

Looking at Personal Norms Construct: Analysing Moral Inclination Towards Buying Organic Food Among Pakistani Consumers

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ABSTRACT

People around the globe are conscious of environmental issues the world is facing in terms of urban air pollution. Organic food buying is understood as just behaviour due to being less harmful to the environment. Consumer awareness regarding organic food benefits for the environment and health has boosted organic food demand in Pakistan. However, in the descriptive viewpoint and to what extent consumers' vantage points represent their moral motivation instigating consumers to buy organic food in the Pakistani context is yet to be evaluated. For this purpose, a descriptive analysis of 200 consumer responses; by using the mall intercept data collection method; was made by evaluating the mean values of personal norms items through SPSS. The results found that Pakistani consumers did assume moral feelings towards buying organic food. Specifically, consumers' emotional feelings towards environmental degradation realised that buying organic food was the right thing to do. Further, being a better person and contributing significantly to environmental safety raised their moral feelings about buying organic food. The study results are essential for organic food marketers in the country. Further, it also offers new avenues for future research in the organic food context.

Keywords: - Personal norms, organic food, descriptive analysis, Organic food in Pakistan

1. INTRODUCTION

People around the globe are conscious of environmental issues that the world is facing in terms of urban air pollution, global warming and shortage of healthy drinking water [28]. These problems take root partially in human behaviour [12] [34]. Hence, it can be managed by changing related behaviours to improve environmental quality [17] [20]. In most cases, pro-environmental behaviour, in comparison to environmentally harmful action, is less pleasurable, less profitable, and takes more time, although mostly it is considered appropriate and the right thing to do [11]. For instance, organic food is mostly dearer than conventional food, yet, organic food buying is typically understood as appropriate and just behaviour because this type of food is less harmful to the environment [18]. Such conviction development is visible to a significant extent in organic food buying in recent times [17]. Organic farming practices and procedures not only contribute to biodiversity maintenance and conservation but also improves the quality of the environment [16] [7] [10]. Further, organic food offers consumers health benefits, including high-level nutrients and healthy food free of pesticide contamination [9].

Past research shows that on the question of conduct is appropriate or inappropriate, moral norms led the people to decide on that merit and made them especially conscious of what they thought they ought to do in a specific condition, like buying organic food products to offer a contribution towards clean environment [15]. Moral norms and their relationship with pro-social and pro-environmental behaviour are explained by Norm Action Theory (NAM) [26], where NAM endorses that personal norms represent a person's intrinsic moral motivation that triggers self-less and pro-social intentions and behaviour [32]. Previously personal norms have been incorporated in many studies to examine the moral intensity of consumers in environmentally responsible decision making [13] [29] [35], such as personal norms significantly affect a consumer's organic food consumption [4]. Many studies in the past

from developed countries [14] [31] and a few of them from developing nations [25] [27] have tested personal norms to evaluate the moral intensity of consumers towards organic food.

Pakistan is a developing nation facing severe environmental and health problems due to conventional chemically intensive agricultural practices, i.e. usage of pesticides and synthetic urea [5]. In this backdrop, the awareness regarding organic food benefits and its positive effects on the environment and health has boosted organic food demand [23]. Recently, a study by Sandhu, Selvan and Fauzi (2019) has empirically tested the strength of personal norms towards buying organic food and its impact on organic food purchase intentions among Pakistani consumers [25]. This study found that personal norms predict purchase intention toward organic food significantly. However, from a descriptive viewpoint, what consideration sprout morality (personal norms) among Pakistani consumers the most and represents their conviction to buy organic food; is yet to be evaluated. For this purpose, the present study reveals a descriptive analysis of the personal norm statement items. This paper enables us to understand and relook on consumers' moral viewpoints that practitioners could use to frame and articulate more effective promotional messages to the target audience.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Norm Activation Model

The NAM has been tested and included in several studies of pro-environmental behaviour to construct proposed conceptual frameworks. [29]. Personal norms, which were previously activated by an individual's contextual beliefs, affect a person's behavioural purpose. These ideas and personal moral norms are likely to favour environmental safety and preservation in the case of pro-environmental objectives. From the NAM perspective, behavioural intentions are based on the extent to which consumers are intrinsically and morally motivated to support an act that is pro-social and altruistic. Moreover, these intrinsic personal sentiments are instigated by the beliefs of being aware of adverse consequences (AC) of a particular behaviour socially, and he or she aspires to responsibility (AR) to avert those negative consequences. A study by Lee and Nguyen [19] explained that according to NAM, people engage in pro-environmental activities when their moral commitments to act pro-socially and environmentally are reflected in their standards. Since its beginnings, NAM has been successfully used in various consumer behaviour studies.[19].

