

**A MODERATION MODEL OF PERCEIVED FOOD QUALITY ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND
INTENTION TO PURCHASE ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS**

Siba Prasad Sarangi

Research Scholar, Annamalai University, Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Sambharam Institute, EMAIL: siba_sarangi@yahoo.co.in

Dr. T. Ramkumar

Assistant Professor (Deputed), Department of Business Administration
Annamalai University, Email: goviramkumar@gmail.com

Dr. J John Adaikalam

Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Annamalai University

Dr. S. Allah Baksh

Associate Professor, Department of Sociology And Social Work, Annamalai University

Abstract:

Consumers' demands for safer and healthier goods rise in tandem with their purchasing power and their level of product knowledge. The organic food movement has also captured the interest of consumers. Considering the mediating roles of perceived food quality, this study examines the connection between environmental consciousness and the desire to purchase organic food. The goal is to provide fresh insight into how people think about and plan to act in response to organic food. Empirical findings from a survey of 590 Karnataka Organic food shoppers at various organic food product outlets support the idea that a concern for the environment influences the likelihood that a shopper will choose to purchase organic products. The connection between ecological awareness and the intent to buy organic foods is moderated by the opinion that these foods are of high quality. This research adds to the existing body of work on organic food in multiple ways. This research will provide light on why people who care about the environment are more likely to buy foods that have been grown using sustainable practices. Previous literature has supplied relatively few indications regarding this link, therefore understanding it helps to fill a study gap. This research contributes to the existing organic food literature by shedding light on the moderating roles of perceived food quality in the connection between environmental consciousness and organic food purchase intention. Consequently, this research not only clarifies the direct effect of environmental consciousness on organic food buy intention, but also the indirect influence of environmental consciousness on organic food purchase intention. Important managerial implications for understanding consumer behavior and building better judgments to meet customers' requirements regarding organic foods are also provided by this study.

Keywords: Perceived food quality, Environmental Concerns, Purchase intentions, Organic food products

INTRODUCTION

Organic food products are cultivated by an agricultural methodology that places emphasis on ecological and social accountability, thereby refraining from the application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. This agricultural strategy acts at the local level, with the goal of preserving the soil's ability to reproduce and regenerate, ensuring adequate plant nutrition, and implementing effective soil management techniques to produce healthy, disease-resistant food **Sadiq, M., Adil, M., & Paul, J. (2023)**. Organic agricultural practices not only protect the inherent integrity of the soil but also play a significant role in mitigating water pollution and ecosystem deterioration **Kumar, S., et al (2023)**. Furthermore, the exclusion of artificial substances in the process of organic food cultivation contributes to enhanced health benefits for individuals. Numerous studies have demonstrated that organic fruits and vegetables exhibit elevated concentrations of vital nutrients and antioxidants, rendering them a more advantageous option for persons prioritizing their holistic health **Kamboj, S., Matharu, M., & Gupta, M. (2023)**. Furthermore, advocating for organic farming not only yields positive outcomes for the environment, but also serves to empower local communities and maintain the stability of rural economies.

India exhibits considerable potential for the cultivation and manufacturing of a wide range of organic commodities, primarily due to the presence of diverse agro-climatic zones within its territory **Dangi, N., & Narula, S. A. (2020)**. The genetic heritage of organic farming bestows a further benefit in specific geographical areas within the nation. This situation provides organic farmers with the chance to tap into a burgeoning domestic market as well as the international export market **Vilvijayan, C., & Lalitha, N. (2021)**.

The projected valuation of the organic food market in India for the year 2020 was estimated to be 849.5 million USD. According to the research, the market is anticipated to demonstrate a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of approximately 20.5 percent from 2021 to 2026, leading to an estimated value of approximately USD 2601 million by the end of the projected period **Pandey, D., et al (2019)**. The exponential expansion observed in the organic food industry can be attributed to the rising consciousness among consumers regarding the advantageous effects on health and the environment associated with organic products. The increasing awareness among Indian consumers regarding the detrimental impacts of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers has resulted in a proactive pursuit of organic alternatives. This phenomenon creates a significant opportunity for organic producers to capitalize on the expanding local market and maybe explore export prospects in order to satisfy the increasing demand for organic food. **Nafees, L., et al (2022)**.

