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From Concern to Consumption: What Fuels the Organic Food Purchase Intention among Millennials?

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ABSTRACT

The rise of green consumerism has fueled the growing popularity of organic food, prompting increased interest in understanding the factors that drive consumer purchase intention. This study examines the influences of health concern, environmental concern, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and consumer trust on the purchase intention of organic food among millennials in Kuala Lumpur. A total of 212 valid respondents participated in a structured survey, and the data were analyzed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The results revealed that health concerns and consumer trust had significant positive relationships with purchase intention, highlighting these as key motivators for organic food consumption. Conversely, environmental concern, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control were not significant predictors. These findings suggest that personal health and product credibility outweigh environmental and social factors in shaping organic food choices within this demographic. The study offers valuable implications for marketers and policymakers, emphasising the need for targeted, health-oriented communication strategies and the importance of fostering consumer trust through transparent labelling, credible certification, and clear information dissemination.

1. Introduction

The remarkable growth in organic food production represents a significant response to increasing consumer concerns regarding environmental sustainability, food safety, personal health and well-being. Organic farming is distinguished by its intentional avoidance of synthetic pesticides, chemical fertilisers, and genetically modified organisms (GMOs), aligning with the values of health-conscious and environmentally aware consumers [1]. Indeed, organic agriculture places a strong

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emphasis on maintaining ecological balance and preserving biodiversity within natural ecosystems [12,29]. Such alignment with consumer values has driven substantial industry growth, with the global organic food market reaching an estimated value of nearly \$150 billion in 2023 and projected to expand considerably over the next decade [35]. Such growth underscores the rising demand for environmentally friendly and health-conscious food choices worldwide.

The growing trend of sustainable consumerism is especially prominent among younger generations, particularly millennials, who tend to prioritise environmental sustainability and personal health in their purchasing decisions. Millennials currently make up a substantial proportion of the global consumer market, holding significant spending power, and are expected to increasingly dominate consumption patterns as they fully enter adulthood and reach their peak earning years, as supported by Zanzaizman *et al.*, [34]. Urban millennials, in particular, are a key driving force behind this trend, with their purchasing behaviours shaped by heightened ecological awareness and a strong preference for healthier lifestyles [14,15]. Therefore, understanding the key factors influencing organic food purchase intentions within this demographic is crucial for both academic research and the development of effective marketing strategies. This is particularly important in the Malaysian context, where the niche organic food market is showing positive growth and expansion [1]. As has been reported, the domestic organic market in Malaysia has expanded remarkably, growing twelvefold from RM1 billion in 2001 to RM12 billion in 2016, with approximately 66% of consumers regularly choosing organic products [31].

However, despite this notable expansion and growth in the organic food sector, the consumption of organic food remains constrained and limited by a multitude of factors that pose challenges to its wider adoption [2]. The existing literature presents a complex and sometimes inconsistent picture regarding the various factors that influence consumers' purchase intentions. In particular, the role of subjective norms, which often vary depending on geographic and cultural contexts, requires further investigation. In collectivist societies such as Malaysia, where social influence and group norms tend to shape individual decision-making, subjective norms may play a more prominent role in shaping organic food purchasing behaviour than in more individualistic cultures, as supported by previous scholars [3,16]. Indeed, considering that millennials are generally more exposed to and influenced by peer opinions, social media, and digital communities, the impact of subjective norms on their purchasing intentions may be even more pronounced, which is worth investigating within collectivistic countries like Malaysia [34].

Moreover, given the study's focus on millennial consumers, perceived behavioural control is a particularly relevant construct that warrants further examination [3,8]. For millennials, who are often tech-savvy, time-constrained, and exposed to a wide array of consumer choices, their sense of control over purchasing organic food may significantly influence their buying decisions [16]. Millennial generation is typically characterised by high levels of health and environmental consciousness, practical barriers such as higher costs, limited availability and uncertainty about the legitimacy of organic food can diminish their perceived control, thereby weakening their intention to purchase [34]. Therefore, exploring the specific influence of perceived behavioural control within the millennial segment, particularly in emerging markets like Malaysia, could offer valuable insights which warrant further investigation.