2.2 Organic Food in Pakistan

Organic producers sell their products at specified superstores, specialised outlets and farmer's markets in urban areas of Pakistan [3]. There are several organic food suppliers, growers and sellers operating in various cities of Pakistan like Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta and Islamabad [24]. Superstores and specialised outlets make various kinds of organic food products available to consumers, including wheat, rice, pulses, organic milk, eggs, chicken, meat, honey, fruits and vegetables [3]. Hence, people in Pakistan are grappling with what is safe to eat and what is not, what is clean and what is not, what food processing is cruel to animals and what is more sustainable [9] [23]. Furthermore, in the case of buying organic food, affordability and availability are considered significant obstacles [5]. Organic items are approximately twice as expensive as regular foods.[21]. In the presence of all apprehensions regarding the environment and health, consumers in Pakistan are not showing a preference for organic food products. Therefore, the government, particularly Pakistan's food industry, needs to understand better their consumers' organic food purchase intentions [5] [23].

2.3 Personal Norms

Personal norms are an individual's conception of moral correctness or incorrectness of specific behaviour, and adherence to them inspires sentiments of pride, whilst disobedience inspires feelings of guilt and shame.[22]. These intrinsic values evaluate a particular action as right or wrong [6]. Past literature conceptualised personal norms as ethical beliefs, personal moral norms, and moral obligation [29] [30]. Personal norms are realised through intentions and behaviour when people are aware of adverse consequences of their conduct and assume responsibility for altering the situation. Moreover, personal norms are known to affect an individual's intention and actual behaviour [1] [26] [33]. Some researchers have found it to be the most significant factor that affects purchase intentions [18] [11] [26] [33].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study offers a descriptive analysis of item means measuring personal norms construct. For this purpose, a questionnaire in English was presented to Pakistani consumers year 18 and above when they were visiting Centaurus Tower shopping mall in the capital city of Pakistan, Islamabad. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed

randomly, out of which 220 responded. Further, after removing 20 questionnaires showing missing values, 200 responses were tabulated in the SPSS worksheet. Next, the means value of each item was calculated for six items of personal norms.

3.1 Research Instruments

The study measures the consumers' personal norms through a six-item scale adapted from [1]. Personal moral norms refer to consumers' sense of realising intrinsic obligation to buy organic food products. The items operationalising the construct were measured using a 5-point scale. The scale was anchored at 1 for 'strongly disagree' and 5 for 'strongly agree'. Personal norm six items are coded as PN1 to PN6, respectively.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In order to analyse descriptive data on personal norms, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was chosen to explain the moral intensity expressed by Pakistani consumers. Specifically, the mean of each item for 200 responses was compared using SPSS.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for construct items of personal norm

Personal Norms	N	Mean
PN1. I feel an obligation to purchase organic food rather than non-organic food	200	3.91
PN2. Consuming organic food rather than non-organic food makes me feel like a better person.	200	3.88
PN3. If I consume organic food rather than non-organic food, I feel as if I am making an individual contribution to something better.	200	3.85
PN4. I feel morally obliged to purchase environmentally friendly organic food products, regardless of what other people do	200	3.89
PN5. I feel guilty when I purchase environmentally harmful products	200	2.98
PN6. I would consider myself a better person if I purchase environmentally friendly organic food products	200	4.02
Valid N (listwise)	200	

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyse the descriptive information that emerged through the response of Pakistani consumers in the effort to measure their moral inclination towards buying organic food. This descriptive analysis explores trends among Pakistani consumers to prioritise factors that trigger their moral motivation. For this purpose, the personal norms items mean was calculated through SPSS shown in table 1. According to table 1, PN6, PN1, PN2, PN3, PN4, showed higher mean values as 4.02, 3.91, 3.85, 3.88 and 3.89, respectively. Whereas PN5 2.98 showed lesser mean values than other items in table 1.