The organic food market in India is now considered a specialized sector; yet, industry analysts anticipate that the industry would witness enhanced market penetration in the coming years. The projected surge in demand for organic food in the foreseeable future can be attributed to the escalating instances of food adulteration. The expansion and progression of the e-commerce sector

not only presents benefits for consumers, but also presents businesses with the opportunity to attract new customers by offering attractive incentives and exploring more markets **Singh, S., & Alok, S. (2022)**. Moreover, companies are establishing small kiosks within shopping complexes situated in prominent urban areas, hence supporting the expansion of this sector. These kiosks function as convenient retail outlets for clients seeking organic food choices, thereby contributing to the expansion of the organic food sector. Moreover, the advent of social media and internet platforms has facilitated the promotion of products by firms operating in this industry, enabling them to effectively target a broader demographic **Kirmani, M. D., et al (2022)**. Consequently, this has resulted in heightened consciousness and desire for organic food. With an increasing awareness among consumers regarding their health and the standard of the food they consume, it is anticipated that the organic food sector will persist in its upward progression.

The relationship between environmental consciousness and intention to purchase organic food products is moderated by perceived food quality. The perception of good quality in organic food is positively associated with the influence of environmental concern on the intention to purchase organic food products **Kumar, S., et al (2023)**. Conversely, in cases when individuals have a perception of inferior quality regarding organic food, the influence of their environmental consciousness on their desire to purchase organic food products is diminished or inconsequential. It is imperative to conduct research on the various aspects that impact persons' evaluations of the quality of organic food, as well as the ways in which these evaluations intersect with their levels of environmental consciousness. Moreover, gaining a comprehensive grasp of the precise factors that influence individuals' decision to procure organic food items can yield useful insights for the development of effective marketing tactics and consumer education initiatives **Sadiq, M., Adil, M., & Paul, J. (2023)**. By advocating for the advantages of organic food production and dispelling misunderstandings regarding its quality, enterprises and institutions can enhance consumers' inclination to buy organic food products and contribute to the establishment of a more sustainable and ecologically aware society **Vilvijayan, C., & Lalitha, N. (2021)**.

With this background the current study aims to analyse the impact of environment consciousness on the purchase intention of Organic food customers. The researchers also examines the role of moderating variable perceived food quality on this relationship.

The first section of the study gives a background for this study. The second section focusses on the review of literature. The research methods are specified in the third section and the fourth section presents the results of the study. The last section of this research concludes with limitations and scope for further research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study employed a systematic literature review approach to analyze previous scholarly works that were pertinent to the research inquiries under investigation. The articles were sourced from reputed journals and were scrutinized to determine the level of quality exhibited by each study. Elsevier database, Routledge and CRC Press Taylor and Francis database. Emerald Group Publishing database, Springer Nature database and Sage database. Several supplementary articles

were acquired from reputable academic databases such as Wiley, Academia, JSTOR, and Guildford Press.

- **Arunkumar, M. V., & Revathy, B. (2020)** In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the present condition of organic products and green marketing in the Tirunelveli District, a survey was undertaken by the writers of an essay titled "Consumer Perception of Green Marketing with Special Reference to Organic Food Products in Tirunelveli District". The study targeted local residents as participants. Primary data was collected through the utilization of questionnaires. A range of statistical techniques, such as frequency distribution, factor analysis, and the Karl Pearson correlation, have been utilized to analyze the data. The research findings emphasize the significance of comprehending the perceptions of customers residing in semi-urban regions about green marketing in the context of organic food products. The study's findings indicate that there is a significant level of consumer awareness regarding organic food products.
- **Duangkanong (2020)** examines the factors that influence the purchase intention of Thai consumers towards organic food products in the paper titled "Factors Influencing Consumers' Purchase Intention for Organic Food Products in Thailand." The data for the study was collected using an online survey. The researchers employed convenience sampling as the method for selecting the sample. The study revealed that consumers' buy intentions for organic food were negatively influenced by price sensitivity. However, other factors like environmental knowledge, environmental concern, institutional trust, perceived risk, and perceived availability were found to have positive effects on consumers' purchase intentions. According to the findings of the research, it is recommended that endeavors to enhance the sales of organic food in Thailand should concentrate on three primary domains: environmental education, the significance of organic certification, and the broadening of inexpensive organic food alternatives
- **Prado, N. B. (2019)**. The interrelationships among environmental consciousness, proactive consumption, and the inclination to purchase organic products. The study's conclusions were compiled using quantitative approaches, specifically employing multivariate data analysis techniques. The findings of the research indicate that individuals who possess environmentally conscious and cautious attitudes towards home practices exhibit a positive influence on their engagement in more active forms of consumption. Based on the findings of this study, it is possible for organic food stores to enhance their ability to predict the needs and preferences of their clients. The investigation also revealed elements that provide challenges to the consumption of organic food.
- **Nidhi and Shweta (2019)** The researchers in a scholarly study titled "Examining the propensity to pay for Organic Food Products through the application of Structural Equation Modelling" investigate the factors influencing households in Delhi to exhibit a higher willingness to pay for food products that are farmed using organic methods. The primary data was collected by a questionnaire survey and subsequently analyzed using statistical tools. The findings of the study support previous conjecture regarding the significance of