Furthermore, a growing body of literature highlights significant associations between environmental concerns, health consciousness, and consumers' purchase intentions, particularly within the organic food context [3,8]. Indeed, as stated by Abdul-Latip *et al.*, [3], consumers who are more environmentally aware tend to exhibit greater sensitivity toward sustainable consumption practices, including a preference for products perceived as eco-friendly, such as organic food and tend to be more receptive toward green communication. Simultaneously, health considerations

have emerged as a dominant driver of organic food consumption, especially in light of increased public awareness following the COVID-19 pandemic [19].

The global health crisis not only heightened consumer concerns regarding food safety and immune resilience but also amplified interest in healthier dietary choices and natural products perceived to enhance well-being [22]. However, while these factors have been frequently cited, their relative importance may vary across different cultural, socioeconomic, and generational segments. In particular, millennials, who are often at the forefront of health and sustainability trends, may demonstrate stronger responses to health cues and environmental messaging due to their exposure to digital media, peer influence, and global discourses on climate change and wellness lifestyles [14], which warrant further investigation.

Additionally, consumer scepticism regarding the credibility of organic certification and labelling remains a persistent issue, particularly in the Southeast Asian context, where concerns over food adulteration are prevalent [24,30]. Thus, trust plays a crucial role in the purchasing behaviours of millennial consumers regarding organic food. Millennials are increasingly sceptical about the authenticity of organic labelling and certification, which can significantly influence their purchase intentions [23]. Trust in food labels is a determining factor for consumers when selecting organic products, as any perceived deception can lead to reluctance to buy [33].

Likewise, the rise of misinformation regarding food production practices has exacerbated this issue, making it essential for brands to establish transparency and credibility in their marketing strategies [10]. Young consumers are more likely to trust and remain loyal to firms that exhibit a dedication to moral behaviour and offer substantiated details about their sourcing and production procedures [28]. Given that trust plays a central role in reducing perceived risk and enhancing confidence in organic food claims, examining the influence of trust on millennials' organic food purchase intentions is both timely and critical. Understanding this relationship is especially important in developing markets, where regulatory mechanisms may be less robust and consumer concerns over authenticity are more pronounced.

Therefore, given the growing prominence of millennials as a key driver of sustainable consumerism, this study critically investigates the factors influencing their purchase intention toward organic food in Greater Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Anchored in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) [4], the research explores how health consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and consumer trust collectively shape millennials' intentions to purchase organic food. As a digitally connected and socially influenced cohort, millennials often demonstrate value-driven consumption behaviours, making them a vital segment for understanding sustainable market trends. Their unique behavioural patterns, particularly within the context of Malaysia's emerging organic food market, necessitate focused academic inquiry. The findings of this study aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and offer practical insights for organic food producers and marketers to design more effective, targeted strategies for engaging this influential demographic. This study is guided by the following research hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Health concern positively influences purchase intention

Hypothesis 2: Environmental concern positively influences purchase intention

Hypothesis 3: Subjective norms positively influence purchase intention

Hypothesis 4: Perceived behavioural control positively influences purchase intention

Hypothesis 5: Consumer trust positively influences purchase intention

2. Methodology

This study focused on Malaysian millennials, defined as individuals aged between 23 and 38 years as of 2024. This cohort was selected due to their increasing financial independence, heightened environmental and health consciousness, and growing influence as a consumer segment likely to adopt sustainable consumption practices such as purchasing organic food. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023), approximately 2 million millennials reside in the country, reinforcing the relevance and impact of targeting this demographic.

A multistage sampling technique was employed to select participants for this study. In the first stage, a geographical area within Greater Kuala Lumpur was randomly selected, resulting in the identification of Kepong as the primary study site. Kepong was chosen due to its diverse demographic and socioeconomic composition, which is essential for examining consumer intentions toward organic food. The area comprises a variety of residential types, including public housing, landed residential properties, and condominiums, reflecting a wide range of age groups, educational backgrounds, and income levels. Such heterogeneity is crucial, as socioeconomic status has been shown to significantly influence organic food purchasing behaviour [17,18]. Additionally, the population includes individuals from various occupational backgrounds, ranging from salaried professionals with stable incomes to self-employed individuals with fluctuating earnings. This diversity facilitates a comprehensive analysis of how income and lifestyle characteristics affect consumer decisions regarding organic food.