After this evaluation, it is found that the mean value of all items measuring consumer's moral intensity (personal norms) was above the average of the proposed Likert scale mean value, i.e. 2.5, as the responses were collected against 5 points Likert scale.

Secondly, the mean value of PN6 (4.02) remained heights among the others, which shows consumer consideration towards the feeling of being a better person buying organic food. It depicts that perceptually consumer's sense of self

appropriateness is connected with his or her action of buying organic food. This sense of realisation instigates consumers' moral inclination toward organic food. Thirdly, according to table1 PN1, PN2, PN3 and PN4 mean values were measured as 3.91, 3.88, 3.85 and 3.89. However, these values are somewhat close, showing their approximately equal importance for stimulating moral urges within consumers. Fourthly, these values are well above the value of 2.5, the calculated mean of the Likert scale 1 to 5.

The overall scenario that emerged from the above discussion represents that the feeling of morality among Pakistani consumers towards buying organic food is a subject of realisation of obligation towards buying organic food and avoiding conventional one. Further, the results show that the consciousness of being morally aloft and contributing something better to the environment let the consumer realise moral sentiments towards organic food. Moreover, Pakistani consumers do assume the conviction to buy organic food indifferent to what other people do, because buying organic food, according to them, is the right thing to do.

On the other hand, PN5 (2.98) scored lowest among the construct personal norms items, barely above the range of the average mean value (2.5), which means the conviction of being guilty in case of not buying organic food had not much effect on moral motivation among Pakistani consumers.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aims to identify items' mean values of personal norms construct to reveal which items are the most influential representing intrinsic moral obligation toward buying organic food among Pakistani consumers and what preferential viewpoint of those represents arousal of morality among them. In the light of the stated results and discussion portion of this study, it has been observed that Pakistani consumers did feel a moral obligation toward buying organic food. Among the significant reasons for their assumption of moral feelings, firstly, they considered buying organic food the right thing to do, and this perception made them realise that those would be a better person to do so. Secondly, Pakistani consumers consider buying organic food as a moral obligation, and this moral assumption drove them to buy organic food. Thirdly, the sentiments of doing something better for the environment and that for other people triggered moral motivation among consumers to buy organic food. Fourthly, following the right path, buying organic food made the consumers indifferent to what other people did in society; this ideology raised their moral feeling toward buying organic food.

Finally, Pakistani consumers did not borrow this idea enough that buying non-organic food stimulates guilt. This response may be that organic food products are still new in Pakistan. Moreover, buying organic food creates a sense of pride and satisfaction among consumers due to the perception that they are doing something better for society and the environment. However, Pakistani consumers do not equate buying conventional food with socially undesirable conduct. Hence, Pakistani consumers do not feel the guilt of doing so. Therefore, not many Pakistani endorsed the idea that buying in-organic food creates guilt sentiments, making them feel a moral obligation to buy organic food. This research has implications for research and practice. As buying organic food is an essential issue in Pakistan. The study's outcomes are essential to promote better market demand in a practical marketing application. Therefore, it is recommended to marketers and promoters of organic food in Pakistan that while articulating promotional messages for consumers to promote organic food buying and consumption, they should focus more on promotional cues triggering individual moral sentiments. Specifically, they can target consumers' emotional feelings towards environmental degradation and make them realise that buying organic food is the right thing to do.

Consequently, by purchasing organic food, consumers will feel that they are making a significant contribution toward environmental safety, making them realise themselves as better people. Further, the results found that the messages focused on making consumers feel guilty when purchasing conventional food may not raise their moral assumptions about buying organic food. Hence, it is recommended that marketers should focus more on pleasure, not on guilt, to let the consumer assume moral feelings towards buying organic food in the Pakistani context.

Finally, this paper recommends that future social scientists interested in studying organic food buying behaviour conduct a correlation and inferential analysis in different settings and organic contexts.

6. REFERENCES

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