ecological factors and the perceived financial implications associated with organic farming practices. The authors propose the implementation of strategic marketing plans and programs as a means to enhance the projected level of interest in organic foods. The authors assert that despite the increasing popularity of organic food consumption, there remains a substantial journey ahead until organic food achieves widespread acceptance as a conventional dietary choice.

- In a study conducted by **Chimi, Jugindar, and Kartar (2019)**, The study titled "An Analysis of the Ecologically Conscious Purchasing Behavior of Organic Products: A Quantitative Investigation in Thimpu, Bhutan" investigates the purchasing patterns of consumers who opt for organic products in the city of Thimpu, located in Bhutan. This quantitative study utilized surveys and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as its research methods. Based on the findings of the research, it can be concluded that the desire to purchase organic products is greatly influenced by two key aspects, namely the accessibility of organic products and environmental considerations. There was no discernible association observed between the sentiments of the respondents and their self-reported intentions to purchase organic products. The research conducted by Chimi, Jugindar, and Kartar (2019) provides insights into the environmentally conscious purchasing behaviors exhibited by customers in Bhutan.
- According to **Doni (2019)**, a study named "Customer Green Awareness and Eco-label For Organic Products" investigated the impact of consumers' environmental awareness on their purchasing behavior by utilizing eco-labels as a representation of "green" product attributes. The present study utilized primary data, which was subjected to validation by factor analysis, correlation analysis, and simple linear regression analysis. Based on the findings, it can be observed that there exists a limited level of consumer awareness regarding the eco-label associated with green products. According to Doni, Oda, and Rohaeni (2019), it is proposed by the author that both the government and enterprises have a significant role to play in the education of consumers.
- **Manangi, N., & Padashetty, S. S. (2019)** Research investigated a cohort of 512 individuals who patronized 24 Mantra Organic food retail establishments situated in several regions throughout India. The primary objective was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the consumers' perspectives, behaviors, and level of awareness pertaining to organic products. A significant proportion of participants indicated that they had acquired organic products, frequently through direct transactions with farmers, and a subset even acknowledged cultivating their own organic vegetable gardens. The majority of consumers initiated their quest for organic products by visiting a supermarket or hypermarket, subsequently transitioning to more specialized retail establishments. The study revealed that consumers exhibit a heightened level of awareness over food safety and exhibit a preference for chemical-free and all-natural alternatives.
- **Raj, V. A., & Kiran, U. (2018)**. In the study titled "Factors Influencing Consumers' Attitudes towards Organic Products," the researchers identified that the primary

determinant of customers' organic food purchasing behavior was their level of concern for societal welfare. The collection of primary data for this study involved conducting in-person interviews. The research findings indicate that consumers' adoption of environmentally friendly purchasing habits plays a crucial role in the preservation and protection of the world. Based on the findings of the study, it is observed that the promotion of organic products often highlights attributes such as safety, healthiness, and environmental friendliness in order to cultivate a positive perception among consumers. However, it is important to consider factors such as pricing and availability alongside these stressed elements.