In the second stage of sampling, three organic food retail outlets were randomly selected within Kepong: BMS Organic, Rising Sun Health Food, and My One Organic. These outlets were chosen to ensure exposure to a realistic and varied customer base while maintaining logistical feasibility for field data collection.

Data were collected through a structured survey administered between August 13 and September 13, 2024. A total of 212 valid responses were obtained, meeting the minimum sample size requirement as outlined by Green (1991) for regression analyses in behavioural research. Data collection was facilitated through a self-administered, paper-based questionnaire distributed in person at the selected retail outlets.

The questionnaire consisted of seven sections. The first section captured respondents' demographic information, while the next five measured the independent variables: health concerns, environmental concerns, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and consumer trust. The final section assessed the dependent variable: purchase intention of organic food. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Through the use of Cronbach's Alpha, the questionnaire's reliability was confirmed throughout the pilot study. Values that are greater than 0.7 were considered satisfactory and this indicates internal consistency in the measurement of scales. To improve the final instrument's reliability, any parts that fell short of this standard were changed or removed as needed.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. To capture the demographic traits and central tendencies of the primary variables, descriptive statistics were employed. Pearson correlation analysis was performed to investigate the strength and directionality of relationships between independent and dependent variables, with statistical significance established at $p < 0.05$.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 212 completed questionnaires were collected for the empirical study. As shown in Table 1, a significant proportion of participants were female (77.4%, $n = 164$), while male respondents comprised 22.6% ($n = 48$). According to age demographics, the majority of respondents (59.9%) were between the ages of 33 and 38, followed by those between the ages of 28 and 32 (26.9%), and those between the ages of 23 and 27 (13.2%). Regarding geographic distribution, Kepong accounted for 46.2% of the respondents, followed by Bandar Menjalara (33.1%) and Setapak (20.8%). For educational attainment, 41.5% of participants held a college or university degree, and 58.5% had finished secondary school. According to the monthly income study, 76.9% of respondents earned between RM5,001 and RM10,000, 14.6% earned between RM10,001 and RM15,000, and 8.5% earned less than RM5,000. All participants (100%) reported purchasing organic food items. The most common purchase frequency was once every two weeks (36.8%) and once a month (36.8%), followed by weekly purchases (16.0%) and once every six months (10.4%), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic profile of respondents

Factor	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	164	77.4
	Male	48	22.6
Age	23–27	28	13.2
	28–32	57	26.9
	33–38	127	59.9
Residential Area	Kepong	98	46.2
	Bandar Menjalara	70	33.0
	Setapak	44	20.8
Education Level	Secondary School	124	58.5
	College/University	88	41.5
Monthly Income	Below RM5000	18	8.5
	RM5001–RM10000	163	76.9
	RM10001–RM15000	31	14.6
Purchase Organic Food	Yes	212	100.0
Purchase Frequency	Every week	34	16.0
	Every two weeks	78	36.8
	Once a month	78	36.8
	Once every 6 months	22	10.4

3.2 Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all variables ranged from 0.754 to 0.912, demonstrating acceptable to excellent internal consistency and reinforcing the reliability of the measurement scales employed in this study. Descriptive statistics indicate that perceived behavioural control recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.591$, $SD = 0.371$), reflecting respondents' strong self-efficacy and perceived ease regarding organic food purchasing. This suggests that, despite potential barriers such as cost or availability, millennials feel empowered to make organic purchases. Consumer purchase intention ($M = 4.578$, $SD = 0.348$) and health concerns

(M = 4.547, SD = 0.382) followed closely, underscoring the significant role these factors play in motivating organic food consumption.

