evaluation, it was discovered that the mean value of all the items measuring consumers' perceived subjective knowledge surpassed the average value of the proposed Likert scale, which was 2.5. This finding was based on the responses collected using a 5-point Likert scale. Secondly, the mean value of CSK4 (4.40), remained heights among the others. Which shows Pakistani consumers think that they have sufficient knowledge of the availability of organic food around them and they have interest in naturally produced products. This result depicts that organic food has not limited to few people and now majority of the people know about its availability and potential health and environmental benefit related to it. Moreover, mean values of CSK1 and CSK5 measured 4.25 and 4.08 respectively showing Pakistani consumers feel that they get sufficient knowledge about the benefits related to organic food consumption and they opined that they hold the knowledge the difference between organic food and its conventional counterparts.

In both of statements the response mean values are above average of mean value of the construct i.e., 2.5. The reason of such response might be due that the organic food is not new to this part of the world and before the application of industrial chemicals in the agricultural farming farmers used to apply organic methods for cultivations. However, for organic food marketers this is an alarming situation because a sense of having sufficient knowledge can restrain a person to have further knowledge. This can be case that driven in the sense of sufficient knowledge consumer may avoid new messages and campaigns from organic food marketers. Therefore, it is needed that marketers should develop new campaigns providing information to consumers regarding new development in organic food, availability venues.

and related benefits in environmental and health context. Finally, according to table.1 CSK5 scored least i.e., 3.70 followed by CSK5 3.90. This result shows that respondents still not confident knowing all about organic food however, according to CSK5 they acquire more knowledge as compared to their circle of friend. This is due to the conception of self-assumed knowledge regarding organic food among the consumers. This study suggests that a confusion exists among consumer regarding perceived organic food knowledge consumers. The best statement supporting this argument is that people know about the health and environmental related benefits of organic food, and they wish to buy it even at higher prices but in the market, they choose inorganic one. Hence, there is still a gap between claim and action of the people when it comes to decide buying organic food.

Conclusions and Discussion

In the light of stated results and discussion portion of this study, it has been observed that Pakistani consumers do feel they possess the related knowledge about organic food benefits and difference between

organic food and inorganic food. The objective of this was study to identify items mean values of consumers perceived subjective knowledge regarding organic food construct to reveal response of consumers against items. The study concludes that Pakistani consumer perceive that they possess sufficient knowledge about the organic food benefits, availability and the difference that offers against inorganic one. It is observed that Pakistani consumer have restrained themselves in a perception that they hold all necessary information regarding organic food and yet it is also a reality that organic food sales are not even nearer to its counterpart the conventional food. This situation shows a gap between people claim and action. On one hand they prefer organic food on inorganic, they know about its health and environment related benefits, its better taste yet they do not choose them to buy in markets.

This study recommends that organic food marketer should initiate information campaigns focusing not only on so called niche (The elite class) those prefer organic food but also to the middle class as well (the majority). The central point of information should not only the health and environmental benefits of organic food and its difference with conventional food but a new edge must be introduced and that is physical fitness and consumption to avoid medical anomalies. This would open a new sight for consumer to get perceived. This idea will also be important to get consumers' selective attention and avoiding selective distortion which seem the consumer plagued with.

This research carries substantial implications for both research and practice, particularly considering the significance of purchasing organic food in Pakistan. From a practical marketing standpoint, the findings of this study hold essential value in fostering increased market demand. Therefore, it is recommended that marketers and promoters of organic food in Pakistan focus on incorporating promotional cues related to organic food products when crafting messages aimed at promoting their purchase and consumption. Specifically, they can target consumers' awareness of environmental degradation and help them understand the importance of choosing organic food as the right choice. By doing so, they can effectively encourage consumers to embrace organic food and contribute to its market growth. Emotional appeal in marketing campaign of organic food will be very effective if it is directly associated with the health and life of consumers. Finally, present research recommends future social scientists, who interested in studying organic food buying behavior, to conduct a

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