- In their study, **Jonas and John (2015)** conducted an examination of marketing strategies for organic products. The study is based on empirical evidence derived from real-life instances. Based on the findings, the primary motivation behind customers' preference for organic products predominantly stems from their concern for environmental well-being. Based on the research findings, it is evident that the adoption of a green marketing approach is crucial for achieving success in the context of Sweden. The product's assertion of being environmentally benign fueled significant consumer interest.
- **Nagaraju and Thejaswini (2014)** present a comprehensive analysis of consumer perspectives on the market for these commodities. The data for this study was collected using the survey methodology, with the research being done in the Mysore region of Karnataka. The study has conducted an analysis of individuals' attitudes towards ecologically sustainable products. The study revealed that environmentally sustainable fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) exhibit a higher price point compared to its non-eco-friendly counterparts. Additionally, the research suggests a collaborative effort among governments, corporations, and consumers to enhance knowledge regarding the importance of adopting environmentally friendly goods.

Research Gap

There is a research gap in the current understanding of the relationship between perceived food quality, environmental consciousness, and consumers' propensity to purchase organic food items. Although there have been earlier investigations into the separate impacts of perceived food quality and environmental consciousness on consumer purchase behavior, limited research has been conducted on their potential interplay. The existence of this research gap underscores the necessity for additional inquiry in order to gain a deeper comprehension of how consumers' impression of food quality can influence their intention to buy organic food products, specifically within the framework of their environmental consciousness.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are –

- To analyse the impact of Environmental Consciousness on Intention to Purchase Organic Food Products

- To examine the moderating role of perceived food quality on the relationship between Environmental Consciousness on Intention to Purchase Organic Food Products

RESEARCH METHODS

According to **Haydam, N. E., and Steenkamp, P. (2021)**, the research process can be visualized as an onion with each layer representing a progressively more comprehensive step. The current study is a positivism approach which is deduced from previous studies on marketing of organic food products. Owing to its nature the study is a mono method quantitative analysis which uses students as the participants of the study. Using the Kregcie morgan formula of Unknown population **Chaokromthong, K., and Sintao, N. (2021)** at 7.5% margin of error a sample of 172 consumers was considered viable. The researcher distributed 210 questionnaires and 190 responses were considered for the study after removing the Outliers. The data collection instrument was self-prepared by the researcher in absence of standard scale to measure the Environmental Consciousness, perceived food quality and Intention to Purchase Organic Food Products. The questionnaire was first validated by 5 experts in the academic field followed by launching a pilot study. The pilot study results revealed that the instrument was reliable and consistent with a Cronbach alpha of 0.856 for 3 constructs measuring the objectives of the study. SPSS and AMOS software were used for analysis of direct relationship and Andrew hayes process macros was used to analyse the moderation analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic profile of the Organic food customers

51.9% male participants and 48.1 % female organic product customers. 25.2% are in the age group of 18-24 years, 28.3% are in the age group of 25-34 years. 20.9% respondents are ranging between 35-44 years. A small percentage of 5.1 % were above 55 years of age. The researcher has made a successful attempt in capturing approximately equal proportion of age cohorts in the age group of 18-55 years. The findings of the study can be generalised to all age groups. A large Proportion of 47 % respondents were graduates followed by 20.4% post graduates. As the study was carried out in Pandemic situation, a majority of participants of the study were educated to answer the questionnaire appropriately. About 33% respondents in the study have education of PUC and lower. When classified based on the Occupation, the study participants majorly belong to student category - 29.6%, Private sector employee -20.8% and Business self employed 25.2%. The smaller cohorts consists of 14% Homemaker, 4.4% Government employees and 6.1% professionals. 66.6 % respondents in the study are Married, 32.8% unmarried and a very small 2-3 each are either widowed or divorced. Monthly income is the most significant indicator of economic status of the respondents. 18.9% respondents earned less than 70,000 every month and 46.8 % respondents earn between 70,001- 1,50,000. 17% respondents in the study earn between 1,50,000-2,50,000 and 17.2 % earn above 2,50,000.

Item analysis for perceived food quality, purchase intention and environmental consciousness

The item analysis showed that the mean scores for environmental consciousness is 3.91 indicating neutral to agreement range of responses , the perceived food quality statements had a mean score

of 4.15 indicating the importance of perceived food quality and a mean score of 3.42 indicates that the purchase intention responses have neutral to agree range of responses. The standard deviation is below 1.500 indicating less variation in responses. The skewness and kurtosis are measures of normal distribution and are well within the acceptable criteria. The item analysis indicate that the variables selected for the study are fulfilling the assumptions of the tests and hypothesis can be tested.