Table 2
Reliability and descriptive analysis of variables

Variable / Items	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Cronbach's Alpha
Health Concern	4.547	0.382	0.754
1. Organic food contains more vitamins.			
2. Organic food contains more minerals.			
3. Growing food organically and naturally is better for humans' health.			
4. Organic food is better than conventional food because it is produced without chemical pesticides.			
5. I choose organic food because it ensures our health.			
Environmental Concern	4.488	0.385	0.768
1. I am greatly concerned about the negative effect of environmental pollution.			
2. The government's effort to control environmental pollution is still insufficient.			
3. Organic food uses less energy.			
4. The prohibition of chemical pesticides in organic food production is good for the environment.			
5. The ban on chemical fertilisers in organic food production is a way to produce more environmentally friendly food.			
Subjective Norm	4.234	0.540	0.796
1. My family eats organic food.			
2. My friend eats organic food.			
3. People who are important to me think I should eat organic food.			
4. People who are important to me think that eating organic food contributes to good health.			
5. I intend to eat organic food because society accepts that it is a good choice.			
Perceived Behavioural Control	4.591	0.371	0.882
1. I am sure I can consume more organic food when I want to.			
2. I believe I can afford to buy organic food.			
3. I have time to look for organic food when I want it.			
4. Despite being expensive, I prefer to consume organic food.			
5. For me, consuming organic food would be possible.			
Consumer Trust in Organic Food	4.537	0.354	0.848
1. I trust my purchases of organic food products.			
2. I trust the description on the label of organic food products.			
3. I trust Malaysia's organic food products in the market.			
4. I trust imported organic food products in Malaysia.			
5. I trust the organic food sold by sellers in Malaysia is genuine.			
Consumer Purchase Intention	4.578	0.348	0.912
1. I prefer organic food over conventional food.			
2. I intend to buy organic food products even if they are more expensive than conventional foods.			
3. I intend to purchase organic food products because it is more concerned with food safety.			
4. I intend to purchase organic food because it is more environmentally friendly.			
5. I intend to consume organic food in the near future.			

Conversely, subjective norm exhibited the lowest mean score (M = 4.234, SD = 0.540), indicating that social pressure or influence from peers and family may exert a less consistent effect on purchase intention within this demographic. The relatively higher standard deviation for subjective norm further suggests considerable heterogeneity in social influence perceptions, highlighting that

peer and societal factors may be more context-dependent or culturally nuanced for Malaysian millennials.

3.3 Pearson Correlation Analysis

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to look into the relationship between the independent variables and customer purchase intention, as shown in Table 3. Health concern ($r = 0.213$, $p = .002$) and customer trust in organic food ($r = 0.180$, $p = .009$) were two factors that showed statistically significant positive relationships. According to these findings, those who are more conscious of health concerns and who have greater belief in organic products are more likely to say that they intend to buy them. On the other hand, there were no statistically significant associations between purchase intention and environmental concern ($r = 0.078$, $p = .259$), subjective norm ($r = 0.057$, $p = .407$), or perceived behavioural control ($r = 0.107$, $p = .121$). This suggests that, despite their conceptual relevance, these determinants had no discernible impact on consumer behaviour within the sample's boundaries. Overall, the results show that subjective standards and environmental concerns seem to have less of an effect on millennial customers in Kuala Lumpur than health concerns and consumer trust, which both have a large impact on purchase intentions. The study emphasizes the need for efficient marketing tactics that take into account the intricate interactions between trust and health consciousness in determining millennials' purchasing inclinations.

Table 3

Relationship between independent variables and dependent variable

Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value	Significance
Health Concern	0.213	0.002	Significant ($p < .01$)
Environmental Concern	0.078	0.259	Not Significant
Subjective Norm	0.057	0.407	Not Significant
Perceived Behavioural Control	0.107	0.121	Not Significant
Consumer Trust in Organic Food	0.180	0.009	Significant ($p < .01$)

4. Discussion

The findings reveal that consumer trust and health concerns are the predominant drivers of millennials' purchase intentions toward organic food, underscoring the primacy of personal well-being over broader sustainability narratives in this demographic. This supports a growing consensus in the literature that health and safety considerations constitute the core motivators in organic food consumption [25]. Trust functions not merely as a facilitator but as a critical determinant that alleviates consumers' scepticism in markets where organic certification and authenticity are often questioned [26]. In this regard, trust acts as a form of risk reduction, especially in emerging organic markets like Malaysia, where regulatory oversight and standardisation may still be evolving.

The non-significance of perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, and environmental concern signals an important disconnect between consumers' stated environmental values and their actual purchasing behaviour. This discrepancy suggests that, despite widespread awareness of sustainability issues, environmental motivations are often subordinated to immediate, tangible benefits such as personal health and product credibility. Such findings challenge the assumption that environmental concern uniformly translates into green consumer behaviour, highlighting the well-documented attitude-behaviour gap [1,2]. The results suggest that environmental concern

may be more aspirational than operational within this cohort, or perhaps constrained by barriers such as cost, availability, or perceived efficacy of organic products in delivering environmental benefits.