H1- There is a significant impact of environmental consciousness on purchase intention of Organic Food products

The chi-square divided by degrees of freedom (χ^2 / df) falls little above the acceptable range of 3 (specifically, 2.980). The observed Goodness of Fit value (0.871) surpasses the proposed attributes. The boundary estimation yields a value of 0.037 for the RMR. The model in question has garnered significant recognition within the academic community, and its measures of fit are reasonably appropriate.

The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant positive association between Environmental consciousness and purchase intention of organic food products with a coefficient of (B=0.24, B=0.32, P=0.000), suggesting that one unit increase in mean scores of environmental consciousness will lead to increase in mean scores of purchase intention by 24 units. This indicates a strong positive impact of environmental consciousness on organizational purchase intention.

Table 1 – Unstandardized and standardized co-efficient - Impact of environmental consciousness on purchase intention of Organic Food products

STRUCTURAL RELATIONSHIP		Unstd Estimate	Std Estimate	P
Purchase intention of Organics	<--- Environmental consciousness	0.243	0.321	***

The influence of customers' environmental concern on their inclination to purchase organic food products has proven substantial. As individuals gain greater consciousness regarding the environmental consequences associated with their decisions, there is a growing inclination towards selecting organic food items as a means to endorse sustainable agricultural methods and mitigate their ecological impact. The change in consumer behavior has led to an expansion of organic product lines by food firms, as well as increased attempts to demonstrate their dedication to environmental sustainability. This, in turn, has further stimulated the demand for organic food items. Additionally, the growing prevalence of individuals who prioritize their health has contributed to the heightened request for organic food items. Due to increasing apprehensions regarding the utilization of pesticides and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) within traditional agricultural practices, people are increasingly opting for organic alternatives as a perceived safer and more health-conscious choice. As a result of this, food firms have been motivated to allocate resources towards organic farming practices and obtaining certification, thereby guaranteeing that their products adhere to the rigorous organic criteria. The increasing

demand for organic food items and the subsequent adaptation of food firms can be attributed to the amalgamation of environmental consciousness and health concerns.

H1 – There is a significant impact of environmental consciousness on purchase intention of Organic Food products is accepted

Further analysis was conducted to understand the moderating role of perceived food quality on the relationship between **environmental consciousness and purchase intention of Organic Food products**.

H2- There is a moderating role of perceived food quality on the relationship between Environmental Consciousness on Intention to Purchase Organic Food Products

Table 2- Moderation analysis results - moderating role of perceived food quality on the relationship between Environmental Consciousness on Intention to Purchase Organic Food Products

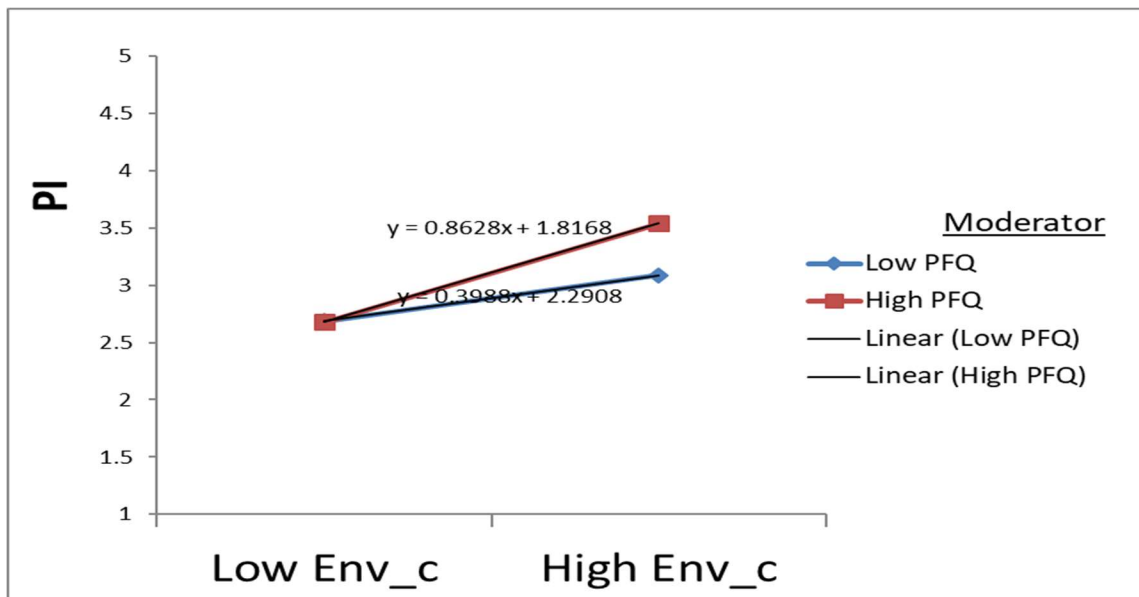
Model : 1						
Y : PI						
X : ENV_C						
W : PFQ						
Sample						
Size: 172						

OUTCOME VARIABLE:						
PI						
Model Summary						
R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
.5563	.3095	.4710	14.4924	3.0000	97.0000	.0000
Model						
	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	4.1493	.6743	6.1531	.0000	2.8109	5.4877
ENV_C	.3154	.1976	1.5960	.0137	.7076	.0768
PFQ	.1110	.1967	.5644	.0038	.5015	.2794
Int_1	.1168	.0504	2.3189	.0225	.0168	.2168
Product terms key:						
Int_1	:	ENV_C	x	PFQ		
Test(s) of highest order unconditional interaction(s):						
R2-chng	F	df1	df2	p		

X*W	.0383	5.3771	1.0000	97.0000	.0225

Y : PI indicates the independent variables, X : ENV_C indicates the dependent variables and W : PFQ indicates the moderating variables. The Interaction value of 0.1168 is statistically significant indicating the effect of moderating variable. The R square change of 0.0383 is also significant at p=0.0225. The moderating effect of perceived food quality is observed in the connection between environmental consciousness and purchase intention among customers of organic food. Customers that exhibit a greater level of environmental consciousness are more inclined to possess an elevated intention to acquire organic food products. Nonetheless, the individuals' assessment of the food quality also plays a significant role in shaping their decision-making process. The perception of good quality in organic food positively influences customers' intention to purchase, while perceiving low quality has a negative impact on their intention.

Figure 2 - Regression equation– Moderating role of moderating role of perceived food quality on the relationship between Environmental Consciousness on Intention to Purchase Organic Food Products



PFQ strengthens the positive relationship between Env_c and PI.

Hence, it is imperative for organic food firms to not only prioritize the promotion of environmental advantages but also guarantee the perceived excellence of their products in order to optimize consumer inclination to make a purchase. Organic food firms can establish confidence and enhance their credibility among customers by prioritizing the maintenance of high quality standards and ensuring transparency in communicating information about their agricultural operations. Furthermore, the implementation of frequent quality inspections and certifications can serve to

augment the perceived quality of their products. This strategy has the potential to not only acquire new consumers but also maintain the loyalty of current ones, ultimately leading to an increase in the intention to make purchases and driving the growth of the firm.

CONCLUSION

The significance of this study lies in its examination of the role of perceived food quality in influencing the relationship between environmental consciousness and intention to purchase organic food products. This research contributes to the existing literature by shedding light on the importance of consumers' perception of food quality and how it interacts with their environmental consciousness when making purchasing decisions. Understanding this relationship can aid marketers and policymakers in developing strategies to promote organic food consumption and encourage sustainable practices in the food industry.

Implications of the study suggest that individuals who are more environmentally conscious are more likely to intend to purchase organic food products when they perceive the quality of the food to be high. This highlights the importance of not only promoting environmental consciousness but also ensuring that organic food products meet consumers' expectations in terms of quality. Additionally, this finding suggests that efforts to improve the perceived quality of organic food products can have a positive impact on consumers' intentions to purchase them, especially among those who are already environmentally conscious.

There is potential for future research to investigate the specific components that contribute to the perception of food quality and their interactions with environmental consciousness. Moreover, conducting an investigation into the impact of various demographic factors and cultural backgrounds on this association could yield significant and meaningful findings. In addition, doing research on the influence of marketing methods and labeling on the perceived quality of food could enhance comprehension of customer behavior regarding organic food items.

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