Moreover, the marginal influence of subjective norms challenges prevalent theories that social influence is a critical determinant in consumer decision-making. This contradicts patterns observed in Western contexts where organic consumption often signals social identity and status [27]. The relative insignificance of social pressure in this Malaysian sample points to a cultural or contextual nuance where organic food choices are more private and health-centered rather than socially performative. It raises critical questions about the applicability of Western-centric consumer behaviour models across different cultural contexts and stresses the importance of localized research frameworks.

These findings imply that marketing strategies focused predominantly on environmental messaging or social endorsement may fail to resonate with Malaysian millennials unless paired with strong narratives emphasizing personal health benefits and trustworthiness. Organic food producers and retailers must therefore prioritize transparency, certification credibility, and health-centric communication to engage this demographic effectively.

4.1 Implications and Recommendations

The findings offer nuanced theoretical support for the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), particularly underscoring the critical role of attitudinal components such as consumer trust and health consciousness in shaping organic food purchase intentions. However, the diminished impact of subjective norms and perceived behavioural control reveals potential limitations of the TPB framework when applied to food consumption behaviours within specific cultural and socioeconomic contexts like urban Malaysia. This suggests a need for the TPB to be adapted or integrated with other psychosocial or contextual models that capture the complex interplay of individual, social, and structural influences on consumer behaviour.

From a practical standpoint, marketers and policymakers should prioritize strategies that enhance transparency and credibility around organic products. Emphasizing clear, verifiable health benefits through trustworthy certifications, transparent labeling, and direct sourcing can significantly strengthen consumer trust, a key determinant of purchase intention. Messaging that foregrounds personal health and safety is likely to resonate more effectively than campaigns centered solely on environmental sustainability, given the relative weight consumers assign to these factors in their decision-making process.

Furthermore, the weak influence of subjective norms highlights an untapped opportunity to foster community-driven social dynamics that support organic consumption. Initiatives such as cooperative buying groups, organic food clubs, and localized markets could facilitate peer interactions and gradually cultivate organic food consumption as a social norm, thereby bridging the gap between individual attitudes and collective behaviour. By making organic products more visible and socially endorsed, such approaches can help transform organic food consumption from a primarily individual health choice into a shared cultural practice.

4.2 Study Limitation and Future Research Direction

Despite offering valuable insights into Malaysian millennials' organic food purchase intentions, this study has several limitations. Its cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, highlighting the need for longitudinal research to capture evolving attitudes over time. The geographically

focused sample from Greater Kuala Lumpur limits generalizability, underscoring the importance of expanding future studies to diverse urban and rural contexts within Malaysia and beyond. Reliance on self-reported survey data introduces potential social desirability bias, suggesting that mixed-method approaches could provide a richer understanding of consumer motivations. The partial support for the Theory of Planned Behaviour, particularly the non-significance of subjective norms and perceived behavioural control, suggests that additional factors, such as moral norms, identity, or situational constraints, should be incorporated to reflect cultural nuances better. Moreover, emerging influences like digital engagement and e-commerce among millennials warrant exploration as potential moderators of purchase intention. Addressing these gaps will enable a more comprehensive understanding of organic food consumption and inform targeted interventions in this rapidly evolving market.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on health concerns, environmental concerns, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and consumer trust as the main determinants of millennials' propensity to purchase organic food in Kuala Lumpur. As demonstrated by the results, purchase intention was significantly positively correlated with consumer trust and health concerns, supporting hypotheses H1 and H5. In the meantime, hypotheses H2, H3, and H4 were rejected because environmental concern, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control were not major predictors. These findings demonstrate how important trust and health care as the main drivers of organic food consumption among millennials living in cities. Although social influence and environmental consciousness are present, they are not the main forces at play here. These findings highlight the significance of stressing health advantages and maintaining credibility in labeling and certification procedures for those involved in the organic food industry. Future studies should expand their theoretical depth and demographic breadth in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Malaysian consumers' purchase habits for organic food.

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